Dubrovnik Lace (*Point de Raguse*): Origins, Techniques, and Attribution in a European Context

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Review

Dubrovnik lace, historically known as Point de Raguse, represents one of the most intriguing phenomena in the history of European lace-making. Although highly esteemed and widely recognised in European artistic and commercial circles during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, its origin, manufacturing technique, and surviving material evidence remain insufficiently understood. This paper analyses historical, archival, and scholarly sources relating to Dubrovnik lace, with particular emphasis on its technical characteristics, terminology, and the cultural and historical context of the Republic of Ragusa. Special attention is devoted to the interpretations of various scholars who associate this lace with Italian, Greek, and local Dalmatian traditions, as well as to the question of its possible production, distribution, or commercial reattribution. The paper also examines the influence of social, economic, and political factors, including trade relations with Venice and the Ottoman Empire, together with the decline of lace production following the earthquake of 1667. The aim of this study is to synthesise existing knowledge and scholarly interpretations while demonstrating the complexity of attributing Dubrovnik lace within the history of European textile craftsmanship.

Keywords: *Point de Raguse; Republic of Ragusa; needle lace; reticella; textile history; Mediterranean trade networks; attribution*

Pregled

Dubrovačka čipka (*Point de Raguse*): problem podrijetla, tehnike i atribucije u europskom kontekstu

Dubrovačka čipka, poznata pod nazivom Point de Raguse, predstavlja jedan od najintrigantnijih fenomena europske povijesti čipkarstva. Iako je u 16. i 17. stoljeću bila visoko cijenjena i prepoznata u europskim umjetničkim i trgovačkim krugovima, njezino podrijetlo, tehnika izrade i materijalni ostaci do danas ostaju nedovoljno razjašnjeni. Ovaj rad analizira povijesne, arhivske i stručne izvore koji se odnose na dubrovačku čipku, s posebnim naglaskom na njezine tehničke karakteristike, terminologiju te kulturno-povijesni kontekst Dubrovačke Republike. Posebna pozornost posvećena je interpretacijama različitih autora koji čipku povezuju s talijanskim, grčkim i lokalnim dalmatinskim tradicijama, kao i pitanju njezine moguće proizvodnje, distribucije ili trgovačke reatribucije. Rad također razmatra utjecaj društvenih, ekonomskih i političkih čimbenika, uključujući trgovačke veze s Venecijom i Osmanskim Carstvom, kao i propast proizvodnje nakon potresa 1667. godine. Cilj rada je sintetizirati postojeća znanja i interpretacije te prikazati složenost problema atribucije dubrovačke čipke u povijesti europskog tekstilnog obrta.

Ključne riječi: *Point de Raguse; Dubrovačka Republika; čipka na iglu; reticella; tekstilna povijest; mediteranske trgovačke mreže; atribucija*

1. Introduction

Dubrovnik lace, historically known as *Point de Raguse*, derives its historical name from Ragusa, the medieval Latin and Italian name for the present-day city of Dubrovnik. Throughout the existence of the Republic of Ragusa (1358–1808), the city was internationally known as Ragusa, and this historical name became firmly established in European sources referring to the luxury lace associated with Dubrovnik. Today, *Point de Raguse* is regarded as one of the least researched yet simultaneously one of the most intriguing phenomena in the history of European lace-making. During the sixteenth century, and particularly throughout the seventeenth century, the term *Point de Raguse* appeared in numerous European sources, where it denoted a luxury lace comparable to the finest products of Venice, Genoa, and other important lace-making centres. Despite its historical reputation, the actual appearance of Dubrovnik lace, the technique by which it was produced, and the extent to which it can be regarded as an indigenous product of the Republic of Ragusa have not yet been conclusively established.

Research into *Point de Raguse* is further complicated by the extremely limited number of surviving examples and the scarcity of archival and material evidence. Current knowledge of Dubrovnik lace is based primarily on inventories, legal regulations, commercial records, literary sources, and the subsequent interpretations of art historians, ethnologists, and lace historians. Consequently, various theories have emerged concerning its origin, manufacturing technique, and position within the broader Mediterranean lace-making tradition. While some scholars consider *Point de Raguse* to be an authentic product of Dubrovnik, others associate its origins with Greek, Italian, or more generally Levantine lace-making traditions. The development of Dubrovnik lace should be understood within the specific historical context of the Republic of Ragusa, which served as an important commercial and cultural intermediary between Western Europe and the eastern Mediterranean. Extensive connections with Venice, the Italian states, the Ottoman Empire, and the Greek world facilitated the circulation of raw materials, ornamental patterns, technical expertise, and artistic influences, all of which contributed to the development of local textile crafts. Under such circumstances, numerous regional variants of embroidery and lace emerged, many of which are now difficult to attribute unequivocally to a particular geographical area or workshop.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the available historical sources and relevant scholarly literature in order to critically examine the origin, manufacturing techniques, and historical significance of *Point de Raguse*. Particular attention is devoted to the interpretations proposed by the principal scholars who have investigated this subject, to the technical and terminological characteristics associated with Dubrovnik lace, and to the possibilities of attributing surviving historical lace specimens to this tradition. Through a comparative analysis, the study seeks to determine to what extent Point de Raguse may be regarded as a distinct lace-making tradition and to what extent it should instead be understood as part of the wider Mediterranean cultural and production sphere.

