

SADBERK HANIM MUSEUM
THE OĞUZ AYDEMİR COMMEMORATIVE HANDKERCHIEF COLLECTION

GLORIFICATION AND COMMEMORATION



09.10.2025 ~ 31.12.2026

Visiting Hours: 10:00 – 17:00, Closed Days: Wednesday

Sadberk Hanım Müzesi, Piyasa Caddesi No. 25 Büyükdere İstanbul

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 **Vehbi Koç Vakfı**

 **SADBERK HANIM
MÜZESİ**



Just as a painting, photograph, or postcard can recall memories long forgotten, the commemorative handkerchiefs in this exhibition evoke emotions and surface memories buried deep within. Across cultures, commemorative objects have served as enduring vessels of remembrance, helping us recollect events of the past.

More resilient than documents or letters on paper, handkerchiefs have traditionally been used in many countries as objects of commemoration, tools of propaganda, and carriers of information. Bearing witness to the eras in which they were created, these handkerchiefs passed through many hands before coming together in this remarkable collection. Through them, we can trace the stories of individuals, communities, institutions, and even states throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

Celebrating its 45th anniversary and known for its many distinguished exhibitions, Sadberk Hanım Museum now presents 'Glorification and Commemoration: The Sadberk Hanım Museum Oğuz Aydemir Commemorative Handkerchief Collection, Coordinated by Museum Director Hülya Bilgi and hosted at Sadberk Hanım Museum, the exhibition invites visitors on a captivating journey through the pages of recent history.

GLORIFICATION

The act of glorifying; a sense of pride, exaltation.

As a passionate collector, H. Oğuz Aydemir wished to entrust his collection of commemorative handkerchiefs, assembled from around the world, to an institution that would safeguard it for future generations. In February 2018, he donated the collection to Sadberk Hanım Museum, recognizing the museum's rich holdings of textile works and its expertise in textile conservation. Here, the handkerchiefs could undergo the necessary restoration and conservation, be preserved in ideal conditions, and be shared with the public through exhibitions and publications, ensuring their transmission as a cultural heritage to future generations.



COMMEMORATION

The act of commemorating a person or event; memorial, memento.

H. Oğuz Aydemir's interest in commemorative handkerchiefs and the origins of this collection date back to 1975, when he acquired its very first piece. What began then has continued for nearly half a century. The handkerchiefs span more than a hundred years, from the mid-19th century to the latter half of the 20th. Rich in imagery and narrative, many depict events of international significance, their witnesses and protagonists, and the settings in which they unfolded.

Sadberk Hanım Museum Director Hülya Bilgi: ‘A contribution to transferring cultural heritage to future generations’

The handkerchiefs in this collection were once produced in the hundreds or even thousands. Yet today, the tradition of creating, preserving, or gifting commemorative handkerchiefs has nearly vanished, surviving perhaps only within small circles. We are therefore dealing with an object whose presence and purpose have become nearly obsolete. For this reason alone, it is essential that such pieces be preserved and passed on to future generations. At Sadberk Hanım Museum, we work with highly experienced textile restorers and conservators. This team restores, conserves, and prolongs the life of textile artifacts such as these handkerchiefs, and prepares exhibitions and publications that allow future generations to see and appreciate them. Many of the museum’s exhibitions feature distinctive themes, compelling narratives, and rare works. Likewise, we often hear from visitors to this exhibition that they were encountering the tradition of the ‘commemorative handkerchief’ for the first time. Clearly, both the collection and the exhibition open a new space for visitors to reinterpret history and to nurture curiosity across various fields.



COLLECTION

Handkerchiefs produced to celebrate, commemorate, and carry across borders events such as a ruler’s accession, the alliance of two nations, the promotion of an international exposition, pride in a battlefield victory, or the proclamation of a new political regime... The 141 cotton and silk handkerchiefs in H. Oğuz Aydemir’s collection serve not only as commemorative artifacts but also as vehicles of both overt and subtle propaganda for events considered highly significant in their time. Created in countries ranging from the United Kingdom, France, and Russia to Italy, Belgium, and Japan, the handkerchiefs also illuminate the political transformations experienced by states whose borders, names, and systems of government changed during the period represented in the collection.

