

NEEDLE AND BOBBIN IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY HOLLAND

By Patricia Wardle

'For as well men as women for their bodies and for all uses of the Family, use very fine linnen, and I think that no clownes in the World weave such fine shirts, as they in *Holland* doe,' so wrote Fynes Moryson after his journeys through the Low Countries in the 1590's.¹ His comments certainly apply with no less force to the whole of the 17th century, when much of the linen woven in Holland was of a superlative fineness, often almost like silk in texture. And, of course, we are quite familiar with the sight of Dutch faces of the period set off by snowy linen, which is sometimes judiciously embellished with a little restrained, but choice needlework or a border of lace (Fig.1). Bed linen does not figure quite so prominently in paintings, but it too was often of an enviable refinement and likewise adorned with skilfully executed whitework or an insertion of simple, hard-wearing bobbin lace (Fig.2).

But who was it who did all the needlework involved? Virtually all girls learned to sew as a matter of course and many of them learned to do embroidery on linen as well, both white and coloured. Numerous samplers have survived from the 17th century which are entirely devoted to whitework in all its forms, ranging from needleweaving via counted thread work to cut and drawn work and needlepoint lace stitches, and sometimes including alphabets in eyelet holes or the elaborate letters and Tree of Life motifs so popular in Friesland and the other northern provinces (Fig.3). Sometimes the whitework techniques occupy just part of a sampler, the rest of it being filled with coloured motifs, inscriptions and the alphabets and figures used in marking linen (Fig.4).² Needlework was, in fact, one of the symbols of the virtues of domesticity and industriousness at that period, witness paintings and prints of girls, wives, mothers or widows engaged in sewing (Fig.5).³

However, if some of the needlework was done by the women of the household, a great deal more was done by professionals, women who did sewing and other forms of needlework to make a living, the *naaisters*⁴, seamstresses or sewing-women. In particular we are concerned here with the *lennenaasters* or linen seamstresses, for a very sharp distinction was made between them and the *wollenaasters* or wool seamstresses, who made woollen and cloth garmets for women and children. The wool seamstresses belonged to a guild and were thus regulated to some extent,⁵ but the linen seamstresses were never linked to a guild, even though, as will appear below, a lot of the work they did was of an elaborate nature. This was the case elsewhere in Europe too, e.g. in France, in respect of which Diderot's *Encyclopédie* tells us that 'Embroidery on linen is done by women, who belong neither to the Guild of the Embroiderers nor to any other'.⁶ Perhaps this was because there were simply too many of them and it would have been virtually impossible to exercise any control over them. This kind of needlework was, after all, one of the principal ways of making a living open to ordinary girls and women and something even those who were better off could fall back on in hard times. Take the case of Vrouste

Claesdochter (d.1638), for example, the daughter of a skipper from Bolsward in Friesland, who was left an orphan and was persuaded to go to Amsterdam by a merchant of that city, but found herself placed as a servant to his mistress in Haarlem instead. After much suffering and a period in hospital recovering from an illness, she refused to go back and decided to manage 'by going out sewing round the houses'. By this she earned six stuivers a week, out of which she spent four on food, buying 'half a loaf a week and a quarter of butter, and if she should partake of some milk, she had half the amount of butter'. A 'sober portion' indeed, but no doubt preferable to her previous servitude.⁷

The life of such a linen seamstress can never have been an easy one. It took a woman artist, Geertruyd Roghman, to convey this in her beautiful and powerful engraving of two women sewing (Fig.6).⁸ She shows the linen seamstresses surrounded by the paraphernalia of their trade – sewing-pillow and basket,⁹ ell-rule, scissors and reel of thread – and makes us feel the long hours (by the candle on its stand), the cold (by the foot-warmer), the cramp and the strained eyesight, and how hard even that rush-bottom chair has become after hours of sitting. Nor were the rewards great. This kind of needlework was a notorious sweated trade in the 19th century and things were not much different in the 17th it seems. In 1628 Gritie Aerss was paid 6 guilders and 2 stuivers¹⁰ for sewing a baby's layette, whereas the cost of the linen, cambric and other materials for it came to 53 guilders and 10 stuivers. In 1630 she got nine stuivers for making a shirt and in 1631 fourteen for sewing six pairs of cuffs.¹¹ Similar comparisons between costs of materials and the cost of sewing them are to be found later in the century too. In 1661 7½ ells of linen for 20 handkerchiefs cost 9 guilders and 19 stuivers, the tassels for them 4 guilders, the sewing 2 guilders; in 1660 4 stuivers apiece was paid for the sewing of 8 lace-trimmed nightcaps, for which the materials cost 7 guilders 16 stuivers, in 1664 6 stuivers 10 penningen apiece for eight man's nightcaps, for which the linen cost 2 guilders, 16 stuivers and 12 penningen and the lace 5 guilders.¹² A record of 1703 from Groningen shows that an income of 18 stuivers a week was considered a reasonable one for a run-of-the-mill linen seamstress at that time.¹³

Since the linen seamstresses did not belong to a guild and since they were such an ordinary part of everyday life, it is not very easy to find information about them, but one good source is the records of the numerous orphanages in the towns and cities of 17th-century Holland, where needlework played a vital role as far as girls were concerned. The regulations of the orphanage at Breda, for example, which was founded in 1606, stated that 'as regards girls who are very young, they shall first be taught their Our Father or the Christian prayer and the Faith. . .and also in due course to read and also to write. . .and after that they shall be set in moderation to learn linen and wool sewing and according to the grace that God shall further grant them, they shall be kept at and exercised in all household work in order to be able to serve in the houses of some good folk or to be placed in a trade'.¹⁴ At Dordrecht too all the orphans were required to learn a trade, 'the girls mostly sewing and bobbin lacemaking, etc.', and the equipment provided for each girl at the Poor

Orphanage there included 'a Sewing or Work-Pillow' and 'Scissors for Wool and Linen'.¹⁵ Our illustration of an orphan girl using such aids with sewing and lace in her lap fits these details to perfection, although it actually comes from Antwerp, a bit further south (Fig.7).

The staff of orphanages often included a linen seamstress and a wool seamstress to take charge of this important aspect of training and here too the two trades were rigidly separated, usually being allocated separate rooms. The regulations laid down for the seamstresses frequently stipulated that they must 'teach the trade of linen or wool sewing in its entirety'¹⁶ and we can get an inkling of what this involved from some of the records relating to girls who were put out to learn the trade. In 1695, for example, a girl at 's Gravendeel was put out for a period of three years to learn sewing, her teacher being paid 90 guilders for this,¹⁷ while other similar records for the 18th century give periods of two or two and a half years for mastering the trade. From Groningen, where, unusually, no sewing-mistress was appointed at the orphanage until 1784, comes a record that casts some light on the skills involved: on 14 May 1708 a girl was 'put out for a year 'to Annegien Jans on Botterdiep in order to learn sewing, lettering, marking, quilting, eyelet holes and darning'.¹⁸

