

BOBBIN LACE TORCHON GROUNDS: focus on spiders

By Doris O'Neill

(Keep in mind, this was a presentation script and the numbers refer to items displayed throughout the presentation.)

Before we get into the exercise I hope some of you will want to do today, it is necessary to distinguish Torchon grounds from other lace grounds techniques, like Binche grounds or Bucks grounds, which we shall NOT consider today, even though there are spiders in those laces .

The term “ground”, like so many lace terms, is used rather loosely. For instance, is this a ground?

Alexandra Stillwell's *Dictionary of Lace* defines a ground as “the background net of lace worked between the various parts of the overall design”, which is probably how we think of ground initially.

Following that definition, Doris Southard's book *Bobbin Lacemaking* considered four grounds as basic, and encouraged beginners to practice those, namely Torchon, Torchon 2, Brussels and twisted hole. A sample of those grounds is here (*1). As ever, there are various names for each of those grounds. Torchon 2 is sometimes called Dieppe ground, Brussels ground could be called Droschel or double Torchon, Twisted hole is called Pin Hole or Tulle Double and is seen in Tonder AND Bucks Point as well as in Torchon.

An early handbook (1974) by Lolita Eveleth illustrated a few more basic “meshes”—a very useful book to see an enlargement of those grounds: Valenciennes, Mechlin, Droschel, Hexagonal, honeycomb, Kat stitch, Spanish mesh, *Flanders. (*2)

And before that, Gertrude Whiting, in 1920, published a book of instructions for working many grounds, including some she created. I am aware of at least one lace guild in England whose members re-created her grounds and variations, called Trudy. Here is a sample page of that book. (3)

Mary Mcpeek, much later, published a translation of a French book (*Les Dentelles aux Fuseaux*) with patterns with illustrations, and instructions, to make a bookmark-type sample of just one ground per bookmark. (*4). Here is a sample page from that book, and here is the IOLI copy of the book, which was rather expensive for the time. A ground variation of roseground is used here, and could make a nice bookmark like those in her book. (*4a)

Cook and Stott's *The Book of Bobbin Lace Stitches* (1980) includes 23 spider ground variations. (*5)

A more recent book is this one by Julie Hendricks (*6), *A Study of Torchon Grounds*. This includes diagrams and a very useful standard pricking in inches, NOT mm. for making many grounds and their variations. And also patterns for laces using those grounds.

One of the grounds she includes, under the section Miscellaneous Grounds, is the fragile spider ground. CTC.CTC. (6a) BUT, one must know, first of all, how to make a spider before being able to reproduce this ground. And so, while technically, not all spiders fit the definition of “net ground ” or “mesh ground” learning to do that ground led me to other spiders, and I decided to focus on the spider and its variations, today, limiting myself to the six-legged spider, excluding 4-legged , 8-legged , 16- legged spiders.

There are many sources for finding how to work the spider variations.

Many authors include drawings in the first part of a book of patterns, illustrating in line drawings, those grounds which will be required to do the book's patterns. Here is the sort of drawing I cite, this is from Veronica Sorenson's book *Modern Lace Designs* page 21, showing clearly how to make a six-legged spider.(*7) And from Ann Collier's book *Creative Designs in Bobbin Lace* , these clear drawings on graphs.

(*8). Some authors (including Ann Collier) encourage the working of samplers of grounds, something I am sure is valuable, but there never seems to be enough time...

Another book still in print, (1995) which has several spider variations and also can be borrowed from the IOLI library is Brigette Bellon's *Ground -Variation*.

In addition to all these books, some websites go into valuable detail about how to work grounds. One of these is Jo Edkin's website. Here is a printout about spiders from her site (*9) She has a conversational style, which I find appealing. I believe Lorelei Halley's website also treats grounds. And there are others.

The idea of finding or creating spider variations is certainly not a new one. I liked especially this article by Ann Dyer "*Playing With Spiders*" from an English LACE guild magazine, encouraging new kinds of spiders. (10) And there are other articles as well in other magazines as well. This one is from an old IOLI bulletin.

To go back to the Stillwell definition of grounds as a "background", there are some patterns which do not fit that definition, that is, the ground is not simply a background, but the whole lovely picture is conveyed by the use of grounds alone. Thus, this rendition of mountain and sky. (*11).

And this prize-winner in an IOLI contest. (*12)

Or this garment totally created by a few grounds. (*13).

Or these, from an Arachne website.

Also, tablecloths, placemats, etc.

And, a variation of the McPeck one-ground-only bookmarks, this book "*Torchon Purses*" (*10), which uses only a combination of many grounds to make the little bags (*14)

Which brings us to today's exercise.

Some years ago I received this spider bookmark as a gift. (*15) I always meant to make it, and maybe someday I will. But today we will use a graph of the pattern, enlarged to 200% to show detail, either to practice the basic spider, if you wish, or to investigate variations of one ground only, a 6-legged spider. By enlarging the thread paths in colored thread equivalent to size 40 linen, you can see the variety possible with only a few pairs of bobbins. If the original pattern is enlarged to 112%, a pattern can be made in size 60 linen. (Note, Lace Police) You might even want to do more, in future. If so, buy this book on spiders. A pattern for many spider variations is included in the book. And some day, I may make this pattern, too. Actually, the pattern was done by a friend.

Here is the chart which Gertrude Whiting included with her book.

One other note—while I was looking for material for this class, I came across; this in the Sunday New York Times. Even Ralph Lauren likes "big thread" spiders.

NOTE: Susie Johnson, Morris, IL, did a rendition of Doris's class pattern and placed it on the L.A.C.E. website free pattern page.

