

Arařtırma Makalesi/ Research Article

Anatolia: The End Point of the Silk Road

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Abstract

The Silk Road has been a trade route spanning a vast area for centuries, sought after by many states attempting to control it. The states that gained control of this route reaped significant economic benefits, thereby bolstering their power and engaging in cultural exchanges with each other. The desire to control the Silk Road has even led to conflicts between some states. The Silk Road also facilitated trade and the exchange of ideas between the Chinese and Roman civilizations. In the Eastern Mediterranean part of the Silk Road, commercial goods were loaded onto ships and sent westward via the Mediterranean, thus facilitating trade. The production of silk by the Chinese and spices by the Indians led to the emergence of some of the most important trade routes in history. Powerful countries of that era, such as the Egyptians and Romans, purchased valuable products like silk and spices from the East centuries before Christ, using specific caravan routes for the transportation of these goods. This significantly contributed to the development of roads and the enrichment of new cultures along these routes. The main route of this historic

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road has served multiple functions simultaneously. Beyond being a trade route, it has acted as a bridge between cultures living in the region for thousands of years. Thanks to this road, different societies and cultures have had the opportunity to get to know each other, create many new cultural elements, and transport many traditional cultural elements. This route has made significant contributions to the sharing of accumulations that contribute to the development of humanity, such as religion, philosophy, science, and technology. Advanced civilizations of that time acquired new knowledge and technologies and transferred them to other parts of the world. People lived knowing that they could reach new worlds and encounter new cultures through this road. Those who had to leave their homes for various reasons arrived in new lands thanks to this road. Many events that changed the course of history have taken place in the context of this road. Perhaps the first example of the communication network that shrinks our world through telephones, television, and the internet of today was established here. The first example of globalization was seen on this road.

Keywords: Silk Road, Anatolia, Turk corridor, social communication.

Anadolu: İpek Yolu'nun Son Noktası

Öz

İpek Yolu, yüzyıllar boyunca geniş bir alanı kapsayan bir ticaret yolu olmuş ve bu yolu kontrol etmeye çalışan birçok devlet tarafından arzu edilmiştir. Bu yolu kontrol eden devletler, büyük ekonomik faydalar sağlamış, güçlerini pekiştirmiş ve birbirleriyle kültürel alışverişlerde bulunmuştur. İpek Yolu'nu kontrol etme arzusu, bazı devletler arasında çatışmalara bile yol açmıştır. İpek Yolu, Çin ve Roma medeniyetleri arasında ticaret ve fikir alışverişini de kolaylaştırmıştır. İpek Yolu'nun Doğu Akdeniz kısmında, ticaret malları gemilere yüklenip Akdeniz üzerinden batıya gönderilmiştir. Çinlilerin ipek ve Hintlilerin baharat üretimi, tarihin en önemli ticaret yollarının ortaya çıkmasına neden olmuştur. MÖ yüzyıllar önce Mısır ve Roma gibi dönemin güçlü ülkeleri, Doğu'dan ipek ve baharat gibi değerli ürünler satın alarak, bu malların taşınması için belirli kervan yollarını kullanmış ve bu durum, yolların gelişimine ve bu yollar boyunca yeni kültürlerin zenginleşmesine önemli katkılar sağlamıştır. Bu tarihi yolun ana güzergahı, aynı anda birden fazla işlev görmüştür. Bir ticaret yolu olmanın ötesinde, binlerce yıldır bölgedeki kültürler arasında bir köprü işlevi görmüştür. Bu yol sayesinde farklı toplumlar ve kültürler birbirlerini tanıma, birçok yeni kültürel unsur yaratma ve birçok geleneksel kültürel unsuru taşıma fırsatı bulmuştur. Bu yol, din, felsefe, bilim ve teknoloji gibi insanlığın gelişimine katkıda bulunan birikimlerin paylaşılmasına önemli katkılar sağlamıştır. Dönemin ileri medeniyetleri, yeni

bilgi ve teknolojiler edinmiş ve bunları dünyanın diğer bölgelerine aktarmıştır. İnsanlar, bu yol sayesinde yeni dünyalara ulaşabileceklerini ve yeni kültürlerle karşılaşabileceklerini bilerek yaşamışlardır. Çeşitli nedenlerle evlerini terk etmek zorunda kalanlar, bu yol sayesinde yeni topraklara ulaşmışlardır. Tarihin seyrini değiştiren birçok olay, bu yolun bağlamında gerçekleşmiştir. Belki de bugün telefonlar, televizyonlar ve internet aracılığıyla dünyamızı küçülten iletişim ağının ilk örneği burada kurulmuştur. Küreselleşmenin ilk örneği bu yolda görülmüştür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İpek Yolu, Anadolu, Türk koridoru, sosyal iletişim.

