

# EXPOSITION *Estella CANZIANI*

Une peintre **anglaise** en Savoie vers 1900



Église Saint-Swithun

Virtual version of the exhibition presented in Saint Swithun, by the Aix-les-Bains Municipal Archives, from Heritage Days 2020

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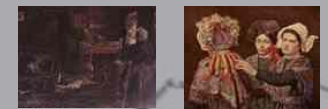
1 Estella Canziani, an Englishwoman discovering Savoyard folklore

2 Estella Canziani, and the folklorist movement

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**Estella Louisa Michaela Canziani was born on January 12, 1887, in London, to an English mother and an Italian father.**

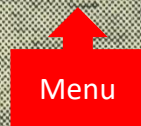
**Her father, Francesco Enrico Canziani, born in Milan in 1848,** himself had an English mother, Estella Castle. After brilliant studies in Pavia and Milan, he became a civil engineer. He was in charge of building a factory for a Genoese industrial group, the "raffineria zuccheri soc. an. Ligure Lombarda", one of the pioneering sugar refineries in Italy. He then went on to work for the chemical and paper industries and became involved in numerous other businesses.

In 1882 he married one of his cousins, Louisa Starr. The couple moved to London, where Enrico pursued many different activities and was part of the London high society. They live in great comfort. Royalist, Italian at heart and in his soul, he presented himself as the representative of the Italian community in London, president of the London branch of the Dante Alighieri Society, participating in many official ceremonies both in Italy and in the United Kingdom.





Estella, elderly with her father in the garden of Kensington. Excerpt from Canziani, Estella. Round about 3 Palace Green. London, Methuen and Co, 1939.





**Her mother, Louisa Stella Starr, was born in 1845 in Liverpool,** to an American father and an English mother, Anna Starr. She studied in London, at the Heatherley School of Fine Art, where she met with great success, regularly participating in the exhibitions of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts.

She quickly became a renowned artist and was part of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. This artistic movement was born in Great Britain in 1848. The painters of this movement, in opposition to Victorian academism, sought to recapture the artistic purity of the Italian primitives, predecessors of Raphael, by imitating their style. They favoured realism, a sense of detail and bright colours. Louisa Starr became the portraitist of London's high society.

A woman of character, a feminist, she set up the family residence in London, at 3 Palace Green, within the royal palace of Kensington. Her husband, Enrico, travelled regularly to Italy to take care of his many affairs while Louisa painted in his London studio.



**A Woman in Ciociarian Costume**  
[Louisa Starr Canziani \(1845–1909\)](#)  
[Birmingham Museums Trust](#)



Louisa Starr in her studio, Excerpt  
from Canziani, Estella. Round  
about 3 Palace Green. London,  
Methuen and Co, 1939



**Estella was born into a privileged artistic environment**, to parents who were already elderly (her mother was 42 and her father 39). She was named after her English grandmother. She was naturally polyglot, her father speaking to her in Italian and sometimes in the Lombard dialect. During her schooling, she learned French until she became fluent.

The family residence was located in the most exclusive part of London, close to the Royal Residence and the gardens of Kensington. The house bought and converted by her mother was an old outbuilding of the castle. Estella kept it and lived there for her whole life, amidst a bric-a-brac of souvenirs and many pets.

At the age of 16, she entered the Copernico School of Art in South Kensington where she prepared for the entrance exam to the Royal Academy of Art, which she passed with flying colours. She stayed there until she was twenty years old.

In addition, her education was largely fuelled by her parents' many intellectual relationships with the British intelligentsia, not only in the artistic field, but also in the literary, philosophical and economic fields. Her mother's American origins, and her father's Italian origins engendered in Estella an open outlook on the world, all the more sharpened as the British Empire, which dominated the world in the 19th century, satisfied her thirst for knowledge, newspapers, travel stories, images of a world moving towards industrialization and modernity.







## Estella and her family



(a) THE AUTHOR'S GRANDMOTHER, HER PARENTS, HER NURSE AND HERSELF  
IN THE FRONT GARDEN OF 3, PALACE GREEN





Her pictorial career began very early, as she mounted her first exhibition at the age of 13, in 1900. When she was 15, one of her works was exhibited by the Royal Gallery. She was never to stop exhibiting her work throughout her life, in galleries in London but also in Milan and in France.

