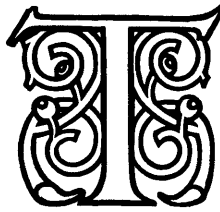


THE LACE COLLECTION OF MR. ARTHUR BLACKBORNE

BY M. JOURDAIN

PART I



THE collection of Mr. Arthur Blackborne is of great interest to the student of lace and of design, since it is peculiarly rich in rare types of lace which never find their way into the market or the museums. Begun in 1850 by the present owner's father in the more profitable days of collecting, it has been added to year by year, and numbers now some six hundred specimens which have never been exhibited as a whole, though a few pieces were shown in 1874 in the International Exhibition, and at the Union Centrale des Arts Décoratifs at Paris in 1882.

Of the lacis, mostly of Italian workmanship, the most curious are illustrated. The interest of coloured embroideries and of lace proper have engaged and absorbed the attention of amateurs and collectors, while it has happened that this class of darning embroidery of the simplest technique upon net or canvas has been relatively neglected. And yet to the student of symbolism or design the work is of importance from its preservation of many extremely ancient *motifs*, such as two birds divided by the sacred tree, two birds perched upon the basin of a double-tiered fountain, small skirted figures, archaically drawn, holding up some undistinguishable object, vase, cone, or cross, from which it is probable that the 'Boxers' in samplers—small, brightly-costumed figures, holding up a branch, vase, acorn, or other ornament—are derived.

In lacis, the groundwork consists of a plain network of meshes, *réseau*, *rézeuil*, *rézil*, *filet*, or *lacis*,¹ upon which the pattern is darned. Cotgrave gives among the

¹ Lacis, though generally applied to the *réseau* when embroidered, was also occasionally used for the *réseau* itself. See 'Bèle Prérie contenant divers caractères, et différentes sortes de lettres alphabetiques . . . pour appliquer sur le réseuil ou lassis. Paris. 1601.'

various meanings of *maille*, 'a mash of a net, the square hole that is between thread and thread'—the *ouures masches* (or lacis) of Mary Queen of Scots; and lacis is defined by the *Dictionnaire antique de Furretière* (1684) as 'a sort of thread or silk formed into a tissue, or net, or *réseuil*, the threads of which were knotted or interlaced the one into the other.' When thus decorated, the network was known as lacis, or in Italian, *punto ricamato a maglia*² *quadra*, and frequently combined with *point coupé* or *reticella* in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when it was known as *punto reale a reticella*. Elisabetta Catanea Parasole (1616) gives designs for this sort of mixed work, which was used for bed furniture and for church vestments. An early undated pattern-book, 'Burato,' contains in its earliest edition four leaves for embroidery upon canvas (*tela chiara*) in squares, but the name 'lacis' is first mentioned in Vinciolo (1587), which contains designs in squares of 'les sept planettes et plusieurs autres figures et pourtraitz servans de patrons a faire de plusieurs sortes de lacis.' These patterns are increased in the second part of the third edition by designs of a lion, pelican, unicorn, stag, peacock, and griffin, and the four seasons.

The ground, or *rézel*, we learn from the highly hyperbolic 'Discours du Lacis' and the pattern-book of the 'tres excellent Milour Matthias Mignerak Anglois' was made by beginning a single stitch and increasing a stitch on each side until the required width was obtained. It was finished by reducing a stitch on each side until it was decreased to one :

'Du monde le principe et le terme commun,'
while the square formed when complete is :

'Des vertus le symbole, et signal
De science du livre et bonnet doctoral.'

² 'Maglia is properly the holes in any net. Also a shirt or jacket of maille.' Florio. 'A Worlde of Wordes.'

