

PEASANT COSTUMES



42 TO 44 PEASANT COSTUMES FROM ABRUZZO



45 COSTUME OF A SCANNO WIDOW, ABRUZZO

46 PEASANT COSTUMES FROM SCANNO, ABRUZZO

From paintings by Amalia Besso

PEASANT COSTUMES



From an Engraving by Pinelli

PEASANT COSTUMES



48 AND 49 PEASANT COSTUMES FROM S. POLO, MATESE, AND CAMOBASSO, MOLISE



50 AND 51 PEASANT COSTUMES FROM MOLISE

PEASANT COSTUMES



Photos Trombetta, Campobasso

51^A TO 51^D PEASANT COSTUMES FROM MOLISE

PEASANT COSTUMES



Photos Trombetta, Campobasso

51^E TO 51^H PEASANT COSTUMES FROM MOLISE

PEASANT COSTUMES



Photo Lombardo, Siena

PEASANT COSTUMES



PEASANT COSTUMES



57 TO 59 PEASANT COSTUMES FROM CASERTA, CAMPANIA

PEASANT COSTUMES



60 TO 62 PEASANT COSTUMES FROM SALERNO, CAMPANIA

PEASANT COSTUMES



PEASANT COSTUMES



PEASANT COSTUMES



PEASANT COSTUMES



73 TO 75 PEASANT COSTUMES FROM CATANZARO, CALABRIA
Photos E. Ragozino

PEASANT COSTUMES



76 AND 77 PEASANT COSTUMES FROM CALABRIA



78 PEASANT COSTUMES FROM SPEZZANO, CALABRIA

PEASANT COSTUMES



PEASANT COSTUMES



Photo I. Florio

PEASANT COSTUMES



PEASANT COSTUMES



PEASANT COSTUMES



PEASANT COSTUMES



90 "WOMEN OF OSILO, SARDINIA." FROM A PAINTING BY AMALIA BESSO



Photo T. Ashby

91 PEASANT COSTUMES FROM SARDINIA

WOMEN'S CRAFTS. BY ELISA RICCI

ITALIAN peasant women, whether they be sewing, weaving or lace-making, do not generally work for money's sake ; they work for their families. They toil in the fields, the woods and at the wells from sunrise to sunset, never sparing themselves the heaviest labour. This is especially noticeable in districts where the current of emigration drains away the male population.

The long winter evenings passed in the warmth of a cow-shed and the spare moments snatched at other times they devote to spinning and their own particular handiwork, but not for the sake of bartering and money. It is work done for themselves, their homes or their families. Thus their work is entirely characteristic of themselves, for not only does it faithfully represent their point of view, both technical and artistic, but also their taste, their dress, their customs and their traditions. It is not work done to serve and please a master, but done for its own sake, for their own kith and kin.

Accordingly their crafts have suffered less from the influence of foreign invasions, rule and dominion than might be supposed from their history. Facts of far less importance have exercised their influence on these rural industries ; a new work introduced and taught in the convent by some foreign nun, or some little ornament brought from abroad by a returning emigrant, takes their fancy and interests their village friends. The innovation thus introduced makes headway and is spread broadcast like a seed by the wind. In some places it falls on fruitful ground and flourishes to perpetuity ; in others it becomes modified by local influences until its original character is hardly recognisable ; whilst in others, again, it retains its foreign characteristics and remains untouched through the course of ages.

A striking example of transplantation of this nature is afforded by the districts of Alagna and Fobello in Valsesia and the village of Parre in the Seriana Valley. In these valleys the women manufacture a lace called the *punto saraceno* * or "maize" stitch. This lace is composed entirely of a double-knot stitch drawn very tightly together—perhaps more aptly described as a double-loop stitch—which is found in no other Italian lace. Now where can it have sprung from and how did this purely foreign lace find its way up into these mountainous regions ? It is Italian neither in design nor in stitch. It suggests much more the geometrical problems met with in Arab art, and the colouring is particularly foreign ; moreover, whilst Italian lacework is always white and slightly coarse this is generally of a brown thread, or of silk of the brightest tints. With

* This stitch is known under various names, viz. *punto alpino*, *punto avorio* (ivory stitch), or *poncett*, being the dialect for *piccolo punto*, or little stitch.

WOMEN'S CRAFTS

the thread the women trim their belts and aprons, with the coloured silks they adorn their blouses, or such parts as are exposed to view from beneath their picturesque costumes. The *punto saraceno* has now, like so many other rustic arts, entered upon a new existence, and to-day represents a thriving industry, which has altogether changed the miserable conditions formerly existing amongst the inhabitants.

This transformation worked by a foreign lace in Valsesia is typical of what has taken place to a like degree throughout all Italy during the last thirty years. Industries have, as if by magic, sprung to life again when on the very verge of ruin and threatened by machinery, that all-conquering monster of to-day. This work of rescue has been accomplished by the ladies of Italy concentrating their energy on their respective districts. Searching everywhere they have singled out the finest types of ancient peasant handiwork and by questioning the old women, the sole surviving guardians of a secret process or of a craft long fallen into decay, they have persuaded them to recall some forgotten stitch or mend some broken loom and thus revive an ancient industry. Their ardour has been rewarded in a remarkable degree by the revival and propagation of many an old art. The spindle and distaff are returning to their place of honour despite the ever increasing progress of machinery; notwithstanding the feverish haste which reigns on all sides hand-made work is steadily returning to its own, and with it the desire and need for something more restful to the eye, something more soothing to the mind than that which machinery, with its cold and rigid forms, can ever offer.

Thus, by the private and individual initiative of numerous ladies, Italians by birth or by choice, a single collective body has come into existence, and, under the title of the "Societa Co-operativa delle Industrie Femminili" at Rome, has developed, unaided by State and Civic authority, what was formerly a languishing cottage occupation amongst women into a flourishing and artistic industry, and at the same time opened up an enormous source of wealth.

Weaving is the principal and commonest work amongst Italian peasants. The heavy rolls of cloth, made of hemp and flax, sown, cultivated and harvested by their labour, spun and woven by their hands, are the product and pride of the peasant women. Nor can it be said that the textures are woven without taste and variety, for besides open, embossed and other delicate work they find means of diapering even the white cloths with their shuttles, ornamenting them with designs dearest to the popular fancy; to these we shall revert later.

In several of the districts of Bologna fine textiles, such as are used

WOMEN'S CRAFTS

for table linen, are still manufactured by hand. These, with their exquisite designs, resemble the Holy Supper-cloths represented by Italian painters of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Greater decorative effect is obtained, as is only natural, by the adoption of coloured materials. The textiles of Perugia made of white flax in bird's-eye pattern, decorated with broad stripes outlined in dark blue cotton, are perhaps the most handsome and best-known of those which it is proposed to mention. They date back to the eleventh and twelfth centuries and we find them already depicted as altar-cloths in paintings of the thirteenth century. A hundred years later Leonardo da Vinci and other great painters introduced them into their pictures as table-cloths or as napkins in the homely scenes depicting the Nativity of the Virgin. They were found in hundreds by a collector in Perugia and the neighbourhood, and an inventory dated 1482, describing "Two cotton cloths with rods for the High Altar representing dragons and lions *after the Perugian fashion*," proves conclusively the birthplace of this art.


The simple subjects depicted in these ancient designs, such as the key pattern or a flight of birds, became gradually more lifelike and richer in detail after the Renaissance with its elegant heraldic fauna, its gryphons, dragons, lions, peacocks, elephants, stags surprised whilst drinking at the fountain, its trees of life, centaurs, sirens, ladies with knights and men with falcons. All these subjects, found alike in textiles, wood-carvings, china and sculpture, maintain a purity of design such as will never again be found in arts of this nature. Lovers' mottoes, and short phrases, sacred and otherwise, are very commonly met with, but generally speaking decorative ornamentation is but seldom added. We find this predilection for figures representing concrete ideas in all forms of female rustic art. Thus in cloth as in embroidery; in plaiting and in lacework, in spite of the difficult problems entailed in its execution, Italian peasants aim at the representation of animals, forms, and objects familiar to them in their daily life, such as birds, lambs, horses, flowers, leaves and stars. These they love and understand, reproducing them in countless numbers and shapes. Their work has, to a certain extent, to speak for itself and to express their life and the world they live in. For them to understand the language adopted must be simple. The abstract and purely æsthetic beauty of some column, the decorative effect of some charming frieze, lie beyond the scope of their intelligence.

But the meaning of the designs is not always clear. Technical difficulties induce the weavers to simplify their work; thus they unconsciously develop a certain harsh style more or less departing from their subject and at times rendering it altogether unrecognisable.

The more the work differs from its original, the more hands and stages it passes through, the more degenerate and incorrect it becomes ; this is especially noticeable in coloured stuffs, for linen is not the only source of income, not the only treasure to fill their coffers—perfumed with the scent of lavender and quince.

The wool from the sheep and the silk from the cocoons serve to clothe the husbands, to decorate the harness of the animals and the windows of the houses on Saints' days, to cover the benches, beds and boxes, and to provide the people with finery for their festivals. With the materials at their disposal they obtain the most varied results, from the downy silk of Cividale in Friuli to the variegated Abruzzi carpets ; from the coarse black cloth of the Sardinian peasant to the finest of nun's-veils and the gaudiest of Calabrian scarves.

Our peasant arts, without exception, possess a common quality—a sense of balance in their embellishments and a perfect proportion in their lights and shades. The ornamentation is never too crowded nor yet too scanty, though the design is more often than not incorrect, childish, illogical and simple. Thus we find a stag without its horns, and a little further on the horns without the stag ! or a lady as tall as the neighbouring watch-tower, and on the tower—without rhyme or reason—stands a horse ! whilst on the ground, between the very claws of a lion, hops a little bird ! But the whole effect is harmonious and peaceful to the eye. Nor do the bright and startling colours they generally affect clash with one another, for the Italian woman is governed in her work by her innate good taste, just as the Italian man is guided through life by his proverbial good sense.

 The love of bright colours and the preference for red is common amongst peasants throughout all Italy, but the further south one travels the more does this become accentuated. Such is the harmony of things that in the cold and foggy northern climate all is dark and sombre, whilst in the southern parts, always bathed in sunshine, the costumes are of the gayest hues.

The work of spinning and weaving by hand is still far more diffused in the country districts than is generally supposed. It has remained hitherto hidden and undisturbed in peasants' cottages, in a silence rendered deeper by the deafening noise and hideous din of modern commerce.

In the Abruzzi and its grazing districts women labour at the wool industry just as their lowland sisters make linen. These high Abruzzi plateaus are peopled only by shepherds with their flocks. Resembling the solemn scenes described in the Bible, innumerable herds of cattle graze throughout these lonely boundless meadows.

WOMEN'S CRAFTS

The freshly-shorn wool is entrusted to women to be cleaned and dyed with the herbs and flowers of the fields or the bark and fruits of the trees, just as in olden times. This coarse and shaggy wool still serves in some localities for the heavy, pleated skirts worn by the women, the ample cloaks of the men and the bright, quaintly designed carpets, with their simple, if somewhat barbaric designs, their magnificent and truly Oriental colouring. Abruzzi carpets are generally divided into squares or oblong divisions, each of which contains a figure representing almost always an animal, or a group of animals, under the inevitable Tree of Life, or beside a fountain or drinking-trough.

In Sardinia the carpets are generally inferior in quality to those of the Abruzzi. The Sardinian women are amongst the few who still preserve intact their ancient peasant costumes. They are also skilful weavers and manufacture characteristic materials. One of these, a coarse woollen stuff, is much worn by the men and is almost as tough as leather. The women's skirts are of the same material, those of a bright scarlet hue being donned on festivals as opposed to the black ordinarily worn. Their blankets, carpets and double panniers, slung across the backs of their mounts, resemble those of the Abruzzi, but differ both in respect of the wool, which is readily picked out, and of the design, which is coarser, purer and freer in every way. Instead of the isolated designs appearing, as it were, in frames and niches, the Sardinian figures follow one another along the borders, and move with far greater liberty and reality in a manner rarely found in other Italian peasant work. From the example reproduced here (No. 226) it will be seen that the lady is seated behind the knight on the horse's crupper, according to the true Sardinian fashion, and that the man's hat has two ribbons flying from it.

In Italy even the poor have their silk—a coarse variety called *bavella*, made up of waste and combings—and this the women of Friuli and Calabria weave into their most costly fabrics. At Cividale the peasants allow the silk to retain its natural rich ivory colour and weave from it every kind of textile, from the soft downy coverlets of their beds to the transparent, shimmering veils they wear. This same type of silk is used in Calabria for counterpanes, which form a necessary adjunct to every girl's trousseau. These will sometimes be seen folded and hung up on strings, lending a very picturesque and gay touch to the poor cottagers' homes. On a dark, woven background, generally of deep red, the usual little figures are worked out in light and bright coloured silks—gold, blue or white. Here, too, the silks and wools have been dyed with wild herbs for centuries, as in the Abruzzi and Sardinia.