Estella was very close to her father, especially since her mother, Louisa Starr, died very early, at the age of 64. She regularly followed him on his travels in Italy.

It was during one of these stays, in 1905, when she was just 18 years old, that her vocation as a folk painter came to her, as she discovered in Maurienne, a vision of authentic Savoy, not yet overturned by the industrial world.



The Master's garden,  
Pembroke College, Oxford







Piper of Dreams,  
Estella Canziani -  
Medici Impression

Ex Libris d'Estella  
Canziani



Menu





## **Estella and the folklorist movement.**

From this meeting was born her first passion for painting the customs and habits of the peasants of the alpine valleys. She approached this world, very different from her life in London, with her soul as a painter, through encounters with the peasants around Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne, whom she asked to pose. It seems that they willingly accepted to serve as a model for this eccentric Englishwoman who was interested in their way of life: "The last time we all left together, we discovered the part of Savoy that we didn't know, peasants who were still authentic, who wore costumes, and I started to paint them. When my father and I went back to the mountains alone, we decided to get off the train when the place seemed interesting and unknown to us. Shortly before we reached Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne, through the window of the car, we saw a woman in a costume, working in the fields; at the next stop, we got off the train with our luggage and walked to the village through the pastures, with grass up to our knees [...]"





Estella Canziani. Costumes, traditions and songs of Savoy



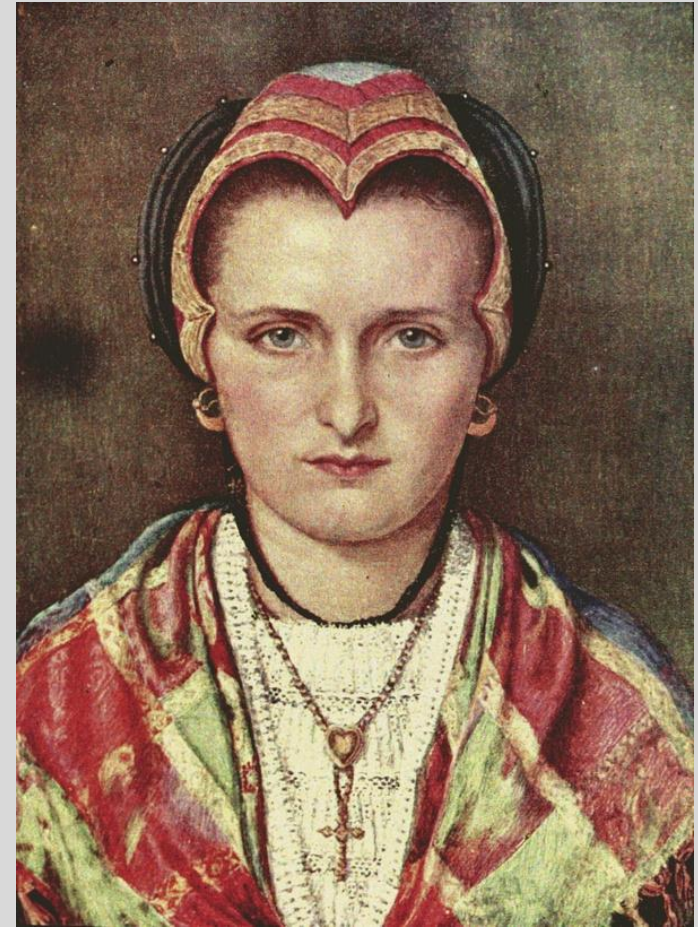
Estella Canziani. Costumes, mœurs et légendes de Savoie. Traduction de Van Gennep, Dardel 1920





« [...] We entered the village, and a woman in a brightly coloured costume passed me, it was too good to miss, so I asked her to sit beside me, and that afternoon I began to work. Thus began what turned out to be a real study of folklore: I painted and wrote my first book."

She was first attracted by the shimmering colours of traditional festive costumes, with no other intention than to create a pictorial work. However, Estella kept a diary of her peregrinations in which she precisely documented her discoveries and encounters, contextualizing her work according to her personal curiosities. Back in London, she showed her work to a family friend, the archaeologist Miles Crawford Burkitt, who introduced her to the Folklore Society and advised her to write a book based on her work.



