

I.

MODANO OR LACIS, DRAWN-THREAD WORK,
BURATTO.



No. 25 — Laces embroidered in linen-stitch. Two lions facing each other before a fountain. The edging is bobbin-made. Original composition. XVI century. Binney, Florence.

MODANO OR LACIS, DRAWN-THREAD WORK, BURATTO.



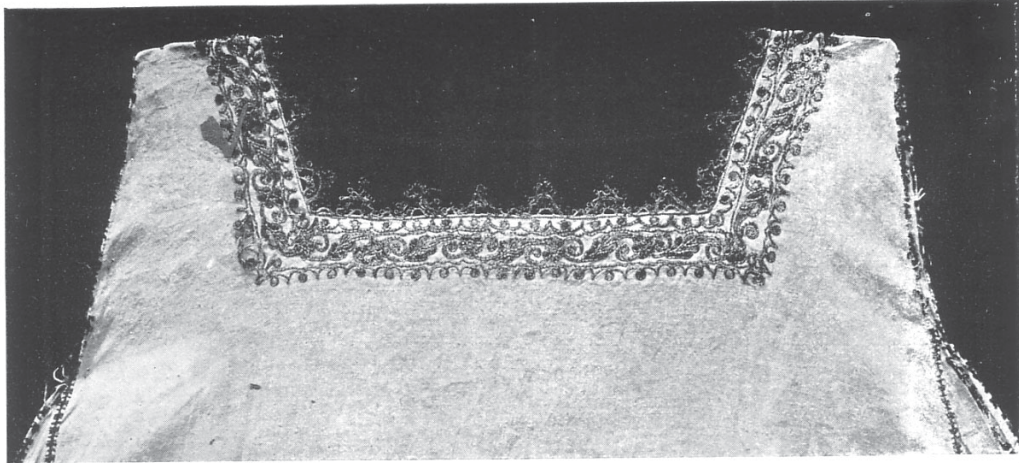
WE have been able to show that laces came into being towards the end of the XV century, and that they owe their existence to the demand for a washable trimming for linen.

As the use of white linen for personal wear gradually became customary during the XV century, women were not long in trying to find something more suitable for trimming it than the gold and silver, and coloured silk embroideries applied to dress-fabrics (No. 26).

At first they tried white embroidery upon white, finding that the beauty of the linen was not spoiled thereby, and that frequent washing did no damage to the work. Some few samples of *counted-thread work*, *satin stitch* and *curl stitch* (No. 27) with figures of animals, ornaments, or sacred mottoes have lasted until to-day; in addition to these, we have seen curl-stitch alternating with other stitches, giving

a most curious effect of white relief on white. But to eyes accustomed to the infinite variety of coloured silk embroidery, this white work soon seemed heavy and monotonous, and ill-adapted to the taste of an age which sought in all things ornament suitable for the use of the thing ornamented. White, fine linen demanded a white, delicate trimming: in a word, lace.

The oldest samples of white embroidery without perforations are rare, either because they were executed on material of extraordinary delicacy or because transparent fabrics were too unsubstantial to serve for every-day wear. The trans-



No. 26 — Shirt of white linen with embroidery and bobbin-lace edging in coloured silk and gold. Ciccolini, Macerata.

parent fabrics were *rensa*, or *rens*, and *filondente*; *rensa* took its name from Rheims, whence it came and, was very fine; *filondente*, on the contrary, was open and coarse, woven with « one thread a tooth » on the weaver's comb. Soon it was recognised that the only thing which could give variety, lightness, and beauty to white thread work on white linen was transparency.

The little pillow-slip (No. 29) of the finest *rensa* is an excellent example of embroidery of the end of the XV century, which foreshadows the appearance of lace. Intended for the *dead* (see Introduction) it has a design of the symbols of Christianity surrounded by four couples of angels kneeling round the ciborium, all worked in satin stitch; in the rich border we see the eagles, stags, and hounds which re-appear later in lacis and drawn-thread work.



