



BORDER OF A ROCHET

MADE FOR THE CORONATION OF CHARLES X SHOWING GROUND OF DROCHEL
METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

“LE DROCHEL”

FROM THE FRENCH BY MADAME L. PAULIS*

THE beginning of the eighteenth century marks a moment of change in the evolution of bobbin made lace which was in happy conformity with its technical possibilities, as the result of which the art was brought to an astonishing degree of perfection.

The quality of extreme lightness and delicacy which became the outstanding characteristic of the laces of the eighteenth century is above all expressed in the development of the *réseau* or net ground, in place of the *brides* or tie-bars which had originally been the means of joining the different parts of the design.

Already during the last quarter of the seventeenth century there had been a tendency toward more delicate effects. The scale of the design diminished, and the dimension of the tie-bars in the grounds was reduced. At the same time, the placing of the tie-bars was becoming more regular, which gave the idea of a net ground, and the transition between a field of small bars arranged with regularity and a braided net-work such as that in figure 1. is not very difficult to imagine. Both of them, as a matter of fact, are “*rapportés*”—that is, when the “flowers” have been made and mounted on the pattern on the lace-pillow, the ground has been executed with threads attached to the edges of the pattern by the process known as *accrochage* or hooked joining. Threads are added at the edge of a design by being looped through the finished part of the work and then braided and twisted to form the part of the pattern for which

*Madame Paulis is teacher of lace design and technique at the normal class of the Société des Amies de la Dentelle in Brussels. The Club is much indebted to her for this interesting article on a delicate technique that had been considered a lost art,—the method of joining the strips of *drochel*.



FIGURE I
BRUSSELS LACE, EARLY XVIII CENTURY
SHOWING ROUND MESH GROUND

they are destined (figure 2). Both of these types of grounding, the *brides* and the *réseau* are composed of tiny braidings of four threads (two pairs of bobbins) short braidings in the *réseau*, longer and ornamented with picots in the *bride* grounds. But while *brides*, when they join are attached to one another either by crossing or by the hooked joining (*accrochage*) or by the crossing of two of their threads, the braidings in the *réseau* are conducted as shown in figure 3. A, B, C are fragments of floral forms which are to be united by a *réseau*. The threads are “*entrés*” or connected at E, then braided to the desired length. The four threads of each braid are then separated into two parts of two threads each, turning in opposite directions. In the accompanying drawing at 1 two threads are joined with the hook to the form A, then

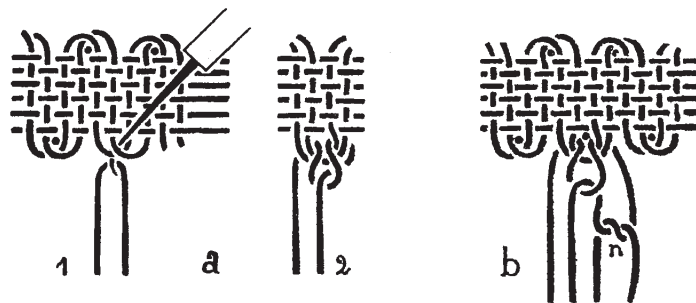


FIGURE 2

are directed toward C in crossing all the bars successively. Attached by looping through the edge of already completed parts of the design, at 2 they form a new little braiding with the two right-hand threads of the last braid and are joined again at 3 and carried toward the left in the same manner crossing all the threads of the second row of meshes, of which the braidings have already been executed.

The work continues in the same manner, the threads being added or removed according to the caprices of the surface to be covered. We notice that each mesh of this *réseau* (net ground), when it has to be connected, is attached at two places: —1 and 4; 2 and 3. It is the only way in which the form can be maintained.