« Costume de ma grand-mère  
(Bourg-Saint-Maurice) »





Postcard from the Savoyard  
costume festival in 1920.

(Coll. Archives d'Aix-les-Bains)



Menu





***The Folklore Society*** was founded in London in 1878 to study vernacular culture, traditional music, song, dance and drama, storytelling, arts and crafts, customs and beliefs. It was part of a broad movement to evoke the vernacular heritage of a world undergoing a rapid transition to industrialization.

Estella became a member of this movement in 1910 and, at the behest of her new friends, decided to write a book based on her paintings and notes. To this end, she began corresponding with a number of Savoyard scholars who sent her a great deal of documentation.

In 1911, she presented the work she had just finished "Costumes, Traditions and Songs of Savoy" to the Folklore Society, together with a few objects from Savoy, including a wooden pipe. In 1922 she joined the board of the Folklore Society on which she remained until her death.

For the publication of her work in French, Estella turned to Arnold Van Gennep, who is considered to be the founder of French folklorism, which he defined as follows: "The purpose of folklore is, on the one hand, to uncover in today's morals and customs, the manifestations of beliefs of the past, and on the other hand, to discern the seeds of tomorrow's beliefs."

Arnold Van Gennep. *En Savoie du berceau à la tombe*. Chambéry, Dardel, 1916, p5.



Postcard from the Savoyard  
costume festival in 1920.

(coll. Archives d'Aix-les-Bains)



Menu



Poster from the Savoyard costume festival in 1920.  
(Coll. Archives d'Aix-les-Bains)

## The folklorist movement also reaches Aix-les-Bains.

The prospect of Revenge and the Great War nurtured a patriotic feeling to which Savoy and Aix-les-Bains were not immune. In addition, the population, confronted with the upheavals inherent in industrialisation, particularly visible in the Alpine valleys, felt the need to bring to light a past that was sometimes idealised, through a series of cultural events in which folklore held an important place. Aix-les-Bains was not to be outdone in organising large gatherings in folk costumes in the years 1920-1921.







8. - Costumes de Savoie (Environs d'Aix-les-Bains)

Menu



LA SAVOIE

B. F., PARIS "Lux"

75 - Aix-les-Bains - « Mlle Rosette » dentellière

Postcard

(Coll. Archives d'Aix-les-Bains)





Estella Canziani's work was translated into French in 1920, adapted by Arnold Van Gennep. It was a major success, despite the reluctance of the scientific community and in particular of the same Van Gennep, who reproached her for her empirical approach and her lack of scientific method.

Estella recommenced a few years later, in 1913, with a study on the folklore of Piedmont, followed by a third work on the Appenines.

The Canziani family, father and daughter, were great collectors of objects related to folklore and ethnology. Objects that they bought en masse during their travels or had sent to them by their many correspondents.

Estella donated her collections to the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, which for a time thought of opening a specialised section, as the donation was so large. More than 2,000 items in the museum's catalogue come from the Canziani. The museum also preserves drawings made in Savoy and some of her correspondence.

In addition to her work on folklore, Estella continued her pictorial work and gained renown through regular exhibitions, both in Great Britain and in the rest of Europe. Her work is very much marked by landscape painting, portraits and the illustration of her many travels.



" Cross and hearts worn by the peasants of Saint-Colomban.  
Earrings of Tarentaise "



Menu







Arnold Van Gennep  
(musée d'ethnographie de Neuchâtel)

**Estella Canziani's work is considered fundamental to the ethnological history of the Alpine valleys** and particularly of Savoy. In her own way, she anticipated the work of another ethnologist who used more scientific methods, Eugenie Goldstern. The latter, an Austrian of Polish origin, studied rural life, particularly in Haute Maurienne, in the years 1913-1914, shortly after Estella, following the principles developed by Arnold Van Gennep.

Arnold Van Gennep was an ethnologist of Swiss origin, who, in addition to his studies on Madagascar, Australia and Algeria, also studied the Alpine world. He developed a method of investigation which enabled him to publish, in 1910 for the first edition, a fundamental work on Savoy ethnology: "In Savoy, from the cradle to the grave".



