

Defining Crochet

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Textile classification systems differentiate between the looped structures that characterise the present-day crafts of knitting and crochet. Printed sources prior to the early nineteenth century do not make this distinction, labelling fabric of either structure as knitting, thereby obscuring references to what would now be termed crochet. These can be identified in published instructions, nonetheless, with the prescribed use of a single hook being a ready indicator. Although looping does not inherently require tools and some structures can be made with alternative techniques, certain forms of crochet-type looping depend on the design of the hooks used to produce them. The typology of such implements provides a framework for tracing the convergence of the precursors of modern crochet into that craft.

INTRODUCTION

Irene Emery defines two major types of ‘interlooped’ fabrics in *The Primary Structures of Fabrics* from 1966. These are knitting and crochet, and are differentiated by the loops in crochet ‘interworking’:

... not only vertically with those in the previous row, as in knitting, but laterally as well — with others in the same row ... In the simplest stitch — plain crochet — each loop is drawn through two previous loops, the corresponding one in the previous row and the previous one in the same row.¹

The most relevant consequence of classifying crochet as a ‘doubly interlooped structure’ is that a single row of chain stitches is not crochet, and can only become so when a second row of stitches is worked into it. If that second row consists of a plain crochet stitch worked into every stitch in the chain, with successive rows produced in the same manner, the resulting fabric is now commonly termed slip-stitch crochet the least complex form of closed work. If the stitches in the second row are not worked into every stitch in the chain, forming instead sequences of shorter chains attached to the growing fabric at intervals, the result is termed openwork crochet. Its simplest regular form is an arched (or diamond) mesh, made by affixing the end of each sequence of chains in the current row to the midpoint of the adjacent sequence in the previous row.

Chain-stitch mesh appears not only in the craft of crochet but is also among the various devices found in the decorative bordering and trimming collectively termed *passementerie*. This necessitates a subjective judgement about whether craft identity or structural detail is the primary factor in the generic classification of an individual example of such work. The range of slip-stitch traditions seen below also suggests craft identity to be of importance when categorizing that material.

Although a specimen of fabric does not necessarily reveal the tool(s) used to produce it, much less the associated terms of art, such information is easily conveyed in a written description. The pre-nineteenth-century texts presented here uniformly treat the closed-work slip-stitch structure made with a hook as a form of knitting, and not a discrete craft. The

authors would have been no less able to perceive the morphological distinction between the crochet and knitting types of interlooping than we are, but ascribe no nomenclatural significance to it. They use the term knitting in the sense that Emery defines as interlooping, without subdividing it by the way the loops are interworked. Openwork chain stitching similarly appears as an attribute of passementerie.

CORE TERMINOLOGY

The first use of the word ‘crochet’ yet noted in British publication to designate the multi-faceted craft now widely known by that name is in an instruction for a purse in double-stitch crochet (*Pour faire une bourse à crochet à double maille*) included in an anonymous compilation of knitting instructions from 1837 (attributed to Miss Watts in a later edition). The purse instruction is in French but the compilation is otherwise entirely in English.² The first crochet instructions in the latter language were published by Jane Gaugain in 1840.³ This was followed by a stream of material on the subject.⁴

Gaugain’s instructions assume prior familiarity with crochet technique and do not otherwise indicate it to have been a recent addition to the fancywork repertoire. A book by Frances Lambert published in 1842 states:

Crochet work, although long known and practised, did not attract particular attention until within the last four years, since which time it has been brought to great perfection, and has been applied with success to the production of numerous ornamental works.⁵

Lambert adds historical detail in 1844:

Crochet — a species of knitting originally practised by the peasants in Scotland, with a small hooked needle called a shepherd’s hook — has within the last seven years, aided by taste and fashion, obtained the preference over all other ornamental work of a similar nature. It derives its present name from the French; the instrument with which it is worked, being by them, from its crooked shape, termed ‘crochet’. This art has attained its highest degree of perfection in England, whence it has been transplanted to France and Germany, and both these countries, although unjustifiably, have claimed the invention.⁶

It is not clear if the shift to the craft’s present name relates to a pivotal development seven years earlier that triggered its rapid ascendancy or what that sequence of events may have been. The introductory remarks about crochet in an anonymous handbook from 1856 both name the initial form and state that the rise in its popularity occurred after the name change: ‘This kind of work, which has lately become fashionable under its new name, was formerly called “Shepherd’s Knitting”’.⁷ The descriptions of the history of crochet in these British sources have been repeated time and again in the subsequent literature. To date, however, only one historiographically rigorous monograph has appeared on this topic: *Crochet, History and Technique*, by Lis Paludan, originally published in Danish in 1986 and in English translation in 1995.⁸ It is restricted to crochet in Europe and draws the central conclusions that it developed there along two separate lines which merged in the early 19th century, and that no material evidence of crochet has been found pre-dating 1800.

