

Puig i Cadafalch and filigree architecture. The influence of a lace-making lineage

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¹ GIMÉNEZ BLASCO, J., *Mataró en la Catalunya del segle XVII. Un microcosmos en moviment* (Premi Iluro, 2001).

² LABORDE, A., *Itinerario descriptivo de las provincias de España*, Valencia, 1816. p. 11.

³ Arxiu Comarcal del Maresme (ACM). Contribució de Comerç i Indústria.

Lace-making is currently thought of as a leisure activity or popular handicraft, yet bobbin lace was for centuries an important economic driver in certain areas of Catalonia, particularly on the coast of Barcelona, or the *Costa de Llevant*. Although the first references to lace-making or haberdashery businesses date back to the seventeenth century, sources situate the boom in this activity around the eighteenth century. In his study, Joan Giménez Blasco talks about Mataró, the current capital of the Maresme province, which had an emerging network of lace manufacture. The lace was produced by women living in poor conditions, overseen by a small group of traders who were also responsible for selling the lace on the Catalan and Spanish markets.¹ Evidence of this intense textile manufacturing activity – not just of lace, but also of calicos, lace stockings and cotton fabrics – can be found in the accounts of travellers who passed through this coastal town. At the start of the nineteenth century, Alexandre Laborde, to cite one traveller, mentioned seven businesses dedicated to bobbin lace and seventeen to blonde lace; that is, lace made from silk.² Unlike other nearby towns, such as Arenys de Mar, the volume of lace-making activity in Mataró began to fall in the mid-eighteen hundreds, as clearly revealed in the records of industries conserved in the *Arxiu Comarcal del Maresme* (Maresme Provincial Archive). The fourteen manufacturers of blonde lace documented in 1836 fell to seven in 1854, and to just three in 1862.³ This was due not only to the introduction of mechanical production of lace, but also to the increasing prominence of other textile industries in the same place.

A lace-making lineage

A good example of the rise of lace-making in Mataró – and indeed of its subsequent fall – is that of the Puig family. The multi-faceted Josep M. Puig i Cadafalch (1867-1956), the hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of whose birth is celebrated this year, was born into this lineage of blonde lace-makers.

The first Puig recorded as working in the lace business was Josep Puig i Ros, a veil-maker by trade. He lived in Carreró, in the same building where, years later, the prestigious architect, art historian and politician – Puig's great-great-



Puig i Cadafalch's daughter making bobbin lace at the family's summer residence in Argentona. 1904. Photograph: Adolf Mas. Amatller Institute of Hispanic Art, Mas Archive.



⁴ *Almanak Mercantil o Guia de Comerciantes para el año 1799 por D.D.M.G. Madrid.*

grandson – would be born. Josep Puig i Ros’s son, Pedro Puig, continued with the family business, and appears in a list of manufacturers of blonde lace in the *Almanaks Mercantils* or *Guia de Comerciantes* for the years 1800, 1802 and 1803. In reference to Pedro Puig and the other names that appear, the almanac states: “The aforementioned manufacturers of lace and blonde lace sell wholesale and export to America themselves”.⁴

In documents consulted on profits for 1811, Pedro Puig is described as a silk weaver, a job that is directly related to the production of the highest quality lace, or blonde lace. In 1815, 1816 and 1817, he is registered as a veil-maker. Josep Puig i Feliu, the next generation and the grandfather of our architect, worked as a veil-maker and trader from 1823. In the 1842 records, he is registered as a silk weaver, information that again points to the trade of luxury lace: blonde lacework for veils, mantillas and flounces for dresses, among other items. Finally, in 1848, he is registered as a producer of blonde lace. On his death, the business, still in the same building in Carreró, was taken up by his wife, Mercè Bruguera, under the trade name of the “Widow of Puig”. This family industry was inherited by Joan Puig i Bruguera, who married Teresa Cadafalch – the parents of our honoured architect – and kept the business going until his death in 1894.



Fragment of mantilla in blonde lace, from the collection of Francesca Bonnemaïson. Nineteenth century. Rec. no. 11162, Arenys de Mar Museum.