The Lace Collection of Mr. Arthur Blackborne

In this collection we see many varieties of ground, including the simple knotted net of the 'Discours du Lacis.' In one, apparently a loosely woven canvas, the horizontal threads are double, and the threads cross without being knotted; and in another the knotted mesh is diamond-shaped. The darning is also infinitely varied, and the open-work stitches upon the *réseau* give the effect of modes of open fillings of lace proper, and shade the solid work. In some specimens we see the forerunner of the cordonnet in a coarse thread outlining the pattern, and raised work or embroidery upon the solid work, which reappears on lace as *la brode*. Of existing specimens, those that can be definitely traced to particular places of manufacture are comparatively rare, so are pieces which can be assigned to an earlier date than the first half of the sixteenth century. Of all lacis work, however, perhaps the most curious are certain pieces showing oriental influence, such as:—

1 (22 inches).—Here is a stag, wounded by an arrow; and a negro with a spear, shoulder-belt, and head-dress, blowing his horn to two dogs who are chasing a hare that runs towards a tree. Upon this tree a peacock is perched. A figure—evidently a negro centaur, for his hoofs can be seen, though the lacis ends abruptly, leaving the form incomplete—is drawing his bow at the peacock. Upon the left of this design is a badge—a lion rampant. This piece is probably of Sicilian workmanship. In Sicily the influence of oriental taste was of necessity more direct than in Venice or northern Italy, and so it came to pass that with the native elements of decoration were associated Persian and Saracenic animals and plants. In the early designs of the Siculo-Arabian style, for instance, in silk fabrics, in addition to the Persian cheetahs, Indian parrots, and antelopes, such animals of African origin as the giraffe, elephant, gazelle, and

other fauna of that continent are to be found.³

2 (44 inches, in two pieces).—The central *motif* of this specimen is a two-tiered fountain, from the upper basin of which two small birds are drinking. Upon either side of the fountain are two small acolytes holding up a hand,⁴ and two large peacocks *vis-à-vis*. To the right is a ship with an ornamental masthead, within which is seated a costumed figure. On either side of the ship is a figure, a man holding up his hand, and a crowned woman, archaically drawn. The peacocks or animal forms *affronté*, drinking from a vase or fountain, with the supporters, are one of the earliest symbolical *motifs*.⁵

3 (18 inches by 36).—A panel of coarse work representing the Crucifixion. Upon the cross is the inscription I.N.R.I., and around the upper portion of the cross are four cherub heads and two stars. The Virgin and St. John are represented at the foot of the cross. One thief only is shown, with one leg drawn up and both arms twisted round the arms of the cross in an agonized position. The variation in darning stitches is shown in the shaded effects upon the figures. Darning figures and subjects upon netting was very much used in church work for lectern or frontal veils, or pyx cloths, and 'corporals' for the altar, as early as the fourteenth century.⁶

4 (30 by 13½).—Fine Italian darned work upon a diagonal-meshed ground. The graceful but overcrowded design is based upon four scrolls springing from a centre and enclosing fruits, flowers, birds, and insects. The double-headed eagle, at the top, in the centre, surmounts a basket of fruit and flowers. The darning is varied to form open-worked ornamental fillings in various places, *i.e.* in the larger flowers, and in the peacock's tail. A very similar piece is to be found in the Victoria and Albert

³ Plate I, page 561.

⁴ One is apparently holding up a cross.

⁵ Plate I, page 561. ⁶ Plate II, page 563.

The Lace Collection of Mr. Arthur Blackborne

Museum. The few specimens of German lacis are noticeable for a rather loose mesh and coarse execution. In general, the designs of German lacis are conventional, but in some examples an attempt to produce more naturalistic ornament appears.

Cutwork, often called 'Greek' lace, owing to the fact that a great deal was found during the occupation of the Ionian islands by the English, is undoubtedly Italian in origin. Some specimens are shown upon the linen on which it was made, but most, however, have been cut off for sale from the original foundation. It was made by withdrawing threads from linen, and working over the remaining foundation threads with buttonhole stitches (*point bouclé* or *boutonnière*). This framework is filled with solid portions of geometrical shape, worked in the same stitch, forming triangles, rosettes, and star devices. In these a row of buttonhole stitches is made from left to right, and at the end of the row the thread is thrown back to the point of departure and is worked from left to right over the thread. In some specimens the close buttonhole stitch alternates with a more open one, formed by twisting the thread before finishing the loop.


The pattern-book of Vinciolo shows certain portions of *point coupé* shaded, and the more complex designs for *punto in aria* in the 'Ornamento Nobile' of Lucretia Romana, and of Parasole, could hardly be reproduced without some variety of stitch in the solid portions.

