



**Punto de Aguja and Point d'Espagne**  
**By Bernhard and Ellen M. Whishaw**

**Part I.**

AUTHORITIES differ as to the origin and description of the antique pillow-lace referred to in the sixteenth and seventeenth century memoirs, pattern-books, etc., as "Point d'Espagne." Mrs. Palliser says that it was the gold and silver lace, sometimes embroidered in colours, which was so popular in the early part of the reign of Louis XIV.\* Lefébure makes no attempt to elucidate its history, although he mentions "Puntos de España" in his account of the "Revolte des Passemens." † Miss Sharp alludes to the frequent misuse of the term "Point d'Espagne" as applied to Italian laces, but frankly admits that "with regard to Spanish lace it seems difficult to be certain of the facts of the case." ‡ MM. Charles et Pagés merely say that "en general, l'aspect des guipures d'Espagne est lourd, compact, même massif." §

We need not multiply quotations from standard authors, who all, with the exception of Mrs. Palliser, appear to be convinced

that Spain never produced any lace worth mentioning, but will bring evidence to show that the so-called "Point d'Espagne" of the sixteenth and seventeenth century writers was in fact neither gold nor silver lace, nor "needle point," nor guipure, but a very fine and delicate fabric, known to this day in Andalusia as *punto de aguja*.

*Punto de aguja* means to the Andalusian lace-maker now, as it did in the sixteenth century, literally "hook-stitch." The old *aguja* is represented to-day by the common crochet-hook, but so largely does this implement bulk in the mind of Andalusian women, and so many centuries of tradition lie behind their use of it, that even the common needle is called after it. The fine steel crochet-hook is to them the *aguja*; the sewing-needle is distinguished as the *aguja á coser*—needle to sew with. This may not be the meaning of *aguja* as given in the dictionaries, but it is universal among the women of the working class in South-west Andalusia.

Even now the Andalusians make a species of lace called *punto de aguja*: and although it has long fallen from its high estate, the designs, however elementary,



FRONTISPIECE

"DOÑA VICTORIA"

\* *History of Lace*, French translation, 1892, p. 76.

† *Embroidery and Lace*, Spanish translation, n.d., p. 205.

‡ *Point and Pillow Lace* (Murray, 1905), p. 62.

§ *Les Broderies et les Dentelles*, Paris, 1905, p. 175.

## The Connoisseur

are still traditional, while amateurs who make crochet professing to imitate *punto de aguja* (No. ix.) are quick to point out essential differences, in the stitches or mode of working, between the real thing and their imitation. A wooden fork called the *horquilla* was an essential part of the outfit of old. On this, with the aid of the *aguja*, a fine braid with a purled edge was made, afterwards to be worked, always with the *aguja*, into delicate and complicated designs. Now, alas! a cheap machine-made braid is produced for the purpose; and even in the convents, where one might expect to find a higher artistic standard, *punto de aguja* on machine-made braid is in vogue to-day, although plenty of women in the provinces of Seville, Cadiz, and Huelva still know how to make it on the *horquilla*.

The earliest mention of *punto* that we have as yet found is in connection with an Edict of 1534, forbidding brocades and gold and silver embroidery, with the result, says Sempere,\* that "the embroiderers gave the patterns to the tailors, and these, with their wives, made of *punto* what used to be made of embroidery, at double the cost."

The Edict of 1563 permitted women to wear "sleeves of *punto de aguja*, of gold, silver, or silk"; and Philip II. wore stockings of the same work.†

The proficiency of the Spaniards in every class of embroidery and ornamental needlework at this time is shown by the extraordinary number of orders issued to repress such adornments. Sixteen or seventeen different kinds of what we should now call art needlework are mentioned by name in the Edict of 1623, which re-enacted, with alterations, those of 1534, 1563, and 1611, and many more are to be found in other Pragmáticas.

Father Marcos Antonio Camos published a book in 1592 in which he inveighed against the *cortaduras*, *trenzas*, *brosladuras* y *pasamanos*,‡ through which more money was spent upon the making of a garment than the material itself was worth. He also pours out the vials of his wrath upon the lace-makers. "I cannot keep silence about the waste and loss of time which has gone on for years with the *cadenetás*, which by a work made of thread extract gold and silver. The disorder and excess is not trifling, but hundreds and thousands of ducats are spent on work in which (while the eyesight is destroyed and the life wasted, and the women become consumptive, losing time which they could better employ) a few ounces of thread and years of time are used up, without speaking of other losses."§

The precise meaning of the word *cadenetás* in this passage is open to some doubt; but in the country districts of Andalusia the *toilé* of pillow-lace is called the *cadena*, and we find in Seville a very fine needle-wrought lace on a pillow-net, known as *cadenetás*, so that it seems safe to assume that the work against which Father Marcos took up his parable was lace in one form or another, if not actually the *punto de aguja* of our essay.