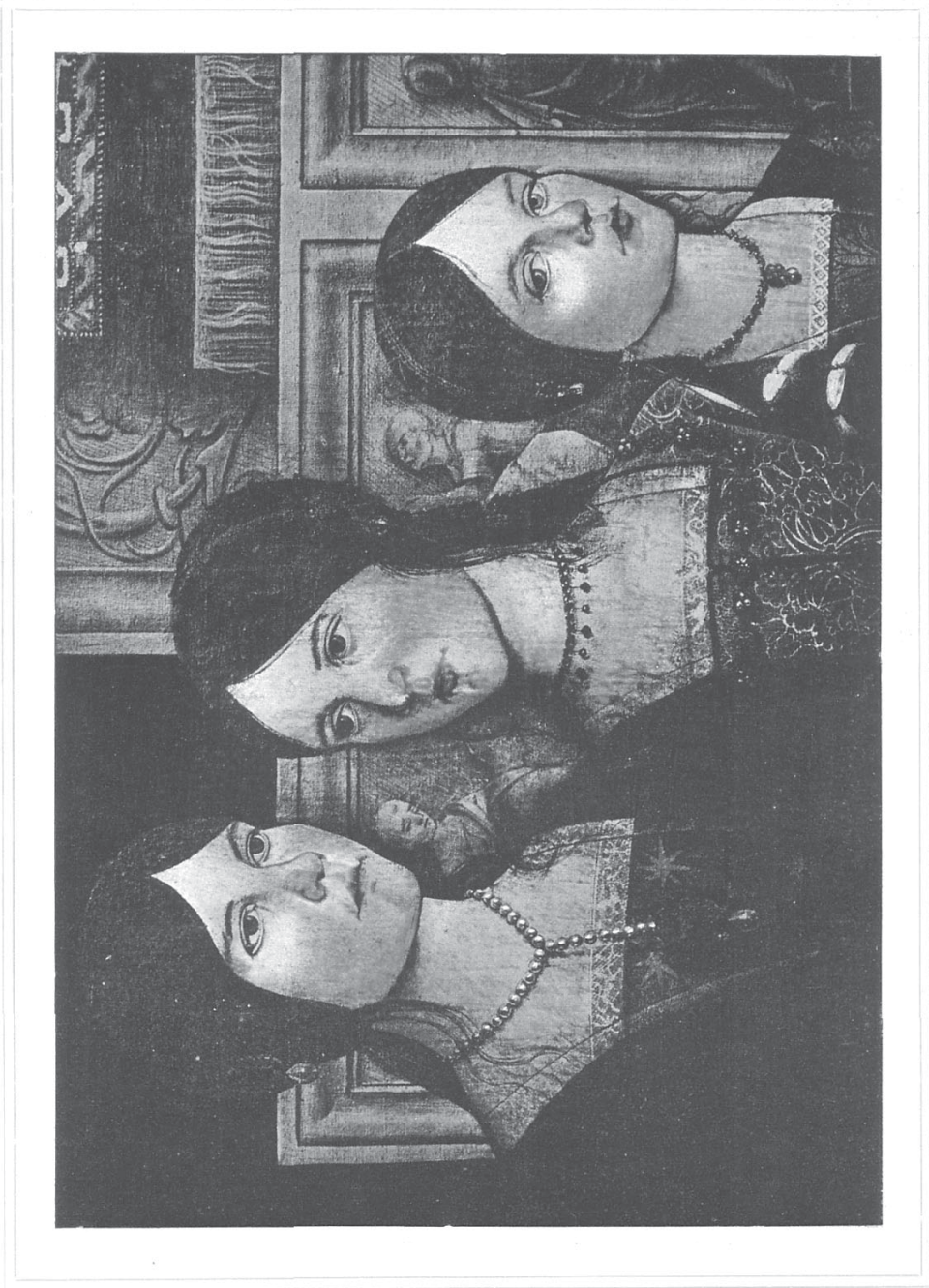
No. 27 — Embroidery in curl stitch, satin stitch, drawn thread and open work, on very fine linen.
Baldini, Florence.



No. 28 — Table-cloth embroidered in curl stitch.
Original composition. XVI century. Property of author.