The next step was to reproduce the same geometric patterns upon a skeleton framework of thread tacked upon a parchment pattern. Threads radiating from a common centre, forming the foundation of triangles, rosettes, and other geometrical forms are the basis of the earliest designs. The somewhat enigmatical directions in 1598, in J. Foillet (Montbéliard), refer to this process: 'Pour faire des dantelles, il vous fault jetter un fil de la grandeur que

desiré faire vos dantelles, and les cordonner, puis jetter les fils au dedans, qui fera tendre le cordon, and lui donnera la forme carrée, ronde, ou telle forme que desirés.' The point so made was known as *punto in aria*.

5 (38 by 3 inches).—Worked squares of cutwork containing grotesque-costumed figures, alternating with svastika-like forms; the linen which divides the cutwork squares is richly embroidered, and forms, as it were, a frame to them.

6 (66 by 2½ inches).—Cutwork and fine embroidery upon linen. This consists of fine openwork S-shaped scrolls, crossed by a transverse piece. The raised embroidery which decorates the groundwork is outlined by a fine cord.

7 (61 by 1½ inches).—Fine cutwork with  and diamond design. The special feature of this piece is the remarkably fine openwork which approximates to that of the finer *points de Venise*. The solid portions are rows of buttonhole stitches, not woven linen, as can be seen by the lines, which run diagonally, and not in an upright and horizontal direction.

8 (9 inches).—A small oblong piece showing great elaboration of the design upon the foundation threads, which are almost indistinguishable. The foundation of square meshes left by the withdrawal of threads from the piece of linen can be detected in this and the preceding piece, upon closer examination. Otherwise, it might easily be mistaken for a piece of needlepoint.

9 (70 inches).—Cutwork, with an unusual ground and fine small edge. This specimen is peculiar, because there is not a particle of the original linen foundation to be seen, except in the centre of the quatre-foils.

10 (1 yard).—A piece of needlepoint insertion representing peacocks drinking at a vase, similar in *motif* to the second specimen of lacis. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries the Byzantine style

The Lace Collection of Mr. Arthur Blackborne

was universally employed by the Venetians. In their sculptured ornament many of the designs appear to be of Sasanian origin; and many panels are derived from the very ancient Assyrian subject of the sacred tree between two guardian beasts or birds. A common variety of this *motif* is two peacocks face to face (*affronté*) drinking from a cup placed on a tall pillar-like object. It is probable that this cup placed upon a pillar developed into the two-tiered fountain, which is more usually met with than the single-tiered fountain or vase. This recurrence of peacock *motif* in lacis and early lace is curious.

We find in the catacombs, and even in Roman architecture, the symbol of a bunch of grapes between two peacocks *affronté*, 'representing the soul quenching its thirst at the eternal fountain of life,' and from the time of the catacombs onwards two figures are placed on either side of the principal christian emblems, the bunch of grapes, the labarum, the rouelle, the eucharistic cup. Sometimes these figures are lambs, and sometimes peacocks. The peacock was held among the ancients to kill serpents, and this may be one of the reasons why it was introduced into christian symbolism. No doubt the peacock with the vase or fountain is a survival of early christian symbolism, and so used in lacis destined for church use; but used in later work as a traditional decorative *motif*. It is curious to find that its use persisted until the eighteenth century in the sampler. In a specimen dated 1742, in the possession of Mr. Marcus B. Huish, the identical *motif* of two birds *affronté*, perched upon the lower basin of a double-tiered fountain, is represented.

The second *motif* in this piece of lace is two sheep with a chain round their necks, separated by a square, and a basket from which flowers are issuing. The raised dotted work upon the sheep is curious. Very similar in *motifs* and treatment are

some Italian tablecloths or towels of the fifteenth or sixteenth century, in the Victoria and Albert Museum (Nos. 484, 486, 600—1884). These are of diapered white linen, woven with blue stripes and various details. In the first, in one of the bands between the stripes are a succession of collared and chained dogs. In the second, bands of winged dragons, *vis-à-vis*, with a fountain between them, occur. In the third, the second band contains repeated pairs of peacocks, with a device between each pair.

