

As a Cultural Bridge between Asia and Europe Anatolian Caravanserais on Silk Road

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In this paper, after giving information on how caravanserais on Silk Road in Anatolian route were managed and functioned, its contribution to trade and cultural life in the middle ages will be dwelt upon.

Transportation of the silk of the East and other goods carried in caravans to West formed a trade road, currently called 'Silk Road' stretching from China to Europe. The Silk Road, one of the oldest and longest international trade roads of the world, economically developed the areas through which it was passing, enhanced prosperity of people and acted like a bridge and meeting ground of cultures and civilizations between East and West.⁴⁰ Thus, it enabled a lot of different religions and nations to meet and exchange their cultural values. Anatolia, geographically a bridge between Asia and Europe, has played an important role in international transportation for thousands of years. As a result of this, in different ages, some trade road nets like King Road, Trade Roads in Roman times and Silk Road covered all over Anatolia. In the middle age, Silk Road which began in China, reached up to Anatolia regarded as a bridge by following more than one route and from here in the direction of East and West, North and South, stretched up to Europe.

Seljuks, who conquered Anatolia, which was very important in terms of trade in the time of the Byzantine shaped their policy in a way that they would make Anatolia more popular in terms of trade and benefit from potential international trade. First of all, they conquered trade roads and coastal areas like Sinop and Antalya, which were the doors opening to the outside world. Sultans of Seljuks made treaties with other neighboring states to regulate trade in the region.⁴¹ They gave freedom to Christian merchants to make trade as equally as Muslim ones in Anatolian land. They provided state insurance against robberies and loss that merchants had to go through. In order to protect trade, they established 'state insurance system' and tried to encourage trade by subsidizing custom tax. They also endeavored to fulfill the political unity of Anatolia for the continuation of trade activities and integrity of economy of Anatolia.⁴²

In addition, Seljuks, who did their utmost to keep the middle east part of Silk Road as an international trade road without neglecting the infrastructure of trade, built caravanserais in order to protect caravans carrying rich trade goods from the intimidation of enemies at borders and to provide secure shelter for merchants and protect them from the robberies of bandits, and also in order to meet caravan's needs in a secure environment. They surrounded the caravanserais with strong ramparts on which they built towers and made the caravanserais more durable and stronger by making iron gates for them.⁴³ Caravanserais that look like castles from distance were the places

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⁴⁰ Kitapçı, Zekeriya, Yeni İslam Tarihi ve Türkistan, İstanbul 1991, Vol. I, p. 227-228.

⁴¹ Koca, Salim, Türkiye Selçuklu Sultanlarının İzledikleri Ekonomik Politikalar, Türkler, Vol. VII, p. 346.

⁴² Cahen, Claude, "13. Yüzyılın Başında Anadolu'da Ticaret", Selçuklular, Cogito, İstanbul 2001, number: 29, pp. 136-137. Koca, pp. 346-347.

⁴³ Turan, Selçuk Kervansarayları, p. 479.

where caravans would meet their needs of all kinds. The first examples of caravanserais are seen in middle Asia.⁴⁴

Caravanserais were built as a foundation by sultans and senior state officials on important trade roads, generally at the intervals of 30- 40 kilometers, which would take one day on camel back or walks of not more than 8-10 hours.⁴⁵ The first construction of caravanserais, which had some source of income like rich houses, shopping centers, bakers, hostels, baths, arable fields, lands and farms,⁴⁶ started for the first time in the time of Kılıç Aslan II and in a century, the trade routes of Anatolia were netted with caravanserais. The research has proved that there are more than 200 caravanserais in Anatolia.⁴⁷

For instance, the road used by northern Azerbaijani merchants and Georgian merchants of Tbilisi, would tie Tebrizi to Istanbul through Erzurum, Sivas, Ankara, Bursa. On this road a lot of caravanserais were built. It would take 40 days to arrive in Konya, the capital of State of Seljuks from Tebrizi, and on this road between Kayseri and Sivas there were more than 24 caravanserais.⁴⁸

In the time of Seljuks, caravan routes became desolate owing to the loss of interest in trade in Anatolia and geographic discoveries. On founding new trade routes, in the time of Ottoman Empire, caravanserais were still built. On the road tying Istanbul to Arabian Peninsula via Syria, caravanserais were built in order to meet the needs of pilgrims.⁴⁹

