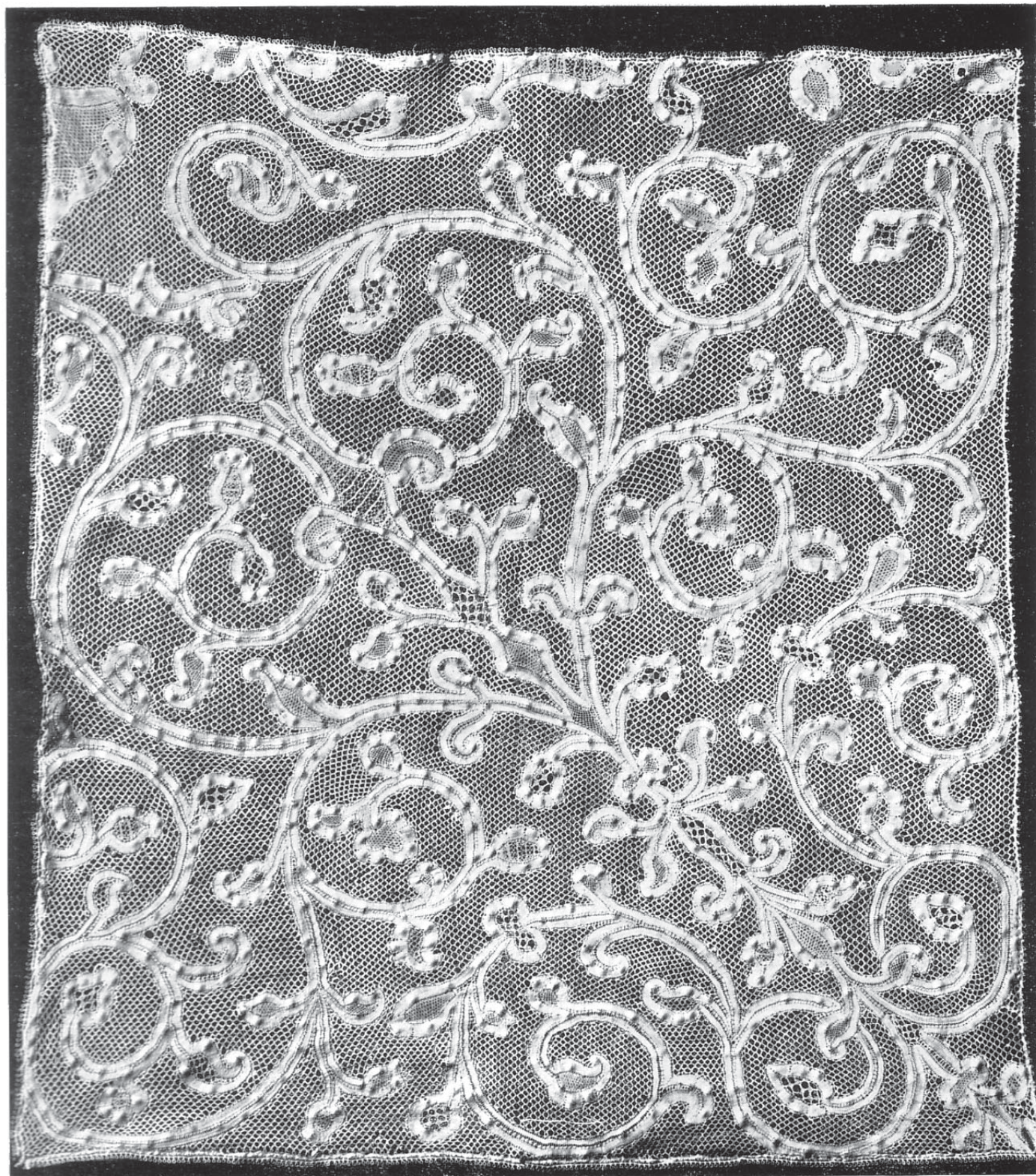


MILAN — XVIII CENTURY.



No. 252 — Fragment of insertion; probably the corner of an altar-cloth.

Most beautiful design, with continuous braid and openwork motives. The Ida Schiff Collection, Florence.

MILAN — XVIII CENTURY.



No. 253 — Insertion with vertical design, rarely found in bobbin-lace.

Sangiorgi, Rome.

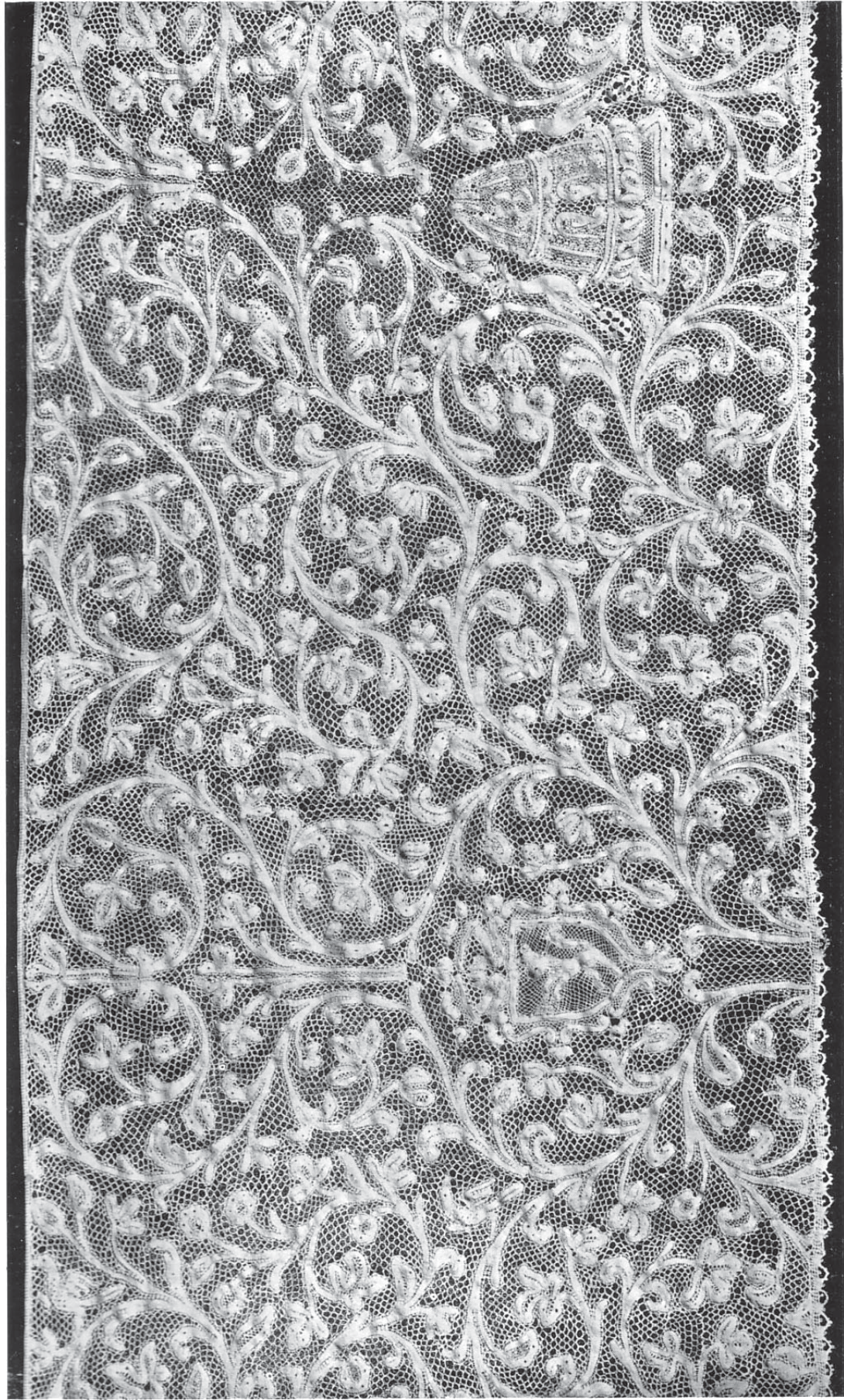
MILAN — XVIII CENTURY.