RESTORATION AND CONSERVATION

Following its transfer to Sadberk Hanım Museum, the collection underwent an extensive restoration and conservation process guided by the evaluation and plan prepared by the museum’s experts. While some pieces were in relatively good condition, others were worn to the point of requiring substantial intervention. Through the meticulous work of the museum’s textile conservators, each handkerchief was properly stabilized and restored, and any structural issues were resolved. As a result of this process, the handkerchiefs were not only presented to the public through the ‘Glorification and Commemoration’ exhibition but were also secured as cultural assets that will remain accessible within the museum’s collection for researchers, enthusiasts, and art lovers for many years to come.



EXHIBITION

The ‘Glorification and Commemoration’ exhibition presents visitors with the opportunity to explore these remarkable handkerchiefs, newly added to the Sadberk Hanım Museum collection, which celebrates its 45th anniversary this year, on site and in their full scope. Rather than following a linear chronology, the exhibition adopts a thematic arrangement designed to invite visitors to reconsider and contextualize the defining events of recent history, viewing them through the lens of their economic justifications and the ways in which they interconnect and form a continuous narrative.

THEMATIC LAYOUT

A total of 82 handkerchiefs were selected from the collection for the exhibition, curated by Dr. Ozan Torun. Presented in a thematic layout, the exhibition traces the political, economic, and social disruptions in the turbulent period from the Crimean War to the Second World War across eight sequential themes.

The race between the major powers to seize colonies, fueled by mass production and capital accumulation that began with the Industrial Revolution, the rise of nation-states with the advent of nationalism, international fairs showcasing new industrial inventions, fighting on battlefronts and life behind the lines in devastating wars, celebrations of rulers and the collapse of once powerful dynasties are all among the many defining events of recent history are all captured in these handkerchiefs, each standing as a historical document in its own right.

Designed by Dr. Umut Durmuş and featuring a welcome video narrated by Prof. Dr. Emrah Safa Gürkan, the exhibition unfolds through eight themes:

Reconstructing Identity: From Coats of Arms to Flags

The Ottomans’ need for a Western-style coat of arms; the creation and use of coats of arms in official contexts; and the spread of nation- and homeland-oriented slogans and crescent-and-star motifs, starting from the Second Constitutional Era.

Long Live the Sultan! / God Save the King!

Parallel examples from different cultures of the unconditional veneration of the throne, held sacred for centuries before the rise of nation-states, and of the rulers who occupied those seats.

Showcasing Power and Pride: Inventions, Exhibitions, Fairs

Industrial inventions showcased at mid-19th-century international fairs in the Western world; the increasing rivalry among great powers; and the ‘othering’ of societies outside the industrialized sphere.

A Farewell to Horses: The Advancement of Warfare

The impact of industry and technology on warfare: armored vehicles, automatic weapons, and the mechanization of armies; the efforts of non-Western states to emulate Western military advancements.

Homeland and Borders: Imaginations on the Map

World War I maps illustrating borders to be seized, defended, or redrawn, revealing each side’s imagined claims over the lands and resources of the other.

Conquest and Loss: Lands Changing Hands

Regions that rebelled against the Ottomans amid rising nation-state movements, gained independence, or fell under foreign mandates, and ultimately separated from the empire: Western Thrace, Greece, Egypt, and Tripoli.

The Waiting and the Awaited: Behind the Battlefield

Soldiers thinking of home while fighting on the front lines; loved ones waiting for their return; and depictions of the emotions experienced both at the front and behind it, conveyed through imagery and soldier’s songs.

What History Writes: Victories and Victors

Traditional historiography narrating the stories of those ‘above’ while obscuring those ‘below’; narratives of victories framed as heroic might for the winners and stories of defeat attributed to misfortune for the losers.