11 (47 by 10½ inches).—A very fine scalloped Charles I collar of needlepoint, with cuffs to match. In Vandyke's portrait of the king's head in three positions, in the National Gallery, a collar of the same lace is to be seen.⁷

12.—A border and dentated edge of fine needlepoint, the design representing a pomegranate with curved leaves, from which hangs a pendent leafy form. The shading of the fruit and leaves by the use of a more open buttonhole stitch in certain portions is to be noticed. Portions of the design are united or strengthened by short unornamented brides.⁸

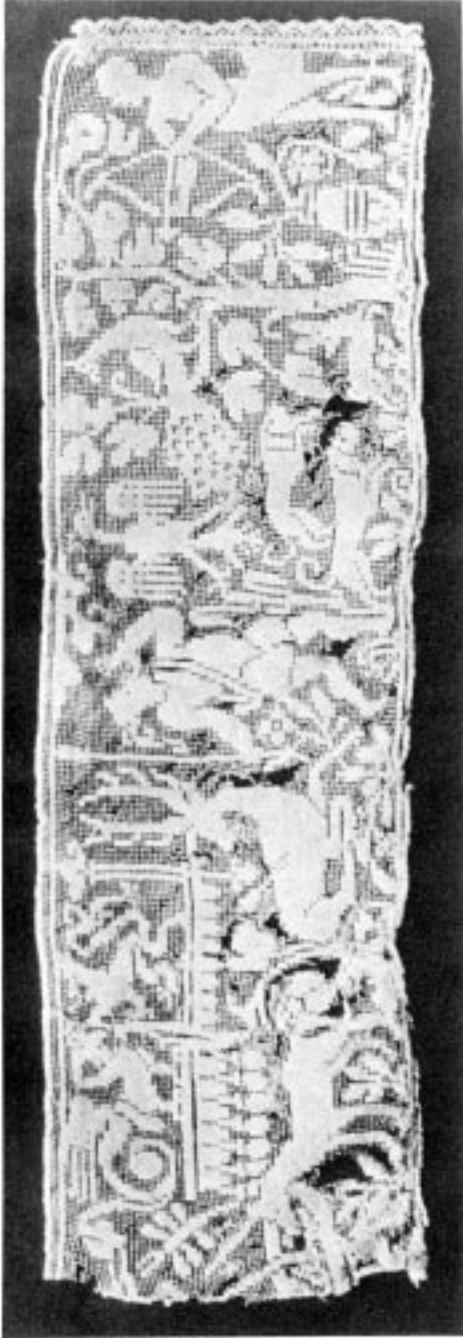
13 (5¼ yards by 2½ inches).—Pillow-made Italian braid-guipure. The design consists of a star-shaped flower, with two pairs of leaves between each flower, forming a straight border. From the border hangs a pendent leafy form. No brides are used; the details of the design touch one another, and are united by short stitches. Small pin-holes worked on the outer edge of the braid give lightness to the lace.⁷

14 (5½ by 2½ inches).—Scalloped lace, with raised work, representing flowers growing from a straight central stem or basket. The stem and portions of the leaves are veined with a more open buttonhole stitch, and the petals of the conventional rose are in high relief. The design is joined together by short plain brides, and the leaves have small picots attached to

⁷ Plate III, page 565.

⁸ Plate II, page 563.

