

## CARAVANSARIES: THE ARCHITECTURAL TREASURES OF SILK ROAD AND THE CASE OF KAYSERI-SULTANHANI

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### INTRODUCTION

The Silk Road, defined as a trade route in most of the platforms, is actually a special transportation and distribution system which is organized with the impact of many other dynamics and components. When the system analyzed in detail, it is seen that the road reflects not only commercial and economic structure but also educational, cultural, security, insurance, logistic, health, religious, maintenance and restoration problems within a organized, systematic and comprehensive model.

The Silk Road[1], which is also defined in many resources as the oldest trade route that connects the China to West, is not a linear route that becomes evident on a single axis but a road network composed of branch roads connected to the main axis or distinct axis with the impact of politic or commercial conditions of the Era. (Fig. 1).

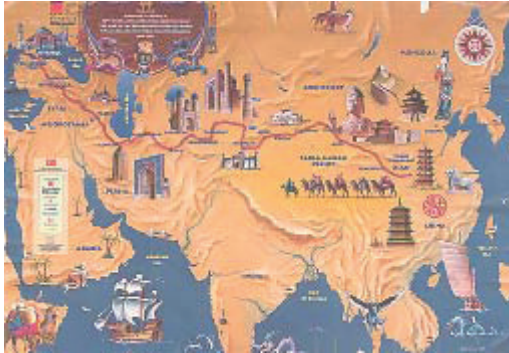


Figure 1: Silk Road Map [2], [3], [4]

These main arteries that become evident through north-west road, Middle-West Road, South-West Road and East Road had a significant role on the transaction of merchandise and thoughts between the two great civilizations, Rome and China. The road helps the transmission of wool, gold, and silver to East and silk to West. [1] The caravansaries on this road were not only used as shelters for passengers but also served as watch houses for the security of the road.

The caravansaries, emerged with respect to commercial potential of the nations on the international merchandise roads, have transformed to external trade centers in their regions and cultural and economic attraction centers and have generated the oldest cores of most of the existing settlements. [5]. It is indicated in various resources that there were 250-300 caravansaries on this road network at Seljuk's Era which is considered as the era of its heydays. [5].

### CARAVANSARIES

These caravansaries, which are seen as a castle from a distance, were arranged in a way to include all the functions for the requirements of the caravan convoys inside and they are settled down in 30-40 km range which indicates the distance of caravans of Seljuk's sultans or important government officers in a day. [2]

These buildings, located on the road which is considered as 6400 km length and starts at Xi, [1] represented security places for the caravans carrying valuable goods and consisted of bunkhouses, kitchen, storehouses, commercial goods and cisterns, barns for the animals of passengers, hay-barns, masjids for the religious needs, libraries, hammams, hospitals for medical needs, pharmacies, shoe houses for repairing and manufacturing for the needs of poor passengers, shoers, coachmans, many exchangers and administrative units (divans) for managing these facilities and for financial issues. [5]

The merchants, carrying goods to distant countries, the missionaries, the craftsmen, the voyagers, the couriers, the travelers, etc., were all stopped down at these caravansaries which were secured by state.[6] The passengers and caravans could utilize these services for 3 days without paying any fee. [2]. The patients in the caravans were treated until they gain their health, [2] the animals were treated by the vets and the treatment expenses were met by Waqfs.

The buildings constructed by the sultans were called "sultanhanı" and regarded as the most important structures in terms of commercial, economic and social characteristics of that Era. Even though they have the similar functional properties, they become different and special buildings with their sizes and adornments in terms of architectural characteristics among other caravansaries. [7] It is mentioned in some resources that there are only 8 buildings in Anatolia which represents these structural properties. [8, 9]. This paper aims to introduce the one of those caravansaries which was constructed on Kayseri-Sivas road and to evaluate its present structural and functional properties.

## KAYSERİ SULTANHANI

Sultanhanı, which was constructed in the Era of Aleaddin Kaykubat [10], between the years of 1232 and 1236 has a very special and distinctive structure with its plan, facade, construction system and adornments, is located on one of the main routes of Silk Road beginning from Ayas or Alaiyye, focused on Konya and continue on the east-west commercial axis [9, 11, 12] of Aksaray, Kayseri, Sivas, Erzincan, Erzen-i Rum, Erzurum, Erzurum, Erzurum, Erzurum through Tebriz (Özergin, 1959:63-87).