This *réseau*, called “*réseau à mailles rondes*” or round mesh, is the most ancient form of Brussels *réseau*. It is sometimes a little heavy-looking but the workers realized that it might be made lighter without changing the general method of the work by eliminating the bar which in the draw-

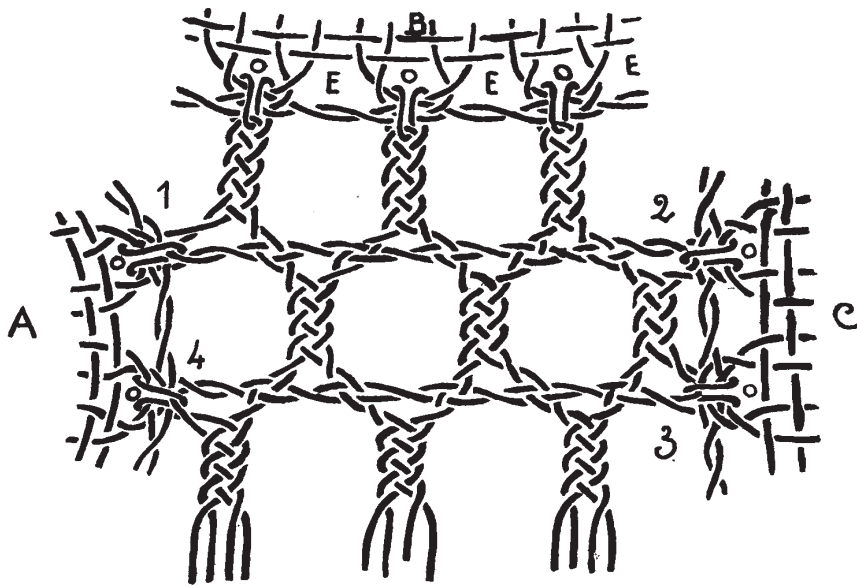


FIGURE 3

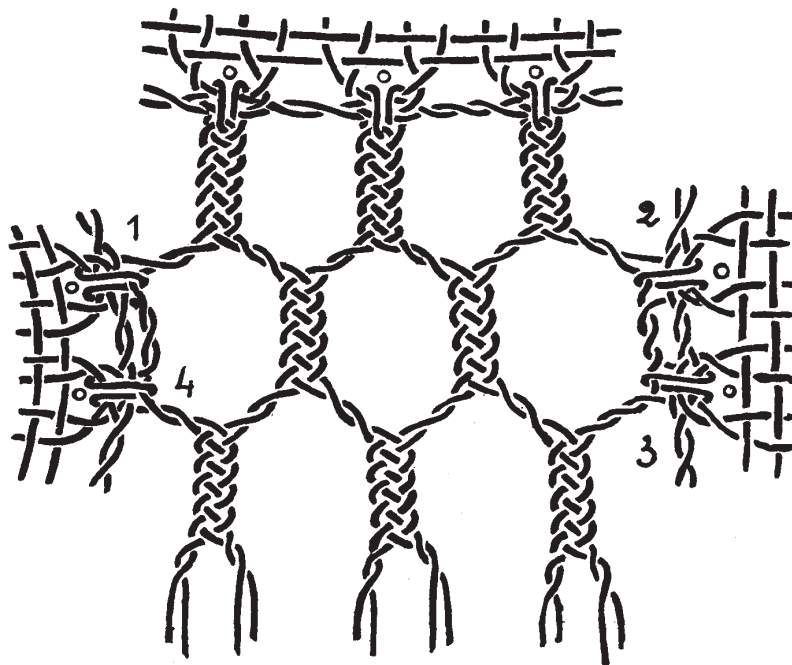


FIGURE 4

ing, figure 3, goes from 1 to 2 and from 3 to 4. The mesh thus worked becomes hexagonal instead of octagonal, and is lighter, simpler, and more clear. The drawing, figure 4, reproduces the preceding figure as it would be modified by the change in working just described. At 1, the same bar is attached in the same manner, but instead of crossing to 2 it is carried down to 4. The same process is repeated at the right, at 2 and 3. Thus was evolved the *drochel*, for more than a century the distinguishing characteristic of Brussels lace. The proportions were later modified by slightly lengthening the braided sections as shown in figure 4.

Like the first type of *réseau*, the *drochel* was executed without the aid



FIGURE 5

of pins except at the edges. To avoid as much as possible the cutting of threads when two sections of the *drochel* are only separated by a small form in the pattern, the worker carried the threads for continuing her work across the back of the flower or bit of completed work, connecting them again at the farther edge as is shown in figure 5. These threads only showed on the wrong side of the lace, which is always worked face down on the pillow, the wrong side uppermost. When the spaces to be filled with *réseau* were small as was generally the case in the designs of the early part of the eighteenth century during which time the ornament filled more of the space than the background, the making of the *drochel* did not present great difficulties. But when a little later, the fashion for

more open patterns left large surfaces of unpatterned ground, the work became more difficult, partly because of the great number of bobbins in action at once, and partly because of the elasticity and suppleness of the network which it was difficult to stretch evenly, evenness of course being one of the requisites of good workmanship.

