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„MATYÓ” FAME IN THE NEW WORLD

Folk art of Mezőkövesd (Borsod county) became popular world wide during the interwar period. Embroideries, textiles, pieces of folk costume and other objects made by, and referred to people called „matyó” reached the American continent early this century. Ways of popularising the folk culture of this settlement populated mostly by landless agricultural labourers are manifold. First, there is a question whether emigrants from Mezőkövesd for the United States before World War I did or did not take their objects to the new environment. Obviously, they adapted quickly to the American daily life and culture although evidences show how some of them were consciously or unconsciously keeping selected items and values of the old country. Second, a transcontinental commercial network of peasant handicraft, mostly embroidery, developed from the 1920s onward and the „matyó” embroideries, souvenirs became very popular among the Hungarian-Americans as well as in certain spheres of the American middle class. The latter fact related to the third way of popularising homeland folk art.

Philanthropic associations, such as YWCA, International Institutes, etc. of the early 1920 used the folk art and handicraft to help immigrants in the Americanisation drive. Later, in the post-Depression years, fairs, commercial expositions, international fashion or automobile shows also used authentic or commercial homeland folk art to attract a wide public. The „matyó” fame in overseas served as in-group assertion of ethnic identity while it represented symbolically the Hungrianness for the outside, i. e. the American world.

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