The exhibition, with its thematic layout, uses these commemorative handkerchiefs to illuminate the political, economic, and social disruptions and continuities that shaped the era from the Crimean War to World War II across eight sequential themes.

The exhibition offers visitors the opportunity to reflect on and reassess the defining events of recent history, both through their economic justifications and within the broader context of their interrelationships and continuities.



The collection features handkerchiefs produced in numerous countries, including the United Kingdom, France, Russia, Italy, Belgium, and Japan.



Why do you think the concept of commemoration remains powerful in terms of collective memory?

Hülya Bilgi: Commemoration refers to the memories we store deep within ourselves; memories that we recall and revive, intentionally or unintentionally, when the moment presents itself. In other words, we ‘remember.’ Collective memory is one of the fundamental pillars that holds together the communities we live in and belong to. Whether guided by a public institution or by the community itself, we are continuously reminded of certain events, places, and individuals considered significant in our shared past. We may not think about these every day, yet a song we hear, a photograph we encounter, a public square we pass through, or a statue we walk by can bring back the values we were taught and allow us to share common joys and sorrows with the community to which we feel connected. Mass media, along with the myriad sounds, images, texts, and actions that fill public space, continually shape and maintain this collective memory. If we fail to value memory, we gradually distance ourselves from our societal past, lose our sense of unity, and drift into isolation.

What alternative does telling history through a handkerchief offer in an age of ‘instant consumption imagery’?

Hülya Bilgi: Whether created for commemoration or propaganda, printing historically significant events for nations and societies on longer-lasting, durable fabrics rather than on easily damaged materials such as paper reflects an emphasis on the intent to ensure that these handkerchiefs and the messages they carry survive for years, are preserved, and when desired, passed down as gifts or legacies. Many were produced during periods of major global conflict and severe crisis.



HÜLYA BİLGİ
DIRECTOR, SADBARK HANIM MUSEUM

Contrary to today’s habits of fast and easy consumption, thrift and modesty still held great value at the time, and people cherished their belongings, striving to use them for as long as possible. I find myself wishing we treated our everyday possessions with similar care today, enjoying them longer instead of simply replacing them.

As the Director of Sadberk Hanım Museum, how do you view the potential of this collection to inspire contemporary artists and designers?

Hülya Bilgi: The handkerchiefs in this collection contain compositions depicting important events and figures from the mid-19th century through the second half of the 20th century. Contemporary artists often reinterpret, investigate, and re-evaluate events from the recent past and at times from a future they imagine. I believe these handkerchiefs, from a not-so-distant period, offer abundant inspiration for contemporary artists and designers as they create new works.

DR. OZAN TORUN
CURATOR

When you began working on this exhibition, which handkerchief or story surprised you the most?

Ozan Torun: I was not familiar with the culture or tradition of the ‘commemorative handkerchief,’ which was my first surprise. After seeing the handkerchiefs, I came to understand why they were produced and why fabric, rather than paper, was chosen as their medium. As I began examining the compositions more closely, I became fascinated by the hidden details, metaphors, and overt or subtle propagandistic messages embedded within the main motifs. A small number of handkerchiefs in the collection, however, were produced not for commemoration or propaganda but for instructing soldiers, illustrating how to use a weapon or how a military operation would unfold. The reasons for their production and the informative nature of their imagery were particularly striking to me.

Was there a detail you discovered in a handkerchief that made you think, ‘I wish everyone could see this’?

Ozan Torun: Two handkerchiefs, one in French and

the other in German, stand out in this regard. Designed much like manuals, they explain how to use two Mauser-type rifles through illustrations and diagrams; they are quite unusual. Created after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 to instruct illiterate soldiers in operating new weaponry, they are remarkable examples and well worth seeing. The handkerchiefs printed with highly detailed maps of various World War I fronts are equally impressive; they are so precise that they resemble atlases. The handkerchiefs from the Second Constitutional Era, each a symbol of pride and victory, offer a vivid way to trace the significant transformations that took place in the empire’s final years.

