

Metropolitan Museum Lace Collection

THE LACE COLLECTION AT METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
BY EVA LOVETT
FIRST NOTICE

A LARGE part of the interest and beauty of the newly opened collection of lace at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, on Fifth Avenue and Eighty-second Street, New York, is due to the skilful grouping by Frau Stephanie Kubasek, who came from Vienna, Austria, this spring, to classify the laces and arrange them for a proper display.

Frau Kubasek, wife of a prominent physician of Vienna, who is attached to a princely house, has an international reputation as a lace expert. She is not a professional worker in these lines, but has an enthusiasm for beautiful lace and an accurate judgment in deciding the character and age of any piece. She spent six weeks at the Metropolitan



KNOTTED NET
GERMANY, 1500

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
ROGERS FUND PURCHASE

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Museum, and the result of her work is now on exhibition in Gallery No. 33, which has been redecorated and fitted with new cases for the better display of the exhibit.

An examination of the many hundred valuable pieces of lace will not only furnish delight to the casual visitor, but stimulate and gratify an interest in lace history in the student. The laces are arranged in chronological order, showing the development and growth of lace manufacture, with many illustrations at each stage. The most beautiful pieces and the greatest number are from Italy, the birthplace of lace, but there are examples from nearly every country and every period. Many gaps are yet to be filled, but the interest aroused in the friends of the Museum makes it certain that the needed examples will come. This method was long ago suggested by Miss Margaret Taylor Johnston,

daughter of the first president of the Museum, and herself a lace enthusiast.

The Astor and Stuart collection of laces, which formerly occupied Gallery No. 20, has been augmented by many gifts, purchases and loans, and both old and new collections are included in this new grouping of Frau Kubasek. Here one may study the history of lace from primitive times up to the finest products of to-day.

While the former collection consisted largely of Venetian points of many kinds, some very ancient pieces will be found in the cases at the south side of the Gallery. These are examples of the earliest net work known, pieces of Coptic origin, dating from the first centuries of the Christian era, and found in Egyptian tombs. The square-shaped cap is woven in an open geometrical design, and the small torn bit of cloth in the corner of the case is also of regular openwork pattern.

The long pointed cap is loosely woven, the threads being twisted together at the top to form a peak. The finished appearance of the openwork weaving shows that it was no strange art in those days.

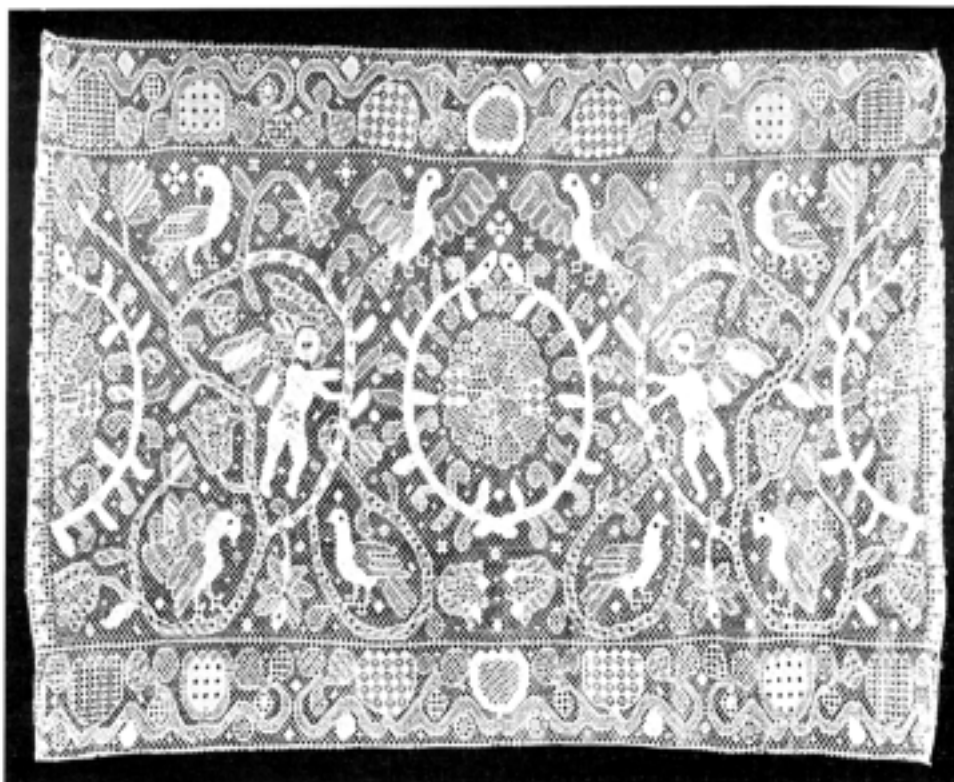
Next in order is a large piece of "darned netting" said to date from the fifteenth century. It was purchased by Sir Purdon Clarke from the Rogers fund. Darned net was one of the earliest forms of lace-making of which samples are preserved. The pattern is executed in white thread upon a netting made of brown thread, such as netting is made to-day. It tells the story of the Nativity. The Madonna, in gown and headdress, holds the infant Saviour, who has a halo around his head. A dove drops leaves of peace over the Virgin, while cherubs' heads with wings attached surround her. Joseph, near by, leans on a staff, looking with round eyes at the babe. Beyond Joseph is an image intended for the devil, who wears an expression of rage, and below him is his dog.



