

# THE ORGANIZATION OF LONG-DISTANCE TRADE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE SETTLEMENT TYPOLOGY IN ANATOLIA IN THE OTTOMAN SOCIETY

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## 1. Introduction

East and West have always been in contact, even before the Ottomans, since the Ancient Greek and Hellenistic period. Although interruptedly, this contact mostly went on via Anatolia and East Mediterranean till India, maintaining the whole potential of trade and transportation. Long-distance trade and transportation organized and benefitted from existed even before the Ottoman's organization besides being trade, was the sum of very significant relationship for that period.

Ottoman Empire with its own central-feudal dynamics has benefitted from the oversupply either by conquest and loot or by organizing the already existing trade relationship between East and West.

The phenomena mentioned above have been thought of influencing the Ottoman settlement typology. Within such a frame work of thinking, this study was aimed to illuminate the influences of trade organization on the settlement typology and emerging variations within the Ottoman society, which was a dependent variable of the social structure in the central-feudal system and a hierarchically balanced structure. Methodology selected for the study is a concise review of the literature.

## 2. Methodology: Literature Review

### 2.1 The Order of Settlement in Anatolia until the 16<sup>th</sup> Century

In the Ottoman society, the basis of hierarchy depended on the sum of all relationships between the cities and hinterland with different functional specializations and variations; and within these variations each city's role in the control of oversupply [1].

Consequently, the hierarchy of settlements in the Ottoman Empire in the 16<sup>th</sup> century was:

- Capital City (Istanbul)
  - o Regional Centers
    - Market Cities
      - Villages and Semi-Nomadic Groups

The capital city Istanbul was at the highest level in the hierarchical system with a population of 400.000 [2]. It is not possible to think that the largest city of the medieval period was fed by the oversupply in the country alone, especially when the primitive methods of agriculture are considered. Sustaining a population that is assumed to increase from 100.000 in 1400's to 400.000 in 1500's, required serious organizations regarding infrastructure, collection of oversupply from different regions and the profits of the transit trade [3].

**Regional centers** within the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the limits of this study (Anatolia) show a homogenous distribution (Fig.1). Their populations were changing in between 20.000-40.000. It is also worth paying attention that these centers were located on the significant trade routes and/or on the transfer points, such as ports [4]. These cities, above and beyond serving for trade, were specialized in various production areas and branches. For instance, Sivas located on the junction of major trade routes from north-to-south and east-to-west, was specialized in woolen and cotton weaving; Diyarbakir, located on the route Trabzon-Mosul-Baghdad specialized in textile and leather manufacturing; and Ankara specialized in production of hardware and accessories for caravans. These regional centers, in the time, became the cultural and social service centers due to the central authority's investments in the form of trusts (vakıf) and soup kitchens (imaret). The factor determining the Anatolia's typology of settlement, meaning the organization of settlements in relation to the long-distance trade was not only the spontaneously developed centers but also the settlements developed with the enforcement of Ottoman's central authority [5].

**Market cities** constitute the third level in the hierarchy of settlements in the Ottoman society. These cities with a population not exceeding 10.000, used to serve as market places for the hinterlands and immediate surrounding, but also were somewhat different from the general settlement typology of Ottoman society. They were located seldom related to the trade and martial routes [6].

