

## **The Motif of Abundance in Turkish Culture and Its Reflections in Decorative Arts**

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### **Abstract**

At the core of the concept of abundance lies an awareness of the cyclical nature of the natural world. Human communities have understood since early times that the continuity of production is directly linked to natural cycles. The regular change of seasons, the resting and rejuvenation of the soil, and the reproduction of animals during specific periods have been decisive in the formation of the idea of fertility. References to the cycle of nature are also striking in the artistic reflections of this understanding. The circular or repetitive arrangements of motifs symbolize seasonal continuity and the continuity of production. The design of the fertility motif as the main motif in pattern compositions is a conscious emphasis on the continuity of nature. This study examines the fertility motif in the context of its conceptual framework, mythological and religious origins, historical development in Turkish culture, and reflections in decorative arts. Prepared with an academic and descriptive approach, this text aims to demonstrate that the motif of abundance is one of our motifs that carries cultural memory rather than being merely a decorative element.

**Keywords:** Abundance, Motif, Ornamentation, Culture, Art

### **INTRODUCTION**

Throughout human history, the relationship with nature has given rise to symbolic narratives shaped by the desire for survival and continuity. At the heart of these narratives has often been the concept of ‘abundance’. Abundance is a multifaceted phenomenon encompassing layers of meaning such as plenty, proliferation, productivity, continuity and prosperity. Particularly in agricultural societies, the idea of fertility has symbolised not only an abundance of produce but also social harmony, divine grace and cosmic balance. Consequently, fertility has transcended its status as an abstract concept to become a visual and symbolic language, reflected through motifs in works of art, everyday objects and architectural structures.

The concept of abundance is one of the oldest intellectual constructs at the heart of the relationship between human communities and nature. From an anthropological perspective, abundance is regarded as a symbolic reflection of humanity’s productive capacity, the will to sustain life, and its fragility in the face of nature. From hunter-gatherer communities onwards, the cyclical nature of the natural world, the order of the seasons and the continuity of life have been decisive in the formation of the concept of fertility. The earth’s yield, the proliferation of

animals and the continuity of water have been perceived not merely as physiological necessities for humans, but also as a sacred and protected order.

When the cultural foundations of the concept of abundance are examined, it becomes clear that this notion is not limited to material wealth alone. In most societies, abundance also encompasses the continuation of the lineage, the preservation of social order, and the desire to live in harmony with divine powers. In this context, abundance carries a collective rather than an individual meaning and plays a significant role in shaping collective memory. The understanding of abundance, passed down from generation to generation through cultural transmission, has over time taken concrete form through symbols and motifs.

In Turkish culture, the concept of abundance has acquired a content rooted in both nature and livestock farming, influenced by a nomadic and semi-nomadic way of life. The growth of the herd, the health of the animals, and the ability of the settlement to sustain itself have been among the most tangible indicators of abundance. For this reason, abundance was not merely an individual expectation; it was viewed as an essential condition for the community's survival. This understanding has, over time, evolved into a symbolic language and gained visual expression through motifs.

In Turkish culture, the relationship between the cycle of nature and abundance has gained particular significance within the framework of nomadic and semi-nomadic lifestyles. The summer pasture–winter pasture system is not merely an economic necessity; it is a conscious choice to align with the rhythm of nature. This system aimed to ensure the healthy proliferation of herds and the preservation of pasture productivity. Consequently, abundance has taken shape not as a concept that exploits nature, but as one that exists in harmony with it.

The motif of abundance is one of the fundamental symbols associated with the concepts of production, proliferation, continuity and sanctity from the earliest periods of human history. Particularly in societies based on agriculture and livestock farming, the idea of abundance has been perceived not merely as an economic expectation, but as an indication of the cosmic order, divine will and social well-being. In Turkish culture, the motif of abundance has acquired a multi-layered world of meaning throughout the historical process stretching from the steppe cultures of Central Asia to Anatolia; it has been represented through rich symbolic expressions on textiles, architecture, ceramics, metalwork, woodwork and everyday objects.

Within the context of Turkish culture, the motif of abundance has drawn its inspiration from a socio-economic structure where a nomadic way of life, livestock rearing and agricultural activities are intertwined. Among Central Asian Turkic communities, fertility was directly associated with the forces of nature and elements considered sacred. Cults of the earth, water,

mountains, trees and animals were decisive in shaping the concept of fertility. During this period, fertility was identified not merely with material abundance, but also with the continuation of the lineage, the proliferation of herds and the strength of the community.