2. Previous Research

The origin, manufacturing technique, and identity of Dubrovnik lace (*Point de Raguse*) have attracted the attention of lace historians for more than a century. Despite numerous attempts to explain its origins and characteristics, no scholarly consensus has yet been reached. The principal challenge lies in the extremely limited number of surviving examples that can be reliably attributed to Dubrovnik, while the available written sources are fragmentary, frequently imprecise, and burdened by numerous terminological and interpretative ambiguities. Consequently, the historiography of Dubrovnik lace has developed primarily through attempts to correlate archival evidence with the few surviving textile artefacts and through comparisons with other Mediterranean lace-making traditions. Among the earliest authors to mention *Point de Raguse* are Frauberger (1894), Nevill Jackson (1900), and Palliser (1902) [1-3]. Their studies were produced during a period of growing scholarly interest in the history of European lace-making, when consider-able efforts were devoted to the classification of lace-making techniques and regional production centres. However, their interpretations relied largely on visual comparisons and secondary sources rather than on archival documentation from Dubrovnik. Frauberger (1894) and Palliser (1902) discussed *Point de Raguse* within the context of Greek and eastern Mediterranean lace traditions, associating it with knotting techniques and net-like structures [1,2]. This approach reflects the prevailing tendency of the period to interpret the lace traditions of the eastern Adriatic as part of the broader Levantine cultural sphere, while Dubrovnik itself was rarely acknowledged as an independent lace-making centre. Nevill Jackson (1900) likewise emphasised the similarities between Dubrovnik lace and lace-making traditions known from Italy and the eastern Mediterranean, although he also left its origin unresolved [3].

The first comprehensive attempt to examine Dubrovnik lace systematically was undertaken by

Margaret Taylor Johnstone (1926). Based on a small number of specimens that she considered representtative of the Dubrovnik tradition, she sought to define the technical and stylistic characteristics of *Point de Raguse* [4]. Taylor Johnstone proposed a four-phase developmental chronology and devoted particular attention to the stitches *punto avorio* and *punto di Ragusa*, which she regarded as distinctive features of this group of laces. Her study represents a significant contribution, as it was the first to reconstruct the developmental history of Dubrovnik lace. Nevertheless, many of her conclusions were derived from a limited number of objects of uncertain provenance, and several of her attributions continue to be debated.

An important contribution to the understanding of the terminology and technological characteristics of historical lace was made by Earnshaw (1999), who highlighted the difficulties of linking historical terminology with surviving textile objects. According to Earnshaw, terms such as *punto a groppo, punto avorio, puncetto,* and *punto di Ragusa* should not automatically be interpreted as referring to distinct lace-making techniques or regional schools. Instead, they must be understood within their broader historical and terminological context. Her approach demonstrates the methodological limitations of simplified attributions based solely on historical terminology [5].

The most extensive research on Dubrovnik lace was carried out by Marijana Gušić [6-9], whose publiccations remain the principal reference for the study of this subject. Unlike most foreign scholars, Gušić based her research on Croatian archival sources, museum collections, and ethnographic material from Dubrovnik, Dalmatia, and the Bay of Kotor. Her studies emphasised the importance of local traditions of whitework embroildery, reticella, koprenica, and other textile techniques that may have contributed to the development of *Point de Raguse*. At the same time, she pointed out that lace production along the eastern Adriatic coast was historically subject to strong Venetian influence, resulting in frequent overlaps between stylistic characteristics, manufacturing techniques, and commercial designations. Although Gušić's work remains the most comprehensive interpretation of Dubrovnik lace, some of her hypotheses cannot be conclusively verified because of the lack of direct material evidence.

Later studies, including those by Ricci (1913), Eckhel (2012), Tortora and Johnson (2013), and Božanić Bezić (1999), largely confirm the complexity of the problem and emphasise the need for caution when addressing questions of attribution [10-13]. Rather than seeking a definitive explanation of the origin of *Point de Raguse*, more recent scholarship increasingly advocates examining Dubrovnik lace within the broader Mediterranean context, shaped by intensive cultural and commercial interactions between Italy, Dalmatia, Greece, and the Levant.