At Taranto, in the heel of Italy, the women make and wear a

kind of soft, warm felt, and in this remote corner of Calabria the ancient and very rare art of byssus-making still exists, known to most people only as a commodity greatly favoured by the ancients. Pliny and Theophrastus mention it as being a most precious and exquisite article and the very essence of luxury to the *grande dames* of their times. It is obtained from a certain species of shell fish, known under the Latin name of *Penna Nobilis*, which has the faculty of emitting a fibrous cord from its glands; this, in contact with the water, becomes exceedingly resistive, and attaching itself to the rocks serves the purpose of an anchor-line well able to stand the motion of the waves. When the fish change position they cast off their old lines and throw out fresh ones. It is these disused lines—as fine and as thin as hair—that the fisherfolk collect, clean and weave like silk. I have seen a muff and gloves made of byssus; in colour it is of a tawny golden hue, dazzling and sparkling, soft and shiny, extremely light and looking more artificial than real.

Straw-plaiting is an art much practised amongst the peasantry; it is an extremely ancient industry, and in the districts of Vicenza, Bergamo, and the island of Sardinia not only is it used for baskets and hampers of every description, but also for larger receptacles strong enough to carry the heaviest loads. At Bergamo the women manufacture their long deep baskets with twigs, turning out most elegant shapes, and these they carry to the markets filled to the brim with different rosy-coloured fruits. For strawberries and mulberries they weave baskets composed of chestnut wood, split up into strips. At Vicenza the women engaged in the production of straw hats, mats, and baskets may be counted by thousands, but it is at Castelsardo, in Sardinia, that this craft is to be seen at its best. Here the work done possesses a singular charm and beauty, and in spite of its straw-like appearance, literally no actual straw is used in its manufacture. The ground material consists of long coils of plaited grass covered over by strips—scarcely a millimetre in breadth—cut from the dwarf palm, softened in water, and bleached in the sun. These flexible and solid coils are built up spirally and sewn one above another, and the baskets are thus given whatever form is required. These coils vary in thickness; large baskets, measuring as much as four or five feet in diameter, are made to hold flour, or to carry loaves to the oven, or figs out in the sun to dry. Nor are they without their ornamentation, for with the black or brown palm strips standing out against the white background, the workers outline the same little figures that we noticed on the carpets and that we shall again meet in the embroidery. The tediousness of this work is only compensated by its durability, and in order to understand how

WOMEN'S CRAFTS

a woman can spend months upon one small basket it is only necessary to know that every particle of these palm strips has to be carefully sewn on to its grass background in order to render the work perfect and durable.

At Florence and Carpi the women are engaged on two industries known throughout the world—plaiting in straw and wood-shavings. More than 80,000 women are occupied in Tuscany in plaiting and sewing straw with which, until 1870, were made the celebrated pale golden Florentine hats, with their broad flexible brims throwing a delicate shadow over their fair wearers' faces—a style of headgear very dear to the period of romance.

Now these so-called *monachine* are no longer worn except by the peasants of Siena, and they have but little in common with the delicate and costly type formerly in vogue which involved two or three months' work and cost as much as five or six hundred francs. But in spite of the fickle ways of fashion the women of Tuscany still continue their work, displaying a prodigious energy and a speed, mastery and perfection unequalled elsewhere in the world. They weave whilst walking, gossiping, quarrelling and talking, just as if their fingers were a mechanism quite apart from their bodies. Instead of hats they manufacture baskets, purses, trunks, and even light and elegant drawing-room furniture, though the material used is no longer white, but coloured. By suiting their wares to the requirements of modern times the women of Tuscany have been able to continue their work uninterrupted, and have never allowed the art of plaiting—in five, seven, eleven, and thirteen strands—to fall into disuse.

Carpi is still the home of the wood-shaving industry. Known formerly under the name of *cappelli di legno*, or wooden hat trade, the art dates back by tradition to the remotest periods of antiquity. The material used is salix or willow, cut into thin white strips, and these being exceedingly light and flexible, are plaited like straw. Extremely common in this part of Italy, towns and villages are named after it; thus we find Salice, Saliceto, Salicello, etc. It would appear from documents extant at Carpi that the art was already practised in the fourteenth century, and it is suggested that the ample hat worn by St. George in Pisanello's picture at the National Gallery was composed of wood-shavings. At any rate, it is certain that the men of Carpi have worked at cutting wood-shavings, and the women and children at sewing and plaiting them, ever since 1500, and that a hundred years later the industry, which was in an exceedingly flourishing condition, was governed by severe laws, and ranked with silk as the most important trade. Such was the importance of the work apparently, that grave fears were enter-

WOMEN'S CRAFTS

tained by the authorities lest agriculture should suffer owing to the peasants deserting the fields and taking up a craft which brought in such quick profits. It is estimated that the peasants and working people of Carpi, Correggio, Modena and Mantua make about £40,000 sterling yearly by this industry ; it is a source of livelihood to all who are engaged in it, and girls are taught to weave triple plaits from their earliest childhood. One might almost say that they learn this trade as soon as they learn to walk and talk, and they continue their work on to old age, becoming experts in the art of plaiting fifty, sixty, and even a hundred strands ; they evolve the most complicated designs called *'fantasie'*, and can plait as many as 450 yards a day.

At Venice, and to a still greater extent at Murano, women are engaged in stringing pearls and glass beads. Squatting in groups on their low straw-seated chairs, women of every age are to be seen, and on their laps are boxes filled with glittering sapphire, emerald, topaz, and ruby coloured beads. Listlessly thrusting their long needles in amongst their multi-coloured gems, they chatter and look about them, earning a paltry penny farthing an hour.

At Loreto the famous sanctuary has given birth to the industry of chaplet and rosary making ; these, however, are not like the glossy ornamental chains of Venice, manufactured for woman's vanity and strung on silken thread, but on very fine wire, and, judging by the enormous quantities produced for the faithful and for the pilgrims visiting Loreto, it would appear that devotion to religion in no way falls short of female vanity in its stimulus to this industry. The dexterity with which women will fashion a rosary in a few minutes is really astounding.

To invite any Italian woman to embroider is tantamount to asking a German to drink ! This essentially applies to the peasants in whose eyes embroidery and lacework form the culminating-point of adornment, and who, living as they do far away from the towns, cannot otherwise provide themselves with this luxury except by their own diligence. Furthermore, apart from the fact that it represents a luxury for themselves and their homes, it is regarded as essentially a woman's industry, both artistic and pleasing to the eye as well as to the hand, and as a welcome change and relaxation from the heavy labours of the fields. It is therefore more desirable and easier, for this latter reason alone, to revive this work in the country districts.

Brides embroider their trousseaus and often decorate handkerchiefs for their sweethearts with naïve and passionate little mottoes, writing sometimes with their needles what they could not with their pens. Young married women embroider the swaddling clothes

WOMEN'S CRAFTS

for their future children and on them such words as "Bello di Mamma" ("Mother's beauty"), "Cresci santo" ("Grow up holy or God-fearing"), "Gioia, Gioia, Gioia" ("Joy, Joy, Joy"). The elder women mend or replace three objects which figure only at the last rites when death crosses their thresholds—the shroud, the pillow-case and the napkin, which are religiously regarded as family heirlooms and often adorned with lace and embroidery.

In many a Venetian country cemetery may be seen little triangular flags attached to staffs marking the graves. If examined closely these pennants will be found to bear symbols or loving words embroidered on them. They are placed there by mothers in remembrance of their little ones called away, and few funereal monuments are more touching than these little flags fluttering in the breeze.

The most popular form of embroidery found amongst the peasants is that which is done by copying and counting the stitches of some previous work, for it is always the drawing of the design that proves the stumbling-block. They therefore imitate the earlier work and borrow the designs made and published for women by artists of the fifteenth century; and these designs they sometimes copy into their note-books for future reference. Here, too, we notice that the peasants omit decorative work and prefer living figures, flowers, objects and symbols, which are familiar to them. Much of the peasant work is common to different parts of the country, and perhaps knitting, which was formerly considered to have its own particular merits as a peasant art, is the most widely distributed. A book of patterns and designs dated 1528 ("L'Opera Nova del Tagliente") mentions the *punto a maglieta*, or "mesh" stitch, as one of the most suitable methods for executing the designs, and there still exist a few knitted fifteenth or sixteenth century doublets. One of them of a rough red and white design is made of coarse cotton, no doubt the workmanship and property of some peasant. In the year 1663 there were undoubtedly more than six thousand women engaged in knitting in the Milanese district alone, and it may be confidently asserted that there is scarcely a single peasant woman who cannot nowadays knit stockings not only well but quickly.

The *punto in croce*, or cross-stitch, varies in character according to the different regions where it is found and the various purposes it is put to. Sicilians, for example, prefer to reproduce the designs found on woven materials by means of detailed and painstaking work, thus imitating with their needles what might be accomplished so much more quickly with a shuttle. Their fondness for beautiful fabrics stimulates them in this labour of love, and they execute their work in coloured silks, and even in gold and silver thread.

On the other hand the women of the Abruzzi employ their cross-stitch or *punto scritto*—"written" stitch—in coarse red cotton on a rough linen background. Yet the handsome designs and their perfect execution do not betray the humble materials which, proving the poverty of the poor embroiderer, do all the more credit to her skill.

In Sicily this coloured embroidery is still used to ornament blouses, and in the Abruzzi to trim aprons, pillow-cases, sheets and towels, not to mention altar cloths and portières presented by the women to their churches.

In the Marches, long swayed by Papal rule, religious mottoes and symbols are frequently met with on objects of everyday use. The women of these parts prefer white embroidery, always working their stitches on very fine material, spun and woven by themselves, and with a far more varied and artistic technique than that of the cross-stitch. They work in the *punto scritto* and the *punto reale* (or "royal" stitch) and the designs composed with these are less angular and far more solid.

Here it must be remarked that our peasants' embroidery but little resembles the lovely gold and coloured silk work with which their silk and velvet gala costumes are ornamented. These latter recall much more the sumptuous magnificence of the richest church tapestries rather than the humble handiwork of peasants. It might almost be said that these gaudy rustic costumes have nothing in common with the peasants who wear them, and their real origin might prove an interesting subject for investigation. Perhaps if sixteenth-century pictures were studied there would be found amongst them the plans and rough sketches of magnificent costumes ordered by some nobleman for his vassals on days of procession and public feasts. For often the tunes which we call popular and believe to be modern are nothing more than the reproduction of musical works of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Many roundelays now heard in the country districts are the productions of Men of Letters of the fourteenth century, and in particular of Poliziano, while the songs of Tasso are still sung by the gondoliers of Venice and the beggars of Naples. Likewise peasant costumes usually resemble those formerly worn, but now no longer used by gentlefolk, only they have been changed and simplified to meet the peasants' tastes, both in the design of the embroidery and the fabric, just as the peasant dialect differs from that of the town folk.

In certain cases, in some very gorgeous costumes, the brocades, the velvets, the damasks, the braid of gold and silver and of silk, the skilful contrasts of the rich hues of the gala dresses all suggest far

WOMEN'S CRAFTS

more the influence of the artist seeking for picturesque effect, or of the nobleman desirous of splendour, than the taste of the peasant ; for the peasant woman is above all things practical, and has a mind imbued with a sense of economy and care ; this has caused her to invent the apron in order to save her skirt from wear and tear, and the detachable sleeves to allow free scope to the arms when working. On her head she wears the folded kerchief of white linen or wool—already met with in fourteenth-century pictures—to protect her from sun and rain. The apron and the cap are trimmed with lace and embroidery or coloured stripes, and the sleeves are laced with gay ribbons. To protect and support the bust she wears the solid bodice corset made of thick material, and she ornaments the chemisette with lace and embroidery only where it emerges from the bodice—at the collar, shoulders, wrists, and on the ample sleeves. With a singular refinement she conceals the seams of the blouse with a narrow trimming, which, in consequence of the broad selvedge, would otherwise be rough and ugly.

Even nowadays blouses of this nature are very common in the country. Extraordinarily rich in embroidery and lace of every description, their ground material is generally of a rough brown cloth, strong enough to stand, as indeed they often have stood, the wear and tear of centuries. The contrast between the frail and delicate work and its rough background has something touching for those who take an interest in such matters.