Puig i Cadafalch, heir of lace-makers

5 PUIG I CADAFALCH, J., *Memòries*, Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, Barcelona, 2003. p. 17.

Puig i Cadafalch always remembered his family business, the years lived between laces, patterns, cushions and bobbins. In his unfinished memoirs, begun in 1944, he talks about his ancestors from Púbol (Baix Empordà), who worked in the lace business probably from the end of the eighteenth century. He describes his childhood at home: “I have a memory of family life, the hustle and bustle of the lace industry, buying silk in Murcia and Andalusia; winding it on to cane tubes and then onto bobbins; the preparation of drawings, the pricking of patterns and dividing the work among hundreds of peasant farmers in Mataró, Argentona, Cabrils, Òrrius, Dosrius, Lllavaneres, Sant Cebrià de Vallalta, etc.”⁵

A lover of tradition, of handicrafts and art industries – the material expression of the Catalan national spirit, as he saw them – Puig lamented the decline of lace-making, which was killed off by mechanisation. In the summer of 1894, the year in which the family business closed, Puig stated in the local press that he was saddened by the gradual disappearance of various handicraft industries from Mataró. In addition to the trades of glassmaker, potter and veil maker, the young architect lamented the loss of lace-making, which he described as: “the most Catalan home-based art that there is”. It died, in his words, like a late shoot in the middle of a freeze. Puig nostalgically recalled a

Spinner with yarn and spindle, by Eusebi Arnau, over the entrance to the Casa Coll i Regas, Mataró. Photograph: ©Ramon Soler Pascuet. [See more.](#)



6 Idem, “L’absolta d’una industria mataronesa”, *Noticiero Mataronés*, 26 August 1894.

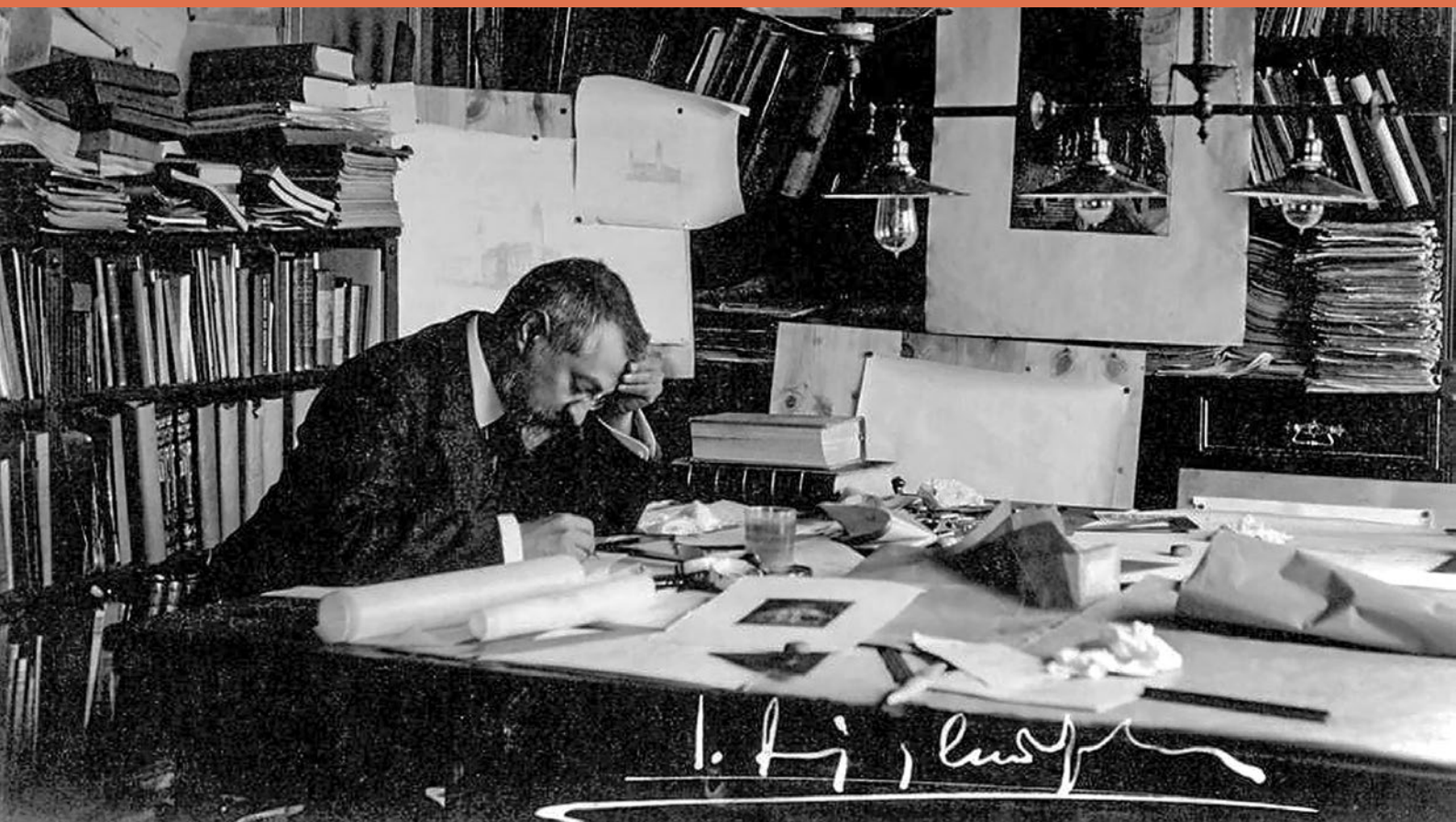
7 ACM. Fons de la notaria de Mataró. Notari Juan B. Calvo, folios 220 to 227.