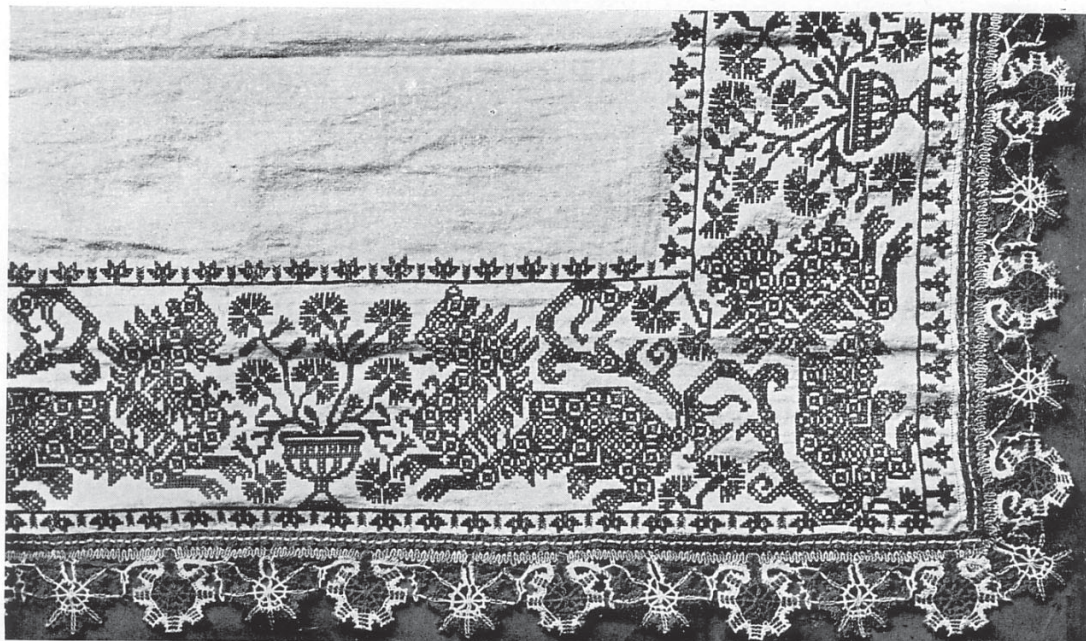
thread. Religious scenes and symbols.
End of XV century. Tranquillí, Ascoli-Piceno.



No. 30 — Bodices edged with laces.
Detail of painting of the Bentivogli by L. Costa, in S. Giacomo,
Bologna, 1438. Photo. Castelli.



No. 31 — Chemisette of embroidered lace, in portrait of
Lavinia Fontana, painted by herself.
Uffizi, Florence. (Phot. Brogi).



No. 32 — Small linen table-cloth, with border embroidered in red silk counted thread-work. Two lions facing each other before a vase of carnations. (The red and white edging is bobbín-made). Original composition. Chieti Exhibition, 1901.



No. 33 — Lace embroidered in linen-stitch. The vase of carnations is identical with that in Fig. 32. Michetti, Francavilla.

Already efforts were being made to find a method of representing light and shade by means of heavy stitches on the light foundation, still further lightened here and there by perforations made by pulling the stitch. But when workers desired to make the design clear upon thicker fabrics, it was necessary to find a means of detaching the outline from the groundwork and lightening this by some artifice.

Perhaps it was a net (ancient as fishing, if not as fish themselves) which

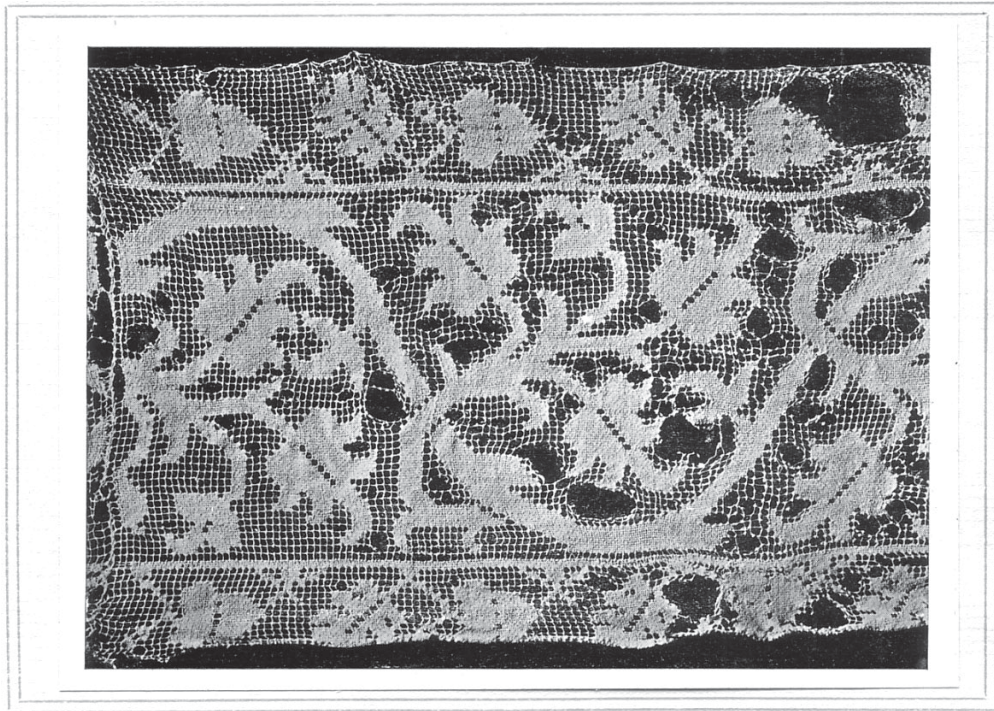


No. 34 — Shirt, embroidered in curl stitch and drawn work; the seams are hidden with small insertions of ivory stitch. XVI century. Binney, Florence.

suggested the ornamental possibilities to be derived from interrupting the close substance of the linen by transparent strips.

