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# Historical References in Souvenir Design

**Ferhan Egemen Sunal**

## **Abstract**

For both citizens and visitors, Turkey offers a unique experience with numerous cultural facets and historical motifs. What one would take away from this experience raises an intriguing question. One of the primary symbols of the things we bring back from our travels is souvenirs. The study's objective is to analyze Turkish souvenir items in light of the references to history included in their designs. The primary focus of the study is the MuzedenAl website, which is the official online museum shop of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Turkey. A content analysis is conducted to determine how the artifacts' design attributes relate to the specified historical topics. Upon analysis, it becomes apparent that the souvenir objects not only serve as mementos for tourists but also encapsulate and portray the intricate and multi-layered history of Turkish design.

*Keywords: cultural heritage, historical motifs, design analysis*

## Introduction

The design of souvenirs has evolved from simple keepsakes to thoughtfully crafted objects that connect with cultural, historical, and aesthetic values. In contemporary souvenir design, historicism plays a critical role by adding layers of meaning to items intended for modern travelers and collectors. Historicist-inspired souvenirs draw from architectural styles, traditional motifs, and historical narratives, allowing them to evoke a sense of place, memory, and identity. Oxford Dictionary (2024) states that a souvenir is something you purchase and/or keep as a reminiscence of a location, an event, or a vacation.

The Latin word *subvenire*, which means “to come up, come to mind,” is the source of the Middle French word *souvenir*, which is derived from (se) *souvenir* (de) meaning “to remember” (Hoven & Eggen, 2005). A tangible component of the travel experience is souvenirs. Hitchcock and Teague (2002) state that a souvenir’s “function is to store or stimulate memories.” Souvenirs can be defined as the physical equivalent of travels, events, relationships, and memories of all types (Singh, 2018). This article explores how contemporary souvenir objects incorporate historicist themes into their creations by analyzing the content of the official Turkish Museum Shops website [muzedenal.com](http://muzedenal.com).

Historicism in architecture can be described in its most general definition as an approach that reuses the building forms of ancient periods and is based on the methods of ancient craftsmen. (Gul, 2024). Using historical symbols and/or references in products that are consumed in cultural and material ways is an approach that spreads a different version of history. Historicism in design makes use of a component by separating it from the comprehensive context in which it actually occurs and tying the past to the present within a distinct system of systems (Yenisehirlioglu, 2002). This approach rewrites history in a storytelling attitude and redefines the user’s relationship with history.

## Methodology

A systematic approach to research, Content Analysis enables researchers to identify trends in media material that are frequently missed by unsystematic observation. Establishing the parameters of the material to be examined is the first step in this procedure. An outline of the necessary steps involved in systematic quantitative analysis is provided (Pavelko & Grabe, 2017). The study utilizes the content analysis method to categorize and examine the objects on the studied online sales website.

The study first sets the boundaries of the study area to achieve the above-defined analysis. The research only focuses on the online inventory of the Muzedenal.com website on 11.11.2024 and 12.11.2024. The inventory is listed according to the object classification stated by the website. There are 10 main categories of the website, of which the study focused on five. These five categories are statues, jewelry, clothing and accessories, decorative objects, and kitchen items. The other categories, which are For Kids, Books and Stationery Items, Replicas, and Atatürk Collection, are out of the scope of the study. The category Museum Collections is a different classification of the existing items according to museum names and was not studied to avoid repetition of items.

A total of 5 categories, including 370 objects, were studied throughout the course of the research. The subcategories were not included, and items were studied using the Browse All option. Items were listed with Price: Least to Most option. Due to the large number of items on the website, only some samples were shared with photos throughout the study. After the examination of the items, the results are shared with numbers and tables according to the results achieved.

**Table 1**

*Categories and Number of Items*

Category Name	Number of Listed Items
Statues	88
Jewellery	125
Clothing and Accessories	91
Decorative Objects	53
Kitchen	13

## The Case

The study focuses on analyzing the products in the online souvenir website Muzedenal (www.muzedenal.com). This website is the online sales channel of museum stores affiliated with Anadolu Cultural Entrepreneurship, which operates over 180 museums and ruins under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Turkey and is the largest museum store chain in the world, as stated in the website About Us section.

Replicas, jewelry, decorative sculptures and objects, special edition books, and everyday-use souvenirs like jewelry, mugs, bags, and t-shirts are all part of the website's product line, which ranges from one-of-a-kind handmade items to special designs of historical heritage. The study focuses on the online inventory of the website and analyses the design properties of the objects through the lens of historical references.

In the first category, which includes statues, statuettes, and reliefs, there are 88 items in total. Hittite Terracotta Relief from the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations (Figure 1) is one of the cheapest items made from Marble Powder and Polyester in 15x9 cm dimensions. It is a direct copy of the original artifact, similar to most of the other relief items in the category. In Figure 2, the statue of Hermes can be seen; it is made of marble powder and polyester in 14x8 cm. The Medusa Relief (Figure 3) is made of Marble Powder and Polyester in 18x14 cm and reproduced in a blue-to-green colour scheme instead of the original white marble colour.