What was the most impactful moment in the exhibition process for you as the curator?

Ozan Torun: Despite originating from different countries, cultures, and periods, once we focused on shared concepts such as the seat of power, office, national unity, national anthem, and homeland, we realized how similar and sometimes even directly inspired certain compositions, motifs, and colors were beneath their apparent differences. This insight not only influenced our interpretation of the handkerchiefs but also shaped the thematic structure of the exhibition.

The parallels and continuities - such as the ways monarchies glorify their rulers, neighboring countries’ competing claims to the same lands, or each nation’s self-image as it mechanizes its army with new technologies - highlight the gap between the order that political institutions seek to establish, the ideals they use to mobilize the masses, and the realities of individuals and societies. This becomes even more evident when the handkerchiefs are viewed collectively rather than as isolated objects. The result is truly striking and encourages us to reconsider our present circumstances.

**Dr. Ozan Torun, Curator of the
Glorification and Commemoration
Exhibition: 'Not just an exhibition, but a
way of keeping memory alive.'**

The handkerchiefs displayed in this exhibition were created so that the people of their time and those who came after would keep unforgettable events alive in their memories. In essence, each one serves as a form of reminder. In presenting this collection at Sadberk Hanım Museum, our aim has been to illuminate the propagandistic role these handkerchiefs were once intended to fulfil within collective memory, and to show how - more than a century later - the subjects they address and their function as 'reminders' remain relevant today.



The exhibition will feature face-to-face talks with academics from university departments of political science, international relations, history, sociology, and art history.



EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

The exhibition catalogue, published in both Turkish and English and prepared by Dr. Mehmet Bezdin and Saro Dadyan, offers a broad historical view of the periods in which the handkerchiefs were produced and the purposes they served. It also provides essential information on the numerous details embedded in the compositions of the featured handkerchiefs.

EXHIBITION TALKS

As part of the Glorification and Commemoration exhibition, Sadberk Hanım Museum will host a series of talks featuring academics from university departments such as political science, international relations, history, sociology, and art history. These free, in-person events will begin with a curator-led tour of the exhibition, followed by the talk session. Participation in the tours and talks is open to all; registration can be completed through the museum's website, by phone, or via email.



TALKS CALENDAR

H. Oğuz Aydemir | Saturday, November 29, 2025 11:00

Preserving Collections for Future Generations

Prof. Dr. Namık Sinan Turan | Saturday, December 20, 2025 11:00

The Public Representation of Monarchical Traditions and the Transformation of Official Iconography in the 19th Century Ottoman Empire

Prof. Dr. Adil Baktıaya | Saturday, January 10, 2026 11:00

Social and Cultural Change in the Eastern Mediterranean in the 19th Century

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Doğan Çetinkaya | Saturday, January 31, 2026 11:00

Liberty, Brotherhood, Equality: Political, Economic, and Social Life in the Second Constitutional Era

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Güven Gürkan Öztan | Saturday, February 7, 2026 11:00

From Distant Lands to the Homeland: Back on the Frontlines, the Feeling of Alienation, and the Heroic Narrative

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mehmet Beşikçi | Saturday, February 21, 2026 11:00

The Ottoman Experience in World War I: War, Society, and Memory

Dr. Elçin Macar | Saturday, March 7, 2026 11:00

In Search of Identity and Memory: Istanbul Greek Literary Society (Syllogos)

Prof. Dr. Yeşim Işıl Ülman | Saturday, March 28, 2026 11:00

A History of Medicine and Nursing in Türkiye in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries

Prof. Dr. Necmi Aksoy | Saturday, April 4, 2026 11:00

From Kaftans to Handkerchiefs: Tree and Flower Symbolism in Ottoman Culture



The exhibition 'Glorification and Commemoration: Sadberk Hanım Museum Oğuz Aydemir Commemorative Handkerchief Collection' will be open to the public daily (except Wednesdays), from 10:00 to 17:00, between 9 October 2025 and 31 December 2026.