In caravanserais, there were dormitories and refectories, food storehouses, trade warehouses, stables, haylofts, mosques, libraries, baths, hospitals and drugstores, shoe makers to repair old shoes or to make new ones for poor travelers, horseshoers, and officials to calculate income and expense and run these establishments.⁵⁰

In the vakfiye (charters of waqfs) of caravanserais, all needs of caravanserais have been worked out and all necessary elements and factors have been mentioned by the foundation. The vakfiye of Karatay caravanserai on the road between Kayseri-Malatya, dated back to 1240-1241 and still in good shape, gives detailed information on how the caravanserai functioned at that time. The vakfiye says clearly that all passengers Muslim or non-Muslim, free or slave man, male or female, should be treated equally without any discrimination, and their need should be met.⁵¹ All kinds of merchants or travelers coming to caravanserais, regardless of religion, language, race,

⁴⁴ Turan, Selçuk Kervansarayları, p. 489.

⁴⁵ Turan, Selçuk Kervansarayları, p. 471.

⁴⁶ Turan, Osman, Selçuk Devri Vakfiyeleri III, Celaleddin Karatay, Vakıfları ve Vakfiyeleri, Belleten, Ankara 1948, vol. XII, number: 45, pp. 62-67; Kayaoğlu İsmet, "Selçuklu Vakfiyeleri ve İçerdikleri Sosyal Motifler", Türkler, vol. VII, p. 281; Yiğit, Hülya, "Selçuklu Kervansaray Vakıfları, Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları", number: 157, pp. 69-70.

⁴⁷ Özergin, M. Kemal, Anadolu'da Selçuklu Kervansarayları, İÜEF Tarih Dergisi, number: 20, p. 143; Bektaş, Cegiz, Selçuklu Kervansarayları Korunmaları, Kullanımları Üzerine Bir Öneri, İstanbul 1999, p. 27.

⁴⁸ Diyarbakirli, Nejat, "Turkish Contributions to Cultural and Commercial Life along Silk Road", The Significance of the Silk Roads in The History of Human Civilizations, İndependent Seminar, Japan 1988, p. 177.

⁴⁹ Turan, Selçuk Kervansarayları, pp. 492-493.

⁵⁰ Turan, "Selçuk Kervansarayları", pp. 483-486.

⁵¹ Turan, Celaleddin Karatay, Vakıfları ve Vakfiyeleri, pp. 85-96; Çetin, Osman, Selçuklu Müesseseleri ve Anadolu'da İslamiyetin Yayılışı, pp. 181-182.

rich or poor, Muslim or non-Muslim, whoever it is, could stay for three days free of charge, and all their needs would be met and all expenses would be funded by the foundation. In caravanserais, ill passengers were treated until they got well again and injured animals were treated by vets, and all expenses were met by the foundation. When poor people died, their burial ceremony would be carried out by the foundation free of charge.⁵²

While merchants' stayed in caravanserais, the places where they would perform their religious rituals have been taken into account. It is very evident from utterances of Muslim and members of other religions that travelers would do their praying and religious rituals in caravanserais. In almost all caravanserais, mosques were built for Muslim passengers to worship. In addition, in the last times of Ottoman Empire, according to what Aubrey Herbert said in his Istanbul memoir, in Eminonu Valide Caravanserai, public festivals were carried out by Iranians like Ashure Festival.⁵³ Galland who set out with a French ambassador, wrote about his participation in a religious ritual carried out by Pope Canisares in one of the rooms of caravanserai where they stayed in Babaeski at around 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning.⁵⁴ Pope Michael Chamchian in his book called *Bamutyun Hayots* published in Venice in 1786 on the history of The Armenians mentions that Catholic Armenians in 1740 organized the ritual called *Messe* (Kudas-ı Şerif) in Sofcu caravanserai in Istanbul.⁵⁵

Caravanserais were used by merchants as well as travelers. A traveler, who set out from Iberik Peninsula to go to legendary East, had to pass thorough Anatolia regarded as a bridge on Silk Road. Travelers like De Buspecq,⁵⁶ Dernschwam,⁵⁷ Sarre,⁵⁸ Tavernier,⁵⁹ De Nerval⁶⁰ conveyed that in Turkish caravanserais, poor-rich, everybody would stay comfortably and in these places, they spent nights with Christian, Jew, Armenian, Roman and Muslim merchants.