The district of Rome has, too, its characteristic female handicraft dedicated to the beasts of burden. By the latter the Italian peasant understands the ox, just as “*la foglia*” (the leaf) means the mulberry leaf cultivated for the silkworm, or “*la roba*” (the stuff) amongst women signifies the linen. Besides spinning and weaving for their husbands fabrics consisting of a mixture of wool and cotton, Roman peasants ornament, with a gay and bizarre embroidery, trappings for their oxen. When driven to the fairs these stately handsome animals, which represent the pride and fortune of the farms, are bedecked by the women with coverlets of coarse white hempen cloth, bordered with a brightly coloured cotton fringe of gold, red, blue or orange. In a region which is essentially agricultural nothing breathes more strongly the poetry of the fields than these trappings for the oxen, embellished with flowers, vases or stars. These designs are amongst the few which have sprung directly from the minds of their rustic makers, and their simplicity and expressiveness are unsurpassed. In the Romagna the long wagons used are painted by women ; these long carts of a flaming red are drawn by long-horned oxen and serve to carry grain, hay, grapes and beetroot along the broad sun-beaten

tracks. The whole conveyance is painted in red and blue lines, from the spokes of the wheels to the shafts, and on it are depicted rosebuds, branches, daisies, serpents, dragons, St. Antony the Abbot and the Madonna. On the back of the cart, in the most conspicuous position, is painted the figure of St. George on a white horse transfixing the monster. One meets these gaudy-coloured carts by hundreds throughout the Romagna districts; they have been painted by women for centuries, and no peasant would neglect to have his wagon thus decorated. The women who provide the colours (mostly cinnabar and ground-up terra-cotta) are content to paint them for twenty or thirty francs, and often accomplish their arduous, if not very delicate task in a single day.

Working on an embroidery frame is both the most ancient and the simplest form of this handicraft. It is practised very generally throughout Italy and is often employed to decorate aprons, more frequently household linen, and still more frequently altar-cloths and priests' garments. (It must not be forgotten that many an Italian works purely with a view to presenting her offering to the church.) Lighter and rather less durable than the drawn thread, to which we shall return later, it lends itself to the same designs and to the same purposes, though in a humbler way. Thus the *buratto*, or silk waste, which is made into a loosely woven transparent textile, is embroidered in the same way as the *rete* or net-lace.

Drawn thread-work is confined almost exclusively to Sicily and Sardinia, where it is used to decorate the beds—the canopies, the supports on which they rest, the valances which hide the mattresses, and the borders of the curtains are all adorned with this wonderful embroidery. The work is fully explained by its name. By withdrawing threads in both directions an aperture is made, and the design is worked on the transparent frame thus made. In Sicily they leave the background practically opaque, but in Sardinia the whole basis is eliminated and then re-formed according to the design. Just as in the case of the basket-work at Castelsardo, the women seem to make a point of trying the slowest way to work. In Sicily this drawn thread-work has a certain dignity about it, even in its less delicate forms. The commonest motives are heraldic, and swans and eagles are very frequently found. The love of bright colours is also common, for in Sicily the background is often of red, green, or blue silk, and in Sardinia of a rusty-coloured thread.

In the country round Genoa, and more especially at Chiavari, we find the people engaged on a closely-knotted work resembling far more a fringe than a lace, which both in name and in appearance bears traces of its Arabic origin. Known as “macramé,”

WOMEN'S CRAFTS

it has never entered into the local costumes, but merely serves to ornament towels and other cloths of this nature.

Throughout the length and breadth of Italy peasant women are found who can make all the various lace stitches with a needle—the *sfilatura*, the maize stitch (of which we have already spoken), the *reticello*, or “bone” lace. The latter serves to trim blouses; and although this work calls for almost a geometrical knowledge of drawing, yet even here we find the peasants trying to reproduce in it animals, objects, flowers, and stars.

Burano, from ancient times a centre of the needle-lace industry, is the town from which the revival of women's arts and crafts first emanated. The first impulse was due to the energy and initiative of Paulo Zambri and Countess Andriana Marcello, and dates from 1870. Nowadays every woman in Burano knows how to make the famous stitch which bears the name of this little country place, and which is only rustic work inasmuch as it is made by the poor, for in itself it is nothing less than a delicate and exquisite art.

Throughout the Bergamo district, Liguria, Tuscany, the Marches, Campania, the Abruzzi and Sicily we meet with aprons, caps, hoods, pillow-cases and sheets decorated with this work. Clever as they are at manipulating the needle, peasant women take a delight in reproducing masterpieces of ingenuity and patience in which is clearly apparent the pleasure experienced by the worker in her task and her desire to prolong it. The facility and ease with which our country people almost improvise braid-lace of exquisite design suggests a dormant faculty ready to spring into fresh existence at the first appeal.

A single, intelligent and energetic woman has, in a few years only, been the means of teaching the women of a small village in Puglia how to bring the art of *reticello* to perfection. Nobody would ever believe that this white and precious lace could ever have been made by the rough hands of these poor peasant women who ten years ago ignored the very existence of such work.

The work which has obtained the firmest hold on the affections of the country is undoubtedly that of pillow-lace. The ladies of the fifteenth century disdained the use of the cumbersome and inelegant cushion required for its production, and abandoned this art to the working classes, who in some cities, as for instance at Genoa and Milan, learned how to create with their bobbins lace as precious and as beautiful as that made with the needle. The country women, however, do not practise this art, but limit their efforts to making that poor peasant lace which has no striking characteristics and bears the same stamp all the world over, in Scandinavia, Greece,

Austria, just as at Cantu, in the Marches, in Piedmont and around Naples.

In Liguria the peasants follow less slavishly the patterns set them by the capital, and here the women specialise in larger pieces of work such as shawls and mantles ; but in the Venetian district and in the Abruzzi rustic pillow-lace has very pronounced characteristics of its own. No one will be surprised to learn that the lace we find at Venice, with its sharp pointed and graceful designs, conveys a decidedly Gothic impression. The women of Murano, Pellestrina and Chioggia all work at pillow-lace, and still continue to reproduce almost exactly the same designs as those published in 1547 in a Venetian book of models entitled "Le Pompe." The book, now very rare, has not been in circulation for centuries amongst the women of the lagoons, but the lace thus originated some four centuries ago by an unknown artist still represents a flourishing industry ; this is a significant example of the conservative spirit with which these humble people, and especially the womenfolk, are imbued.

Pillow-lace was never made in the Venetian district for home purposes, but always for sale. An old song tells us how traders scoured the country of the lagoons and bought up all the handiwork of the lacemakers, giving a pear, an apple, or a root of garlic in exchange for lace.

The lacemakers of the province of Aquila are, for the most part, very skilful, but although the general style of the work often, at first sight, resembles that of Milan, yet it differs in reality both in the manner of execution and in the design. It is more like Russian lace, so much so that the latter is frequently mistaken for old Aquila lace.

These were the arts and industries which were everywhere dying out and on the point of extinction when they were so skilfully revived by the Feminine Industries Association.

In one small, sparsely populated district in the high Abruzzi plateau there still exists the art of pillow-lace making, which dates from the sixteenth century and has preserved a particular characteristic of its own and a unique mode of execution. The country is called Pescocostanzo, and it is a spot noted for its rare natural beauty, for its traditions of rustic trade, ranging from lace-making to working in iron, and for its old-world appearance and customs which have been preserved almost unchanged from ancient days. In this part of Italy every woman, from the beggar to the "Gran' Signora," from the grandmother to the youngest girl, knows how to make pillow-lace. In the streets, in the squares, sitting on the staircases outside their houses and in the porches, the women are to be seen

WOMEN'S CRAFTS

working at their lace pillows. And—what is quite unique—they work without any design. If I had not seen them with my own eyes making the lace with the *aquile*, I should never have believed that a poor peasant woman could design with so much grace and purity by means of countless pins. Another peculiarity of the lace of Pescocostanzo is a natural sequel to this faculty for dispensing with designs imposed by the book. For we see once more those same figures, animals, flowers and symbols, which in pillow-lace are so rarely found. The designs, which are all traditional, always bear a name which corresponds in the imagination of the worker to some concrete figure, even though we may not understand its meaning. Thus in a simple lace with points she sees a resemblance to “denti di cane,” or dog’s teeth, and calls it by this name; another with open work-holes she calls “camerucchie,” or little rooms; a ground-work studded with small circles is called the “cardinelli,” or little carlino, from the ancient coin carlino, and thus in the same way we get “the trefoil,” “the heart,” “the vases,” “the figures,” &c.

And with these Abruzzi lace-workers I will conclude this brief and incomplete sketch. No other peasant sums up better than they do the true characteristics of the Italian peasant woman. The women of Pescocostanzo, as beautiful and as elegant as they are robust, cut and collect the wood, perform the most arduous labours in the fields, and draw water from the wells, carrying on their heads the large heavy amphorae, filled to overflowing, and enormous bundles of wood. They walk erect, lightly and gracefully on their rope shoes, also the work of their own hands. And yet these poor hands, hardened, tanned and made rough by the use of the hoe, the mattock and the billhook, still retain intact that delicate faculty for reproducing all the particular merits that women’s work possesses.

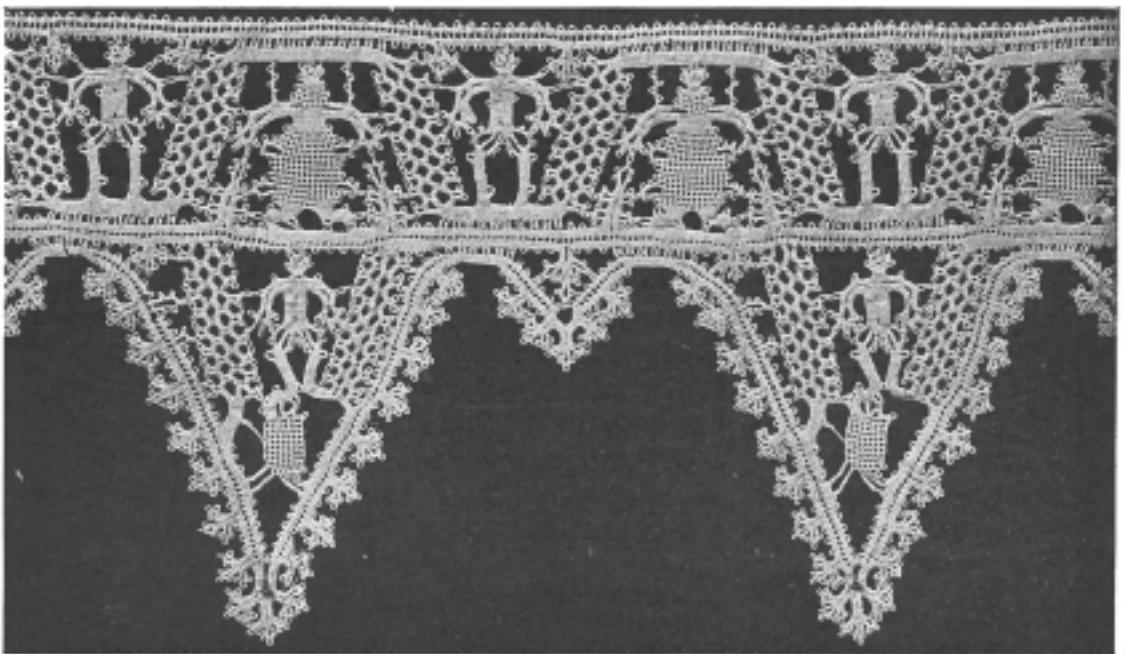
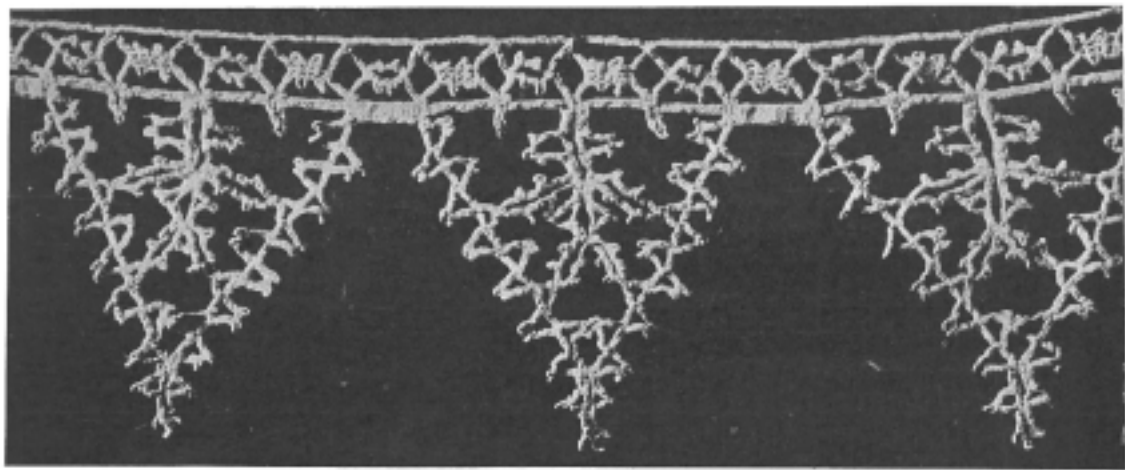
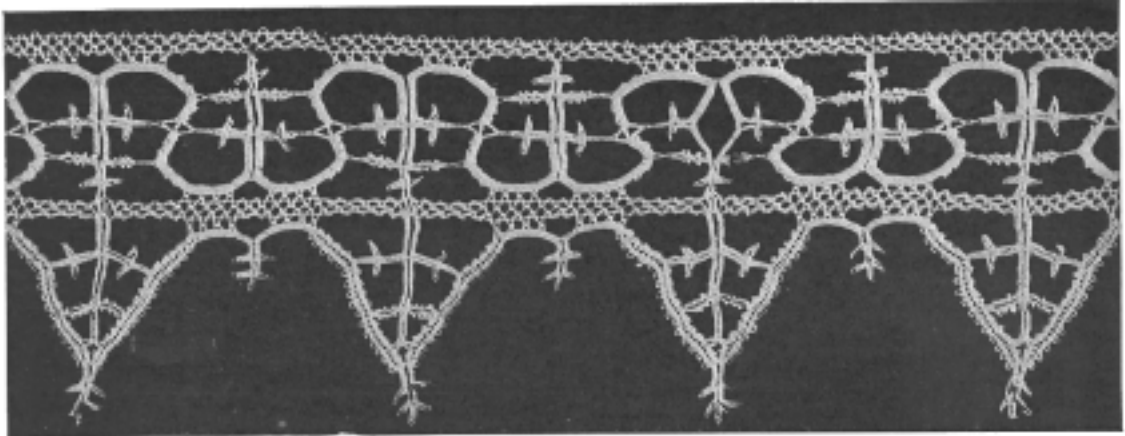
Parre is the only part of the Bergamasco district where the peasant costume still obtains. Its austere and almost monkish character justifies the legend attributing its origin to a vow made in olden times to exorcise some epidemic. This costume of the Bergamasco highlands has one curious peculiarity in common with a dress worn in the Southern Apennines; namely, the way in which the breast is repressed and tightened in as if to denote penitence. This habit of dress is found both at Parre and at Scanno in the Abruzzi. Throughout Crociaria and Brienza peasant women in general leave the breast free and scarcely supported even by their bodice; whilst in Sardinia not only is the bosom left entirely unconfined, but it is emphasised by means of a cord outlining the bust. But, of course, this does not imply penance in the case of the women

