STUDIES FROM THE MUSEUMS.

HAND-MADE LACES

FROM THE

SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM.

EDITED BY

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HAND-MADE LACES.

The accompanying photographs have been made from hand-made laces, which have been selected for their beauty and completeness, as characteristic specimens from the comprehensive and representative collection in the South Kensington Museum. They also illustrate typical methods of lace making, and are, therefore, referred to in the following remarks upon various distinctly marked branches of lace-making.

Briefly described, lace making is the twisting, plaiting, and looping together of threads into an ornamental texture, the principal effect of which is secured by the contrasting of dense textures with open spaces. Not might be insinuated as the simplest lace, for it consists of threads twisted and looped or knotted together in such a way as to form a succession of cross lines, and so give the effect of a series of perforated or open diamond, circular, or hexagonal shapes. Again, although a fringe of loose separate threads is clearly not a lace, its threads may be interwoven or knotted together in various cross line or trellis patterns, with the result that we get a simple lace-like fabric. From the earliest historic times, such as those of the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Greeks and the Romans, different nettings and plaited and knotted fringes have been known. But apparently for such things as ornaments other than the simple ones produced by crossed threads or cords, were sought for by these nations. And it is not until the sixteenth century that the methods above alluded to came to be employed in the making of more elaborate ornaments suited for use as trims and trims and household linens, &c. As a special art, therefore, lace making was not practised until the sixteenth century. From that period onwards we become supplied with embroideries in twisted, plaited, and looped threads of all sorts of ornamental compositions, into which we are called to describe other quite different classes of lace.

The lace thus made are ornamental thread work of a character quite distinct from that of embroidery upon a given material. There are, however, classes of embroidery the ornamental effects of which are similar to those of laces. As an example of a lace-like work, let us refer to Plate II; this gives us a bed cover composed of a number of squares of net separated from one another and framed with bands of lines. The net has served as the foundation upon which patterns have been darned with a needle. The bands of linen have somewhat of a lace appearance, for the patterns in them consist of interlaces made by cutting out little pieces from the linen. In both cases, however, a woven material, a net, and a linen, is the basis of the operations. Let us now turn to Plate I; here we have a series of rosettes, small scrolls, tulips and other flowers made quite independently of any ground work like a woven material. The threads fastened together to make these various devices are coloured silk gauzes, and metallic threads. This specimen is a true representative of guipure, and I call attention to this because the word guipure is familiarly used by lace amateurs to describe other quite different classes of lace.

Plate III gives us a linen table cloth variously embroidered, but further enriched with insertions of narrow bands of geometrical pattern, and with a scalloped edging. Now the band of insertion and the scalloped edging are laces in the sense already defined. They differ in make from the guipure of Plate I. They also differ in make from each other. Two sorts of insertion are made with a needle and principally by means of button hole stitches. The scalloped edging is of threads twisted and plaited together, the work of a needle worker. Therefore, two distinct methods of making lace; and it is upon these two distinct methods of work that the classification of laces into needlepoint and pillow or bobbin laces, depends. And here may be given short descriptions of the methods of making needlepoint and pillow or bobbin laces.

NEEDLEPOINT LACE.

For needlepoint laces the pattern is drawn in outline upon a piece of parchment or stout paper; the parchment is then fastened to a corresponding bit of linen: it is then ready for the lacemaker, who begins by fastening a thread along this outline, and so constructs a skeleton thread pattern upon the surface of the paper or parchment. The thread skeleton pattern is held down to the face of the parchment by small stitches taken through the parchment and linen. The thread skeleton pattern is then overcast with fine threads in button hole stitch and its variations, and the intervening portions of the skeleton pattern are filled in according to the indications on the pattern by overcasting threads in a similar way. When the entire design has been thus constructed in needlework, it is turned over on to its face; between the parchment and its linen backing a razor or knife is passed so as to sever the threads used in fastening the thread skeleton pattern to the face of the pattern. This operation consequently releases the completed lace work from the parchment pattern, which is available for use in making another similar lace. It is impossible within the present prescribed limits to write in detail of the numerous modifications of this needlework process, which have been invented by lacemakers in order to produce such rich and solid laces as those shown in Plates VII to XIV, or such filmy laces as those in Plates XV, XX, and XXI. The modifications arose and were perfected in the course of years of labour throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as degrees of ingenuity and skill possessed by lacemakers of different countries successively acted and counteracted upon one another.