Nothing subsequently published has called these findings into question.⁹ In the interim, however, additional source material has come to light. The study reported here examines the consistency of information found in representative such documents with the assertions cited

above. It also attempts to determine if the change of name from ‘shepherd’s knitting’ to ‘crochet’ was purely a matter of nomenclature or was coupled with substantive changes to the craft.

In light of the 1844 comment about the unjustified claims of crochet originating in France and Germany, particular attention is focused on activity in those countries. Given the eponymous role of its fundamental tool, the development of the *crochet* is considered in parallel with that of the craft. The examined material largely supports Paludan’s conclusions, albeit with a significantly more detailed view of activity prior to 1800 and during the early nineteenth century.

THE *CROCHET* AS A TOOL FOR EMBROIDERY AND PASSEMENTERIE

In the early 1760s, a technique for the rapid production of chain-stitch embroidery using a small hooked needle was introduced into Europe. This is known as tambour embroidery, and commonly taken to be the direct precursor of crochet. However, some form of hook was used to make ‘chains in the air’ in the context of passementerie before the arrival of tambour embroidery. This is explicitly documented in a patent granted to the *passementiers* in 1653 by Louis XIV and is seen in earlier decorative applications. The patent applies to the production of a list of items including ‘... thread for embroidery, enhanced and embellished as done with a needle, on thimbles [*aux dés*; possibly purse moulds], on the fingers, on a crochet, and on a bobbin’.¹⁰

Thread knotted in ‘chaine stitch’ also appears in the accounts of the wardrobe of Queen Elizabeth I, which were kept starting in 1558.¹¹ There are further references to garments with ‘cheyne lace’ bordering in this and other inventories. A typical description from 1588 is of ‘a longe cloake of murry velvet, with a border rounde aboute of a small cheyne lace of Venis silver ...’¹²

The configuration of the 1653 *crochet* is not indicated but a French dictionary from 1723, compiled by Jacques Savary des Brûlons, describes the tool then in use:

Crochet. It is yet another small instrument of iron, three or four inches long, curved and pointed at one end, with a wooden handle at the other, used by Passementiers for many of their works. It serves particularly for making hat seams, with *chânettes*, and applying flowers to mesh.¹³

Illustrations in the 1763 volume of the Diderot and d’Alembert *Encyclopedié* include a *crochet* with enlarged details of its needles (Fig. 1) and a *chânette* separated from the base into which it would have been embroidered (Fig. 2).¹⁴

Surviving material from the eighteenth century illustrates that the mesh to which flowers were affixed in passementerie could itself be *chânette* (Fig. 3) and therefore directly producible with a *crochet*.¹⁵ A freeform equivalent of this mesh is seen in lace bordering from the late seventeenth century.¹⁶

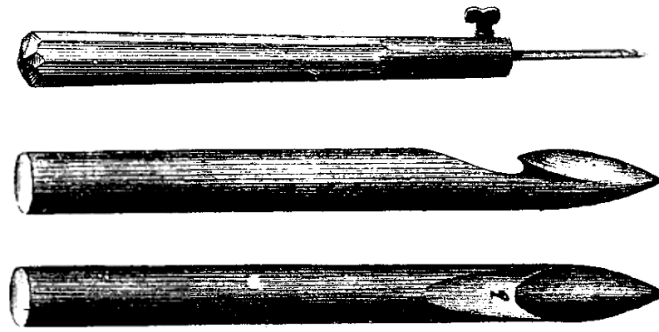


Fig. 1. *Crochet* illustrated in 1763 with details of its needles.
D. Diderot & J. le Rond d'Alembert, Planches de l'Encyclopédie (Paris: Briasson et al, 1763), vol. 2, plate 11.



Fig. 2. *Châinette* made with the *crochet* in Fig. 1.
D. Diderot & J. le Rond d'Alembert, Planches de l'Encyclopédie (Paris: Briasson et al, 1763), vol. 2, plate 11.



Fig. 3. Eighteenth-century *passementerie* based on *châinette* mesh.
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, Acc. no. 12.8.4.