8 A collection that cannot now be located. We are grateful to Sílvia Ventosa, of the Barcelona Design Museum, for research collaboration.

lost era, the years in the Carreró building, “with its patriarchal organisation, its systems of working at home, [...] with no strikes, no anarchists, no monopolies, or large amounts of capital [...]”.⁶ In the broadest sense, as he himself stated, the loss was to the detriment of both art and civilisation.

Apart from the data provided in administrative documents, no other sources have yet been discovered that provide more details of the business at *Can Puig*. No records of tools, lace samples, or any other object associated with the trade of lace-maker appear in either the testament of Puig Bruguera, dated 22 February 1878⁷, or the 1894 record book of the notary Joaquin Cabanes, which details the property inherited by Puig i Cadafalch. This is probably because these objects were not considered remarkable.

Fortunately, in 1930, the architect, who always supported the conservation and safeguarding of historical and artistic heritage, donated to the *Biblioteca dels Museus de Barcelona* (Library of the Museums of Barcelona) a notable collection of patterns, templates and drawings for lace that had belonged to his family.⁸ Thanks to an article on this generous donation written by Adelaida Ferré, an expert on lace-making and folklore studies, we know more about the products that were manufactured and sold by members of the family.



Portrait of Josep Puig i Cadafalch. 1913-1918. Francesc Serra. Photographic Archive of Barcelona.

⁹ FERRER, A., “Col·lecció de patrons de puntes al coixí ingressada a la Biblioteca dels Museus d’Art”. *Butlletí dels Museus d’Art de Barcelona*, November 1931, no. 6, pp. 169-176.

