

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Central Asian Civilization: The Silk Road and The Arab Caliphate

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VOLUME: Vol.06 Issue06 2026

PAGE: 98-102

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Abstract

This article reveals the history of relations between the peoples inhabiting the vast region of Central Asia, connected by a single artery of the Great Silk Road. This region experienced an intensive integration of economic, trade, cultural, and urban planning values. The influence of the political situation during different eras of the Great Silk Road on changing caravan routes is emphasized. The features of city design and planning that arose from active trade—stimulating the development of craft production, agriculture, and animal husbandry—are examined. The mutual influence of construction traditions from various Central Asian countries on the formation of caravanserai architecture has been studied in detail. Terms used for inns in Central Asia, such as caravanserai, khan, funduq, etc., are explained. The origins and development of inn architecture from ancient times to the classical style formed during the Arab Caliphate are considered.

KEY WORDS

Silk Road, urban planning, culture, caravanserai, architecture, planning structure.

INTRODUCTION

Central Asia is a unique and vast region of the continent whose population practiced both nomadic and settled lifestyles. Despite differences in mindset, common spiritual, economic, and cultural values have been formed among various countries and peoples since ancient times. The social phenomenon of the unity and integration of spiritual and artistic traditions is confirmed by the material evidence of past centuries—monuments of architecture and urban planning, works of art, and handicrafts. Relations between states and different ethnic groups have always existed in Central Asia. In the Middle Ages, Central Asia was part of the Turkic Khaganate (5th–7th centuries), later the Arab Caliphate (8th–9th centuries), and subsequently the Mongol Empire (13th–14th centuries). In the words of Academician N. N.

Negmatov: "Since ancient times, the peoples of Central Asia have been linked not only by common territories, but also by common foundations of economic, aesthetic, social, and cultural development. Issues regarding the formation of national characteristics in architecture and art were inextricably linked with the continuity and mutual enrichment of traditions" [1, p. 10].

The nomadic and semi-nomadic population of Central Asia was in political, economic, trade, and cultural contact with urbanized agricultural oases. The succession of political and historical events, the emergence of new states, and the collapse of old ones could not disrupt international trade, economic, and cultural ties and contacts, even with the most

distant regions. In ancient times (2nd century BCE – 4th century CE), the route passing through the widely accessible Fergana Oasis (Khorasan) became dangerous due to continuous disputes and struggles among local feudal lords. Over the centuries, the routes of the Great Silk Road shifted dramatically—"certain sections acquired special significance, while others, on the contrary, fell out of use, and the cities and trade stations along them fell into decline" [3, p. 127]. In the 9th–12th centuries, trade caravan routes passed through the Near East, Central and Asia Minor, Syria, and Byzantium, whereas in the 13th–14th centuries, the old routes of the early medieval period (6th–8th centuries)—passing through Syria, Iran, Mawarannahr, Southern Kazakhstan, Northern Kyrgyzstan, Eastern Turkestan, and China—were actively reused. "The political situation on the continent dictated the choice of routes made by diplomats, merchants, and other travelers" [3, p.128].

The Great Silk Road stimulated and accelerated the emergence and rapid growth of cities. "New cities grew along busy caravan routes (Taraz, Suyab, Nevaket, Balasagun, Kuva, Otrar, Bundjikat, Penjikent, etc.), and ancient cities developed and were restored (Samarkand, Bukhara, Balkh, Merv, Nishapur, Termez, Khulbuk, Uzgen, Gurganj, Khazarasp, Kath, etc.)" [4, p. 70]. Trading cities that sprang up at the intersections of trade routes and transit hubs quickly turned into major economic and cultural centers; "significant material values accumulated in them, craft production and art flourished, and artistic-aesthetic styles were formed" [5, p. 436]. Markets—trade pavilions, market squares, or commercial streets stretching from one city gate through the entire city to another—encompassed all the social activities of the urban population. Commercial streets lined with shops where artisans lived, worked, and traded were divided into guild quarters based on the type of production—potters (glaziers), blacksmiths, weavers, bakers, and others. "A shop (dukan) was a one-room building with a porch (aivan), which could also have a second floor (balkhana)" [6, p. 198]. Street intersections were marked by domed trade pavilions (tim,

chorsu, etc.), which housed artisans' shops and where wholesale trade was conducted. Directly adjoining them were inns (postoyannye dvory)—places for accommodating travelers and merchants, conducting major trade operations, storing and transporting goods, and housing pack animals.

Along the entire path of trade caravans—in cities or rural settlements, in large oases or in the desert at one-day travel intervals (20–30 km)—there were structures serving as inns, reloading stops, and trade stations. The earliest building of this type was discovered in Mohenjo-Daro (Pakistan, 3rd–2nd millennium BCE); its floor plan resembles the design of modern inn complexes, featuring living quarters with bathrooms situated opposite one another. Apart from inn buildings, cities contained many other trade-related facilities—artisans' workshops, covered markets, warehouses, dining establishments, baths, and more [9, p. 386].