THE CROCHET AS A FLAT HOOK

A text by Eléanore Riego de la Branchardière from 1846 includes a section headed ‘Shepherd or Single Crochet’ that describes a slip stitch.¹⁷ It is clear from this and other early British publications that what they called shepherd’s knitting is now generically termed slip-stitch crochet. A distinctive flat ‘shepherd’s hook’ is commonly used for it.

The earliest illustration of a flat hook yet noted (Fig. 4) is in the Roland de la Platiere *Encyclopédie Méthodique* from 1785.¹⁸ It is presented in a description of an alternative to ordinary knitting devised by soldiers who used a bent nail as a hook, thus giving the craft the name ‘nail knitting’ (*tricot au clou*). The caption to the illustration provides additional detail:

Fig. A, Example of knitting done on a nail, a type of finger for a glove worked in twine, designed as represented in the drawing.

Fig. C, crochet substituted for the nail, shown in the ordinary proportions.

Fig. D, crochet intended for use with very large objects, and which is larger, to produce more open stitches.

Fig. B, Another example of *tricot au clou* made with a crochet.¹⁹

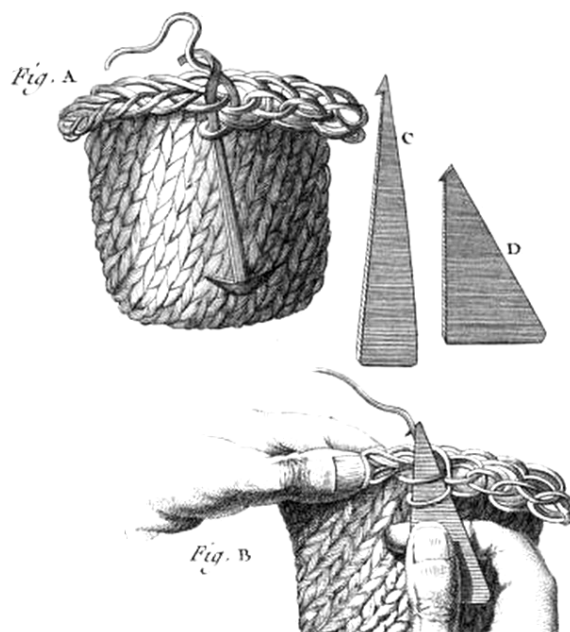


Fig. 4. Slip stitches made with a flat hook, illustrated in 1785.

R. de la Platiere, *Encyclopédie méthodique* (Paris: Panckoucke, 1785).

The control of stitch tension by varying hook size indicates that the craft had acquired a degree of sophistication by the time of this documentation. The instructions also note that the appearance of the described stitches made through the front of the preceding loop can be changed by working through the back of the loop instead. The article further states that the hook is poorly suited to work with thread, and gloves knit with a hook are ‘inferior to those made on a needle’.

A flat hook in silver (Fig. 5) bears a Swedish hallmark used from 1778.²⁰ Such implements are in current production in Sweden where flat-hook slip stitching remains a traditional craft known by a variety of dialectal designations. A dictionary compiled during the 1790s defines one such term: ‘*påta* v. (*põtå*) to knit caps, mittens, etc., with a small hook’.²¹



Fig. 5. Late eighteenth-century flat hook.
Nordic Museum, Stockholm, Cat. no. NM.0136184. Photograph: Elisabeth Eriksson/Nordic Museum.

Flat hooks are illustrated in a German publication from 1800 by Johann Friedrich Netto and Friedrich Leonhard Lehmann (Fig. 6), with the explanation:

The *hooks* for knitting on the second half of the copperplate [Plate 15; here Fig. 6] must be made in the following manner: The shaft may not be over one sixth of an inch thick, at most, i.e. like a medium knife blade. The shape of the hook is conical to make it all the more convenient to slide off the stitches; it can be half an inch wide at the bottom. The point of the hook must turn inwards, so that it does not snag when pulling through. Nr. 1 has a wooden handle but that can also be done without.²²

The text describes the initial use of this hook in a local instantiation of shepherd's knitting:

The hook-knitting [*Hakenstricken*] already mentioned is not an entirely new invention but was once limited to winter shoes and boots. The uppers of these shoes were, primarily in Leipzig in many hundreds of pairs, knit from white ordinary sheep wool yarn with a hook that was commonly made from the handle of a spoon to save expense. (A more exact description of this follows below [here above] in the explanation of the plates.) These knitted shoe uppers are then dyed black, fitted with soles and heels, lined with coarse felt, and shipped far and wide.²³

