

that slavish imitation which spoils so much of the work of foreign lace-makers; the Italian women were guided by their own sure sense of decorative beauty and harmony.

*Punto in aria*, the most Italian of laces in its discreet and aristocratic beauty and its pure design, seems to us the supreme expression of the art. Later, laces



No. 256 — Border of cut linen round table-cloth in picture by Paul Veronese « Supper in the House of Levi », Accademia, Venice.

became much richer and finer, but they were no longer so perfect in style, in clarity of design and graceful sobriety of execution, as *punto in aria* properly so called.

The title *punto in aria* might be generically applied to all needle-laces whose designs are independent of linen, are not raised and have no background. But denominations and nomenclature are very difficult to determine. Our art is dignified by no acknowledged literature, and the artists who published patternbooks either gave no designations, or gave them somewhat at random.

Names had a precise signification only when they were used for the first time

to designate some new kind of work. From *fili tirati* (drawn threads) to *punto tagliato* (cut stitch), *reticello* (mesh work) and *punto in aria* (stitch in the air) we can follow the road easily, and words are descriptive of things. Later, they become as confused in the mouths of the workers as in the directions of the designers, and the confusion reached its height when our Venetian laces were disguised under French names: « point à la rose » or « gros point de Venise ».

The first *punto in aria*, of which we have spoken, was succeeded by the so-called *punto tagliato a fogliami* (Rose Point or gros Point de Venise) first mentioned in Mathio Pagan's *Honesto Esempio*. But this is dated 1550, when *punto tagliato a*



No. 257 — Cut linen with foliage pattern in relief.  
(Venice, first half XVIII century).

*fogliami* certainly did not mean a lace with relief and an extraordinary richness of complicated stitches and baroque design, an inadmissible progenitor for our pure and simple *punto in aria*.

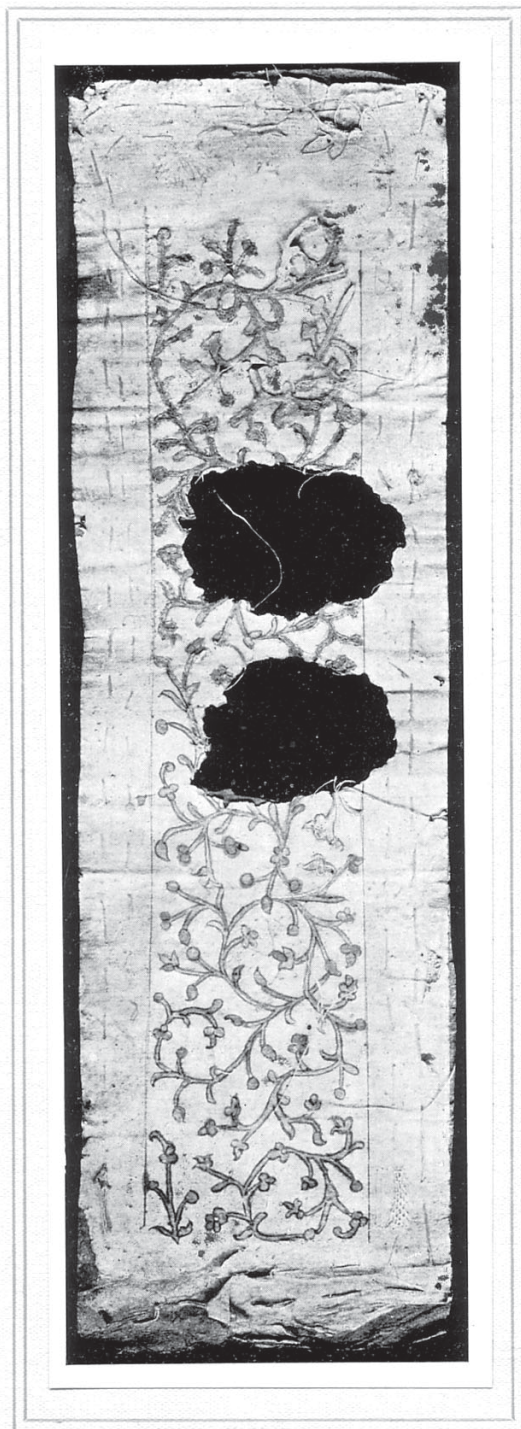
Perhaps here again as in *punto in aria* embroidery gave a name to lace, as it had given it stitches. Indeed in 1550 the name *punto tagliato a fogliami* was already given to that which Franco describes as « tagliatela », which consisted in following a foliage-design, in Renaissance style, with a little gold cord or a button-hole stitch, and cutting away the linen foundation. This simple, effective method is used in many old examples, and is found in pictures of the time (Nos. 255, 256).

Certain is it that only at a later date, at the beginning of the XVII century (until which time *punto in aria* had a flat appearance, or was embellished simply by some little cord in relief), did this work round itself in generous curves more





No. 258 — Round bodice and sleeves heavy Venice Point.  
Bust of Princess Pico della Mirandola by L. Ottoni in the  
Ducal Palace of Mantua.



No. 259 — Work in Venice Point, properly so called, prepared and begun on parchment in XVII century. Antolini, Macerata.

nearly conforming to the taste of the day, become enriched with ornaments sometimes in very palpable relief, and powder the background with light capricious little roses which added greatly to the richness and variety of the whole. In this new and tasteful form, the lace had a tremendous vogue; the lace-makers saw sculptors imitating their ornaments and reliefs; the greater art doing homage to the lesser! At Carpi, the inventor of a kind of marble inlaying, Guido Fassi, made an altar-front unmistakably copied from lace; this he signed, as is the custom with artists who believe their work will redound to their credit (No. 240).

Together with the grave and sober *punto tagliato a fogliami* (Rose Point) so much in request for the dress both of men and women and for the vestments of priests (Nos. 257, 258) the XVI century saw the introduction and speedy popularity of Venetian Point properly so called. Executed in the same way as *punto in aria*, Venetian Point diverges from it to execute branching designs amidst corals and sea-weeds, which sometimes take the shape of some object easily distinguished, and at others are governed by the vagaries of the worker (No. 259). In request among queens and great nobles, Venice Point and *punto tagliato a fogliami* realised fabulous prices. The *Dictionnaire des Précieuses* of 1660 tells us how men wore three frills of lace



on their breeches, paying 7,000 livres for them: and the history of vanity (*masculine*, on this occasion) records such prices as 13,000 scudi for cravats, cuffs, and frills.

It is easy to understand how under such conditions the pastime of wealthy ladies became so flourishing and remunerative an industry throughout the land as to attract the attention of Louis XIV's minister Colbert, and induce him to direct a series of edicts and prohibitive tariffs against our fragile art. But these had no effect; when the price of Venice Point was increased tenfold, people were but the more determined to procure it. In 1665 the astute minister saw the mistake he was making and changed his tactics; instead of striving to keep Venice Point out of his country, Colbert bribed some of the best workers in Venice and Brussels Point to leave their native lands, and settle in France to teach the art of lace-making. Venice sent 30 of her most expert needle-lace-makers, and these were distributed throughout French centres such as Alençon and Argentan, where women were already working at *reseuil* and *pointes coupés* by the end of the sixteenth century.