Aegean architecture of the Minoan-Mycenaean culture (Island of Crete, 15th century BCE) gives us an idea of the planning layout of another archaic inn located near the Palace of Knossos. Its rooms included a ceremonial hall decorated with a floral frieze, sleeping quarters, as well as a foot-washing basin and bath fed by an underground spring [9, p. 182]. In the city of Dura-Europos (Syria, 2nd century BCE), a trade center of the Parthian Kingdom and a major transit hub along caravan routes, the remains of an inn have been preserved. Its spatial layout laid the foundation for the compositional structure of medieval caravanserais—an open inner courtyard formed the central core of the composition, surrounded along its perimeter by rooms designated for various purposes. In Sasanian Iran (3rd–7th centuries), "trade fortresses" (outposts) were constructed to protect and defend territory as well as to receive and accommodate merchant caravans. As R. Hillenbrand noted, "only after the Arab conquests did a sufficiently standardized and easily recognizable type of inn intended for merchant caravans emerge in the East" [7, p. 331].



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In the period of Samanid dynasty, Makhmud of Ghazni (city of Ghazni in eastern Afghanistan) was appointed the governor of Chorasani. Taking advantage of revolts in the Samanid State, he began to interfere in the affairs of Mawarannahr and infringe on the heritage of the Samanids. But he could not break the influence of Karakhanids who had already consolidated their position in the conquered Mawarannahr and moved to Khorezm, which was a separate state at that time. In 1017 he defeated and destroyed Khorezm. Then he decided to conquer India. Makhmud of Ghazni made 15 campaigns to India from 1002 to 1026. In the 12th century Ghaznavid Dynasty was replaced by Ghurids Dynasty.

In 1040 the state, created by Makhmud of Ghazni, was weakened by the nomads, the Seljuk-Turks tribes. Ghaznavids were unable to hold power for long and by 1059 Seljuks had taken over Chorasani and Mawarannahr. As the result of countless conquests these tribes succeeded to create a great empire at the turn of the 11th–12th centuries. This empire included Asia Minor, Middle East and major part of the Armenian-Kurdish highlands. Following the approval of Western domination Seljuks transferred their attention to the east, namely to Mawarannahr. They conquered it in 1097. During the Seljuk reign, territory of modern Uzbekistan was decorated with many wonderful palaces and buildings. Architecture, crafts, arts and culture were flourishing. In the 12th century Mawarannahr was invaded by new nomadic tribes, Kara-Khitani. They conquered the entire Mawarannahr,

large areas from Khorezm to Kashgar. Defeating the Seljuk Empire, Kara-Khitans created all the prerequisites for the strengthening of a powerful state of Khorezmshahs in the early Middle Ages.

The Great Silk Road (GSR), a means of trade, ethnic and cultural relations, has an important place in the history of the two great civilizations on the Eurasian continent—Western and Eastern civilizations. GSR has connected Eastern and Western cultures for tens of centuries. GSR served the development of science, technique, technologies, international and interregional relations and exchange of cultural values on the mainland. GSR was created in the 3rd century BC and was in force until the 16th century AD. During the 17th century, the nations located on the 18,000-kilometer-long Great Silk Road played a major role in spreading new knowledge, religions, and writings to the world, in the interaction of different languages and cultures, and in the ethnic relations of peoples. The Great Silk Road passed through the territories inhabited by more than 100 peoples, representatives of many races, peoples and countries participated in the trade and economic relations carried out on this road for centuries. But among them, the ancestors of the peoples who lived in Central Asia—peoples with Turkic origins, a special role. For this reason, the location in the center of GSR has left its traces in the formation of the history, ethnopsychology, culture, languages, religious beliefs and traditions of peoples in this region. It is known that the loss of importance of the Great Silk Road in the Middle Ages led to the disconnection of many countries located in the center of Eurasia from universal connections and falling into the clutches of world imperialism as a result of their backwardness in development. In our days, when humanity has entered the new world order and the era of globalization in its development, the beginning of the restoration of this ancient way of dialogue and cooperation between civilizations with the initiative of the People's Republic of China "One Belt and One Road" is not at all accidental, because humanity is based on equal cooperation. The demand for this project is increasing. Early implementation of the "One Belt and One Road" initiative will contribute to the economic well-being of the countries along the

Silk Road and economic cooperation in the region, cooperation and relations between different civilizations, and peaceful development on our planet, the "One Belt and One Road" project is a huge step taken for the well-being of all countries of the World. The Turkic peoples must find their rightful place

in the new Silk Road and be a bridge again between East and West, as they have been for centuries.

CONCLUSION

The Great Silk Road played a major role in integrating the economic, trade, and cultural relations of the peoples of Central Asia. Political circumstances and objectives influenced the shifts in caravan routes. The development of trade in this region, alongside the emergence of new cities, led to the formation of an urban planning culture—specifically, craft and architectural traditions. In particular, the architecture of inns along trade routes—caravanserais, khans, and funduqs—underwent significant transformations from ancient times to the period of the Arab Caliphate. Featuring a compositional structure with a central open courtyard and fortified protective walls, they created comfortable conditions for travelers and merchants.

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