

FIG. 1. LACIS OR PUNTO RICAMENTO A MAGLIA QUADRA
FRENCH OR ITALIAN, SIXTEENTH CENTURY

NOTES ON THE LACE COLLECTION

THE lace collection, which has recently been augmented both by gift and purchase, contains among the older specimens some especially fine pieces worthy of attention. In the early days of the Museum, while it still occupied the old building on Fourteenth Street, the first step, looking toward the establishment of a department of textile fabrics, was effected when a friend and patron of the Museum purchased the McCallum collection of laces and embroideries which had been exhibited as a loan in 1877; this was presented in 1879. In 1886 the collection was enlarged by an additional gift, the name of the donor being withheld, and two years later the Astor laces were presented by Mr. John Jacob Astor shortly after the death of his wife. These various gifts were assembled and displayed in Gallery 29 until 1906 when the entire collection was re-arranged and placed in the new lace room—Gallery 33.

Among these gifts Venetian points stand pre-eminent, but there are, nevertheless beautiful examples of the earlier styles of needlepoint that should not be overlooked, and also some interesting pieces of network—the *punto ricamento a maglia quadra* of Italy, and *lacis* of France. Of the latter class, embroidered net, two pieces are worthy of mention. One of them (fig. 1), No. 2, apparently worked from a design found in a pattern book dated 1527, shows two uni-

corns drinking from a central fountain, the water pouring from the mouths of satyrs; the other, a still earlier piece of this class, No. 6, is a narrow band of what is called *burato*, the *toile clere*¹ of Taglienti (1527), a sort of woven canvas. The identical design—a vase of flowers between two birds—is found, stitch for stitch, in Pagan's "Opera Nova" (1546), adapted possibly from a similar, though more stilted, pattern found in Paganino's "Libro Primo de Rechami" (1527), who in turn may have copied an early Sicilian brocade, of which the two birds *affrontés* are markedly characteristic.²

With the increasing circulation of pattern books, the art of lace-making received an impetus, and bed trimmings of *lacis* and *point coupé* became the fashion; this was especially true in the French Court, where, under Catharine de' Medici, Mary, Queen of Scots, among others, became an adept with the needle. The only lace found in portraits of this period is the simple needlepoint and bobbin edgings that trimmed the ruff or "*fraise*," as it was sometimes called. Within a few years, however, this article of dress became paramount and the demand for handmade lace increased daily. Edgings gave way to elaborate borders of cutwork and *reticella* with Vandyck points, and in the elaborate collars shown in the portraits of Marie de Medici it is difficult to recognize

¹ Palliser, Mrs. Bury. *A History of Lace*. London, 1902. p. 53.

² Errera, Mme. Isabelle. *Collection d' Anciennes Étoffes*. Bruxelles. 1901. p. 3, No. 4.