Introduction

The Silk Road is not merely a path for silk to travel from one end of the world to the other; it's a route through which culture and elements of civilization are transported¹. In this aspect, the Silk Road has served as a bridge between different nations, languages, religions, cultures, and civilizations for centuries. It has facilitated the emergence of common values, emotions, and thoughts in the regions it connected. One of the oldest and busiest thoroughfares in human history, the Silk Road stretched from Asia to Europe, and from Europe to Africa. It served as a path not only from West to East but also from East to West. These routes were crucial guides for the Seljuk Turks to reach the East and were utilized during the campaign of Genghis Khan. Nations and empires met, rose, and fell along these routes. Religions and philosophies were born and spread to various parts of the world. In this regard, the Great Silk Road stands as one of the greatest witnesses to history.²

Stretching from China through Anatolia and the Mediterranean to Europe, the most prominent symbol of this trade route has been the

¹ The commercial movement that developed from east to west utilized a network of roads that had been in use since earlier ages. These thousands of kilometers of caravan routes, which facilitated the transportation of silk, porcelain, paper, spices, and precious stones, as well as cultural exchange between continents, came to be known over time as the "Silk Road."

² Cengiz Alyılmaz, *İpek Yolu ve Orhun Yazıtları*, Atatürk Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Enstitüsü Dergisi, S.24, Erzurum, 2004. s.181.

"silk weaving" produced in China and spread worldwide.³ The production and processing of silk have given rise to various legends and myths. Based on archaeological excavations, it is believed that silk cocoons dating back to the 12th century BC have been found, indicating the usage of silk during that period⁴.

Silk weaving is considered one of humanity's most significant inventions, with China being recognized as its birthplace. The chief concubine of the Chinese emperor Huangti, Leizu, is credited with discovering the weaving methods of silk, which resulted in the production of a fabric far superior in quality to all other fabrics of the East. Silk weaving brought great wealth to China and marked a significant advancement in both product and technology. Therefore, the cultivation of silkworms and silk weaving techniques were kept highly secretive. Those who disclosed this knowledge faced the penalty of death, but some dared to take the risk. This high-quality and magnificent weaving provided the Chinese with both superiority and wealth.

However, the challenge lay in transporting these products to unknown lands and selling them there under the conditions of that time. This is where the importance of the Silk Road comes into play. During those times, Rome was experiencing its most splendid periods, with luxury and extravagance reaching unprecedented levels. Silk was one of the most beautiful products that could satisfy the insatiable luxury cravings of the Romans.⁵

The production and trade of silk have a history dating back approximately 3000 years. This historical process also demonstrates that the Silk Road is the world's oldest cultural and trade route. This route, resembling a belt between the East and the West on the map, traverses a region where great wars and competitions have historically taken place⁶. As a result, numerous military and political events have occurred along the Silk Road, directly impacting trade and the economy.

³ Wilder Smith, *Gezi Tıbbı Gezgin Sağlığı ve Hastalıkları El Kitabı*, Çev. Cengiz Uzun, Zeki Yumruk, Nobel Yayınevi, İstanbul, 2012. s.11.

⁴ Ahmet Rıza Bekin, *İpek Yolu*, Ankara Üniversitesi Yayınları, Ankara, 1982. s. 6

⁵ Ahmet Rıza Bekin, *a.g.e.*, s.15.

⁶ Nejat Diyarbakırlı, *Dünden Bugüne İpek Yolu*, Ötüken Yayınları, İstanbul, 2008. s.10.

The term "Silk Road" was first coined by the German geographer Von Richtofen to describe the historic caravan route that connects China to the West through Central Asia. These thousands of kilometers long trade and caravan route, which facilitated the transportation of silk, porcelain, paper, spices, and precious stones, as well as cultural exchange between continents, came to be known over time as the Silk Road. These events have increased the significance and impact of the Silk Road throughout history. They have contributed to the development of relations between the East and the West and facilitated the interaction of different civilizations. The Silk Road has transcended being merely a trade route for goods. It has been a platform where different cultures, languages, religions, and ideas have interacted. This has enriched humanity's common heritage and increased cultural diversity. Even today, the legacy of the Silk Road lives on. Cultural tourism, economic cooperation, and diplomatic relations continue to carry the effects of this ancient trade route into the present day. It is believed that the Silk Road will remain an important part of global relations and development in the future, just as it has been in the past. The historical significance and impact of the Silk Road have not been limited to trade and economy alone. This route has been one of the most important cultural and commercial bridges in human history, and it continues to form the foundation of relationships and interactions worldwide even today.

Methodology

In this article, the methods employed involve compiling and analyzing historical and phytogeographic data. Various sources were utilized to understand the formation and impacts of the Silk Road in Anatolia and Asia Minor. Below, we detail our methodological approach:

1. **Literature Review:** Initially, a comprehensive review of the literature on the history of the Silk Road and the role of Anatolia was conducted. This literature review encompassed various academic articles, book chapters, and sources from history and archaeology.
2. **Data Compilation and Documentation:** Information obtained from the review was compiled to document how the Silk Road developed geographically and historically, particularly its impact in

Anatolia. This process involved using maps from different periods, archaeological findings, and written records.

3. **Analysis and Interpretation:** The compiled data was analyzed to understand the geographical, economic, and cultural impacts of the Silk Road passing through Anatolia. This analysis helped elucidate how the Silk Road functioned as a trade network and bridged different civilizations.