The workers then conceived the idea of making the *drochel* in strips, as may be seen in figure 6. Each band in process of execution is attached

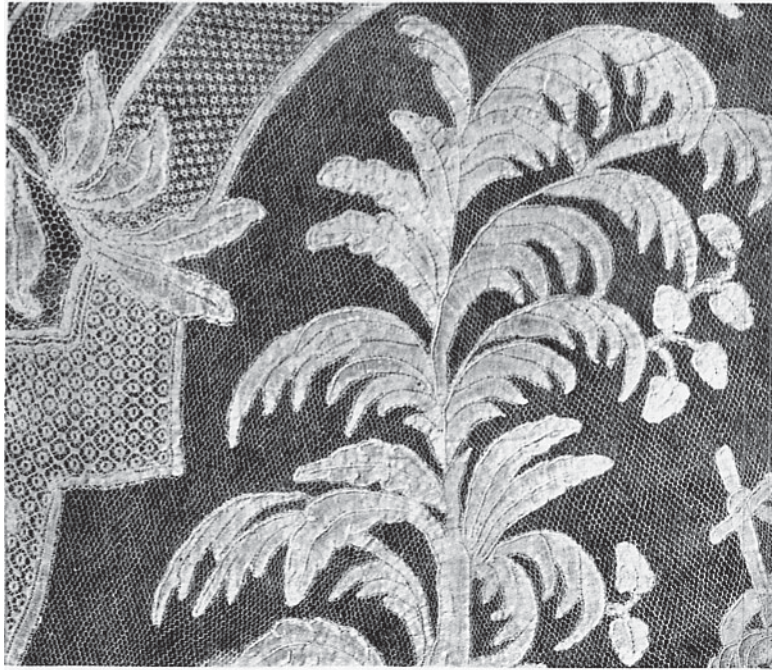


FIGURE 6

to the part already finished in the same manner that it is to the parts of the pattern (the flowers, etc. which are worked in the "linen stitch"), i.e. by two hooked joinings to each mesh. This minute and painstaking process leaves the meshes where the joining has been accomplished with the same appearance as the other meshes of the *réseau*. The joint is practically invisible, though sometimes the line of the joining can be detected.

This process was used increasingly often in the designs of the time of Louis XVI, where the *réseau* played a more and more important part, as the designs became more open. The laces of this period show the constant