PLATE IV

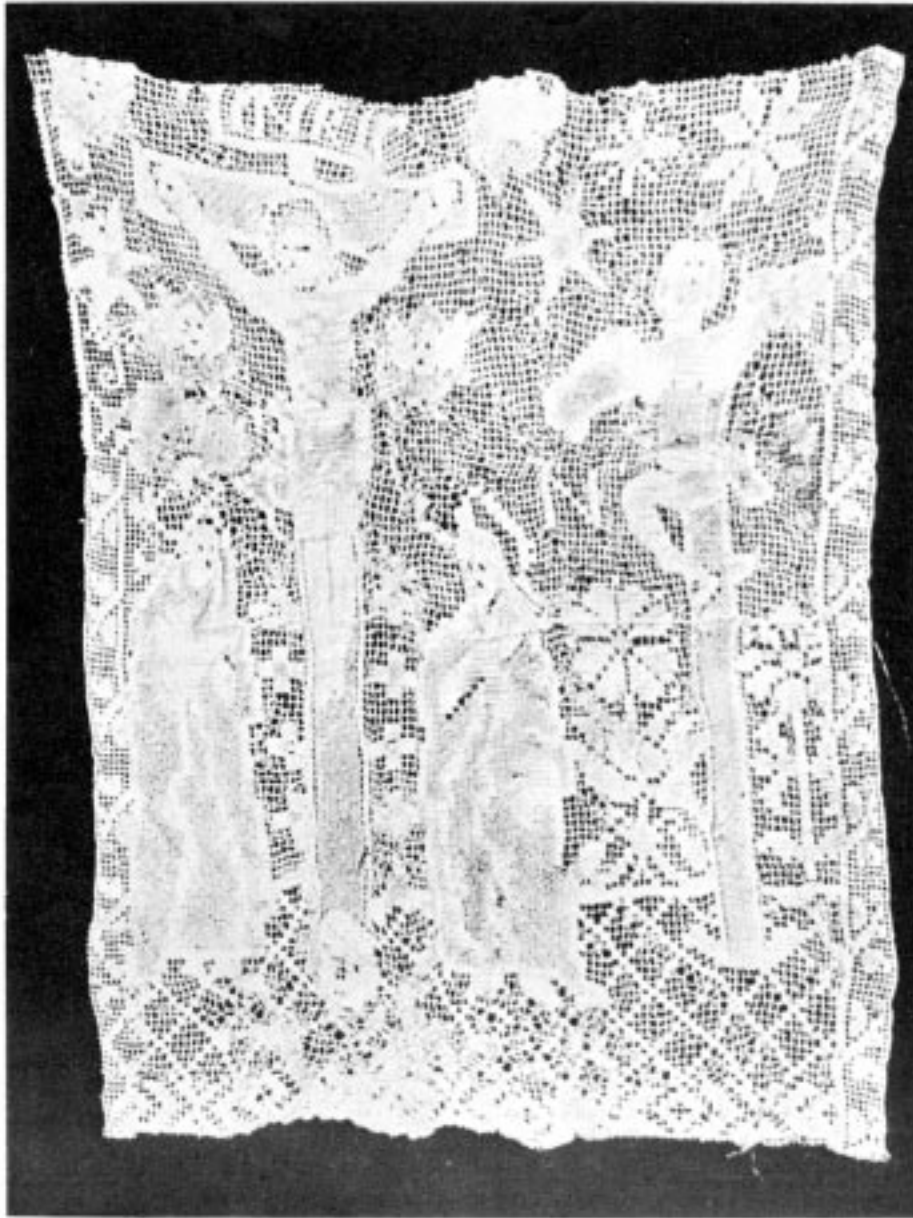


NO. 1. LACIS

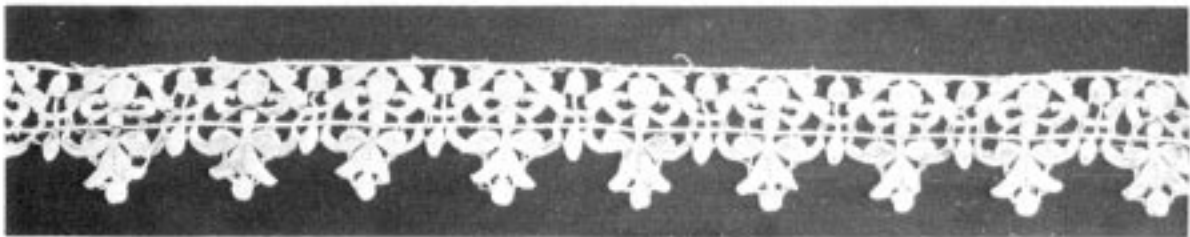


NO. 2. LACIS

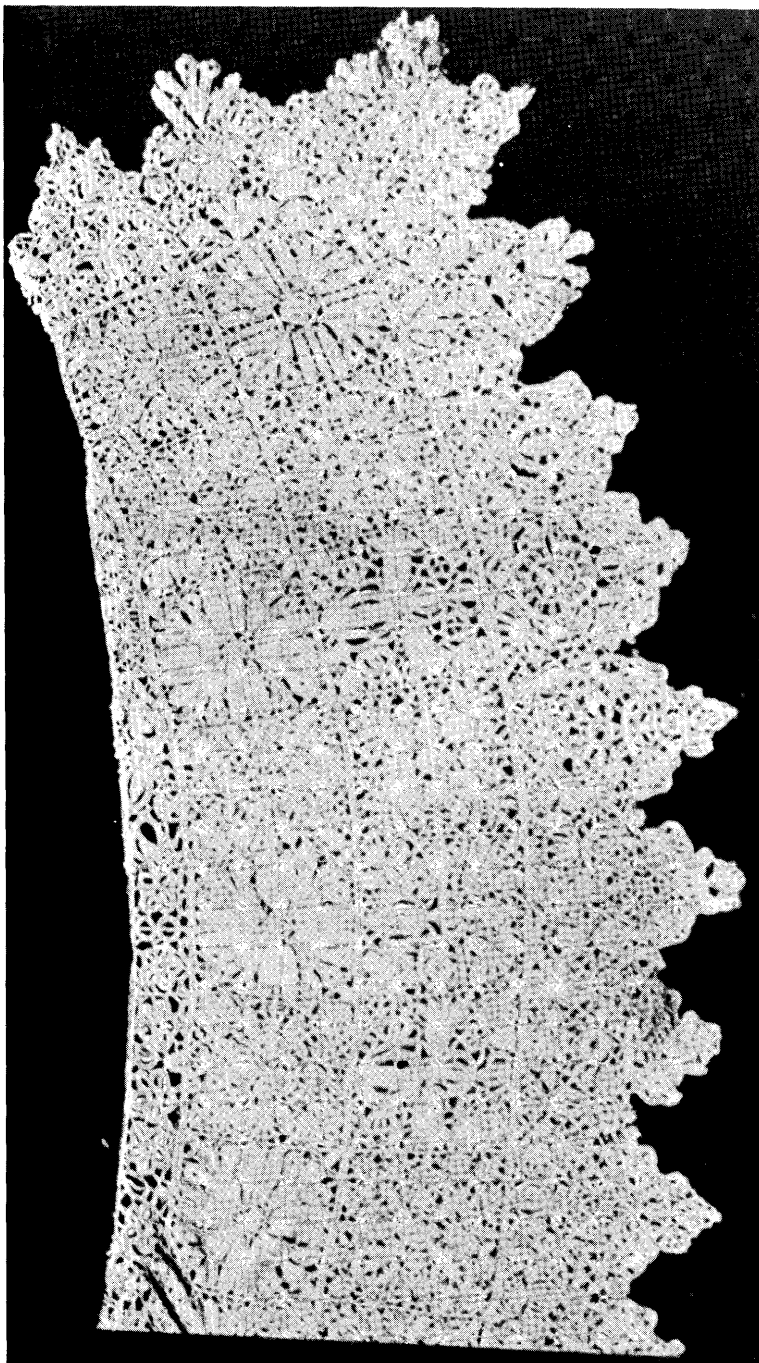