With the Turks' adoption of Islam, the concept of abundance was reinterpreted within a new system of belief; however, it largely retained its old symbolic codes. In Islamic thought, abundance was accepted as a manifestation of divine will and established a stronger connection with the sacred. This situation has paved the way for the motif of abundance to be used extensively in works of art as both a religious and cultural symbol. In Turkish decorative arts, which developed particularly in the Anatolian region, the motif of abundance is characterised by a rich variety of forms and symbolic expressions.

An examination of Turkish mythology reveals that the concept of fertility is associated with numerous mythological elements, both directly and indirectly. Belief systems such as the earth-water cult, the mountain cult and the tree cult form the mythological foundations of the idea of fertility. In particular, the elements of earth and water were regarded as the source of life and sanctified as the bearers of fertility. This sanctity is directly linked to the idea of productivity and proliferation.

The tree emerges as one of the most powerful symbols of fertility in Turkish mythology. The concept of the Tree of Life represents the connection between heaven and earth; at the same time, it symbolises continuity, fertility and the cycle of life. The relationship between the tree's roots, trunk and branches has been perceived as a cosmic schema expressing the order of the universe and the continuity of abundance. For this reason, the tree motif has frequently been used in works of art as a symbolic element directly linked to abundance.

Gender roles occupy a significant place within the symbolic world of the fertility motif. In particular, the concepts of production and fertility have been addressed within a symbolic relationship to female identity. The fact that the art of weaving is largely practised by women makes the concentration of fertility motifs in this field meaningful. Women have been perceived as the bearers of fertility, as figures of production and reproduction.

In this context, motifs of abundance represent not only economic prosperity, but also domestic harmony, the continuity of the family line and social stability. The frequent appearance of these motifs on household items indicates that abundance is perceived as a household-centred value. This demonstrates that the concept of abundance is directly linked to the social structure.

The historical journey of the Turks from Central Asia to Anatolia has also brought about a formal and semantic transformation of the motif of fertility. The concept of fertility, which

was expressed primarily through direct and abstract symbols during the Central Asian period, became enriched and diversified in Anatolia as a result of interaction with different cultures. During this process, the motif of fertility both retained traces of ancient Turkic belief systems and integrated with new religious and cultural elements.

The agricultural suitability of the Anatolian landscape led to the concept of fertility being emphasised more distinctly. The strong connection with the land ensured that fertility was perceived through agricultural production; this situation was also reflected in the formal characteristics of the motifs. Ears of corn, bunches of grapes, pomegranates and stylised plant forms became prominent elements in the symbolic representation of fertility.

During this process of transformation, the motif of abundance was not confined solely to rural life; it also found its place within urban culture and architectural structures. Particularly in the decorative schemes of religious and civil architecture, abundance was interpreted as a wish for the protection and continuity of the structure. Thus, the motif of abundance gained a broad scope of application, extending from private living spaces to public spaces.

The decisive role of belief systems in the development of the motif of abundance cannot be denied. With the Turks' adoption of Islam, the concept of abundance was reinterpreted within a new religious framework. In Islamic thought, abundance is associated with the concepts of divine grace and mercy; this has deepened the symbolic meaning of the motifs. However, this transformation did not mean the complete abandonment of old symbols; on the contrary, a powerful synthesis emerged between old and new elements of belief. Formally, the fertility motif is derived from the combination of the 'elibeline' and 'ram's horn' motifs. In terms of meaning, it represents family, unity and proliferation. In Turkish ornamentation, the eye motif is frequently used within the central field of the fertility motif to protect the family from the evil eye and ill intentions.

The ram's horn motif has been associated with masculinity in Anatolia. As one of the symbolic decorative motifs, the ram's horn has become synonymous with a symbol representing heroism, power, strength and fertility (Eldener, 2011, p. 38). The ram's horn motif, a symbol of fertility, heroism, strength and masculinity, is a motif used in Anatolian culture either after or alongside the Great Mother Goddess. The horn symbol has always been associated with the male, who has been a symbol of power and strength throughout human history (Erbek, 2002: 30).