At the end of the XIV century nets were already in use, and were made in gold thread and pearls for confining the hair and for veiling the shoulders in the sumptuous head-dresses of the day; towards the end of the XV century we sometimes find a simple white net, as in the fresco of San Gimignano, in Raphael's *Holy Family* in the Berlin Museum, and Mostaert's *Woman Reading* in the same; at last, in 1488 Lorenzo Costa gives us the first clear and indisputable reproduction of lace in a tempera painting in a church at Bologna (No. 30). This is a portrait

of the large family of Giovanni II Bentivoglio ; we see that his daughters, adorned with jewels which are veritable works of art, and wearing rich dresses, have at the necks of their gowns various insertions of lacis which are supposed to be the trimmings of their chemisettes. That this plain lacis simply embroidered in linen-stitch should have been held good enough to ornament the gala attire of princesses, and that it was carefully reproduced by the painter shows that at the close of the XV century the first specimens of lace were rare and were prized for their novelty.



No. 35 — Lacis embroidered in linen-stitch.
XVI century. Amari, Florence.

Once the first step had been taken, the glowing fancy of expert embroiderers led them to trace the most varied geometrical figures in linen-stitch among the square meshes, which were soon to be further embellished with foliage, ornaments, animals, fantastic figures and whole histories. Sometimes the workers revert to old patterns which had served for cross-stitch and counted thread-work in white and colours. At the Chieti Exhibition there was an embroidered lacis with the self-same vase of carnations which was the model for an embroidery in counted thread-work, most probably taken from the pages of the same book, in one case combined with two lions facing each other, in the other with two columns spanned by an arch (Nos. 32, 33).



By reason of the easiness of execution of both mesh and linen-stitch, this sort of lace – the first ever made – never fell into complete disuse; it was its



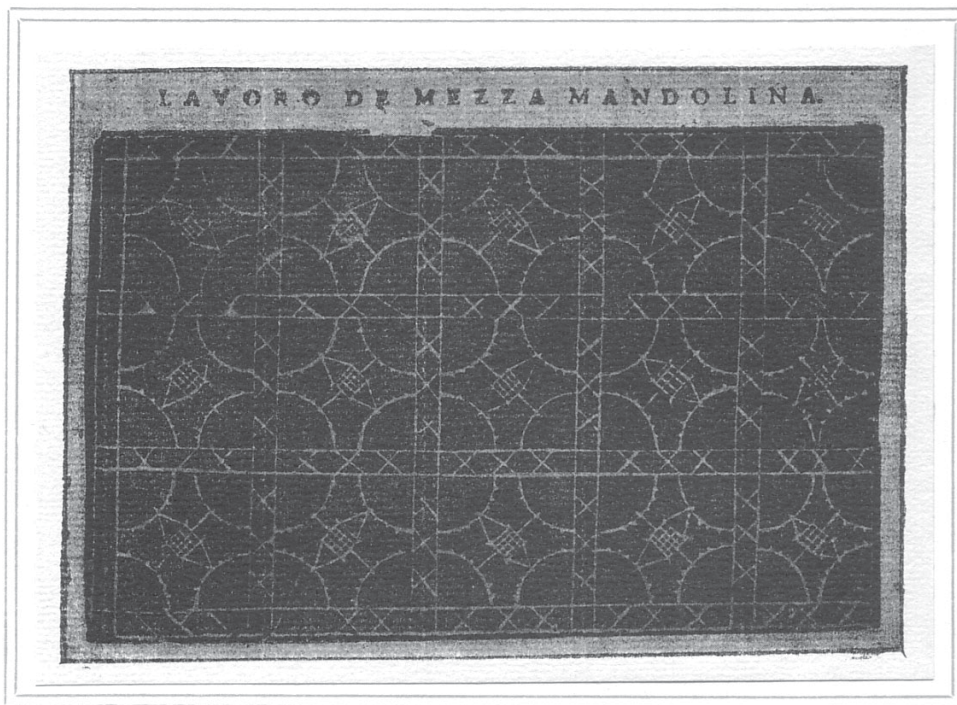
No. 36 — Laces embroidered in linen-stitch with various figures, dragon, sphinx, etc. XIX century. Amari Collection, Florence.

misfortune, indeed, to survive with crochet-work into the evil days of bad taste which followed the Empire period. Owing to this calamity both kinds of work have fallen into a disrepute from which we may hope they will emerge.