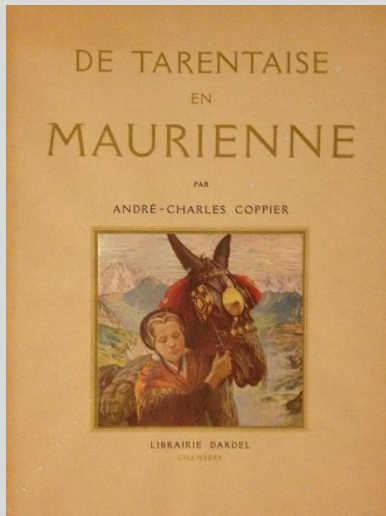
Closer to Estella's work, the work of André-Charles Coppier is contemporary to her, although published later by Dardel, in 1931. At the end of his book he explained his motivation: "I simply wanted to mark with images and these direct notes the stages of my walks which will, no doubt, in very few years, take on a legendary accent, when the stream of travellers, passing the high passes of Bonhomme and Iseran, will have modernised these valleys where so many ancient traditions still survive in the isolation of the mountain clans..." Estella could have written this sentence herself. The work was conceived in the same spirit, based on notes made on walks and drawings begun a little before Estella's peregrinations, around 1895. However, Coppier also turned his attention to pastoral life, unlike Estella, who only had eyes for costumes and jewellery.

It should be noted that these folklorists were totally unaware of the industrialization that had already been making its presence felt in the valleys since the 1890s, and that they could not fail to notice on their way. They described to us an idealized world of a mountain region in which lively traditions are the reflection of an immemorial past.

As for the world of leisure, they were completely oblivious to it, although Estella Canziani passed through Aix-les-Bains, or at least the region. A painting representing the lake and the Dent du Chat (Cat's Tooth) bears witness to this.







Menu



## The Lumière autochromes from the Duvernay collection.

Louis Duvernay was a doctor from Aix-les-Bains, born to a pharmacist father in 1877, and founder of a dynasty of thermal physicians in Aix-les-Bains. He was therefore a contemporary of Estella Canziani.

Cultivated, erudite and very curious about the scientific innovations made during his lifetime, he was particularly interested in photography and the history of his region. He had done his military service in the Haute-Maurienne, from where he had brought back many photographs of life in the high-altitude forts at the end of the 19th century. He exercised his talents as a photographer during the Great War, when he served as a military doctor in hospitals behind the front lines.

Curious about everything, he travelled a lot in Europe. His medical career was illustrated as much by his merits as a thermal doctor as by his medical research and his numerous publications.

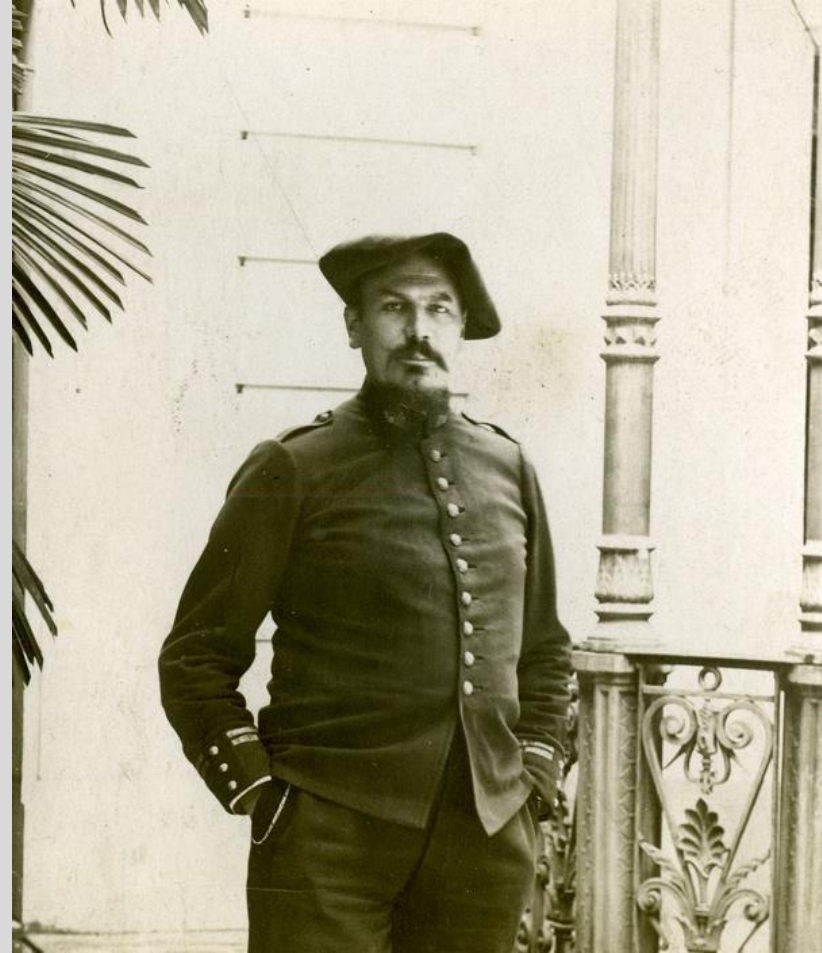
His descendants donated part of his library and archives to his hometown and among these was a collection of 15 Lumiere autochromes of Estella Canziani's paintings.