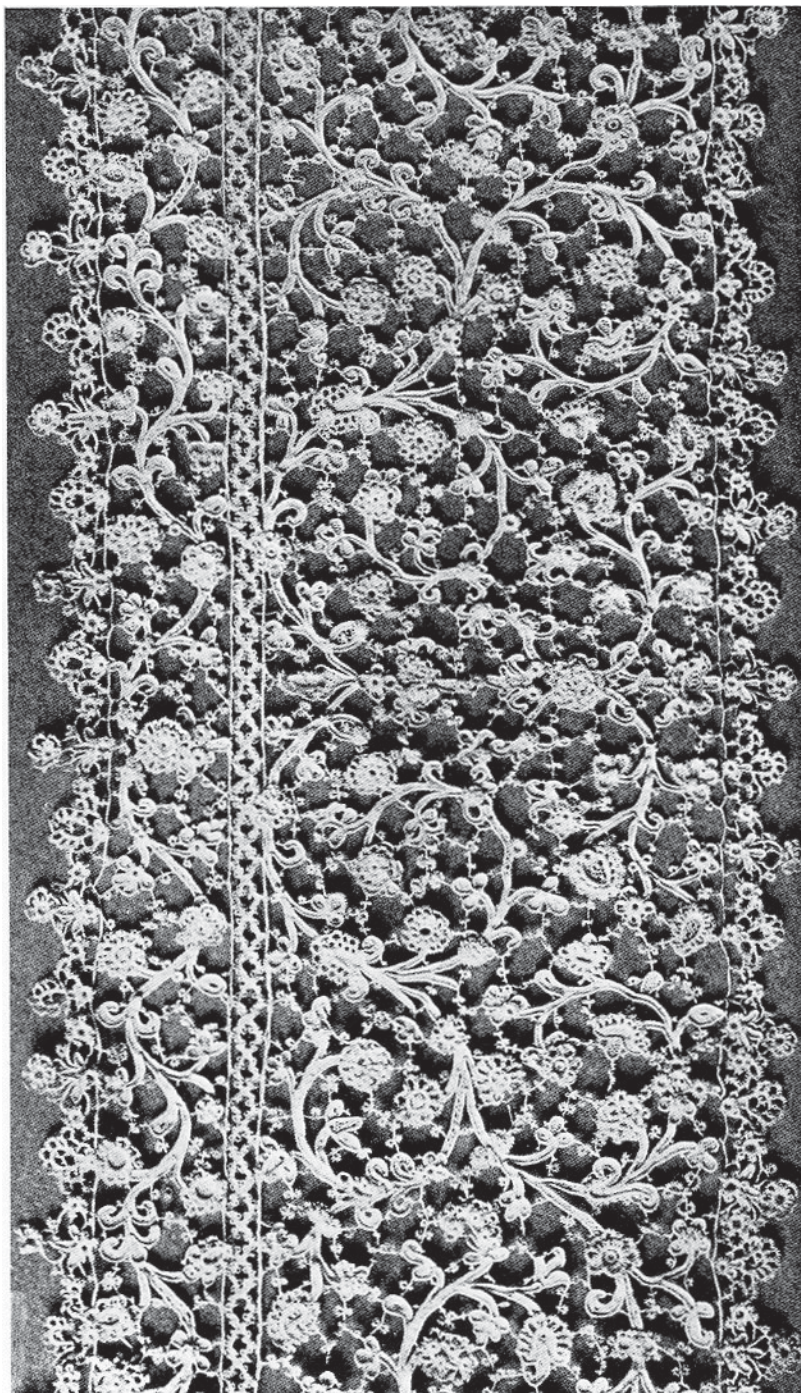


FIG. 6. VENETIAN POINT. ABOUT 1700

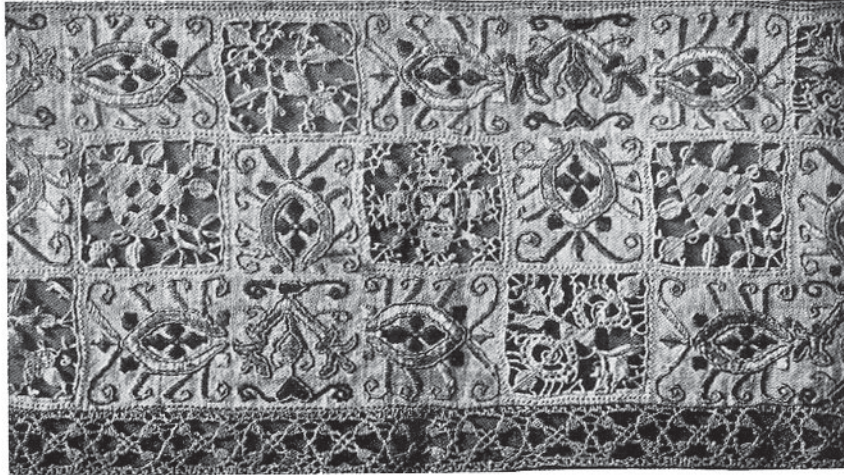


FIG. 2. PUNTO REALE E RETICELLA
EARLY SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

the simple ruff introduced by Henry II to hide a scar.¹

In England the first record of cutwork, or *opus scissum*, as it was called, is found in the New Year's Offerings of 1577-78 at which time Sir Philip Sidney presented to the Queen a "suit of ruffs of cutwork."² Queen Elizabeth, who was extravagant in her love of this fabric, did nothing to encourage the art at home, but purchased largely in the Flemish and Italian markets. Some of the best pieces of cutwork (*punto tagliato* or *point coupé*) may be

¹ Palliser, p. 140.