It is certain that laces or filets were in high favour in the XVI century both at the French and Italian Courts. « In the Palace of Catherine de' Medici in Paris » says a contemporary writer, « the maids and attendants spend the whole

of their time in making squares of filet ». In Catherine's Inventory is an entry concerning a cabinet containing 381 squares of *unmounted* filet and of another containing 538, some worked with roses, others with bunches of flowers. The *unmounted* filet leads one to suppose that these squares were intended to alternate with squares and strips of linen embroidered in reticello or with open-work designs.

Either by itself, or associated with other needle-work, laciis was used to beau-



No. 37 — Design from the *Gemma Pretiosa* of Isabetta C. Parasoie.
Rome, 1615.

tify coverlets and bed-borders, or, as insertion, to adorn church-linen, cloths, towels and albs.

There is a variety of mesh-work very seldom found existing now, although several designs for its manufacture are to be seen in an old pattern-book, Isabella Parasoie's *Studio delle virtuose Donne* published in 1597; the work was known as *mezza mandolina*, and is a net of irregular mesh, sometimes left plain, but more often embroidered with little leaves in matting-stitch which fill the square mesh and join it to the others so that the background can hardly be seen between the interwoven figures (No. 38).



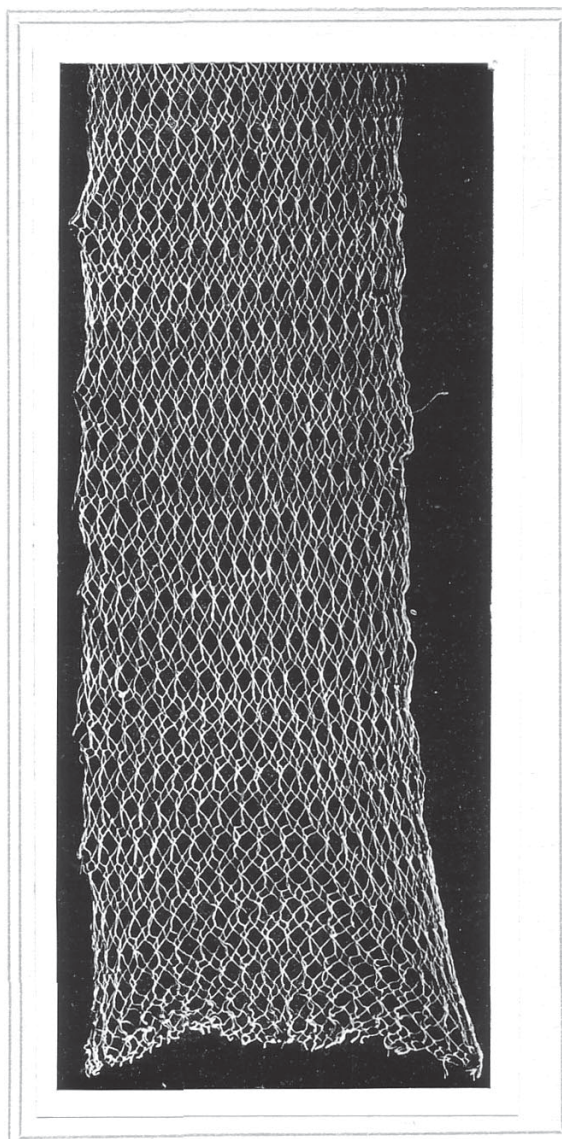
No. 38 — Embroidered chemisette of *mezza mandolina* net, in portrait of Eleonora da Toledo by Bronzino (c. 1550). Museum, Berlin.

The islands near Italy, Sardinia especially, furnish examples of a sort of embroidered filet differing essentially from the Tuscan and other Italian varieties. The square mesh is filled with a darning-stitch instead of a linen-stitch, and crossed either horizontally or diagonally with a single thread; by this device the design gains in freedom and becomes less angular, while the work, although coarser and simpler than the other, is not without an interest and character of its own (No. 44).

In other examples of later date we find lacis covered with much richer and more intricate embroidery with which it attempts to imitate lace of a more precious description, and to obtain effects of *chiaroscuro* by means of matting-stitch, outlines in relief, and threads of various thicknesses.