It must be borne in mind that down to the year 1609 the descendants of skilled Arabic craftsmen and manufacturers were still living in hundreds of thousands, under the name of Moriscos, among the Christian Spaniards. Even after the wholesale expulsion by Philip III. an appreciable number of them must have remained in the country, for the final edict of expulsion was not issued until 1712. How great an influence these capable and industrious people had on the development of the textile arts of Europe may be judged from the constant occurrence of such words as "Moresque," "Arabesque," "Arabicque," and "Spanishe stitche," in the pattern-books published in England, France, Italy, and Germany in the sixteenth century, while Dominic de Sera, in his *Livre de Lingerie*, published in 1584, says that most of his designs for *point coupé et passement* were collected by him in Spain. There were also "dentelles de moresse," patterns for *Moreshi* and *Arabeshi* (Taglienti, 1530); a *Livre de Moresque*, published in 1546; and another which included "entrelatz et ouvrages moresques" in 1530.\*

We know that when the Moslem dominion in Spain, save for the kingdom of Granada, was brought to an end in the thirteenth century, the conquerors not only adopted the arts and industries† which centuries before had placed the Arabs of Spain in the forefront of European civilisation, but encouraged the conquered nation to remain and carry on their manufactures in the country by granting them rights and privileges similar to those of the Christians themselves. The result was that during the fifteenth century, even under so negligent a monarch as Henry IV. of Castile, the manufactures of Andalusia, and especially of Seville, were largely exported to England, France, Italy, and Flanders; textile fabrics being one of the most important branches of this flourishing commerce.‡

\* Palliser, pp. 76, 86, and *Bibliography*.

† Needlework begins to bulk large in the Royal Wardrobe accounts of this period in England, and purchases of materials for the daughter of Edward I. are recorded. In this connection it is interesting to recall that Edward I. married Eleanor, daughter of Ferdinand III. of Castile, who conquered Seville in 1248.

‡ Zuñiga, *Anales de Sevilla*, 2nd ed., 1789, vol. i., pp. 68-73; vol. ii., pp. 451-2. First published in 1677.

\* *Historia del lujo*, Madrid, 1788, vol. ii., p. 23.

† Sempere, vol. ii., pp. 56, 67.

‡ Cuttings, plaits, embroideries, and passementerie.

§ Sempere, vol. ii., pp. 76-8.

## *Punto de Aguja and Point d'Espagne*

That the lace known as *punto de aguja* was one of the articles of luxury which set a fashion for Europe in the sixteenth century we have long felt convinced, and now, after several years' search, we are able to give reproductions of two portraits, showing to what perfection this beautiful work had attained in Andalusia before persecution had driven the Moriscos out of Spain and caused the industrial ruin of the country. It is admitted to-day that Spain after the re-conquest owed her pre-eminence in the applied arts to the impulse given by the Arabs to these arts at a time when Christian Europe had hardly realised their existence. Moslem Spain was carpeting her floors with rich woven fabrics when England and France were covering theirs with rushes; was hanging her walls with gorgeous tapestries and brocades when England was content with the bare stone of which her fortresses were built; and was heating her palaces with tubular stoves when the Northern nations had

not advanced beyond a fire in the centre of the hall, with a hole in the roof for the smoke to escape. The beds of her princes and nobles were spread with cloth of gold and silver when the Anglo-Saxon slept under the skins of wild beasts, and in the tenth century delicately embroidered linen was the underwear, not only of the great, but also of modest litterateurs who came to Cordova in search of fame and fortune.

All this domestic luxury took root and flourished among the Spaniards when Andalusia became a nominally Christian country. So much so, indeed, that the bishops and clergy are found inveighing against the enthusiastic attachment of their people to the "Moorish" fashions which led to such costly

modes of life; and edicts against profusion in dress and outward display were continually issued at short intervals from the second half of the thirteenth down to well into the eighteenth century.

Was it likely that Spain, with so good a start in the race, should have so lost her pre-eminence in the textile arts as to be compelled to take lessons from Italy, France, or Flanders, in her own special line of production, at a time when the Moriscos, who had been her teachers for so long, were still numerous in the land?

It is interesting to compare the ruff of *punto de aguja*, which forms the frontispiece of this article, with the ruffs of geometrical cut-point worn by Queen Elizabeth in the portrait in the National Gallery, and with that of Princess Eleanor of Mantua, reproduced in Miss Sharp's *Point and Pillow Lace*. That the Andalusian product is far more advanced artistically and more skilfully executed is not, we think, open to dispute, and that its



NO. I.—DETAIL OF RUFF OF PUNTO DE AGUJA, SHOWING ARABIC INSCRIPTION, ALLAH



*a*.—FIGURE FORMING AN ESSENTIAL DETAIL OF THE DESIGN IN DOÑA VICTORIA'S RUFF  
*b*.—ALLAH, DRAWN FOR COMPARISON ON THE SAME SCALE AS *a* BY DON MAXIMILIANO RAIDÁ, OF MOROCCO

origin was Arabic is proved by the introduction of figures resembling Arabic letters, as an essential part of the design (No. i.).

