

ST MARGARET'S CHURCH
 MEDIAŞ - MEDIASCH



CAT. 242 'Lotto', 'kilim' style field and ragged palmette and hooked bar border, West Anatolia
 17th century, 120 x 205 cm
Schmutzler 1933, plate 18
 St Margaret's Church, Mediaş
inv. 511

Located in the heart of Transylvania, on the road between Sibiu and Sighişoara, Mediaş is the main city of a hilly region, known as the 'wine country', crossed by the Târnavă Mare river. The first document relating to Mediaş, *possessio Mediesy*, goes back to 1267 when Saxon settlers first arrived in the area. In the Middle Ages the town was an important centre of craftsmanship and trade. In the 15th and 16th centuries there were 33 craft guilds who also contributed to the defence of the city.

The pride of the inhabitants is St Margaret's Church, one of the most beautiful fortified churches in Transylvania. A 15th century Gothic building with three naves, the church is surrounded by a fortified wall and for this reason is referred to as the 'Castle'. The Trumpet Players' Tower dominates the whole complex.

As well as frescoes from different periods, the church has the oldest bronze baptismal font in Transylvania, dating to the second half of the 14th century, and an impressive Gothic altar (1480). Three further pre-Reformation altars that have been brought here from smaller parishes provide evidence of Transylvanian art in the early 16th century.

In common with most other Transylvanian cities, over the centuries Mediaş was besieged, occupied and looted. However, no serious episodes of fire are recorded in the annals of the church. This might explain the large number of antique rugs, including three 'Holbeins' from the 16th century or possibly even earlier, that still survive here.

Research carried out for this study¹ brought to light a report from 1901 when the rugs were found in the vestry (see p. 38). It describes how the "women of the church" decided which of them were still usable and carefully placed them on the pews and choir stalls. This is a unique account of the moment when the rugs, after a long period of storage, were 'discovered' and used to adorn the church. Being out of use for such a long time probably favoured their state of preservation. Later documents record the theft of nine rugs from the church during the period of the 'hunt for rugs' in Transylvania.

A group of 13 pieces were sent to the 1914 exhibition and it is significant that



Small-pattern 'Holbein'
 'Lotto' and Selendi rugs
 in St Margaret's Church in Mediaş