² *Idem.*, p. 304.

enumerated as follows: No. 128, a chalice veil of the early sixteenth century, exquisite in design and technique;¹ No. 145, a piece so delicate in texture and pattern as to closely resemble the finest Carrickmacross, differing only in the outlining stitch, which is solid buttonhole, and in the many needlepoint ornaments of the intervening spaces. Another piece worthy of mention is No. 154 (fig. 2), a strip of cutwork in which the linen is heavily em-

¹ This chalice veil has recently been copied by the Scuola d'Industrie Italiane in this city, for an exhibition held in Boston.

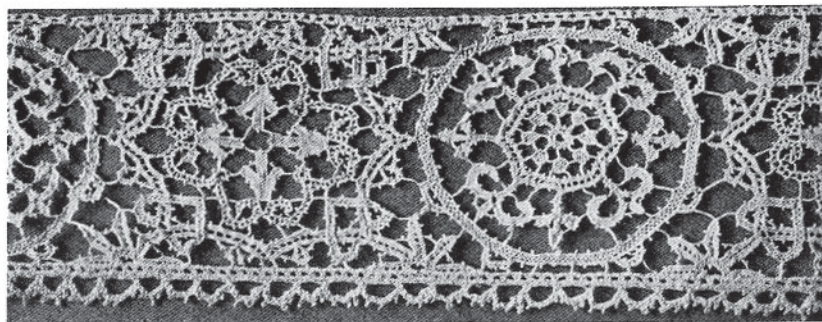


FIG. 3. NEEDLEPOINT
FRENCH, EARLY SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

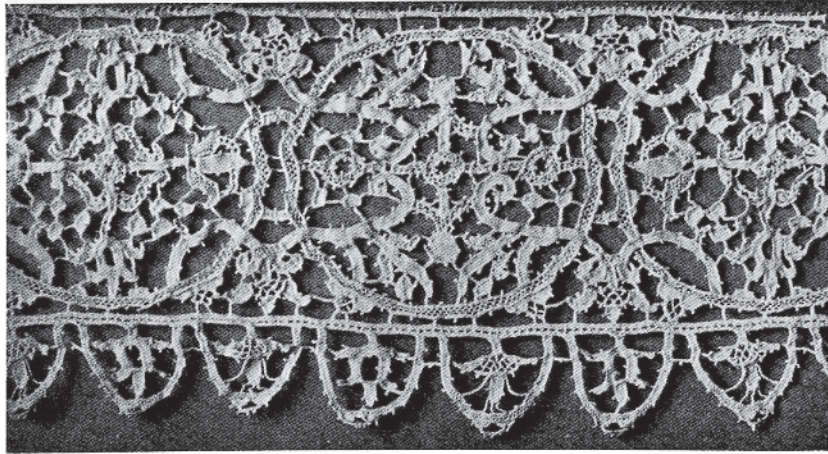


FIG. 4. NEEDLEPOINT
FRENCH, EARLY SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

broidered in colored silks, and the open spaces filled with varied designs in needlepoint, *punto reale e reticella*.

From cutwork developed *reticella*. In this the linen grounding is almost entirely cut away, or the threads withdrawn, leaving only occasional supports for the design, which, in these early pieces, is always geometric. When the workers gradually realized that no framework was necessary *punto in aria* was evolved: this gave more

freedom of design and floral patterns with scrolls became possible. Nos. 249 and 250 (figs. 3 and 4) are notable examples of *reticella* and resemble the lace shown in one of the portraits of Elizabeth in the National Portrait Gallery, London.¹ And it may be of interest to note at this point that on the wax effigy of the Queen

¹The Burlington Magazine No. XLV. Jourdain, M. Lace before the time of James I. Pl. II.

