



Book Review: The Silk Road in Anatolia, Roads and Caravanserais in the 16th and 17th Centuries

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The book *Anadolu'da İpek Yolu XI–XIV. Yüzyıllarda Yollar ve Kervansaray* by Ali Kilci and Gökçe Günel is a historical-visual study that discusses the role of the Silk Road in the Anatolia region during the Middle Ages, specifically between the 11th and 14th centuries. Published by the General Directorate of Foundations under the Turkish Ministry of Tourism and Culture, this book highlights the close relationship between international trade networks and the development of waqf (foundation) institutions in Turkish history. The first part of the book explains the Silk Road routes that traversed important cities such as Erzurum, Sivas, Kayseri, Konya, Antalya, Bursa, and Istanbul, emphasizing its role in bringing together the Eastern and Western worlds. The second part details the strategic function of the kervansaray—caravanserais built and managed through the waqf system—as economic, social, and philanthropic infrastructures that guaranteed the safety, comfort, and continuity of trade along these routes. This book also displays the architectural and cultural dimensions of the kervansaray as a symbol of public service open to all, regardless of origin or background. Although not compiled with a deep academic approach, this work is highly valuable as an educational tool introducing the historical and cultural heritage of the Silk Road in Anatolia, as well as being an inspiring source for understanding the relationship between foundations, trade, and civilizational development during the Seljuk period.

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Caravanserais served as the backbone of the Anatolian trade infrastructure. Situated at intervals of approximately 30 to 40 kilometers—the average daily journey of a caravan—they offered shelter, food, and protection for merchants and their animals. Beyond providing basic necessities, these establishments acted as commercial centers where goods from China, Central Asia, Persia, and the Mediterranean were stored, exchanged, and taxed.

The Seljuk rulers recognized the economic importance of facilitating trade and thus offered free lodging, meals, and veterinary care, encouraging both domestic and foreign merchants to use Anatolian routes. The surrounding villages often evolved into vibrant marketplaces, enhancing local economies and creating employment opportunities.

Caravanserais were more than rest stops—they were crossroads of civilizations. Within their walls, traders of diverse ethnicities and religions—Turks, Persians, Armenians, Greeks, Arabs, and Europeans—interacted daily. Such encounters led to the diffusion of languages, technologies, and artistic traditions, contributing to the rich multicultural fabric of Anatolian society.

Travelers such as Marco Polo documented the diversity and hospitality found in Anatolian caravanserais, highlighting their role in spreading knowledge and promoting intercultural understanding. In this sense, caravanserais were both economic and intellectual infrastructures, fostering the growth of cosmopolitan culture across Eurasia.

Architecturally, caravanserais reflected Seljuk engineering mastery. Constructed mainly from stone, they featured fortified walls, monumental gates, and large courtyards surrounded by rooms, stables, storerooms, and sometimes small mosques or baths. These elements provided both security and comfort, ensuring the caravan's safety during long journeys.

Politically, the network of caravanserais strengthened Seljuk administrative control and enhanced state legitimacy. By guaranteeing safety and hospitality, the Seljuks projected an image of order and authority across Anatolia. Iconic examples include Sultan Han (Aksaray, 1229), Ağzıkarahan, and Karatay Han, which remain among the finest examples of Seljuk architecture. The title of this book is *Anadolu'da İpek Yolu XI-XIV. Yuzyillarda Yollar ve Kervansaray* (The Silk Road in Anatolia. Roads and Caravanserais in the 16th and 17th Centuries). This book was published by the General Directorate of Foundations under the Ministry of Tourism and Culture. The book has two

authors. They are Ali Kilci and Gokce Gunel. Ali Kilci is known as an academic who has worked for many years in the research and maintenance of various waqf objects in Turkey. He is also known as an academic with expertise in the Ottoman Turkish language. Gokce Gunel is an expert in the field of Ottoman Art History and is known for writing extensively about foundations in the Ottoman Era.

This book consists of three main parts. The first part explains how the Silk Road route in the Middle Ages played a vital role in moving the wheels of the world economy at that time. Furthermore, this chapter also highlights the important role of this trade route in the advancement of civilization and culture in the various cities traversed by the Silk Road. In the Silk Road Route section, the author features various major cities on the Silk Road along with their surrounding satellite cities. These cities include Erzurum, Sivas, Kayseri, Konya, Antalya, Bursa, and Istanbul. The author explains in this section the importance of this trade route because it connected the western and eastern worlds.