The existing body of research demonstrates that scholarly interpretations of Dubrovnik lace continue to oscillate between two opposing viewpoints. On the one hand, some authors regard Point de Raguse as an authentic product of Dubrovnik, whereas others interpret the name as a commercial designation under which laces of different origins were distributed throughout the European market. Owing to the absence of securely attributed specimens and the limitations of the available historical evidence, neither interpretation has been conclusively confirmed. Consequently, the identity of Dubrovnik lace remains an open question, and its investigation continues to require the critical integration of archival research, technological analysis, and comparative studies of historical textiles.

3. The European Reputation of *Point de Raguse* and Historical Sources

During the seventeenth century, the name *Point de Raguse* enjoyed considerable prestige among Europe's luxury textile products. Although very little material evidence has survived to enable a precise reconstruction of its appearance and manufacturing technique, numerous historical sources confirm that contemporaries regarded it as a highly valuable lace comparable to the finest products of Venice, Genoa, and other major lace-making centres. This striking contrast between its historical reputation and the present scarcity of surviving examples makes Point de Raguse one of the most intriguing subjects in the history of European textiles [3,5,9].

The most important evidence concerning the social and economic status of Dubrovnik lace is provided by French sources dating from the second half of the seventeenth century. In the satirical poem *La Révolte des Passemens* (1661), *Point de Raguse* is listed among the most prestigious and expensive laces available on the European market. The poem portrays Dubrovnik lace as a luxury commodity whose high price contributed to the extravagance of the French aristocracy, while its quality is compared with that of the celebrated laces of Venice and Aurillac. Although these references do not provide a technical description of the lace, they clearly demonstrate its widespread recognition and commercial value beyond the territory of the Republic of Ragusa. The fact that *Point de Raguse* appears in a literary work satirising aristocratic extravagance further indicates that the name was sufficiently well known to serve as a symbol of luxury and social prestige [5,9,14].

Further evidence of its reputation is provided by French economic policies implemented during the reign of Louis XIV. In 1654, increased import duties were imposed on lace imported from Dubrovnik, Venice, and Genoa, indicating the significant presence of these products on the French market. Even more revealing is the royal edict of 1665, which promoted the organised production of French lace modelled on lace from Venice, Genoa, Ragusa, and other foreign centres. During the same period, the French Crown gradually restricted the importation of foreign lace in order to protect domestic manufacture. The inclusion of Ragusa alongside the leading European lace-making centres demonstrates that its production was regarded as an important model for the development of the French lace industry [2,3,5,9]. Archival records from Dubrovnik likewise confirm the widespread use of lace in both everyday and ecclesiastical contexts within the Republic. Throughout the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth century, lace is frequently mentioned as an ornament on household linens, tablecloths, ceremonial dress, and liturgical textiles. Particularly significant are the sumptuary regulations issued in 1624, which sought to restrict the use of expensive lace trimmings on clothing. The very fact that the authorities regulated the width and manufacture of lace edgings demonstrates not only their widespread use but also their considerable monetary value. Such regulations were by no means unique to Dubrovnik but formed part of broader European efforts to curb luxury consumption, comparable to measures introduced in France, Italy, and other countries [9,11,13].

Despite the relatively large number of written references, historical sources do not clearly establish what *Point de Raguse* actually represented. In different documents, the term appears to denote a particular type of lace, a specific manufacturing technique, an individual stitch, or even a luxury commodity associated with Dubrovnik's commercial networks. This ambiguity is one of the principal reasons why scholars have been unable to reach a consensus regarding its true nature. While some researchers argue that the term referred to a distinctive local lace-making technique, others suggest that it functioned as a commercial designation under which laces of different origins were marketed throughout Europe [4,5,9]. A further obstacle is the almost complete absence of securely attributed surviving examples. Unlike Venetian, Genoese, or Alençon lace, for which numerous specimens and technical pattern sources have survived, Dubrovnik lace is known primarily through written records and later scholarly interpretations. Consequently, its European reputation rests not on a substantial body of surviving artefacts but on the consistent appearance of the name *Point de Raguse* among the most highly esteemed luxury laces mentioned in seventeenth-century European sources. It is precisely this disproportion between its remark-able historical reputation and the almost complete disappearance of its material evidence that makes Dubrovnik lace one of the most challenging subjects in the history of textiles [3-5,9].

4. The Question of the Origin of Dubrovnik Lace

The origin of the lace known as *Point de Raguse* remains one of the most debated issues in the existing scholarship. Although the name itself unmistakably refers to Dubrovnik, historically known as Ragusa, the scarcity of surviving specimens and the limited number of direct written sources have given rise to a variety of interpretations concerning its origin. Over the past century, scholars have proposed theories that regard Dubrovnik lace either as an indigenous product of the Republic of Ragusa or as a lace-making tradition rooted in Greek, Levantine, or Italian traditions [2,4,5,9].