No. 254 — Lace with various figures of serpents, birds, butterflies, etc.

Sangiorgi, Rome.

MILAN — XVIII CENTURY.



No. 255 — Alb trimming with heraldic arms, a fountain, flowers and birds.

Sangiorgi, Rome.

MILAN — XVIII CENTURY.

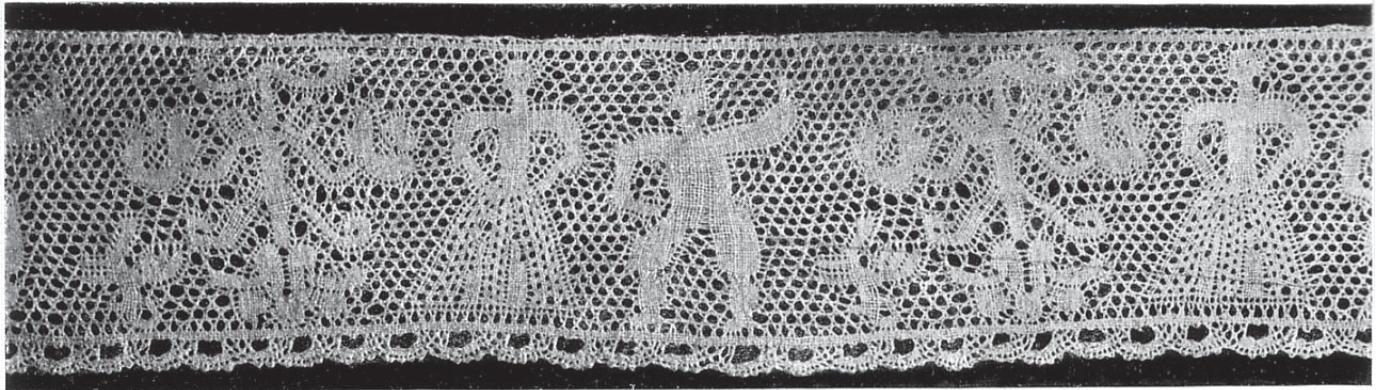


No. 256 — Lace for alb with hunting motives.

Lions, stags, peacocks, huntsman with hounds, a rabbit. Of the same type as No. 242, more accurate in execution and more varied in openwork, but greatly inferior in balance and proportion. Industrial Museum, Rome.

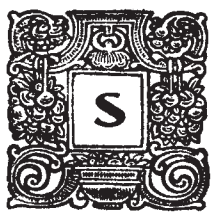
IV.

ABRUZZI.



No. 257 — Figured lace of Pescocostanzo. Amari Collection, Florence.

ABRUZZI.



SOUTHERN Italy, with her two capitals, Naples and Palermo, bore no inconsiderable part in the pageantry of the XVI century, and the furniture of her churches and the dress of her ladies and gentlemen were embellished with magnificent laces of gold, silver, silk, and thread.

Neapolitan and Abruzzian inventories describe their gold and silver laces as being of *Florence*, either because they came actually from thence or because they had assumed the name of their place of origin. Some of the laces must certainly have been Venetian, Milanese, or Genoese; but the ancient bobbin-laces of silk — as well as the white thread variety — most frequently met with in those parts of Italy, which slope gradually downwards from Rome to Sicily, and known as the *Laces of Southern Italy* are undoubtedly of Abruzzian manufacture.

Sicilian table-covers, bed-borders, and coverlets ornamented with the characteristic *drawn-thread-work* of the island were, in the early days, trimmed with lace of the Abruzzian type. In the Marches we find the same sort of lace, though lighter and finer in texture, round beautiful embroideries in satin stitch on *filudente* (common linen) and Rheims lawn.

How, we may ask, can the bobbin-craft of Southern Italy have selected the barren mountains of Abruzzo as a spot in which to settle and to flourish? In what way could the first idea of this fragile work have been wafted into those distant and lonely regions?

Although so picturesque in landscape and possessed of many fine medieval churches and monuments, the province of Abruzzo was but slightly affected by the Renaissance.

From the XV century onwards, artistic ardour displayed itself in many mi-



No. 258 — Work of Sicilian drawn thread, trimmed with lace of the Abruzzian type. Property of the author.

nor forms; wood-carvers produced fine polychrome statues and richly carved choir-stalls; goldsmiths created marvellous and splendid monuments of precious metals; workers in iron wrought fanciful grilles and balconies for churches and palaces; while potters and carpet-weavers devised cheerfully audacious schemes of colour and quaint patterns bringing a note of healthy gaiety into the lowly habitation of the peasant.

We can imagine that in such a district the first lace-maker arriving among their mountains armed with her lace-pillow with its dangling bobbins must have found a host of women eager to learn the gentle art and make it their own; for the native women were not only admirers of beauty, but peculiarly active and intelligent.

The most ancient centres of lace-making in the Abruzzi seem to be: Aquila, Pescocostanzo, and Gessopalena: each remote from the other, and all three far from the sea, which goes to disprove the contention that bobbin-laces had their origin on the sea-coast, and made use of fish bones on pillow-work until pins were introduced at the end of the XVI century.

Although the three Abruzzian laces differ, each one shows some characteristic strongly suggestive of Milanese lace. Thus Aquila and Pescocostanzo each has the



No. 259 — Embroidery of the Marches, trimmed with lace of the Abruzzian type. Tranquilli, Ascoli Piceno.