COPTIC, EGYPTIAN TOMBS
THIRD TO SEVENTH CENTURIES A.D.

MUMMY HEAD
COVERINGS

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KNOTTED NET, GERMANY, "NETZARBEIT"

LOAN, MRS. H. K. PORTER

In each upper corner is a horned ox, and above each the letters "I. H. S.," the letters being reversed in the left corner. Two angels with outspread wings occupy the upper centre, holding a crown over a cross, which is between them, and surrounding them are small cherubs, a pair of candelsticks and stars. Lines of openwork pattern, queer hieroglyphics and stars fill all vacant spaces, the object apparently being to have as many symbolical figures as possible. This piece is in excellent state of preservation. The netting is slightly torn in the upper left corner, but the darning is intact.

Another piece of darned netting is divided by lines into squares, each one holding a large peacock, with every detail of his body and feathers perfectly defined. The border has a line of smaller peacocks. There are a number of pieces of darned net all along this south side. This was one of the favorite trimmings from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, and was not only made by nuns, but worked as a pastime by noble dames. These pieces come from old monasteries, churches, convents and castles. Some have flowing lines and conventional patterns. Others are adorned with birds, flowers, animals, grotesque monsters, angels and devils.

Some are worked regularly according to the square mesh of the net, others are darned in and out without regard to the mesh.

One odd piece tells the story of Abraham offering up Isaac. Isaac is bound and held by Abraham on the altar. A ram is caught in some bushes in the upper corner, and an angel touches Abraham and points towards it. It is worth noting that these ancient workers had a passion for filling all the vacant corners with small ornaments or additional figures. Sometimes these were symbolical, sometimes merely decorative. In the piece just described other angels and other bushes fill the background. Biblical subjects were favourites, and conventional patterns were used for borders.

One set tells the story of David and Goliath in a series of pictures, showing each event of the battle to the end where David holds the head of the giant up before the king. The story of Adam and Eve, the serpent and the apple, is told with all its particulars. A curious story of land and sea is worked on another piece. Men are coming in many ships and boats to a shore where there are houses, churches and other men, some of them on horseback. The quaint appearance of the ships shows the early date

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of its manufacture. The amount of detail in this piece is surprising. It tells of infinite patience, work and time.

The Bible was a treasure house of subjects, but when these old workers got away from Biblical traditions, their imaginations ran riot among angels, devils, griffins, mythological creatures and monsters, half beast and half human, which are found in the literature of those days. While men wrote of these beings, contemporary ladies were busy working them in darned netting. A curious German piece of a later date has an intertwined pattern of birds, flowers, serpents and leaves. This "Netzarbeit" was loaned by Mrs. H. K. Porter, of Pittsburgh, who has lent many laces to this exhibit.

These pieces are mostly Italian, German and some English. A strip of Spanish work is of odd wheel pattern, seen in no other piece.

Cases on the south side of the room contain some curious coloured examples of drawn and cut work. Pieces of "drawn work," in which the solid material is left in the centre to form the design, and threads drawn out around it at regular intervals, and the threads remaining worked over to make a firm background of filagree style. The work of some is very fine and intricate, and many are worked with coloured cottons, silks of varied shades and silver and gold threads. The worker of those days not only drew upon her imagination for her themes, but she was extremely inventive about stitches and methods, so that there are many individualities in

the work which appeal strongly to the imaginative and curious student.

On some of these fine linen materials one may see the earliest examples of the famous Italian Punto a Reticella, which was made by cutting holes in the linen and working upon the few threads left to hold the opening together an elaborate pattern. In the oldest example shown here, it was worked in pale brown silks on grey linen. Some Persian and Turkish patterns, with their wonderful soft mixtures of colour, show that these countries also were interested in this work.

The close, heavy nature of the drawn work made it extremely durable. It is no wonder that pieces kept as precious treasures in families whose members, perhaps, did the work are in so good a state of preservation. A beautiful table-cover is in alternate squares of Punto Trafora, or cut-work, and darned netting, showing the many combinations in use. The attention to detail displayed in the work, as in the strings of the guitar played by the lady and the feathers on the wings of the griffin, is particularly noticeable.

From this time on Reticella grew more and more popular, and furnished alike borders for priests' robes and for fashionable garments. It trimmed capes, caps, collars and cuffs, as shown in pictures of people wearing lace-trimmed garments, by Holbein, Van Dyke and other early painters, which hang above these show cases, to display the vogue in those days of this new lace.