In the Maagdenhuis, the Roman Catholic orphanage for girls in Amsterdam, the linen sewing-room was the first room on the left of the entrance in the new building that was completed in 1629. This easy access from outside reflects the fact that from 1611 the girls did sewing not only for the requirements of the orphanage itself, but also for outsiders in order to earn money. The first sum made by this means in 1611 came to 168 guilders, but it was not long before linen sewing was providing a sizable part of the orphanage's income. In 1629, when the new building was opened, sewing brought in 1,266 guilders and in 1630 2,000 guilders and in fact the sewing-room continued to be lucrative from that time on. It was not finally closed until 1845.¹⁹ In other orphanages too sizable revenues were secured by sewing, some of the older girls also going out to sew for people in the town. In the Poor Orphanage at Haarlem a profit of 4,219 guilders was made by the sewing-room in 1677, in Dordrecht one of 1,332 guilders on the girls' day wages in 1650.²⁰

While these figures may sometimes cover other work as well as sewing, a comparison with the prices quoted earlier nonetheless shows that they must reflect very long hours of work. Often the girls spent the major part of the day in the sewing-room. In the Holy Ghost orphanage at Dordrecht, for example, the girls rose at 7:30 in summer, 8:30 in winter. After a short session in school they had half an hour for breakfast and then went to the sewing-room until 11:30, after which there was Bible-reading and catechism. By 1:30 they were back in the sewing-room again and there they stayed until seven in the evening, after which there was another school session.²¹ Elsewhere the day followed a similar pattern, albeit further north five and five-thirty were the more usual hours of rising in summer and winter respectively,²² so that even longer hours were spent in the sewing-room. And it goes without saying, of course, that the hours worked by linen seamstresses elsewhere must have been

longer still.²³

The linen seamstress in an orphanage was usually required to be active in obtaining work for the institution. At the Protestant Orphanage in Rotterdam, for example, she was instructed 'to recommend her needle work among the Citizenry at every opportunity, in order to be able to teach the children better by increasing the outside work and bring more profit to the house'.²⁴ At the City Orphanage in Utrecht in 1697 the Regents noted that there were twenty girls there who would be unable to make a living outside because of physical handicap. They solved the problem by taking on Emerantia Siddere at a salary of '100 guilders ordinary and 50 guilders extraordinary, provided she does her duty to procure so much outside work for the House and take in burghers' children to be taught, this on the clear understanding that the profit from the one and the other shall accrue to and remain with the House alone'.²⁵

Emerantia Siddere was required to teach girls from outside the orphanage as part of her duties and hers was not the only institution where this was the case. The Maagdenhuis at Amsterdam seems to have taken outside pupils from the time it began its sewing enterprise: the first record of an income from this source in 1611 is accompanied by a further record of income from school fees.²⁶ The last record of such fees dates from 1654, after which no more outside pupils appear to have been admitted.

Another group of women who frequently taught sewing were the *klopjes*. These were Catholics who were neither nuns nor laywomen, although they did take a vow of chastity and aim to lead a religious life. They might live with their families, or on their own, or in small groups of two or three, or in larger communities, but in all cases they were required to earn their own living and sewing was naturally one of the more obvious ways of doing this. Vrouwtge Claesdochter, whom we have already met above, eventually became a *klopje*. She joined the large community in Haarlem known as 'De Hoek'. This ran a school for the children of needy parents in which the girls were instructed in the Catholic religion and taught sewing and bobbin lace-making as trades,²⁷ and there were similar schools attached to communities in other towns, such as Gouda and Delft, while individual *klopjes* also ran sewing-schools in numerous parts of the country. These often came under suspicion, as it was feared that teaching in Catholicism was being given as well as instruction in sewing, but the various measures taken to prevent this do not seem to have deterred the *klopjes* much.²⁸

Obviously it was more remunerative to run a sewing-school and to have other seamstresses working for one and this was what many individual linen seamstresses did if they could. In the villages these schools, which were always private schools with no official backing, were often little more than child-minding establishments, where young children were taught to knit and sew and perhaps also their ABC as well.²⁹ In the towns, however, while they might also be of this variety, they often

also provided a form of apprenticeship opportunity, whereby girls could learn a trade. Girls placed at sewing-schools of this type at the age of around ten to twelve soon began to earn something and their earnings rose each year.³⁰

This brings us to a further important source for our knowledge of 17th-century Dutch linen seamstresses and in fact a much more amusing one, for we find a lively picture of such a seamstress in her school in a farce by M. G. Tengnagel entitled *Frik in 't Veurhuis*, which was published in Amsterdam in 1642.³¹ The cast includes Grietje van Buuren, a linen seamstress, who is the mistress of a school for seamstresses and bobbin lacemakers. The first scene is actually set in the schoolroom, but for our present purpose it is more convenient to begin a bit further on in the play, when Diewertje, the mother of Frik, who is shortly to be married, comes to Grietje with an armful of linen to order shirts, collars and handkerchiefs to be made for him. She has, she says, allowed 27 ells for 6 shirts, i.e. 4½ ells for each shirt plus an ell for the sleeves, and she wants them made with a band round the neck and a hook and eye at the throat, according to the present fashion. Grietje, who has meanwhile made Diewertje comfortable with a foot-warmer, then asks how she wants them sewn, to which the reply is that Diewertje is now so old that she has clean forgotten how to sew and she asks Grietje to mention a few techniques. Happily for us, Grietje is delighted to do so and there follows a whole list, which affords us a glimpse of the more complex aspects of the linen seamstress' work.

The list reads in Dutch: *schuynsjens, spaensjens, schuyne spaensjens, pissebedjens, gaetjeswerk, gesneen-werk, wit-werk, jeud-werk, 4 bientjens, 6 bientjens, 8 bientjens, spinnekopjens*. As usual in such a catalogue there are some items that defy identification now, notably in this instance *jeud-werk* or Jewish work. The actual stitches mentioned all relate to the finishing of hems and seams: *schuynsjens* = rows of hemstitching worked in such a way as to form chevron-patterned openwork-lines; *spaensjens* = punch stitch; *schuyne spaensjens* = punch stitch worked diagonally; *bientjens* (lit. 'little legs') are probably bars worked over 4, 6 or 8 threads respectively, which were also called *lommertjes*. Great importance was attached to the precise finish of hems and seams, this often involving extremely close work on the fine linen of the day (Fig.8). In the play *Griane* (first performed in 1612, printed in 1616) by Gerbrand Adriaansz Brederode (1585-1619), one of the characters speaks of his wife having her handkerchiefs finished with *lommerstickjes, schuyntjis, spaansjis* and *bientjes* as well as 'red tassels' and 'black ribbons', while in inventories and other records the type of finish is often specified. Wendela Bicker's accounts include a reference in 1655, among the pocket handkerchiefs listed, to '6 very fine small ones with three *scuijnties*,³² while the inventory of Margriet Jan Betten, widow of Burgomaster Ysbrant Jacobsz Bontenos of Amsterdam, who died in 1625, includes 210 top sheets, 125 of which were finished off with two or three rows of *schuyntjens*.³³ The inventory of 1692 of Catharine Hooft, widow of another Burgomaster of Amsterdam, Cornelis de Graaf, includes immense quantities of linen, all described in great detail: pillows are decorated with *spaansje* or three *schuyntjes*, sheets, with both of these or with flat or rolled hemstitched hems.³⁴