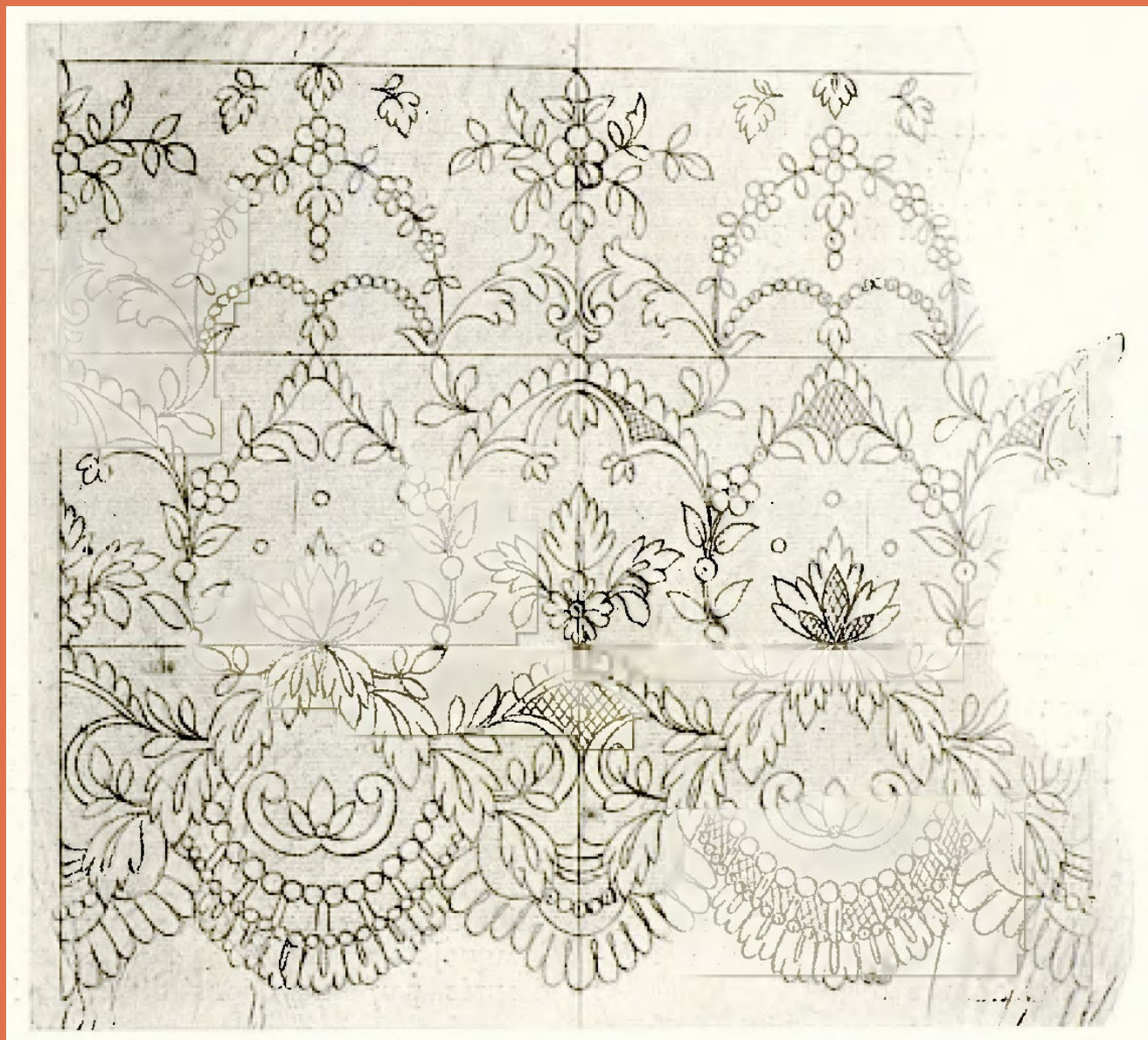
¹⁰ Some works discuss the *sgraffito* of the *Casa Amatller* in reference to examples of lace found in the Episcopal Museum of Vic.

Beyond the information on the Puig house, the complete, detailed study by Ferré is a valuable source of technical, artistic and commercial information for weaving together and filling out the history of lace in Catalonia.⁹ The donation is further proof of Puig i Cadafalch’s long-standing interest in the world of textiles in all its many manifestations, encompassing not only lace but also fabrics in general, a legacy he knew must be protected, defended and disseminated.

