

Pasamanos: A Survey of Spanish Needlework

Spain has a rich tradition of *pasamanos*—handwork. As early as the 4th century BCE, Spain was developing unique adornments. By the height of the Spanish Golden Age in the 1500s, Spanish techniques were renowned throughout Europe. This class will introduce the many varieties of *pasamanos*, when they developed, how they evolved, and what made them distinctive.

What is pasamano?

Pasamano is the Spanish equivalent of *passementerie* or handwork. The term is quite literal; *manos* are hands, and *pasa* derives from *pasar*, which translates (more or less) to doing, passing, happening. So, thing done with the hands—*pasamano*. It is a broad term that can be used to describe all manner of adornments—everything from decorative braid and macramé to drawnwork, network, knotwork, and needlework.

Nowadays, it means the railing on a staircase. This makes internet research challenging.

Timeline of *Pasamanos* Development in Spain

Indicates first known date of appearance—it's entirely possible the technique existed beforehand, but we can't prove it. Most items have not been dated more specifically than the century. Most specific dates come from written mention of that art. I've separated this into external/attached (which could be removed from a given piece of cloth and re-used) and internal, which could not.

	External/Attached	Internal/Worked Into The Cloth
1200	Caireles (Fringe) 13th c Tassels 13th c Trenza 1338	Pasamano 13th c Randa 1374
1300	Macrame 14th c	Rapacejo 14th c
1400	Net & Embroidered Net 15th c Redecilla 15th c Cadenetas 15th c	Deshilado (drawnwork) 1479
1500	Punto de España early 16th c Puntas 16th c Punto Espiritu 16th c Punto de Aguja (Needle Lace) 16th c Reticella 16th c Punto de bolillos (Bobbin Lace) 16th c Ruedas 16th c	Punto Cortado (cutwork) 16th c
1600		Bocadillo 17th c (?)

Pasamano—Hand Work 13th c

Used as both a catch-all term for handwork and as a catch-all term for the earliest forms of the genre. The earliest *pasamano* was braid-like in its form, but ended up with a more open appearance rather like links in a chain.

The earliest example of *pasamano* exists in the Episcopal Museum at Vich in the form of a border on a vestment dating back to the late 13th century (to date, I haven't been able to find images of this). The images here all date to the 15th c, but references to *pasamano* continue in inventories and sumptuary laws in the intervening centuries.



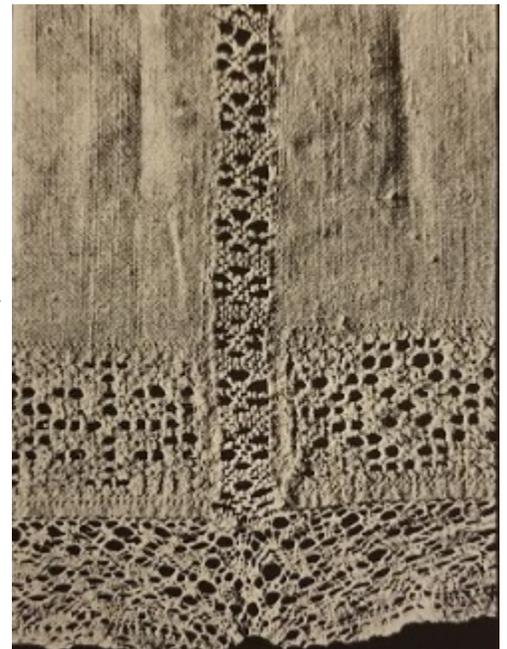
Trenza—Braid 1338

A close braid, often in geometric patterns, akin to modern military braid. Considered to be close to *pasamano*, but distinguished by the more open working of the *pasamano* vs the more closed working of the *trenza*. It's worth noting that the word *trenza* has endured to mean 'braid' beyond period as well.