With one stroke of the pen Colbert transformed the laces of Venice, Genoa, and Ragusa into *French Point*; but he supported this arbitrary act with princely liberality, providing against its degeneracy and decay by severe regulations; not content with making such men as Lebrun and Bailly its directors and furnishers of designs, he enacted that no lace should be made in France save that which should conform strictly to the Venetian type.

Soon an army of 1600 women were at work taking away the occupation of Italy's daughters.

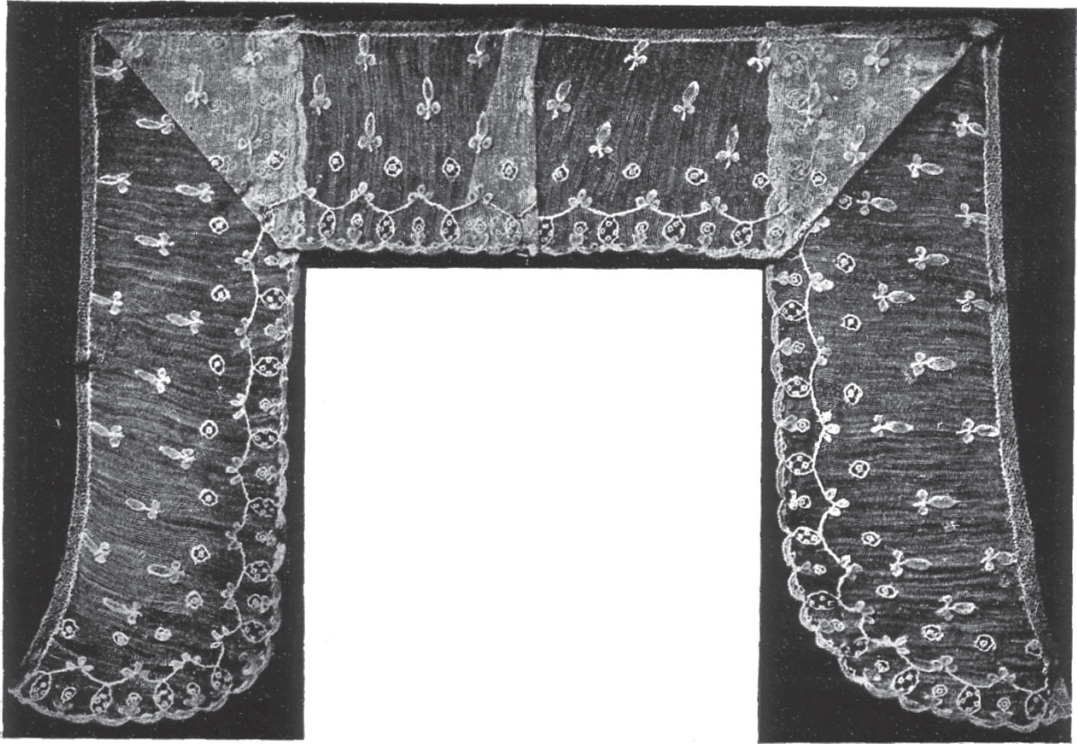
Venice tried to defend herself against the closing of the French markets and this merciless competition by making laws against the emigration of lace-workers, and begging them to redouble their patriotic efforts to produce careful and excellent work; too late, alas! The miracles produced at Venice during the latter half of the XVI century will be shown in this last series of needle-made laces: Rose Point, with large, superbly majestic leaves, comparable to bas-reliefs in ivory, and the light « *rosaline* » lace, exquisite as the finest jewelry on a background of sprigs of various designs (No. 261).

Skill and handicraft have reached the culminating point. Henceforth the great variety of nets and the perfection of relief not only enable workers to draw, but to colour with light and shade, to sculpture ornaments and figures, which thus assume a new precision of outline and even sentiment and expression.

Italy continued the contest for some time. Throughout the XVI century those who wished to acquire the best laces in Europe had recourse to Venice, whose

laces set the standard by which all other work was judged. In 1682, by which time lace-making was flourishing in France, and languishing in Italy, Colbert wrote to the Director of the Works at Alençon « the chief defect is that none of the French lace is so firm and white as the Venetian ».

But these are our last fragments of consolation. From that moment, thanks



No. 260 — Very fine Burano Point. Guggenheim, Venice.

to the iron laws of Colbert and the generous help afforded by the King, Point de France prospered and improved in every way. The most famous French artists designed patterns for lace, which gradually acquired a character of its own, lighter, and more frivolous, but extremely elegant, and admirably adapted to its new uses and its new country. Henceforth delicacy was more prized than beauty. Alençon crowds and strengthens the little groundwork bars until a hexagonal mesh is obtained, which in the the seventeenth century makes way for a net foundation, altering



the lace entirely. The prevailing fashion of frills and flounces favoured the new style of lace, which took even Italy by storm; henceforth her aristocracy prefer the vaporous Alençon and Argentan to the more staid and stately *punto tagliato a fogliami*.

Still Venice stands in the breach triumphant: both she and Burano hotly contest the field with France and Flanders, excelling the foreign laces even with the changed methods, both in fineness and variety.

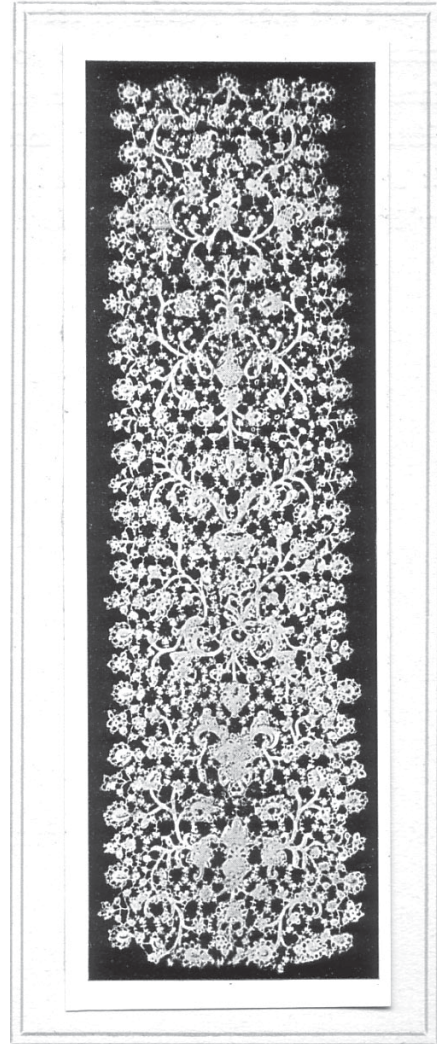
But the new laces have lost their Italian characteristics; the designs are poor and trite, the execution is monotonous, with prescribed stitches continually recurring in the pattern. There is no touch of individual genius in these works of eye and needle, fine, light and elegant, but far removed from the solid, practical, useful beauty of the best old laces of Italy. Some last few elements of the glorious past linger in the Venetian Point with mesh-work *toilé* (No. 261) the combined clearness and richness of which eclipse that Alençon it resembles.