Among the more elaborate types of linen embroidery in Grietje's list is *gesneen-werk* or cutwork, while *spinnekopjes* ('spiders') are a type of wheel that could be used as a decorative filling in cutwork and it may be that *pissebedjens* ('dandelions') are another type. Cutwork was still used on costume in the early 17th century (Fig.9; see also Dieuwke de Nes' cap and handkerchief in Fig.1), but it was already beginning to go out of favour then and by the time Tengnagel's play was published in 1642 it was no longer fashionable among townsfolk. Diewertje reacts to Grietje's list by crying, 'Stop, stop, stop! A rolled hem with 3 *schuynsjens* on the breast will do, like the rich folks have'.³⁵

On bed linen, however, cutwork remained popular throughout the 17th century and well into the 18th century too, especially in Friesland and the other northern provinces, where it often reaches an exceptional degree of refinement.³⁶ Sheets were made of two widths of linen joined together. Bottom sheets were left undecorated, but top sheets frequently had an insertion and perhaps also a wide border of cutwork on the part that was turned over and thus visible, while pillows, which were often placed on top of the bed for show during the day, might have an insertion of cutwork along their narrow ends.³⁷ The examples illustrated (Figs. 10-12) show that a strictly geometrical type of cutwork had become traditional with much use of rectangular S and X forms and lozenges, patterns of the type that appear in the first pattern-book devoted to cutwork, Matthio Pagan's *Giardinetto nuovo di punti tagliati*, which was originally published in Venice in 1542. The work is restrained in character, but often of an amazing delicacy, thanks to the fineness of the linen and the precision of the needlework, while the example in Fig. 10 clearly shows what a rich effect could be obtained by a combination of needlework and lace. Great play is made with such luxuriant effects by Jan Starter in a farce set in Friesland, in which he has Melis, 'a half-baked lover', hopefully recommend himself to a series of girls by listing the goods he possesses, including 'three pillows that were stitched and sewn, with *spaensjes*, with hems, full of ribbons drawn through each other, with five stitches in one, double rosettes, fancy stitching and picots on top of that' – a temptation indeed!³⁸ The cutwork in particular bespeaks a high level of professionalism on the part of the linen seamstresses. This kind of embroidery long remained in favour in Holland and survived into the present century in the formerly isolated community of Marken, as did the other kinds of linen embroidery discussed here.³⁹

Finally, Grietje's list includes two more techniques: *wit-werk* or whitework, which is clearly meant to indicate white embroidery in which there is no form of openwork, and *gaetjeswer*, 'eyelet-hole work'. These two techniques are often found in combination with each other on bed linen from Friesland in particular, where it was common practice to embroider large initials on sheets, often with a Tree of Life between them (Fig. 13).

A last important task of the seamstress to be mentioned in Tengnagel's play is that of the marking of linen, something to which very careful attention was paid.

Diewertje tells Grietje that the shirts and collars she is to make need not be marked, but the handkerchiefs must be marked 'just as nicely on both sides' (Fig. 8). Bed linen and table linen too were invariably marked with initials in the same way, with letters worked in tiny eyelet holes or cross stitch, and it was often numbered and occasionally dated as well.

Clearly, then, although the bulk of the work done by linen seamstresses inevitably consisted of plain sewing, they were expected to have numerous other skills at their command as well. But that was not all. In the play *Warenar* by P. C. Hooft (1581-1647), which was first published in 1617, a husband complains of his wife's extravagance, listing all the tradespeople who are continually coming to the house, including 'the seamstress with muslin and laces, and it makes no difference that there is one permanently ensconced there already'.⁴⁰ In this case the seamstress appears to be supplying the linen and lace herself and in Tengnagel's play, although Diewertje has brought her own linen, she has not brought the lace for the collars she wants made: 'I thought you'd be bound to have some,' she says, and sure enough Grietje has, as she teaches bobbin lacemaking at her school as well as sewing.

Lacemaking was never a huge commercial industry in Holland as it was in the Southern Netherlands and the bulk of the lace used there undoubtedly came from Flanders, but it is nonetheless clear that a considerable amount of bobbin lace, known as *speldewerk* ('pin work') and doubtless of a less sophisticated variety, was made in Holland itself. Girls were often taught bobbin lacemaking at school and we have already seen that it was one of the trades taught at the school run by the *klopjes* of 'De Hoek' in Haarlem. It was taught in some orphanages too, e.g. at Breda and Dordrecht,⁴¹ while at Groningen some of the girls were put out to bobbin lace workrooms to learn the trade. It was apparently so profitable there that in 1674 the authorities decided that it would be better to set up a lace workroom at the orphanage itself and the house next door to the orphanage was earmarked for this purpose. In January 1675 it was further agreed that the 33 or 34 girls who were working for Jantien Roelfs in the town should be allowed to stay with her for a time, but that all the others would be brought together in that house under the guidance of Widow Pietertjen Masmans.⁴² The lace workroom was given up in 1725, but the numbers of girls involved before then show that considerable quantities of bobbin lace must have been produced.

The trade of *speldewerkster* or bobbin lacemaker was normally a separate one from that of linen seamstress, but it seems clear that at least some of the seamstresses were also able to make lace and teach lacemaking. This was certainly the case with Grietje in Tengnagel's play and that source again provides us with some valuable information. In the scene set in Grietje's schoolroom with which the play opens most of her pupils are busy with their sewing and lacemaking and have non-speaking parts, but five of them do speak and they are all learning lacemaking. The scene is a lively one with much complaining on Grietje's part about pupils who arrive late or want to leave early and about a pupil whose work is loose and dirty: 'How can you

work so dirtily, as if it were the coldest part of the winter? What's to stop you from working as white as anyone else? Just look at Elsie's work: that's as white as hail and yours is as yellow as tan. Work a bit more tightly too: it looks as if it's all muddled'. And we hear about parchments being given out, work being cut off the pillow and a new parchment being set up.

When it comes to the scene with Diewertje and the question of the lace for the collars, Diewertje asks to see some samples and Grietje motions her to a whole box of lace and tells her to put her spectacles on and look at it in the daylight: 'There's Count Maurice's lace, the bosom lace, the doll, the mouse tooth, the death's head, the death's head with the arrow, the princess, the letter N lace, the tulip, the fan, the Italian floor, the double princess and so on'. So here we have a whole list of names, most of them probably relating to quite simple forms of lace edging or insertion. In the first scene, for example, Grietje scolds a lazy pupil, saying that the doll pattern only has 18 bobbins, so she ought to be able to do a sixteenth of an ell in an hour, whereas she has only done one tiny scallop. It is, of course, much more difficult to identify these kinds of lace than it is in the case of the embroidery stitches and techniques quoted by Grietje. It seems fairly safe to say that the 'mouse tooth' is a narrow edging with triangular points, such as the orphan in Fig.7 is wearing and working with, on the basis of the fact that the same name remained in use in Marken into this century for a picot edging. The name 'Italian floor' too reminds us of the beautiful floors of squares of black and white marble in 17th-century Dutch houses and probably refers to the edgings and insertions with geometrical block patterns quite often found on Dutch bed linen. One could make guesses about the 'tulip' and the 'fan' as well, but these are only guesses and in default of any other information do not advance us very much.