Trenza is frequently mentioned in sumptuary laws. The earliest mention of it is in a decree from Alfonso XI given in 1338 in which all those but the monarch are banned from wearing it as a trimming. This decree also gives us the 1338 date, although given that it was an art perfected enough to be worthy of royal edict it was almost certainly in development long be-

Randa 1374

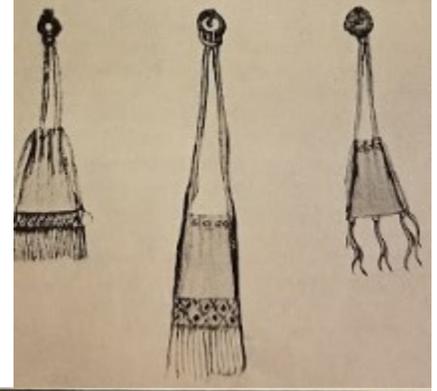
The first mention of *randa* occurs in 1374 in the division of property between two sisters. A common embellishment for bedsheets, it becomes so ubiquitous and prominent that inventories in the 15th century actually note the omission of *randa* from bed linens rather than its inclusion. *Randa* was a common way to join two pieces of fabric, as in the image at right. It involved using a needle to create a lace-like structure encasing the raw edges of the fabric, providing beauty and strength all in one.



Caireles—Fringe 13th c

Caireles indicates fringe; it is unclear whether it was a particular type of fringe, or whether it was a catch-all term for the duration of its use. The first indications of *caireles* occur in the 13th century, when images of women with fringed head coverings become common.

Fringe continues to be a mainstay of Spanish fashion through the end of period. It is commonly found on towels, bedcovers, scarves, and tablecloths. *Caireles* are mentioned very frequently in the inventory of Isabel of Castile (yes, the famous Isabel) - they are dwarfed only by mentions of *randas*, which would have been present in virtually any large item in the inventory. Fringe is well represented in imagery, possibly due to the ease of rendering it.



Tassels 13th c

Tassels arrive roughly contemporaneously with fringe—unsurprising, considering that the technique to create them both is rather closely related. Tassels remain a common decoration throughout the rest of period, gaining in complexity over time. They are never considered as prominent a factor as fringe, *randa*, or other elements which are often called out in inventories and other such accounts for their value. Rather, tassels seem to be an adornment additional to the rest. The two attendants in the image below both have tassels on their belt pouches.