This admirable needle-lace and the lovely *Burano*, with its billowy foundation on which delicate petals are scattered here and there (No. 260), upheld the glory of Venetian Point, until the end of the XVIII century, when it died in splendour.

It died, but it will rise again.

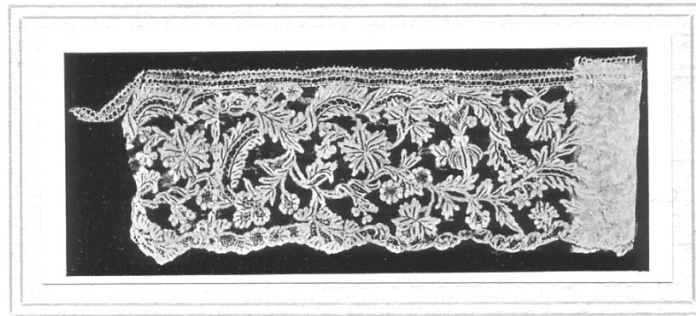
As in the XVI century the modest work of women assisted the great artistic movement of their day, so do their descendants participate in the new sentiment of veneration for those fine arts which were once our glory, doing their utmost to revive the minor forms of art which the needle can create.

Their efforts have been crowned with amazing success. It is barely forty years since the revival of the charming art was initiated, of course in Venice. And once



No. 261 — Burano work properly so-called.  
XVII century. Jesurum.

more, as in the sixteenth century, it was a lady aided by a knight<sup>(1)</sup>, who took needle in hand again, and began to enquire into the secrets of lace-making, devoting time, money, and enthusiasm to an enterprize which at the time may well have appeared hopeless. These two pioneers are dead, but their work lives, and enjoys the most wonderful results. Throughout Italy, among women of the aristocracy, the middle classes, the populace, and even among the women of the fields, faculties that seemed for ever dead have burst into new and fruitful life. Every district sees its women once more intent on their traditional work, and henceforth it may be claimed that there is no antique work, however delicate and complicated, which some among our modern lace-makers could not reproduce.



No. 262 — Venice Point on net foundation.  
XVIII century. Carretto, Turin.

(1) Contessa Adriana Marcello and Paulo Fambri.



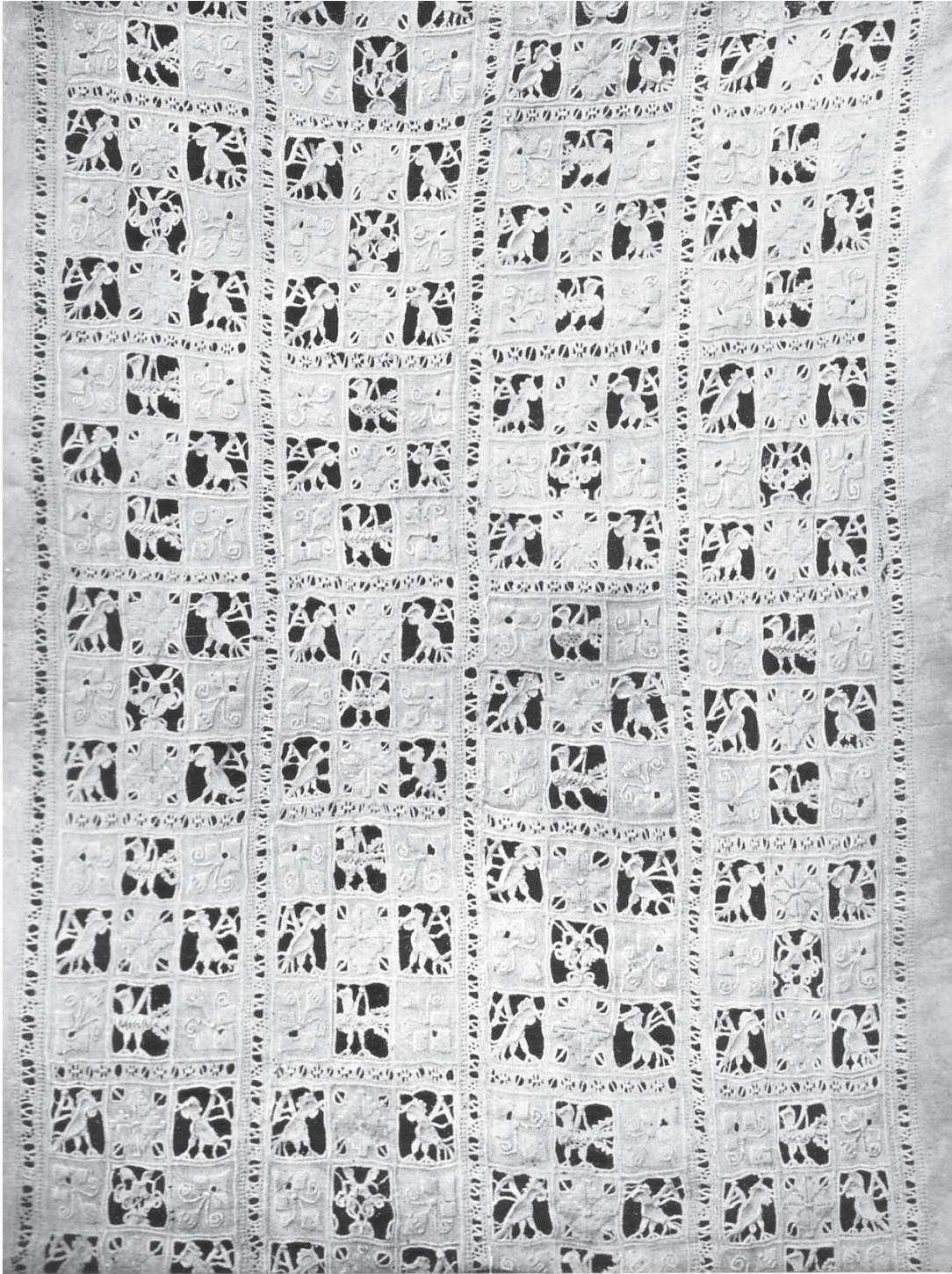
III.

PUNTO IN ARIA.

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PLATES.

PUNTO IN ARIA — XVI CENTURY.



No. 263 - Original pillow-slip in little squares of linen embroidered in satin and curl stitch, alternating with figures of chickens in *punto in aria*.

Sangiorgi, Rome.



PUNTO IN ARIA — XVI CENTURY.



No. 204 Chalice-veil of fine linen. In centre, among rays of light the sacred monogram, surrounded by the words, IN NOMINE JESU. The edging is bobbin-made.

Siena Exhibition, 1904.