In 1932 Jonkheer Six published an article on Dutch lace in this journal, in which he drew attention to a length of bobbin lace depicted in a painting of 1638 of the Regentesses of the Spinhuis in Amsterdam, a reformatory where lacemaking was clearly among the work engaged in by the inmates.⁴³ The lace in question is very similar to the edging on the sheet in Fig. 10, so that it would be fairly safe to regard that as Dutch lace too. Indeed it seems quite likely that much of the tougher sort of lace used on bed linen was made in Holland itself. This could even apply to quite elaborate patterns like that on the sheet and pillowcase in Figs. 11 and 12.⁴⁴ When it comes to lace on costume accessories such as collars and cuffs, the question is more problematical. Jonkheer Six illustrated a close-up of the cuffs of one of the Regentesses in the 1638 painting,⁴⁵ which is trimmed with a relatively simple lace, the narrower border of which could easily be Grietje's 'death's head and arrow pattern'. It is also undoubtedly possible that at least some of the lace on the actual cuffs from his collection featured in the article was made in Holland,⁴⁶ while the refined narrow edging on the handkerchief in Fig.9 is almost certainly Dutch work too. A scrutiny of portraits by a painter closely bound up with a single town, such as Johannes Verspronck in Haarlem, also brings to light various less sophisticated or even idiosyncratic types of lace which may be a local fashion or have come from a

local source, such as, in the case of Haarlem, the school at 'De Hoek'.⁴⁷ All this, however, is pure conjecture and will remain so unless further research produces more concrete evidence. Meanwhile it is hoped that the present article will have done something to rescue from obscurity a humble class of women on whom the spotlight has seldom fallen up to now.⁴⁸

Notes:

1. J. N. Jacobsen Jensen, 'Morysons reis door en zijn karakteristiek van de Nederlanden', *Bijdragen en Mededeelingen van het Historisch Genootschap gevestigd te Utrecht* 39 (1918), p. 264. Moryson, who was born in Lincolnshire in 1566 as the third son of Thomas Moryson, steward of the royal domains, made two journeys abroad between 1591 and 1597 after finishing his studies in law at Cambridge. He began writing up his account of his travels in 1606 and it was published in London in three volumes in 1617.

2. The importance of marking linen is emphasized by the very word for sampler in Dutch: *merklap* = mark cloth. For samplers see M. G. A. Schipper-van Lottum, *Over merklappen gesproken. . .*, Amsterdam 1980, and *idem.*, *Merk- en stoplappen. Schoolwerk van Amsterdamse meisjes uit vier eeuwen*, Amsterdam 1980.

3. Other textile crafts with a similar connotation were spinning (see exhib. cat. *Tot Lering en Vermaak*, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, 1976, nos. 3 and 5) and lacemaking (this is particularly clearly evident in a *Family Group in an Interior* by Gillis van Tilborgh [c.1625-c.1678] of Brussels in the Boymans-van Beuningen Museum, Rotterdam, but there are also Dutch paintings of the theme, e.g. *The Lacemaker* by Caspar van Netscher [1639-84] in the Wallace Collection, London). Textile crafts were given an extra cachet in the Renaissance as Classical symbols of female virtue (see, for example, J. Stradanus' engraving of 1573 of *Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi*, reproduced in Patricia Wardle, 'Belgium', p. 164 in H. Bridgeman and E. Drury [eds.], *Needlework. An illustrated history*, New York and London 1978).

4. From the verb *naaien* = to sew.

5. In Amsterdam, for example, they belonged to the Tailors' Guild at first. In Haarlem they had a guild of their own. See J. G. van Dillen, *Bronnen tot de Geschiedenis van het Bedrijfsleven en het Gildewezen van Amsterdam*, Vol. I (R.G.P.69), The Hague 1929, pp. 122-3 and 402-4, Vol. II (R.G.P.78), The Hague 1933, p. 463, No. 804.

6. Diderot, *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers*. Vol. II, 1751 (reprint Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt 1966), p. 434. I am indebted to Saskia de Bodt for this reference.

7. J. J. Graaf, 'Uit de levens van der "Maechden van den Hoeck" te Haarlem', *Bijdragen Gesch. Bisdrom van Haarlem* XX, pp. 142-3.

8. Geertruyd Roghman was born in Amsterdam in 1625 and worked as an etcher and engraver. This print is the first in a series of *Women's Occupations*, published by C. L. Visscher. The others show women making ruffles, cooking, spinning and cleaning. See F. W. H. Hollstein, *Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts ca. 1450-1700*, Vol. XVII, Amsterdam, 1949.

9. For sewing-pillows and baskets see M. G. A. Schipper-van Lottum, 'Een najmangent met een najcussen', *Antiek* 10 (1975-6), pp. 137-63, with separate English summary.

10. In the currency of the day there were 16 penningen in a stuiver and 20 stuivers in a guilder.

11. 'Het kasboek van Mr. Carel Martens, 1602-1649', *Jaarboek Oud Utrecht* 1970, pp. 159, 182, 185.

12. J. H. der Kinderen-Besier, *Spelevaart der Mode*, Amsterdam 1950, Appendix II: Account book of Johan de Witt and his wife, Wendela Bicker, pp. 168, 270.

13. J. J. Woldendorp, *Opvoeding en onderwijs in de 17de en 18de eeuw in het Groene Weeshuis te Groningen*, Groningen 1935, p. 93.

14. Thomas Ernst van Goor, *Beschrijving der Stadt en Lande van Breda*, The Hague 1744, p. 116.

15. Matthys Balen, *Beschrijving der Stad Dordrecht*, Dordrecht 1677, pp. 177-81.

16. J. D. Schmidt, *Weezenverpleging bij de Gereformeerden in Nederland tot 1795*, Utrecht 1915, p. 171.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

18. Woldendorp, *op.cit.* (see note 13), p. 89.

19. T. C. M. H. van Rijckevorsel, *Geschiedenis van het R. C. Maagdenhuis te Amsterdam. 1570-1887*, Amsterdam, 1887, pp. 35, 39; M. G. A. Schipper-van Lottum, *Merk en Stoplappen*, Amsterdam 1980, pp. 38-9.

20. J. D. Schmidt, *op.cit.* (see note 16), p. 242.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 169-70.

22. These were the hours in the Maagdenhuis at Amsterdam and the Green Orphanage at Groningen, for example.

23. Perhaps it is not entirely surprising to find that orphans and seamstresses occasionally strayed from the path of rectitude. In the records of the Green Orphanage at Groningen for 1674-5, for example, there is a reference to Sara Dercks being put in the stocks for thieving, while the receiver of the stolen goods, Agneta, a seamstress, was sent to the House of Correction for six months (Woldendorp, *op.cit.* (see note 13), p. 110).

24. Schmidt, *op.cit.* (see note 16), p. 170

25. J. H. Adriani, *Het Stads-ambachtiskinderhuis te Utrecht*, Utrecht 1941, p. 94.

26. Van Rijckevorsel, *op.cit.* (see note 19), p. 39.

27. E. Theissing, *Over Klopjes en Kwezels*, Utrecht/Nijmegen 1935, pp. 49-50.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 199; C. J. A. Helvoort, 'De klopjes in Twente', *Feestbundel Jan Herman van Heek*, Enschede, 1933, pp. 121-2.

