



Cutwork (Reticilla) and Punto in Aria Part II. By M. Jourdain

THE evidence for the date of the invention of lace is threefold, that of pictures of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and the pattern books and documents of the period.

In pictures, I have found very little lace until the first quarter of the sixteenth century.* White lace has been said to be found in a portrait of a lady, by Carpaccio (1476-1522), in the gallery at Venice.† In his other pictures there is no

cross-stitch appears. No lace is to be found in Mantegna (1431-1506) or ‡ Luini (1470-1530). In Pinturicchio (1454-1513), embroidery of cord or metal gimp is applied in conventional patterns to the borders of dresses.§ To judge by Italian painting, there is little evidence of Cav. A. Merli's theory that "the art was even at the apex of perfection at the commencement of 1500."

An exceptionally early instance of what appears



BORDER OF NEEDLEPOINT LACE (*PUNTO IN ARIA*), SHOWING GROTESQUE FIGURES OF A MAN, WOMAN, AND STAG, WITH POMEGRANATE MOTIF ITALIAN, 16TH CENTURY

lace, and but little embroidery, and the linen is for the most part plain, in one case embroidery in

to be needle-point fillings of open spaces in a

* Cav. A. Merli cites as the earliest known painting in which lace occurs, a majolica disc, after the style of the Della Robbia family, in which is represented the half-figure of a lady, dressed in rich brocade, with a collar of white lace. As the precise date cannot be fixed, and the work may be by one of Luca Della Robbia's descendants, this, as evidence, is useless.

† "The cuffs of the lady are edged with a narrow lace, the pattern of which appears in Vecellio's *Corona*, not published until 1591" (Lefébyvre).

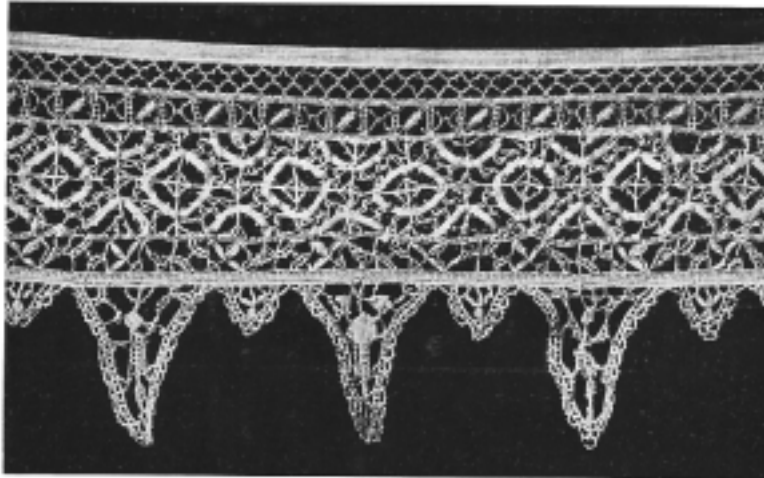
‡ In Luini's *Presentation in the Temple*, geometric cutwork, or embroidery, appears on the Priest's robe.

§ Later, lace appears more frequently. In *Titian* (1477-1576) narrow lace is used to edge shirts and shirt-sleeves in female costumes. In the Prado Museum (Madrid) a portrait of a woman, ascribed to *Del Sarto* (1486-1531) has a narrow edging of lace. *Del Sarto's Portrait of a Sculptor* (Portrait of the Artist) has a border of lace to the shirt (National Gallery). In *Tintoretto* (1518-1594) narrow lace, apparently bobbin-made, appears, in the picture of *Lucretia*.