WOMEN'S CRAFTS

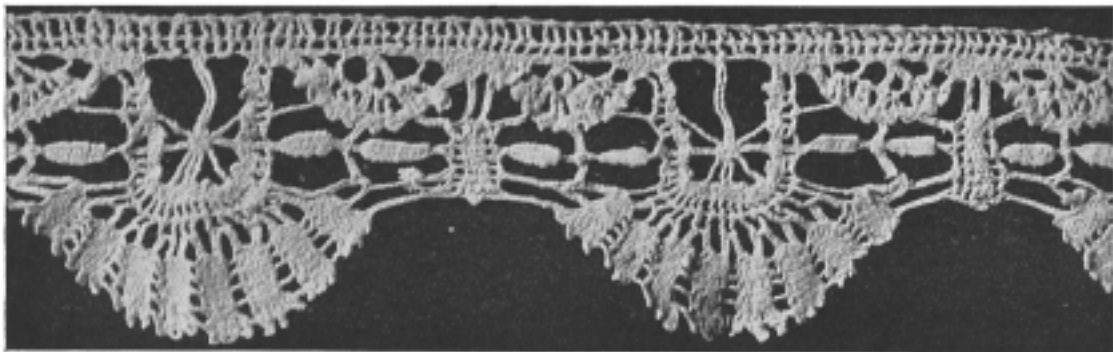
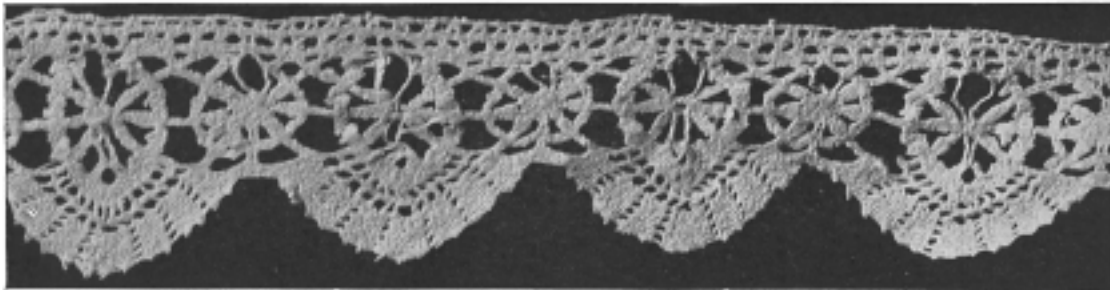
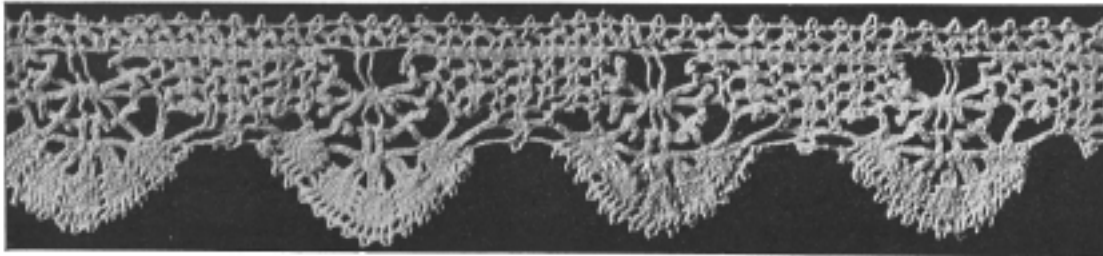
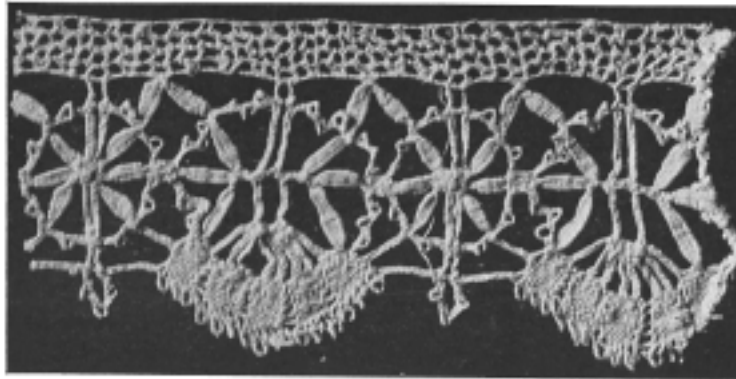
of Scanno and Parre any more than the Sardinian mode of dress implies that the wearers are coquettes.

The Parre costume consists of a chemisette, the seams of which are embroidered with the *punto avorio* or *punto saraceno* (ivory or maize stitch) which is found in Valsesia. At the neck it is thrown open and the lapels worked with designs. The bodice is of a brown hue and worn very tight, being laced-up with cord, or, on holidays, with coloured ribbons. The pleated petticoat is of dark blue wool, the stockings are red, and clogs are worn as footgear. Formerly the aprons were embroidered with coloured silks, but they are now of plain white muslin. The women of Parre adorn their heads with large brass-headed pins and intertwine silk ribbons in their hair. Married women wear embroidered veils, square in shape, whilst widows wear them long and unadorned. In the cold weather the women don white woollen jackets trimmed along the seams with red stitches ; these coats vary in length and are worn longer in the case of married women than of girls.

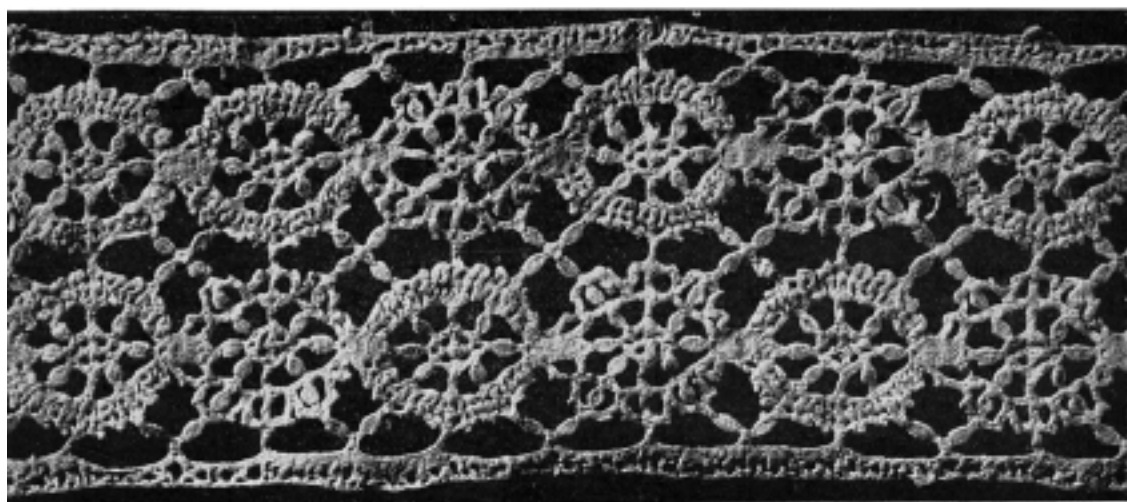
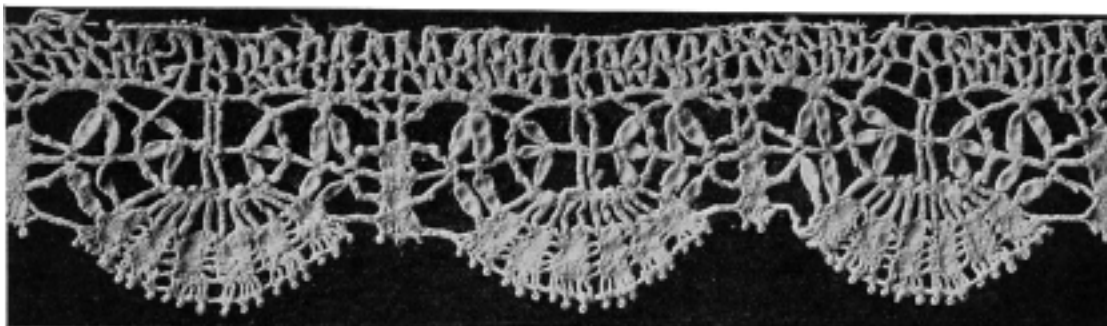
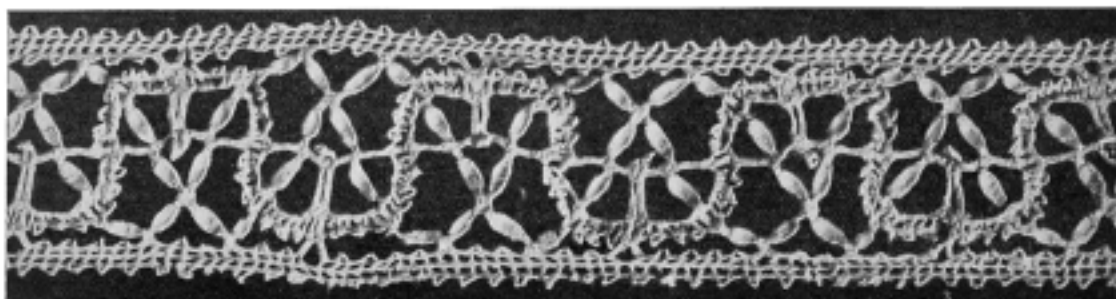
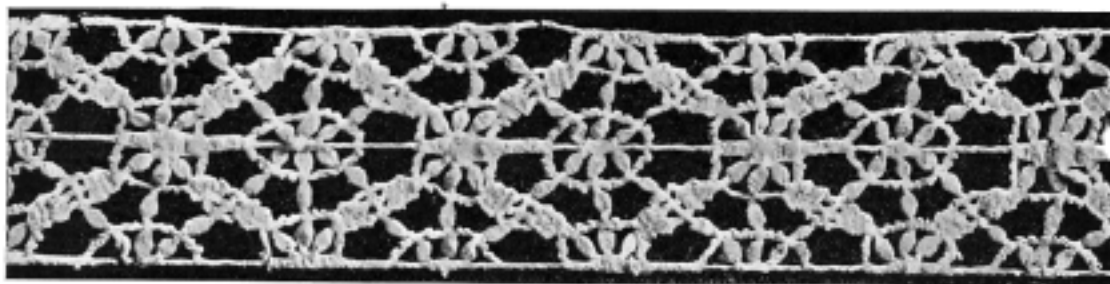
LACE AND EMBROIDERY