PUNTO IN ARIA — XVI CENTURY.



No. 265 — Original coverlet with border and points. Two animals confront each other before a vase of flowers. Actual size.  
Sangorgi, Rome.



PUNTO IN ARIA — XVI CENTURY.

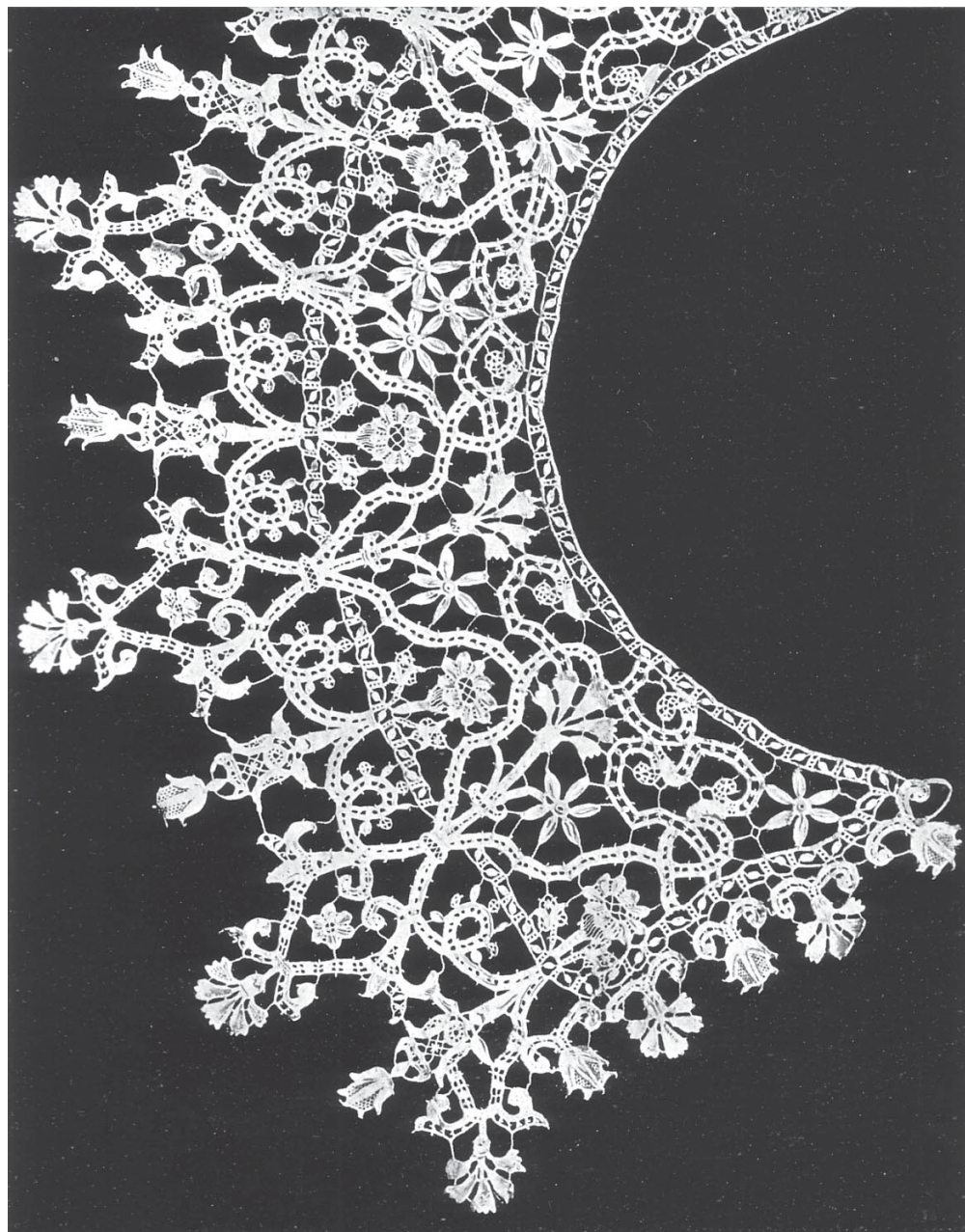


No. 266 — Original apron with border and edging of flowers and birds.

Antolini, Macerata.



PUNTO IN ARIA — XVI CENTURY.