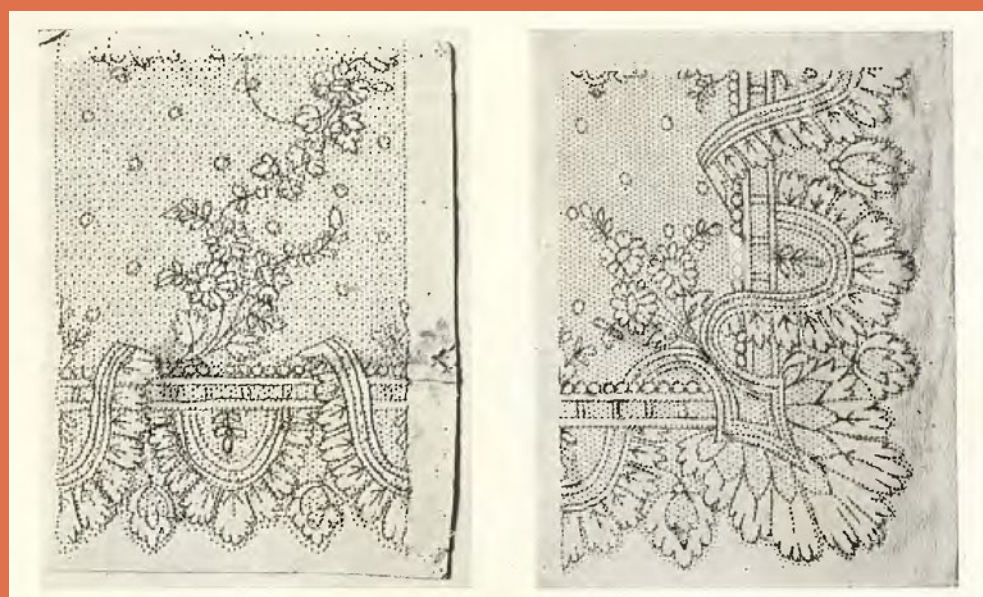
The filigree architect

At the decorative level, expressed in a multiplicity of applied arts drawn from the fine crafts so highly prized during the years of Catalan *modernisme*, Puig i Cadafalch’s work teemed with floral and plant decorations, which also permeated lace and fabric design at the time. However, models adapted from late-Gothic or Renaissance cut velvet – particularly well-known motifs of the pomegranate, pineapple or thistle, seen in the famous *griccia* velvet – are used extensively in *Casa Amatller*, perhaps more than patterns that might have been taken from lace and blonde lace.¹⁰

Although the *sgraffito* that covers some of his constructions, notably those designed during his “white period”, has often been compared with very fine



Plans presented by Puig i Cadafalch to the Board of Museums, taken from an article by Adelaida Ferrer de Ruíz-Narváez: *Col·lecció de patrons de puntes al coixí ingressada a la Biblioteca dels Museus d'Art*, Bulletin of the Art Museums of Barcelona, Volume I, November 1931, No. 6.



Detail of a corbel on the Casa Martí, depicting a lace-maker, 1896 (Els Quatre Gats), Barcelona. ©Ramon Soler Pascuet.



11 JARDÍ, E., *Puig i Cadafalch, arquitecte, polític i historiador de l'art* (Premi Iluro 1974), Mataró, 1975, p. 9.
 12 “[...] from this rare employment of all the many material advances and the elegance with which they are constantly dressed in traditional attire emerges the personal seal that defines his work, distinguishing it from all others [...]”. See “Artista constructor”, *Hispania*, vol. IV, 28 February 1902, pp. 93 and 94.

lace, the influence of lace-makers on Puig i Cadafalch should be considered from a more conceptual perspective of composition, rather than as a formal influence. The literature on his architecture describes the decorative elements – in stone, iron, glass, ceramic and stucco – in terms that could easily be applied to the work of lace-makers, including “delicateness”, “attention to detail”, “baroque style”, “exuberance” and “luxuriance”. The decorative work undertaken on most of these buildings, particularly private dwellings, can be defined in terms of its execution, perfection and complexity as true filigree; a word that is used to describe one of the most characteristic types of *ret fi* or Arenys lace. In fact, as stated by Enric Jardí, some biographers believe that the work of Puig i Cadafalch’s father as a producer of tulles and laces accounts for our architect’s preoccupation with precision.¹¹

