Rosary - from the bequest of István Báthory

Metalwork Collection

Accession Nr.:	E 65.76
Date of production:	ca. 1570
Place of production:	Italy
Materials:	coral; silver-gilt
Techniques:	repoussé/punched
Dimensions:	length: 49 cm width: 7 cm weight: 227 g

Eleven large coral beads attached to an engraved silver-gilt ring make up this rosary. Suspended from the end are a filigree ball and a cross, its stems formed of four smaller coral beads. The body of the cross was painted with scenes which are now illegible, although archive documents indicate that they were in gold and silver on a red ground and depicted the Holy Family and the Annunciation.
Several different theories have been put forward to explain the origin of this rosary. Since it is of typical size and material, it can be related to a number of entries in the Esterházy inventories, most of them in turn indicating a royal connection.
For instance, the list of Palatine Pál Esterházy's treasures drawn up in 1685 mentions a rosary which more or less accords with this piece and links it to Janos Szapolyai (1487-1540), King of Hungary from 1526. Later inventories of the Fraknó treasury, however, dating from 1696 and 1725, name a similar rosary as having belonged to István Báthory, King of Poland (1533-1586). István Báthory might have received such a gift from Pope Gregory XIII through the new Papal Nuncio, Giovanni Andrea Caligari (1527-1594), who arrived in Krakow in 1578.
In 1670 the richest art collection of any Hungarian aristocrat, that of Ferenc Nádasdy (1622-1671) - known as 'the Hungarian Croesus' - was confiscated after his execution for involvement in a conspiracy against the Habsburg rulers. An inventory made the same year the Nádasdy treasures were taken to the court in Vienna lists two rosaries of coral beads. Such a rosary may have come to the Nádasdy family from the Báthory, who were closely related, and this possible link was stressed by the Esterházy. The latter may have acquired the rosary via Palatine Pál Esterházy, who took up the opportunity of redeeming objects from Hungarian collections sequestered by the Habsburgs in the wake of the Wesselényi Conspiracy of the late 1660s.

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