The first needlepoint laces were produced in Italy early in the sixteenth century. They were termed "punto in aria," or points in the air. This designation is to be found in Venetian pattern books of that period, and possibly the first use of the title "punto in aria" occurs in the patterns for all sorts of needlework published in 1528, by Antonio Tagliente. An apparently obvious interpretation of "punto in aria" is needlepoint work done independently of a material foundation—done, in pique-sequence language, in the air. The ornamental character of these, the earliest points in air, is geometric. The patterns for them are, according to the pattern books, open squares with diagonals from corner to corner, and two bars from side to side, the diagonals and bars crossing one another at the common centre and forming a radiation of eight lines bounded by a square. This may be verified by an examination of one of the little squares in the blank of insertion in the table cloth of Plate III. Now, it is to be observed that this type of simple geometric ornament in thread work was also known some few years earlier, that is, at the end of the sixteenth century. It was called "punto a velocello" or "punto alla elisabetta," and was worked upon linen. The feature in this earlier phase of the production of geometric ornament in thread work is the employment of lines as the starting foundation of the work. Threads were withdrawn or pulled out of the linen to form the open spaces which the "elisabetta" was to adorn. Samplers of the early part of the sixteenth century furnish instances of this drawn linen elisabetta. The unknown threads, designedly left in the open square spaces, are confronted with buttonhole stitches. The effect of the work is identical with that of the geometric
patterned needlepoint lace, or early "punto in aria;", and, as may have been gathered, the same "reticella" pattern are equally suited to both classes of drawn linen and needlepoint lace. The drawing out of the threads, by means of which the reticella pattern was achieved, was possibly then more laborious than the construction in threads of skeleton reticulations; but the transition from the one method of work to the other was effected in the ordinary course of things, without attracting peculiar attention. It is, however, important to note that the skilful needleworker who constructed skeleton reticulations in threads upon a parchment, created the parent needlepoint lace from which the family is descended. The principal classes of needlepoint laces are as follows:-

1. Punto in aria, usually denotes the simpler patterned needlepoint laces, from 1328 until the seventeenth century.

2. Punto tagliato a fiorami, is a term given to scroll and flower patterns of the middle of the sixteenth century, wrought in embroidered and cut linen. Towards the end of the century and the beginning of the seventeenth century the patterns known as punto tagliato a fiorami were also worked in needlepoint lace, and then became classifiable as-

3. Venetian Rose, or Raised Points, of which there are various degrees of bold and delicate work. The most delicate and elaborated of the Venetian rose point laces are fancifully called by the French, Pointe Négres, or Snow White, on account of the massing of ranks or clustering of little loops in the rose patterns. Venice was the principal producer of the foregoing three classes of needlepoint lace. In the seventeenth century the refinements in making needlepoint laces were adopted by the French, and about 1650 the Royal Manufacture of French laces was started at the instigation of Louis XIV and his Minister, Colbert, in various towns of France. The laces made at these towns were named after them, whence we have the Pointe de Soissons, Pointe d'Alençon Points d'Argentière, etc. These laces exhibit many classes of design and variations of texture, the earlier pieces being more substantial than the later ones of the 18th century. As prototypes of these latter, we have a remarkably delicate and thin lace made at Venice about the end of the 17th century, known as Point de Venise à nœuds, or as a sort of imitation Point d'Alençon called Point de Barana.

Needlepoin lace was made at Brussels in the 18th century, but generally that lace was partly of needlepoint and partly of pillow work, the meshed ground being of pillow work and the ornamental floral sprays of needlepoint work. These, briefly, are the notable needlepoint laces. Adaptations of one or other of them have been and are made at the present day at Alençon, Bayeux in France, Ghent in Belgium, in Bohemia, in Devonshire and in Ireland. Where the industry of needle lace making has been carefully observed, local characteristics have arisen, and in this connexion one may mention the laces of Ireland made at Youghal, Kenmare, New Ross and Lismore.

PILLOW OR BOBBIN LACE.

We now turn to the second class of lace making, namely; the bobbin or pillow lace making. For such lace, a pattern has to be first drawn in clear outline upon a piece of stout paper or parchment. The pattern is then pricked with pin holes, and fastened down to a casiment or pillow. These pin holes guide the lace maker where she should place the pins, around and between which she plaites and twists the threads of her bobbin. The lace maker then commences to throw the bobbins one over the other, thus interwisting the threads; and as she comes to the pin holes of the pattern she inserts pins so as to give the required direction to the various interwistings. If we look into the scroll forms (Marchiés à plombiés) to the table cloth on Plate III, we may gain a rough notion of the interwistings required in producing that lace. But on turning to Plate VI, we may see that the same thing is done between the scroll forms by interwistings, such as were employed for the edging in Plate III, we find that a different character of interwistings has been employed for the flat, bold scroll forms, the texture of which resembles fine cambric. Plate XVI, with its ground of meshes, suggests other modifications and adaptations of the interwistings and plaiting operations; whilst subtleties of manufacture far beyond those of earlier pillow laces are to be seen in the examples given in Plates XVIII, XIX, XXII to XXIV and XXVI to XXVIII.

