



Fig. 1 Valenciennes flounce, Walters Art Gallery,
Baltimore (Walters 84.22). Magnification 2x.

L'ÉTOILE EN CARRÉ DOUBLE: STAR IN A DOUBLE SQUARE A RECENTLY REDISCOVERED LACE FILLING STITCH

Aurelia L. Loveman

Lace, as everybody knows, is currently in fashion. If all that is contained in this statement is merely that lace collars, lace cuffs, lace placemats, etc., appear plastered all over the overpriced models in the mail-order catalogues, the idea is of minor interest; here today, gone tomorrow. But there is another sense in which lace is currently in fashion; and in this sense the idea is exciting: people are interested in lace *making*. Lace revivals have been with us before, mainly in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for a variety of good reasons: to give employment to starving villagers; to rescue a dying craft from oblivion; to raise artistic consciousness. Those efforts, praiseworthy in themselves, did indeed succeed in reviving lacemaking again and again, always for a while; and all, finding their final common pathway into collars, cuffs, placemats, etc., foundered on the rock of fickle fashion and subsided.

It is too early to say whether the lace revival that we are experiencing today will go the same way. It is, however, a revival in a much different sense from all the others that have appeared since the Industrial Revolution. What we are seeing now is an interest primarily in the structure of lace. It is the process, rather than the product, that is currently charming lacemakers by the thousands into joining guilds and taking classes. Oh, the occasional collar or handkerchief is still produced. But what is really being produced are notebooks full of sample pieces, produced for their own sake.

A harbinger of things to come appeared in 1920 in the shape of a quite remarkable volume by Gertrude Whiting, a founder of the Needle and Bobbin Club in New York in 1916. By now *A Lace Guide for Makers and Collectors* is a collector's item, increasingly hard to find. It is a collection, essentially, of stitch samples. Each page carries a photograph showing the overall effect of an inch or two of the stitch in question; plus a schematic diagram of it; plus a word or two of elucidation to help the student through the thickets. So fascinated was Miss Whiting with her structures that she tried inventing a few of her own, and these are included in the volume, identified as "Trude," along with famous old names like *Cinq Trous* and *Point de Paris*. The book was never forgotten, and continues to be coveted by lacemakers and others, in spite of the fact that it is not a beautiful book as that term is understood by bibliophiles.

Eleven years after the appearance of Gertrude Whiting's book, another book appeared whose point of view is even more involved in the study of lace structures. This remarkable book is far rarer than the Whiting book, and copies are not known to change hands: it is *The Art and Craft of Old Lace* by Alfred von Henneberg.

Henneberg seems to have been, surprisingly, an engineer by training, who became infatuated with lace. His draughtman's technical skills served him magnificently in his book, for (notwithstanding the many technically mediocre photographs of gorgeous pieces of lace) the emphasis and the glory of this work lie in the brilliant categorizations of clothwork techniques, and in the schemas of the thread pathways. No one who picks up this wonderful book (it can be found in specialized textile libraries, even if not at your nearest bookseller) can fail to be first astonished, then seduced, by the author's obvious and compelling passion for lace structures. I truly believe that, having once seen this book, the student of lace is never the same again, possessed by an Euclidean sense of having once looked at beauty bare.

Half a century passed while these two books slowly and quietly did their work. Fashion, in the collars-and-cuffs sense, was helpful, as was also the pervasive crafts movement. Lacemakers began to reappear --leisured persons whose fascination was and has continued to be with the intricacy of their craft. Inevitably a book appeared that embodied this altered vantage point, and thus we had *The Book of Bobbin Lace Stitches*, by Bridget Cook and Geraldine Stott which is a sort of amalgam of Whiting and Henneberg, lacking the almost childlike delight of the former, and the incredible passion of the latter, but nevertheless sturdy in its own right as a compendium of lace structures. It will not tell you how to make anything, but it will educate you and leave you with an enhanced sense of wonder as well. The book, at long last, is right for the times.

Cook and Stott, *mutatis mutandis*, in a few respects cover the same ground as Henneberg, notably in their treatment of the *étoile* variety of clothwork. It would seem that the student of, for instance, early Valenciennes, who may be trying to lay bare the structures of what Jourdain calls the *neigeux* grounds of early Valenciennes, early Mechlin, or Binche,¹ should be able to find in the one or the other book the solution to every possible problem. So it was that, coming upon an odd bit of *neigeux* ground (Fig. 1) embodied in an exquisite, a breathtakingly beautiful flounce of early Valenciennes in the collection of the Walters Art Gallery of Baltimore (Walters 84.22),² I turned to both these books for help in understanding what I was looking at.