The portrait is inscribed on the back "Doña Victoria." The lady was an ancestress of a distinguished family still living in their sixteenth-century mansion in the now dying town of Puerto de Santa Maria, which in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was one of the wealthiest seaports in Southwest Spain. It was for centuries the winter quarters of the royal galleys; and whole streets of ruined and decaying palaces dating from the period of its grandeur show what "El Puerto" was when kings and princes habitually sojourned there, and when great galleys were built and furnished by its merchants

## The Connoisseur

for use in war or for trade with the New World. The name and history of the descendants of "Doña Victoria" and her husband are known to us, and although we refrain from publishing them here out of consideration for those still surviving, the facts can be privately communicated to any expert in lace who desires corroboration of our statement that the portrait is that of an Andalusian lady, painted at the end of the sixteenth century, and never removed from its niche in the family dwelling-house until it was sold, about a year ago, still in its sixteenth-century frame (No. ii.), to the man through whom we eventually obtained it.

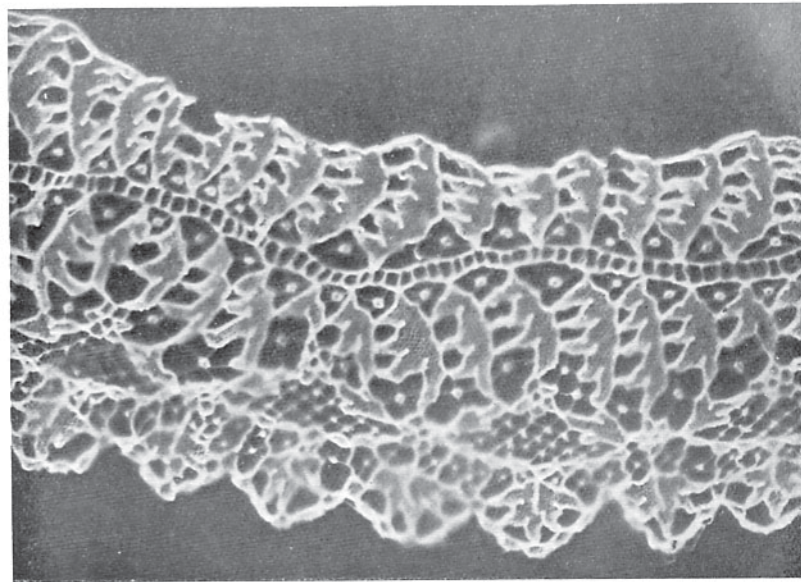
The second portrait (No. iii.), though valuable as corroborative evidence, has nothing like the same interest to students, because it not only shows a later development of the lace, from which the Arabic outlines have almost disappeared, but it has not been possible to learn its history. It was purchased in Seville quite lately from an old woman, who said that it had been given to her on the breaking up of the family to whom it belonged, the



NO. II.—PORTRAIT OF "DOÑA VICTORIA" IN ITS FRAME

this particularly fine and beautiful style of lace. Both paintings have the arms of their respective families in the corner, with a knight's helmet above.

Our next specimen of *punto de aguja* (No. iv.) brings us down to nearly a hundred years later, being Philippine work of perhaps the end of the seventeenth century. It is not generally known



NO. IV.—DETAIL OF COLLAR OF PUNTO DE AGUJA PHILIPPINE WORK 17TH CENTURY

## *Punto de Aguja and Point d'Espagne*

that when the Spaniards colonised the Philippines they largely employed Chinese labour at Manila in making embroideries and fine needle-wrought laces for home use. These first appeared in the form of fine work in white thread on soft muslin, or a most delicate fabric made of the fibre of the *abacá*, and developed later in the direction of the gorgeous silk-embroidered shawls, which are now the gala dress of every self-respecting Sevillian woman of the working classes, making the streets on a feast-day look like a garden of moving flowers.

Another specimen of *punto de aguja*, this time of late eighteenth or early nineteenth century make, is shown in No. v. It was rescued, in Seville, from the children of the late owner, who were using it as reins in a game of "horses," and is now in our possession. A striking



No. III.—RUFF OF PUNTO DE AGUJA LATE SIXTEENTH  
OR EARLY SEVENTEENTH CENTURY SEVILLE

feature of the more modern specimens is the use of pillow-made flowers and leaves in connection with those of the legitimate *punto de aguja*, and in our opinion the joint employment of the two methods offers an explanation of the otherwise inexplicable intricacy of the design represented in the portrait of Doña Victoria. The sprays in No. v. have been appliquéd on machine-made net, but enough of the original *punto de aguja* and pillow-work remains to show its beautiful execution.

(Photographs by  
Beauchy, Seville, and  
Castro Verde, Puerto de  
Santa María.)

Erratum in article "Puntas and Passementerie," published in the June Number:—

Page 82, col. 1, 3rd line from bottom, insert a comma after *puntas*. [All rights reserved.]



No. V.—PUNTO DE AGUJA TRANSFERRED TO MACHINE-MADE NET EIGHTEENTH CENTURY FOUND IN SEVILLE