The meshes of pillow or bobbin laces vary a good deal, and to appreciate this it is well worth while to study the different meshes of them under a magnifying glass. Meshed grounds seem to have been invented—so far as pillow lace is concerned—in the latter half of the 17th century, and the rivalry between different lace-making centres in Flanders and France, such as Valenciennes, Mechlin, Brussels, Lille, engendered local or special meshes of meshed grounds or "réseau." Without diagrams it is somewhat difficult to describe the varieties of meshed grounds. That of Valenciennes consisted chiefly of a lozenge or diamond-shaped mesh, each of the four sides of which being of four threads plaited together five or six times. Mechlin ground consisted—indeed it consists at the present-day—of hexagonal meshes, two opposite sides of which are of four threads plaited together three times; the other sides are each of two threads twisted once round one another. The Brussels meshed ground is similar to the Mechlin, with the difference, however, that the two plaited sides of the Brussels mesh are of four threads plaited together four (instead of three) times, thereby making the plaited sides of Brussels longer than the corresponding sides of the Mechlin mesh. The meshes of the Lille ground are of twisted threads only, no part of the ground being plaited. In pillow laces, plaiting and twisting threads are the characteristic features of their production, they are well defined in contradistinction to the butt-hole and looped work of needlepoint laces.

The principal pillow or bobbin laces may be enumerated thus—

1. Marchesi à plombiés.—Simple Vandyke wavy looking trimmings of plaited and twisted threads, made in the 16th century, with 12, 24 and 26 plombiers or bobbins to a piece of 6 or 9 inches in length.

2. Flemish and Italian pillow or bobbin laces of the 17th century, in which the texture of the bobbin threads in the pattern is of woven or cambric character, the ground between the pattern being of small bars or tyes. Bobbin-made laces of this class are frequently called guipures. The so-called guipures of Milan, Bologna, Brussels and Houton are well known. The same patterns were used for the guipures which would also be employed, with a meshed ground instead of one of small bars or tyes, and such laces were known as lace "à rivières." Differences small as these were sufficient to characterize different classes of laces like the point de Flamand and the point d'Angouléme. The point de Flamand were termed guipures, the points d'Angouléme were laces à rivières. The former were made chiefly for French and Flemish wearers, the latter for English.

Soon after the middle of the 17th century the laces with meshed grounds, made with hundreds of bobbin, became more common, and it is at this time that the Valenciennes, Brussels, Mechlin and Lille pillow laces come to the fore.
PATTERNS.

Notwithstanding the two distinctive methods of making lace, the patterns for both needlepoint and pillow laces are often much alike, not only in respect of scheme but also in detail. Now the similarity of lace patterns is in the designs in which more general and more delicate, is an interesting study. The variations in design over was for lace, exerted as considerable an influence in the pattern development as did the intricacies in the making of the lace, whether by the needle or by the needle. The possibilities of a pattern were naturally more important, when it was a question of a large floral or a deep fleur-de-lis, than when, at an earlier period, it would only be a question of an inserted band or a Vandyke or shell-shaped bordering on both the two sides. Refinements in winding threads, in making pins, &c., connected in eliminating ingenuity devices on the part of the lace maker.

It is safe to say that the maker of lace has been or should be also the designer of the patterns for the laces. But, however true this may be in respect of the simplest patterns, it is not so regards involved patterns. From the 16th century forward, patterns of ornamental beauty have always been designed by ornamentists having knowledge of the composition of ornament, and of the materials, for which they were called upon to design. Lace pattern books were published in considerable quantities in Italy, France, and Germany, during the 16th and 17th century, and from these the lace makers worked. In the 18th and 19th centuries, when lace patterns became much more elaborate amongst the French designers, they were often ornamentists as Benoit and Le Bieu. In a measure the designers are to the lace makers what authors are to writers. Few publishers would try and drive a trade in the sale of literature by relying upon ghostly printers allowed to write. And on the other hand, few authors would turn their untrained hands to setting type and pulling from it editions of their own writings.