One glance under the microscope (as critical a tool for the lace student as thread for the lacemaker) ruled out either the haloed stars³ or the framed stars.⁴ Cousins, possibly, or even siblings, but certainly not identical. Henneberg, whom normally nothing escaped, is mute on the subject.

A new stitch! Columbus, Balboa, Cortez - - brothers mine - - in the ecstasy of discovery. A new lace stitch is a new world, if only in microcosm, and deserves its own name. *Étoile* it would be, of course, because its fundamental structure is that of the *étoile*; and some reference must be made to the little square within which the stitch is articulated - - hence the *carré*; and to the peculiar squarish encirclement of the star within that *carré* - - hence the *double*; and French it must all be too, since are not *panache* and *cachet* French? So *l'Étoile en Carré Double* it is, and the flag is planted.

The basic type of *étoile* we have here can be found in Henneberg,⁵ or in Cook and Stott.⁶ It is not an unusual way to treat the cloth spots of the various *fonds de neige*.

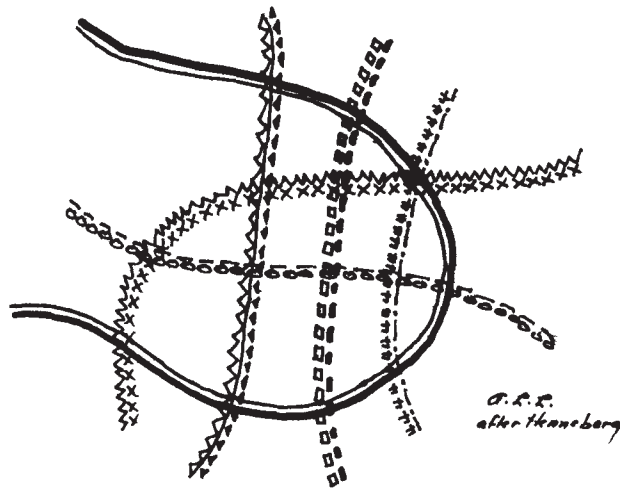


Fig. 2 Basic *étoile*, A.L.L. after Henneberg (reproduced with permission of the publishers).

The star has six rays (six pairs of threads) coming into it, three and three, from left and right, of which the second on the left acts as weaver, its two threads making a complete circuit left to right and returning, while the other five rays act as passives (this is a fundamental difference between the star and the familiar spider, in which each pair gets the chance to act as weaver).

Nor is the square diamond of the *carré* remarkable (see, for instance, Cook and Stott)⁷ and more will be said about this below. What is special is the inner square frame, the *double*. It is neither halo (as, for instance, Cook and Stott's "haloed spider",⁸ or Whiting's *arraignées [sic] rondes*.⁹) nor frame,¹⁰ but has something of both. Although it is clearly a descendant of the "ring" pair found in Flanders lace,¹¹ it does not have the same function, i.e., outlining the clothwork, nor is it made the same way as the ring, though there are decided echoes in its use of half stitch.

This *double*, as I am calling the two pairs coming in through the *carré*, one from the left and one from the right, begins up at the top (Figure 3 below), like the Flanders ring, with a cloth stitch and a twist, thereby sending the right pair D out to the left, and the left pair D' out to the right. Pair D, now on the left, encounters the first ray of the star, R-1, which has just entered with cloth stitches through the *carré*, and with which D now makes a half stitch (whereas the usual Flanders or

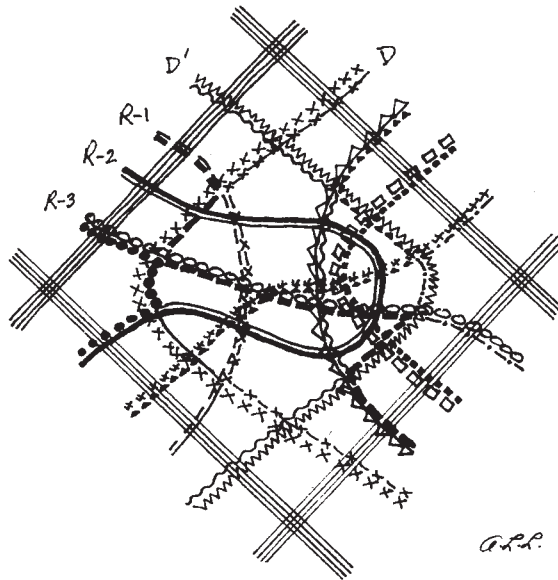


Fig. 3 Schematic diagram of *étoile en carre double*, enlarged (drawn by A.L.L.).