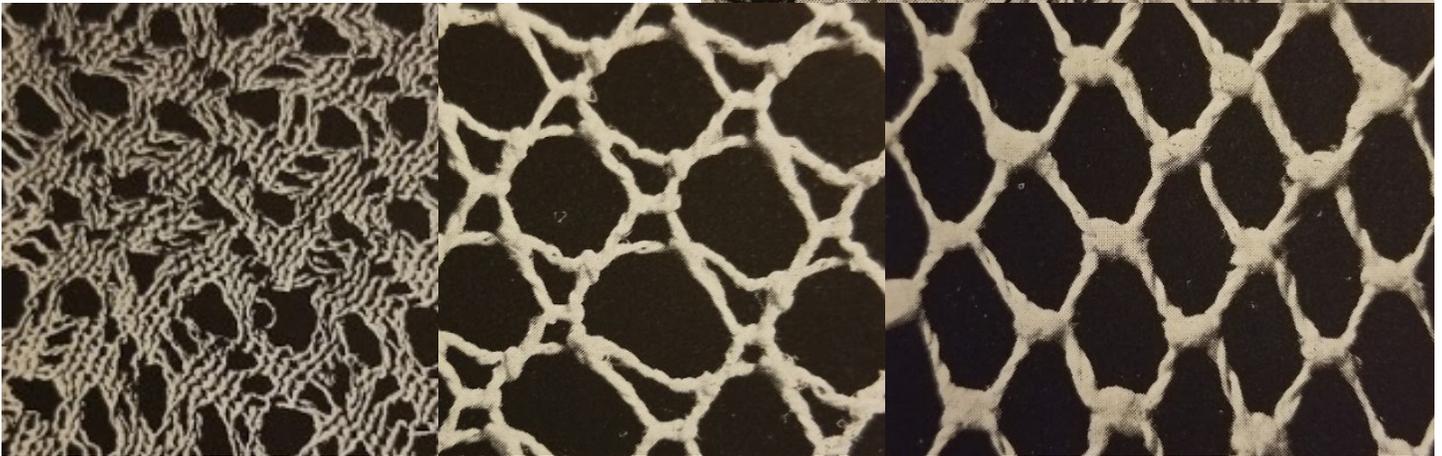
Rapacejo—Macramé (Yes, Really) 14th c

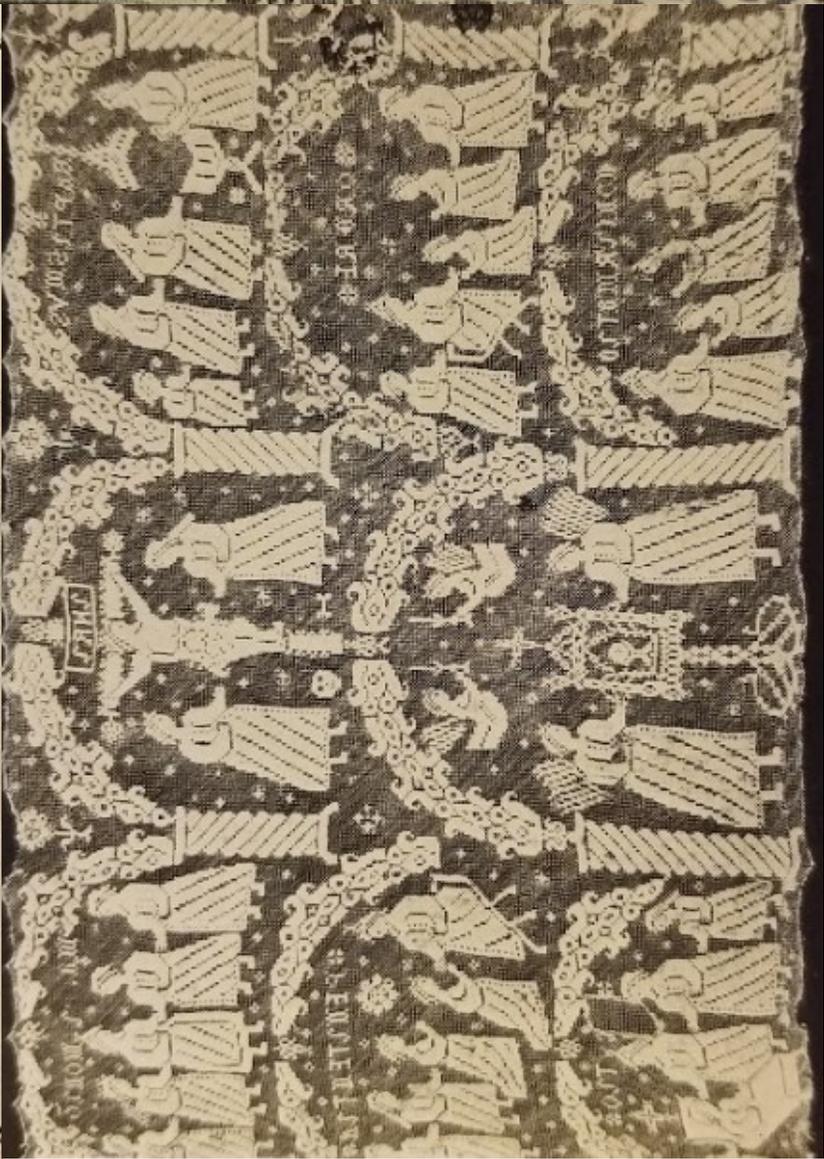
After the development of fringe, it is only a short leap to twisting those fringed threads together in an early form of the modern art of macramé. Little is known about how this would have been done; it seems to have been like so many household arts, something that was passed down within the family and rarely formally written down.

Often found on tablecloths, bed hangings, and other such decorative objects, but rarely found on clothing. This is a distinction from fringe, which is common on clothing as well. Early macramé is often combined with other decorative traditions, as seen in the image below. Not only is the fringe elaborately detailed and worked, but extensive embroidery decorates the tablecloth here. Bonus *randa* on the *camisa* of the woman sitting on the far right and the towels held by the attendants, and possible *trenza* on the gentleman next to her in the red (look right at the base of his neck).

Redecilla (net) 15th c

Originally seen as actual fishing nets, netting quickly spread to headwear and cushions (right), network became incredibly elaborate (bottom). Knotting and darning could be complex in their own right (middle). Darning stitch was often used for the embroidery within the net, and most embroidered network was done on a ground of square, knotted mesh. Often made of linen or metallic threads; mentioned in inventories especially when made of a particularly valuable material. This is an area where significantly more research is needed—terms change and vary as the art evolves, and lots of extant pieces exist.