Figure.2. Kayseri Sultanhanı

### Architectural & Structural Characteristics

Kayseri-Sultan Hanı has a special situation between the other structures which were built in the same period. It was the second biggest roadhouse (Han) with 3900 m<sup>2</sup> size constructed by I. Keykubad at the outskirts of the urban settlements. [7, 12].

The building represents typical Seljuk's caravansary's characteristics and had a symmetric plan with a courtyard. The entrance of this planned courtyard from a meticulously decorated door. There are riwaqs with etched arches through the courtyard at east and west side. The quadratric planned mansion masjid is placed on four arched pedestal. It is entered to the masjid by the stairs located at both sides. This part is designed as a cubic structure. The bottom of this structure is empty. By this way, it is possible to strengthen the circulation between empty and closed spaces and the spatial integrity of the courtyard is preserved.

The entrance to the part used in winters, which has basilisk plan with five entrances, is from the courtyard surrounded by riwaqs. This place is located at the south part of the courtyard and entered from another portal through the courtyard with very rich adornments. A central naïve across the

entrance and 24 vaulted high-arches with quadratic bases at the borders are found. There are 60-70 cm high platforms at the feet of arches for the separation of human and animal spaces. The borders of walls are allocated for animals and the spaces near the central naïve for the people. The central naïve is used for the services. The winter place, which is constructed for the accommodation of the voyagers at nights, has a very attractive architectural atmosphere by the impact of the light coming from embrasures at the walls and lighting lanterns are settled on pendants at the central naïve

The domed bath at the northwest of the courtyard is comprised of five parts. The spaces with riwaqs in this part are allocated for the voyagers and their animals. Across this section there are also spaces with riwaqs used at summers. The portals at the main entrance winter space and the mansion masjid take part on the axis of symmetry. [12]



Figure.3. Ornamented, The Mansion Masjid and Gargoyle

Sultan Han, constructed with a simple and natural structural system, represents a classical Seljuks caravansary's characteristics in terms of façade and construction systems. The Han, structured with stone materials is constructed with rubble filling between cutting stones. The façade represents a plain appearance except the magnificent portal. The corner towers for the strengthening the structure and the buttresses zing up the massive facades. They constitute a monumental, attractive and reassuring façade profile by the integration of the embrasures and gutters which are not only functioning of the drainage of the rain water but also become an aesthetic facade element with their animal figures.

There is huge adornment program on the building. The façade of mansion masjid, the adornments on the arches, the badges, the double-knotted borders and the dragon portraits represents rich stone workmanship. The dragon figures on both arches of the masjid with their meandering bodies around the arch and faces meeting on the keystone also symbolize the special figures of the Seljuk's era [7].

#### **The maintenances on the building/ existing situation and the problems**

Unfortunately, the existing situation of the caravansary are not certified their previously important functions in terms of architectural features and social and cultural construction programs. In fact, as being the first public security and insurance system in the world they represent a very crucial role in the past. Most of these buildings were wholly demolished, some of them lost their important elements due to disrepairs, natural hazards, and the others lost their unique characteristics because of sloppy restorations which were done against the contemporary principles.



Figure.4. Photographs' before restoration [13]



Figure.5. Photographs' after restoration

Kayseri Sultan Han was left to the impact of the external factors for years. Even though, the first survey was drawn by Albert Gabriel between 1927 and 1929, technically the first ones were done by architect A. Salih Üngen in 1951 and presented to the Conservation Council [14].