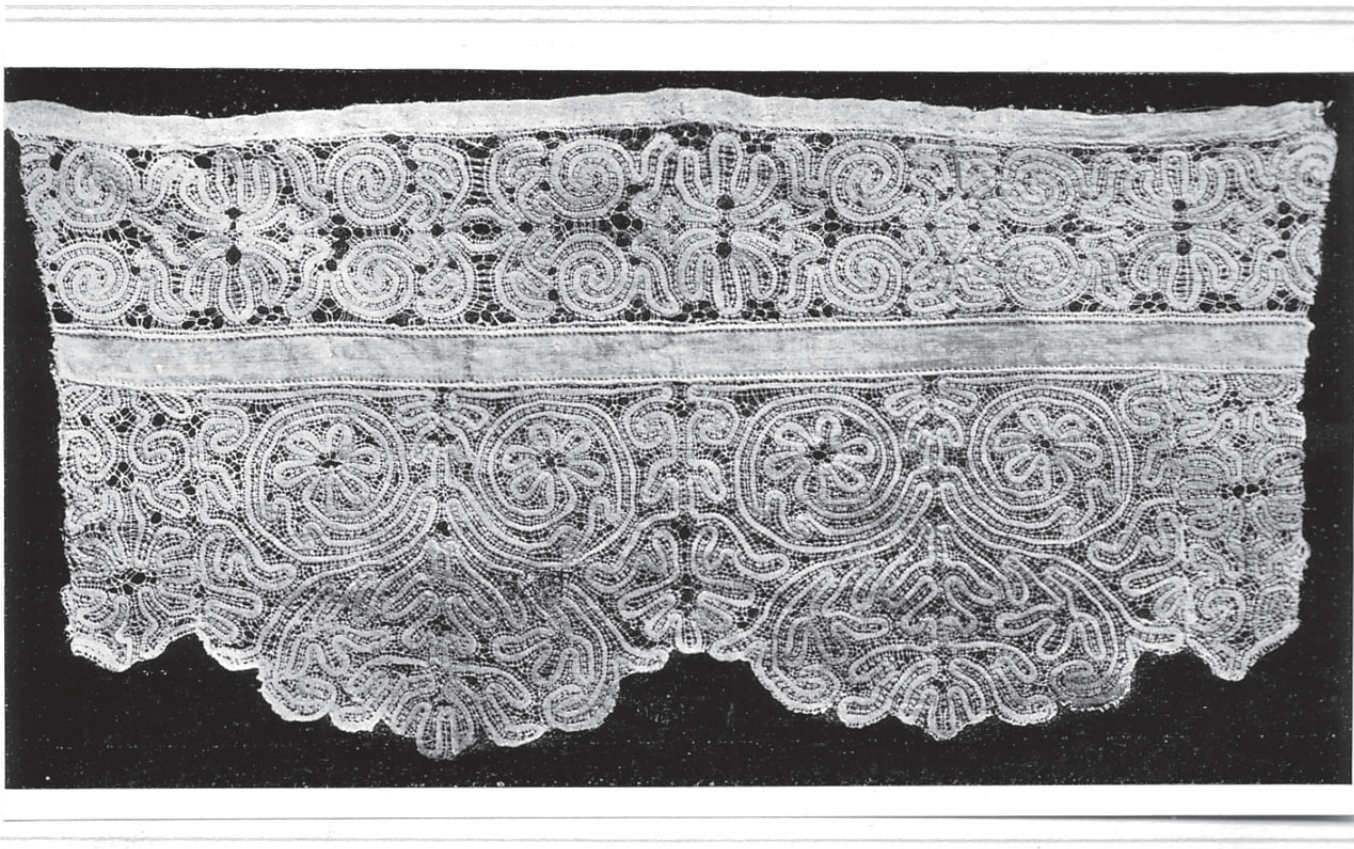
tape or braid with perforations on either edge. In Aquila, this braid, though much slighter, is carried on continuously, as in Milanese, forming curves, flowers and ornaments; but these close, frequent turns take up all the space, leaving no room for ground-work of mesh or little bars. If the lace be very fine and the pattern clear, a background of *mezza passata* is added, differing entirely from the Milanese background and giving it a purely Aquilian character.

Differing from the Lombard model in design and groundwork, these laces further differ in the method of working. At Milan the braid was made with a few bobbins, whose number was increased for the execution of the background; at

Aquila, on the contrary, the lace was made *a tutte coppie*, that is to say, foundation and design were all made at once with a large number of bobbins in play at the same time.

When the design required, Aquilian lace-makers had recourse to the crochet-hook as well, like the Milanese, and lace thus made was called *a punto riattaccato*.

Further on we shall see how the Pescocostanzo laces — direct descendants



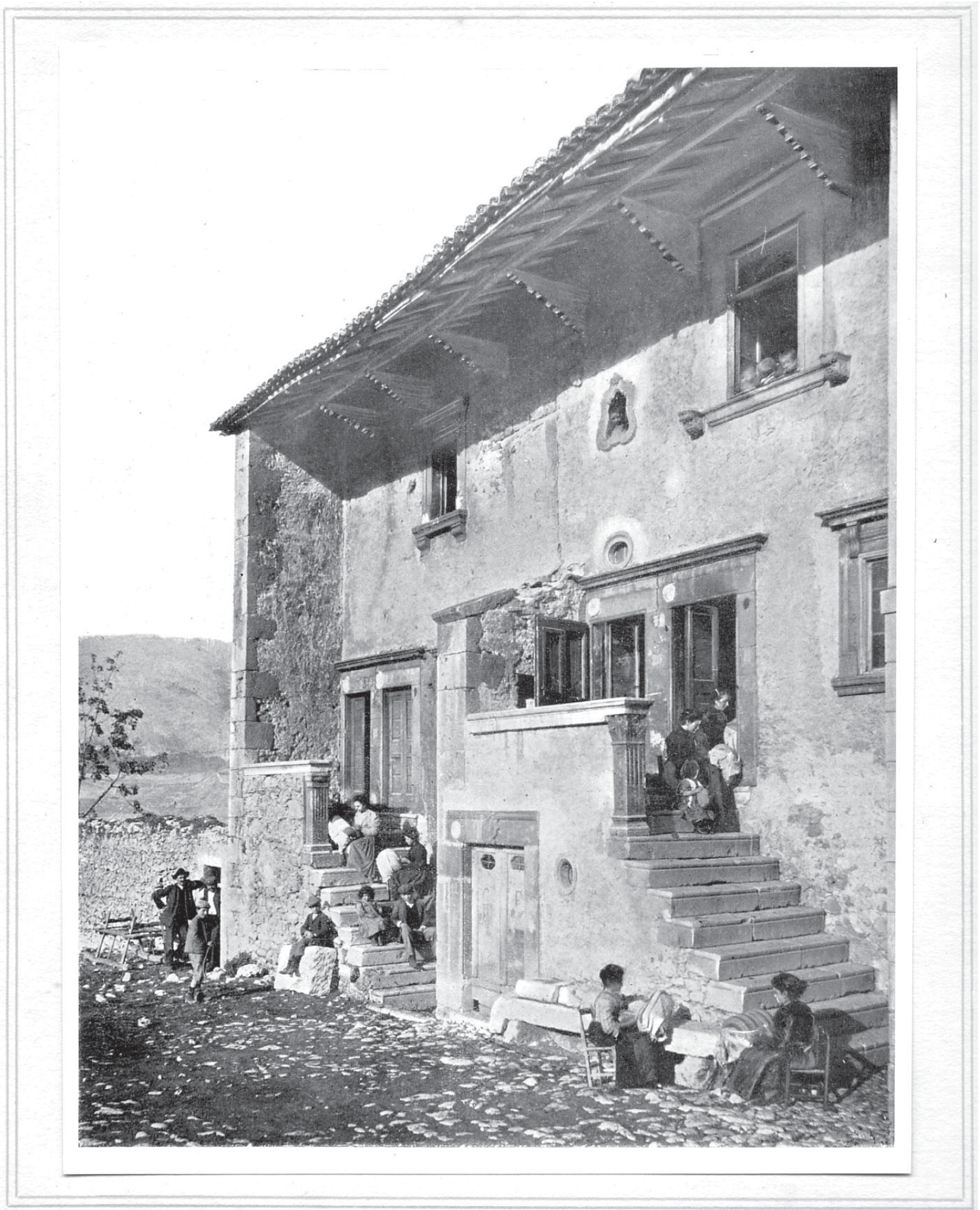
No. 260 — Aquila lace with continuous braid. Aquila Cathedral.

from Milanese lace — assume new characters. While Aquilian laces are ever seeking after greater richness and refinement, those of Pescocostanzo are satisfied to remain in their uncultivated native condition; the former are the intellectual young ladies and the latter sturdy peasant-lasses.