Proponents of the Dubrovnik origin theory argue that the name Point de Raguse was consistently associated with Dubrovnik in seventeenth-century European sources, at a time when the city was an important commercial and cultural centre on the eastern Adriatic. French literary works, fiscal regulations, and other documentary sources mention Ragusa alongside Venice and Genoa as a recognised lace-making centre, suggesting the existence of a product sufficiently distinctive to be identified by its own geographical name [3,5,9,14]. Additional support for this interpretation is provided by evidence of a well-developed textile industry within the Republic of Ragusa. Numerous archival records refer to various forms of embroidery, lace, and decorative textiles, as well as legal regulations governing their production and use. These sources confirm that lace-making was practised in Dubrovnik throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, although they do not provide sufficient information to determine the manufacturing technique of *Point de Raguse* with certainty [9,13]. A particularly important contribution to the Dubrovnik theory was made by Marijana Gušić, who sought to relate historical evidence to the traditional embroidery and lace-making practices of Dubrovnik, Konavle, the Bay of Kotor, and the wider Dalmatian region. In her view, the development of Dubrovnik lace should be understood as a continuation of local textile traditions, with koprenica, reticella, and early forms of needle lace occupying a central position. Gušić argued that local workshops and monastic communities created the technical foundations for the

development of the lace that later became known as *Point de Raguse* [6,7,9]. Nevertheless, this interpretation relies to a considerable extent on reconstruction and analogy, since no surviving specimens unequivocally demonstrate a developmental sequence linking local traditional techniques with the luxury export lace described in European historical sources.

In contrast, several foreign scholars have questioned the exclusively Dubrovnik origin of *Point de Raguse*. Frauberger (1894) and Palliser (1902) [1,2] discussed Dubrovnik lace within chapters devoted to Greek lace, proposing that it originated on the Greek islands or within monastic communities of the eastern Mediterranean. Such interpretations stem largely from the absence of convincing material evidence for organised lace production in Dubrovnik, whereas valuable examples of early lace displaying certain technical and stylistic similarities had already been documented in Greece, Crete, and the Ionian Islands. These authors also emphasised Dubrovnik's role as an important commercial intermediary between the Levant and Western Europe. Given that Dubrovnik merchants maintained extensive commercial connections with the Greek world and the Ottoman Empire for centuries, it is conceivable that luxury lace produced elsewhere may have reached European markets under the name Ragusa through Dubrovnik's commercial networks [1,2,5]. This possibility is further supported by the historical circumstances of the period. Following the fall of Constantinople and during the Ottoman expansion across the eastern Mediterranean, significant population movements from the Greek territories to the Adriatic coast facilitated the transmission of artistic and artisanal knowledge, including textile techniques [7,8,13]. It therefore cannot be excluded that certain lace-making practices reached Dubrovnik from the Greek cultural sphere. However, this hypothesis likewise lacks direct evidence demonstrating that *Point de Raguse* was exclusively a Greek product.

The problem is further complicated by the fact that the boundaries between regional lace-making traditions during the early modern period were considerably more fluid than modern historiography often assumes. Lace patterns, technical knowledge, raw materials, and finished products circulated continuously between Venice, Dalmatia, Greece, and other Mediterranean regions. As Europe's leading lace-making centre, Venice exerted a profound influence on lace design, manufacturing techniques, and terminology. Consequently, many products originating from the eastern Adriatic entered European markets under Venetian designations, irrespective of their actual place of manufacture [3,6,9,11]. At the same time, several scholars have suggested that the international prestige of Venetian lace may have contributed to the gradual replacement or disappearance of the name *Point de Raguse* from wider European usage [3,6,9].

A critical evaluation of the existing interpretations demonstrates that none of the proposed theories is supported by sufficient evidence to provide a definitive explanation of the origin of Dubrovnik lace. The Dubrovnik theory convincingly explains the historical association between the name Ragusa and Dubrovnik, as well as the existence of local textile production, yet it cannot securely identify surviving examples of *Point de Raguse*. Conversely, the Greek theory successfully highlights the importance of eastern Mediterranean influences and commercial exchange but fails to explain why the name Ragusa continued to be used consistently in European sources over several decades if the lace had originated elsewhere [2,4,5,9]. It therefore appears more plausible that *Point de Raguse* emerged within a zone of intensive cultural and economic interaction linking Dubrovnik, Venice, and the Greek world, where modern concepts of national or regional identity cannot readily be applied to the production conditions of the early modern period. In this sense, *Point de Raguse* may best be understood as the product of complex Mediterranean cultural interactions, whose original form can still be reconstructed only partially on the basis of surviving written sources and the few extant textile artefacts [4-6,9].

5. Manufacturing Techniques and Terminological Challenges

One of the greatest challenges in the study of Dubrovnik lace lies in the inconsistent and often ambiguous terminology encountered in historical sources. Unlike the leading lace-making centres of Western Europe, where specialised terminology for individual lace-making techniques and lace types gradually developed during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, no comparable terminological system emerged in Dubrovnik or along the eastern Adriatic coast. Consequently, archival records contain numerous terms whose meanings are difficult to define with certainty and even more difficult to associate with specific surviving textile objects. As Earnshaw has observed, an understanding of historical terminology is essential for reconstructing the appearance and manufacturing technique of *Point de Raguse*, since inventories and other archival documents frequently refer to valuable laces without providing detailed descriptions of their technical characteristics [5].