4. **Drawing Conclusions:** Findings were summarized in a conclusion section that emphasizes the role of the Silk Road in Anatolia and its contributions to cultural exchange, trade, and historical processes.

This methodological approach forms the foundation of our analysis focused on the importance of the Silk Road in Anatolia. Rigorous data collection and interpretation ensure the article is scientifically robust and comprehensive.

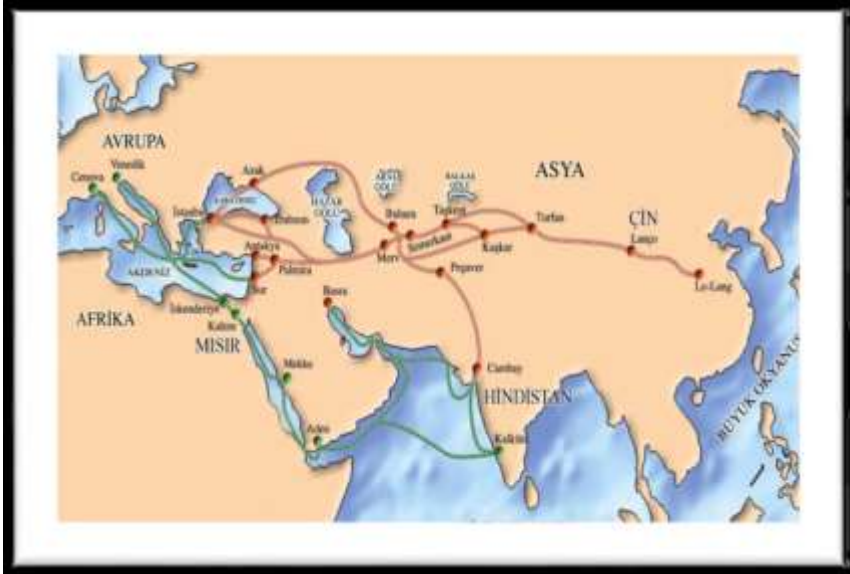
The Silk Road

The Silk Road has been a trade route spanning a vast area for centuries and has been sought after by many states attempting to control it. The states that gained control of this route reaped significant economic benefits, thereby bolstering their power and engaging in cultural exchanges with each other. The desire to control the Silk Road has even led to conflicts between some states. The Silk Road also facilitated trade and exchange of ideas between the Chinese and Roman civilizations. In the Eastern Mediterranean part of the Silk Road, commercial goods loaded onto ships were sent westward via the Mediterranean, thus facilitating trade.

The production of silk by the Chinese and spices by the Indians led to the emergence of some of the most important trade routes in history. Powerful countries of that era, such as the Egyptians and Romans, purchasing valuable products like silk and spices from the East centuries before Christ, using specific caravan routes for the transportation of

these goods, contributed significantly to the development of roads and the enrichment of new cultures along these routes⁷.

Map 1: Silk Road from Istanbul to China



Source: 6th Grade Social Studies, Lesson-Driven, Exam Publications, Ankara, 2019. p. 45.

The main route of this historic road has served multiple functions simultaneously. Beyond being a trade route, for thousands of years, it has acted as a bridge between cultures living in the region. Thanks to this road, different societies and cultures have had the opportunity to get to know each other, create many new cultural elements, and transport many traditional cultural elements. This route has made significant contributions to the sharing of accumulations that contribute to the development of humanity, such as religion, philosophy, science, and technology. Advanced civilizations of that time acquired new

⁷The features of these roads include primarily gentle mountain passes, wetlands, grasslands, and river crossings. Bkz. Aydın Bolak, *Vakıflar*, Vakıflar, Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü Yayını, Ankara, 1985. s. 12.

knowledge and technologies and transferred them to other parts of the world.

People lived knowing that they could reach new worlds and encounter new cultures through this road. Those who had to leave their homes for various reasons arrived in new lands thanks to this road. Many events that changed the course of history have taken place in the context of this road. Perhaps the first example of the communication network that shrinks our world through telephones, television, and the internet of today was established here. The first example of globalization was seen on this road.

Beyond being a trade route connecting Asia to Europe, the Silk Road carries the traces of cultures, religions, and races that have lived in the region for 2000 years, offering extraordinary historical and cultural richness. The Silk Road has been not only the path of merchants but also the path of knowledge, armies, religions, and cultures from east to west and from west to east.⁸