FIGURE 7

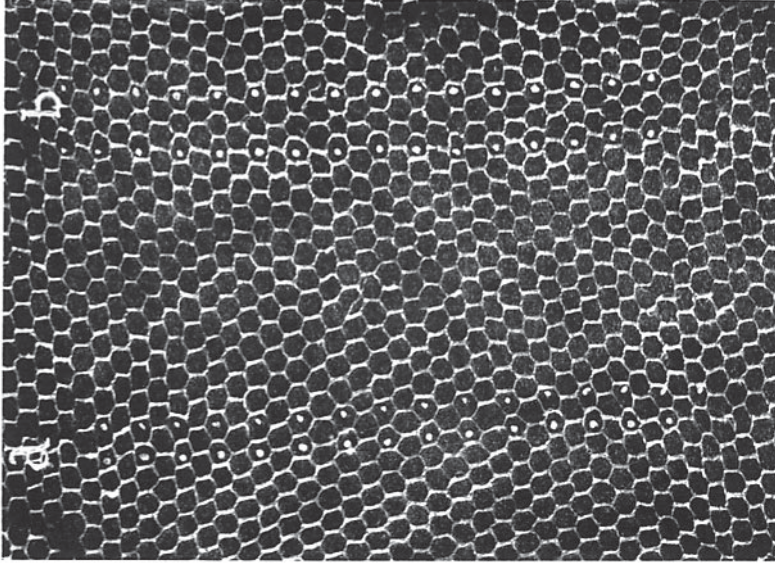


FIGURE 9

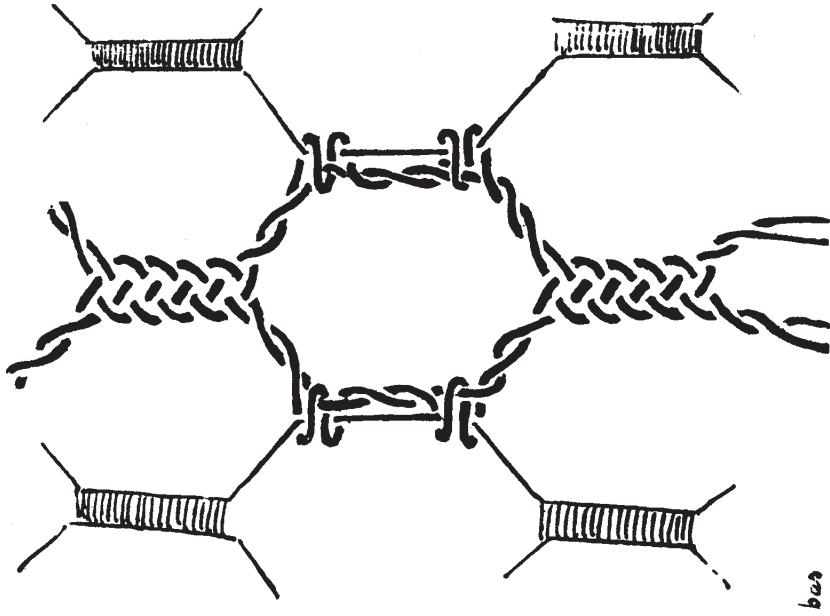


FIGURE 8

ENLARGEMENTS OF DROCHEL NET SHOWING METHOD OF JOINING STRIPS

employment of *drochel* made in bands. These bands varied somewhat in width. The specimens in the Cinquantenaire Museums in Brussels are from eight to twenty meshes wide, with an average of from thirteen to fifteen meshes, requiring from fifty-two to sixty bobbins to make.

During the Empire it became the fashion to wear large floating lace veils, fastened to the head-dress and falling on the shoulders. The drochel ground was their great beauty.* But what infinite patience is represented by one of these veils of *drochel* with their delicate designs of bobbin-made flowers and sprays. One can form an idea of it in considering that a single mesh, just one of the little hexagons of the *réseau*, required thirty-two movements of the bobbins.

It is evident that making the *drochel* in bands would somewhat simplify this tedious work. A final modification consisted in making the entire veil or piece of lace of the drochel and then applying the flowers by sewing them to the net (figure 7), instead of working the net around the flowers as had been done in the beginning. This process permitted the division of labor; “*dentellières*” executing the flowers, the “*drocheleuses*” working on the net ground. Several *drocheleuses* could even be working simultaneously on the same piece because a way had been found, not only for joining a band of unfinished *drochel* to a finished band, but two finished bands could be joined together. Figure 8 shows the method for doing this. The two bands would be fixed on the cushion side by side, separated by the width of one mesh. With two pairs of bobbins, the worker undertaking this careful and painstaking piece of work could fill in the little space, being constantly obliged to stop her flying bobbins in order to make her hooked joinings to the edges of the finished work. She would make a little braid, separate it into two strands of two threads each, attach them each twice at left and right, the first joining being made at the top, the other at the lower edge of the “*mitoyenne*” or intermediate part of the existing mesh. She would then make another little braid and pass on to the next mesh.

The supple and delicate *drochel* is incontestably one of the marvels of the Brussels laces of the eighteenth century and of the early part of the nineteenth. Unfortunately the time and skill required for its fabrication make of it a sort of phenomenon. But modern industry does not want

*After the invention of machine-made net many of the less exquisite of these veils were made of that, with designs embroidered and darned in by hand,—often by the wearer herself.

to stop to make phenomena if it can do anything else. This something else was provided by the invention of machine-made tulle, which is no doubt coarser and less exquisite, but which was soon sufficiently perfected to render any competition impossible between it and the very costly hand-made ground.

The making of the marvelous *drochel* disappeared completely between 1830 and 1840, having lingered about twenty years to be used only on the most precious laces. The invention and general use of the machine-made net had made the more laborious and costly method a thing of the past.