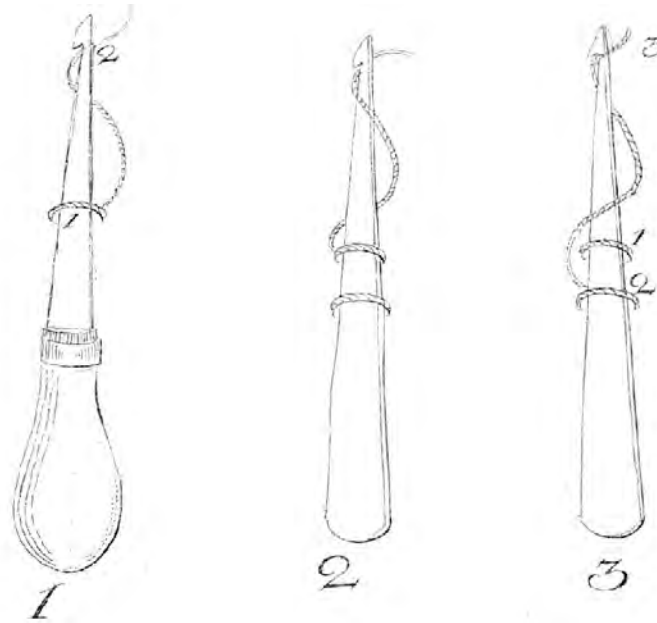


Fig. 6. Flat hooks illustrated in 1800.

J. F. Netto and F. L. Lehmann, Dir Kunst zu Stricken in ihrem ganzen Umfange (Leipzig: Voss, 1800), p. 38 plate 15.

Here again, separate illustrations of yarn being wrapped around the hook both clockwise and anticlockwise, which Netto discusses further, indicate a technique that has acquired some degree of nuance. The ‘hook-knitting already mentioned’ was the use of a pair of knitting needles ‘into the one end of which a space had been filed forming a small hook like a tambour needle’, by a virtuoso Swiss knitter named Dübois whom Netto had encountered in 1779–80.²⁴ Since Dübois was using these modified knitting needles at the time of that meeting, the shoemakers would have been working with flat hooks prior to it by whatever interval ‘not entirely new’ is taken to mean.

Netto then describes a series of innovative applications of the flat hook:

The simplicity of this hooked knitting and the rapidity with which it proceeds caught our attention, and we were delighted by the complete success of our attempts at using it for other forms of knitting. One can knit all sorts of coloured borders, flowers, arabesques, etc., with the hook, just as knitting with knitting needles.²⁵

He follows this with instructions for small rugs, stockings, vests and leggings, noting that ‘hooked knitting is recommended above all for purses’, further detailing flat-hook techniques that go beyond basic slip stitching. The hooked knitting needle is not used as an alternative to the flat hook in any of these instructions, nor is a tambour needle, despite it being an implement with which an earlier work indicates him to have been fully familiar.²⁶

Extensive portions of the text on flat-hook knitting were incorporated into a handbook of household information for young women that appeared in 1801, and in subsequent editions of it, and similar texts, at least into the mid-1820s.²⁷ Netto and Lehmann published a French translation of their work in 1802 using the word *crochet* for the flat hook but still calling the craft a form of knitting (*la tricotage avec une aiguille à crochet*).²⁸

The first literal reference to shepherd’s knitting was of its manifestation in the Scottish Highlands, in a journal entry from 1812 by Elizabeth Grant:

... he wore a plaid cloak, and a nightcap, red or white, made by his industrious wife in a stitch she called shepherd's knitting; it was done with a little hook which she manufactured for herself out of the tooth of an old tortoise-shell comb, and she used to go on looping her home-spun wool as quick as fingers could move, making not only caps, but drawers and waistcoats for winter wear ...²⁹

Audrey S. Henshall describes a pair of bootees in the collections of the National Museums of Scotland, 'supposed to be made about the year 1780'. She classifies them as '*naalebinding* or looped needle netting' but notes this to be an unusual technique in context and structural detail, which is 'rather like knitting or crochet'.³⁰ She illustrates this structure with what would otherwise be taken as a textbook drawing of slip-stitch crochet (cf. the illustration of 'simple crochet' by Annemarie Seiler-Baldinger in *Textiles: A Classification of Techniques* from 1994).³¹ A photograph of one of the bootees, with additional narrative details of their structure, indicates that every row was worked in the same direction and the yarn cut and secured at the end of each. This was the prevalent form of hooked slip stitching described in the early sources presented here.

