

A M I R M O H T A S H E M I



Ottoman Silk Coverlet (Yorgan Yüzü)

Ottoman Turkey, Late 18th to early 19th century

196cm high, 168cm wide

Embroidered silk

Provenance: North American private collection

Stock no.: A5865

A vibrant blue, white, and green embroidered tree of life grows out of a European-style urn, contrasting with the orange silk canvas. A range of textures is achieved by the use of different stitches, including French knots for the flowers and chain stitch for the leaves. Textiles of this size were often used as quilt covers (*yorgan yüzü*) or wall hangings to keep the home warm in winter. The rich silks were also used as ostentatious status symbols. The *Sünnet*, or circumcision ceremony, was an occasion to display a family's most precious textiles. Celebrated in the women's quarters, a professional would come to the home to dress a bed with canopies and covers.¹ The 'Cosmic Tree' or 'Tree of Life' is a concept in pre-Islamic Turkish mythology whereby a baby is likened to the world and the umbilical cord to a tree.

Perhaps this association with new life is why the tree motif was so popular in this ceremony.²

By the mid-eighteenth century, European styles were increasingly fashionable in the Ottoman world. Brightly-coloured silks embroidered with large trees growing from vases, bouquets of flowers, and large bows, became fashionable.³ An example of a large yellow silk (228.6cm x 172.7cm) in the Cleveland Museum of Art (accession no. [1916.1358](#)) is decorated with a large tree of life with a bow. A red silk decorated with another tree of life in gold appliqué and embroidery is in the International Quilt Museum, University of Nebraska-Lincoln (accession no. [2023.014.0007](#)) measures 226 x 163 cm.

n.b. accession nos are clickable links

¹ Taylor, Roderick. *Ottoman Embroidery*. Wesel: Uta Hülsey, 1993. p. 110.

² Can, Mine. 'Tree Motifs in Turkish Embroidery Art', *Contemporary Issues in Arts* (2015). pp. 292-301.

³ Mackie, Louise W. *Symbols of Power: Luxury Textiles from Islamic Lands, 7th-21st Century*. Cleveland; New Haven: Cleveland Museum of Art; Yale University Press, 2015. pp. 336-7.