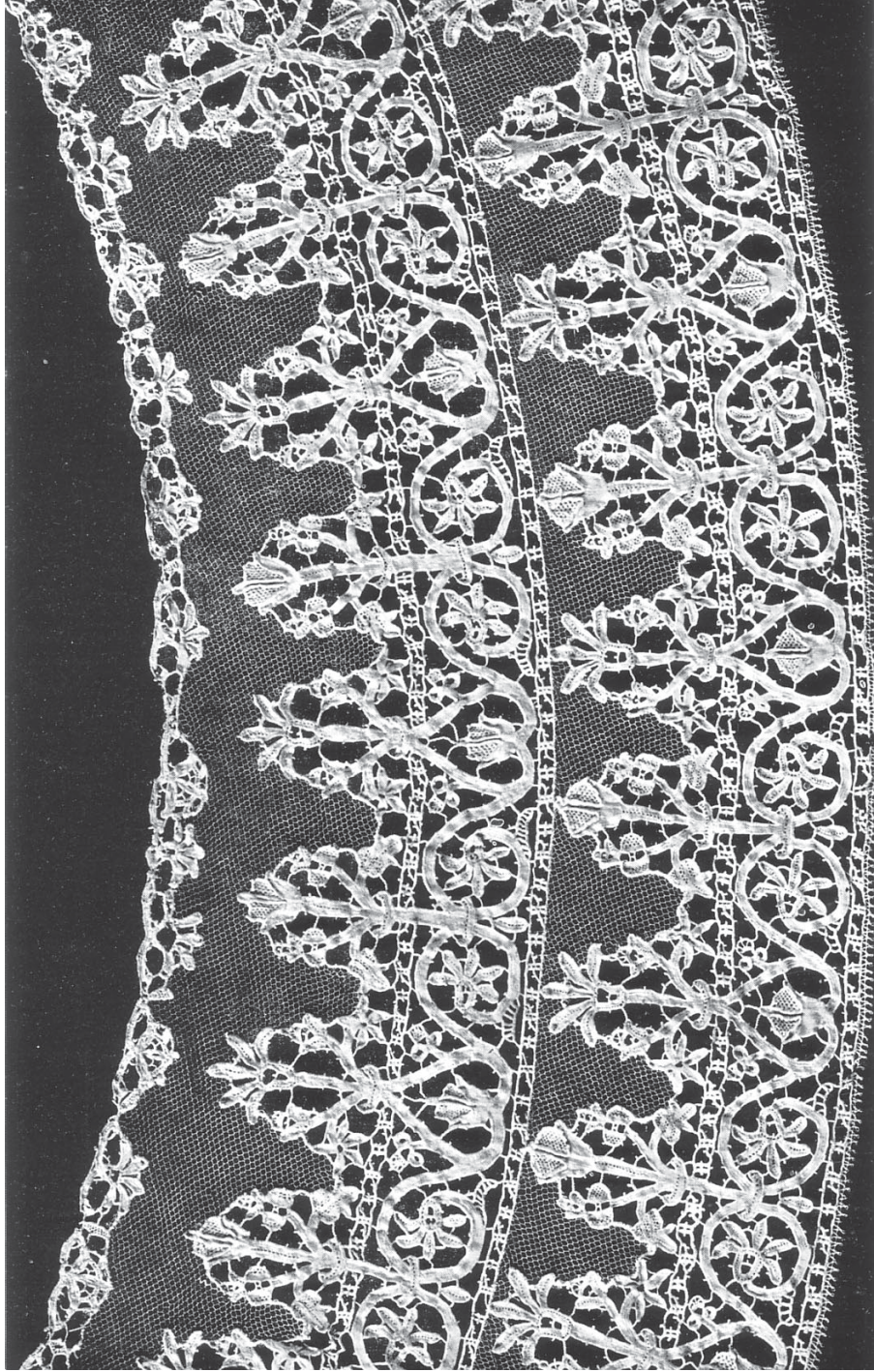


N. 267 — Original collar, flowers and ornaments.

Pogliaghi, Milan.



PUNTO IN ARIA — XVI CENTURY.

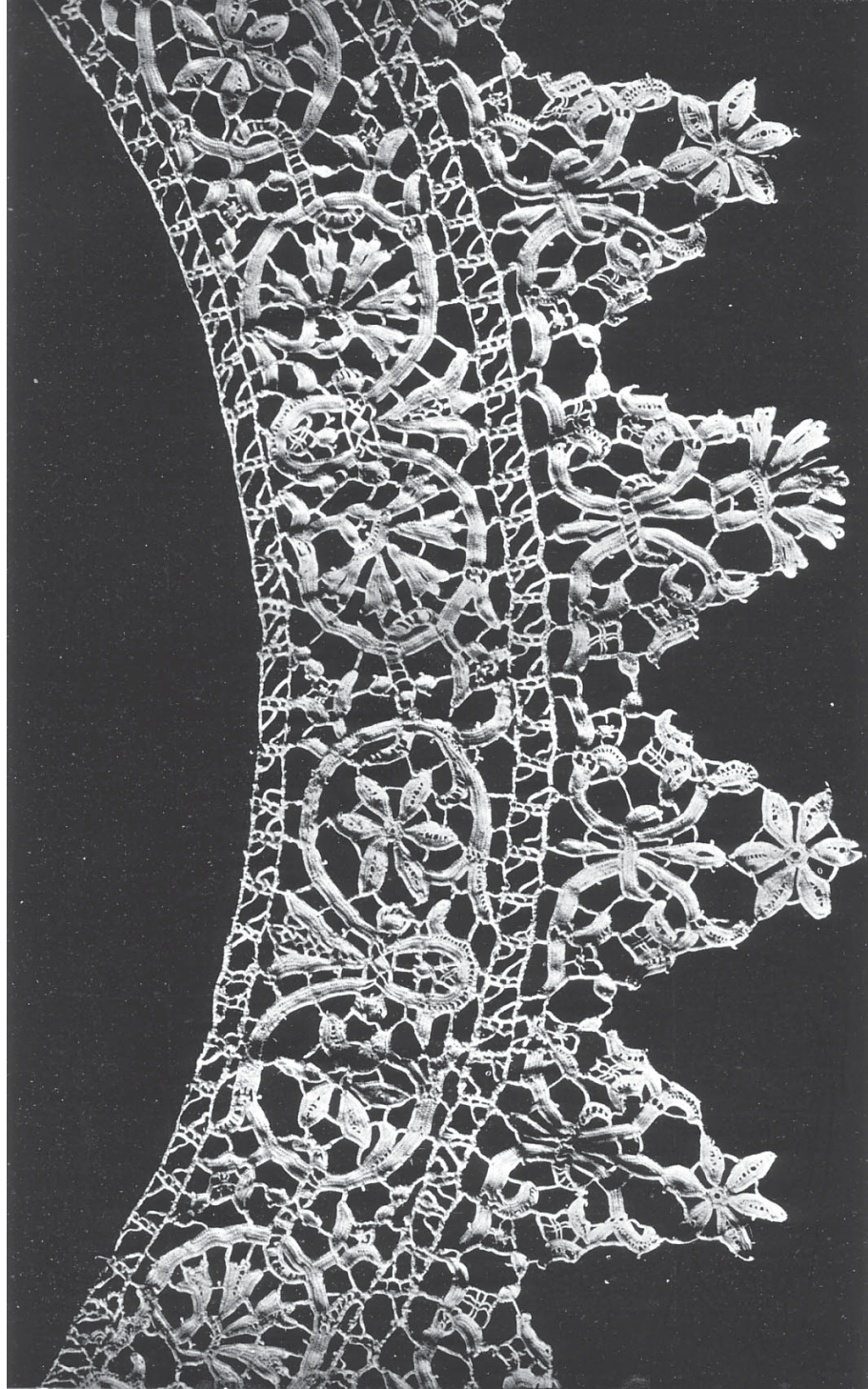


No. 268 — Lace with various flowers. The net foundation is modern.

Amari, Florence.



PUNTO IN ARIA — XVI CENTURY.

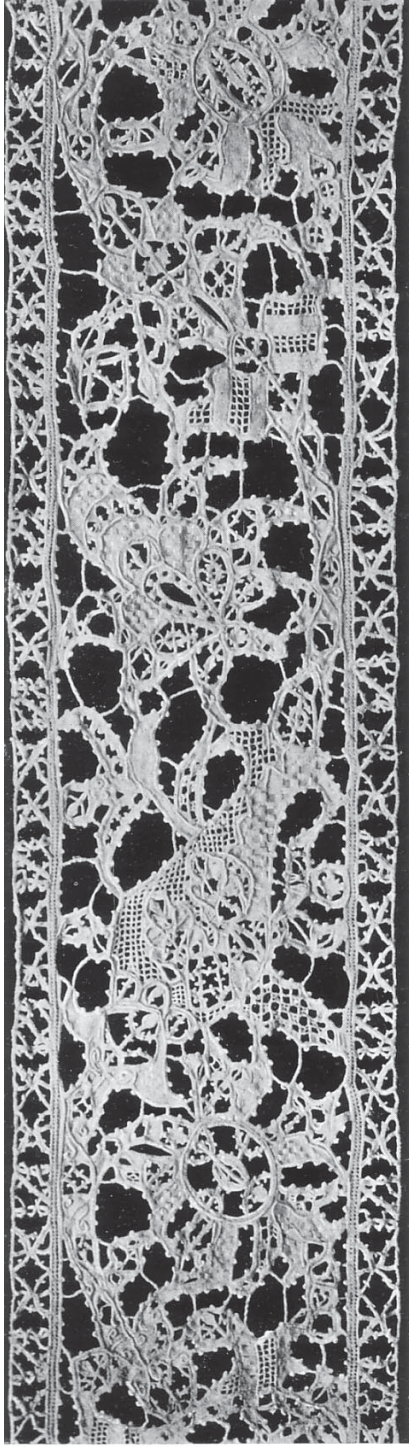


No. 269 -- Collar with flowers and ornaments.

