

## THE CARAVANSERAIS DURING THE REIGN OF THE GREAT SELJUKS (1038-1157)

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### ABSTRACT

This article provides information about the caravanserais of the Great Seljuk period (1038-1157). The caravanserais of Rabati Anushirvan, Rabati Zafaran and Rabati Sharif in the Khurasan region, and partly on the caravanserais of Kirman and other regions were touched upon. Also, It is paid attention to the architectural tradition of Seljuk era caravanserais, in particular, the features of the building, such as construction materials. Also, constructions such as rabat, khan, zawiya, takya, khanqah, which are the equivalent of a caravanserai, and their functions are explained.

**Keywords:** Sultan Malik-Shah, Nizam al-Mulk, Qavurt Bey, caravanserai, rabat, khan, zawiya, takya, khanqah, Rabati Anushirwan, Rabati Zafaran, Rabati Sharif, minaret, wall, brick, stone.

### INTRODUCTION

During the Seljuk period, the social welfare of the population was improved as a result of the construction of mosques, houses, libraries, hospitals, caravanserais, trade stalls and baths throughout the country.

From the socio-cultural point of view, the caravanserai, hammam (bathhouse), takya, zawiya, khanqah, rabat, hospital, bridge, road, mosque, school and madrasah are the languages of the peoples. The peoples of the past tried to express themselves to the whole humanity and convey their messages to the future generations by means of these structures. In addition, the people's point of views, inner experiences, religious beliefs and attitudes to society, events, and history are embodied in these monuments.

The traditions of caravanserai architecture started by the Karakhanids and Ghaznavids were adopted by the Great Seljuks and reached a stage of development during this period, and many unique architectural monuments were built.

Caravanserais are also found in the sources under the name "rabat". In fact, in most regions of the Islamic world, instead of the word caravanserai, its equivalent term rabat is used more often than caravanserai. Even the word rabat is found in the Holy Qur'an. For example, in the 60<sup>th</sup> ayah of Surah Anfal, rabat, which appears in the form of "va min ribatil-xoyli" (وَمِنْ رِبَاطٍ (الْخَيْلِ)), means "the place where the horses of the horsemen who are ready to fight against non-Muslims are tied." From this, it can be understood that in the essence of rabat lies an institution that has acquired military importance related to the fatkh in Islam, that is, the spread of religion. In particular, the establishment of the city of Rabat in Morocco was also intended for military purposes, and this city served as a gathering center for Muslim fatikhs going to Spain [Köprülü M.F., 1942: 268-269]. Later, rabats acquired the meaning of a caravanserai, a place where riders stopped and changed their horses on the road.

The famous Turkologist F.Koprulu (1890-1966) said that among the barbarians of North Africa, the meaning of the place where the guardian lives together with his murids was understood from rabat. After the spirit of fatkh weakened in the Islamic world, when Sufism appeared and began to occupy an important place in the life of the society, Rabat expressed the meaning of a place such as zawiya, takya, khanqah where dervishes engaged in dhikr and pray. By the end of the 10th century and the first half of the 11th century, rabat was almost used instead of the word khanqah [Köprülü M.F., 1942: 267-288].

### MAIN PART

Caravanserai, also found in Persian language sources in the form of “Carabanserai”, are the continuation of rabats, which were previously widespread in the entire Islamic land. In particular, the word rabat was used instead of the words caravanserai and khan in the chronicles, inscriptions and foundation documents of the Seljuk period [Turan O., 1946: 489]. In general, caravanserais are strong fortifications built for military purposes on the borders of Muslim countries. Ghazis who came from different regions of the Islamic world to organize fatkhs against non-Muslim countries settled in these places on the borders. These rabats, which included dormitories, dining rooms, warehouses, mosques, baths, and stables, continued as a defense system on the borders. Rapid communication between remote border areas was established by signaling fire from observation towers on the walls, and measures were taken against the enemy. Rabat expenses were covered by waqf provided by the state or wealthy merchants. Arab geographers noted that there were 10,000 rabats in Mawarannahr (Transoxiana) [Turan O., 1946: 489; Köprülü M.F., 1942: 267; Cezar M., 1977: 170].

In the history of Islamic civilization, the magnificent and large caravansarai types, where trade and pilgrimage caravans stopped and rested at intercity intersections, and where passengers were received and trade processes were conducted in cities, were named “khans”<sup>1</sup>. In Anatolia, the most famous caravanserais in large cities and urban centers are called khans [Sönmez S., 2007: 274]. In short, from the point of view of space and time, we find the concept of caravanserai in the sources in the form of caravanserai, zawiya, takya, khanqah, khan, duwaira, buq’ah, dargah, sawma’ah, astanah and in many cases rabat.