Henshall illustrates the production of this structure with an eyed needle at the leading end of the yarn. It does not resemble anything described as *nålebinding* (lit. 'needlebinding') in the core literature of that craft. As she also notes, there is no prior evidence of such work in Scotland. Notwithstanding the producibility of the 1780 bootees with either a hook or a needle, in light of the documents attesting a Scottish nexus for both shepherd's knitting and the hook used for it, it therefore seems safe to regard them as examples of that craft.

Gudrun Böttcher describes a child's sock found in Fustat, the first capital of Islamic Egypt (between the mid-seventh and mid-twelfth-centuries), illustrating a structure identical to the one shown by Henshall. It is also presented as needlebinding with a similar comment about its atypical resemblance to crochet.³²

THE *CROCHET* AS A LONG HOOK

Although Netto stopped short of applying his hooked knitting needle to the production of crochet stitches, that action was demonstrably taken elsewhere and led to the development of what is now widely called Tunisian crochet. The earliest narrative descriptions of *crochet à tricoter* — among the first of many names given to the craft — were in a series of five booklets published by Cornelia Mee and Mary Austin between 1858 and 1861.³³

They present it as something 'that has been produced for many years' without indicating the length of that interval. Its extent is suggested by a drawing of Elizabeth Sutherland Leveson-Gower (née Gordon), the Duchess of Sutherland (b. 24 May 1765–d. 29 January 1839), working yarn with a single long hook.³⁴ The date of her death fixes the latest point by which such implements had been taken into use for crochet, regardless of the type of stitching to which they were initially applied.

During the course of the Mee and Austin series, Eleanor Riego de la Brandardiére published a booklet about the same craft titled *Tricot Ecossais*.³⁵ If the long-hook crochet seen in the drawing of the Duchess of Sutherland — who had a strong association with Scotland and the Scottish Highlands — was an indigenous craft, this may explain the name Riego gave to it. She also called it 'tricot crochet', which was the most common generic designation of the day.

A large number of documents about that craft were published during the 1860s. Lacking specific evidence of it prior to the emergence of 'ordinary crochet', the characteristic long-hook structure is not considered further here, beyond noting the links between Scotland and both 'shepherd's knitting' (slip stitch crochet) and 'Scottish knitting' (tricot crochet).

A treatise from 1770 by Charles Germain de Saint-Aubin defines the *crochet* with an illustration that corresponds to the 1763 tool, and gives a date for the advent of tambour embroidery in a section headed, *De la Broderie en Chaînette & au Tambour*:

Many women are occupied with chain stitch embroidery, which was long made either on the finger or as an ordinary craft with a sewing needle ... Since a new technique was brought to us from China nearly a decade ago, which provides correct results six times more rapidly, we abandoned the earlier mode of operation.³⁶

A book published in 1826 by Élisabeth-Félicie Bayle-Mouillard (writing as Élisabeth Celnart) includes a chapter on tambour embroidery (*Broderie au tambour ou au crochet*) with a description of the *crochet* in the established form and instructions for its use.³⁷ Her description resembles those in the earlier sources, but makes an important shift in nomenclature:

This form of embroidery is named for the implements we use to produce it. We describe the first of them taking account of the changes made to it during the time since its first appearance. We shall therefore not speak of the round *tambour* frame which has now been replaced with a square frame; the *crochet* remains unchanged.³⁸

Bayle-Mouillard uses the term *crochet* in additional senses. She explains the heading of a section on purses: ‘This name is used to distinguish this purse from the crocheted purses [*bourses tricotées avec un crochet*] that we will discuss later’.

The section on crocheted purses (*Bourses au crochet*) begins with wording that seems to preface a description of ordinary crochet, but immediately turns toward what is now termed loom knitting:

Knitting on a *crochet* [*le tricotage au crochet*] cannot only be used for purses, but serves for all other objects that ordinary knitting does. For this we use a round knitting loom [*un moule arrondi*] and lift closed work only off it from above, working the stitches that are held on the pegs of the loom using a hook that resembles a tambour needle [*une crochet semblable l’aiguille à broder au tambour*].³⁹

There is no illustration of the *crochet* but whatever its form may have been, the craft for which it was used was at a significant structural and technical distance from the crochet described in other sources from that time. Bayle-Mouillard retains the material on *tricotage au crochet* through her 1837 edition without reference to crochet in any other form beyond the previously mentioned *broderie au crochet*. This indicates need for caution when interpreting contemporaneous French references to work knit with a *crochet* found without contextual clarification.