29. E. P. de Booy, *De Weldaet der Scholen. Het plattelands onderwijs in de provincie Utrecht van 1580 tot het begin der 19de eeuw*, Utrecht, 1977, pp. 104, 109.

30. *Idem*, *Kweekhoven der Wijsheid. Basis en vervolgonderwijs in de steden van de provincie Utrecht van 1580 tot het begin der 19e eeuw*, Utrecht 1980, p. 74.

31. Mattheus Gansneb Tegnagel (1613-52) was born and died in Amsterdam and spent most of his life there. He was the son of a painter and grew up in an artistic milieu, but he was undoubtedly the black sheep of his family. He enrolled as a law student at Leiden University in 1633, but did not stay long and himself admitted that he preferred hunting to studying. In general he seems to have led a thoroughly irregular life. All his works were written between 1638 and 1643. They were disregarded for a long time on account of their bawdiness and ribaldry, but have been rehabilitated in the present century largely because of the vivid insights they give into the life of the time. The one-act farce *Frik in 't Veurhuis* is considered Tegnagel's best work. The action concerns the outrage of the various victims of an Amsterdam rake (Grietje van Buuren is one of them) on learning that he is to be married and their efforts to prevent him from doing so.

32. Der Kinderen-Besier, *op.cit.* (see note 12), p. 268.

33. M. G. A. Schipper van Lottum, *Over Merklappen gesproken*. Amsterdam 1980, p. 64.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 64-5.

35. It may be noted that Frik himself, who had met his mother on her way to Grietje's, had asked to have 'a small lace or bit of sewing set on the breast and an insertion on the sleeves'.

36. Extremely fine cross stitch was done on linen in Friesland too, notably on the special cloths in which a young man would present a gift of money to the girl he hoped to marry. See *Fries Museum* Leeuwarden, Haarlem, 1978, p. 68, and A. Meulenbelt-Nieuwburg, *Embroidery Motifs from Dutch Samplers*, Amsterdam 1974, pp. 62-3 and Pl. 7.

37. For a large number of illustrations, covering the 17th to 19th centuries, see A. Meulenbelt-Nieuwburg, *Onder de dekens, tussen de lakens. . .*, Nederlands Openluchtmuseum, Arnhem, 1981.

38. Starter was born in London in 1594, but moved to Amsterdam in 1607 and to Leeuwarden in 1612, where he set up as a bookseller. This play, *Boertigheden*, was published in his *Frieschen Lusthof* in 1620-1.

39. See Maria van Hemert, *The needlework of the island of Marken*, Nederlands Openluchtmuseum, Arnhem, 1978. This book, which was first published in Dutch in 1943, gives detailed descriptions of all the stitches and techniques mentioned here.

40. This reference and that to Bredero's *Griane* were kindly run to earth by Saskia de Bodt.

41. See notes 14 and 15.

42. Woldendorp, *op.cit.* (see note 13), pp. 91-2.

43. *Bulletin of the Needle and Bobbin Club*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (1932), pp. 3-16. I am grateful to Santina Levey, Keeper of Textiles at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, for drawing this article to my attention.

44. For a broader lace of almost identical pattern used on costume (boys' collars) see A. Wassenbergh, *De portretkunst in Friesland in de zeventiende eeuw*, Lochem, 1967, Figs. 80 and 81. These portraits, of two brothers, Gemme and Doecke Martena van Burmania, aged 7 and 6 respectively, are dated 1633.

45. *Bulletin of the Needle and Bobbin Club*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (1932), p. 8, Fig. 3.

46. Happily, these cuffs are now in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.

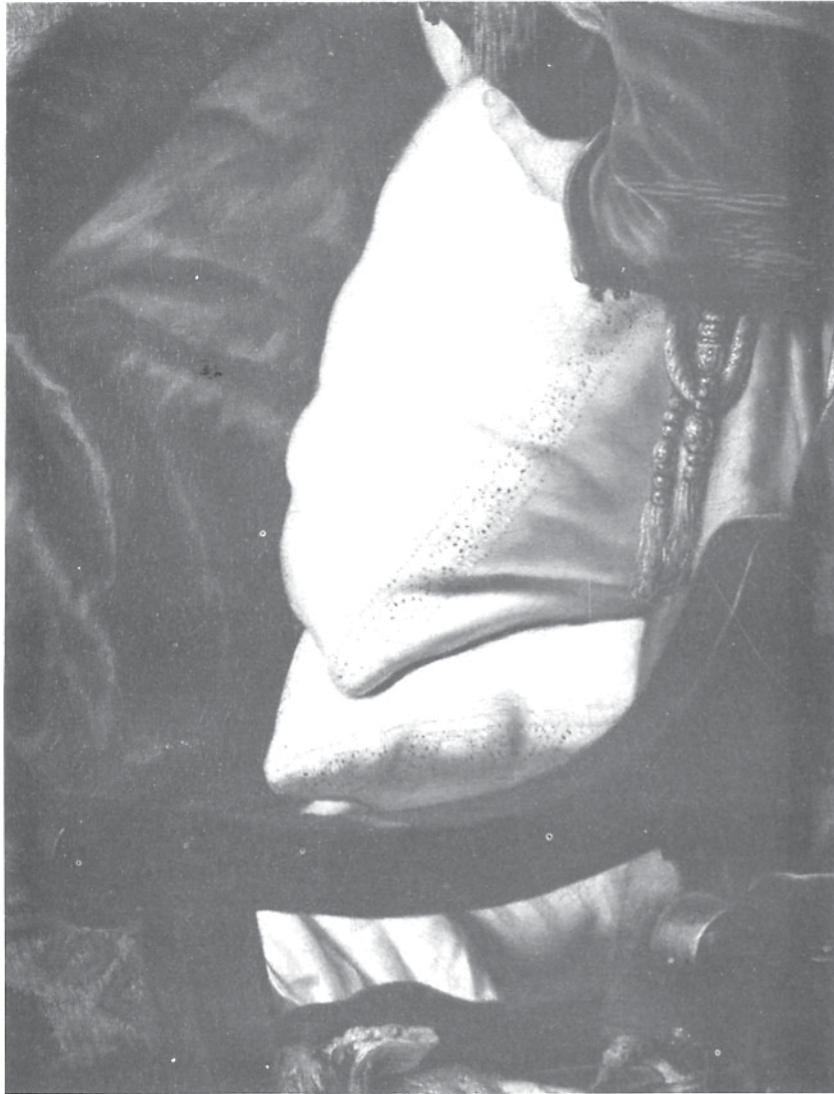
47. See, for example, R. E. O. Ekkart, *Johannes Cornelisz. Verspronck*, Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem, 1979, Figs. 21, 22, 29, 51, 54, 56. Verspronck himself was a Catholic and had many contacts with leading Catholic families in Haarlem.

48. It would also be very interesting to know whether there are any records of Dutch linen seamstresses emigrating to the Dutch colonies in North America and whether any traces remain of their activities there.