EDGING OF NEEDLEPOINT LACE

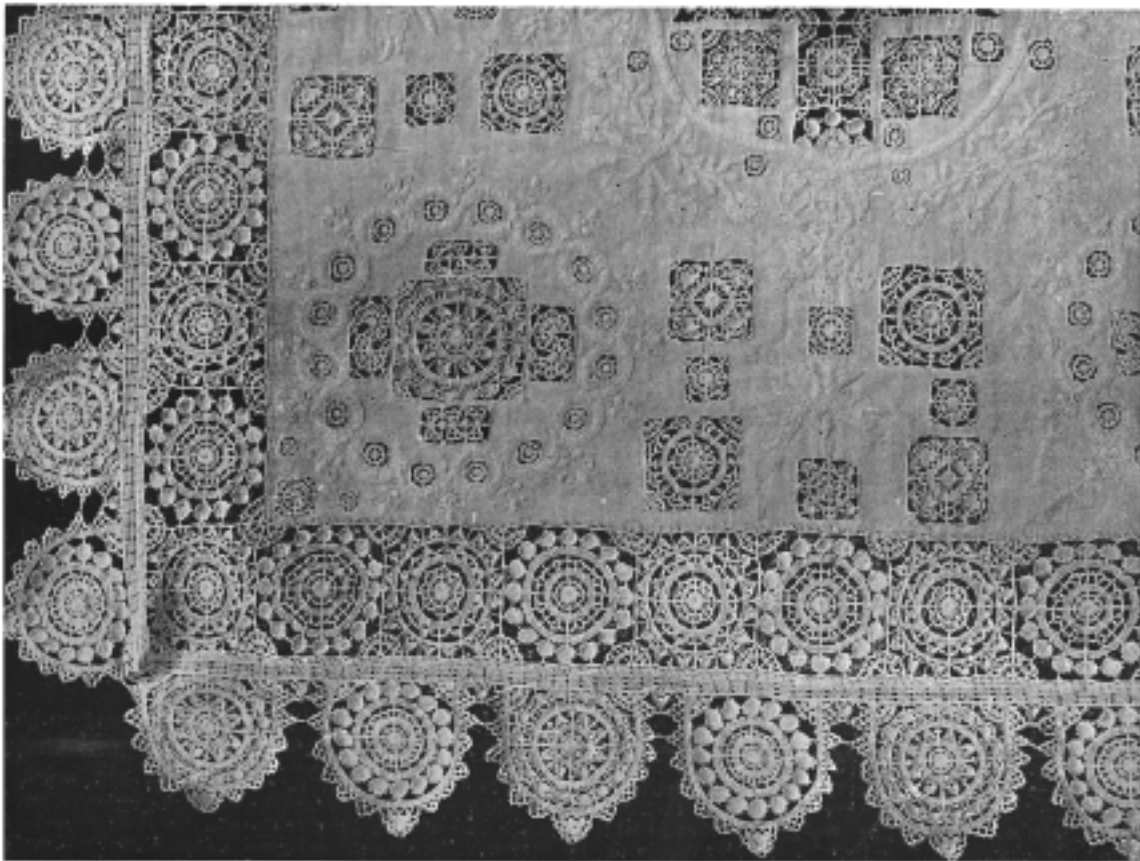
Cutwork and Punto in Aria



RETICILLA INSERTION, WITH POINTED EDGING

linen cushion is to be seen in a fresco by Ambrogio Lorenzetti (completed in 1339) in the Public Palace of Siena. Here Pax reclines upon a linen cushion with an openwork seam, and diamond-shaped

openings filled in with star-like devices. Simple work of this nature, approximating to embroidery, was no doubt produced as early as fine linen was in use in Venice.