LACE IN THE COLLECTION OF
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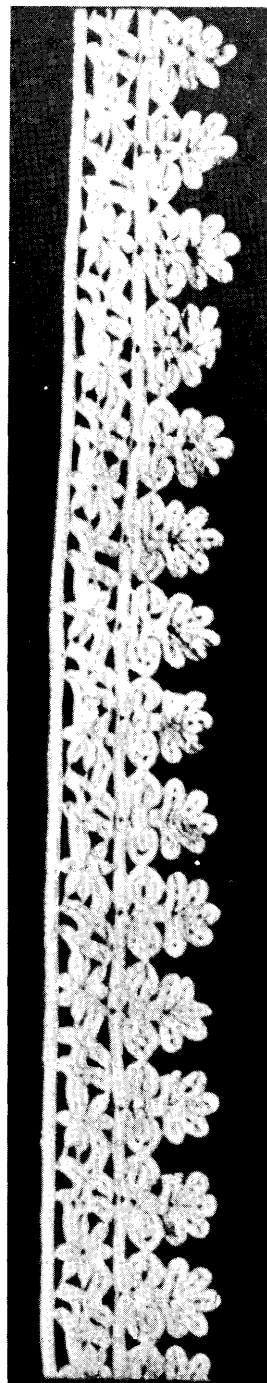
NO. 3. LACIS