The ram's horn motif has been used in a stylised form not only in the art of weaving, but also in stone carvings, woodwork and metalwork. The motif's curving structure creates an effect of dynamism and movement, lending vitality to the composition. Within the cultural

continuum stretching from Central Asia to Anatolia, the ram's horn has been regarded as a symbol of the continuity of lineage and social power. In this respect, the motif carries both a protective and a symbolic meaning.

In Elibelinde, it is a symbol of motherhood, fertility, femininity and productivity. It also symbolises good luck, abundance, fortune, happiness and joy. It is also known by names such as 'bride', 'girl with a child', and 'mother and daughter' (Erbek, 2002: 12).

Direct depictions of the human figure are not found in Anatolian carpets and plain-woven textiles. Instead, stylised motifs are used to represent the human form. In this context, the motif known as 'hand on hip' does not represent a direct figurative depiction but rather embodies the form of a human figure with hands on the hips. The motif is recognised as a symbolic interpretation of the human figure, featuring a triangular torso representing the female form and arm-like extensions spreading out to either side.

This decorative motif, which is mostly used on wide bands and ground patterns and is known by various regional names such as 'hand on hip', 'girl', 'oh girl', 'comb' and 'cauldron handle', is found today throughout almost all of Anatolia, both in border bands and in ground patterns. It is regarded as a symbol of abundance and fertility (Deniz, 2010: 61). In plain weaves, the 'hand on hip' motif, representing femininity, fertility and procreation, and the 'eye' motif, representing the evil eye, are the most fundamental motifs symbolising and associated with women (Akpınarlı and Arslan, 2018: 74).

The eye motif is usually arranged within the composition according to a symmetrical pattern, reinforcing the central focus. The motif's triangular body structure and the arm-like forms extending to either side are interpreted as a stylised female figure symbolising both fertility and protection.

The eye motif, frequently used in Anatolian carpets and kilims, is seen woven in the shapes of triangles, squares, rectangles, crosses and stars. In Anatolia, the eye motif, which symbolises protection against the evil eye, is generally in the form of an equilateral rectangle divided into four parts (Soysaldı and Parabaş, 2015: 79). It is believed that these motifs, which point to four distinct directions, disperse the evil gaze by breaking it into fragments (Eldener, 2011: 52).

Due to its protective function, the eye motif is often positioned in borders or at critical transition points within the composition. The perception of the evil eye as a tangible threat within belief systems explains the widespread and enduring use of this motif. The depiction of the eye, abstracted through geometric forms, is one of our traditional motifs used in the Anatolian weaving tradition as a means of warding off evil and protection against the evil eye.

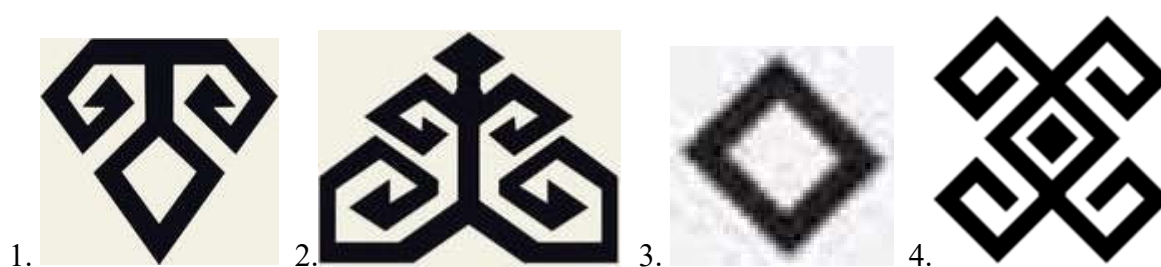


Figure 1. Ram's horn, 2. Elibelinde, 3. Eye, 4. Fertility (Kılıç Karatay, 2026).

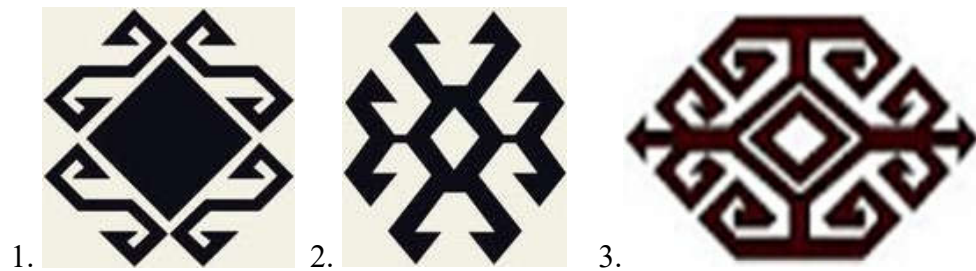
Motifs of abundance were used not only to express wishes for plenty and proliferation, but also to serve a protective function against the fear of scarcity, famine and disaster. In traditional societies, famine was not merely an economic problem; it was a serious phenomenon threatening the social order. Consequently, abundance was perceived as a value to be safeguarded and attempts were made to secure it through motifs.

