



ITALIAN FILET, LATTER HALF OF SIXTEENTH CENTURY  
BROOKLYN MUSEUM COLLECTION

## THE LACE EXHIBITION AT THE BROOKLYN MUSEUM

BY CATHERINE T. D. FOX

**D**URING the past summer the Brooklyn Museum has made a special display of lace. The exhibition was composed of the lace given to the Museum by the late Colonel R. B. Woodward, and many specimens kindly lent by lace lovers, among whom were members of the Needle and Bobbin Club. Incidentally, the notable collection of ancient ecclesiastical vestments and Renaissance textiles, the gift of the Rembrandt Club of Brooklyn, was reinstalled and shown in connection with the lace. The exhibition was opened on the afternoon of April 28th, and it is a tribute to the interest and growing influence of the Needle and Bobbin Club that the exhibition was inaugurated primarily for the Club's benefit and entertainment.

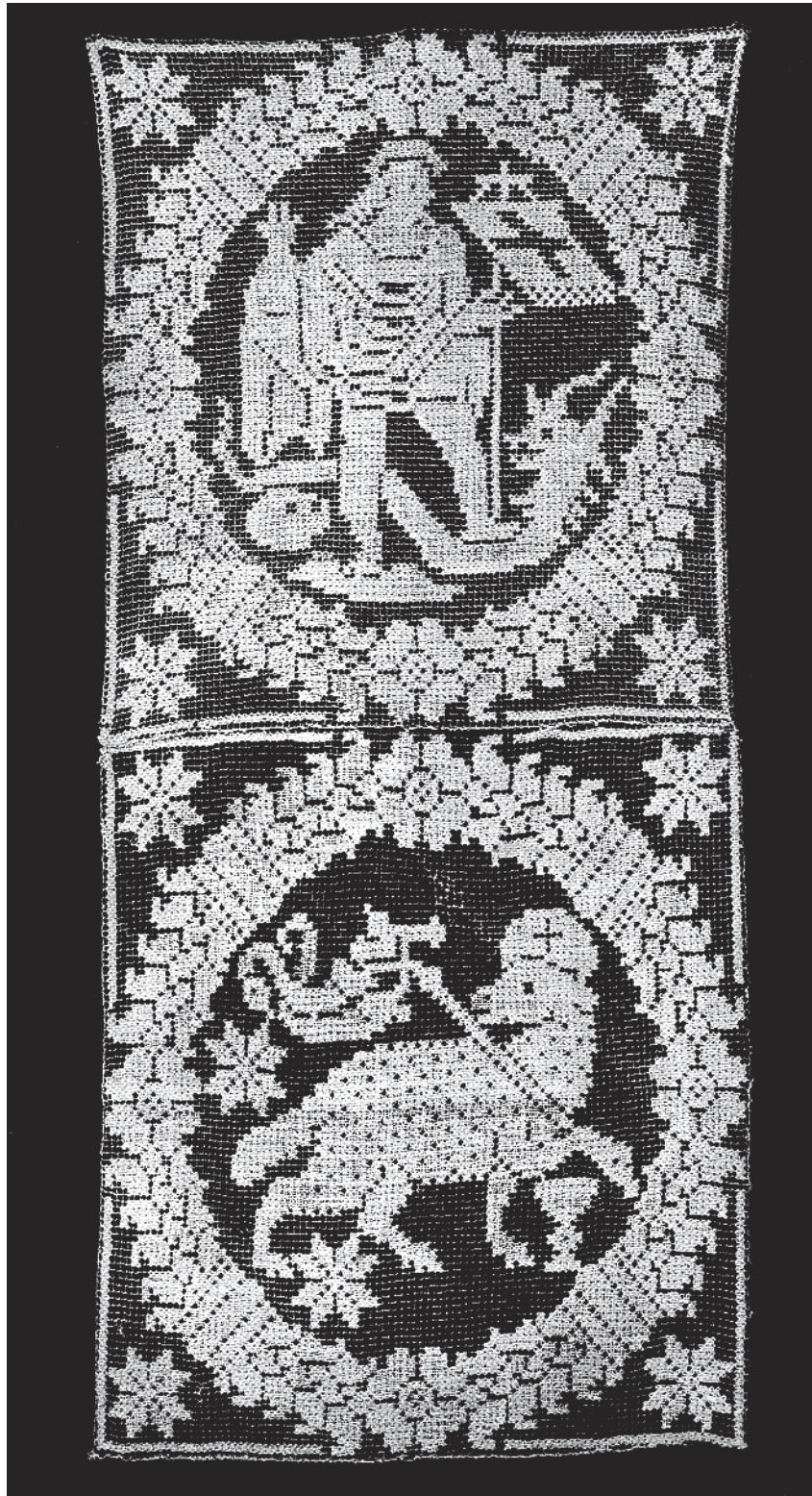
The cases were arranged in the galleries and corridors surrounding the central rotunda, on the top floor of the Museum. On the occasion of the opening, tea was served to the members of the Club and other guests from a refectory table placed under the dome of the rotunda. The fine old Italian silk and velvet draperies hanging from the walls, the rich hues of the copes and dalmatics, the marbles and terra-cottas, the altar with its furnishings of lace and velvet and gilded candlesticks, the "Ma-