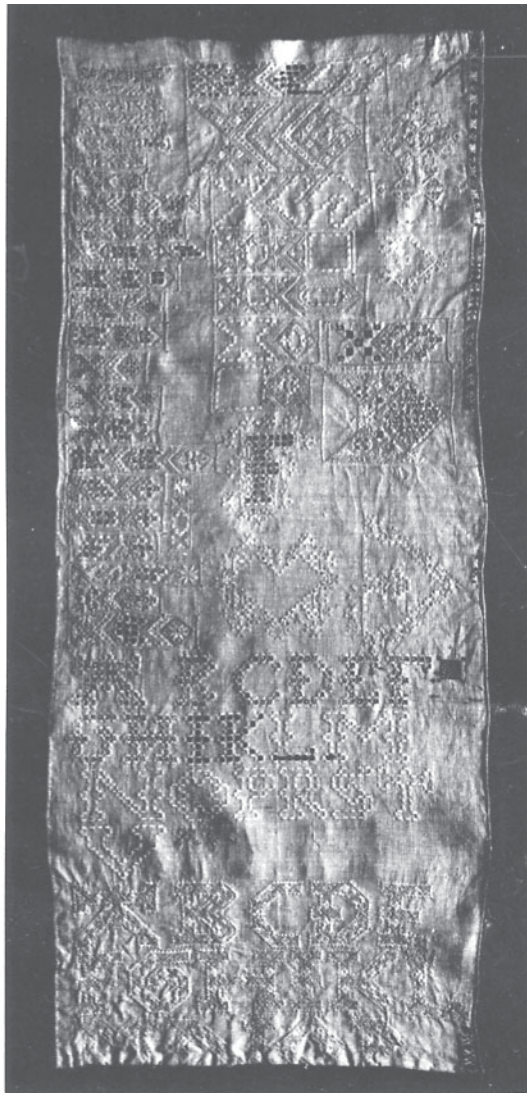
I would like to express my grateful thanks to C. A. Burgers, Keeper of Textiles in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, for his invaluable help in obtaining the photographs from the Rijksmuseum.



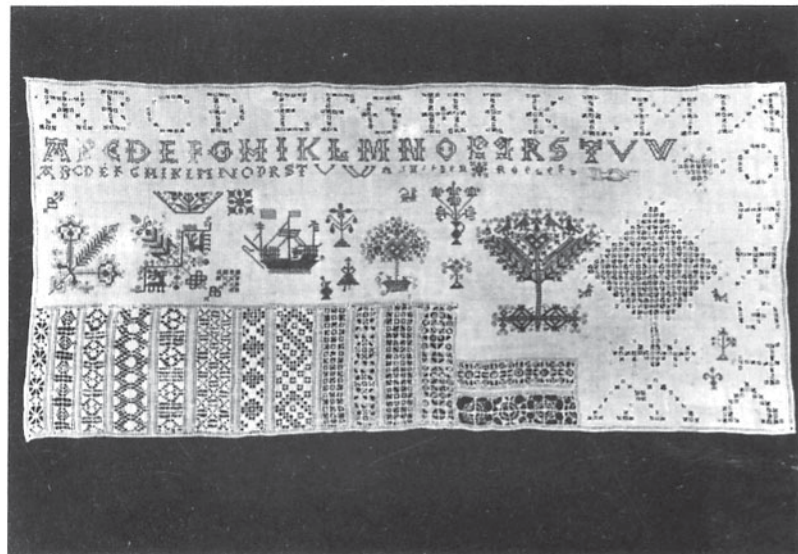
1. Artist unknown, *Dieuwertje van Nes (nee de Bye)*, aged 44, dated 1606. Rijksmuseum, Meermanno-Westreenianum, The Hague.



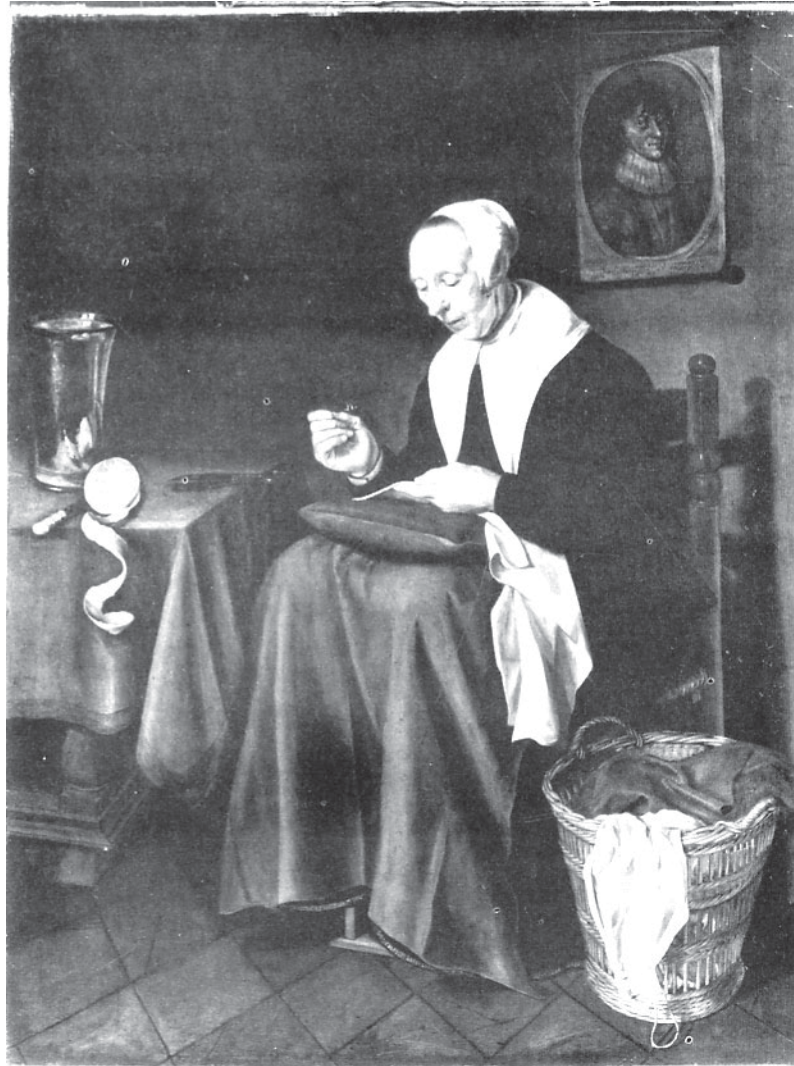
2. Jan Victors (1619/20-1676 or later), *Isaac Blessing Jacob* (detail), c. 1640-52. Musee du Louvre, Paris. Photograph by courtesy of the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



3. Sampler, white linen thread on linen in hem, stem and geometrical satin stitches, with eyelet holes, drawn fabric work, cutwork and needleweaving, probably Frisian, mid 17th century. Centraal Museum, Utrecht.



4. Sampler, white linen thread and red and green silk on linen in hem, cross and long-armed cross stitches, with cutwork and needleweaving, Frisian, 17th century. Netherlands Open-Air Museum, Arnhem.