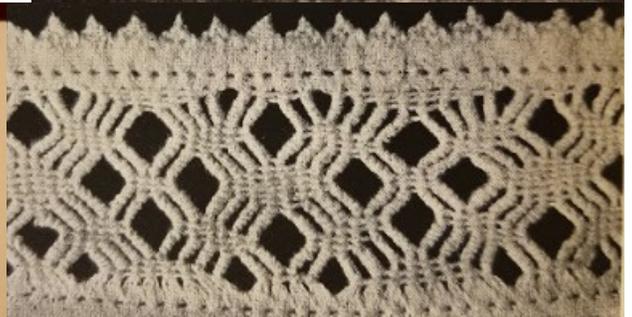




Deshilado (drawnwork) 1479

Drawnwork rose to prominence in the 15th century, being mentioned in the inventory of the Duchess of Albuquerque and queen Juana. The bonnet at the bottom right was said to have been worn by Juana's son, Carlos V of Spain. While the drawnwork was often executed using the same fabric as the ground (at right), but was also frequently executed with contrasting thread (as in the *gorguera* at bottom left). The contrast threads may have been silk, but were equally often golden or silver metallic thread.

Designs could range from simple and geometric to complex and figural. Firsthand accounts of some of the later drawnwork indicate it is so fine that it at first appears to be lace-



Cadenetas 15th c

Cadenetas is a bit of a mystery; it's described as being made of spun metallic threads, but is also light enough to be used on a ruff. No definite extant exemplars have been determined.

Punto Espiritu 16th c

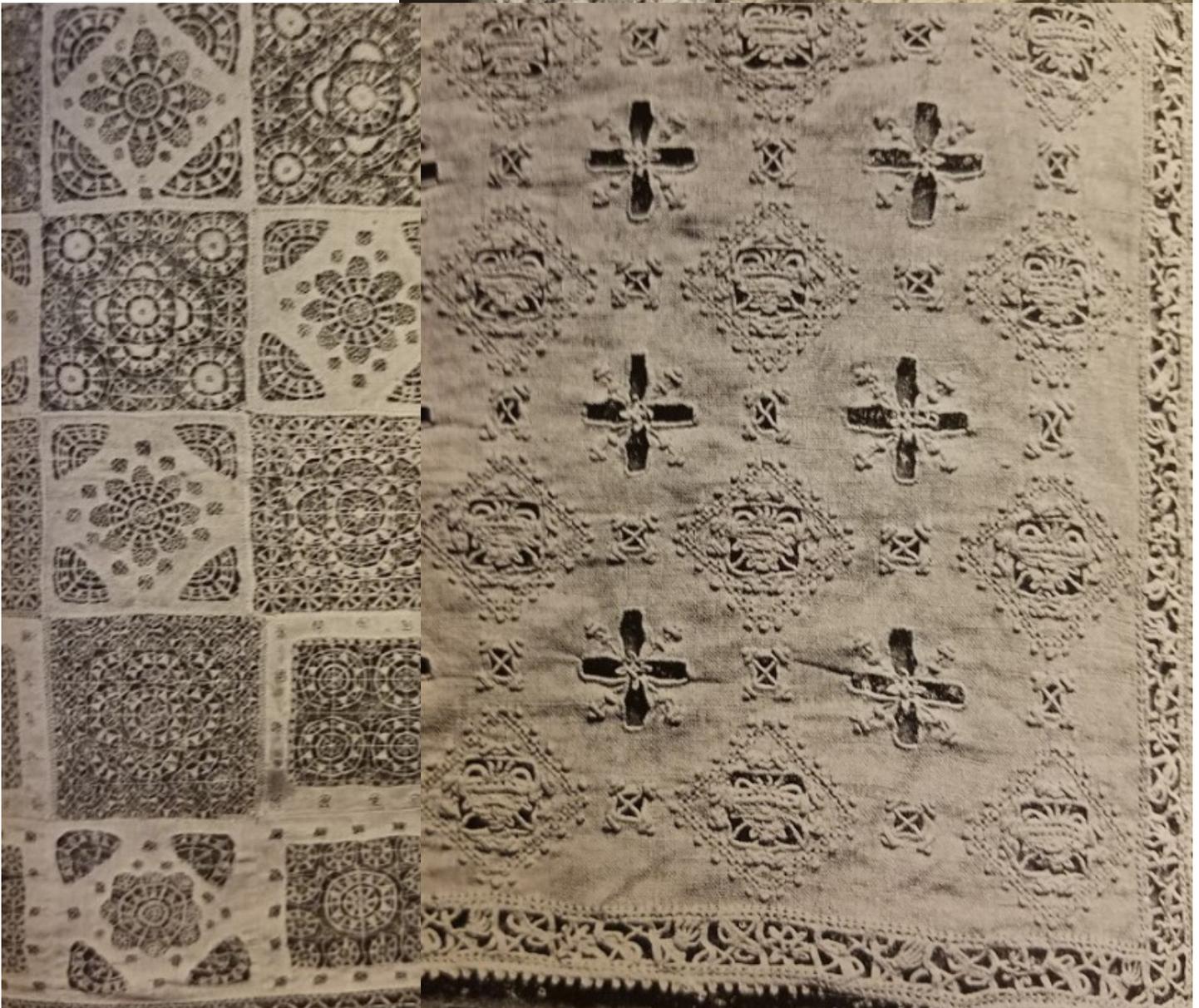
Drawn work which would then be worked over with a particular type of loop stitch, ultimately leaving a quatrefoil pattern (at right)