The first French publications yet noted to describe crochet, as the term is currently understood, appeared anonymously in 1848.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, French nomenclature was entrenched in the English sources from the 1840s, using the terms *crochet* and *tambour* synonymously to designate a crochet stitch. Gaugain describes a *Plain French Tambour or Double Tambour* in 1840 that Riego calls a *Plain, Double or French Crochet* in 1846.⁴¹ This reflects Bayle-Mouillard’s comment on the two primary tools used for tambour embroidery providing alternate roots for the terminology of that craft. It also reinforces the suggestion

that openwork crochet developed subsequently to the arrival of tambour embroidery without recognition of any continuity with the *chaînette* mesh of passementerie.

CONVERGENCE

The slip-stitch traditions that employ the flat *crochet* constitute one of the two paths Paludan sees leading toward the namesake craft. The other emanates from the *crochet* used for passementerie, which was supplanted by the tambour needle when that form of embroidery arrived in Europe.

The earliest known description of what is explicitly labelled as crochet in the current sense, ‘A hooked purse in simple openwork crochet’ (*Een gehekelde beursje, au crochet simple à jour*) is found in a series of three Dutch crochet instructions from 1823 in the monthly periodical *Penélopé*.⁴² The tambour needle is the only tool prescribed, and is used with silk and metal threads to make slip-stitch fabric of the type seen in the earlier sources, basic openwork mesh, a ‘demi-jour’ mix of chain and slip stitches, and closed work with double crochet stitches (UK terminology, as in all following references).

The 1821 volume of *Penélopé* includes a description of tambour embroidery in customary terms, including an illustration of the tip of a tambour needle (*tamboureernaald*).⁴³ A separate instruction for passementerie later in the same volume uses an identical illustration, but describes it as the tip of a small ivory pin (*en ivoren pennetje*) used for making a sequence of free chain stitches.⁴⁴ The instructions for tambour embroidery and passementerie indicate no recognition of similarity between the two implements, suggesting that the respective crafts were conceptually separate. This conclusion is further supported by the lack of any mention of the ivory pin in the 1823 crochet instructions.

The Dutch text from 1823 states that, at the time it was written, crocheted works were very popular. This is at odds with the English statements about that popularity first manifesting itself toward the end of the following decade. If we trust the authors to have described the circumstances in their respective countries correctly, this means that crochet became fashionable in Holland notably earlier than it did in England. Although not necessarily a reflection of urban trends, double crochet was also an established technique in Sweden before 1823, as attested by a neckpiece in two-colour tapestry crochet with the date 1812 worked integrally into the fabric.⁴⁵

The 1833 volume of *Penélopé* contains further crochet instructions. They describe the treble crochet stitch as a ‘rosette stitch’ in a pattern for *filet* crochet.⁴⁶ This is a fully square horizontally oriented mesh with the chains separated and held parallel by vertical treble crochet stitches at regular intervals, equal to the height of those stitches. The squares are filled with additional vertical stitches where solid elements are required. (This differs from arched mesh, which has no discrete vertical separator and requires the fabric to be under tension to reveal its diamond shape.) The treble crochet stitch is also seen in solid work from the 18th century.⁴⁷

The 1833 instructions still explicitly prescribe the use of the tambour needle for work with silk thread. There is no mention of the 1821 ivory pin, but the alternative of a flat hook (Fig. 7) is added: ‘For coarse work in yarn or thick knitting cotton, one uses a copper hook of this form which must be very smooth and, from above, must be very thin.’⁴⁸

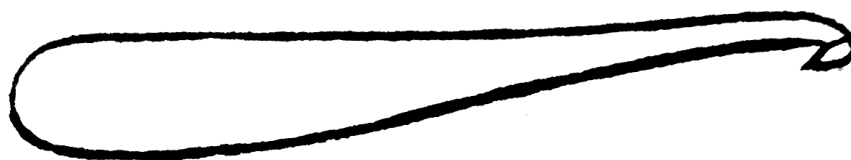


Fig. 7. Flat hook illustrated in 1833.