Menu



Louis Duvernay. Coll. Archives  
d'Aix-les-Bains

Louis Duvernay, photographe  
Don de Mme Romieux



## The Lumiere autochromes. (Text François Fouger)

Nicephore Niepce is considered to be the first to have succeeded in fixing the image obtained with a "camera obscura" in 1823-24. Niepce's associate and successor, Louis Daguerre, perfected the process and photography was finally officially born with the presentation of the daguerreotype by Arago to the Academy of Sciences on January 7, 1839.

The first indirect process of colour photography (subtractive trichromy) was developed by Charles Cros and Louis Ducos du Hauron (1837-1920) and presented in 1869 to the same Academy of Sciences. Simply put, this consists of creating 3 photos on 3 coloured gelatins under 3 filters coloured with complementary colours, then assembling these 3 photos, a long and very slow process!

On February 2, 1891, the French physicist Gabriel Lippmann presented a revolutionary process of colour photography: the interferential method. Although complex and expensive, this process is to date the only one that can reproduce colours directly, and accurately fix all the colours of the spectrum.





The autochrome was invented by the Lumière Brothers in December 1903, and marketed from 1907 onwards; it used a homogeneous mixture of microscopic grains of potato starch dyed with primary colours (red-orange, green and blue-violet, 7000 grains per square mm) spread out on a glass plate. The resulting trichromatic selection mosaic was covered with a thin panchromatic black and white gelatino-silver bromide emulsion. This plate could be used in any photographic chamber and, once developed and inverted to positive, it was possible, by looking at the plate through a transparency or by projecting it like a slide – to see a colour image, the colours of the starch grains remaining visible through the emulsion. Compared to its predecessors, this process of colour photography was much simpler to use and was to remain in use until the appearance of Agfacolor and Kodachrome in 1935-36.



The Lumière brothers  
[Copyright](#)

## The paintings of Estella Canziani at the Birmingham Museum.

Most of the paintings Estella produced in Savoy, published in her book, are kept in the Birmingham museum. They are Tempera paintings (egg-bound), on wooden panels, quite small in size: 15 by 20 cm. They are reproduced life-size in her book.



"Peasant women looking at the salt in a wooden barometer in the shape of a chicken to find out if the weather will be nice. Wet salt announces rain and dry salt announces good weather."







" Saint-Jean-d'Arves Sunday Costume".





" Everyday working costume of Saint-Colomban ".







"Young girl costumer from Jarrier's maiden costume"





"Young girl in mourning costume from Valloires".