donna and Child" of Andrea della Robbia suspended above it, and the tapestries, were a fitting background to the lace which was the main feature of the exhibition. To further emphasize the Renaissance atmosphere, the tea table was spread with filet over Genoese velvet. In the centre stood a large majolica jar filled with a mass of spring flowers. Candles burned in old Italian candlesticks, and for other practical purposes of the table the plates and bowls were Hispano-Moresque and other faïence from the Museum's collection. The company present numbered six hundred. A touch of contemporary interest was lent to the afternoon by the presence of some beautiful children dressed in Alsatian costumes and carrying baskets of flowers. They were chaperoned by Mrs. Cass Gilbert and were there in the interest of the American Committee for Devastated France.

The exhibits so graciously placed at the disposition of the Museum included specimens of Venetian needlepoint, point de France, point d'Alençon, point d'Angleterre, point appliqué, point de Gaze, filet, Valenciennes, some Holland, Spanish and Honiton; from Ireland there were Limerick, point d'Ardée, and Youghal. Some handsome veils in particular added charm to the exhibition, two of them "court" veils of point appliqué, interesting from the historical standpoint. The one lent by Mrs. Moore, having been specially ordered by Napoleon for Marie Louise, shows the imperial crown and eagle with the monogram underneath. The mesh is powdered with the bee and the border is composed of tulips and foliage. The other is said to have been worn by the ill-fated Marie Antoinette and later by the Empress Josephine. The motifs employed were the narcissus, rose, tulip and wheat. It is of exquisite quality, both as regards texture and design.

A striking feature of the loans was the filet. About twenty-five important examples of this effective lace were installed in a small skylighted room leading off from the rotunda. A soft radiance shone from above on the filet pieces hung on the creamy-toned walls in frames which for contrast were ebonized. The room was further embellished by the "Danæ" of Rodin and two other sculptured marbles. A notable example was a Sicilian strip seven feet long by two feet wide, of the late fifteenth century, the contribution of Mrs. Helen Foster Barnett. Concerning this panel, it is the opinion of one authority that "its chief ornamental fea-

tures, horsemen, figures of men and women, and chimera, bear no relation to each other, but their general character, as well as their archaic treatment, suggests the influence of design seen in the first period of Sicilian embroidery, a design which was made up of Arabian motives. The piece was made for domestic purposes, the fact that no ecclesiastical symbols occur in the decoration showing that it was not intended for the uses of the Church." Another example was a vertical strip in which two independent sections were repeated. One section showed a figure resembling Saint George and the Dragon, and the other the Paschal Lamb. Both were enclosed in circular bands which resemble the "tondi," much affected by the Florentine painters, although the design is probably Portuguese. Rosettes occupied the spaces in the corners of the section. The reaching out toward balanced design in this specimen shows the transition from the primitive. In the same room was a rare work of the sixteenth century. It represented Orpheus with a viol playing to the beasts, and was a copy of a design taken from G. A. Vavassori's book of design, published at Venice in 1546. There was a second edition in 1556. The rare quality and general mellow appearance of the filet would suggest that it was executed shortly after the book appeared. The two end borders of a linen cover, joined, made an exhibit of very great interest. The motive of the design was a fountain with the water spouting from human heads, the fountain supported on each side by a unicorn. Other spaces were filled with peacocks, acorns and oak leaves. A similar design was repeated as a narrower border with fringe below. The specimen was obviously of a later date than the Orpheus piece, but of the same century. Instead of the rather primitive scattering of detail of the latter, it presented a most sophisticated fulness of design. With the balanced arrangement of its figures and elaborate border it showed that it was inspired by all the sumptuous ideas of the Renaissance at its height. Contemporary with this interesting pattern was a linen cover with a beautiful border showing an heraldic lion utilized for pure ornament in a series of scrolls. The piece was edged with vandyked needlepoint. Its effect, as may be seen in the illustration, was elegant and highly imaginative. Another sixteenth century piece, lent by the writer, was a vertical panel. Here again we have detached figures, in this instance an heraldic bird, horses, boats and the repeated motive of a man and woman with



ST. GEORGE AND THE PASCHAL LAMB. FILET, SIXTEENTH CENTURY, PORTUGUESE (?)  
LENT BY MRS. FREDERIC B. PRATT

joined hands, attired in the rich dress of the period. Supplementing the white filet were two silk covers, one azure blue and the other a soft and mellow pink, both mounted with deep borders of colored filet. The darning is carried out in delicate shades of silk and linen threads. The pieces are beautiful examples of Italian seventeenth-century workmanship.