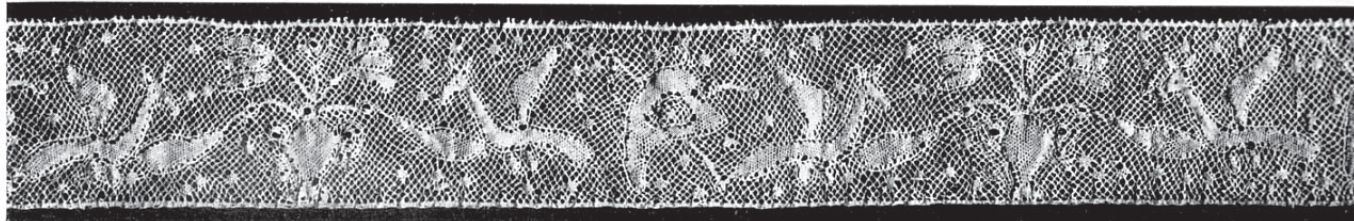
Most likely the history of the two industries could supply reasons for this dissimilarity.

Nothing leads us to suppose that bobbin-lace-making was common to all classes of women in Aquila, while in Pescocostanzo and Gessopalena all made laces and all wore them. The records we have would seem to suggest that Aquila looked on the occupation as aristocratic, and caused it to be pursued in schools and convents.

Nuns from Milan and Genoa taught the various methods and carried about



No. 261 — Women of Pescocostanzo working in the open.

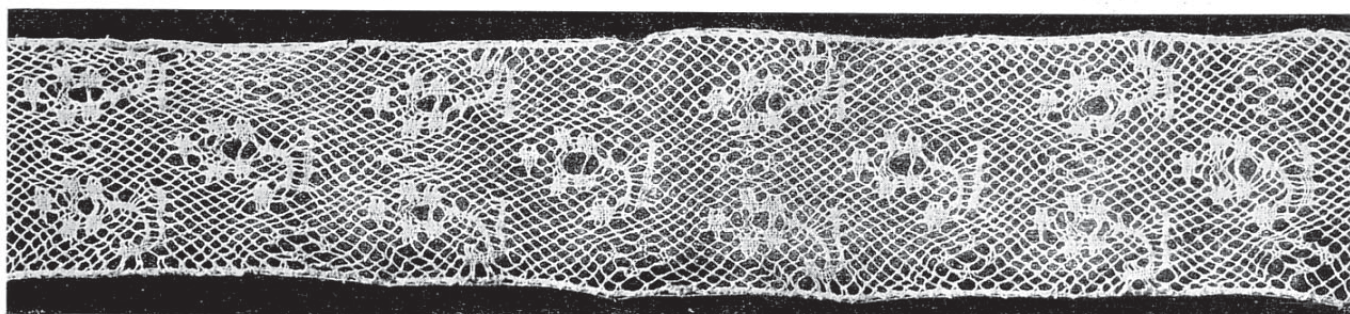


No. 262 — Aquila figured lace, with foundation, a *tutte coppie*.
Ristori, Florence.

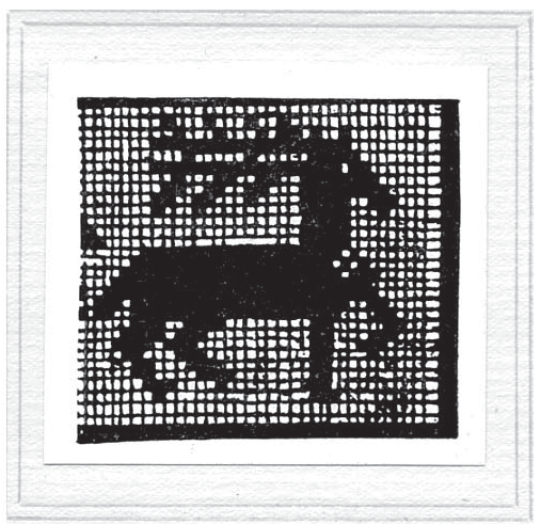
designs with them; those pupils who were especially skilful and intelligent would fuse the knowledge they had gained from their several mistresses, and introduce important changes into methods as well as designs. The nuns of St Chiara prepared valuable white lustrous thread of the finest quality for the precious work; and Aquilian laces adorned not only vestments in churches of the neighbourhood and the clothes and linen of the nobility, but were sent hundreds of miles away, either as gifts for important persons or for special festivals.

In the Acts of the Academy of the Order of Veiled Nuns of Aquila, we read that Sister Veronica of the House of Angelini, a nun in the XVIII century, mistress of embroidery and *punto antico*, directed « the work of the celebrated Aquilian lace eight hands high, executed by six of her cleverest pupils on pillows ten long. This lace was made by order of the French Court and presented by Marie Antoinette to Pius VI on the occasion of his elevation to the papal throne ».

Such contact with the foreign world must have contributed largely to the fact that the laces of Aquila were able to enter into competition with their rivals of Flanders. And thanks to the marvellous skill shown in manipulating *thousands*



No. 263 — Aquila lace with foundation.



No. 264 — From the *Esemplario di Lavori* of G. A. Vavassore, Venice, 1532. Figure of stag.

of bobbins, as well as to the excellent quality of their glossy thread, they were so victorious in the contest that, in his *Dizionario Corografico* of 1866, Amati says under the word *Aquila* « From this place comes lace like that of Flanders ».



It is not thus at Pescocostanzo where we are fortunate enough to be able to see bobbin-lace made under our eyes, exactly as it used to be in the XVII century, where, even to this very day, the truly feminine art flourishes

gaily in the hands of all, like a wild flower in its native fields.

Travellers taking the train from Sulmona to the station of Rivisondoli-Pescocostanzo (over 4000 feet above the sea) find themselves in a vast extent of green fields with gentle undulations. In utter solitude does the train make its way through the meadows, hardly does it win a glance either from the herdsmen who, with their flocks, are the sole occupants of the wide plateaux, or from the two villages which give the station its name, standing proudly as they have stood for centuries on the two highest peaks in the neighbourhood, nearly a mile from the railroad.

But he who takes the beautiful road leading to Pescocostanzo, finds himself in the very centre of the country of bobbin-lace. Here every single woman, old, middle-aged, young, lady or peasant, works at the « pizzillo » she creates on her pillow. In the fine season, the women carry their pillows into the open and sit making their lace in the sunshine and breezes of their short but lovely summer; among the old XVII century houses, the antique workshops, and the overhanging roofs of buildings resting on carved and painted wooden corbels, the traveller often catches sight of pretty heads bent over the pillow, and fingers swiftly manipulating the bobbins.

It is quite usual to see an ancient dame making beautiful lace with experienced fin-

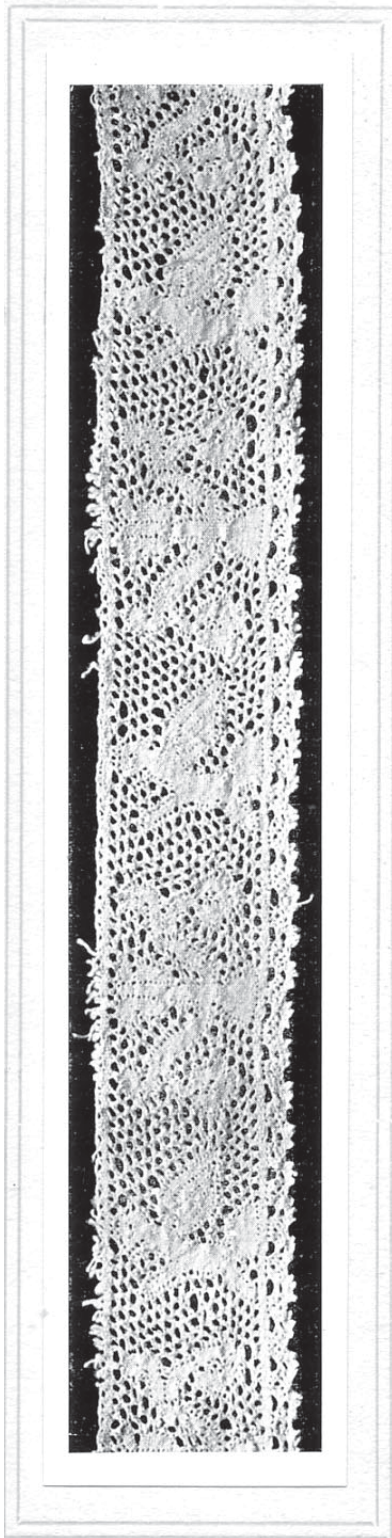


No. 265 — The same stag deformed; in an old Abruzzian table-cover.