For instance, for the continuation of trade, at Yabanlu Bazaar in the proximity of Kayseri, where a lot of caravanserais were built, in the reign of Seljuks, a lot of merchants from Geneva, Venice, Napoli, Italy, France, Byzantine, Russia, Kipchak, Syria, Egypt, Iran, Turkhistan would come together for trade.⁶¹ It is very conceivable what kind of opportunities might occur when such numerous different elements came together in terms of cultural interaction. That the merchants would travel safe and secure in the Middle East and Anatolian part of the Silk Road and that in the mentioned areas, local values gained international quality was because of the caravanserais which gave them safe shelter and met all their needs.

⁵² Turan, "Selçuk Kervansarayları", pp. 484-485.

⁵³ Herbert, A., *Ben Kendim*, (Terc. Yılmaz Tekcan), Ankara 1999, p. 40.

⁵⁴ Galland, A., *İstanbul'a Ait Günlük Hatıralar*, (1672-1673), (Terc. Nahid Sırri Örik), Ankara 1998, p. 87.

⁵⁵ Pamukciyan, K., *İstanbul Yazıları*, (Terc. Osman Köker), İstanbul 2002, vol. I, p. 119.

⁵⁶ De Buspecq, O., G., *Türkiye'yi Böyle Gördüm*, (Haz. Asel Kurutluoğlu), İstanbul undated, p. 28.

⁵⁷ Dernschwam, H., *İstanbul ve Anadolu'ya Seyahat Günlüğü*, (Terc. Yaşar Önen), Ankara 1992, p. 59.

⁵⁸ Sarre, F., "Küçükasya Seyahati", (Terc. Dara Çolakoğlu), İstanbul 1998, p. 142.

⁵⁹ Tavernier, J.B., 17. Asır Ortalarında Türkiye Üzerinden İran'a Seyahat, (Terc. Ertuğrul Gültekin), İstanbul 1980, p. 61.

⁶⁰ De Nerval, G., *Doğuya Seyahat*, (Terc. Muharrem Taşcıoğlu), Ankara 2002, p. 40.

⁶¹ Diyarbakirli, Nejat, p. 177.

As a conclusion, as one of the oldest and longest trade roads of the world, Silk Road, has played a vital role in shaping world trade and policies as well as world cultures. Merchants would carry commercial goods as well as knowledge, courtesy, and cultures. Owing to such journeys, the bias and prejudice that nations had against one another diminished and cultural heritage of nations and customs and traditions were shared among continents. Merchants traveling from East to West took the samples of handicraft of the East with them. The arts of painting and plastic in China and Turkmenistan were carried to Middle East and West through Silk Road. Stories of Dede Korkut which tell us the history of Oguz Turks and have been told from mouth to mouth for centuries, and the stories of Koroglu called by different names in different regions spread all over the world from Asia thorough Silk Road. Besides, Nasreddin Hoca born in Sivrihisar in 1200 and died in 1284 in Akşehir, expressed his universal life philosophy based on love and tolerance in a humorous way. The stories of Nasreddin Hoca spread not only in Anatolia but neighboring countries as well. With the help of Silk Road, his stories and understanding of life have reached from Iran to Italy and to North Africa.⁶² Anatolian caravanserais which fulfilled the continuation of Silk Road trade in Middle East have a great share in terms of transport of mentioned values among countries and continents and making them the shared values of the world.

Owing to the merchants who stayed in these caravanserais, Anatolian people were informed about the cultural heritage of both east and west and as a result, a nation which got used to living together with other nations in Anatolia peacefully has emerged. Silk road, an asset in terms of cultural interaction for both Asia and Europe may become a cultural and economic bridge as it did before in the middle age. Nations should benefit from their cultural and economic experience. So that the revival of Silk Road can be a historic opportunity.

⁶² Diyarbekirli, Nejat, p. 180-181.