The author also underlines that in the Middle Ages, it was not only the Silk Road that played an important role. Besides it, there was also the Spice Route. Both routes originated from China, East Turkistan, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, then entered Syria via the Iran route. Another route entered Anatolia and continued to Europe (Durukan, 2015). The author also includes various notes from historians who had visited cities on the trade route, such as Marco Polo, Ibn Battuta, and Jean Baptiste Tavernier.

The Silk Road also played a crucial role as a means for the exchange of religion, language, science, art, and culture. The Silk Road made the cities it passed through bustling and alive with various community activities. This was considered capable of forming an advanced civilization (Topral, 2008).

The next part of the book consists of an explanation of the role of the Kervansaray, which was the most important element in ensuring the continuity of economic activities on the Silk Road. The Kervansarays found in various cities along the Silk Road developed rapidly, especially in the Selcuk Era. The widespread distribution of Kervansarays in various cities is also closely related to waqf. This is because these Kervansarays were waqf objects originating from sultans, ministers, and state elites. The author emphasizes the position of the Kervansaray, which not only supported the vibrant economic activities along the

Silk Road but also had a strong dimension as a charitable and philanthropic institution (Öztürk, 1984).

The author explains in this book in sufficient detail some important information related to Kervansarays, such as their distribution distance. Generally, Kervansarays were spread along the Silk Road at a distance of seven to eight hours of travel by camel. This distance is estimated to be equivalent to 35 to 40 kilometers. The existence of these various Kervansarays was deemed capable of increasing trade volume and supporting economic growth in the Middle Ages because trade caravans felt safe during their journey. They would not worry about fatigue, running out of supplies, or falling ill, because they would find many Kervansarays to rest at along the trade route. Kervansarays could also guarantee the safety of trade caravans from various threats to their safety on the journey.

Besides its substantial function in serving trade caravans, the Kervansaray also became a symbol of architectural progress in the Middle Ages. The Waqifs (donors) competed to build magnificent Kervansarays with complete facilities. It wasn't just about splendor; they also paid attention to details concerning the comfort of the guests. Thus, the architecture of the Kervansaray was also adapted to the environmental conditions where it was built.

The Kervansaray also became a symbol of public service that was inclusive and open to anyone who wanted to stop by. This is because, generally, Kervansarays could be used by trade caravans from anywhere, regardless of their background or where they came from. The author also explains that anyone could stay in a Kervansaray for three to seven days for free and could experience the various service facilities there.

Kervansarays had various facilities that might differ from one another. However, there were some facilities that were certain to be in a Kervansaray, such as a mosque, a bathhouse, food and drinks distributed for free, a treatment room, and a workshop. Uniquely, not only did they provide services for the trade caravans, Kervansarays also provided services for the mounts (animals) used by the caravans during their journey.

Not only functioning as a service facility for trade caravans, the Kervansaray also had a very important function in state defense. This is because if the state faced an invasion from a foreign party, the Kervansaray would be temporarily converted into a military guard post. That is why almost all Kervansarays have a fortress-like form (Tugen, 2019).

The prosperity of caravanserais declined with the shift of trade routes following the Age of Exploration in the 15th and 16th centuries. Maritime trade gradually replaced overland commerce, reducing the significance of Anatolian routes. Many caravanserais fell into disuse, yet their remnants endure as tangible testimonies of Anatolia's historical role in connecting continents and cultures. Today, these structures are preserved as cultural heritage sites by the Turkish government and UNESCO, symbolizing a legacy of coexistence, hospitality, and global exchange.

In this book, the author provides several examples of Kervansarays spread along the Silk Road in the Anatolia region. Cities like Kayseri, Konya, Sivas, Aksaray, Nevsehir, Nigde, Isparta, and Kahramanmaras. Besides the explanations related to the trade route and Kervansarays, this book is also equipped with supporting illustrations such as maps and photos.

Overall, Anadolu'da İpek Yolu is not a purely academic work, but rather a popular-informative work aimed at introducing the cultural heritage of the Silk Road in Anatolia to a wider audience. The book is effective in raising awareness about the important role of Anatolia in the history of trade and cultural exchange between East and West.

Anadolu'da İpek Yolu provides an interesting picture of the traces of the Silk Road in Anatolia with an emphasis on the historical and architectural heritage of the Seljuks. Although its scientific approach is limited, this book is highly valuable as a means of cultural education and promotion of Turkey's historical heritage. This book can be used as an initial reference in deepening the understanding of the role of trade routes and Kervansarays.

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