No. 266 -- Lace-maker of Pescocostanzo.

gers, while a child scarce two years old instinctively twists three or four threads at its grandmother's feet.



No. 267 -- Pescocostanzo lace, with the figure of a kneeling angel deformed and represented as a bird.

From infancy to old age, this lace-making is life to the woman of Pescocostanzo; it consoles her in sorrow and rests her when over-fatigued from the hard work imposed on her during the absence of the men, many of whom leave their native land.

Pescocostanzo women are as hardworking and strong in body as they are bright and cheerful in mind, and it is a pleasant sight to see them starting forth to hew wood at sunrise; they carry enormous weighty bundles on their heads, walking upright and firmly with skirts tucked up and their feet protected by a coarse kind of sandal consisting only of a flexible sole sewn to the stocking. In the same way they fetch water from the fountain, carrying jars containing many gallons, and moving with admirable grace and freedom. Housework also occupies much of their time, cooking, washing, care of children. But when once the hard work of the day is over, they seize their pillows, and the hands which wielded a heavy axe at sunrise, or helped to carry stone or mix mortar for the building of houses, are now able to produce beautifully designed white lace, the pride, comfort and delight of these industrious, noble-hearted creatures.

One noticeable peculiarity of Pescolane lace, not seen in any district save Abruzzo, is that it is made without being copied from any pattern. The most expert of the lace-makers do not even seek guidance by covering their cushions with a striped material. When she puts the model

before her eyes, a lace-maker of Pescocostanzo is able to draw with her bobbins and pins as she would draw with a pencil. This strange, free method (called in the district *disegno sciolto*), while showing extraordinary dexterity, invests the work

with a vague, indefinable character recalling that of the ancient specimens. The design seems to be looked at through water or some fog which blurs the general outline, an effect still further accentuated by the fact that in this place — as in Aquila — the method of *tutte coppie* is pursued, taking considerably from the accuracy of the design, which, however, remains original and characteristic.

Pescolane laces often have what may be called *speaking* designs of simple every-day objects: a cock, a jar, birds, leaves, flowers; or sacred and symbolic subjects: a lamb, a chalice, a lamp, a scorpion, a lily, a star; or animated groups; peasant-couples dancing, or love-making; doves, hearts, roses. Pretty sentiments are suggested in rebus; thus lace bearing figures of a key, a heart and a rose may have had some such signification as « give me the key of your heart and I will give you the rose of my love »; flowers and leaves are to be found everywhere.

There is a marked tendency towards floriation in this emblematical speech. The oriental swastika, which still approximates to a serpent in Venetian lace, becomes a sort of floral scroll, almost unrecognisable in its disfigurement.

The lace-artists of these regions cannot bring themselves to servile imitation of other people's work, and it is their idiosyncrasy to give concrete significance to the purely decorative lines found in the Milanese, Venetian, and Genoese laces.

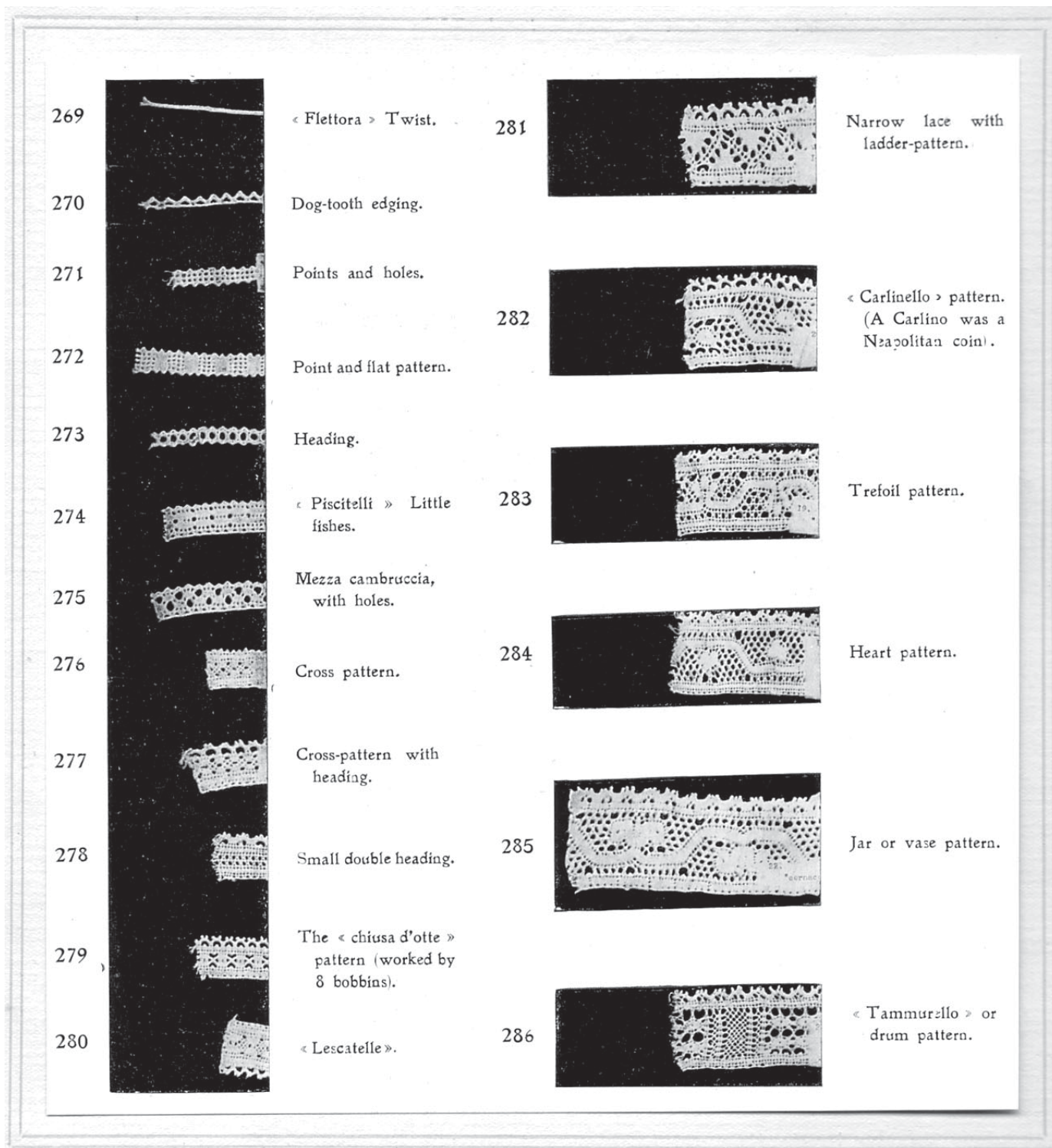
The Greek key-pattern, scrolls, geometric forms of academic precision have no place in the instinctive art of Pescocostanzo, whose workers are adepts mainly in giving expression to some definite object; they excel in simplifying, and in the happy conventionalisation of the most diverse subjects.