" At the church in Valloires "



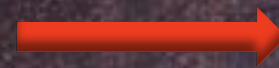


" The shower (Valloires)"





"Interior used as stable, bedroom and kitchen"

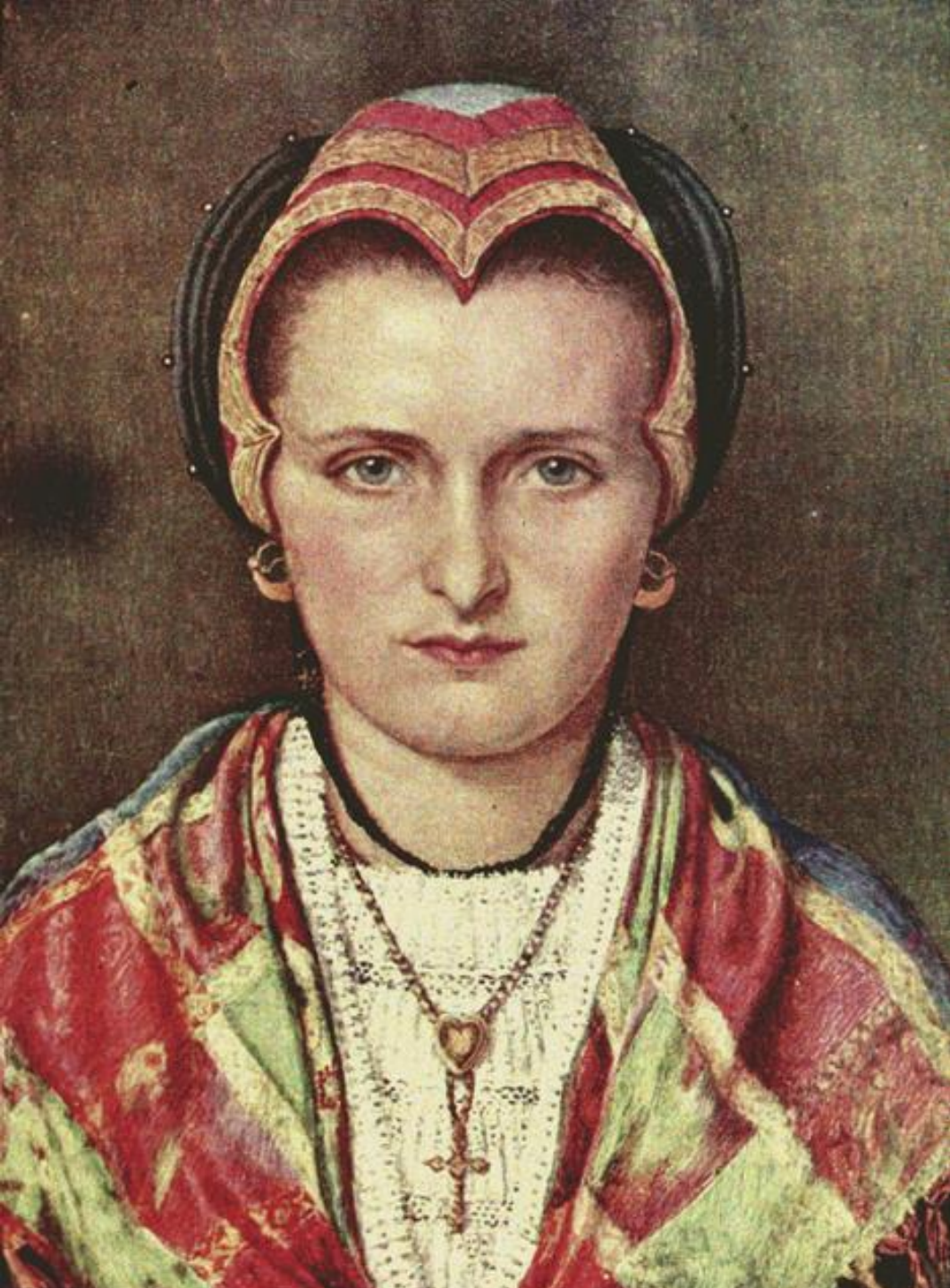




"Young girl making lace"







" Costume of my grandmother (Bourg-Saint-Maurice)"







"Wedding headdresses"







" Costumes of Fontcouverte and Jarrier "



"Children of Saint-Sorlin-d'Arves "







"Belt buckles, apron buckles, stars to decorate belts. Saint-Colomban "





Menu







[Where to find the catalog?](#)