Rouillon de Wirth, Florence.



PUNTO IN ARIA — XVI CENTURY.



270



271

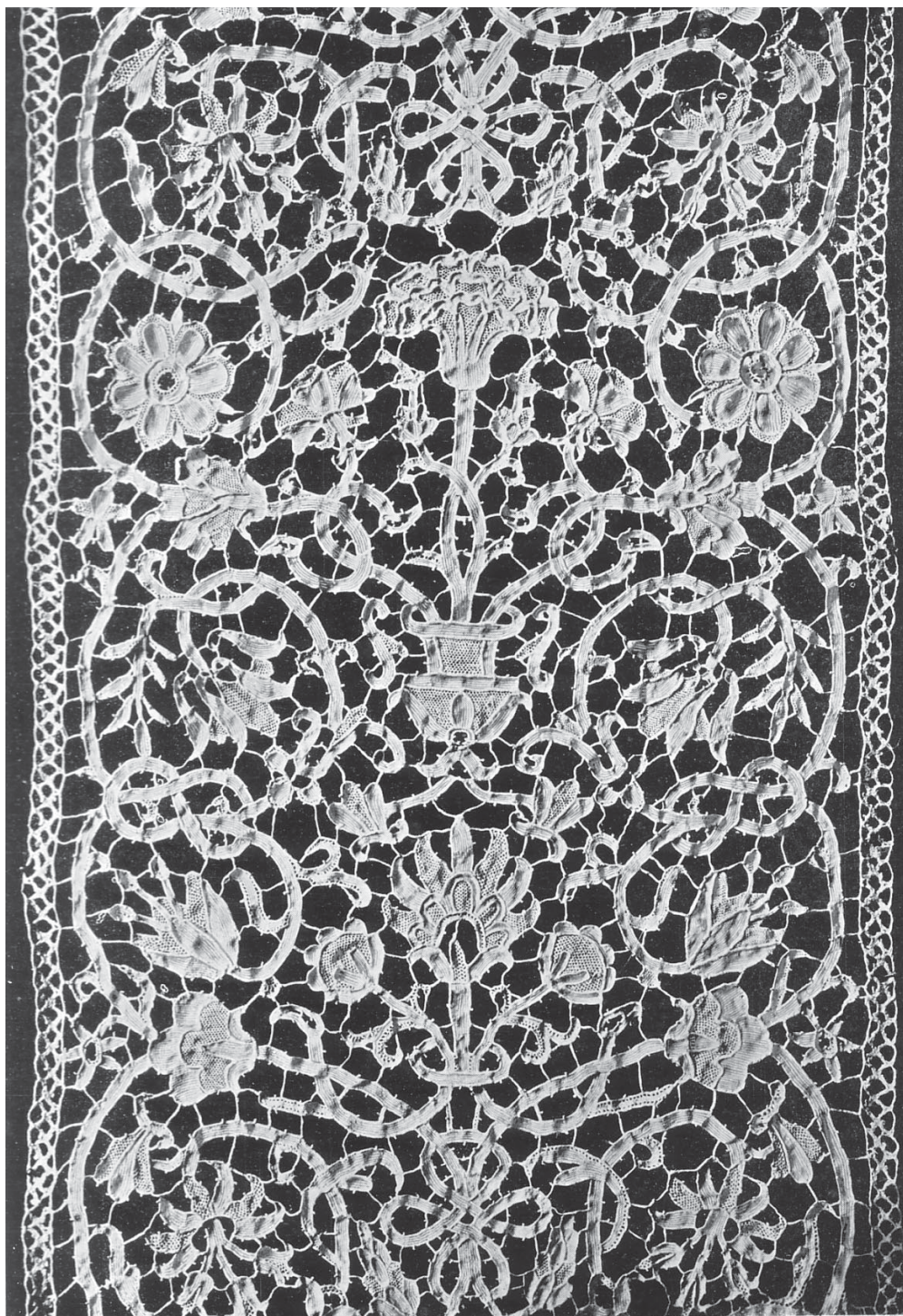
Two strips of *punto in aria* and embroidery.

No. 270 — In the first, the ground is cut away and the flowers are worked in various stitches and holes on the linen.

No. 271 — In the second, the linen ground is allowed to remain, and the flowers, vase and pomegranate are in *punto in aria*. Jesurum, Venice.



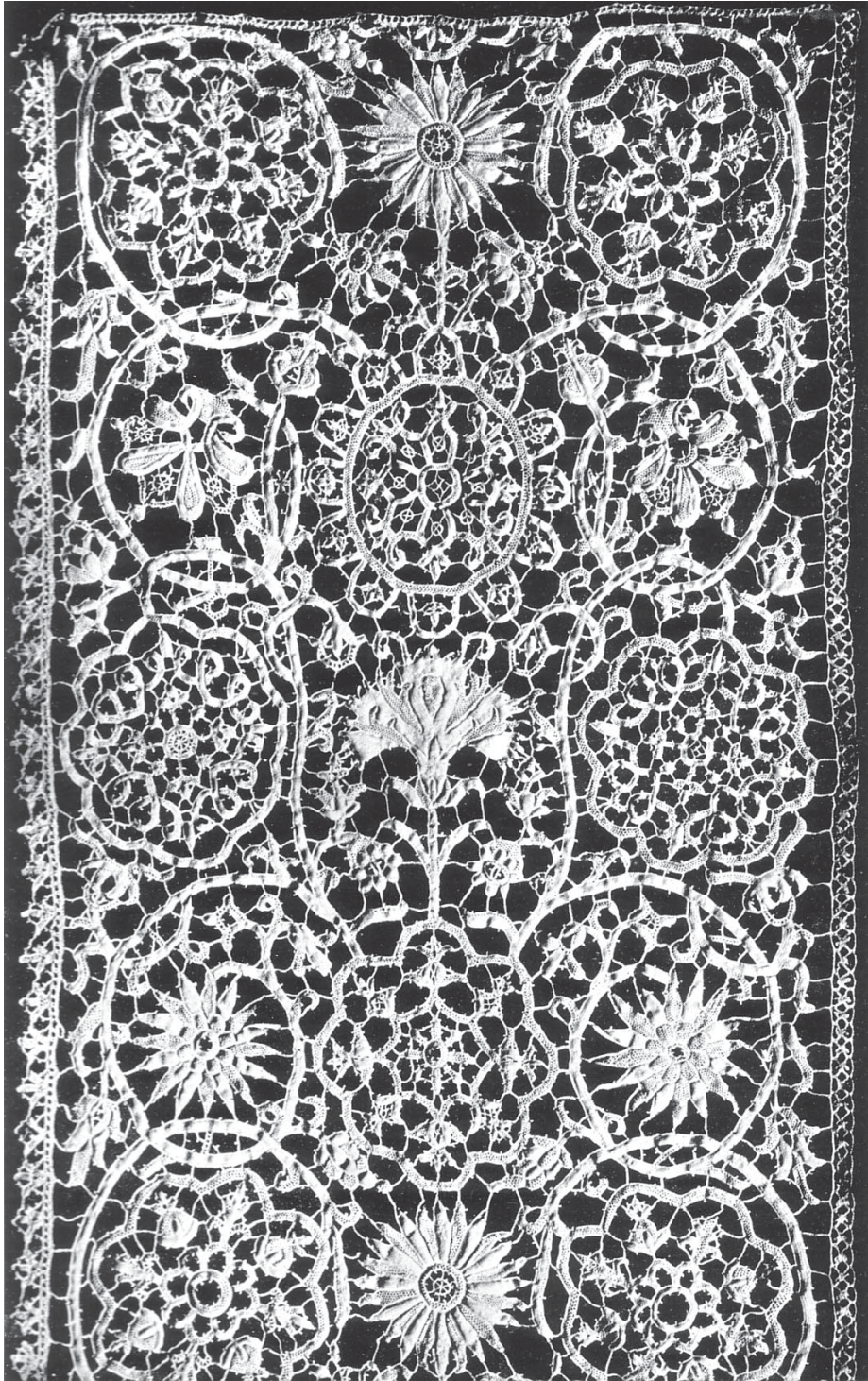
PUNTO IN ARIA — XVI CENTURY.