The reason that the Museum gave a special installation to filet was both to emphasize its place in lace history and to suggest in a measure its



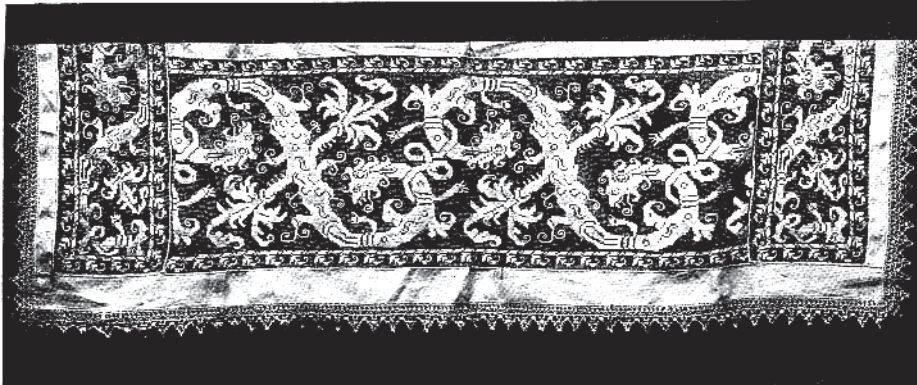
ORPHEUS. ITALIAN FILET, SIXTEENTH CENTURY  
LENT BY MRS. JOHN REILLY

use for practical purposes. One of the earliest types of lace, it has retained its popularity through the succeeding generations because of the persistent use of it in the church and in the household. Unlike the more costly needlepoint wrought to adorn the persons of the select few, filet has always been known familiarly by the mass of the people at their devotions and in their homes. It has and suggests the true folk spirit. Its adaptability to the needs of modern life is obvious, and if the making of hand-made lace is to be encouraged in this country, filet should receive the same superior consideration that it has enjoyed in Italy through the activities of the "Industrie Femminili Italiane."

Special mention should be made of a collection of fifteenth century Umbrian weaves in the form of towels, in which are the motives peculiar to the fabric—the Perugian griffin, the Guelph lion, the stags and dragons.

The Rhodian, Greek and Balkan embroideries lent sprightliness to the display with their variegated colors and pronounced but handsome designs with motives of figures and flowers. Mention should also be made of an exhibit of covers and spreads of early cut work, many of them combined with squares or bands of filet, colored drawn linen, and embroidered linen and muslin of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries from Italy, France and Belgium.

A novelty was two "lambas" or shawls from the Island of Madagascar,



ITALIAN FILET, EDGED WITH NEEDLEPOINT. LATTER HALF OF SIXTEENTH CENTURY  
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spun from raw silk and dyed with vegetable dyes, contributed by Miss Young. Beautiful old jewelry, belonging to Mrs. Lockwood and Mrs. St. Clair McKelway, and some fans were arranged among the lace as a related feature.

As to the Woodward collection, it was given to the Museum in 1915. It consists of one hundred and sixty-nine pieces, originally assembled by Count de Besselièvre, of Paris. The nucleus of the Museum's permanent collection has been formed through the purchases by Colonel Woodward at the d'Avaray sale earlier in the same year. The golden age of lace making of Italy, France and the Netherlands, covering the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, is here represented in great variety and richness. The Woodward collection forms a remarkably graphic and instructive epitome of the history of lace during its best period.

The members of the Club who were among the exhibitors are Mrs. Frederic B. Pratt, Mrs. Luke Vincent Lockwood, Mrs. William H. Moore, Mrs. John Reilly, Mrs. Helen Foster Barnett, Miss Gertrude Young and Mrs. William Henry Fox. The Pratt Institute, with which the Brooklyn Museum enjoys such cordial relations, also exhibited from its own ample and choice collection, and valuable pieces were lent by other friends.

It is refreshing to record an excellent attendance at this display, and to note the fact that at the Metropolitan Museum there was another lace exhibition during the summer. It is fair to say that up to within a few years of the immediate past, such an exhibition of this very specialized art would have been impossible. At all events, the public would have been indifferent to it, perhaps bored by it; but to think of two lace exhibitions held at the same time in the same city, with every indication of popular interest! To use Whistler's favorite expression, "Incredible, public taste is certainly looking up!"

#### MARIE STUART'S INTEREST IN FILET

Queen Mary Stuart made a will in 1560 which still exists in the Record Office at Edinburgh. After disposing of her jewels, she concludes by bequeathing "tous mes ouvrages masches et collets aux 4 Maries, à Jean Stuart, et Marie Sunderland, et toutes les filles";—"masches" with *punti a maglia*, being among the numerous terms applied to filet. Cf. Bury-Palliser, p. 22.