The chief defect of this quality is one which is found in all minor, fireside arts, where the workers are allowed to make laws for themselves. The design, repeated for centuries, is gradually altered and deformed. We note the same thing in



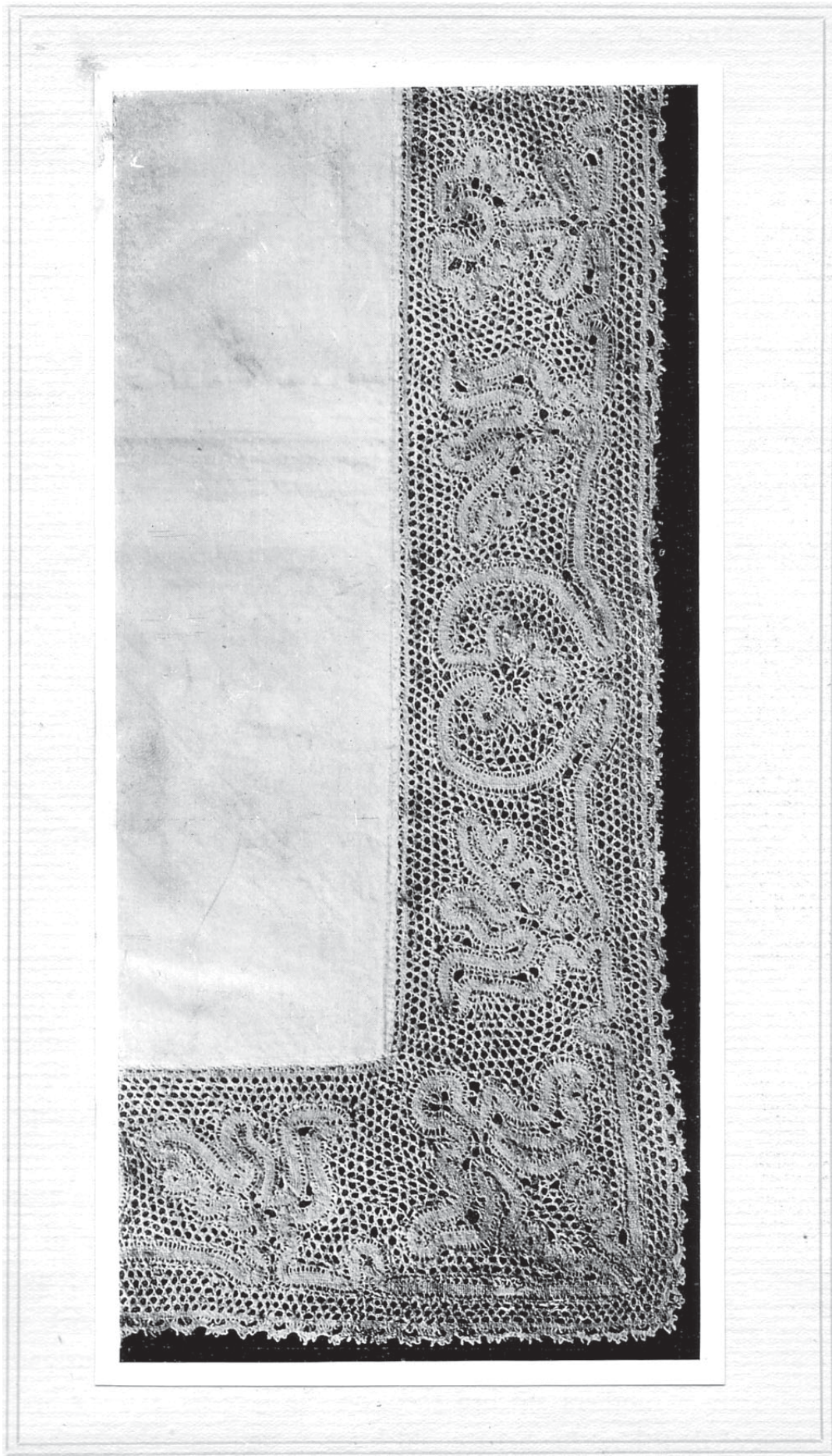
No. 268 — Fragment of Pescocostanzo lace, where we see the figure of a bird deformed in beak and wing.

the woven fabrics, which are so picturesque and characteristic in this district. We may see how a fine design is taken from a book of patterns or a piece of ma-



No. 269 to 286 - Showing progression of Pescolane lace.

terial; for instance a stag, which at first is faithfully and successfully copied with clearness and grace. The figure is copied and reproduced by four and five generations in succession. But the original form is distorted; some workers have



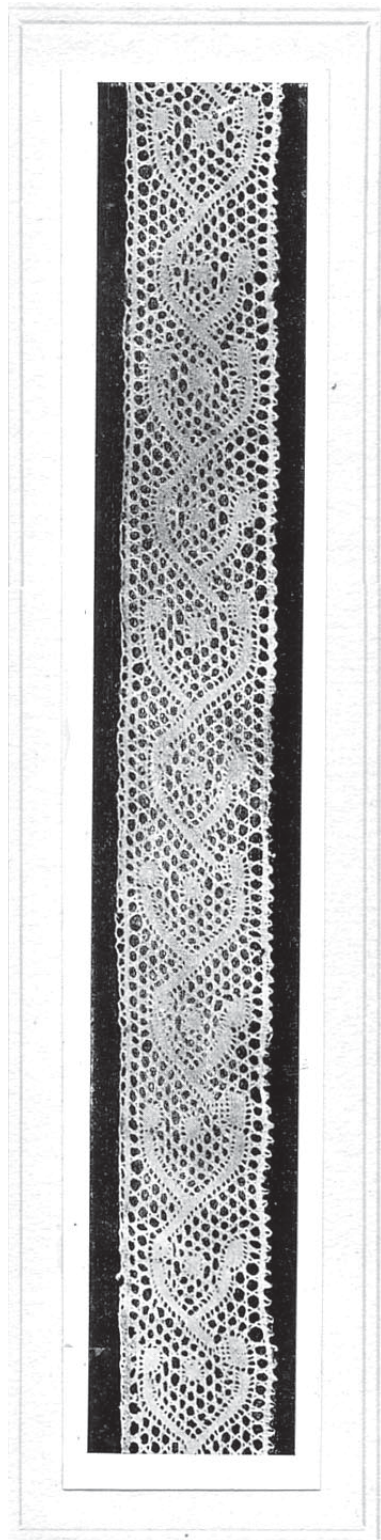
No. 287 — Old lace of Pescocostanzo. The continuous braid forms the bird, the flower, and the ornament of the corner. Property of the author.

added, some have subtracted, some have altered. A century has sufficed to transform the stag into a dog, a camel, or a giraffe. The antlers, which in spite of other vagaries serve to characterise the stag, have been shorn from the head and, treated as ornaments, are detached from the animal (No. 265).

This fault occurs often in Abruzzian laces, even where the original figure can still be traced.

In No. 257, for instance, the couples are divided from one another by the motive of a spray of flowers which has been reversed by the lace-maker; it was intended that the bird should be perched upon the flowers, but now, with its tail in the air and its head downwards, it is meaningless and deformed. In No. 267 we see how a figure which should have been a kneeling angel is transformed into a grotesque distortion of a bird.