Among the terms most frequently associated with Dubrovnik lace are *punto a groppo, punto avorio,*

punto di Ragusa, puncetto, reticella, and *punto in aria*. It is not always evident whether these terms denote particular lace types, specific manufacturing techniques, or individual stitches employed in the construction of lace structures. The problem is further complicated by the fact that the same terms often changed meaning over time or were applied to different techniques in different parts of Europe [5,9].

In the specialist literature, *Point de Raguse* is frequently associated with *punto a groppo* (knotted lace), in which the word *groppo* refers to the knot as the fundamental structural element of the lace. Such lace was produced by joining short threads into sequences of knots that formed net-like or decorative edging patterns. These laces were most commonly used to ornament silk handkerchiefs, liturgical textiles, and other luxury textile objects. Earnshaw identifies *punto a groppo* as one of the earliest lace-making techniques practised during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and suggests that it may have developed in Italy, Spain, or Dubrovnik. At the same time, she emphasises that its precise place of origin cannot be established with certainty, illustrating the broader complexity of determining the origin of Dubrovnik lace [5]. Similar interpretations are found in the works of Pfannschmidt and Nevill Jackson, who describe *Point de Raguse* as a net-like lace created through knotting and thread-linking techniques, displaying certain similarities to later forms of macramé and guipure lace [3,4].

A particularly important place in discussions of Dubrovnik lace is occupied by the term *punto avorio*. The name itself, referring to the colour of ivory, suggests a lace of exceptional refinement and aesthetic quality. Powys describes it as a characteristic stitch of Byzantine or eastern Mediterranean origin, whereas Taylor Johnstone considers *punto avorio* to represent the principal technical component of *Point de Raguse* [4,15]. According to her interpretation, it is a particular variation of the buttonhole stitch in which the formation of each stitch produces a compact and tightly secured knot. This technique created a dense surface that could resemble woven fabric while simultaneously retaining the characteristic openness of lace. The stitch could be worked in both directions, each successive row building upon the previous one to produce a stable and compact structure. Taylor Johnstone [4] further argues that the contrast between densely worked and more open areas is one of the distinguishing charac-teristics of Dubrovnik lace. Comparable techniques were also known in Asia Minor and other parts of the eastern Mediterranean, leading some scholars to regard them as evidence of Greek or Byzantine influence [16].

Within the same context, the term *punto di Ragusa* appears in several studies as a particular variation of *punto avorio*. Taylor Johnstone describes it as a freer execution of the same stitch, characterised by knots that are more widely spaced or arranged less regularly within the lace structure [4]. It remains uncertain, however, whether *punto di Ragusa* refers to a distinct manufacturing technique or merely to a local variation of a more widespread method. The problem is compounded by the fact that the term punto di Ragusa has been used in different publications both to describe an individual stitch and to designate an entire group of laces. Such terminological inconsistency is one of the principal reasons why technical and geographical definitions frequently overlap in the literature [4,5].

The techniques of reticella and punto in aria also occupy an important place in discussions of the origin of Dubrovnik lace. Gušić argues that understanding their development is essential for interpreting the emergence of *Point de Raguse*, since they represent some of the earliest forms of needle lace along the eastern Adriatic coast [9]. *Reticella* developed from the technique of cutting and withdrawing threads from densely woven linen fabric, after which the remaining threads were reinforced and ornamented with needlework. The earliest examples consist predominantly of geometric motifs worked on the fabric ground, whereas later examples display increasingly elaborate patterns and more open lace structures [3,9]. The appearance of *reticella* in Dubrovnik archival records from the early sixteenth century testifies to the early adoption of Italian lace-making influences and confirms Dubrovnik's close connections with the principal textile centres of southern Europe [9].

The subsequent development of *reticella* gave rise to *punto in aria* ("stitch in the air"), a technique widely regarded as one of the most significant innovations in the history of lace-making. Unlike *reticella*, in which the pattern remained partially dependent upon the textile ground, *punto in aria* enabled lace to be constructed entirely in free space with the aid of a temporary parchment or other supporting foundation. This innovation allowed the creation of considerably more elaborate and luxurious compositions, ultimately leading to the development of the magnificent Baroque needle laces of the seventeenth century [3,9]. Gušić considers this technological transformation to represent one of the possible preconditions for the emergence of Dubrovnik koprenica lace and *Point de Raguse*, although the absence of securely attributed surviving examples makes such a connection impossible to confirm conclusively [9].