In earlier examples, lace such as for instance, a old bands of insertion and the collapsed border in Plate III of this principal ornamental work has an geometric in character, and consists of squares, circles, and such like. The details are not drawn from anywhere but the ground of the design, are against one from the other. The borders in Plate VII give us another example of this phase in patterns, here, we have a ground composed of a series of cross lines or trellis. The development of such features may be followed in succeeding plates. In some other patterns development are obvious in, for instance, square and oblong forms in Plates XIII and XIV. Others such as Plate XX give us development in both wavelike ground and pattern, the plates of Plate XXV, a whole pattern. Together with its freshness of lace designing, the ground having become more like an even worked net, the details of the ornament are fanciful in shape, some of them being close imitation of flowers and leaf forms. These forms led to the use of ornamental fillings, embroidered to a leaf or a blossom, as may be noted in the two outer specimens of Plate XV. Often, such fillings were placed in panels or spaces intervening between floral devices; see centre specimen Plate XX and left hand border on Plate XXVI. Thus, from geometric figures, the pattern designer passed to wheels, and from wheels to naturalistic plant ornaments. Broadly speaking, the geometric patterns for lace belong to the 16th century, the ornamental to the 17th, and the French ornamentation to the 18th century. Apart from recognizing these more salient characteristics of lace pattern, the student of such patterns does not of course need to analyze and understand the plain or design of each pattern. Some involve merely the repetition of the same device, others consist of various groups, interchanged and balanced, the details in each group being arranged according to some pre-determined plan. As with any compositional, ornamental, literary, artistic, so with designing patterns, certain rules must be known or felt before success in it can be appreciated.

DESCRIPTIVE TERMS OF DETAILS IN LACES.

The component parts of a piece of lace, irrespective of its special make, have distinguishing names, and the following explanation is more important, meaning the French terms in some instances, are not given.

Bride—a small bau, or eye, which serves to hold the details of a pattern together when an intervening ground of meshes or ornamental fillings is not used. (See varieties of lace in Plates VI, VII, XII, &c.).

Burma—The outline to ornamental forms consisting of (1) a single thread (as in Maclin pillow lace, see Plate XXIII); or (2) of several threads twisted together (as for certain flowers and florals in Bursile pillow lace, see Bursile specimen on Plate XXIII); or (3) of a closely worked and slightly raised line (as in Fonds d’Armoir, milliner’s work, see Plate XX).

Clothing or gimp—voile in French. The close cambric-like portion of a lace pattern (see, for instance, Plates VI, XIV, XVI, &c.). The Point a pli and the madeline a premiere (Plate III) have no clothing.

Fillings—stitch in French. The earliest forms of these are those seen in the Italian needle-point laces, the point d’Alençon, where they are used to fill in the centre of a flower or part of a leaf, for instance, such details in cuff on Plate XXV. The most elaborately filled will be found in the specimen on Plate XV. The centre and right hand lappa of Plate XXI display the use of a ground of a circle such as spirally occurs in centre lappa of Plate XX. Makers are also used freely in specimen on Plate XXII.

Plate, Milieu, mesh worked on the edge of a bride or eye, as for instance in specimen of Plate XII. Similar Plates are used for enriching other parts, such as bloomers devices of raised lace, as in Plates X and XI.

Remise—Ground of meshes in contradistinction to that of a ground of eyes, as for instance, Plate XV, Plate XVI, and Plate XXVI, &c.

USES OF LACE.

There is one further aspect of lace to be pointed out, and that is the uses to which they have been put. At first they were but narrow bands of insertion and skeleton or Vandyke edgings, in cuffs and high standing and wide spreading cuffs. It was high time to speak of the indicated edging as a "point", and in France as a "dentelles". Shapes of caps, gowns, and such collars appeared on the ears. This is especially true about the time of Louis XIII of France and our Charles I. At this time, the lace trimmings were applied into the bodices and flourishes of women’s dresses. As the texture of the lace grew lighter so lace come to be used more abundantly as fabrics for making collar decorations, loose ample sleeves, veils, lapels, and so forth. Corresponding changes may be noted in the costumaries, as distinct from the last use of lace in costumes. Lace have also largely been used for house purposes, as in table cloths, uprails, coverlets, and curtains. Another novelty of the later extravaganza uses of lace in this direction may be gathered from such instances as those noted about a typical French Duchesse and grande dames of the early eighteenth century, whose costumes were of Point de Venise, while the length of Batiste d’Argentoff for her sheets were worth at least 300,000 crowns. There is a marked change now-days in quality of texture and make of much so-called lace. What dwelling, paper, or cottage is without its Nottingham machine-made curtains? These, indeed, while possessing an effect of hand-made lace are not to be mistaken for any more than a chromo-photography is to be mistaken for the work of the painter. But with machinery.,-or rather this publication has to concern the protection of such fabrics is an industry of itself, thriving under conditions different to those of penning up hand.
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TABLE COVER, made of coloured silk gimps, and gold and silver thread. The pattern of the main portion of this Cover is composed of two varieties of blossom device, repeated in alternations. The edging around the Cover consists of scallops or Vandykes, in each of which is a floral spray, or tulip, or carnation, or rose, &c.