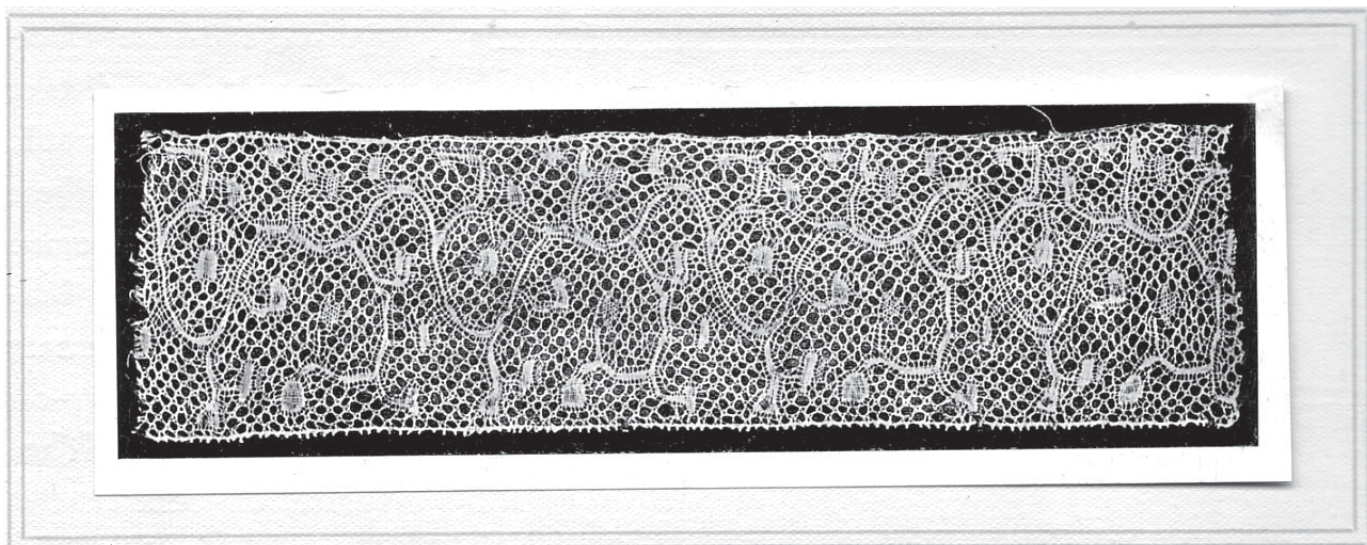
Nevertheless if, now and then, the concrete signification of some figures be no longer intelligible, it does not prevent it from having once existed. This seems to be proved by the nomenclature of old Abruzzian laces which, even now is used to designate the *pizzilli*, those narrow strips which guide the progress of the lace-maker, by a wise progression, from apprenticeship to mastery. Every pattern — even the elementary designs — correspond with some object more or less familiar, which must be copied faithfully by the little pupil with no guide save her eye (Nos. 269-286). The patterns have childish names to suit the infantile learners. The local and rustic character of these Pescolane laces, due to what may be called their *oral* design and execution, shows that they were not made originally to gain money or to be sent to strange lands. While pious women endowed the church with the best results of their labour, girls worked them for the trimmings of their wedding trousseaux and mothers stitched them on the layettes of their first-born.



No. 288 — Pescocostanzo lace < a tutte coppie > and free design.

This is the outcome of that thirst for beauty which seems unquenchable in the nation.

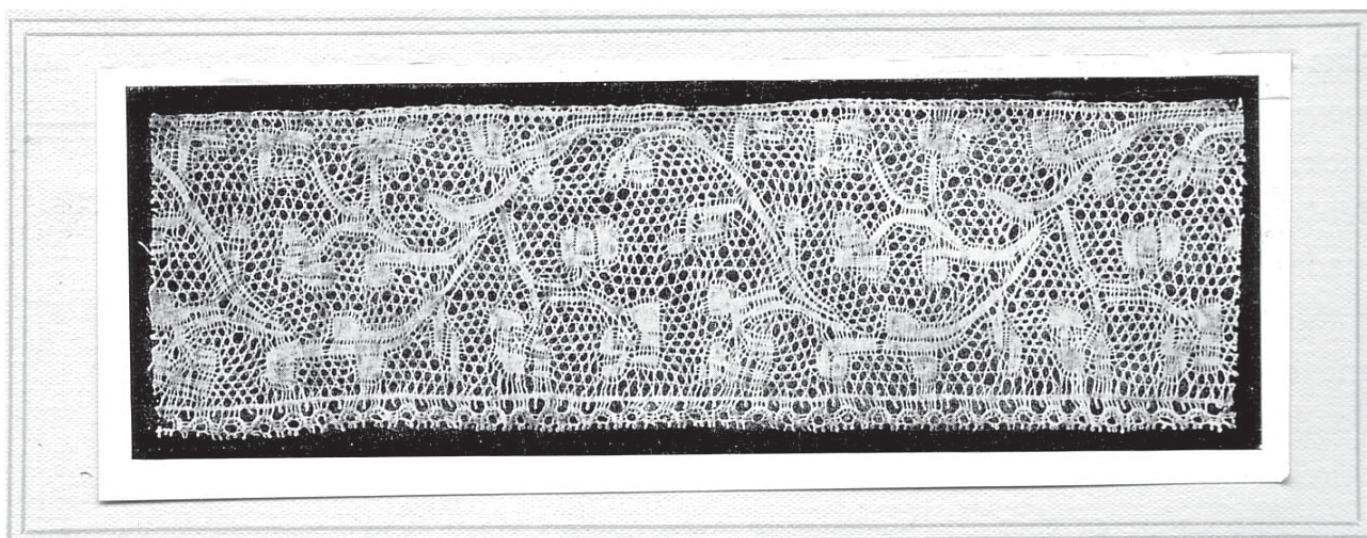
A learned and enthusiastic student of Pescocostanzo lace had the rare good



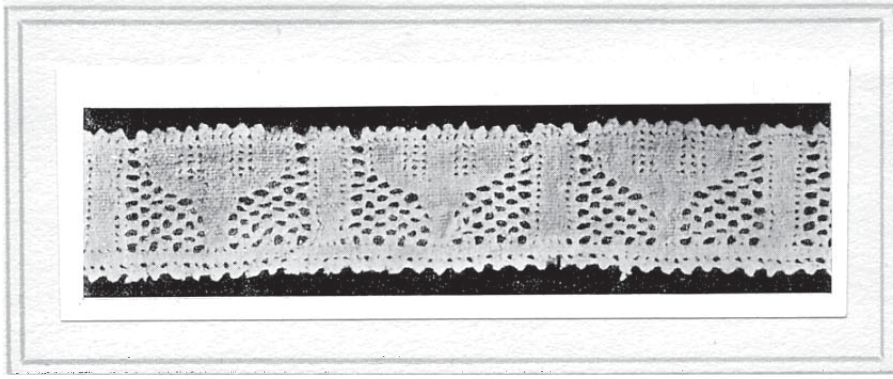
No. 289 — Old < free hand > lace of Pescocostanzo.

fortune to find amidst the few scattered papers which have escaped flames, time, carelessness and ignorance, valuable remarks concerning Pescolane lace, observations which date from the XVI century. From these we learn that the lace is but seldom mentioned in Pescolane inventories and wills; mention of it becomes more frequent in the XVII century; indeed we gather that, by that date, lace was in the possession of every woman, even the poorest, in Pescocostanzo. In 1675 we find mention of *pieces of bobbin-lace for trimming*, and other laces are noted in an order of sequestration for non-payment of legal expenses!

In inventories of the wills of poor persons and humble Pescolane trousseaux in the XVII and XVIII centuries there is always mention of *pizzilli* and bobbin-laces and trimmings for coifs, tablecovers and sheets, offering irrefutable evidence of the



No. 290 — Old < free-hand > lace of Pescocostanzo.



No. 291 -- Old lace of Pescocostanzo with lamps and columns.