The Silk Road Route

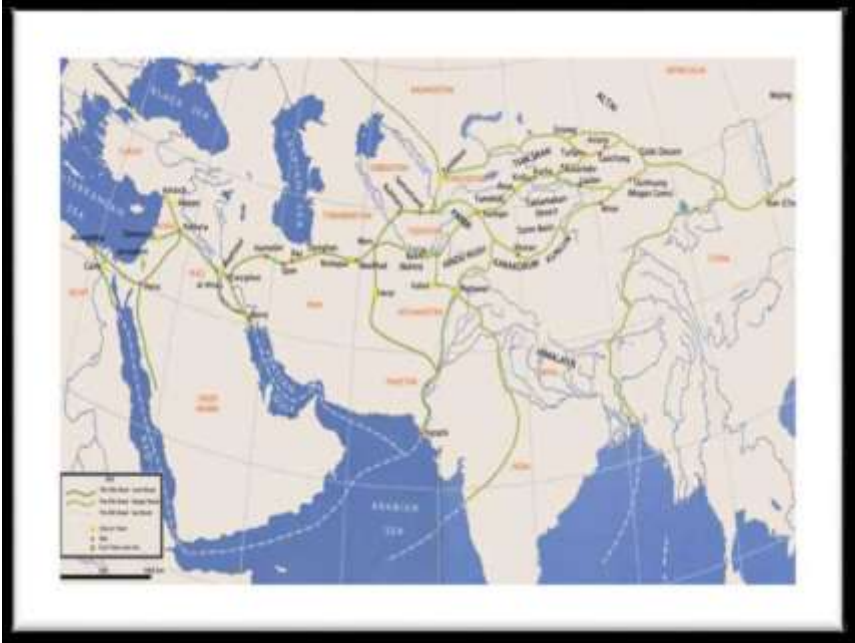
The northern route of the Silk Road, passing through the northern part of the Tarim Basin, was described in detail by the famous historian Herodotus in 450 BC, and he also gave the names of the indigenous peoples living in the route's centers. According to Herodotus' description, the northern route starts from the mouth of the Don River, initially heading north and then east towards the region of the Parthians, then passing through the caravan route north of the Tien Shan Mountains, which culminates in the city of Kansu in western China.⁹ There isn't a description similar to this for the southern route. However, when the southern route is reconstructed, it starts from Mesopotamia; however, this data is not definitive. The Silk Road begins in Anatolia in Antakya, passing through Gaziantep and extending to the Pamir Valley in the north of Iran and Afghanistan. Additionally, it passes through Gaziantep and Malatya in the Southeastern Region, reaching Europe through Thrace and important ports such as Izmir on the Aegean

⁸ Gökçe Günel, "Anadolu Selçuklu Dönemi'nde Anadolu'da İpek Yolu" *Kekibeç Dergisi*, S.29, İstanbul, 2010. s.139-142

⁹ Herotod, *Herotod Tarihi*, Çev. Metin Kan, Eramus Yayınları, İstanbul, 2019. s.41

coast, Trabzon and Sinop on the Black Sea, and Alanya and Antalya on the Mediterranean. A third route is formed by the combination of sea and land routes reaching the port city of Bargyzaga in India, where the Narmada River flows into the Indian Ocean, through the convergence of the Egyptian and Mesopotamian routes. All three routes emerged as a result of the centuries-long development of the Silk Road.¹⁰ The Silk Road encompasses a route stretching from China to Europe. This caravan route, spanning 6,400 kilometers in length, begins from the city of Xi'an in China. It follows northwest direction, tracing the Great Wall of China, passing by the Taklamakan Desert, crossing the Pamir Mountains, and eventually reaching the Eastern Mediterranean after traversing Afghanistan.

Map 2: Silk Road Map



¹⁰ Fırat Purtaş, *Afganistan, Pakistan ve Hindistan'ın Orta Asya Türk Cumhuriyetleri ile İlişkileri*,

Hoca Ahmet Yesevi Uluslararası Türk-Kazak Üniversitesi, Ankara, 2011. s. 43.

Source: Valerie Hansen, *The Silk Road: A New History*, Oxford University Press. Oxford, 2012, s. 26.

The extensive length of the Silk Road, the vulnerability of caravans to raids, and the presence of numerous kingdoms led to the practice of levying tolls on caravans passing through kingdom territories, discouraging many from traveling the entire route and opting for shorter segments. There are varying interpretations among scholars regarding the routes of the historical Silk Road. Routes used varied according to the era and circumstances, resulting in the establishment of a network of roads along the same corridor. Therefore, it is not possible to speak of a single Silk Road route.

In this regard, the Silk Road can be seen as a network of roads extending from China through Central and South Asia to Europe, resembling a web of different routes. Approximately 7,000 kilometers in length, with a 4,000-kilometer stretch within Chinese territory, it represents a complex network of paths rather than a singular route¹¹. In ancient times, trade caravans would depart from the ancient capital cities of China, such as Xi'an, and make their way to the city of Kashgar in Uzbekistan. Upon reaching Kashgar, the caravans would split into two routes: one route would lead through the plains of Afghanistan to the shores of the Caspian Sea, while the other route would traverse the Karakoram Mountains, passing through Iran to reach Anatolia. From Anatolia, they would continue their journey to Europe either via sea routes or overland routes through Thrace¹². The trade routes utilized in this east-to-west commercial movement benefited from the network of roads that had been in use since ancient times. The Silk Road, which retained its significance until the 14th century, began to struggle to maintain its former vibrancy following the geographical discoveries of the New Age and the discovery of the Cape of Good Hope. With the commencement of silk production in Europe and the advent of maritime activities in the 16th and 17th centuries, the Silk Road started to lose its former importance, and caravans along the route began to disappear. Additionally, as maritime trade gained momentum, the

¹¹ Nejat Diyarbakırlı, *a.g.m.*, s.22.