No. 272 — Wide insertion with vertical design of carnations, daisies, jasmine, etc.  
Sermoneta, Florence.



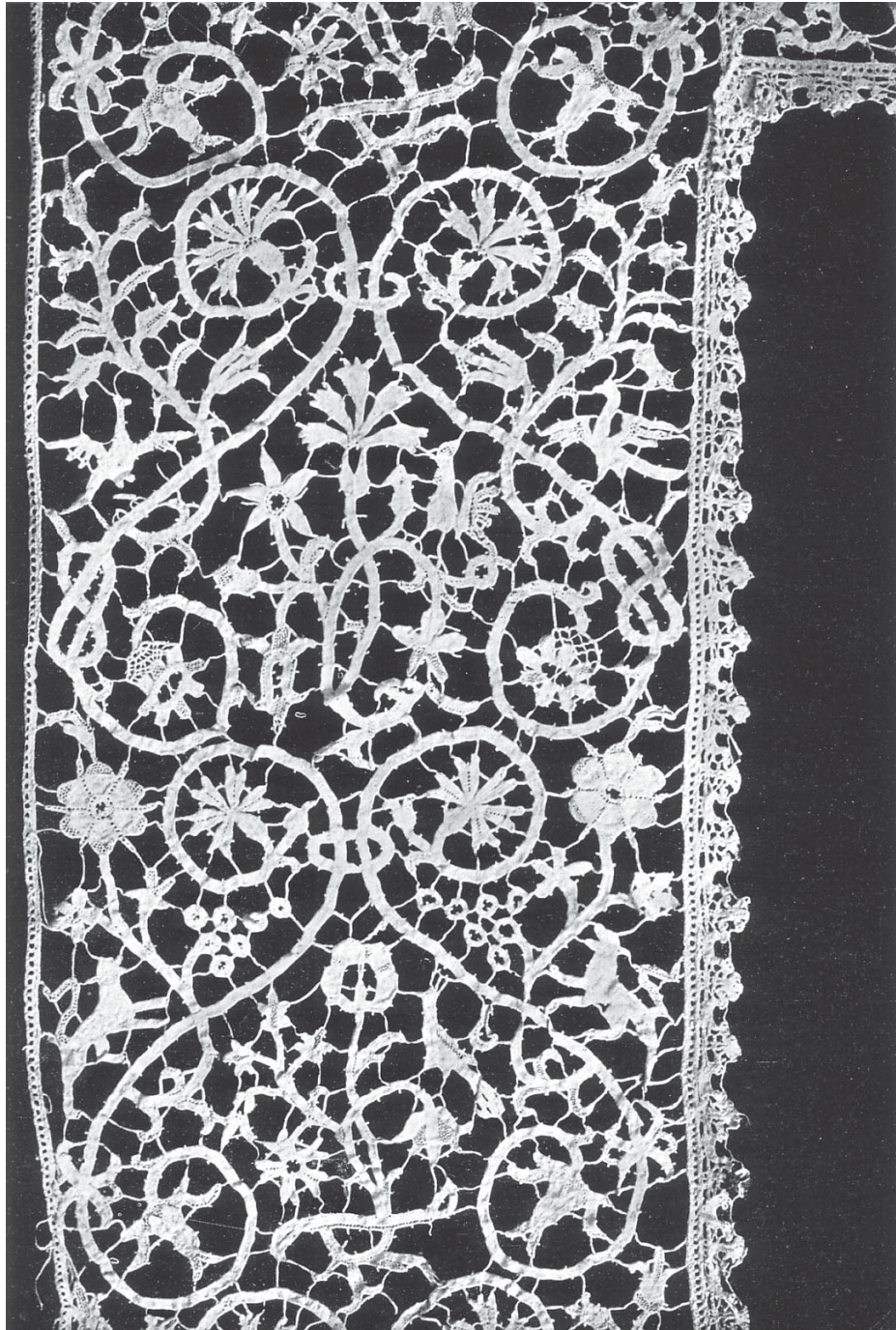
PUNTO IN ARIA — XVI CENTURY.



No. 273 — Same as last. Same owner.



PUNTO IN ARIA — XVI CENTURY.