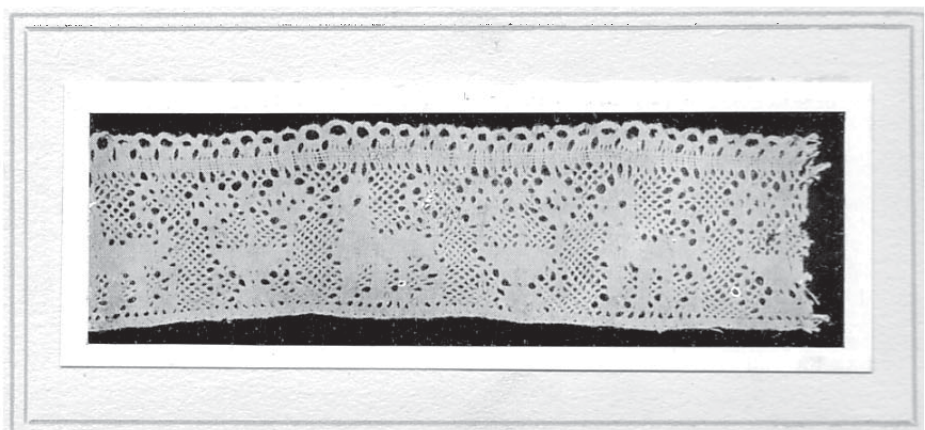
age-long existence of lace-making in the district where it flourishes still, for how could these poor mountain-women afford to send for luxurious and unnecessary trimmings from far-off centres such as Milan, Venice, or Genoa?

The Pescolane laces, like those of Aquila, are of Milanese derivation. The tape, which in Aquilian laces is narrowed and refined, is thicker and more pronounced in Pescocostanzo models, by reason of the thread which is home-made and coarser, browner, less lustrous than that used by the lace-workers of Milan and Aquila. Pescolane examples frequently show a lace with ground in which the tape is often interrupted in its course and loses its form by being made to assume the shape of leaves, buds and figures of persons and animals; in these cases the lace is made *a tutte coppie* (as in Aquila) and always by *disegno sciolto*, or free hand, with no guidance from a paper design.

Whence came this Milanese influence to the lonely, far-off hamlet of the hills? In a document dated 1566 mention is made of one G. B. Bagatti, Lombard, Captain of Pescocostanzo (captain means governor). At that date bobbin-made lace was already flourishing at Milan, so it is possible that the ladies of the governor's household brought their pillows to their new home, and sowed good seed in fertile ground.

Judging from the really good collection of lace at Pescocostanzo in the Casa Colecchi, the women of that locality must have been expert in every sort of feminine work of needle, bobbin, and spool. The shirts of coarse linen (spun and woven at home) have neck, wrist and shoulder-trimmings of needle-made lace, Venetian both in stitch and design and called *cartiglia*, the Southern designation for *reticello*.

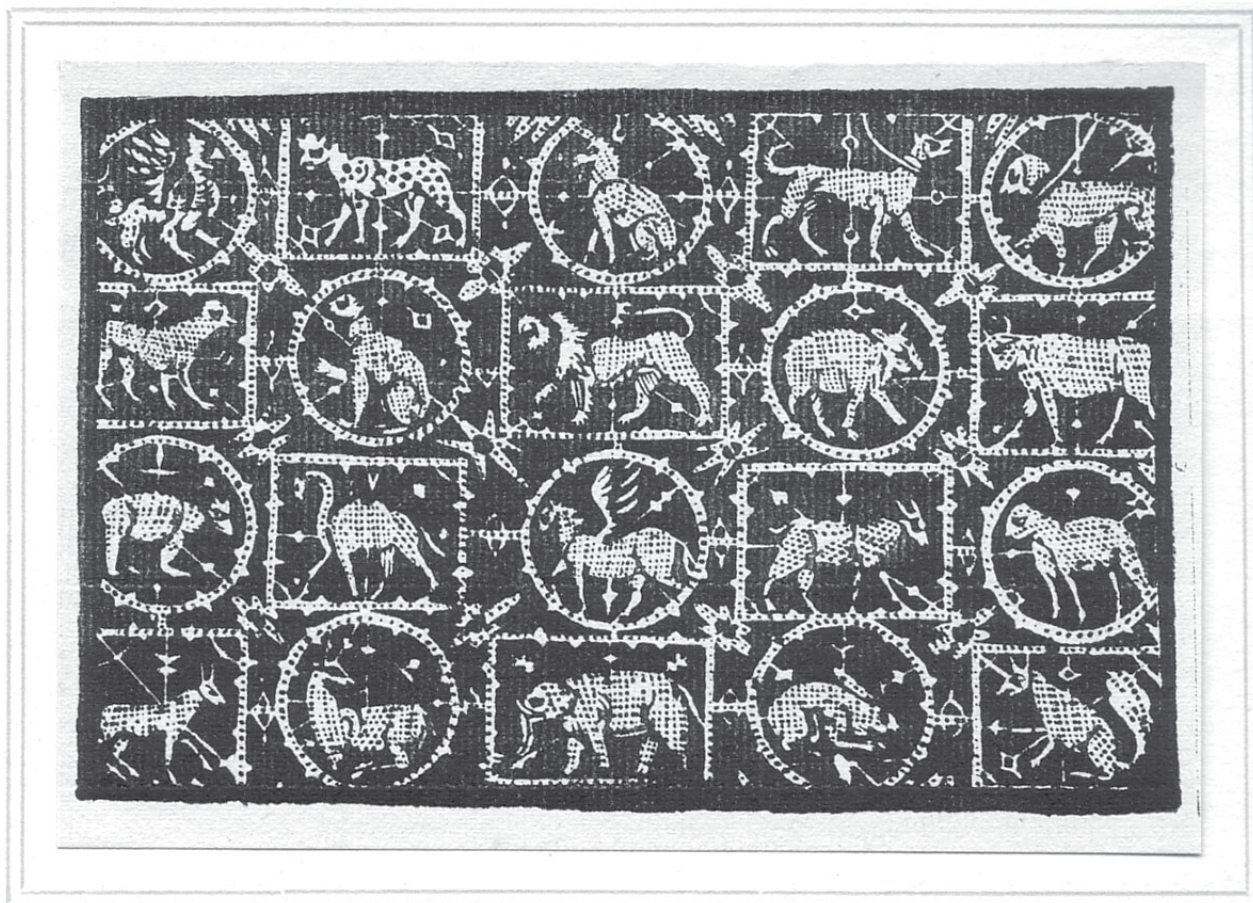
The cause of this Venetian influence may



No. 292 -- Old lace of Pescocostanzo, with animals and vases

be traced to the wide circulation – marvellous, indeed, for those times – of the manuals printed in Venice, rather than to the historical fact that Venetian settlers came to Abruzzo at the end of the XIV century. A most rare old copy is in the possession of a priest named Grilli, and has been examined by the famous lace-authority Dr. Sabatini, who knows of other books in the district.

The little volume is entitled *The Flowers of Embroidery newly brought to light, in*



No. 293 -- From the « Fiori di Ricami » of G. B. Gargano, Naples, 1613.

which will be found many varied designs for different kinds of work, and is a compilation of patterns taken from the books of Vecellio, Parasole, and C. Franco; who can say how greatly the gifted native workers were inspired by such an exquisite anthology of decorative motives?

In the *Flowers of Embroidery* is a plate from the *Corona* of Vecellio which certainly suggested the design of the Ricciardelli table-cover reproduced in our No. 293. The compartments and figures of animals are very similar in each. The lace round the tablecover is obviously copied from a design for lace in the same book.