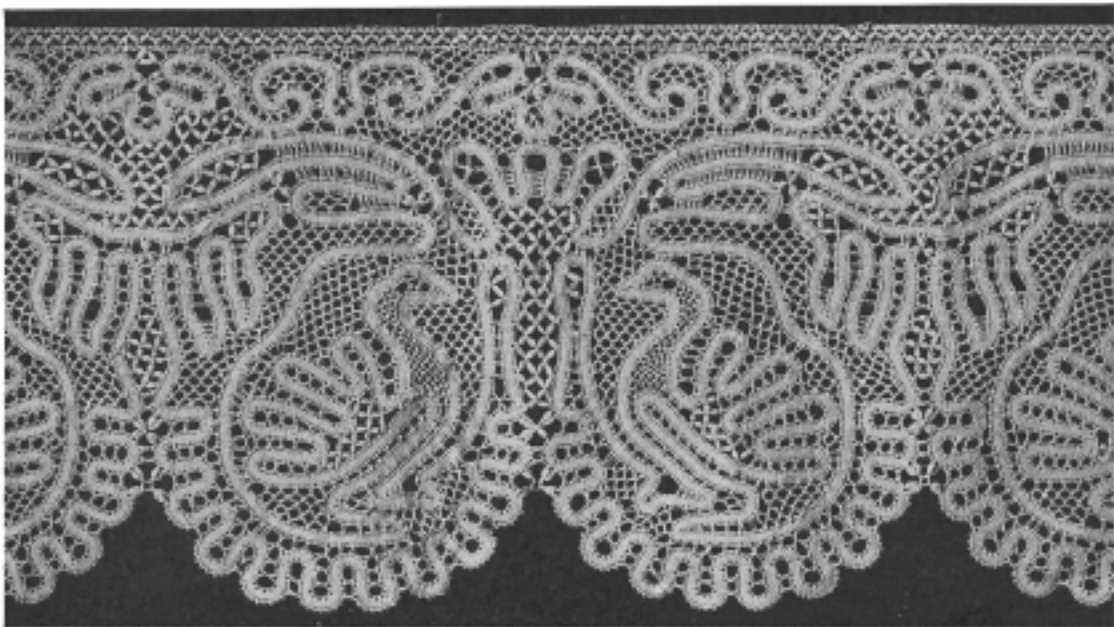
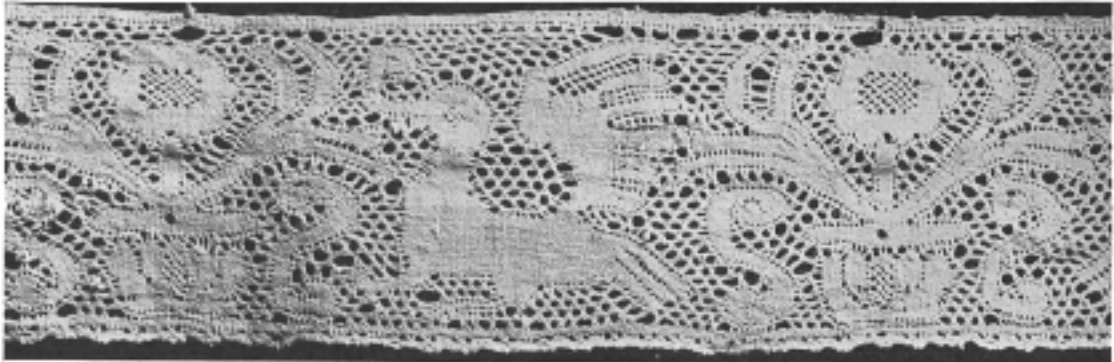
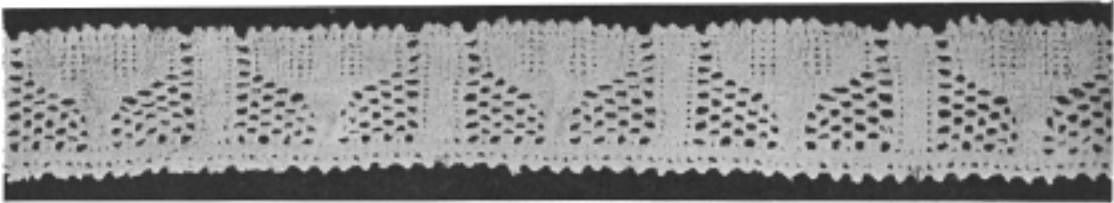
LACE AND EMBROIDERY