**Figure 1, 2, 3.**

*Hittite Terracotta Relief(1), Statue of Hermes (2), Medusa Relief(3)*



The Mars Statue (Figure 4) from Zeugma Mosaic Museum is reproduced in metal in 11x4 cm, including a wooden base. The statue is made in a bronze-like color; the origin of the metal is not stated by the website. Figure 5 shows Hatay Tel Tayinat Lion Black Statue in brown-black polyester in 16x14 cm. The Reclining Achilles Statue (Figure 6) is 28x19 cm made of marble powder and polyester as a direct copy in scale to its original.

**Figure 4, 5, 6.**

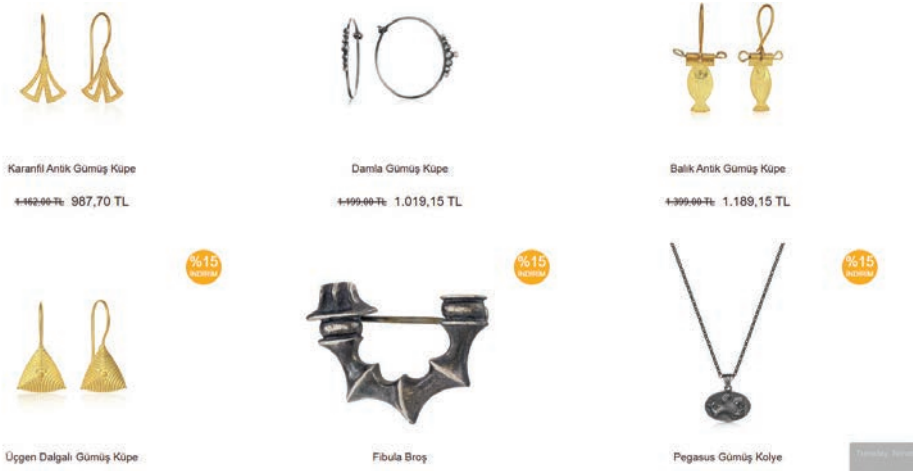
*The Mars Statue (4), Hatay Tel Tayinat, Lion Black Statue (5), The Reclining Achilles Statue (6),*



The second category is Jewellery. This is the category with the most items. Figure 7 shows six of the cheapest items in the jewelry category. Though the price increases and some material and detail changes are seen, most of the jewelry can be clustered into two main subcategories. The first one is geometric abstractions, and the second one is direct copies. In Figure 7, examples from both categories, like a geometric pair of earrings and a necklace with a directly copied symbol, can be seen. A pair of gold-plated 825 sterling silver earrings with a geometric circular composition can be seen in Figure 8.

**Figure 7**

*A screenshot of the jewelry items.*



**Figure 8, 9, 10, 11**

*Circular Antique Silver Earrings(8), Spearhead Earrings (9), Turtle Earrings (10), Fravahar Silver Necklace (11).*



**Figure 12**

*Trojan Bracelet*



The third category is Clothing and Accessories. It consists mostly of T-shirts, Sweatshirts, and Bags. All designs are common objects with symbols from the historical heritage of Turkish culture on them. The silhouette of Topkapı, Pamukkale, İstanbul, Kapadokya, and the Nazar shape are some of many popular cultural icons are used directly on the clothing items' surfaces (Figure 13, 14). In Figure 15, another object, a fan, from the collection can be seen. It is a directly scaled copy of a famous miniature drawing from the Ottoman Era, and the design does not have an interpretation of the existing drawing.