This protective understanding of fertility was also supported by rituals. Practices carried out at specific times reinforced the symbolic power carried by the motifs. This ritual context reveals that fertility was perceived not merely as an individual expectation but as a social security mechanism. Following the advent of Islam, abundance was perceived not merely as material plenty, but also as an indicator of spiritual peace and moral order. This understanding is particularly evident in the decorative programmes used in religious structures. The emphasis on continuity and proliferation in plant motifs has reinforced the notion that abundance is part of a divine order.

The meaning acquired by the motif of abundance in works of art is directly related not only to its conceptual and historical background, but also to its iconographic structure. Iconography aims to analyse the relationship between a motif's formal elements and the symbolic meanings it conveys. In this context, motifs of abundance should be regarded as multi-layered systems of meaning conveyed through visual language. The first striking aspect in the iconographic analysis of the fertility motif is its preference for indirect representation rather than direct depiction. In Turkish decorative arts, fertility has mostly been expressed through abstract, stylised and reproducible forms. This indicates that the motif represents not merely a specific object, but an idea and a wish. Ears of corn, branches, fruit, ram's horns, slices of baklava or repeating geometric shapes are not direct depictions of abundance; they are its symbolic equivalents.

From an iconographic perspective, most motifs of abundance feature structures that evoke the idea of proliferation. Forms that open out, branch, multiply or expand from the centre outwards visualise the qualities of abundance: growth and diffusion. In particular, the

arrangement of motifs developing around central compositions reflects the idea that abundance springs from a core and spreads outwards. This compositional approach offers a symbolic narrative regarding the workings of the universe and nature.



Figures 1–2–3: Drawings of the fertility motif in various forms

Another important iconographic element found in fertility motifs is the fear of emptiness. The complete filling of the surface, the avoidance of leaving empty spaces, and the arrangement of motifs in dense patterns constitute a deliberate emphasis on the continuity of abundance. As emptiness is associated with absence and deficiency, the avoidance of empty spaces in the representation of abundance is significant. This approach is clearly observable in textile and architectural ornamentation.

The use of the fertility motif derives meaning not only from the motif itself but also from the space in which it is placed. The space provides a context that reinforces or transforms the symbolic value carried by the motif. Fertility symbols found in textiles, architecture and everyday objects are concrete manifestations of this protective function. The concentration of motifs on door thresholds, entrances or central areas reflects the desire to incorporate fertility into the space and to protect it against potential threats. This indicates that the fertility motif is regarded not as a passive decorative element, but as an active symbolic tool. In the art of weaving, fertility motifs have mostly been represented through geometric and stylised forms. Bidirectional motifs, repeating patterns and symmetrical arrangements offer visual representations symbolising the continuity and proliferation of abundance. In particular, the cross-patterns and interlocking motifs seen in kilims symbolise the uninterrupted flow of abundance.

Motifs typically woven by women include those intended to ward off the evil eye and ill will (such as hands, fingers, combs, eyes, thistles, scorpions, wolf's mouths, hooks, and flints), as well as motifs symbolising marriage, childbirth, fertility and happiness (such as a woman with her hand on her hip, a ram's horn, a shackle, a hair tie, a chest, star, bird, fertility, earring, etc.) (Balkanal, 2019, 343). Symbols of fertility and good luck express a desire for

endless happiness. They generally symbolise the relationship between men and women and reproduction (Erbek, 2002: 15).



Figure 1-2. The fertility motif in woven samples of various forms  
(<https://www.google.com/search>, 11 February 2026).

The fertility motif serves not merely as a direct decorative element in monumental structures, but also creates a symbolic layer of meaning. Monumental structures are architectural works constructed as spatial representations of collective memory and typically carry political, religious or cultural significance.

At Anıtkabir, ram's horn motifs known as symbols of abundance, fertility and strength—along with bow-and-arrow motifs (also known as 'yaba'), which symbolise warrior spirit and bravery, and comb motifs, have been used to create the impression that the floor is covered with a large carpet (Çakmakoğlu Kuru, 2017: 80, 87, 89).