LACE AND EMBROIDERY



LACE AND EMBROIDERY

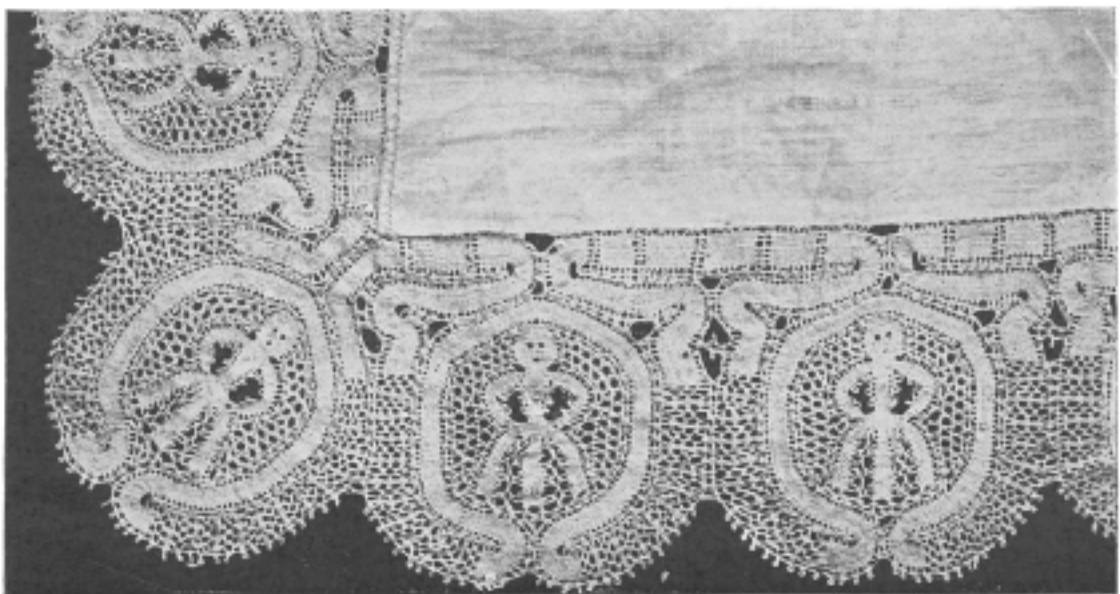


103 TO 105 PILLOW-LACE FROM PESCOSTANZO, ABRUZZO

LACE AND EMBROIDERY

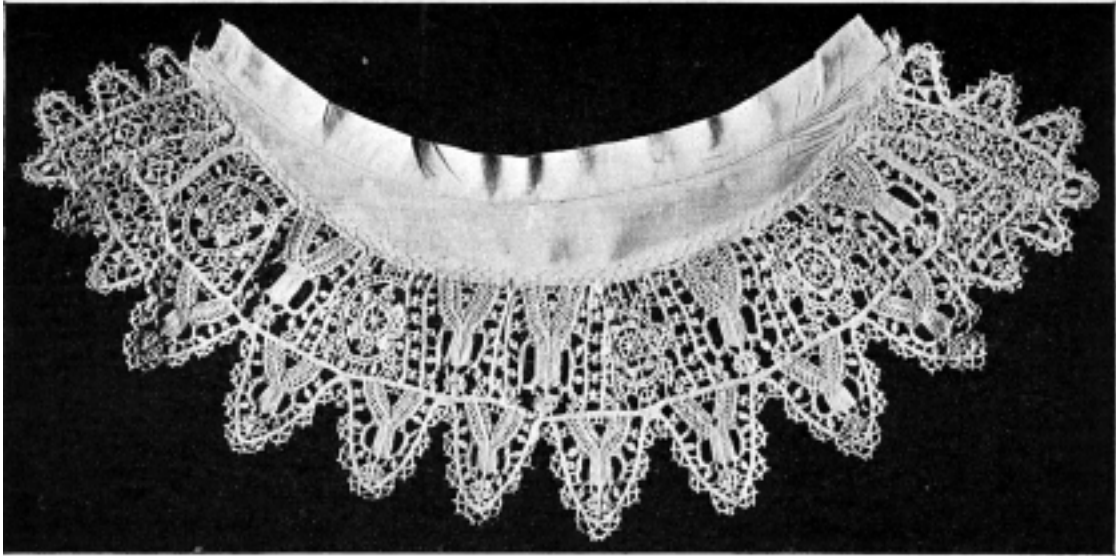


106 AND 107 PILLOW LACE FROM AQUILA, ABRUZZO

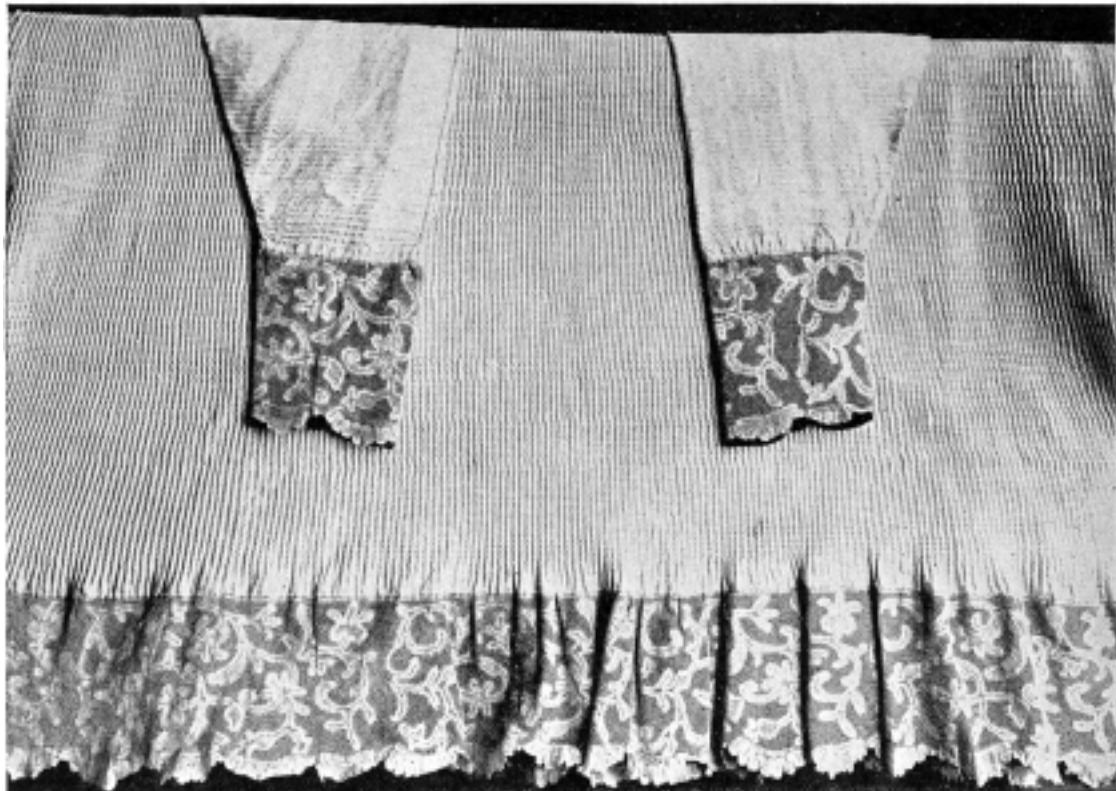


108 PILLOW-LACE BORDER OF BED-SPREAD, FROM PESCOSTANZO, ABRUZZO

LACE AND EMBROIDERY

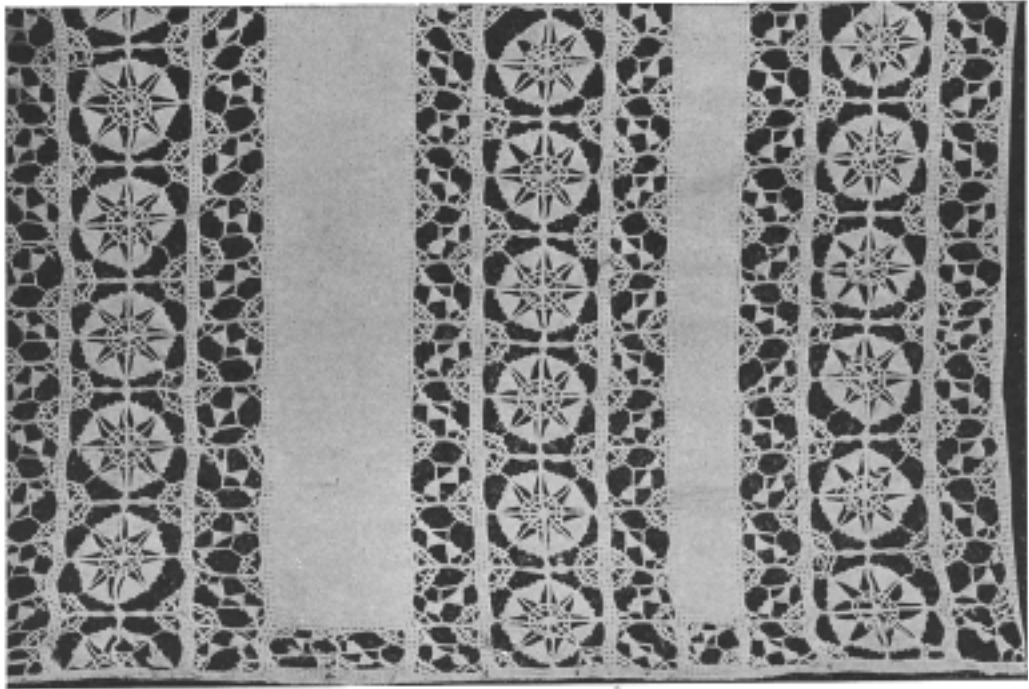


109 COLLAR OF OLD NEEDLEPOINT LACE, FROM ABRUZZO

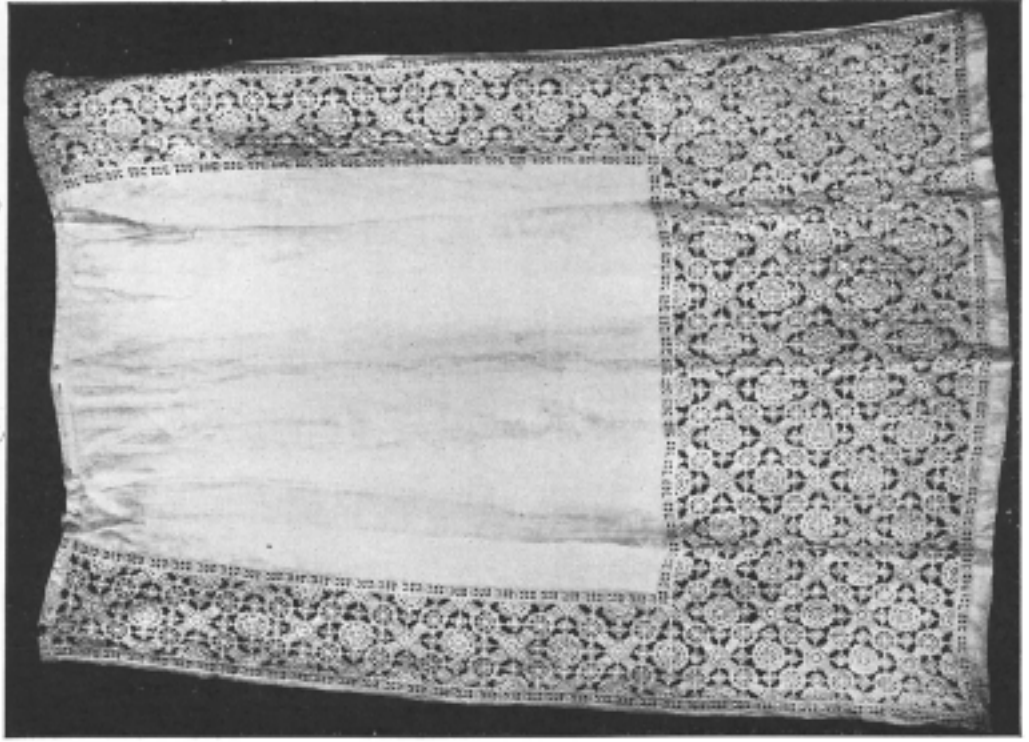


110 PRIEST'S SHIRT TRIMMED WITH PILLOW-LACE, FROM AQUILA, ABRUZZO

LACE AND EMBROIDERY

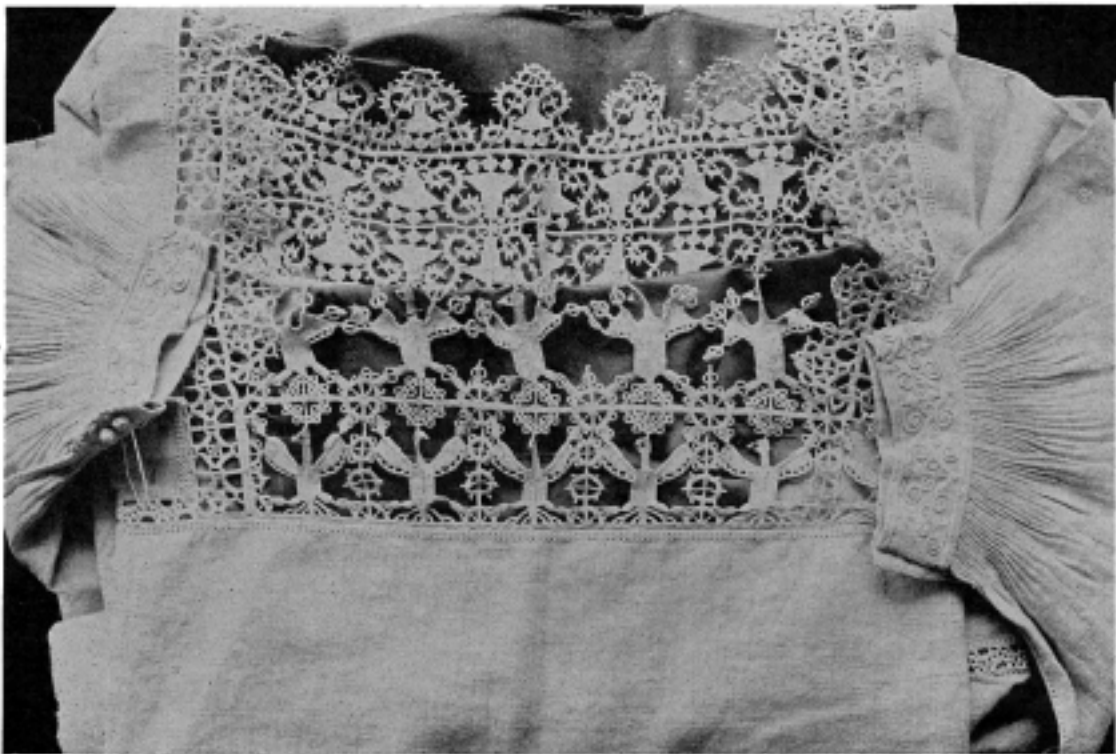
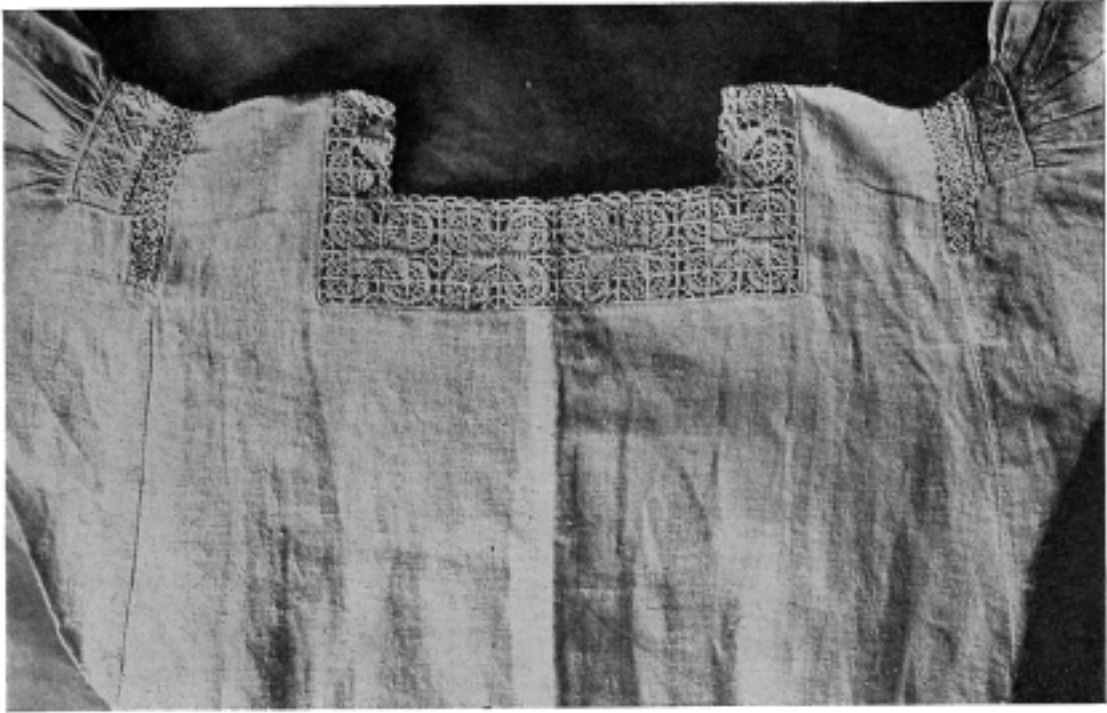