Punto Cortado (cutwork) 16th c

Punto cortado is closely related to drawn work, and was often combined with net work. The technique involved measuring and cutting out a pattern in a cloth ground, securing the edges with buttonhole stitch, and then (optionally) filling in the remaining holes with needlework.

Several unique styles emerged over time, but perhaps most characteristic was *bocadillo* (17th c) which involved turning under the edges of the cutwork before stitching it, which caused an almond or crescent shape to form in the finished product.



Reticella 16th c

Reticella is a lace-drawnwork hybrid that evolved after the development of drawnwork and before the elevation of lace to the heights it would attain in the 17th century. There are two main techniques which can be used to form *reticella*: it may have been formed by pulling threads and then using those same threads to form a lacework on the garment. Alternatively, it could indicate lace which had been made with the aid of a parchment pattern, primarily using a button stitch. Both were known as *reticella*, and the latter eventually eclipsed the former. Regardless of the method, the lacework would traditionally be pointed lace bearing some similarities to *puntas* (see below).

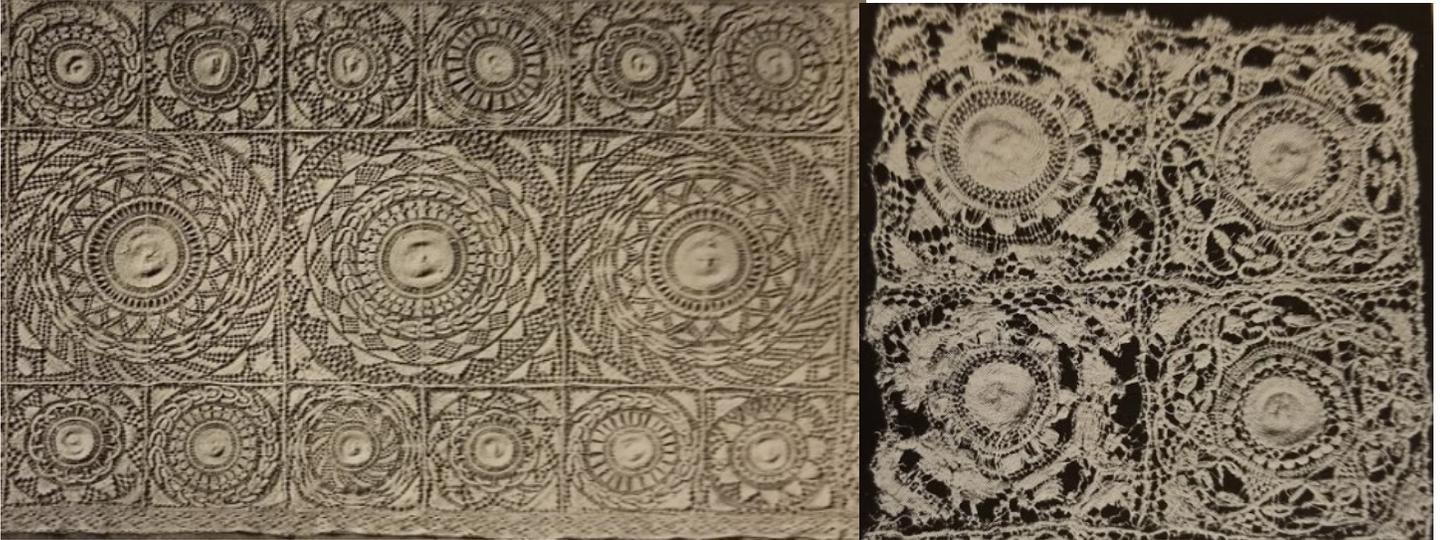
The style was so distinctive and popular that it spread beyond Spain (or possibly, developed alongside the Spanish variant—more research needed). Italy and Flanders both produced it as well, and the Spanish elite would freely trade with their neighbors for the *reticella* they produced. Along with many other forms of drawn work, *reticella* was often banned by sumptuary laws. The royalty was largely unaffected by these laws, and would freely wear the adornment.