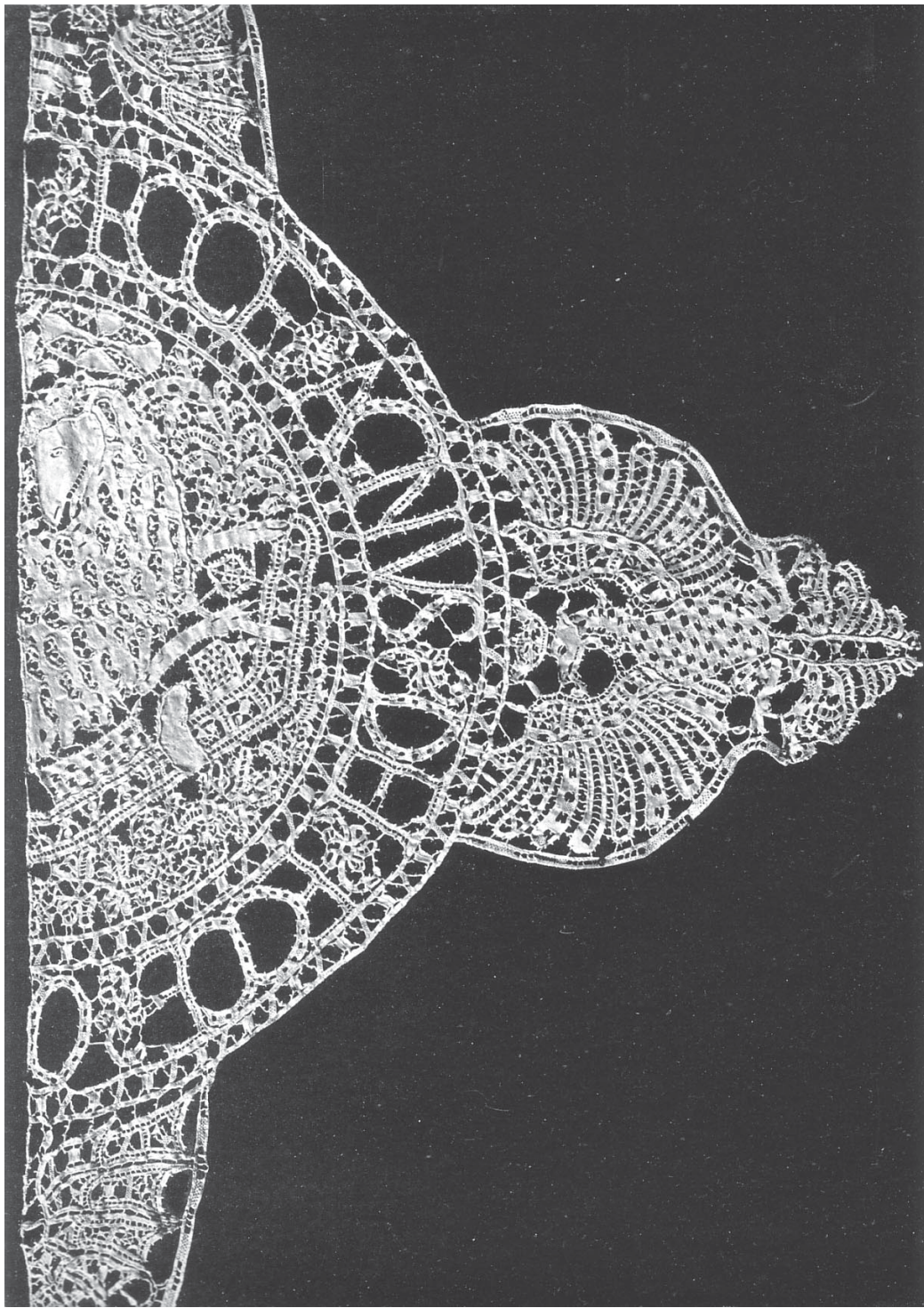


No. 274 — Insertion with vertical design of flowers, birds, and animals.

Brusadaz Church, Belluno.



PUNTO IN ARIA — XVI CENTURY.



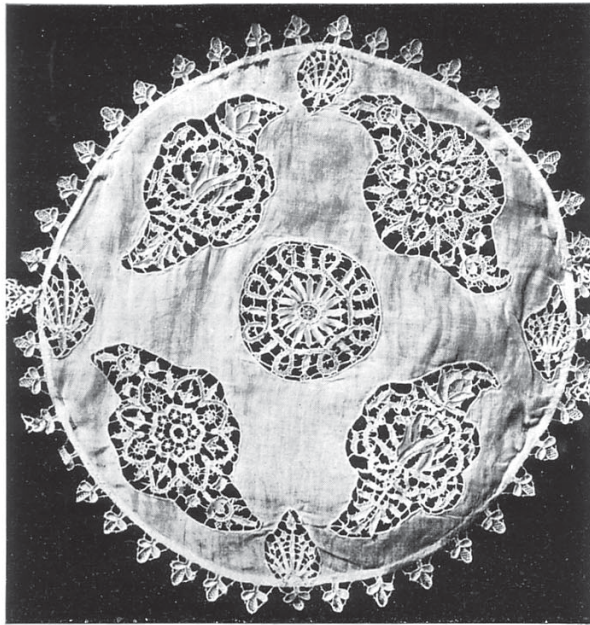
No. 275 — Half of chalice veil made in a circle, with Lamb and motto " *Ecce Agnus Dei* ", and four points on which are two eagles and two dragons (Arms of the Borghesi). The dragon is seen incomplete in the following illustration.

Colgate, New York.

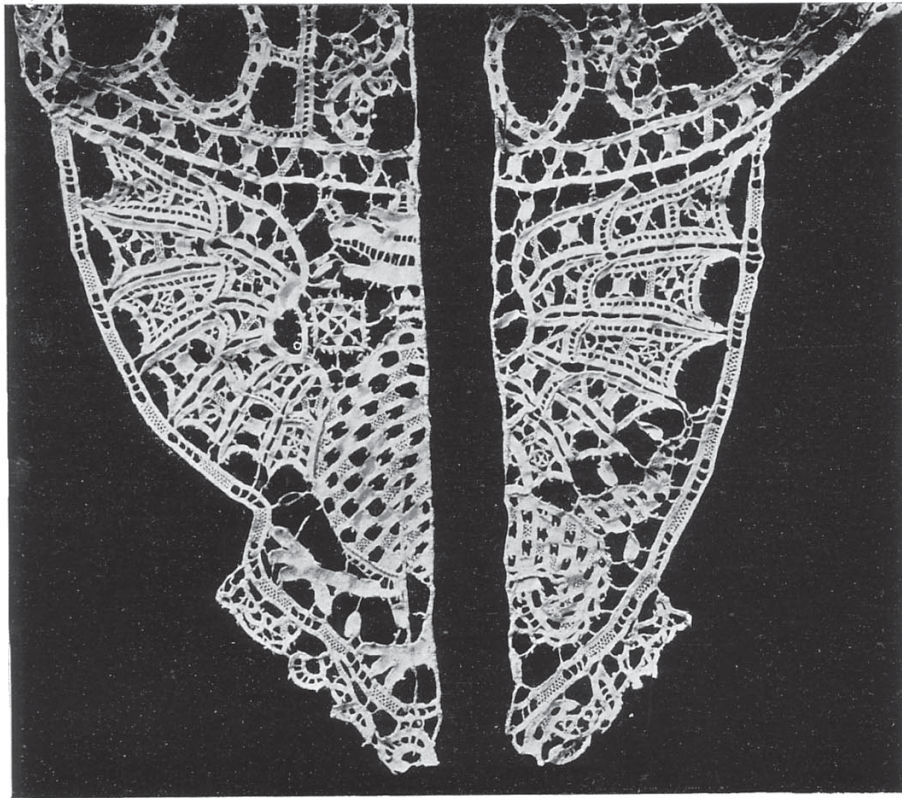


PUNTO IN ARIA — XVI CENTURY.

276



277



No. 276 — Conventional flowers. Modern composition. Jesurum, Venice. No. 277 — Fragments of dragon of preceding plate.