

## SELJUQ ECONOMIC HISTORY – Trade

Much like the Qarakhanids, information in written sources about the economy and trade of the Great Seljuq state is sketchy, and any conclusions regarding them are primarily reliant on indirect evidence such as coins and architecture. Their coinage indicates an active economy, and the extensive territories that they ruled, extending from Khorasan to Anatolia, gave them control over important trade routes. Their control over these routes that linked Central Asia with Eastern Europe, as well as China and India with Syrian ports on the Mediterranean, combined with the security and stability that the Seljuq Empire provided would have encouraged long-distance trade. The construction of caravanserais by the Seljuqs along these trade routes is both an indication of commercial activity as well as official encouragement of it. One example is the Ribat-i Sharaf (رباط شرف), a large Seljuq caravanserai located in Iran approximately halfway between Nishapur and Merv, Turkmenistan.

Paradoxically, despite the very limited number of written sources related to the history of the Seljuqs of Rum, information regarding their trade is more plentiful than for the Great Seljuqs. The economic life of the Sultanate of Rum can be divided into two distinct phases; the first beginning with the establishment of the independent sultanate in the late 11<sup>th</sup> century under Süleyman-shah and continuing to the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> – beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. In this period the Sultanate of Rum was an inland state bordered by the Byzantines to the north, west and southwest, Armenian and Crusader states to the south, and Turkic principalities to the east, the most important of which was that of the Danishmends.

In this period Seljuq trade was overland trade conducted along the old trade routes that linked Constantinople with lands to the east. One route linked the city with Antioch and Aleppo; another passed through Malatya and then continued on to northern Iraq, Armenia and Iran. However, one route from Iran passed through Erzurum and terminated in Trabzon where goods were loaded onto ships to reach their final destination. With the establishment of the Sultanate of Rum this overland trade was now directed towards the Seljuq capital of Konya, with Seljuq merchants conducting the trade with the Byzantines in Constantinople.

With the destruction of the Danishmend state in 1178 this picture began change. Among the territories the Seljuqs took from the Danishmends was the city of Samsun on the Black Sea coast, giving the Seljuqs in Anatolia their first access to the sea. Although the degree of impact this had on Seljuq trade is unclear, the contemporary Arab historian Ibn al-Athir stated that before 1205-1206, Iraqi and Syrian merchants were meeting with Russian and Qipchak merchants in Sivas. Sivas soon became an important transit point, where goods coming from Syria and Iraq were delivered to Seljuq traders who then forwarded them to Sinop or Trabzon where they would be loaded onto ships to carry them to other Black Sea ports. Another development in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century indicating the expansion of trade was the construction of the first caravanserai on the Konya-Kayseri road during the reign of Qilij Arslan II (r. 1156-1192).

Events in the first two decades of the 13<sup>th</sup> century would have an even more profound impact on Seljuq trade. The first was the capture of Antalya, motivated in part by commercial considerations, in 1207 by Sultan Kayhusraw I (r. 1192-1196, 1205-1210). Antalya gave the Seljuqs access to the Mediterranean, and trade with Europeans soon followed. One of the first European states to make a commercial treaty and establish direct links with the Seljuqs of Rum was Venice. The first trade agreement was concluded during the reign of Kayhusraw I, and renewed during the reign of Kaykavus I (r. 1210-1219) and in 1220 under Kaykubad I (r. 1219-1236) a more detailed treaty was signed. In addition to the Venetians, other texts mention the presence of Pisans, Genoese and Provençal traders in Antalya.

Shortly after the first treaty with the Venetians was signed, the Franks in Cyprus also sought to establish regular trade relations with the Seljuqs in Antalya. The first treaty, drafted by the Seljuqs and written in Greek, was signed in 1213, and a more comprehensive treaty followed in 1216.

Overland trade also appears to have increased in volume in this period. Contemporary sources mention Iranian merchants in Konya and Sivas, as well as Italian merchants from Cyprus and Syria in Seljuq cities. Another clear indication of the importance of overland trade in the Seljuq lands in the 13<sup>th</sup> century is the number of caravanserais that were built in this period. These rest-houses for travelling merchants and their animals (a large one was referred to as a *kervansaray* / کاروانسرای , a small one as a *han* / خان) provided free lodging for up to three days and were generally spaced approximately 30 kilometers apart, the typical distance covered in nine hours of travel by camel. Somewhere between 30 and 40 caravanserais were constructed along the major trade routes in Anatolia before the Mongol conquest in 1243, with a number of others added in the following years.

Contemporary sources indicate that the Anatolian Seljuqs themselves were also active participants in this long-distance trade. Although mentions of Seljuq traders are not numerous, one document dating from the first quarter of the 12<sup>th</sup> century found in the Cairo Genizah mentions “Oghuz traders” in Muslim Spain, while the 12<sup>th</sup> century Chinese chronicle the *History of Song* (*Song Shi* 宋史) makes mention of envoys sent to the imperial court by both the Great Seljuqs and the Seljuqs of Rum. The fact that these envoys arrived by land indicates that there were trade routes that linked Anatolia to China.

According to various contemporary sources the exports of the Sultanate of Rum were diverse. Among the agricultural products exported were wheat, dried fruits, nuts, and cotton. Livestock, particularly horses and mules, was also exported to neighboring regions. Silver, alum and rock salt were among the mineral resources traded to outsiders. The main manufactured goods were leather and leather goods, carpets, and textiles. Woolen, cotton and silk textiles were valued exports, and noted for both their vibrant colors and varied designs. Fine cotton and silk textiles interspersed with gold threads were especially sought after. Finally, slaves were valuable commodity, particularly Georgian slaves.

On the other hand, the Seljuqs actively imported a number of items, mostly luxury goods. Syrian textiles and glassware and western weapons were frequent imports, but trade with the Russians and Qipchaks provided some of their most valuable imports – honey, furs and slaves.

## Readings

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## Discussion Questions

1. How territorial expansion affect trade in the Seljuq Sultanate of Rum?
2. Why are sources about the external trade of the Sultanate of Rum more plentiful than those for either the Great Seljuqs or the Qarakhanids?



*Portal of the Rabati Malik caravanserai, Uzbekistan (Wikicommons)*



*Ribat-i Sharaf Caravanserai, Iran (Wikicommons)*



*Sultan Han, Aksaray, Turkey (Wikicommons)*