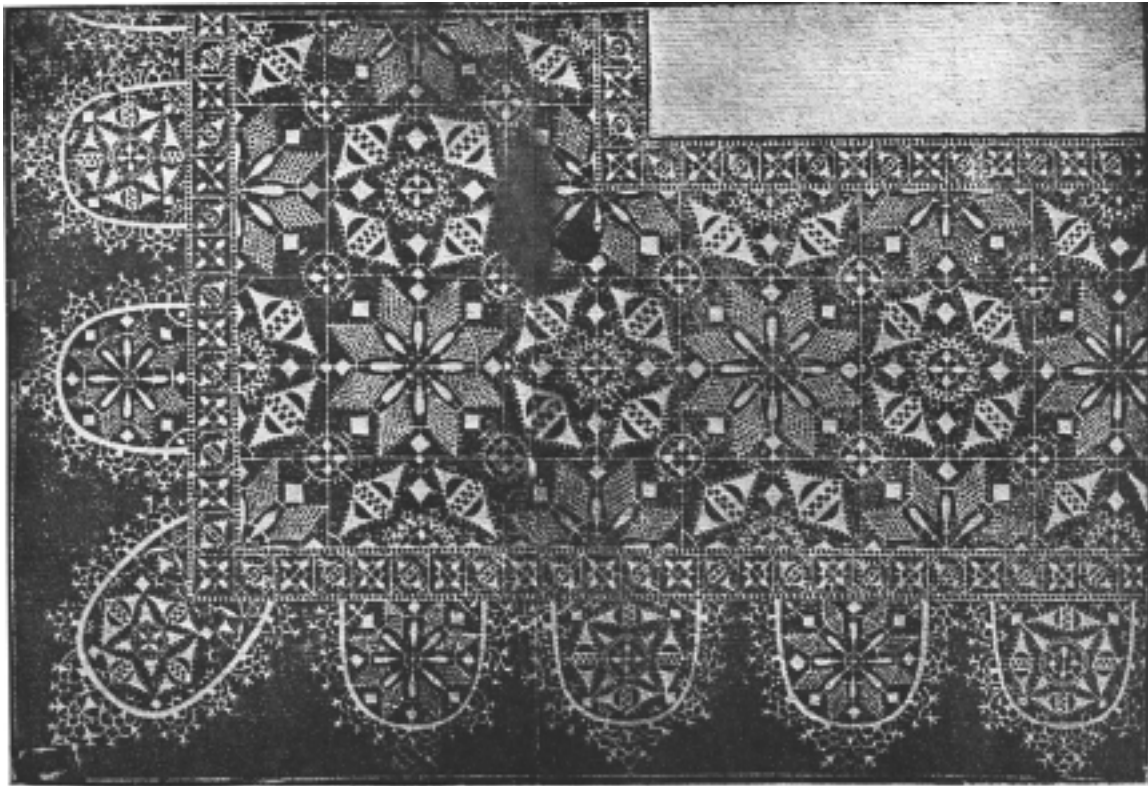
SQUARE EMBROIDERED LINEN, SHOWING *RETICILLA* INSERTIONS AND EDGING OF NEEDLEPOINT (*PUNTO IN ARIA*)
EARLY 17TH CENTURY MUSÉE DE CLUNY

The Connoisseur

By the evidence of documents, 1493 is the date of the earliest mention of lace. The often-quoted Storza inventory mentions "radelexa," lace of gold, and work *a gruppi*. Earlier references point probably to gold and silver gimp or embroidery.*

Of the pattern books the earliest in date we possess is 1527, there may, however, have been earlier lost editions. Vavassore begins the first book of his we know of (1530) by saying: "Havedo io pel passato alcuni libri di esempli"—having

1527, is one of the earliest.† Putting aside the author's ascription to himself of the credit of having published the first book on the subject, neither patterns nor titles indicate lace work. The first six cuts are designs for embroidery, the rest designs upon squares, to be used for lacis or embroidery. In the work by Antonio Taglienti, 1530,‡ there are also patterns for embroidery to be done upon a foundation of stuff with silks of various colours, and gold and silver thread.



PATTERN FOR *RETICILLA* WITH BORDER OF NEEDLEPOINT
FROM THE PATTERN-BOOK OF ELISABETTA CATANEA PARASOLE (1616)

made myself in the past some books of patterns. The patterns are described as being for *recami*.

That by Alessandro Pagannino, dated Venice,

* See *The History of Lace*, Mrs. Palliser, p. 46. "In 1476, the Venetian Senate decreed that no Punto in Aria whatever, executed either in flax with a needle, or in silver or gold thread, should be used on the curtains or bed-linen in the city or provinces." *Punto in aria* was also applied to embroidery.

"Among the state archives of the ducal family of Este, which reigned in Ferrara for so many centuries, Count Gandini found mentioned in a Register of the Wardrobe, dated 1476 (A.C. 87), an order given for a felt hat 'alla Borgognona,' trimmed with silver and silk gimp made with bobbins. Besides this, in the same document is noted (A.C. 96) a velvet seat with a canopy trimmed at the sides with a frill of gold and silver, made in squares, with bobbins."