Figure 6-7: Sultan Hanı-Albert Gabriel [15]

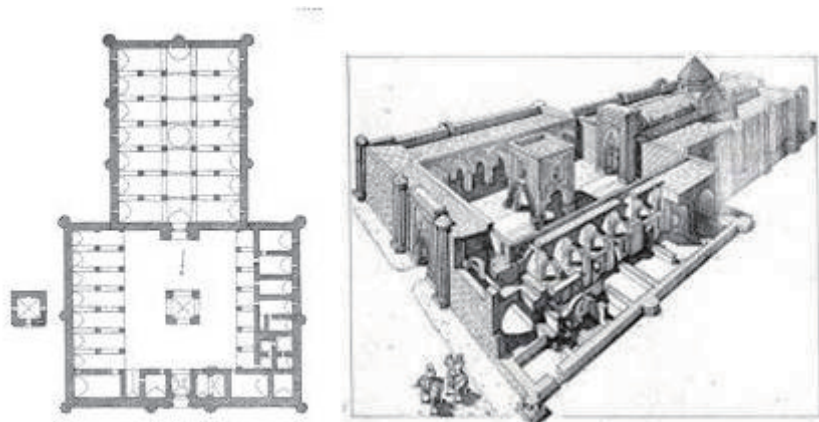


Figure 8: Sultan Hanı-Mahmut Akok [15]

The first comprehensive repair was realized by the regional directorates of Waqfs. By this restoration even though the building got rid of destruction but lost most of its unique characteristics because of the insufficiency of preliminary surveys and technical analysis. After this maintenance which was done against the principles of contemporary conservation, another restoration project was prepared for the time worn building and was approved in 2006. The main decisions of this restoration project are criticized in terms of the lack of adornment repetition and lack of integration between the stairs and the usage of contemporary material in some part of the building. Even though these applications do not have a contrast with contemporary restoration principles, they are not considered as a successful conservation in terms of the quality of the structural maintenance, unqualified materials, insufficiency of conservation implementations comprised of unique mortar and connective analysis

The new walls which are completed incompatibly with the unique walls, the discordant stones used on arches and vaults, illumination elements, the discordant appearance of cables and insurance boxes, overflow of grouting, and stairs exaggerated reinforcement applications at the foot of courtyard riwaqs, sloppy workmanship reduced to a special quality of the building and caused and a negative visual impact on the general appearance of the building. In addition to the negative impact of this conservation, some other technical problems such as intensive salination and discharges were occurred due to the construction of a new roof.



Figure.9. Sultanhan's restoration problems

Furthermore, the lack of new functions and being out of use are the main reasons which contradict with international conservation principles.

### Evaluation and Results

Being the most important commercial and cultural buildings with their multi-functional structures the caravansary represented and active and crucial usage on the silk-road until 16th century. [5] The process beginning with their losing importance after 16th century has been considered as the main reason that causes the deterioration because of their locations being far away from settlements, it could not be possible to give new functions to those buildings and therefore some of them became ramshackle with natural impacts and the others still resist to all the negative impact of the years.

According to Kuban, there are two main difficulties to study on Seljuk's architecture. The first and the most important one is the bad quality of the restorations which cause the deterioration of the unique characteristics of the buildings and the other is aesthetical vacancy due to careless, loveless and ignorant usage of them [7]. Indeed, we face with these two reasons in Sultan Han, lying under the failure of restoration. As being the most important building of its era, Kayseri Sultan Han have lost its monumental impact which was created with a plain but an impressive way, the aesthetic and symbolic values of portals by the restoration which was done only with the aim of maintenance without any attention to the creative solutions lying under its constructions and decorations.

As emphasized by many researchers, it is known that the Seljuk's art and architecture have impressive aesthetic contents on the sensitive on the observers (Kuban)[7], however, when we look at Sultan Han very few elements remain left for such an impact.

By taking into consideration the sustainability problems due to the wrong functioning against economic, social and cultural characteristics, a new function recommendation is tried to be developed in this paper.

The solutions for the medieval French castles can also be suggested for Kayseri-Sultan Han which has similar characteristics with its monumental impacts, volumetric sizes and locational properties far from settlements.

Within the scope of this recommendation, after the restorations according to contemporary conservation principles, the building can be equipped with all technical and technological opportunities and can be utilized as an important touristic point for the visitor for daily tours, as an impressive place for alternative courses and activities of artists and universities.

An ideal atmosphere for cultural activities and artistic workshops and shows can be formed when the architectural impact, which belongs geometrical sizes, light shadows and different rhythms, combined with technological infrastructure.

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