NO. 12. NEEDLEPOINT

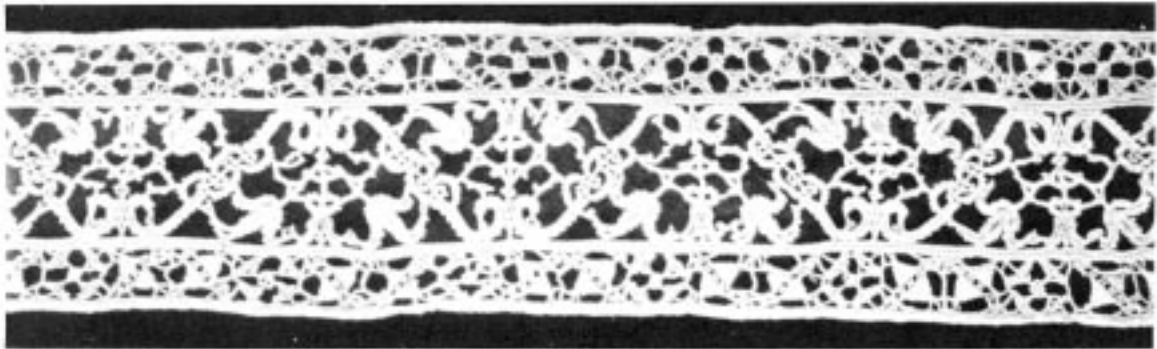


NO. 11. ENGLISH NEEDLEPOINT

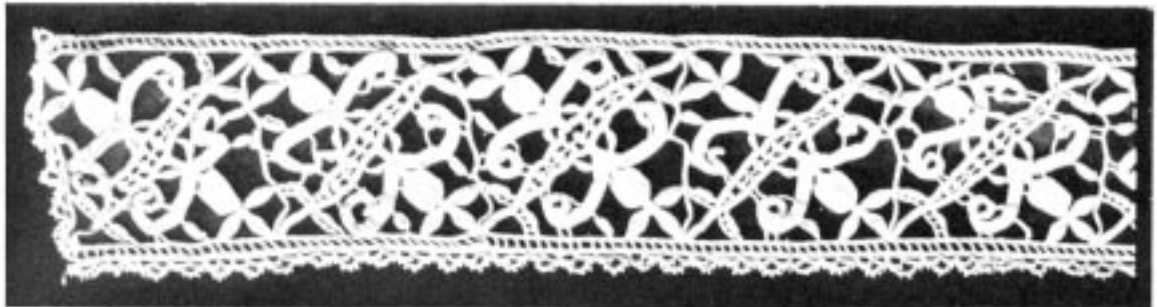


NO. 13. PILLOW-MADE ITALIAN BRAID-GUIFURE

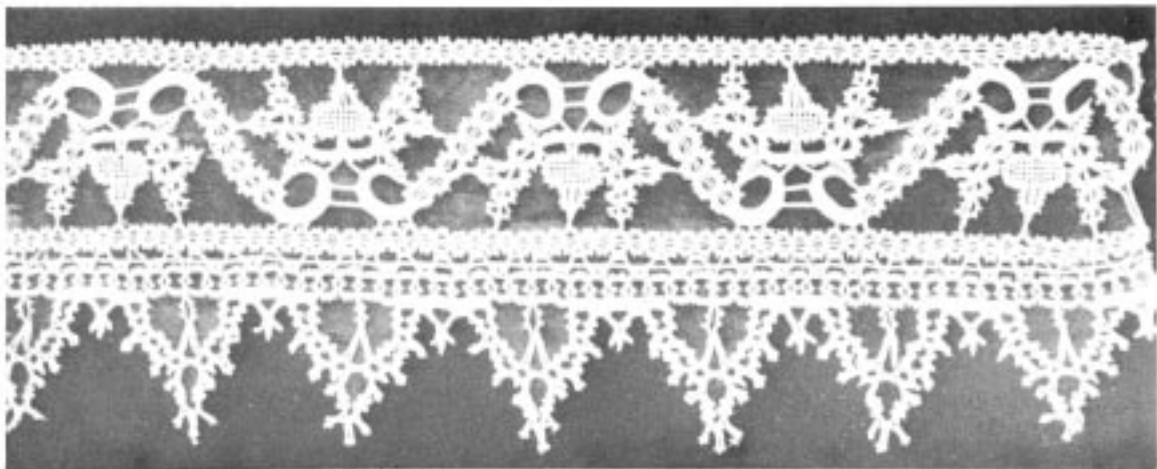
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NO. 17. PILLOW INSERTION WITH NARROW STRIPS OF NEEDLEPOINT