Figure 3-4: The fertility motif in various forms in the ornamentation of Anıtkabir  
(<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DRCRNNwDB3C/>, 13.02.2026)

In civil architecture, however, fertility motifs are more commonly found in transitional spaces. Doors, window surrounds and thresholds are symbolic points signifying the entry of abundance into the space. The motifs used in these areas carry the nature of a wish for the household's prosperity and continuity. The incorporation of abundance into the space also reflects a notion of protection against potential adversities from the outside world.





Figures 5–6–7: The motif of abundance in various forms in the exterior decoration of buildings (Kılıç Karatay 2026)

The use of the motif of abundance in works of art is not merely an aesthetic choice; it is also a declaration of intent and a wish. In textiles, the peace of the home and the continuity of livelihood; in architecture, the protection and endurance of the structure; and in everyday objects, the user's well-being and happiness have been expressed through symbols of abundance. In this respect, the motif of abundance is a tangible manifestation of the strong bond established between art and life.



Figure 8. An example of plain weave featuring the fertility motif in the main and secondary patterns (<https://www.bellona.com.tr/blog/icerik/kilim-motifleri>, 25 February 2026).

The art of weaving is one of the fields in which the fertility motif is used most intensely and meaningfully. Rugs and kilims are not merely aesthetic objects; they are also visual texts that reflect the weaver's intentions, expectations and life experiences. In this context, the fertility motif emerges as a symbolic language in weavings, expressing wishes such as the household's livelihood, family harmony and the continuation of the lineage. The use of the fertility motif in the art of weaving varies according to the type of weaving. Weaving techniques such as carpet, kilim, cicim, zili and sumak directly determine the formation of the motifs and their effect on the surface. For this reason, the fertility motif must be evaluated separately within the context of each type of weaving.

In carpet weaving, fertility motifs mostly appear as central compositions or arrangements spread across large areas. Given the carpet's position within the home and its

duration of use, the durability and constant visibility of fertility motifs have become important. For this reason, the motifs have been placed in such a way as to dominate the carpet's overall composition.



Figures 8–9. An example of carpet weaving featuring a fertility motif and detail  
(Kılıç Karatay 2026)

In kilims, however, fertility motifs are expressed through more rhythmic and repetitive patterns. The plain weave structure of the kilim has allowed the motifs to be stylised in a geometric manner. This has brought to the fore visual narratives that emphasise the continuity of abundance. In cicim and zili weaves, however, abundance motifs are highlighted through weaving techniques that cause the threads to rise slightly from the surface, thereby enhancing the motif's visual impact.

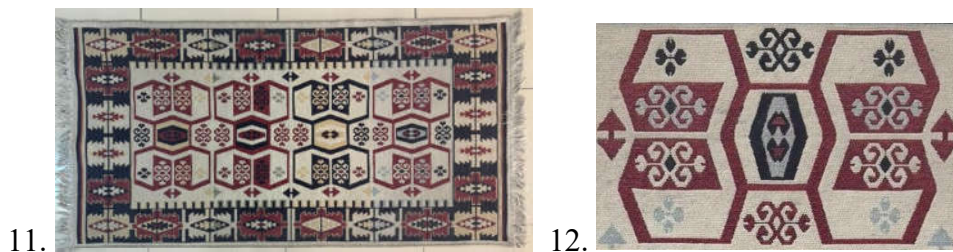


Figure 10-11. A detail of the fertility motif in a kilim weaving sample (Kılıç Karatay 2026)



Figure 12-13: An example of a kilim weave featuring a fertility motif and detail  
(Kılıç Karatay 2026)

The fertility motifs found in Cicim weavings feature more complex and dense compositions. This density visually reinforces the association between fertility and abundance. These differences between weaving styles demonstrate that the fertility motif has been reinterpreted in accordance with technical possibilities.



Figures 14–15. The fertility motif and detail in a Cicim weaving sample (Kılıç Karatay 2026)

The fertility motif holds an important place not only in works of art but also in everyday practices and rituals. Motifs on everyday objects reflect an individual's desire to imbue their living space with symbolic meaning. The decorations found on jugs, chests, woven bags and kitchenware are regarded as concrete expressions of the wish for abundance.