111 TOWEL WITH LACE TRIMMING (RETICELLA)
(From the *Industrie Femeninile* Collection)



112 APRON WITH CUT-WORK LACE BORDER, FROM ABRUZZO

LACE AND EMBROIDERY



113 AND 114 SHIRTS TRIMMED WITH CUT-WORK LACE, FROM SOUTH ITALY

LACE AND EMBROIDERY

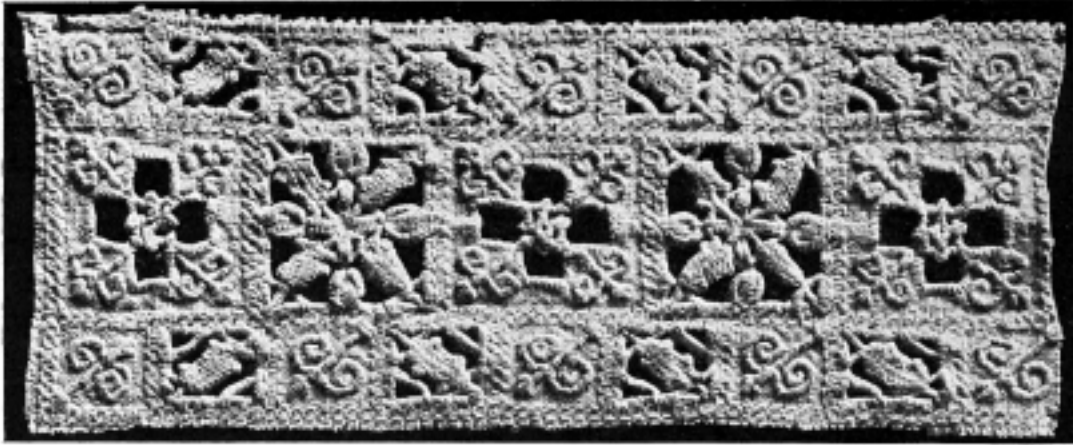


115 SHIRT TRIMMED WITH NEEDLEPOINT AND PILLOW-LACE, FROM CAMPAGNA, ROME

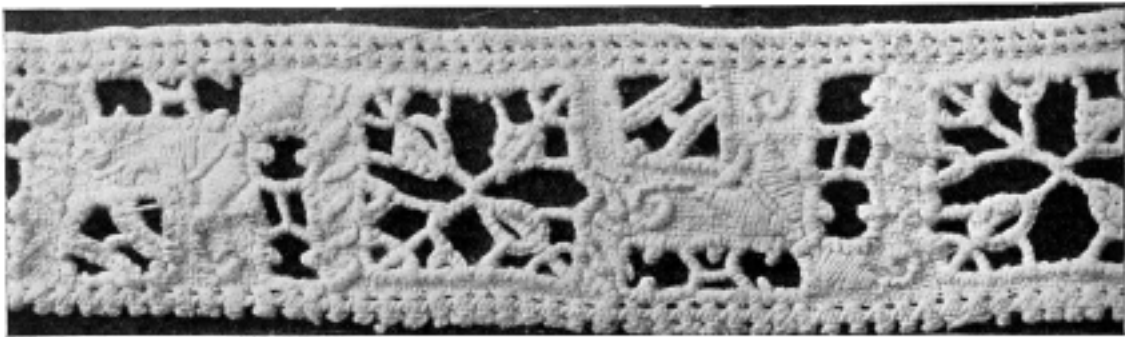


116 DETAIL OF ABOVE SHIRT

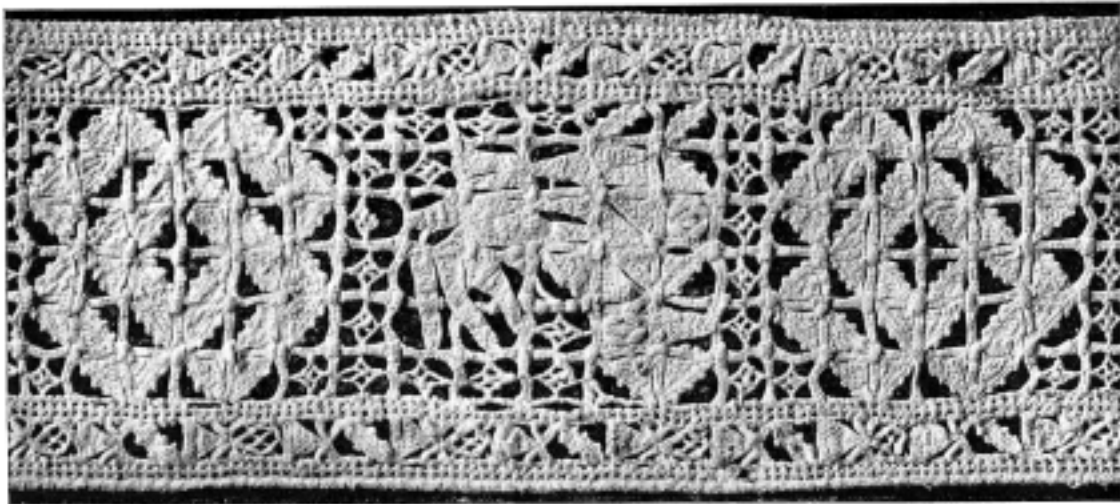
LACE AND EMBROIDERY



117 LACEWORK (PUNTO TAGLIATA)

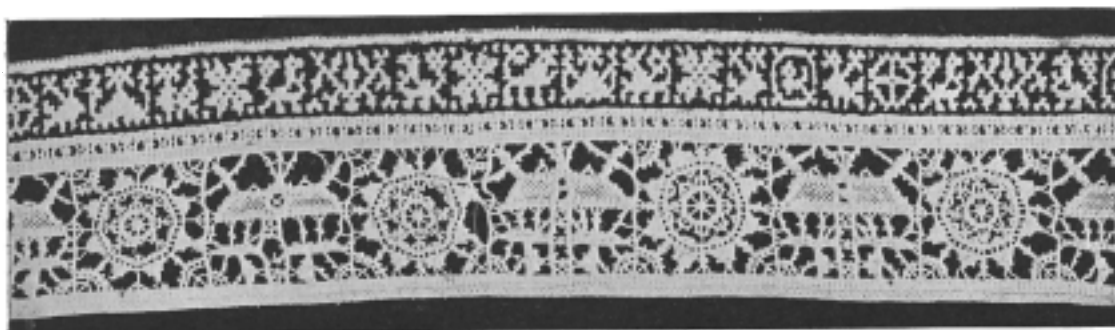
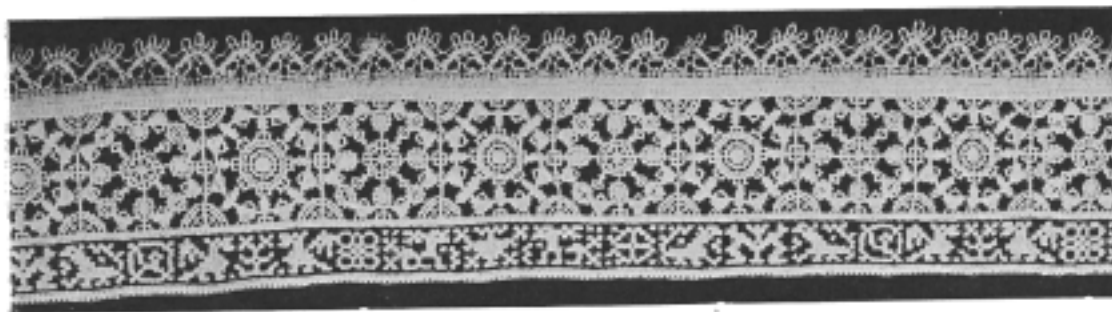


118 LACEWORK (PUNTO TAGLIATA)

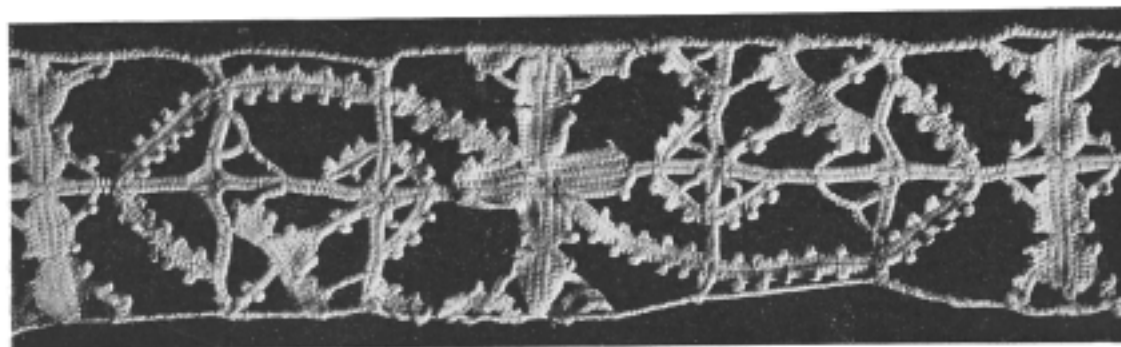
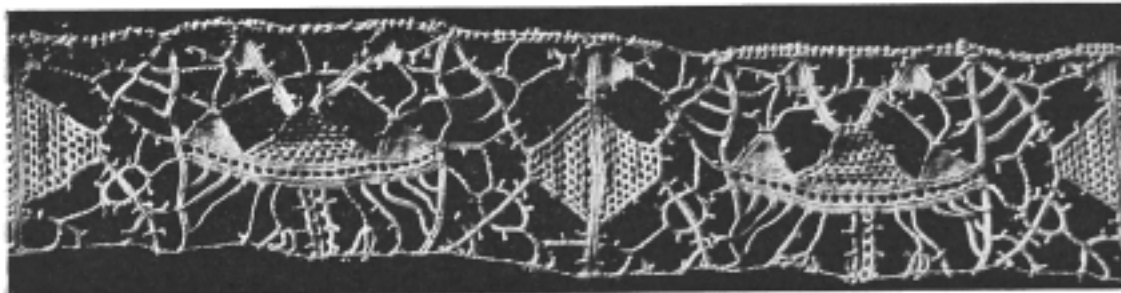


119 LACEWORK (RETICELLA)

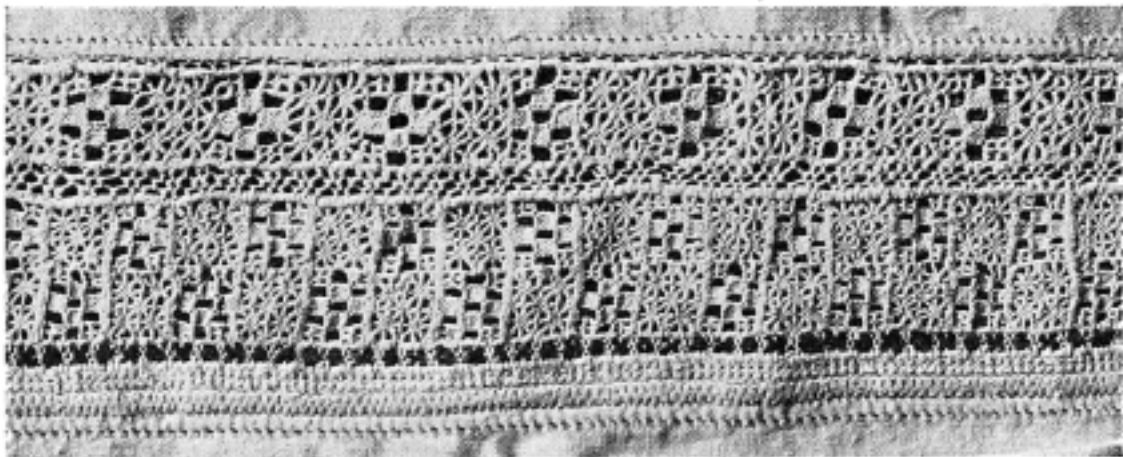
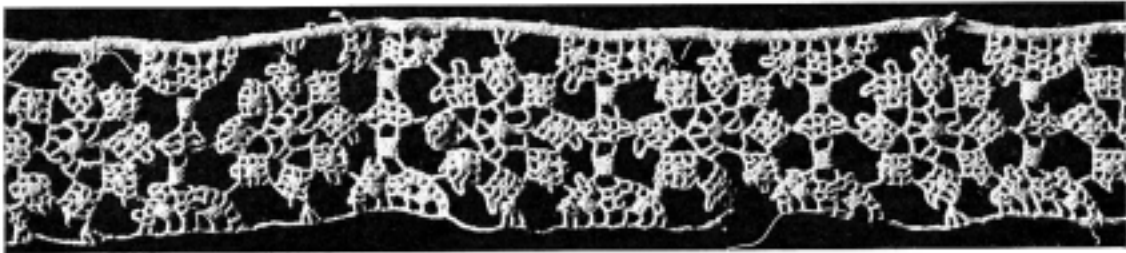
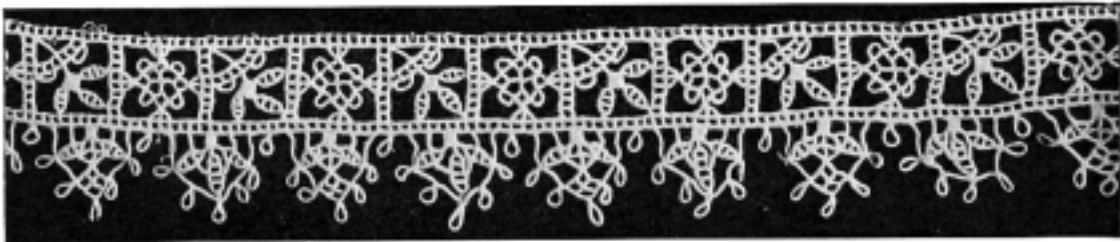
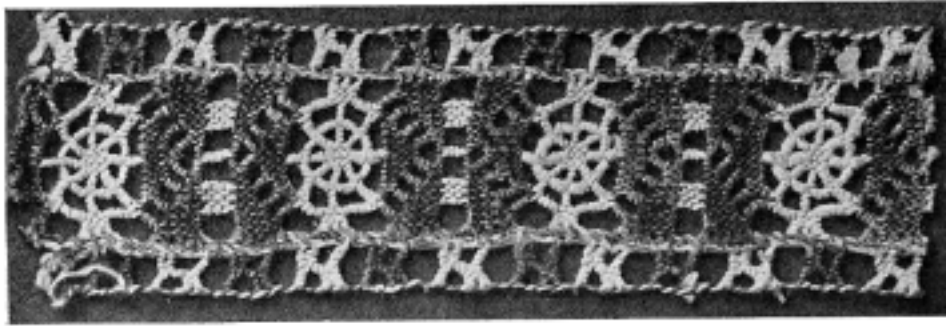
LACE AND EMBROIDERY



I20 AND I2I LACEWORK (RETICELLA)