¹² Gökçe Günel, *a.g.m.*, s.142

allure of products from the Far East began to diminish. By the 19th century, the Silk Road had largely fallen out of use.

Silk Road Route in Anatolia

Anatolia, acting as a bridge between Asia and Europe, has naturally played a significant role in international transportation due to its geographical and geopolitical position since ancient times. It has been a central hub for numerous important trade routes. Hosting many cultures and civilizations, Anatolia possessed some of the oldest commercial routes developed over time even before the Anatolian Seljuks. Among these were the roads of the Hittites, Assyrian trade colonies, the Persian Royal Road, and the Byzantine Road network known as the military and trade routes.¹³ Subsequently, these routes later became known as the Silk Road. Over thousands of years, these roads in Anatolia, which served as connections between civilizations, were utilized by trade caravans and armies. These roads in Anatolia followed natural routes and passes in accordance with the geographical conditions of the regions they traversed.¹⁴

During the golden age of the Anatolian Seljuk State (1176-1237), the Silk Road in Anatolia resembled a network, and trade was thriving. To protect the rights of merchants, fifteen consulates were established in Sivas. In Anatolia, it took place on the roads and in caravanserais. There were nearly 200 caravanserais along these roads. Caravanserais were established at intervals of 7-8 hours of camel travel, which equated to approximately 35-40 kilometers. Some areas had even denser concentrations of caravanserais. For example, there were 24 caravanserais between Sivas and Kayseri alone.¹⁵

The Silk Road entered Anatolia through three main routes: in the south through Cizre and Hasankeyf, in the center through Doğubayazıt, Erzurum, Erzincan, and Sivas, and in the north through Kars and Trabzon. During the Anatolian Seljuk period, the northern route passed

¹³ Orhan Cezmi Tuncer, *Anadolu Kervan Yolları*, Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü Yayınları, Ankara, 2007. s.37.

¹⁴ Tuba Ökse, "Kızılırmak ve Fırat Havzalarını Birbirine Bağlayan Eski Kervan Yolları", *Bilig Dergisi*, S. 34, 2005. s. 19.

¹⁵ Hakkı Acun, *Anadolu Selçuklu Dönemi Kervansarayları*, Kültür Bakanlığı Sanat Eserleri Dizisi, Ankara, 2007. s.15.

through Erzurum, Erzincan, Tokat, Amasya, Sinop, and Kastamonu, reaching ports on the Black Sea; while the southern route passed through Bitlis, Malatya, Kayseri, Kırşehir, Konya, Isparta, and Antalya, reaching ports on the Mediterranean. The southern route's farthest point was Akhan, located within the boundaries of present-day Denizli province. Caravans departing from Akhan reached the Menderes River after 20-30 kilometers, and from there, they reached the Aegean ports. During the Anatolian Seljuk period, the Silk Road traversed Anatolia like a network in an unprecedented manner, connecting east to west and north to south. Roads forming hubs in Erzurum, Sivas, Kayseri, and Konya in the east extended as far as Sinop in the north and Antalya in the south.¹⁶

The conquest of Antalya in 1207 and Alanya in 1223 provided opportunities for trade by sea with Cyprus, Syria, and Egypt. The capture of Sinop in 1214 and the Suğdak Expedition to Crimea in 1226 revitalized trade with northern countries through the Black Sea. Cities such as Erzurum, Sivas, Konya, and Kayseri stood out with their economic and commercial vitality. International fairs known as "Yabanlu Pazarı" were also organized. Although the exact location of the Yabanlu Pazarı is uncertain, it is known to have been held in the town of Pazarören, located on the Kayseri-Pınarbaşı road. This market was the world's largest international fair where fabrics from all countries along the Silk Road, dresses made of silk fabrics, furs, silks, agricultural and livestock products, weapons, grains, horses, sheep, wool, cashmere, and even slaves were sold. Fairs were set up at the beginning of May and lasted for 40-45 days until mid-June.¹⁷

The routes and centers of the road starting from China and passing through Iran to Anatolia are as follows¹⁸.

1. a. Tabriz, Bargiri, Erciş, Malazgirt, Hınıs, Erzurum, Tercan, Erzincan, Sivas, Şarkışla, Kayseri, Aksaray, Konya, Adana, Ayaş. b.

¹⁶ Gökçe Günel, *a.g.m.* s.134

¹⁷ Faruk Sümer, *Yabanlu Pazarı*, Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları Vakfı Yayınları, 1985, s. 83.

¹⁸ M. Kemal Özergin, *Anadolu Selçuklular Çağında Anadolu Yolları*, İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Tarih Bölümü Doktora Tezi, İstanbul, 1959

Tabriz, Nakhchivan, Iğdır, Pasinler, Erzurum, Tercan, Erzincan, Sivas, Şarkışla, Kayseri, Aksaray, Konya, Adana, Ayas.