Length, 3 ft. 7½ in. Width, 2 ft. 5½ in. South Kensington Museum.
Reg. No. 57.—69.
BED COVER, composed of a series of squares of "natch," (point a maglia quadra) or netting darned with representations of the months of the year, male and female heads, figures, and groups; between the squares and forming the outer border are bands of linen, with simple ornaments repeated and cut into them. The designs for the darned on it are similar to those published by P. Vincoli, who was employed at the French Court at the time of Catherine de Medicis.

Length, 6 ft. 7 in. Width, 4 ft. 7 in. South Kensington Museum.

Reg. No. 109—94.
TABLE CLOTH of linen, with a deep border of "lace," set between linen embroidered, with unbleached thread, in feather and satin stitches. Narrow insertions of "fettosia" needle-point lace run along each side of the border of "lace." Beyond the outer band of linen embroidery is a scalloped edge of plaited and twisted threads, "Herati a ploomb."
Part of a HANGING of "lace," or netting darned with ornament grouped in vertical panels, which have been joined together, and so form a well-distributed and balanced pattern, the main features of which are boldly curving decorated stems, enclosing pointed oval compartments, up the centre and on each side of which are narrow bands of scroll ornaments. Within the spaces bounded and intersected by these stems and bands are leafy and blossoming sprays, sportmen, birds and animals of the chase, harpies, &c.

Length, 5 ft. 10 in. Width, 2 ft. 11½ in. South Kensington Museum.
Reg. No. 252—86.
GERMAN—17th Century.

BORDER for a Cloth, of "lack," or netting darned in white and tusked threads, with pattern of conventional flowers and other devices.

Length, 5 ft. 1 in. Width, 14 in. South Kensington Museum.
Reg. No. 723.—75.
FLEMISH—17th Century.

FLEMISH RIBBON LACE, with conventionalised floral pattern held together by rows of "petal" points.

Plates VI and V show similar pieces, both resembling "gauze" and much of it was made at Bruges in the 17th Century.

Length 1 ft. Width 6 in.

Reg No. 1022-94.
VENETIAN—17th Century.

PORTION of raised needle-point lace, known as "Point anglaise a filets," and "Point de Pissy." Besides the grace and richness of the forms in the upper specimen, which, however, is but a part of a wider lace, its workmanship is of a high order, securing crispness to the compact reliefs, and a noticeable regularity of texture throughout. The lower piece is remarkable for the ground of cross-barring, not frequently to be seen in this class of lace.


CHASUBLE of raised needle-point lace "Ponts taglés a fillet," and "Point de Venise." The back and front of this vestment are of similar design. A centre band of scroll work is placed between two broader pieces of similar design, shaped to the form of the vestment. The free use of "punts," or minute loops, upon the raised portions as well as upon the "série" or bars between the scrolls of the lace, is noticeable.

Length, 3 ft. 5 in. Width, 3 ft. 3½ in. South Kensington Museum.
Reg. 743—70.
(See also No. IX.)
VENETIAN—17th Century.


These with the Chasuble (No. VIII) form a remarkable and rare set of ecclesiastical vestments of raised needle-point lace, "Point de Venise" and "Point de Venise." In the centre of the chalice cover will be noticed the chalice and wafer, grapes and wheat ear, surrounded by a halo of tongues of fire and star rays. The planning of the ornament is noticeable and well worth careful study.

South Kensington Museum.
(See also No. VIII)
JABOT or COLLAR of raised needle-point lace, "Fusta taglata a follami," and "Point de Venise." Fringes of "pietre" enrich almost all the raised portions of the work and much of the stems. This specimen ranks with a somewhat similar collar preserved in the Musée de Cluny, Paris.

Length, 3 ft. Width, 7 in. South Kensington Museum.
Reg. No. 848.—'53.