PUNTO A MAGLIA QUADRATA
ITALY, EARLY SIXTEENTH CENTURY

GIFT OF MISS MARGARET
TAYLOR JOHNSTON

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PUNTO TRAFORA
RETICELLA BORDER

LOAN, MRS. H. K.
PORTER

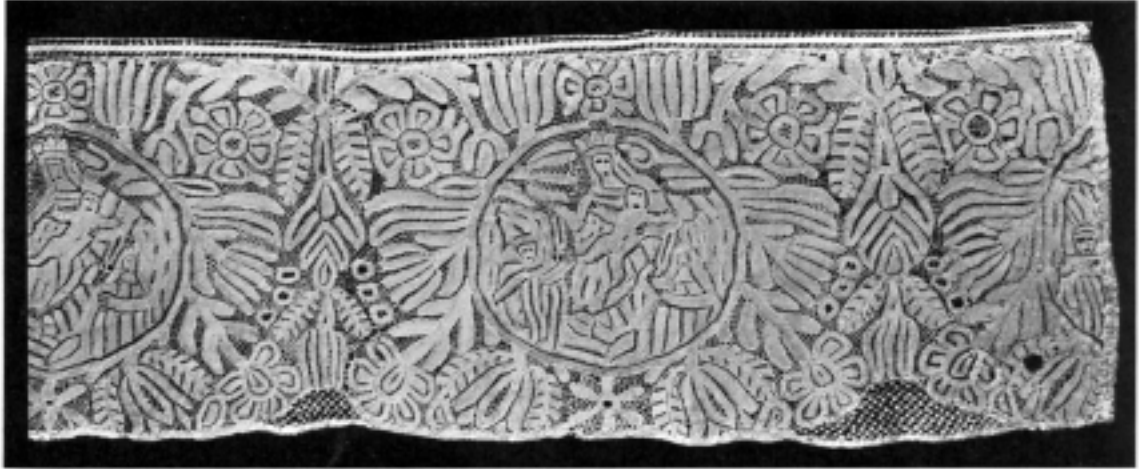
The next step in lace-making, illustrated here, was during the sixteenth century, when lace was first made with thread, without any foundation at all. "Punto in Aria" the first of these lighter laces was called. They were made with a needle. It was slow work, the laces were consequently expensive, and only used by the noble and wealthy. Sometimes they were made for a bride, and contained the coat-of-arms of two united families. Some beautiful examples of these early "bride-laces" are in the cases along the west side wall. A large number of these early Venetian laces are from the stores of the Astor and Stuart collection which was on exhibition before, and was specially complete in these laces.

In Italian laces of this early period the collection is specially rich. A very rare piece of needlepoint of the sixteenth century is from an anonymous donor. Only two other specimens like it are known to exist; one is in the Musée de Cluny and one is in Denmark. The design is Italian, although the

work suggests that found in Northern Europe. The centre of each portion of the pattern is a copy of an old picture of the Madonna and Child, and the extraordinary truthfulness of the copy and fineness of the surrounding ornament make it probable that years were spent in completing the strip, which was no doubt made for church use. This piece is one of the most costly in the case. Another and similar piece was given by A. E. Eno, and several most interesting examples of this period were given by other friends.

A still later development, the "Venetian Points," in their varieties, occupy the central case, on the east side. Three large "Cardinal Capes," shown on forms, are of Point de Rose, Point Plat and Gros Point. Point de Rose is distinguished by its tiny raised roses and other flowers, leaves, birds and figures, which seem to be overlaying the groundwork. This is all done with a needle, and one can imagine the tediousness of its manufacture. In Point Plat, the work is of flat character, and

The Rochester Room



NEEDLE POINT
ITALY, SIXTEENTH CENTURY, VERY RARE

PRESENTED BY A FRIEND
THROUGH FRAU KUBASEK

there is no ornament separated from the background. Gros Point has very bold flowing lines joined by fine ornamental stitches. These capes, it is said, are worth small fortunes. With them are a number of flounces of the same points, further illustrating the laces, of which new beauties are brought out by the closest examination.

A number of pieces of Venice Points are in the case to the right of this. In some of the Gros Points the pattern is so heavy it resembles tape, and, in fact, at a later period, imitations were made of it by using a tape for the design. Handkerchiefs, collars, cuffs and strips, both wide and narrow, of these early "points" are in this case. Some of them are gifts or loans from Miss Johnston, some from the Astor and Stuart collections, which were specially rich in laces of this period.

On the opposite side of the room are some fine examples of early Flemish, Antwerp and Dutch laces. There are quaint caps with wide lace borders, worked with swans and peacocks, and with heavy edges. The German laces are of heavy character, but show variety in the mesh. "Pillow" or "bobbin" lace was invented, which made the work proceed faster, and the designs grew more intricate. Curious features were the amount of shading introduced around the designs, by light or heavy work, and the closeness of these laces.