Valenciennes ring would have had a whole stitch). It is this unexpected use of the half stitch that gives the *double* its salience as an inner frame: the two threads of D and of R-1 separate and recombine to form two new pairs, each of which contains one D thread and one R thread. This maneuver pulls one of the entering R-1 threads back out towards the left, instead of allowing it to enter the *étoile* as it would normally have done; and this is what creates the foundation of the squarish frame-like look of the *double*.

This newly-created *double* pair next encounters the second entering ray of the *étoile*, R-2. R-2 is the pair that functions as the primary weaver for the entire star. It intersects with the downward-moving reconstituted *double*, by means of a whole stitch. Thus, no pairs separate their threads, R-2 continues intact into the star, and the *double* continues on down to encounter the third entering ray, R-3. This ray gets the same treatment as did R-1: it makes a half-stitch with the *double*, and again one of the entering R-3 threads is pulled away from what would have been its normal entry into the *étoile*. This deflected thread, one of the pair of threads of R-3, joins with one of the threads of the *double* to become the by-now-twice-altered *double*; and the discarded thread of the *double* that had been acquired from R-1 originally, now joins with the discarded thread of R-3, and both enter the *étoile* together.

A somewhat similar routine now occurs on the right side of the *étoile*: the pair D' of the *double* makes a half-stitch with the first and the third rays entering through the *carré* from the right, and a whole stitch with the second ray. This second ray on the right remains a passive throughout. The four half-stitches, two on the left and two on the right, firmly set the character of the *double* as an inner square diamond, and not a ring or a halo, as would have been the more usual feature.

The reconstituted rays, meanwhile, enter the *étoile*. R-2 cloth-stitches its way, left to right, through four passive pairs, and rests. The third ray on the right, reconstituted with one thread from the *double* and one thread of its own, cloth-stitches, right to left, through the resting R-2 pair and the three passive pairs lying to its left, and then it rests. The reconstituted third ray on the left cloth-stitches, left to right, through four pairs; and finally the original R-2, still unreconstructed, has the last word on the *étoile*. It cloth-stitches its way, right to left, through four pairs. Encountering the *double*, however, in R-2's new position as the first of the three lower left rays, it makes a half-stitch, thus losing one of its threads and assuming one from the *double* (the one that came from R-3); and now, giving itself a single twist, it cloth-stitches through the two pairs of the *carré*, twists once more and becomes the new D pair for the next little *Étoile en Carré Double* lying diagonally left and downward from the one just made. Whereupon, back within the original frame in which we have been working, the remaining passive pairs intersect with the *double* as before, i.e., the second ray makes a whole stitch with the *double*, the third ray a half-stitch. The *double* pairs D and D' , by now composed, after so many metamorphoses, of their original threads reunited, repeat their initial maneuver, crossing through each other by means of a whole stitch (cross twist, cross twist), and out, by means of cloth stitches, through the *carré*. Each of these *double* pairs will become the third ray in neighboring frames.

L'Étoile en Carré Double is one among several varieties of *fond de neige*, a beautiful and intricate form most infrequently met with. It is exceptionally time-consuming to do, which may be a reason for its scarce appearances in the examples of lace quoted in the literature (see TABLE below), and to my knowledge has not been previously described. It is an unusually bold stitch, and as can be seen both from the example existing in the Walters Art Gallery and the photograph in Earnshaw,¹² functioned as a bit of striking accent, relieving large snowy areas of the otherwise monotony of *fond de neige*.

A search for our stitch in some especially distinguished volumes on the general subject yields the following frequencies of appearance:

TABLE

Author	Frequency
Earnshaw *	1 ¹³
Fouriscot	0 ¹⁴
Henneberg	0 ¹⁵
Jourdain	0 ¹⁶
Lefébure	0 ¹⁷
Levey	0 ¹⁸
Lowes	0 ¹⁹
Palliser	0 ²⁰
Powys	0 ²¹
Schuette #1	0 ²²
Schuette #2	0 ²³
Sharp	0 ²⁴

* On p. 85, at lower right, the photograph is not sharp enough for the viewer to extract the technique, nor is it entirely clear that the snowflakes are made like *étoiles* and not like spiders; still, the effect is strikingly like that of our stitch.