NO. 18 NEEDLEPOINT



NO. 19. ITALIAN PILLOW LACE

The Lace Collection of Mr. Arthur Blackborne

them. A collar of the same work is catalogued in the Victoria and Albert Museum as Italian. Judging from the design, however, which is more compressed and heavier than in Italian laces, it is of English workmanship, as is No. 11. Italian lace, unlike certain Flemish laces and English needlepoint of this period, shows an appreciation of the decorative value of open spaces to form a background to the solid portions.

15 (75 by 2 inches).—Small pointed border of rare design. The long points are formed by three tasselled triangular forms. Each dentation is separated from the corresponding point by smaller dentations. This type of edging is very effective, and frequently met with in late sixteenth-century portraits.

16 (38 inches by 4 inches).—Fine needlepoint lace, the design of which is formed by oblique billet-shaped forms arranged in squares, and edged with a light Genoese pillow-edge.

17 (1 yard 30 inches by 3½ inches).—Border of pillow insertion with narrow border of needlepoint at top and bottom. The design is of a very characteristic Italian type, consisting of two light scrolls, lying transversely, and ornamented in the centre by semi-circular devices; from between the curved extremities of the scrolls springs a conventional flower and a three-pointed leaf.⁹

18 (58 by 3 inches).—Fine straight-edged border of needlepoint, of curious design, consisting of a pomegranate with leafy crown between two curved leaves, springing from an oblique open-work ornament. This is a variant upon the design of No. 8, where the same pomegranate *motif* occurs. A highly conventionalized pomegranate is frequent in textile designs of the period, and the conventional flower of the heavier rose-points may be derived from the same fruit.⁹

19 (63 by 5¼ inches).—Border and edge

of very fine Italian pillow-lace. The design, which is open and curious, should be compared with No. 17. In this straight-edged border the oblique S-shaped scrolls are joined by plain brides, and the centre of the scrolls are decorated. From the base of the scroll springs an acorn or trefoil, with its leaves. Portions of the design are edged with minute loops, such as are shown in certain illustrations in the pattern book 'Le Pompe' (1559). The wiry pointed pillow-edging is also decorated with loops. The character of this and the two preceding pieces shows the superior *effectiveness* of Italian design, which, from the simplest ornamental *motifs* of conventional types, produces the most effective combinations by allowing its true value to the 'background.'⁹

20 (105 by 3½ inches).—Scalloped Genoese lace of the seventeenth century, taken from a Greek coffin. The Ionian islands for many years belonged to Venice, and Italian cutworks and needlepoint were introduced there from Venice. Much lace sold about 1860 in the Ionian islands was taken from grave-clothes, and the hunting of the catacombs was then a regular trade. As a natural consequence, a coarse imitation of this type of old needlepoint was made and discoloured in coffee or some drug, and when thus stained sold to English visitors as from the tombs. The present specimen is of a greenish yellow tint.

21 (40 by 3¼ inches).—An example of the pillow-lace with rounded or oval scallops which became usual when the flat-falling collar supplanted the ruff trimmed with pillow-lace with pointed or arrow-headed dentations. This change took place in England about 1620, at the close of the reign of James I. Evelyn describes a medal of Charles I, struck in 1633, in which he is represented in a 'falling band, which new mode succeeded the cumbersome ruff.' In France a similar change took place under Louis XIII.

(To be continued.)

⁹ Plate IV, page 567.