The terminology and techniques associated with *Point de Raguse* demonstrate that Dubrovnik lace cannot be assigned to a single clearly defined lace-making tradition. Historical sources indicate an interweaving of knotting techniques, embroidery, and

needle lace, while modern scholarship points to strong Italian, Greek, and eastern Mediterranean technological influences. *Point de Raguse* should therefore be understood as a complex phenomenon situated within the wider Mediterranean lace-making tradition rather than as a single, clearly defined technique whose characteristics can be reconstructed with precision on the basis of the limited written evidence and the small number of surviving specimens available today.

6. Organisation of Lace Production

The organisation of lace production in the Republic of Ragusa was closely associated with monastic communities and the *trećoretkinje* (Franciscan tertiaries)—lay religious women who had taken vows of chastity and devoted themselves to religious life without entering enclosed monastic orders. In Croatian scholarship, these women are occasionally referred to as *picokare*, a term derived from the Italian *pinzochere*, which is etymologically related to *pizzo*, the Italian word for lace [9]. Housed in a building adjacent to the Franciscan Monastery of the Friars Minor in Sigurata Street, which also served as their textile workshop, the Franciscan tertiaries were engaged, until the twentieth century, in washing, spinning, dyeing, sewing, knitting, weaving, and the production of both major lace types [6,9]. Gušić argues that the Franciscans, who had been actively involved in lace-making in Italy and Venetian Dalmatia since the beginning of the sixteenth century, acted as the principal initiators and stylistic innovators of Dubrovnik lace while employing techniques that were already established in their surroundings, particularly in the production of fine *koprenica* lace. Women from Dubrovnik, Konavle, and the Rijeka Dubrovačka gradually adapted textile ornaments from traditional costume to aristocratic dress as well as to liturgical textiles and church furnishings [9].

A reliable supply of high-quality raw materials was an essential prerequisite for the production of fine lace. Regulations issued by the Minor Council (Vijeće umoljenih) in 1624 and subsequently in 1631 permitted the manufacture of Dubrovnik *koprenica* lace exclusively from gold, silver, and silk threads, although considerably finer lace could be achieved using the highest-quality finely spun linen thread, which had been imported from the principal lace-making centres of northern Italy and Flanders since the fifteenth century [9,13]. Gold and silver threads were also employed by Dubrovnik goldsmiths, while documentary sources attest to the workshops of the battiora Bernardo di Francesco in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, followed by the arrival in 1666 of the Venetian *magister coreorum indoratum* Leonardi Molino [13,17]. In his study of Dubrovnik goldsmiths, Cvito Fisković notes that *Point de Raguse*, produced by women and exported to France, was already well known during the seventeenth century, thereby suggesting a close relationship between Dubrovnik lace and gold embroidery [18]. Lefebure, Caulfield, and Saward support the hypothesis that Dubrovnik lace consisted of lace cords made from gold and silver threads that were sewn together to form highly luxurious compositions [5]. Earnshaw also points to a possible connection between *Point de Raguse* and lace made with metal threads, drawing attention to its comparison with Aurillac lace in the poem *La Révolte des Passemens* [5,14]. Palliser, in turn, reproduces an illustration of a decorative braid with picots as a possible representtation of the lost *Point de Raguse*, together with patterns published in *Le Pompe* in Venice in 1557 [2].

Venetian influence on Dubrovnik lace-making was both profound and far-reaching. Venice established schools and workshops for the training of female lace-makers, employed artists, designers, and engravers to create lace patterns, and during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries published numerous pattern books for both principal lace-making techniques [9]. During this period, the Venetian dialect effectively became the informal language of European lace-making, exerting a lasting influence on both lace terminology and the commercial designation of lace products [9]. Dubrovnik lace-making, by contrast, never developed a systematic technical vocabulary, while knowledge of lace-making techniques continued to be transmitted orally from one generation to the next [6,11]. Pattern drawings dating from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were discovered in the Franciscan monastery on the island of Badija near Korčula. These were catalogued by Gušić and subsequently deposited in the archives of the Franciscan Monastery of the Friars Minor in Dubrovnik [9,19]. Among them are designs for the Venetian Baroque needle laces *Point plat de Venise* and *Rosallino*, confirming the close interaction between Venetian and local lace-making traditions [9,13]. As lace production became increasingly decentralised, two parallel traditions developed. One consisted of traditional whitework embroidery and archaic lace-making techniques intended primarily for domestic and ecclesiastical use, while the other comprised elaborate Baroque lace produced acc. to Venetian patterns, much of which reached international markets under Venetian commercial designations [9,12]. Archival sources from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries confirm that lace produced in Dubrovnik and other parts of Dalmatia was frequently marketed under the name Point de Venice

[9,13]. Because the style and manufacturing techniques of Dubrovnik *koprenica* lace differed substantially from those of the highly developed Venetian Baroque lace tradition, many scholars have suggested that Venice gradually appropriated *Point de Raguse* during the seventeenth century and incorporated it into its own lace-making tradition [3,6,9,11].