As noted above, there are quite a few varieties of *fond de neige*, in which can be seen the separate ingredients of frame, halo and spot, variously executed and variously combined. The particular form of *étoile* in our piece is done in such a manner as to produce a solid spot. There are other ways to produce these snowflakes,²⁵ many of them having a pronounced central hole.²⁶ Again, the halo is quite often met with; our piece is exceptional in that the halo is square, not round. Finally, it is not hard to find the snowflake set into a frame. A twisted two-thread frame is usual;²⁷ the four-thread frame in our piece is far less usual, but can be seen elsewhere.²⁸ What makes our particular snowflake distinctive enough to warrant giving it its own name is the simultaneous inclusion of the three features: the four-thread frame, the most unusual halo squared by means of half-stitches, and the solid *étoile*.

This writer would welcome communications from other students of lace who encounter examples of the stitch in their own study of the Binche, Valenciennes and Mechlin laces.

NOTES

1. Margaret Jourdain, *Old Lace* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1909), p. 56 (hereafter cited as *Jourdain*).
2. Walters Art Gallery #84.22 is a strip of Valenciennes lace of overall length 142¾ inches. In width, all but 24¾ inches of it is 2¾ inches wide; but for those 24¾ inches, it is only 2¼ inches. It is not a single length of one piece, but has been put together in its present form from eight strips seamed together magnificently and all but invisibly. To find the seams that I knew were there, I had either to hold it up to the light, or shut my eyes and feel for the seams with my fingers. The eight strips, A through H, are as follows:

A	2¼ inches
B	22 inches
C	11½ inches
D	4½ inches
E	27½ inches
F	31½ inches
G	32 inches
H	11½ inches

A and B are 2¼ inches wide; the rest are 2¾ inches. The fact that two of the pieces are 11½ inches suggests that originally the pieces C through H, which are all of the same pattern, may have been a set of lace made for the same costume, of which pieces C and H were sleeve ruffles. A and B are a very similar Valenciennes but of a totally different pattern! However, the thread, the fineness, the density are so similar that it came as a surprise, after some acquaintance with the piece, to discover that 24¾ inches of it didn't really belong. To make A and B fit in width with the rest, they were given a doubled engrelure, whereas C through H have only the single width. It is A and B which contain the *étoile en carré double*; the remaining lengths show a variety of early Valenciennes grounds, but not the one which is the subject of this article.

3. Bridget M. Cook and Geraldine Stott, *The Book of Bobbin Lace Stitches* (Watertown [Mass.]: Charles T. Branford Co., 1980). p. 242 (hereafter cited as *Cook and Stott*).
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 241, 243.
5. Alfred von Henneberg, *The Art & Craft of Old Lace* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd, 1931), Plate 53, # 110c (hereafter cited as *Henneberg*).
6. Cook and Stott, p. 243, stitch diagram.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 102, 243.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 210.
9. Gertrude Whiting, *A Lace Guide for Makers and Collectors* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1920), p. 199.
10. Henneberg, Plate 58, #122.

11. Vera Cockuyt, *The Technique of Flanders* (Privately printed, 1983), p. 37.
12. Pat Earnshaw, *The Identification of Lace* (Aylesbury [England]: Shire Publications Ltd.), p. 85.
13. Ibid.
14. M. Fouriscot, *La France en Dentelles* (Paris: Diff-Edit, 1979) (hereafter cited as *Fouriscot*).
15. Henneberg.
16. Jourdain.
17. Ernest Lefébure, *Embroidery and Lace* (London: H. Grevel and Co., 1888).
18. Santina M. Levey, *Lace: A History* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum in association with W. S. Maney & Son, Leeds, 1983.) (hereafter cited as *Levey*).
19. Emily Leigh Lowes, *Chats on Old Lace and Needlework* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1908).
20. Fanny Bury Palliser, *A History of Lace* (London: Sampson Low, Son and Marston, 1865).
21. Marian Powys, *Lace and Lace-Making* (Boston: Charles T. Branford Co., 1953).
22. Marie Schuette, *Alte Spitzen* (Munich: Klinkhardt and Biermann, 1981) (cited in TABLE as *Schuette #1*).
23. Marie Schuette, *Spitzen von der Renaissance bis zum Empire: Sammlung Vieweg-Brockhaus*, (Leipzig: Karl W. Hiersemann, 1929) (cited in TABLE as *Schuette #2*).
24. A. M. Sharp, *Point and Pillow Lace* (London: John Murray, 1899) (hereafter cited as *Sharp*).
25. Henneberg, Pls. 53, 54 and 57, Fig. 120; Cook and Stott, pp. 237-243.
26. Levey, Fig. 268A.
27. Fouriscot, p. 60; Levey, Fig. 306.
28. Sharp, p. 155 #1.