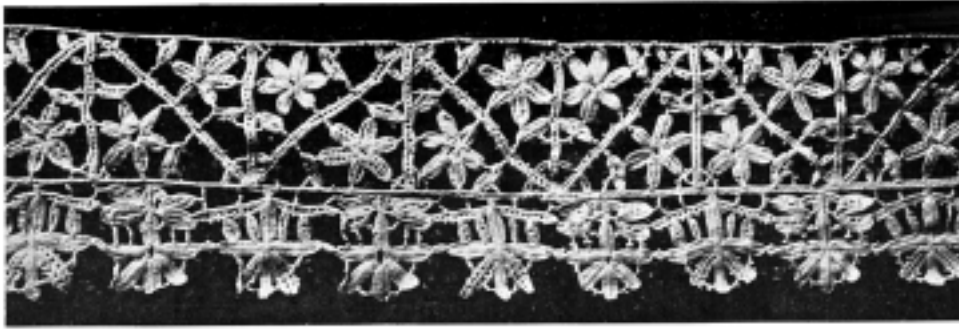
Many embroidery stitches are mentioned, among others, *punto in aere*, a term afterwards used for needlepoint lace. The designs to be worked for collars, bed-hangings, and insertions in pillow-cases, consist of scrolls, arabesques, birds, animals, flowers, herbs, and grasses.

In fact all the earliest engraved pattern-books

† See Mrs. Palliser, *History of Lace*, Appendix, p. 460. In the six pages of instructions we learn the various stitches in which these wonderful patterns may be executed: "damaschino, rilevato, a filo, sopra punto, ingaseato, Ciprioto, croceato, pugliese, scritto, incroceato, in aere, fatto su la rate, a magliata, desfilato, and di racammo."

‡ Brunet gives an edition dated 1528.

Cutwork and Punto in Aria



SPANISH COPY OF ITALIAN NEEDLEPOINT, CLUMSILY MADE

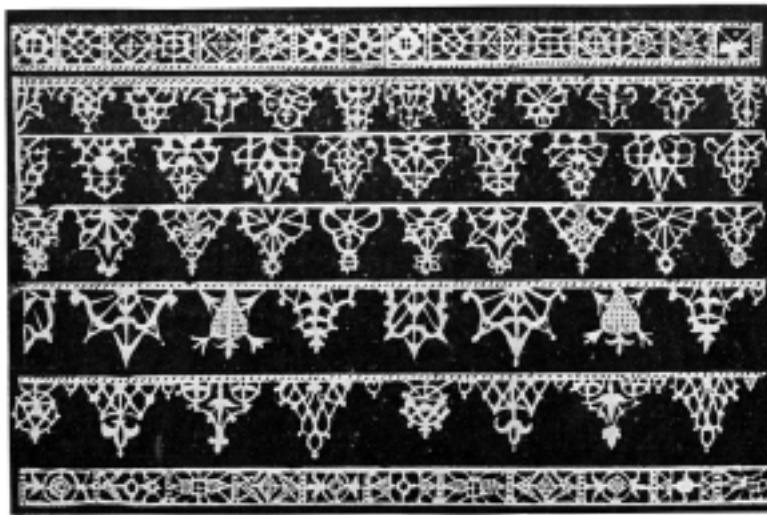
contain only designs for various sorts of embroidery upon material such as darning upon canvas (*punto fa su la rete a maglia quadra*), drawn thread work of reticulated patterns (*punto tirato* or *punto a reticilla*), and cut work (*punto tagliato*) (cut out linen, not the cutwork before described).

It is not until about thirty years later that we have special geometric patterns workable by lace-makers; this development of lace was the con-

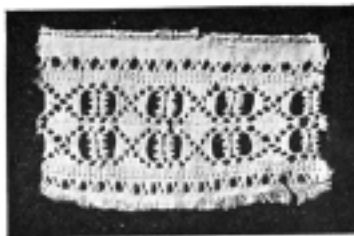
sequence of the innovation of collars and ruffs, which began to be used in 1540.

According to Quicherat, from this date geometric lace made rapid progress, until it culminated in the beautiful and brilliant designs of Vinciolo (1587).*

* The various types of lace appear in the Pattern book of Elisabetta Catanea Parasole (1616). Her patterns are entitled:— (1) Merletti a Piombini; (2) Lavori di Ponto Reticella; (3) Lavori di Ponto Reale e Reticilla (cutwork combined with reticilla); (4) Lavori di ponto in Aria.



PATTERNS FOR EDGINGS AND INSERTIONS OF NEEDLEPOINT
FROM THE *CORONA DELLE NOBILI ET VIRTUOSE DONNE* OF CESARE VECELLEO (VENICE, 1592)



PIECE OF DRAWN WORK