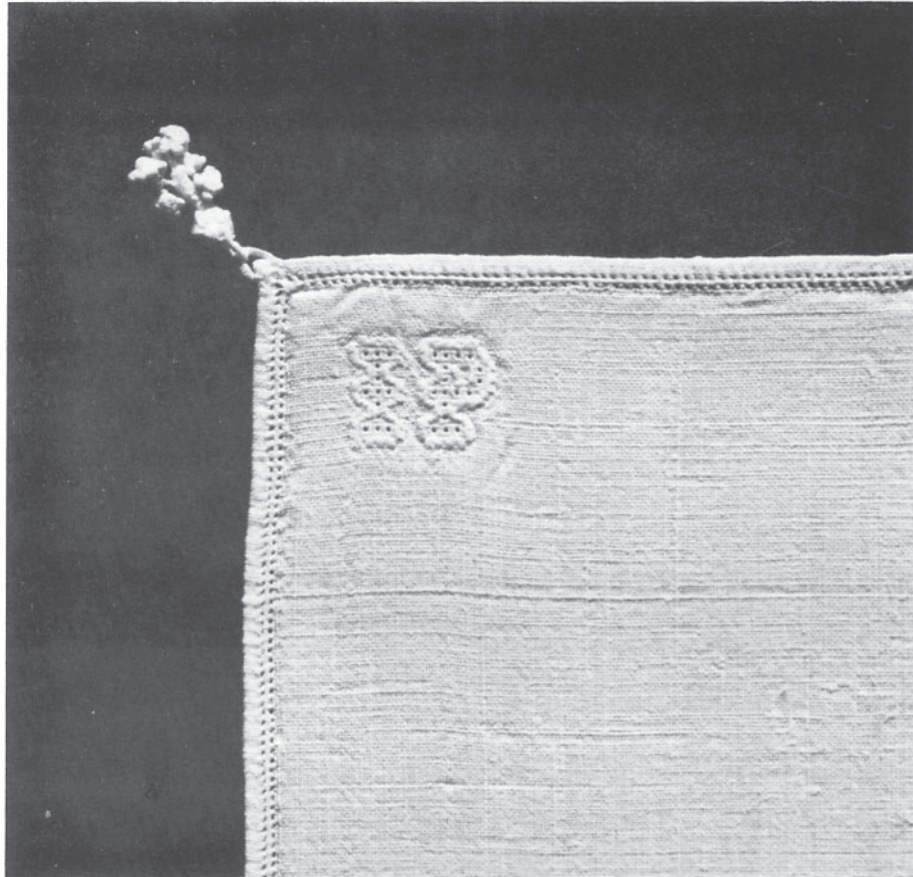
5. Johannes van der Aack (1635/6-after 1680), *An Old Woman Seated Sewing*, signed and dated 1655. National Gallery, London.



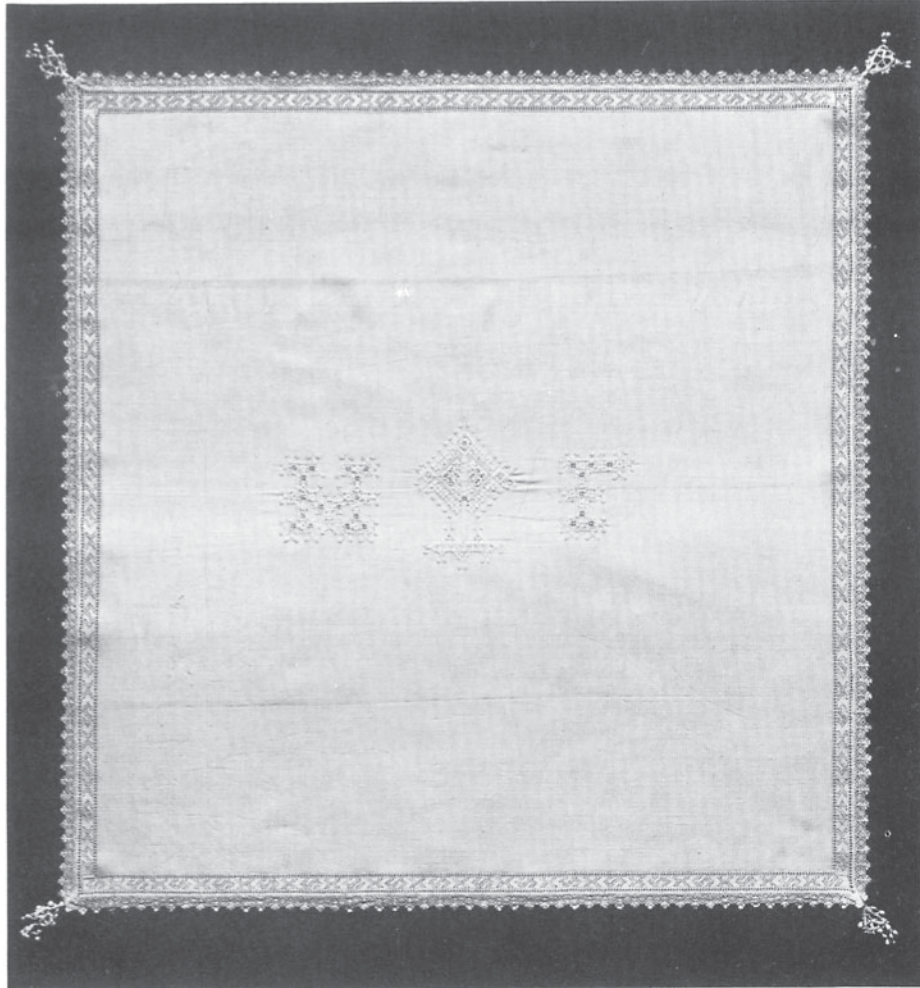
6. Geertruyd Roghman (b. 1625), *The Linen Seamstresses*, engraving, one of a series of five *Women's Occupations* published by C. L. Visscher. Atlas van Stolk, Rotterdam.



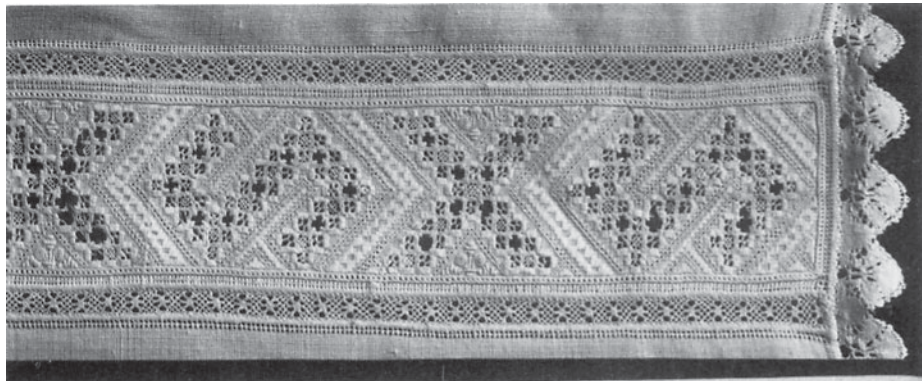
7. Cornelis de Vos (1584 – 1651), *The Orphan*, c.1630-40. Maagdenhuis (formerly a girls' orphanage), Antwerp.