According to the information of Nizam al-Mulk, the famous minister of the Great Seljuk Sultanate, one of the main tasks of the Seljuk sultans was to build rabats at important points of highways [Nizamü’l-Mülk., 1999:145]. The traditional view of who built the caravansarai during the Seljuk period is as follows: “The Seljuk sultans and statesmen built caravanserais approximately every 30-40 km along the trade routes. The ruins of these caravanserais are living documents that tell us what historical trade routes existed at that time and their place in the life of society [Turan O., 1946: 471; Turan O., 1971: 268-319]. When Nizam al-Mulk commissioned Persian architects to build madrasah’s, they had their own houses, caravanserais, rabats and maristans (hospitals) [Herzfeld E., 1943: 29].

Along with the Karakhanid and Ghaznavid dynasties, the Seljuks built caravansarai along the caravan routes in the Mawarannahr region, but also along the trade routes from Khorasan to Northern Iran. Among them, Seljuk era caravanserais such as Rabati Anushirwan, Rabati Zafaran and Rabati Sharif, located on the Khorasan-Northern Iran caravan route, have been

<sup>1</sup> This Persian term was also used in ancient Turks to mean khan or sultan.

connected to our time. The construction of these caravanserais is dominated by architectural traditions formed before the Seljuk period. However, some differences are noticeable in the caravanserais of the Seljuk era, without departing from the traditional foundations of architecture.

Anushirwan Sharaf al-Ma'ali (420/1029-440/1049), one of sultan Tugrul Bey's emirs, built a rabat in the Northern Khorasan region. This building is called Rabati Anushirwan [Aslanapa O., 1989: 86; **Cezar M., 1977: 206**]. However, local residents have false information that this rabat was built before Islam, and they identify the person who built the building as Khusraw I Anushirwan (531-579), a representative of the Sassanid dynasty [Herzfeld E., 1943: 26].

Rabati Anushirwan is the first rabat built during the Seljuk era, and it is located between the cities of Simnan and Shahrud (Imomshahr)<sup>2</sup> [Aslanapa O., 1989: 86; **Cezar M., 1977: 206**]. German archaeologist and Iranologist E. Herzfeld (1879-1948) came to the conclusion that Rabati Anushirwan served as a military camp or a place of exchange of letters, based on the absence of other religious symbols in the construction of the mihrab and the building and the fact that the building was solidly built [Herzfeld E., 1943: 25]. In the construction of rabat, there are some similarities with the Dihistan and Daya Khatun caravanserais of the Karakhanid era. The building has a square plan (72x72 m), the walls are strong like those of a castle, and the corners and sides are reinforced with cylindrical towers [Aslanapa O., 1989: 86]. The case of Rabati Anushirwan clearly shows that defense requirements were also taken into account in the construction of Seljuk era caravanserais. In addition to the large round towers in the corners of the caravanserai, additional semi-cylindrical towers on the walls are proof of our opinion. There were also special holes<sup>3</sup> in the towers.

Despite being one of the ancient structures of the Seljuk period, Rabati Anushirwan is a historical monument that has been preserved intact to this day. In the construction of Rabat, stone was mainly used, and in some places brick was also used. In particular, the walls of the caravanserai were made of stone, and the dome and pillars were made of brick [**Cezar M., 1977: 206**]. It is an important change in architecture that stone was the main building material in Rabati Anushirwan, unlike the caravanserai, which were built only from raw brick or baked brick. So, the Seljuks took into account the possibilities of the building material of the region when constructing this building. The Seljuks followed the same path in Anatolia, which is rich in stone and has an ancient tradition of stone construction. Since stone is a strong building material, Rabati Anushirwan has been preserved until our time.

Rabati Zafaran is another caravanserai of the Seljuk era, located between the cities of Nishapur and Sabzawar. According to E. Herzfeld's research plan in 1925, the size of the caravanserai was 75x75 m. Raw bricks were laid on the high foundation of the caravanserai made of baked bricks [Herzfeld E., 1943: 22-23]. There are minarets at every corner and a mosque near the entrance [**Cezar M., 1977: 209**]. The Russian orientalist N.V. Khanykov<sup>4</sup> (1819-1878), who visited Rabati Zafaran in 1858, noted that the mosque had a domed shape. N.V. Khanykov came to the conclusion that the caravanserai was built during the reign of sultan Malik-Shah, based on the phrase "...composed in the time of the great sultan..." and the

<sup>2</sup> One of the cities is in the Iran Islamic Republic.

<sup>3</sup> Special holes opened in the walls of the castle for observing the enemy and shooting.