Figures 16–17–18–19: The fertility motif and detail in a sock design (Kılıç Karatay 2026)

Although the process of modernisation has transformed the contexts in which traditional motifs are used and their symbolic meanings, the fertility motif has largely retained its continuity within Turkish culture. With industrialisation, urbanisation and mass production, the role of handicrafts in daily life has changed; however, the symbolic value carried by these motifs has not entirely disappeared. In this process, the fertility motif has become less a direct representation of religious belief and more a manifestation of cultural identity and traditional aesthetics.



Figures 20–21–22. Example of a waistcoat featuring fertility motifs  
(<https://www.uludagtriko.com.tr/>, 11 February 2026)



In the modern era, the use of fertility motifs has regained prominence, particularly through a conscious focus on traditional arts. In the production of carpets and kilims, motifs are no longer chosen solely on the basis of necessity; they are now selected with the aim of preserving cultural heritage and emphasising identity. In this context, fertility motifs should be regarded as an expression of a symbolic link to the past. The meaning of the motif is reinterpreted not so much in terms of direct expectations of productivity, but rather through a sense of continuity and belonging.



24.



25.

Figures 23–24. Examples of bags featuring fertility motifs

(<https://tr.pinterest.com/pin>, 12 February 2026)

In today's artistic discourse, the fertility motif emerges as a symbol open to contemporary interpretations. Used in stylised forms across fields such as graphic design, ceramics, textile design and architectural decoration, fertility motifs bring together traditional symbolism with a modern aesthetic sensibility. These applications demonstrate that the motif is not merely an element of the past; rather, it is a dynamic component of cultural memory that guides contemporary production.



Figure 26. A unique fertility design created using acrylic and gold leaf paint on canvas

(<https://www.facebook.com/100069874871927>, 11 February 2026).

The simplification and abstraction of the fertility motif in modern interpretations is striking. In traditional textiles, dense and repetitive motif arrangements have given way to more minimalist compositions. However, this simplification does not weaken the motif's meaning

but rather renders it interpretable within a new context. Fertility is no longer merely a wish for abundance; it is now associated with contemporary concepts such as sustainability, balance and the continuity of life.

This demonstrates that the fertility motif is a symbol that withstands the test of time. Even as social structures and ways of life change, the human desire to create, multiply and ensure continuity persists. By providing a cultural expression for this universal desire, the fertility motif retains its meaning in the modern era.

### **CONCLUSION**

The motif of abundance is not merely an aesthetic decorative element in Turkish culture; it is a multi-layered symbol that has taken shape as a visual expression of beliefs, ways of life and social values. Throughout the historical process stretching from Central Asia to Anatolia, the concept of abundance has evolved under different geographical and cultural conditions; yet it has largely retained its fundamental framework of meaning. This continuity clearly demonstrates the motif of abundance's strong position within the cultural memory. According to the data obtained, abundance is a motif that signifies social continuity and harmony rather than individual prosperity in Turkish societies. Within the context of Turkish mythology and belief systems, abundance has been associated with natural elements and entities considered sacred; this connection has deepened the motif's semantic world. The belief in earth and water, the cult of trees and animal symbolism have formed the mythological foundations of the concept of fertility, endowing works of art with a powerful narrative language. The art of weaving stands out as one of the art forms in which the motif of fertility is most frequently employed. Rugs and kilims are not merely utilitarian objects; they are the bearers of cultural memory and social values. Fertility motifs, woven into these surfaces using the principles of repetition, symmetry and continuity, have provided powerful visual examples of the continuity of life. In architectural ornamentation and everyday objects, fertility has been used to express ideas such as the protection and well-being of the space and the individual.

In the modern era, the motif of abundance has not lost its symbolic power. The reuse of traditional motifs through contemporary interpretations demonstrates the importance of abundance in terms of cultural identity and continuity. In this context, the motif of abundance retains its significance as a fundamental motif of Turkish culture, serving as a symbol that spans from the past to the present. In conclusion, the motif of abundance is one of the key traditional motifs for understanding Turkish decorative arts and cultural structure. This motif serves as a visual summary of the relationship humans establish with nature, faith and society. The embodiment of abundance through motifs demonstrates that cultural values can be transmitted

not only through spoken or written means, but also through visual and artistic channels. In this respect, the motif of abundance continues to exist as an important symbol in Turkish culture, carrying the traces of the past whilst also guiding the future.

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