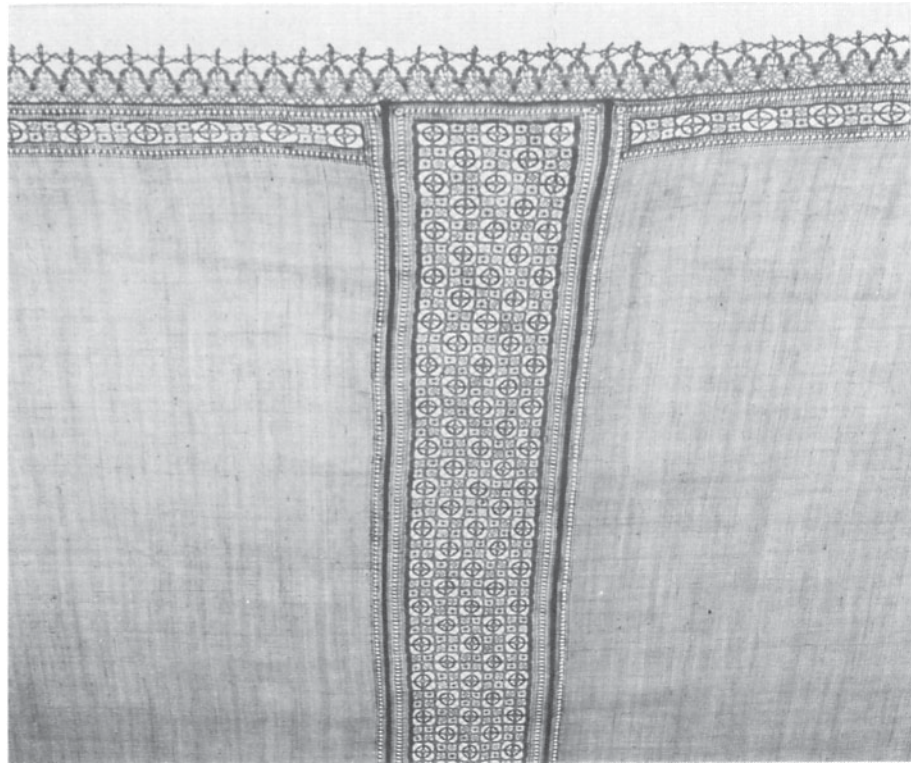
8. Corner of a plain handkerchief, with hem-stitching, eyelet holes and geometrical satin stitch in white linen thread, and tassels at the corners. Marked with the initials IP, Dutch or Frisian, 17th century. Private Collection, Netherlands. Photograph by courtesy of the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



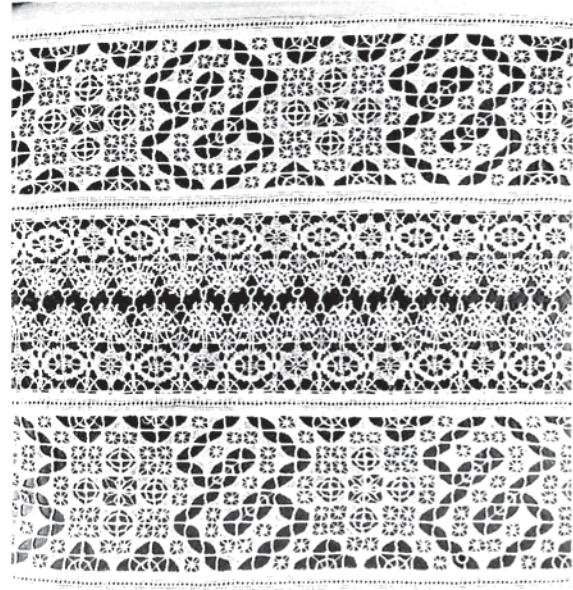
9. Handkerchief, white linen thread on linen in hem, stem and geometrical satin stitches, with bars, cutwork and needleweaving, narrow border and tassels of bobbin lace. In the centre the initials MF on either side of a Tree of Life. Frisian, first half of the 17th century. Private Collection, Netherlands. Photography by courtesy of the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



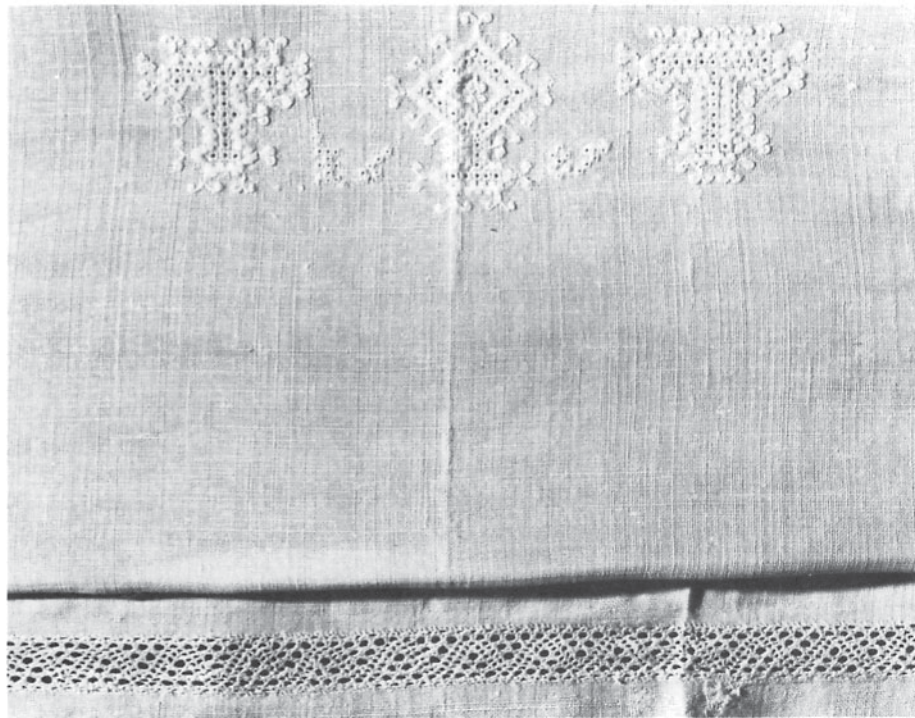
10. Sheet, white linen thread on linen in hem, punch and geometrical satin stitches, with cutwork, narrow insertions and border of bobbin lace. The sheet also bears embroidered initials which may relate to a Frisian family. Probably Frisian, first half of the 17th century. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



11. Sheet, white linen thread on linen in hem stitch with bars and cutwork, border of bobbin lace. This sheet, which also bears the embroidered initials KVD, belongs with the pillowcase in Fig. 12. Frisian, 17th century. Fries Museum, Leeuwarden.



12. Pillowcase, white linen thread on linen in hem stitch, with bars and cutwork, insertion of bobbin lace. This pillowcase belongs with the sheet in Fig. 11. Frisian, 17th century. Fries Museum, Leeuwarden.



13. Sheet, white linen with initials TT, date 1687 and Tree of Life embroidered in eyelet holes and whitework in white linen thread, narrow insertion of bobbin lace. Frisian, 1687. Netherlands Open-Air Museum, Arnhem.