**Figure 13**

*Bags with motifs on*



Muni Topkapı Sarı Telefon Çantası

1.250,00 TL



Muni Topkapı Nil Yeşili Telefon Çantası

1.250,00 TL



Muni Topkapı Lila Telefon Çantası

1.250,00 TL



Muni Topkapı Kraliyet Mavisi Telefon Çantası



Muni İstanbul Arkeoloji Bej Telefon Çantası



Muni Topkapı Kırmızı Telefon Çantası

**Figure 14**

*T-shirts with motifs on*



Reflect Pamukkale T-Shirt Sarı Unisex

1.580,00 TL



Reflect Göreme T-Shirt Sarı Unisex

1.580,00 TL



Reflect Nazar T-Shirt Gri Unisex

1.580,00 TL



Reflect İstanbul Arkeoloji T-Shirt Gri Unisex



Reflect Konya Kubbe T-Shirt Beyaz Unisex



Reflect Pamukkale T-Shirt Beyaz Unisex

**Figure 15**

*Fan with miniature art drawing*



Another category examined by the study is Decorative Objects. The category consists of vases, bowls, candle holders, boxes, tiles, and other objects. Figure 16 shows a wooden box inlaid with a mother of pearl, which was a refined branch of crafts in the Ottoman Era. It is understood that the use of mother-of-pearl in woodworking dates back to 4500-5000 years ago, together with materials such as ivory, bone, lapis lazuli, and colored limestone in the decorative arts of ancient Mesopotamia. Toilet boxes, game boards, instruments such as lyres and harps decorated with this technique, and various decorative objects are considered masterpieces of Sumerian art (Bozkurt, 2024). The object on display is a recreation of the traditional crafts style. A replica of a traditional Iznik ceramic tile can be seen in Figure 17. The art of tile has shown great progress and richness in the Ottoman Empire since its beginnings with the application of various techniques. İznik, which was an important center of tile and ceramic production in the Ottoman period, continued this activity until the end of the 17th century (Yetkin, 2024).



**Figure 16, 17**

*Wooden Inlay Box (16), Iznik Ceramic Tile (17)*



Figure 18 shows a metal door knocker. It is an exact reproduction of the door knocker found on the Mahmud I Library's double-winged bronze door, which is adorned with curving branches and floral designs. Geometric patterns of Islamic art were also a part of Turkish decorative objects. Both Seldjuks and Ottomans used the repeating patterns on daily objects. A small sugar bowl with gold leaf coating on glass, inspired by the bathhouse cage in the Harem section of the Topkapi Palace Museum, brings glass and Islamic patterns together, directly copying the forms from the original object (Figure 19). The blue bowl (Figure 20) combines the turquoise color with the Seldjuk star pattern on the surface, along with a floral pattern on the wider edge. All three components are exact replicas from historical sources that have been used as inspirations.

**Figure 18, 19, 20**

*Metal Door Knocker (18), Latis-I Harem Collection Sugar Bowl (19), Karatay Medresesi Koleksiyonu Mavi Kase 18x10 cm (20)*



The final category is under the name Kitchen. It contains glasses, mugs, cups, coasters, and tea sets. Figure 21 shows a selection of mugs and a glass. They have illustrations or miniature art copied onto them. Form wise there seems to be no search for an innovative approach. The coffee set (Figure 22) in the category brings together a more contemporary form and color with a traditional pattern.

**Figure 21, 22**

*Mugs and glasses from the website (21), Turkish Coffee Set (22)*



Bodrum Su Altı Müzesi Koleksiyonu Kupa

199,00 TL



Göbeklitepe Koleksiyonu Kupa

300,00 TL



Göbekitepe Dairesel Koleksiyonu Kupa

300,00 TL



Topkapı Sarayı Koleksiyonu Topkapı Sarayı Silüet Kupa

300,00 TL



İstanbul Koleksiyonu Kupa

300,00 TL



Minyatür Koleksiyonu Pembe Su Bardağı

399,00 TL



## Conclusion

370 objects were examined under 5 categories throughout the study. 23 of the objects were shared with photos.

In harmony with the purpose of the study, objects were studied in order to look for ways of using historical references in design. The biggest group is the exact replicas, either in the same dimensions or scale (Figure 1). The replicas are repeated in shape but not in material. These objects appeared mostly in the Statues and Decorative Objects categories. The second category came out as the objects that had copies of original motifs and symbols on their surface with relatively contemporary forms and colors (Figure 14). The jewelry category had examples of historical symbols on contemporary forms of accessories. Clothing, decorative objects, and kitchens also contained contemporary items with historical symbols, motifs, and illustrations directly copied onto them. The third group consisted of objects that synthesized historical references in a new way, resulting in a new interpretation (Figure 8). These objects mostly existed in the jewelry category with the approach of using geometrical shapes either by copying or redesigning.

One of the most preeminent results of the study is the official online sales platform of Turkish museums consists mostly replicas of existing historical items. The second group to follow up includes items with historical symbols copied and directly transferred onto them. Only a small amount of souvenir items have an understanding of decomposing historical references and composing them in another context.

Considering the rich history Turkiye has outside and within its boundaries, these results can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, because of the large amount of history and related culture and symbolism, even the replicas on their own can be considered a rich and fun inventory that could promote history. On the other hand, the lack of decomposing and resynthesizing this history in an innovative approach could point to issues in the depth of understanding the multi-layered history of Asia Minor and Turkiye's background.

**Table 2**

*Items in Groups*

Ways of Using Historical References	Categories	Number of Items	Total
GROUP 1 Replicas	Statues	81	106
	Jewellery	6	
	Clothing and Accessories	1	
	Decorative Objects	17	
	Kitchen	1	
GROUP 2 Direct Transfer of Symbols and Motifs	Statues	-	152
	Jewellery	30	
	Clothing and Accessories	90	
	Decorative Objects	25	
	Kitchen	7	
GROUP 3 Synthesis of Historical References	Statues	7	95
	Jewellery	84	
	Clothing and Accessories	-	
	Decorative Objects	1	
	Kitchen	4	

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