<sup>4</sup> N.V. Khanykov (1819-1878) spent the last 18 years of his life in France and most of his works were published in French, so his name appears in French-language publications as Nicolas de Khanikoff and in English-language literature as Nikolai Khanykov.

unique features of the building. E.Herzfeld also confirms the opinion of N.V.Khanykov, taking into account that Malik-Shah received the title of “as-Sultan al-muazzam” [Herzfeld E., 1943: 23; Aslanapa O., 1989: 87]. The French archaeologist A.Godard (1881-1965), who studied this area in 1940, said that Rabati Zafarani had completely disappeared [Aslanapa O., 1989: 87; **Cezar M., 1977: 210**].

During the reign of sultan Malik-Shah, the minister Nizam al-Mulk reorganized the road and postal system throughout the country. In particular, Nizam al-Mulk repaired the road from Baghdad to Jalula<sup>5</sup>. And sultan Malik-Shah built a rabat near Jalula and it was named Rabati Jalula (later Red Rabat) [Herzfeld E., 1943: 25].

Rabati Sharif is another beautiful architectural monument that has survived to this day from the products of large-scale public activities of the Seljuks. This rabat was built along the ancient Nishapur-Sarakhs trade route, between the cities of Mashhad and Sarakhs, where trade caravans used to travel [**Cezar M., 1977: 198**; Aslanapa O., 1989: 87; Piyadeoğlu C., 2008: 163]. However, the location of the caravanserai was in a remote area compared to the trade routes that operated at that time.

This caravanserai was built in 508/1114-1115, by Sharaf al-Din Abu Takhir ibn Sa'd al-Din ibn Ali al-Kumi, governor of Marv of the Seljuks. According to the part of the inscriptions on the wall of the caravanserai that has survived to us, it is known that the inscriptions were written by a master-scribe named Ali Abad al-Mansur Asad ibn Mukhammad from Sarakhs [**Cezar M., 1977: 198-199**; Пугаченкова Г.А., 1967: 112; Piyadeoğlu C., 2008: 163]. The inscriptions are written in Kufic script [**Cezar M., 1977: 204**].

The well-known Uzbek archaeologist G.A.Pugachenkova (1915-2007) in her research reported that societies of architects and masters were active in the cities of Sarakhs and Marv and that these architects built buildings in other countries besides their cities. It has been suggested that may have sent the architect Khuseyn from Sarakhs or Marv to build Rabati Sharif [Пугаченкова Г.А., 1967: 112-113].

During the Oghuz rebellion in the last years of sultan Sanjar's rule, the capital Marv and some other cities suffered heavy losses, and some caravansarais, including Rabati Sharif, were damaged. In 549/1154-1155 sultan Sanjar's wife Turkan Khatun<sup>6</sup> repaired Rabati Sharif. The plaster decorations in the caravanserai appeared after this repair [Aslanapa O., 1989: 89; **Cezar M., 1977: 200**; Piyadeoğlu C., 2008: 163].

Rabati Sharif consists of two courtyards. The complex is built entirely of baked bricks [**Cezar M., 1977: 200**]. Geometric order and symmetry covering regular rectangular and square shapes, which are notable features of Central Asian caravansarais of the 11th-12th centuries, can also be seen in the construction of Rabati Sharif. The fact that the caravanserai has a single entrance, the thickness of the front and back walls, and the extreme thickness of the side walls, as well as the minarets in the corners, indicate that attention was also paid to security and defense issues.

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<sup>5</sup> Today it is one of the ancient cities located in the territory of Iraq.

<sup>6</sup> The word Turkan does not denote the name of a person. The word Turkan means the title given to Turkish khagans, wives and daughters of khagans. After the Seljuk sultans married Karakhani princesses who had the title of Turkan, this word became popular in the form of "Turkan Khatun". Among them: the wives of Charibey, Alp Arslan, Malik-Shah and Sanjars were Karakhani princesses who received the title of "Turkan Khatun". Later, the Khorezmshahs, Salguri and Timurid dynasties continued the tradition of giving the title of Turkan to the palace queens.

## RESULTS

Hammams (bathhouses) also played an important role in the Seljuk society. Usually waqf institutions are built together with a hammam. Madrasah, hospital and caravanserai hammams were used by residents and foreigners of these institutions. In Anatolia, there were public hammams and separate hammams for men and women, which were built by sultans and statesmen and turned into foundations [Turan O., 1969:275]. Also, nomadic Turks bathed in tent hammams called *cherge* made of leather. This type of bath was adopted by the Byzantines, and Byzantine emperors used tent hammams during their travels [Feher G., 1937:317; Turan O., 1969: 275]. It was natural that this nomadic culture came to the Middle East through the Seljuks. For example, Anatolian Seljuk sultan Ala ad-Din Kayqubad I used to carry a tent hammam called “a travel hammam” during his travels. The army of the Khorezmshahs also used this type of hammam, and it kept its name “Cherge”. Semi-nomadic Aqqoyunids also used *cherge*.