Reticella should not be confused with *redecilla*, the previously discussed Spanish net work.



Ruedas 16th c

Originally incorporated into drawnwork, *ruedas* are an enduringly popular motif in Spanish needlework of all stripes. They continue to be found in lace from the 16th century onward, and are a popular motif in *Punto de España*. This is another area ripe for more research—it's a highly distinctive motif and I want to know how it was done, both with drawnwork and with lace!



Puntas 16th c

This elementary form of lace is an ancestor of Spanish needle lace in its more full-fledged form. Characterized by the points in the design, *puntas* was created with the use of a needle. Florence Lewis May gives an excellent description of the craft of early needle lace in *Hispanic Lace and Lace Making*:

“Early needle laces had the pattern traced first upon a piece of parchment which was then attached to a cloth foundation, formed of two pieces of linen. The lace was then begun by working the main lines of the design upon the parchment, these fastened to the cloth at intervals by means of small stitches. Connecting threads, called ties or bars, were inserted

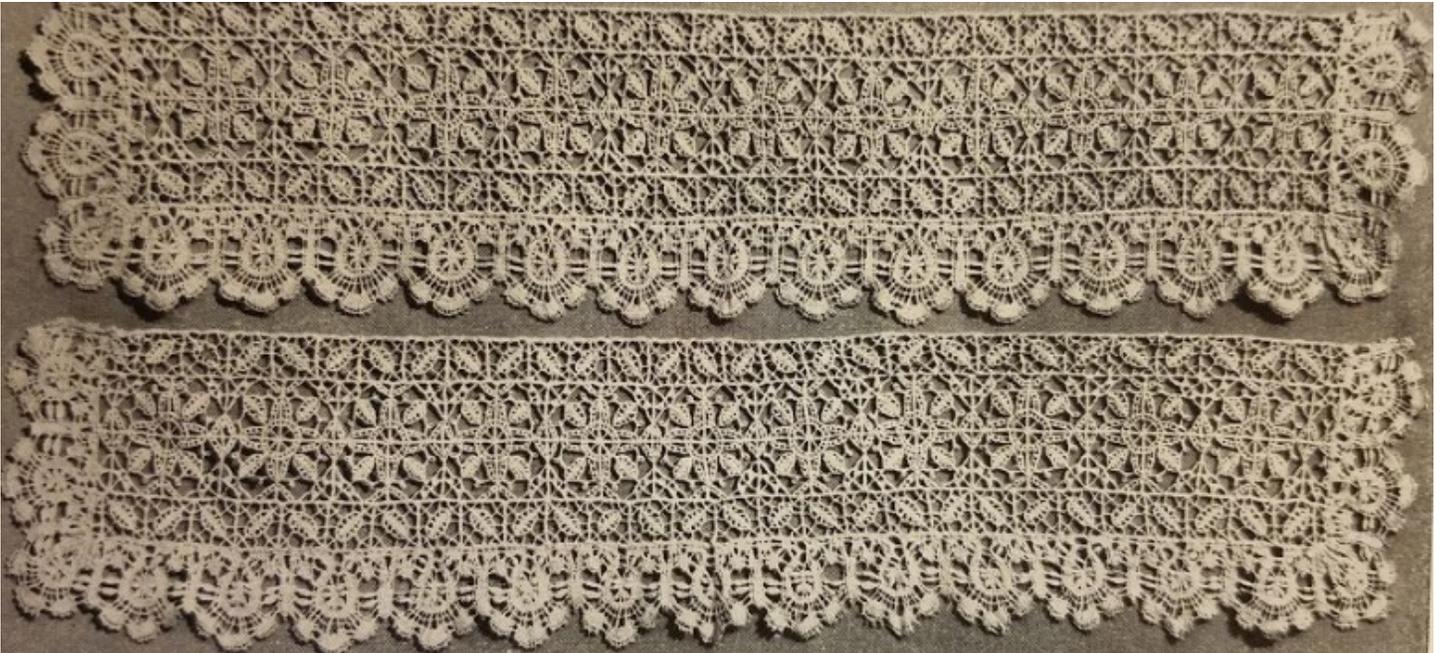


between the outlines while the spaces which they enclosed were filled in with fancy stitches. When this was finished, a sharp instrument, passed between the two pieces of linen, released the lace.”

This lace was characteristically made of metallic thread in Spain during its earliest days, later incorporating colored silks and leading to the development of *punto de España*.

Punto de Aguja (Needle Lace)—16th c

Punto de Aguja, or needle lace, was the natural successor of *puntas*. It became wildly popular in Spain, in many cases displacing embroidery. With needle lace, highly complex designs could be created. The simplest methodologies involved buttonhole stitch, but designs evolved wildly. While the decoration would be left of same-colored thread in some cases, it was quite common (and distinctively Spanish) to adorn the work with metallic or brightly colored silk threads. Needle lace appears to have evolved organically in Spain. It can be seen around the edges of the image below. The main body of the below is *punto de bolillos*, or bobbin lace.



Punto de bolillos (Bobbin Lace)—16th c

Unlike *punto de aguja*, which appears to have evolved organically from the early *punta*, *punto de bolillos* was likely imported from elsewhere. There are two theories: the first that it may have been imported by Moorish artisans to both Andalusia and Sicily, and the second that it was Flemish artists who brought it to Spain at some point in the 16th century, possibly even trading instruction in *punto de bolillos* for Spain's trade secrets of *punto de aguja*. By the 16th century, both types of lace were in wide use. *Punto de bolillos* borrowed heavily from embroidery techniques as well; there is indication of potential cross-sharing of Spanish bobbin lace into embroidery patterns in England and elsewhere.

Lace could be made in a wide variety of colors. Linen, silk, and metallic (especially gold) were common in both *punto de bolillos* and *punto de aguja*. Additionally, the two techniques were often used together, as above. The *punto de bolillos* was used to form the repeating "band" or other such element and then accented with *punto de aguja* for the edging.