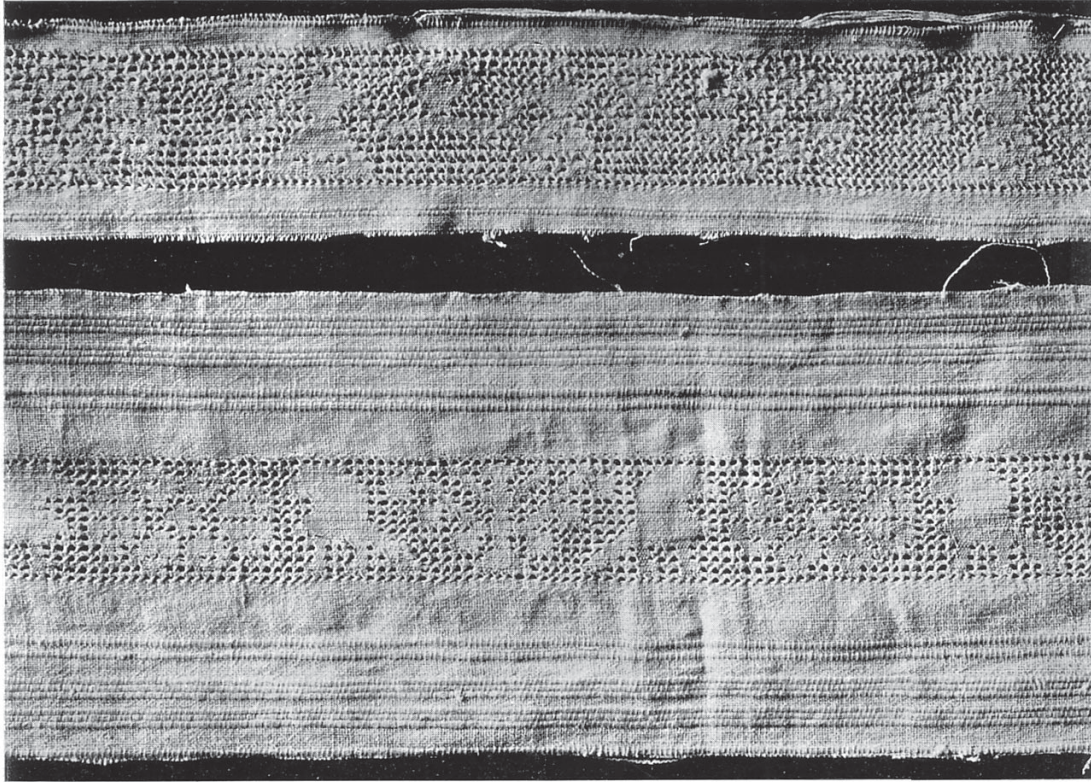
But lacis or filet, sometimes coarse, and always more or less angular, was to give way very quickly to a species of work, not richer merely, but of much greater substance, being worked directly on the linen. The first effort of the kind was drawn linen-work; curl and satin-stitch embroidery had already been enframed in a series of open-work stitches, obtained by drawing out the thread with which the work was being done; later on, this method was employed to render the whole background transparent, leaving the figures solid (Nos. 40, 41); but this tedious work was not effective when finished, and soon



No. 39 — Fragment of *mezza mandolina* net.
Bargagli, Florence.

suggested the lighter and easier mode of drawn-thread. Examples — many of them Sicilian — have come down to us excellent in design, execution, and preservation.

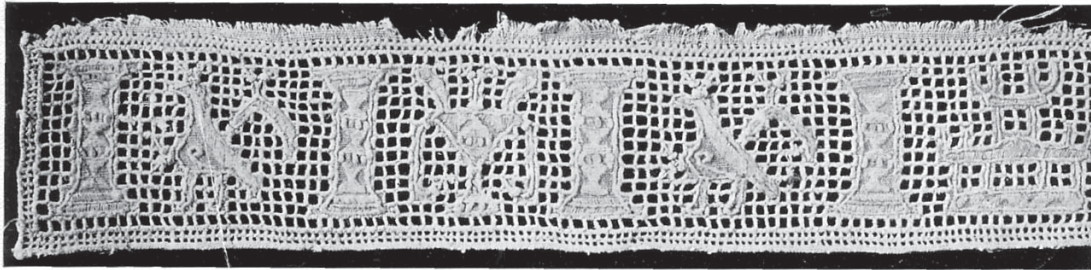
The affinity of such lace to embroidery is obvious. Two or three of the threads drawn regularly from warp and woof respectively, produce a mesh-net clearer and more solid thanks to a rope-stitch crossing the point where the



Nos. 40, 41 — Drawn thread-work with figures, flowers and animals.
XV-XVI century. Aghib, Leghorn.

woven threads themselves cross. An American lace-collector, Miss Colgate, had the good fortune to find an old and precious sample of unfinished drawn-thread work in Sicily, which demonstrates in the clearest manner how the early embroiderers executed this work (Nos. 73, 74).