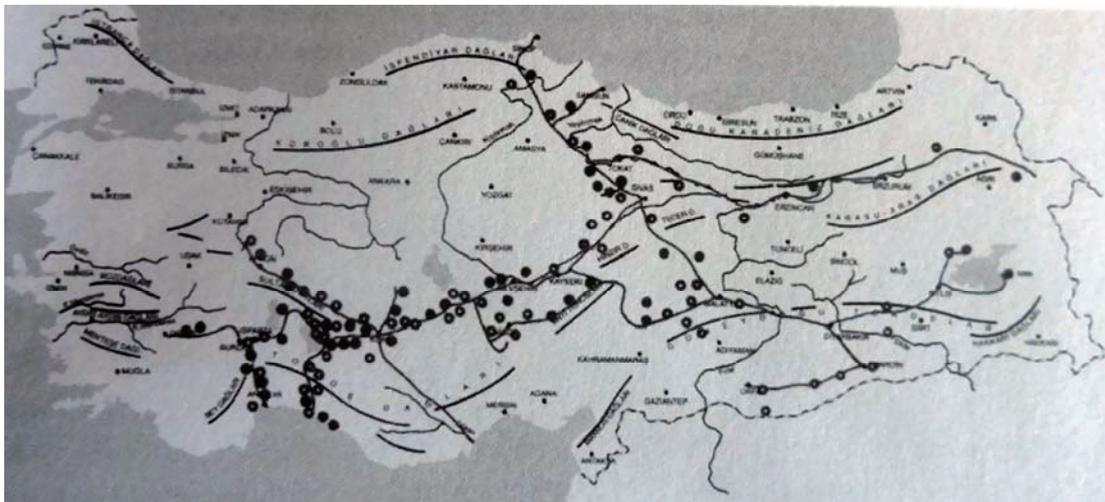


Figure1: Trade routes, regional centers and caravanserais/inns in Anatolia

The foundation of the settlement hierarchy of the Ottoman society was comprised of two basic units; **villages** of agricultural production and the villages with basic functions other than agriculture. The first one is the most important unit of the feudal system that depends on agriculture as the basic function. In the central feudal system of the Ottoman Empire, oversupply from agricultural production was being transferred from these villages to a

particular center. The other one existed for the purpose of organizing transportation, trade and contact within the country. Although not many in number, these units show a systemized and functional distribution in Anatolia. Moreover, these units were happened to be either forced inhabitations or were the existing settlements with new functions assigned.

## **2.2. The Organization of Transportation in the Ottoman Empire**

The empires that were founded in Anatolia and Middle East before the Ottoman Empire, have constructed shelters called "*ribat*" to provide secure accommodation for traders, travelers, caravans and military forces. These shelters have emerged as trusts financed and constructed by wealthy people of the region [7]. When Seljuk's have settled in Anatolia, first security and peace have been established and then many caravanserais were constructed systematically on the transit trade routes by the authority, which is aware of the significance of Anatolia for the long-distance trade connecting east-west. These systemized constructions of Caravanserais which have not been seen in the other Turkish-Muslim states, were the tangible signs showing Seljuk's effort of securing, organizing and benefiting from transit trade in Anatolia [8]. In time, immediate surrounding of caravanserais have become trade centers, which later had significant roles in the social and economic life of the empire (at the Syria-Iraq-Middle East-Armenia junction, Karatay Caravanserais) [9].

During the period in between Seljuk's fall and Ottoman's rise, the control and security of the trade routes in Anatolia has decreased, therefore the organization of transit trade and contact between east and west influenced adversely. For the recovery and reinforcement of the trade and trade routes within the boundaries of the new empire, a guard organization "*Derbent Teşkilatı*" has been set up [10]. This organization that commenced as guarding the mountain passages, bridges and gates later became a system for controlling the whole transportation network and was managed by the central authority. "*Derbent*" units were mostly set up in the uninhabited areas, especially on the intersections of key martial and trade routes and on the mountain passages.

With the foundation of such a system some locals have taken over the responsibility of guarding and maintenance of the routes, gates and bridges and were excluded from the taxes in return [11]. Responsibility and dependency to the system have been used as a policy for inhabitation in the desolated neighborhoods of trade and martial routes [12]. As is seen "*derbent*" units, guarding desolated neighborhoods and roads, have emerged as a type of settlement with single function and have served successfully for the trade and transportation and have become an example of central authority's direct influence on the settlement typology.

## **2.3. Settlement Typology Concerning the Long-Distance Trade**

Settlement typology in Anatolia can be studied within two groups. First, settlements organized by the central-feudal authority on the trade routes; the second, settlements spontaneously emerged near or on the trade routes.