2. Tabriz, Erzurum, Sivas, Kayseri, Aksaray, Konya, Antalya, Alanya.
3. a. Tabriz, Erzurum, Bayburt, Gümüşhane, Trabzon. b. Tabriz, Erzurum, Erzincan, Trabzon.
4. Tabriz, Erzincan, Zara, Sivas, Tokat, Amasya, Samsun, Sinop.
5. Tabriz, Sivas, Yozgat, Yerköy, Kırşehir or Yahşihan, Ankara, İstanbul.

The main road routes and centers extending south, north, and westward from Baghdad to Malatya and Sivas are as follows;¹⁹

6. a. Baghdad, Mosul, Mardin, Diyarbakır, Ergani, Gölcük, Harput, İzoli (Castle), Malatya, Ankara. b. Baghdad, Harput, Pertek, Çemişkezek, Eğin, Divriği, crossing the Zara or Buzbel mountains to reach Sivas.
7. Sinop, Kastamonu, Çankırı, Ankara, Konya, Beyşehir, Seydişehir, Antalya, Alanya.
8. Samsun, Havza, Merzifon, Amasya, Aksaray, Konya, Ayas, Amasya.
9. From Trabzon and Samsun, to Sivas, Konya, Beyşehir or Gelendost, Burdur, Denizli, Alaşehir, Foça, İzmir, Ephesus.
10. Trabzon, Sivas, Malatya, Baghdad. b. Trabzon, Sivas, Malatya, Gaziantep, Aleppo.
11. Sinop, Vezirköprü, Amasya or b. Sinop, Vezirköprü, Samsun, Amasya, Sivas, Malatya, Baghdad or Aleppo.
12. Aleppo, Gaziantep, Göynük, Elbistan, Kayseri, Hacıbektaş, Kırşehir, Lalahan, Ankara, Afyon, Kütahya, İstanbul.
13. From Antalya, Burdur or Denizli via Dinar, Afyon, İstanbul.
14. Ayas, Konya, Lâdik, Iğın, Akşehir, Çay, Afyon, Kütahya, İstanbul.

¹⁹ M. Kemal Özergin, *a.g.t.*

Map 3: Silk Road in Ancient Anatolia

Source: <http://www.gateofturkey.com/section/tr/275/4/turizm-turleri-ipek-yolu-anadolunun-ipek-yolu-rotalari>

The Importance of the Silk Road for Turks

The strategic importance of the Silk Road for Turks is undisputed. Although the general name for trade routes is the Silk Road, it is a fact that along these routes, silk, porcelain, paper, spices, precious metals, and gemstones were exchanged at marketplaces and provided regional value added. Thus, the Silk Road is not simply a route representing the silk trade from east to west, but it is also the general name for an institutionalized trading culture.

Regardless of the route taken from east to west, besides silk, products from China and other Eastern Asian regions typically passed through the boundaries of the Great Hun Turk Empire.²⁰ Therefore, Silk Road caravan trade, which caused intense competition among Turks

²⁰ İbrahim Kafesoğlu, *Türk Milli Kültürü*, Boğaziçi Yayıncılık, İstanbul, 1993. s. 313.

and their neighbors, was one of the major sources of great profits.²¹ Bu nedenle Türklerle komşuları arasında şiddetli rekabetlere sebep olan büyük kazanç vasıtalarının başında İpek Yolu kervancılığı geliyordu. Pekin'in az kuzeyinden başlayan Türk sınırları İran'a, Horasan'a, Ural Dağlarına, Hazar Denizi'ne kadar uzanıyor, Karadeniz kıyılarına temas ediyordu. Bu suretle Türkler eski dünyanın başlıca devletleri olan Çin, Sasani ve Doğu Roma İmparatorluklarının komşusu idiler.²² Turks, on these routes, not only conducted trade and operated marketplaces but also exported valuable metals involved in trade. In other words, they became one of the important pillars of the trade culture along the east-west axis. However, the role of Turks on the Silk Road is not limited to just these aspects.²³ Turkic states, which dominated the Silk Road for over a thousand years, not only ensured the control and security of the east-west trade routes during their dominion but also derived significant revenue from this trade. Indeed, perhaps the most significant reason underlying the geographical explorations and the quest for new sea trade routes was the Turks' complete control over the Anatolian peninsula and the straits from the 1300s onwards, followed by the Mediterranean and Black Sea port cities, and eventually the Arabian Peninsula and Egypt from the early 1500s. Thus, the Turks made themselves entirely dependent on both overland and sea trade for east-west commerce, marking the period as their strongest in their history and in international politics. Chinese merchants could conduct trade using ships called "Jonk" all the way to India and the Arabian Peninsula via sea routes. Shipments continued overland from there to the shores of the Mediterranean, providing Turks with substantial income.