In this piece the design is made by the linen left intact, its outline secured by rope stitch; in other instances the decorative complement of the figures is em-

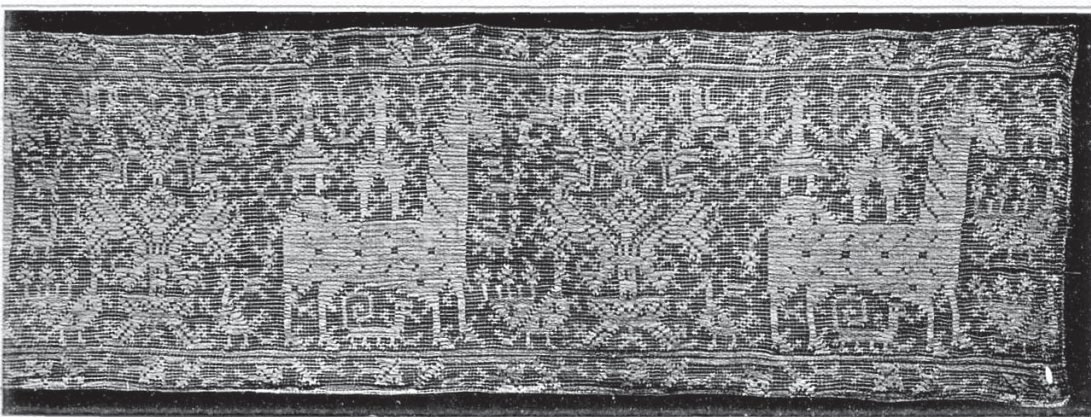


No. 42 — Drawn-thread work and embroidery; a castle, vase, and bird, divided by a column. XV-XVI century.
Property of author.

broidered on the linen itself (see the capital of the column and wings of the bird of No. 42) giving beautiful relief and greater richness of effect. Again, in other instances, the linen is made thread-bare and on the net-work thus procured a design is worked in darning or linen-stitch, serving finally to re-clothe the net-work of the ground.

Linen of the kind called Buratto (from the Latin word *burā*, coarse linen) which is a stiff, transparent material something like canvas, provides a convenient medium for the quick and easy attainment of a drawn-thread effect. The texture is treated like drawn linen, and on the already transparent ground the design is worked in darning or linen-stitch (No. 43).

Sometimes one comes across drawn-thread or *buratto* with the ground worked



No. 43 — Embroidered Buratto; animals, flowers, figures.
XVI century.
Citernes, Florence.

in rope-stitch with coloured thread or silk, generally russet red or indigo though the use of other colours is not excluded; this serves to enhance the effect and relief of covers for chests or other articles which do not need frequent washing.



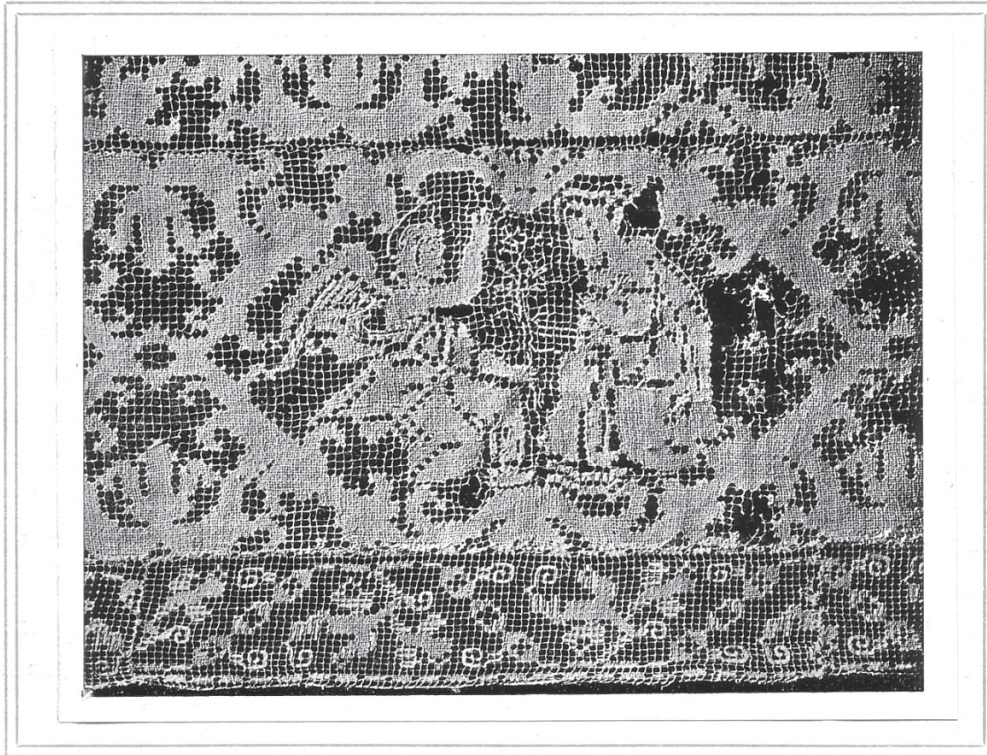
No. 44 — Modern laces from antique design. Sardinian work in darning stitch. Property of author.