The first group of settlements has already been described as "*derbent*" in the previous sections. These small-scale service settlements in Anatolia were the most conscious influence of the central-feudal authority in Ottomans by which the security and maintenance

of the trade routes were provided. The existence, scale and the distribution of these settlements were directly related to the distance that a caravan could travel in a day time, hence the distribution of these units were balanced and homogeneous on the trade routes[15]. This settlement typology in Anatolia have already existed before the Ottomans since the Ottoman Empire has been established on the on the major trade route “The Silk Road”.

Ottomans, for along time have benefitted from the international transit trade due to the special geographical location and empire’s dominance over the Persian Gulf, Red Sea, Ports of Syria and all the trade routes in Anatolia [16]. Taxes collected from the merchandise on the trade routes were a significant income for the Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, public living on and near the trade routes was earning their living by taking an active role in trade as innkeepers, saddlers, and commission agents. Nomadic and semi-nomadic groups in Middle East were living as transporters and caravan organizers.

Not only these service settlements but also other small or large ones used to make profit from trade. Besides each village close to the routes with caravanserais, ones located away used to transfer vegetables, fruits and various goods to the market cities [17].

Larger settlements which were mentioned as regional centers in the previous sections and were pointed out as the contact points of East and West are subjects requiring further analysis concerning the basis of their existence and distribution. The influence of long-distance trade or any other dynamics in their formation also requires further research [18], [19]. However it is certain that long-distance trade routes have brought additional functions to regional centers, by which consequently a kind of diversification due to particular specializations emerged. For instance Sivas, located at the intersection of east-west and north-south trade routes specialized in cotton and wool textiles; Maras, located near mountain Berid, iron industry; Konya and Afyon, making of felt; Ankara, iron and leather hardware for caravans; Usak, carpets and rugs; Bursa and Bilecik, silk weaving; Diyarbakir, coloring textiles, leather [20], [21].

Diversification due to the specialization of regional centers have had dynamics that impeded with the feudal structure of the empire since specialized regions needed to be supported with the agricultural oversupply in the country. When the primitive agricultural techniques and large populations of these centers in the 16<sup>th</sup> century are considered, the only dynamic that make specialization possible seems to be the transit trade.

### **3. Discussion and Conclusion: The Settlement Structure Influenced by the Transit Trade Social Structure Change in the**

Briefly, there were two different ways of utilizing oversupply in the central-feudal organization of the Ottoman society. On account of the unique geographical location of the empire, benefiting from the organization of the transit trade, which happens to be one of the major branches of the historical trade route “The Silk Road”, influenced the settlement typology in Anatolia significantly.

One of the major reasons for central-feudal authority of the Ottoman Empire to loose strength after the 16<sup>th</sup> century was the change in the trade routes connecting east and west. The changes in the transit trade routes have reduced public’s income in the villages and cities,

and states treasury. Reduced income and control of trade routes have also agitated the security of the transportation network (26). Furthermore, small-scale service settlements with single function, the guarding and maintenance of the trade routes have collapsed correspondingly [22].

Although the traces of change in the regional centers, which make profit greatly from the transit trade, are the subjects of further research. After the specialization and interdependency between these settlements have collapsed, they have thought to become self-sufficient feudal cities that only interact with immediate surrounding. Some sources mention that these settlements' populations have continued growing until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, due to the immigration from villages to cities as a result of insecurity in the villages [23].

Further more, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, craftsmen and artisans in Anatolia started experiencing difficulty in maintaining raw material. Especially the economic inflation due to the increase in the amount of silver and gold in Europe, caused raw material to be sold cheaper in Anatolia. This phenomenon led to the flow of raw material from Anatolia to Europe, resulting with the collapse of artisanship and craftsmanship in the Ottoman Empire (31).

The adverse influences of change in the transit trade routes have become powerful both for the public and state in the Ottoman society. Especially, Europeans settling down on the shores of America, India and Persian Gulf had strengthened the adverse affects of change.

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