The first Portuguese reaching China in 1514 gained a significant advantage in sea trade. However, they couldn't maintain it for long and soon ceded superiority to the Spaniards. While Turks attempted to facilitate French ships in the Mediterranean to provide them an advantage against other countries, the chance of a trade route continuing by land beyond Palestine and Sinai prevailing over trade

²¹ W. Heyd, *Yakındağuşu Ticaret Tarihi*, Çev. Enver Ziya Karal, Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, Ankara, 1975. s.17.

²² Yılmaz Öztuna, "*Eski Türklerde Ticaret Hayatı*". Hayat Tarih Mecmuası, S.12, İstanbul, 1972. s. 4-6.

²³ Gökçe Günel, *a.g.m*, s.137.

conducted by ships circumnavigating the Cape of Good Hope was almost nonexistent. With the emergence of new routes initiated by Portuguese and Spanish sailors, followed by English and Dutch sailors, land trade along the Silk Road gradually lost its significance.

During this period, Turks attempted to shape international political relations by facilitating trade for the French and some other nations in the Mediterranean. However, had they focused on the Suez Canal Project instead, they could have reversed the situation in their favor. Over time, Turks established significant dominance over the Silk Road but eventually lost their dominance due to the political conditions of the era. Therefore, the Silk Road holds additional strategic importance for Turks.

The New Gateway from East to West: The Turkic Corridor

The power struggles emerging along the lines of the Silk Road have led the states dominating this route to seek new solutions. As a result of the exploration of this route, during the time of the Huns, two main transportation methods emerged from China towards the West, namely the Northern and Southern Silk Roads (Rzayev and İsayev, 2012, p. 22). These historical routes are divided into three main branches. One starts from China and passes through Russia, known as the northern route; the second route, again starting from China, extends through Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkey, known as the central route; and the third route starts from China, passing through Southern Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Iran, and Turkey, ultimately reaching the European continent via railways (Kulaklıkaya, 2013, p. 3). In this context, the victory of Azerbaijan over Armenia in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War has injected new excitement into the Silk Road, particularly towards reviving the central route. In 2017, Ömer Kocaman, the former Deputy Secretary-General of the Turkic Council, stated, "The Silk Road is a road extending from China to Europe, and the daily trade volume of 1 billion dollars could reach 3-4 billion dollars in the coming years" (Turkic Council, 2019, p. 122). The formation of a transportation corridor between East and West by Turkic countries will enable them to benefit from transit passage and logistic connections.

Three out of four members of the Organization of Turkic States (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan) are landlocked and lack direct

access to the open sea, yet they can obtain this opportunity when connected to Turkey via Georgia. Such regional and international geopolitical events have enhanced the reputation of the central corridor on which Turkic Council member states are located. These include increasing trade between Asia and Europe, China's efforts to restore the historic Silk Road, and Turkey's relations with Russia and Iran (Doğan, 2014).

Map 4: Zengezur Corridor



Source: Anadolu Agency

During the Soviet era, the relinquishment of the Zangezur region to Armenia was a tactical move by the Russians to fragment the Turkistan geography. Despite being only 40-45 kilometers wide, this area separates Azerbaijan from Nakhchivan. Initially, about 70% of its population consisted of Turks, but by 1920, Armenians were resettled in Zangezur, and through massacres and forced migrations, the Turkish population was reduced to around 40% by 1986 (Kızıl, 2016, p. 5). Consequently, Azerbaijan's territorial integrity was compromised, and the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, lasting 44 days in 2020, ended with Armenia's defeat. Article 9 of the ceasefire agreement, lifting all obstacles to economic activities and opening a land transportation

route between Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan, represents a diplomatic victory, particularly for Azerbaijan and other Turkic countries.

Azerbaijan, especially on the Zangezur corridor, is making significant efforts for the activation of road and railway transportation. Negotiations with Russia for the construction of the 43-kilometer section remaining in Armenian territory are due to Russia's ownership of railway infrastructure in the Armenian basin. According to the map above, a 158-kilometer railway line from Ordubad to Velidağ will be repaired, and the line, ending at Velidağ, will be extended by 14 kilometers to the Armenian border. Additionally, a new 166-kilometer railway line will be built from Horadiz to Ordubad to complete the line as a whole. With the parallel construction of a road connection, seamless transportation will be achieved to Armenia, Russia, Iran, and Turkey (Rehimov, 2021).

The Zangezur corridor will not only establish direct links between Turkey and Turkic Republics but also allow regional countries to act according to their interests. Despite Armenia's weakness in the global market and its inability to engage in global trade due to its location, the new corridor will enable it to benefit economically from Europe and Asia. Trade routes coming from the east to Europe will diversify, shortening the distance, and relations with the Asian continent will increase. From this perspective, the gain is not just a victory; it can also influence regional and global dynamics in various dimensions such as economic, political, and sociological. Therefore, considering that the name "Zangezur Corridor" is insufficient as it only emphasizes a region and the corridor to be opened will establish a direct connection with the Turkistan geography, provide new options for Silk Road trade, and bridge Europe through the Zangezur connection, it should be referred to as the "Turkic Corridor" in the literature. The strengthening and liberalization of this corridor have implications and challenges for China's globally proposed "Belt and Road Initiative."