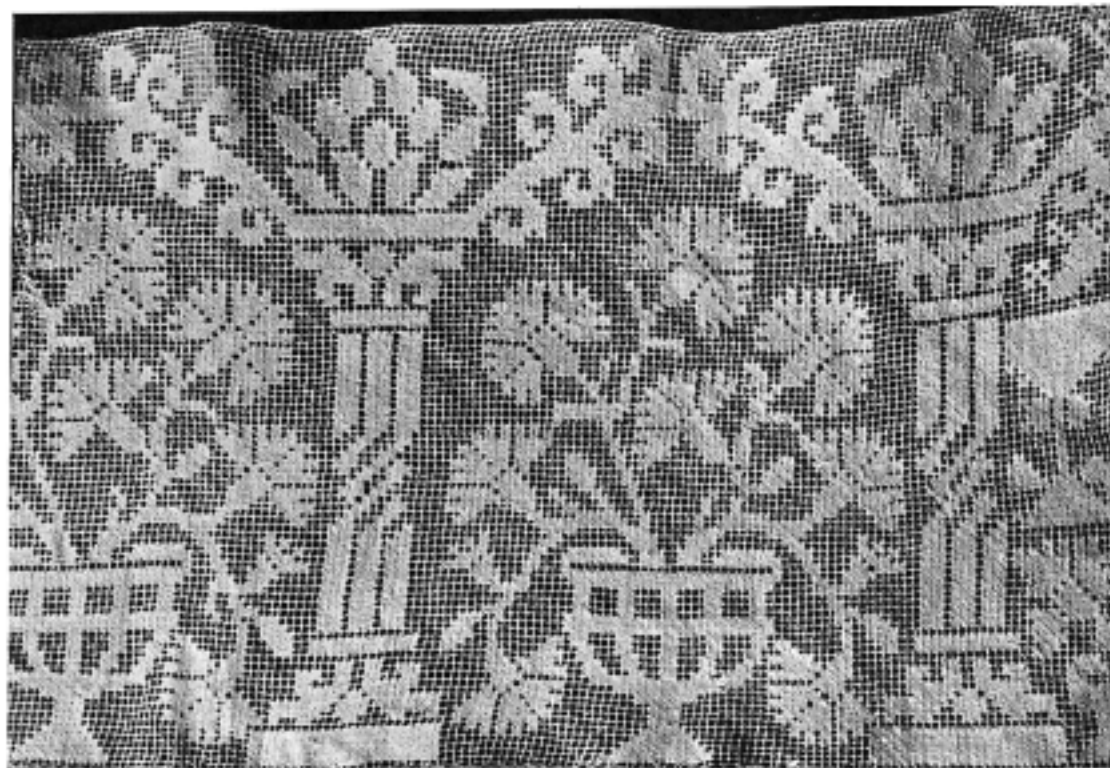
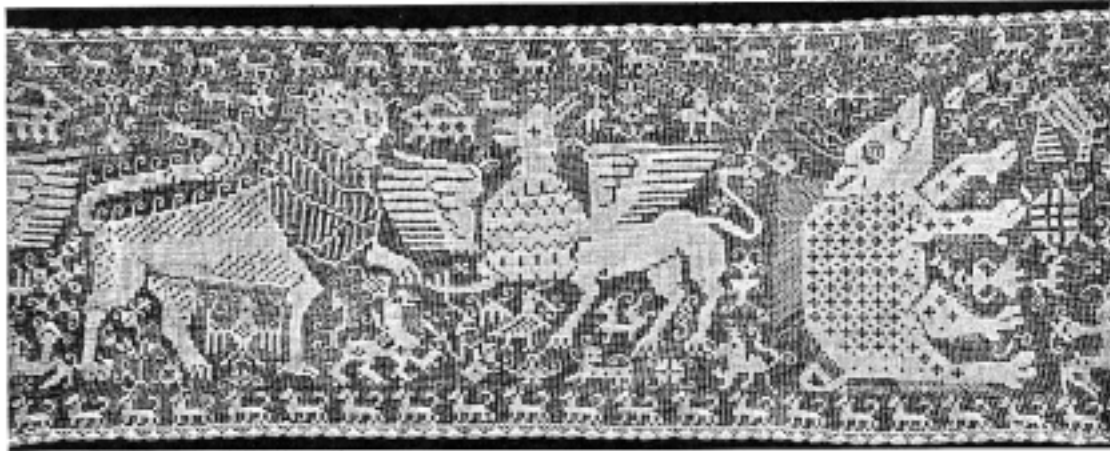
I22 AND I23 NEEDLEPOINT LACE



LACE AND EMBROIDERY

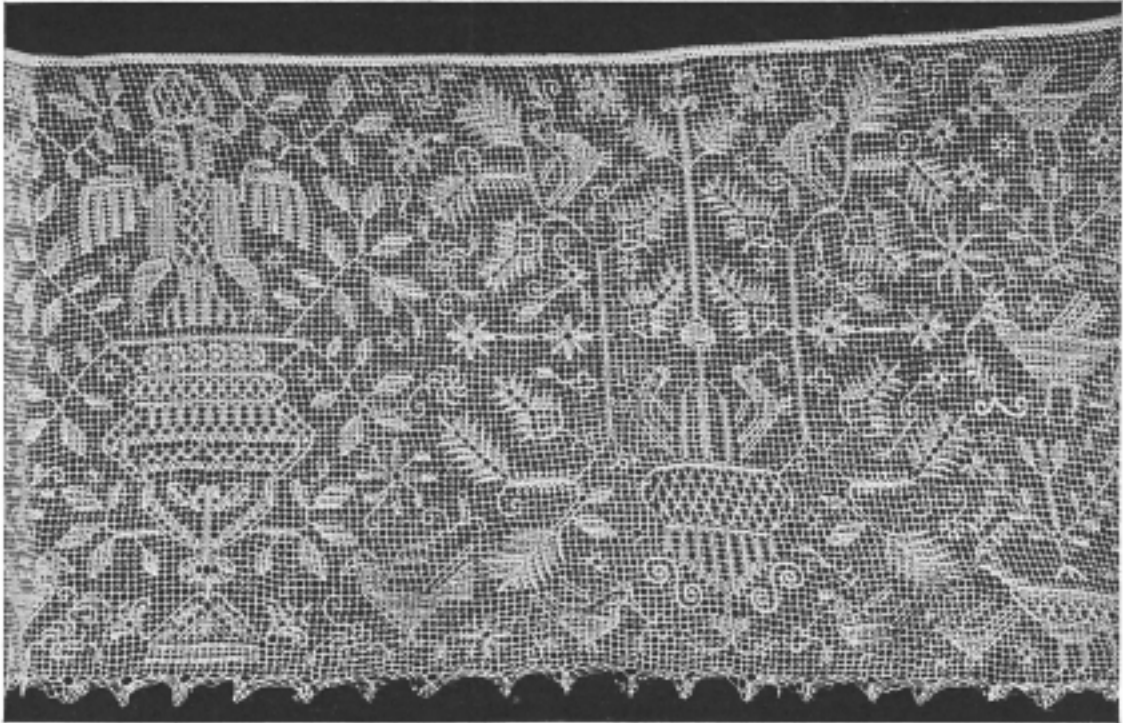


128 LACEWORK (PUNTO A MAGLIA), FROM LOMBARDY

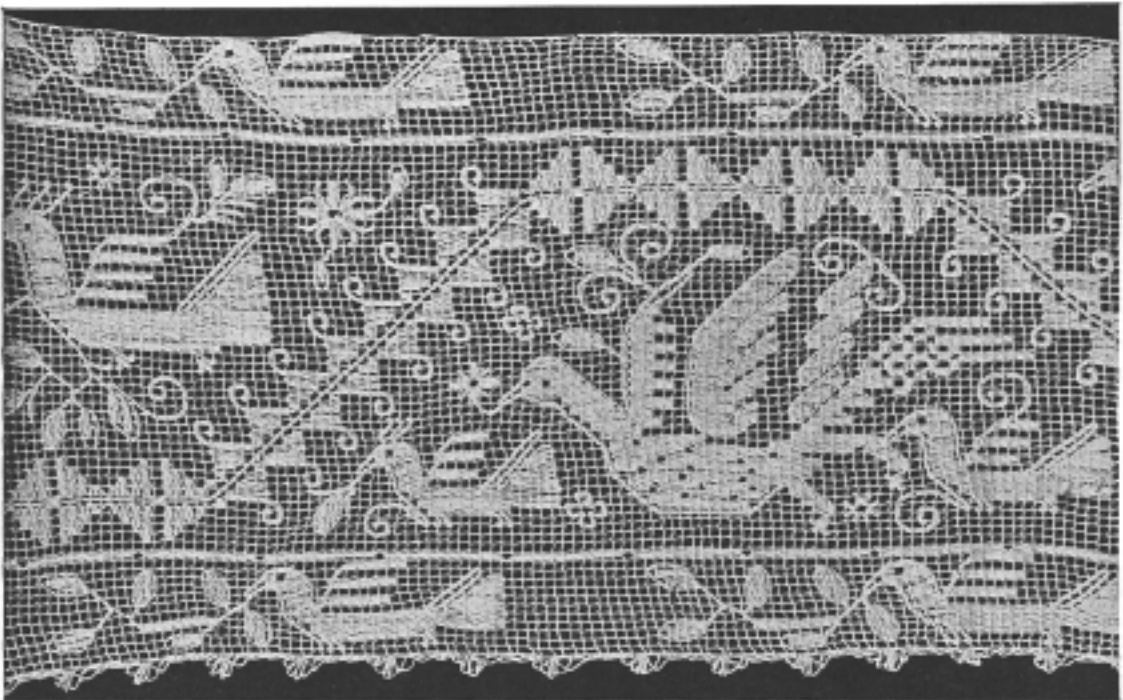


129 AND 130 FILET LACE FROM LOMBARDY

LACE AND EMBROIDERY

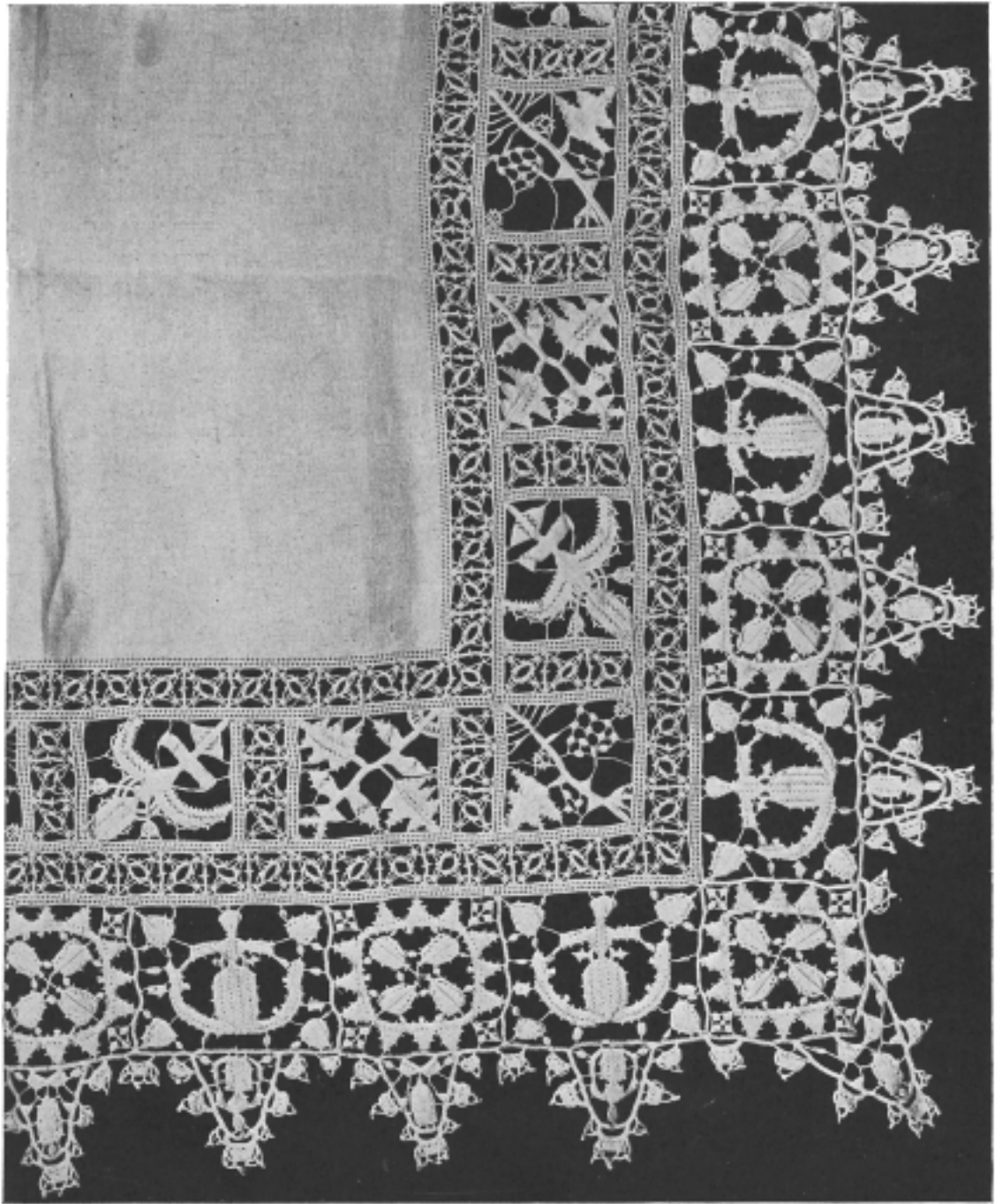


131 NET-LACE FOR BED-CANOPY, FROM SARDINIA



132 NET-LACE FOR BED-CANOPY, FROM SARDINIA

LACE AND EMBROIDERY



*(From the Industrie
Femminile Collection)*

LACE AND EMBROIDERY



134 CUSHION WITH BORDER OF NEEDLEPOINT AND PILLOW-LACE, FROM SARDINIA



135 LINEN BED-SPREAD WITH NET-LACE PANEL AND SQUARES OF RETICELLA, FROM ABRUZZO