Table cover - altar cloth of Mária Széchy

Textile and Costume Collection

Accession Nr.:	19461
Date of production:	mid 17th century
Place of production:	Northern Hungary
Materials:	canvas; silk yarn; silver thread; silver-gilt thread
Techniques:	loop stitch; stem stitch; Turkish satin stitch
Dimensions:	height: 178 cm width: 253 cm

The Calvinist church of Szendrő traditionally derives the table-cloth from a commission given by Maria Szechy (1610–1679) known as the “Venus of Murany”. In the corners and along the sides there are separate symmetrical bunches of flowers. The middle is adorned by a bunch of pomegranates growing out of a cross shape and composed into a rectangle. Between the flower bushes along the sides there are folk-style griffons each holding the front paw above a peacock. The exact prototype of this figure can be found in Federico da Vinciolo’s pattern-book of netting (Les singuliers et nouveaux pourtraicts. Paris 1587. R. III) with the difference that under the griffon’s paw is a flower. This table-cloth well illustrates the fusion of eastern and western styles that characterized Hungarian aristocratic linen embroideries in the 16th–17th centuries. The composition of symmetrical flower bushes with coiling flowery vines on either side derives from Italian Renaissance ornamentation. The prototype is the bunch of flowers rising from the so-called “Italian jug”. The motif of jug was gradually omitted and replaced by a heart, tulip, and pomegranate or root shape adjusting to Hungarian tastes. While the positioning of the vines preserved the West European tradition for centuries, the shape of the flowers underwent a transformation rooted in local traditions. The large blue flowers of lacy edges and the serrated leaves bear the imprint of Ottoman influence as they were borrowed from Turkish needleworkers in the occupied areas and from imported textiles. The decoration of the table-cloth is an artistic alloy of Italian, Turkish and Hungarian traditions.

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