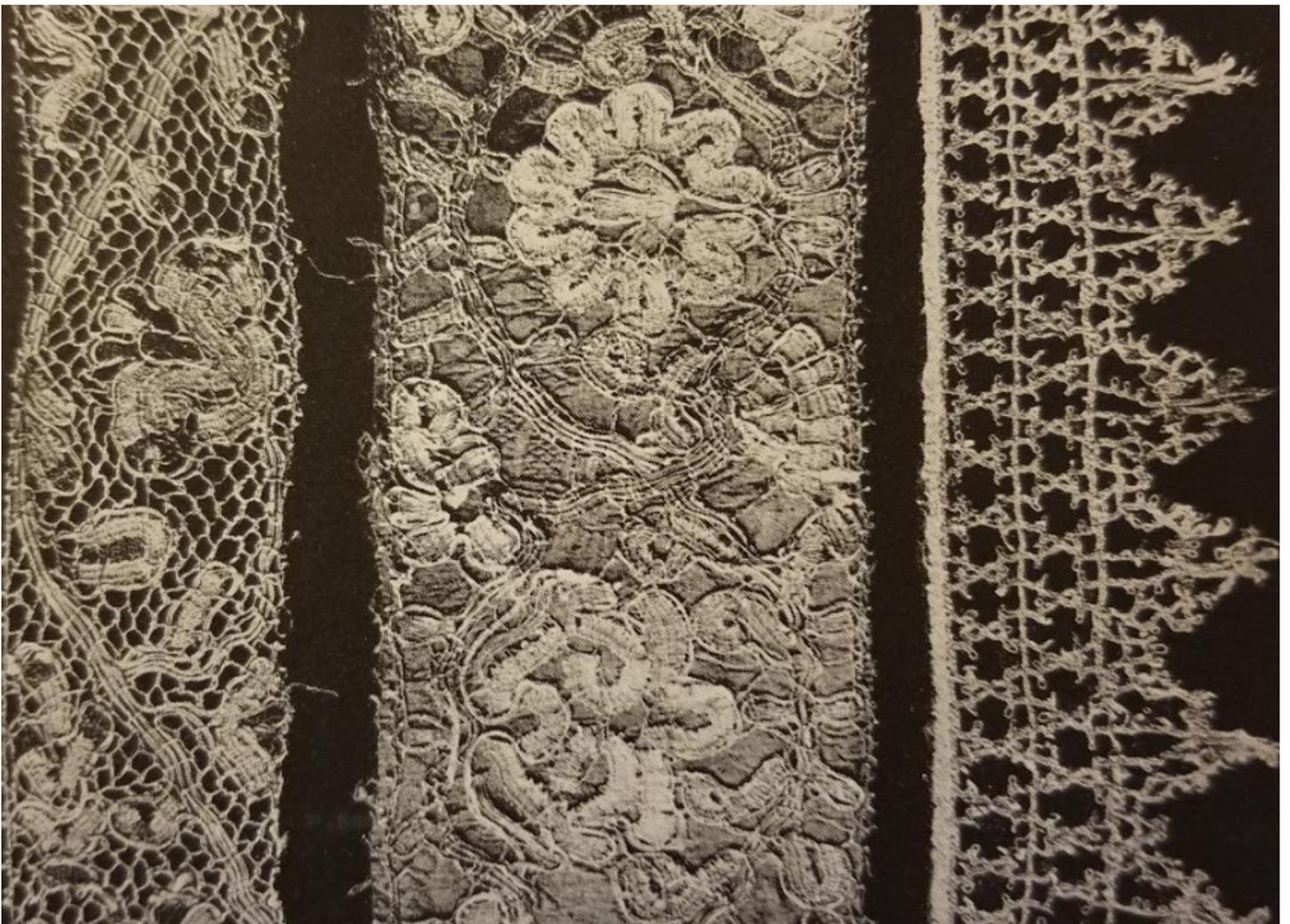
These techniques together would contribute to the development of Spain's best-known lace: *punto de España*, a style of lace that would endure for hundreds of years and was quite distinctively Spanish.

Punto de España—early 16th

Combining both *punto de aguja* and *punto de bolillos* and the Spanish love for interweaving bright metallics and silks into their laces, *punto de España* reached such prominence during the Spanish Golden Age at the end of the 17th century that it is almost better known as *point d'Espagne* because of its notoriety in France.

These laces rely heavily on bobbins, and as such may not have a mesh ground. We have descriptions of certain special bobbins required to construct *punto de España*, indicating that they may have been up to 20 cm in length. By the mid-1600s, *punto de España* was well known enough that it (or at least, items claiming to be it) were manufactured outside of Spain. *Punto de España* occupied an interesting time, as sumptuary laws were aggressively targeting the gold and silver that were commonly favored during the golden age of lace-making. As a result, flax and other threads were not infrequently used.

Interestingly (and as distinct from other locations), Spain did not produce a lacemaker's guild. It is unclear why. It is possible that lacemaking was an art that was done in the home for home use. It may also have been folded into the more general *Pasamaneros* (handworkers) guild. This is an area ripe for research—with such complexity, it's interesting to understand why it was (or was not) viewed as a profession per se.





Punto de España in full color (from a partial of a dress). Spanish, late 16th/early 17th centuries



Detail from a suit thought to belong to Gustavo Adolfo, showing *trenza* (braid) detail. Real Armeria, Estocolmo, Suiza



They definitely also used embroidery too. Detail of a men's marriage shirt, 16th century, from the collection of the Instituto de Valencia de Don Juan, Madrid.



Reticella, actually from Italy but an extant is an extant. Late 16th/early 17th century. In the collection of the Palazzo Madama-Museo Civico de Arte Antiguo de Turin.

Sources

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<https://www.flickr.com/photos/fiberferret/albums/72157656258313642>

Questions? Comments? Thoughts?

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