A. B. van Meerten-Schilperoort, Penélopé, of Maandwerk aan het vrouwelijk geslacht toegewijd (Amsterdam, 1833), vol 7, p. 152.

As seen in the preceding illustrations, the tambour needle and flat hook differ in form not only from each other but also from present-day crochet hooks. The burgeoning modern design is encountered in the English sources, which still prescribe a tambour needle for work with fine thread. They additionally use a tapered hook, typically made of bone or ivory, for coarser thread and yarn. This differs from a shepherd's hook by having a far less marked taper, a smaller head, and a round or oval cross section along its entire length. It was commonly referred to simply as an ivory hook.

There was a similar shift from the initial form of the tambour needle by a modification of its handle, either replacing the side screw with a concentric chuck or integrally joining the needle and handle. The latter alternative permitted what was termed a steel hook to be made in a larger range of gauges, and to be profiled with tapered and cylindrical segments along its length.

Lambert's text from 1842 shows an illustration of a steel hook (Fig. 8). An anonymous French guide from 1848 includes an image of an ivory hook (Fig. 9) and compares it with a flat hook.

When choosing a hook to be used with wool, one in bone or ivory should be taken, rather than steel, with a round shank rather than flat; the latter form has disadvantages. It must be of suitable length, and the tip of a size that is perfectly matched to the yarn, so that the edge does not project through it.⁴⁹



Fig. 8. Steel crochet hook illustrated in 1842.

F. Lambert, Hand-book of Needlework (New York: 1842), p. 149.

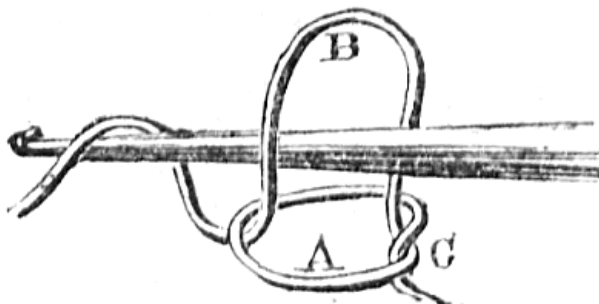


Fig. 9. Ivory crochet hook illustrated in 1848.

Anon., L'Art du Crochet ou Guide Élémentaire (Paris: Guillois, 1848).

The convention through to the present day is to regard thread and yarn crochet as separate forms, made with ‘steel hooks’ and ‘regular hooks’ respectively, with variation in the techniques of their manipulation. It should be noted, however, that the steel hooks in current use are not identical to the initially described steel hooks. Tapered bone hooks remained in commercial production until the Second World War, but differed even more clearly from the current regular hook, which is primarily cylindrical and may not have any conical segment at all.

The round-cross-sectioned tapered hooks are absent from all sources through 1833. The ivory hook is first mentioned by Gaugain in 1840, specified alternately with a tambour needle as appropriate to individual instructions. In 1842, Lambert adds the tapered steel hook to them and retains the term shepherd’s hook but uses it as a synonym for crochet hook, regardless of form. The gently tapered hook with a round cross-section therefore appears to have been added to the crocheter’s toolbox at some time between 1833 and 1840.

Coupled with the references to the ascendancy of crochet in England during the same period, the new hook design may have provided particular impetus to the craft by making its tools more tractable. The Dutch texts remark on how awkward it is to crochet with a tambour needle, while in contrast several British authors note the ease of using an ivory hook.

In 1842 Lambert states:

[Wool] of a six-thread size, with an ivory needle offers the easiest kind of work with which we are acquainted ...

A steel crochet needle is generally advisable; — with expert workers, it makes the most even stitches, but an ivory needle is easier to work with.⁵⁰

This is echoed by Cornelia Mee in a publication from the same year:

An ivory hook for beginners is preferable, though an experienced worker will generally find that a steel one makes better stitches more even, and is in most respects better.⁵¹

OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Shepherd’s knitting was, and remains, a common designation for a utilitarian craft traceable back into the eighteenth century. It was regarded as ‘a species of knitting’ until crochet became an established name for fabric consisting of a number of characteristic stitches made with a crochet hook. The term acquired that sense at some point after work with *chainettes* ceased to be a protected concern of the *passementiers* and entered the realm of diversionary fancywork. The outset of that transition can be linked to the advent of tambour embroidery in Europe at around 1760.