7. Surviving Examples and Attempts at Reconstruction

Material remains that can be reliably attributed to Dubrovnik lace are exceptionally rare, and their attribution remains a matter of scholarly debate in most cases. It is well known that a considerable portion of the artistic and textile heritage of Dubrovnik and Dalmatia was dispersed through sales during the nineteenth century, which partly explains the scarcity of surviving examples in the region today [5,13]. An important role in this process was played by intermediaries such as the Split-born collector Ernesto Jesurum, who acquired textile objects from churches and monasteries throughout Dalmatia and supplied them to museums worldwide as well as to his relatives in Venice, particularly Michelangelo Jesurum, who played a leading role in the revival of traditional Italian lace-making [3,9]. Lace produced in monastic communities was especially sought after and was frequently marketed as Venetian or Greek lace, as this increased its commercial value [9].

Among the few surviving objects associated with Dubrovnik lace are three decorative border laces from the legacy of the Sorkočević (Sorgo) family, acquired by the Dubrovnik Museums in 1948 [20]. Gušić argued that these fragments originally formed part of a white linen altar set and described their technique as an early form of *reticella*, executed with coarse linen thread and dense *punto in aria* stitching, creating distinctive geometric compositions with diagonal patterns and figural motifs [6]. Another significant example is an altar frontal discovered in 1950 in the Church of Our Lady of Šunj on the island of Lopud, which had previously been cut apart and later restored. Its central section consists of figured silk damask surrounded by a border lace worked in yellow and pale blue linen thread. The use of polychromy together with the early appearance of bobbin lace suggests that this may be one of the oldest surviving examples, dating to the sixteenth century [6]. Perhaps the most important surviving example of Dalmatian *reticella* was an alb preserved in the Franciscan monastery at Drid on the island of Čiovo near Trogir. Unfortunately, it was destroyed in a fire in 1949. Its exceptional artistic value had already been recognised by Ljubo Karaman in 1933, who described it as one of the finest examples of Dalmatian textile craftsmanship [9,16]. The only surviving record is a photograph taken in 1904 when the vestment was lent to the Museum of Applied Arts in Vienna, where it stimulated Austrian scholarly interest in Dalmatian lace [11,21,22].

Another important contribution to the reconstruction of Point de Raguse derives from Gušić's analysis of a Baroque floral lace formerly owned by Mario Levi Moreno of Venice, a descendant of the Jesurum family. Examining its construction in 1959, she concluded that the lace exhibited a characteristic needle-lace technique based on rows of buttonhole stitches arranged in a regular grid, which she regarded as one of the defining technical characteristics of the lost *Point de Raguse* [9,21].

Margaret Taylor Johnstone (1926) also attempted to reconstruct the typological development of Dubrovnik lace on the basis of lace fragments from the collection of Countess Suardi of Bergamo, which she classified into four developmental phases. The first phase (sixteenth century) is characterised by geometric motifs incorporating the distinctive stitches *punto avorio* and *punto di Ragusa*, together with rosette motifs composed of five, six, ten, twelve, or sixteen petals, in contrast to the characteristic eight-pointed Venetian star. The second phase (1600–1650) marks a transition towards freer representations of figures, flowers, and scrolling foliage while retaining the interplay of light and shadow. As a representative example, Taylor Johnstone identified a chalice veil depicting Saint Blaise, preserved in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York [4]. Since 2025, this lace has been officially documented as an example of the Dubrovnik stitch depicting Saint Blaise [23]. The third phase (1650–1700) is characterised by increasingly elaborate compositions joined by auxiliary elements such as picots and barrettes, whereas the fourth phase (from the eighteenth century onwards) marks the gradual disappearance of lace displaying the characteristic features of Point de Raguse from this region [4].

Despite these important attempts at reconstruction, the conclusions reached by scholars such as Taylor Johnstone and Gušić cannot be fully verified, since the original objects on which many of their interpretations were based are no longer accessible for independent examination. Consequently, comprehensive and systematic material analyses of historical lace preserved in Croatian and international museum collections remain an essential prerequisite for advancing the attribution and identification of Dubrovnik lace [4,5,9].

8. Discussion

The synthesis of the existing scholarship reveals a fundamental methodological tension that characterises the study of *Point de Raguse*: the striking disparity between its remarkable reputation in seventeenth-century Europe and the almost complete absence of securely attributed surviving specimens. This paradox raises a series of questions that remain unresolved, particularly concerning the lace's origin, manufacturing technique, organisation of production, and the reasons for its eventual disappearance.