Like the meticulousness and skill with which bobbins were moved around their cushions, braiding together the threads that would create fine pieces of lace or blonde lace, in Puig i Cadafalch’s building a large and diverse team of craftspeople worked in coordination and juxtaposition to weave together a series of cohesive decorative elements. On more than one occasion, these elements have been compared to clothing on the “body”, on the underlying architectural structure.¹² To continue with the textile parallel, like lace-makers working from pre-established patterns, the craftspeople interpreted perfectly the sketches that the architect – known for his love of spontaneous drawings – passed on to them.

On the origins

We must look beyond subjective metaphorical comparisons to find the true influence of lace and lace-makers on Puig i Cadafalch’s work. In 1973, the architect Lluís Bonet i Garí, who had worked with our architect and with Gaudí, stated in a conversation that while Gaudí felt at home with the forgers from



The lace-maker Marià Castells Simon drawing in his workshop. First quarter of the twentieth century. Photograph: Joaquim Castells i Simon. Fidel Fita Historical Archive, Arenys de Mar.

Camp de Tarragona, Puig i Cadafalch was comfortable with the embroiderers of the Maresme, which we can interpret as including lace-makers or needle workers. Bonet offered this as a graphical explanation of Gaudí's preponderance for spacious volumes and Puig i Cadafalch's love of decorative filigree.¹³

In fact, much has been written about the potential impact that boiler-making (his father's trade) had on Gaudí's work. It seems that Gaudí himself acknowledged that his conception of space, his interest in decorative elements, his manual skills, and his capacity to endow flat surfaces with volume were the result of hours spent working and learning in his father's workshop. Might we draw a similar conclusion about Puig i Cadafalch? What had stimulated his creative thought through before he began his studies in Barcelona? The "preparation of drawings" that he himself spoke of in his memoirs, hides from the public the meticulous and delicate task of drawing, which in the creation of quality lace left no margin for even the slightest error.

In the collection of the Castells family of lace-makers, kept at the Museum of Arenys de Mar and which includes preparatory drawings and final designs by Marià Castells Simon (1876-1931), we can see in greater detail how a lace design was created. The ruler, the set square, the compass or the drafting triangle, among others, are essential tools on the lace designer's

¹³ ROHRER, J., "Puig i Cadafalch: els primers treballs", a VV.AA., *Josep Puig i Cadafalch: la arquitectura entre la casa y la ciudad = Architecture between the*

house and the city [exhibition catalogue, Centre Cultural de la Fundació Caixa de Pensions, 4 December 1989-11 February 1990], 1st ed., Barcelona, 1989, p. 29.

table, alongside the eraser and pencil. The secret of this trade is not just to be able to draw by hand, it is also vital to ensure that the various parts of the design into which a piece of lace or blonde lace is divided – the patterns that the lace-makers will work on – match up. In addition, it is essential that the drawing is harmonious with the ground, whether tulle or torchon, on which it will unfold. It is normally created using templates with a precise grid. As in so many other arts and crafts, behind the production of lace is a geometric foundation of varying complexity that is vital to its successful completion. The same precision is required to prick out the template and patterns, a task that is completely mechanical and repetitive, the perfection of which will determine the quality of the final piece.

Therefore, it is far from fanciful to imagine a young Puig i Cadafalch in the family workshop, pricking out patterns or laying down his first drawings, his first decorative compositions, his first floral, plant-based or geometric universes that he would then apply to his architecture, using the same tools that he would re-purpose to another art form some years later. We cannot know for certain whether his talent as a designer, his capacity to develop complex ornamental repertoires, was first expressed in the design of a mantilla, a flounce on an Alb, or even simple lace inserts. Yet in a family-based industry like lace production, in which all members were likely to have taken a role, it is hard to imagine that the young and energetic Puig i Cadafalch would not have been involved in these tasks. ●