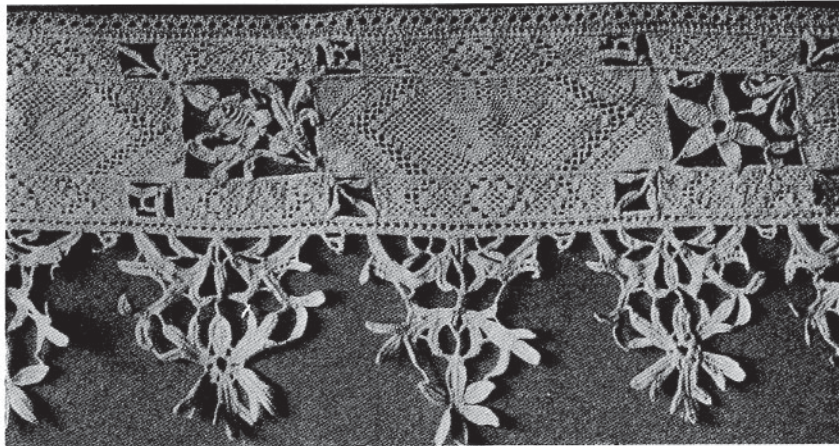


FIG. 5. NEEDLEPOINT
ITALIAN OR SPANISH, EARLY SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

in Westminster Abbey the lace of the ruff is still in fairly good condition. A splendid example of *punto in aria* is shown in No. 248 (fig. 7); it is made in three large points in which the worker has wrought out, with exquisite delicacy, the snowy petals of the edelweiss.

Another piece of lace No. 273 (fig. 5), exceptionally unique, is composed of a band of the finest needlepoint stitches separated into lozenge-shaped medallions, each ornamented with a reindeer, a peacock or a double-headed eagle. Bordering this is a fine edge of *punto in aria*. While the origin of this piece may be either Spanish or Italian, it is an interesting fact that these same *motifs*, the reindeer with retreating antlers and the double-headed eagle are found repeatedly in the Melian embroideries.¹

Among the Venetian points, of which there is a rich display, one finds splendid examples of the three varieties—"Flat" point (*Punto di Venezia*), "Rose" point (*Punto a rilievo*) and "Gros" Point (*Punto tagliato a fogliami* or *fiorami*) of Italian, French and Spanish work. Of the first, "Flat" point, there are many charming pieces. In one, No. 331, a finished piece of exquisite design, a series of well-balanced scrolls branch out on either side from a central ornament, with connecting *brides* or "tie bars" rich in ornamental *picots*. Three pieces of "Rose" point quite overshadow all others: No. 334, a splendid flounce of what is sometimes called *Point de neige*—the *picots* adorning the *brides* worked in such a way as to resemble perfectly the crystals from which the name is derived; No. 363 (fig. 6), shown in the illustration, and No. 348, a most marvelous piece of needlework, made in the form of a large cape. In this the design is more French than Italian, but the perfection of detail suggests the work of Venice; tiny *picots* mount one upon another in such profusion that the eye becomes confused in a maze of thread and one wonders as to the fate of the worker. A splendid collar of "Gros" point, No. 327, shows that work in its best period.

¹ Id. No. XLVI. Vol. X. Pesel, Louisa F. Embroideries of the Aegean, Pl. II. No. 8.

Too numerous to mention are the many other examples of this lace which in the seventeenth century not only adorned the rich vestments of ecclesiastics, but was also used to trim the *rabats* and boot tops of the dandies who flourished at the Court of Louis XIV.