With regard to its origin, the analysis demonstrates that none of the proposed hypotheses—the Dubrovnik, Greek, or Mediterranean-hybrid hypothesis—is supported by sufficient evidence to permit a definitive conclusion. The Dubrovnik-origin hypothesis convincingly explains the consistent association of the name Ragusa with Dubrovnik in European historical sources and is supported by evidence of a well-established local textile tradition. However, it has not succeeded in securely identifying surviving examples of *Point de Raguse* [5,6,9]. Conversely, the Greek-origin hypothesis draws attention to the importance of eastern Mediterranean influences and to Dubrovnik's role as a commercial intermediary, yet it fails to explain why the name Ragusa would have been consistently applied to a lace of entirely foreign origin [1,2]. The most convincing interpretation is therefore that *Point de Raguse* emerged within a zone of intensive cultural and economic interaction linking Dubrovnik, Venice, and the Greek cultural sphere, where the boundaries between local lace-making traditions were considerably more fluid than later national historiographies have assumed [5,6,9].

The question of manufacturing technique remains equally unresolved. Scholars generally agree that *Point de Raguse* refers to a form of needle lace, since bobbin lace could not achieve the same degree of structural refinement and delicacy [9]. However, the stitches most frequently associated with its manufacture—*punto avorio, punto di Ragusa*, and *punto a groppo*—were not exclusive to Dubrovnik but also occurred, in various forms, throughout Italy, Greece, and Asia Minor [4,5,16]. The inconsistent terminology found in historical sources further complicates identification, as identical terms may refer to different techniques depending on their geographical and chronological context [5].

Although the organisation of lace production is better documented, several important questions likewise remain unanswered. The role of Franciscan tertiaries and monastic communities in lace production appears beyond doubt, yet it remains unclear to what extent their production was intended for export or whether it achieved the exceptional quality described in contemporary European sources [1,9]. Venetian influence was both profound and long-lasting, while the coexistence of local lace-making traditions and elaborate Baroque needle lace produced from Venetian pattern books rendered locally produced lace increasingly difficult to distinguish from imported products [9,11,13].

The disappearance of *Point de Raguse* towards the end of the seventeenth century was most likely the result of several interrelated factors. The devastating earthquake of 1667 disrupted the continuity of production and dispersed the monastic communities involved in lace-making. At the same time, deteriorating diplomatic relations with Louis XIV may have contributed to restrictions on the importation of Dubrovnik lace and even to the gradual disappearance of the name Ragusa from French commercial usage. These developments coincided with the increasingly protectionist policies adopted by France to promote its domestic lace industry [2,5,9]. Meanwhile, Venice progressively absorbed Dubrovnik lace into its own commercial sphere, appropriating both its production and, ultimately, its market identity, thereby contributing to the gradual disappearance of *Point de Raguse* as a distinct commercial designation [3,6,9].

Taken together, the available evidence suggests that *Point de Raguse* should not be understood as a clearly defined and geographically bounded lace-making tradition, but rather as a complex cultural and commercial construct reflecting the dynamic networks of the early modern Mediterranean. It is also possible that numerous surviving examples of this lace already exist in museum and private collections around the world but have been catalogued under different names. Only systematic material, technological, and comparative analyses of historical lace collections will make it possible to identify surviving examples of *Point de Raguse* and to reconstruct more precisely the characteristics of this lost lace-making tradition.

9. Conclusion

The analysis of historical sources, archival records, and scholarly literature demonstrates that Dubrovnik lace, known historically as *Point de Raguse*, remains one of the most complex and unresolved issues in European textile historiography. Its outstanding reputation during the seventeenth century—attested by literary works, legislative sources, and the economic policies of major European powers—is not matched by a corresponding body of securely attributed surviving material. As a result, all attempts to reconstruct its appearance, manufacturing tech-

nique, and historical development remain methodologically constrained.

The available evidence suggests that *Point de Raguse* developed within the distinctive geopolitical and cultural environment of the Republic of Ragusa through the interaction of local Dalmatian traditions of whitework embroidery and reticella with Italian, Greek, and broader Mediterranean lace-making influences. Monastic communities and Franciscan tertiaries played a central role in its production, while strong Venetian influences shaped both the stylistic development of the lace and the terminology associated with it. At the same time, these Venetian influences, together with unstable political circumstances and the devastating earthquake of 1667, contributed to the gradual disappearance of *Point de Raguse* from the European market and from the historical memory of European lace-making.

The questions surrounding the origin, manufacturing technique, and identity of Dubrovnik lace cannot therefore be resolved on the basis of the currently available evidence. Rather than seeking a single definitive explanation, it is more productive to understand *Point de Raguse* as a phenomenon reflecting the complex processes of cultural exchange, commercial circulation, and symbolic appropriation that characterised the Mediterranean world during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. From this perspective, the absence of definitive conclusions does not diminish the scholarly significance of *Point de Raguse*; rather, it highlights the need for further systematic research, including the examination of textile collections in Croatian and international museums, material and technological analyses of surviving lace specimens, and the critical reassessment of existing attributions, all of which may ultimately contribute to the identification of surviving examples of *Point de Raguse*.

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