The first documented appearance of the flat hook and tambour needle on the same workbench was in Germany at some time between 1780 and 1800, with the additional presence of the hooked knitting needle. The outcome was published in 1800 with tutorial intent, describing successful attempts at using the flat hook to produce both functional and decorative articles that had previously only been made by knitting with two or more needles. The result is described as hooked knitting, also using that term for a pre-existing school of flat-hook slip stitching.

Instructions in a Dutch magazine from 1823 use French designations for several crochet stitches, implying that crochet was already being practiced in France. However, a comparable

work published in France in 1826 makes no mention of crochet in the same sense, instead using the term to designate knitting on a peg loom and retaining that usage through 1837.

The English reference to a pivotal event in the late 1830s that triggered a marked rise in the fashionability of crochet may be to a development that facilitated its practice as a leisure activity. One possibility is the addition of ivory and steel hooks to the toolbox then consisting of the flat hook, hooked knitting needle, and tambour needle. The new hooks were first described in the English texts and may also have been developed in England. If so, there may be a basis for the assertion that crochet was perfected there and then (re-)exported to Continental Europe.

The position of shepherd's knitting in the retrospective dating of the advent of crochet depends on how morphological and terminological criteria are balanced. If emphasis is placed on the fabric structure as produced with a hook, since shepherd's knitting includes the elements that define basic slip-stitch crochet, it is also crochet and the craft can be traced continuously back into the latter half of the 18th century. If terminological considerations are primary, the solid fabric consisting of chains and slip stitches worked with a hook and regarded as a species of knitting by its makers was a craft of its own, variously named hooked knitting, nail knitting, shepherd's knitting and so on. Crochet then dates (tautologically) from the first reference to it by name, attested in 1823 in the literature examined during this study.

Similar conditions apply to the *châinettes* that were an element of passementerie. The mesh into which these were worked also appears regularly in descriptions of openwork crochet. However, none of the texts about crochet located during this study indicate any awareness of hooked mesh in the context of passementerie. Terminological and historical references to earlier techniques are all anchored in tambour embroidery or shepherd's knitting.

A morphological continuity can be seen nonetheless between chain-stitch mesh as an attribute of passementerie and, say, the openwork crochet purse described in 1823. If this is taken as an overriding consideration, since such mesh consists of the same structural elements regardless of the craft in which it appears, it can also be traced back at least to the beginning of the eighteenth century. If the earlier terminological and conceptual perspectives are emphasised, openwork fabric consisting of chains linked to each other at intervals by slip stitches was separately regarded as passementerie or crochet by the respective practitioners of those crafts. Despite chain-stitch mesh being a shared attribute of both, there was no mutual recognition of that by the two groups. As noted above, it would therefore only be appropriate to label such work as crochet from the first reference to it by that name.

In all cases, crochet was clearly in gestation before the outset of the nineteenth century, with sparser evidence of antecedents at significantly earlier dates. The 1823 descriptions of both closed and openwork explicitly as crochet, and their juxtaposition in the same piece of fabric together with more complex crochet stitches, signal a point at which that label can be applied generically to all manifestations of the craft.

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¹² J. Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Possessions of Queen Elizabeth*, 3 (London: John Nichols, 1823), p. 2, <https://archive.org/details/progressespublic03nichuoft> (accessed 17 November 2017). Noting the frequent appearance of bobbin work in extant wire bordering from that time and its mention in the French patent, cheyne lace may have been a generic designation for trimming with wire or metal-wrapped thread.

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²⁰ Flat crochet hook, silver, hallmarked ‘AVS’ (Arvid Vernström, used personally 1778–1810), Nordic Museum, Stockholm, Cat. no. NM.0136184. Photograph: Elisabeth Eriksson/Nordic Museum (image cropped), <http://digitaltmuseum.se/011023640617> (accessed 17 November 2017)

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³² Coptic child’s sock, cotton, pre-1160, Museum der Kulturen, Basel, III 16705. Described in, G. Böttcher, ‘Nadelbindung – Koptische Textilien im Museum der Kulturen Basel und im Städtischen Museum Simeonstift, Trier’, *Archaeological Textiles Newsletter*, 39 (2004) p. 5, <http://atnfriends.com/download/ATN39Final.pdf> (accessed 17 November 2017). All but one other of the twenty-four objects presented in this article are typical Coptic looping made with a single eyed needle (often but not invariably classified as needlebinding). Pending the confirmation of its dating, the sock can be seen as an isolated early instance of slip-stitch fabric. In light of the indications of knitting having developed in Egypt as an

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