Interesting by comparison are the tape and needlepoint laces. These were made in imitation of the Venetian lace and were much less costly. With these may also be mentioned the North Italian guipures, bobbin-made, which, in their bold, or flowing scrolls resemble closely the flat needlepoint lace of Venice. In all of these the pattern predominates and the *brides* serve simply to hold the line of its curves in place. Toward the end of the seventeenth century, however, the *brides* were supplanted by an hexagonal mesh and this gradually developed into the fine net grounding (*réseau*) of the eighteenth-century laces. One interesting bit of early Flemish lace with *réseau*, No. 420, has for its design a series of foliated scrolls and small animals, —a rabbit pursued by a dog, while a bird perched on an upper branch watches the chase with interest. In the early Italian pattern books there are many designs in which animal life figures, but, as a rule, the effect produced is one of balance. In later work, however, as in the present specimen, the motives are apt to be scattered through the design in a more irregular way. There are some charming specimens of Brabant lace: one, an exceptionally fine example of early Binche, No. 516, the filmy lace from which Valenciennes was developed. The different periods of Alençon are well represented, from the graceful design of Louis XIV. to the less attractive ones of the First Empire. In connection with the *Point d'Alençon* may be mentioned the beautiful Italian needlepoint with the fine grounding — *Point de Venise à réseau*. This is the most delicate of laces and is becoming every day more rare; the two specimens in the collection are splendid in design and represent the best period of the work.

Since the rearrangement in 1906, several important gifts have been received, all of which have been mentioned

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in the Bulletin; and thanks to the unflagging interest of Miss Margaret Taylor Johnston and the generosity of many other donors, the collection is steadily growing; specimens from Norway, Sweden and Denmark having recently been acquired, countries not heretofore represented. Many interesting gifts are constantly being added; among those recently received may be mentioned a unique piece from Mrs. William M. Kingsland¹ bearing the arms of a bishop surmounted by the bishop's hat; some beautiful examples of Spanish blonde from Mrs. James W. Pinchot; two unusual specimens of needlepoint from Mrs. James Boorman Johnston and Miss Margaret Taylor Johnston; an exquisitely fine cap of Irish crochet from Mrs. William D. Frishmuth; a piece of Honiton from Miss Eva Morris; some Flemish lace from Mrs. Vanderpoel and an interesting example of early American lace from Mrs. Frances E. Smith. Several pieces of machine lace have also been

donated and form an interesting group; one a rare early piece from Mrs. Leonard E. Opdycke, a similar piece from Miss Frances Morris and two modern copies of Venetian needlepoint the gift of Mr. W. E. Truell.

With the increasing interest in the development of the lace industry in the city, the collection is daily becoming more valuable as an educational factor. To this end several panels have been placed in the gallery illustrating the different stitches on an enlarged scale and showing needlepoint and bobbin laces side by side where they can be compared; also a lace cushion showing a piece of Austrian bobbin lace in process of making, the gift of Mrs. William Kubasak. In other frames will be found some notes on the history of lace, a list of books for reference and a glossary explaining technical terms.

The splendid gift of Mrs. Luckmeyer, two exquisite capes of Point de France and a unique piece of early needlepoint, will be noticed in a later Bulletin.

F. M.

¹ See Palliser; Plate VII, *Heraldic lace*.

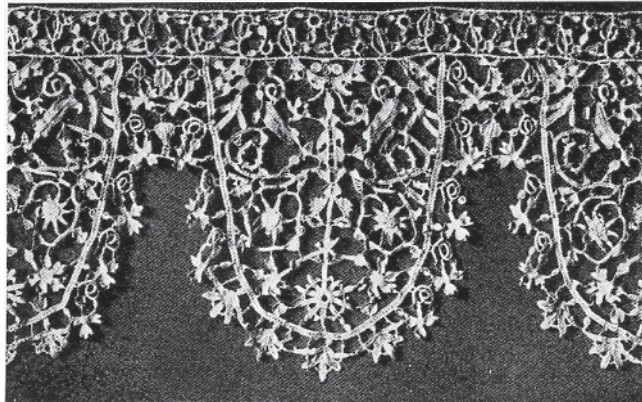


FIG. 7. PUNTA IN ARIA
ITALIAN, EARLY SEVENTEENTH CENTURY