Also, the Kirman Seljuks paid attention to the construction of social and household facilities. In particular, during the period of Qavurt Bey (1043-1073), new buildings, roads, caravanserais and water facilities were built in the center of Bardsir and other Kirman cities [Turan O., 1969: 206]. In particular, Qavurt Bey built a *darband*<sup>7</sup> between Seiston and Darra<sup>8</sup> road, as well as a khan, a pool and a hammam in Darra [Yıldız H.D., 1989: 288]. This castle was built 4 farsakhs away from the city of Isfih<sup>9</sup>, and its gate was made of iron [Atçeken Z., Bedirhan Y., 2012: 229]. Also, according to the order of Qavurt Bey, one or two human-height posts were placed at every 300 paces of the 24-farsakhs distance, on desert road from Darrah to Bam. Even on a dark night, one could see the other from one side. This was meant to prevent the caravans from getting lost on the desert road [Merçil E., 1989: 218]. At the same time, Qavurt Bey dug a well at a distance of 10 farsakhs from the city of Yazd, and this well was named “Chahi Kavurt”. In addition, Malik Kawurd repaired the Tiz<sup>10</sup> port, which is of commercial importance [Atçeken Z., Bedirhan Y., 2012: 229].

Fearing that Malik Turan-Shah I (1085-1097) would attack the population, he built a new neighborhood outside the central city. He built a madrasah, a hospital, a hammam, a rabat and houses there, moved to a new neighborhood together with the soldiers in 1094 and forbade the soldiers to live inside the city [Turan O., 1969: 206; Atçeken Z., Bedirhan Y., 2012: 229]. Also, Malik Arslan-Shah I (1101-1142) and his wife Zaytun Khatun built rabat in the cities of Kirman [Yıldız H.D., 1989: 288]. The rabat built by this woman, nicknamed Ismat al-Din, was named Rabati Yazdiyan [Atçeken Z., Bedirhan Y., 2012: 230].

The son of Arslan-Shah I, Malik Mukhammad I (1142-1156) also built many rabats in the cities of Bardsir, Bam and Jiroft [Yıldız H.D., 1989: 288]. At the same time, Khani Sarbizan was one of the buildings he built [Atçeken Z., Bedirhan Y., 2012: 230]. Muay al-Din Raykhan, one of the atabeks of Kirman, built caravanserais on the roads and allocated endowments to provide food and shoes to poor travelers. He also founded the hospital of Darbi Habis [Atçeken Z., Bedirhan Y., 2012: 230; Merçil E., 1989: 224-225].

<sup>7</sup> A road through a gorge between two mountains. In the sources, it also means fortification in the border areas.

<sup>8</sup> The name of valley.

<sup>9</sup> A small valley containing water sources on the way from the city of Narmashir to Zaranj, the center of Seistan.

<sup>10</sup> Today it corresponds to the Iranian port of Chabahar.

## DISCUSSION

Although Muslim Turkic dynasties such as Karakhanids, Ghaznavids, and Seljuks spread caravansarai to the Islamic world and gifted it to the entire world civilization, some orientalist recognize Iranians as the founders of caravansarais. In fact, American orientalist A.U.Pope (1881-1969), who attributes caravansarais to Iranians, noted in his work "A survey of Persian art": "The geniuses of Iran spread the word with their caravansarais [Pope A.U., 1938-1939: 1246-1247]." However, this work of A.U.Pope does not have a section that provides detailed information about the emergence of caravansarais or caravanserai in Iran and Turkestan. After introducing some Seljuk era caravanserai, the researcher continued his thoughts with the achievements of Iranians in the field of architecture. However, it is true that the oldest caravanserai were built by the Turkic peoples, and the Turks started the construction of this type of structures in Iran.

Afterwards, The caravanserai were built not only in Iran, but also in Anatolia, Syria, Iraq and Egypt by Turkic peoples [Sauvaget J., 1937: 98-121; Sauvaget J., 1939: 48-55; Sauvaget J., 1940: 1-19]. Although some modern publications claim that Iranians built structures such as rabat and sabat before Islam, Iranian rabat and sabat have nothing to do with the formation of Turkish caravanserai.

## CONCLUSION

Caravanserai were social institutions with a long history and unique service traditions, unique in the history of world civilization. In the medieval Turkish-Islamic world, a caravanserai is a place where groups traveling for business or to visit holy places stopped and rested. Caravanserai were social and household institutions with multifaceted features and deep historical roots. Although the typical examples of caravanserai were located in the geographical area between Anatolia and Mawarannahr, the names such as rabat, takya, zawiya, khanqah, khan, duwaira, buq'ah, dargah, sawma'ah, astanah were also spread in the regions of the Islamic world stretching from Andalus to Central Asia.

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