In these works, which are the true precursors of needle-lace, the whole interest centres in the design. While their execution is elementary and uniform, their designs vary so greatly in value, style and sentiment, that it is difficult to realise they belong to the same period, instead of being divided from one another by centuries.

A style of work which makes so little demand on the skill or purse of the embroiderer is accessible to women of all conditions, and was common to Catherine de' Medici, who worked *Carrés de réseuil* for her Palace, and the uncultured peasant making trimmings for the pillow and sheets for her dead; thus it is always individual, reflecting the refinement or coarseness of the old workers. This gives

these primal efforts variety, and with it, a fascination and interest all their own. « Primal » not « primitive ». How could the latter epithet be applied to work of the XVI century, when not only were lace-workers capable of « painting with



No. 45 — Lace embroidered in linen-stitch with the Annunciation.
XVI century. Levier, Florence.

their needles », but when the designs for the earliest laces and embroideries were also the purest and best, and when famous artists did not disdain to offer Manuals to the feminine public.

No; we do not suggest that antiquity is responsible for the childish, coarse, grotesque designs. They are due to the fact that in many instances the worker herself was insensible to the new afflatus, and copied old patterns, misunderstanding their designs. In proof of this contention, we find Modano of the XVIII century with designs taken from Byzantine and Romanesque sources. Indeed, they persist even to-day, and it is not unusual to find these old designs worked with machine-made thread by ignorant peasants, who repeat the same figures throughout the centuries, just as they repeat the same prayers.

So those far-off days witnessed things often seen to-day. The lady of leisure works « New Art » designs of the most bizarre kind, while the peasant darns into her coarse Modano clumsy motives such as those of No. 44, with its grotesque rendering of doves bearing flowers and olive-branches. In like manner was the XVI century nun forced to copy her *Agnus Dei* from the pages of an ancient *libro d'oro*, while the more fortunate Viera Vendramin Nani, proud consort of the Procurator of the Republic, was able to command Titian's relative, Cesare Vecellio, to design patterns for the embroidery with which she varied the brocades and damask-hangings of her bed, making it as magnificent as a throne.

Among the laces of this variety, those with a square-mesh are the most personal, and offer the widest field for the development of feminine taste and fancy; we shall see it soon invaded by the most vivacious symbolism; nuptial scenes, in which the bridegroom, with a flower, and the bride, with a fan, are followed to church by a whole retinue of tiny guests; hunting-scenes, with every kind of animal, wild boars and sirens, winged lions and hens; hounds or stags or eagles forming a frieze or frame for the centre-piece; mediæval scenes; the castle, the tower, falconers and ladies of histories which must have been both interesting and amusing to those to whom they were intelligible; to us, their language conveys nothing but its mysterious harmony.

Harmony! that is the secret of their fascination in spite of their simplicity of design and execution. And this happy quality may be claimed as truly Italian, for it is that perfect sense of equilibrium, enabling our workers to produce compositions neither over-loaded nor poor, which distinguishes these early Italian laces from those of the foreigner.



No. 46 — Drawn thread with a Siren.
The background in red silk. Rucellai, Florence.

I.

MODANO OR LACIS, DRAWN-THREAD WORK,
BURATTO.

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PLATES.

MODANO — XV-XVI CENTURY.



No. 47 — Laces embroidered in linen-stitch outlined with gold thread. Bobbin-made lace and fringe in gold and thread.

Original composition. Siena Exhibition, 1903.

MODANO XV-XVI CENTURY.



48

49

Lace embroidered in linen-stitch with hunting-subjects.

Chieti Exhibition, 1905.

MODANO - XVI CENTURY.



50

51

Two table cloth borders embroidered in linen-stitch.

Property of author.