Connecting the Route to the Turkic Corridor: One Belt One Road

Acknowledging the presence of global memory and aiming to integrate the Silk Road into the modern world and make it more attractive, the "One Belt One Road" project, which started in 2013 and rapidly gained acceptance by many countries aiming to be stakeholders,



has been referred to as the commercial and economic project of the century. An Uzbek proverb states, "In the universe, there are two great roads. The Milky Way in the sky, and the Silk Road on the earth," which aptly describes the prestige of this route (Tutar and Koçer, 2019). This road, known as the Silk Road in the literature, is not defined as a single route. Indeed, it has undergone changes and developments beyond its starting and ending points due to periodic circumstances, political changes, and security reasons. The aim here can be explained as ensuring uninterrupted sustainable trade. Based on common information extracted from various sources, it is stated that this road, stretching from China to Europe, is 6400 kilometers long (Düğen, 2011, p. 118). Steps to increase commercial benefits between East and West are supported by both Europe and China. The fact that various projects are financed by China in terms of commercial routes and the nature of products involved in trade illustrates this situation. China, with a 12% share in global trade, is a prominent player in the international arena. In addition to expanding its trade volume, it uses monetary policies as a means to spread to larger geographies, offering low interest rates and long-term credit incentives. For example, to mitigate the effects of the global crisis, it invested \$392.6 billion in the European continent and \$568 billion in the Asian continent. A total investment amount of \$1.985 trillion worldwide is mentioned (İstikbal, 2021). China is not only aiming for economic but also security, political, and sociological goals. Measures taken to ensure the continuity of trade and expand commercial volume include China's efforts to enhance the security measures of the Belt and Road. As a state with very high energy consumption, China aims to minimize the threats it faces in energy dependence and counter the US threat to reach the European market by taking measures in the defense sector (Brands, 2019). From a broad perspective, multifaceted policies are pursued to ensure the smooth operation of the Belt and Road and to replace political chaos with effective state authority in the Middle East and Central Asian countries, and to shift terrorism activities towards effective state control. The primary reason for this is to maintain economic and commercial stability. To give a specific example, the Chinese government is striving to support the Taliban's takeover of governance in Afghan territories from a political and strategic perspective. In addition to the economic

support it provides, it also suggests that countries with influence in international trade routes follow the same policy (BBC, 2021). Ensuring secure, stable, and problem-free world trade is one of the common goals of countries worldwide. As such regional and global problems mentioned above can cast a shadow over world trade stability, countries that shape global trade at a global level seek to minimize risks to sustain trade. Likewise, when these countries encounter problems that cannot be resolved or when they seek to strengthen their gains, they sometimes seek alternative solutions or produce remedies to reduce transportation costs.

Starting from the People's Republic of China and reaching Turkey through the Turkic Republics in Asia and across the Caspian Sea via the Caucasus region, the middle corridor of the Silk Road emerges as a significant secure route. Considering that 96% of containers traveling from China to Europe are transported by sea annually, it can be concluded that only about 4% of shipments are made via the northern corridor by land. However, the middle corridor reduces the land route distance by 2000 km compared to the northern corridor, while also cutting down the shipping time by a third. Currently, there is a potential to tap into a \$600 billion annual trade traffic (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021). The strategic value of the Turk Corridor, also known as Nahcivan or Zengezur, when compared to the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, is its projected 340-kilometer shorter length. In total, the trade route from China to Europe is expected to be shortened by 2300 km compared to the northern corridor. When activated, the Turk corridor will generate new commercial and economic opportunities. When evaluated in terms of trade relations, this corridor will add a new branch to the middle corridor of the Silk Road, making it the shortest corridor between Europe and Asia. Furthermore, it will attract the interest of regional countries by bringing a new order to multilateral trade, thus reducing passenger transportation and shipping costs. Additionally, the possibility of using the trade connection between the middle and northern corridors created by the Zengezur corridor in bilateral trade activities of regional countries such as China, the EU, and the Turkic Republics, as well as Afghanistan, Iran, and Russia, could deepen multifaceted policies on the international stage positively. In this context, Turkey plays a leading role

as the locomotive country for the revitalization of the "One Belt, One Road" project and the Turk Corridor. Turkey's focus on the Turkic Republics through historical ties, its status as one of the most reliable logistics countries in Europe and Asia due to land and sea transportation via the Mediterranean and Black Seas, opens up new policy equations for the Turk Corridor.

Conclusion and Recommendations

For countries aiming to elevate their economies to higher levels of development, a growth model based on exports becomes achievable through trade. When a country achieves economies of scale but fails to market its surplus production to the external world through bilateral or multilateral partnerships, it cannot reach the desired level of prosperity. When all these factors come together, countries that can stabilize economic growth trends over the years become the cradle of trade. Global and regional trade routes determine the magnitude of intercontinental trade and invite both hot and cold conflicts. The Silk Road, which has occupied the world trade agenda for centuries, has witnessed power struggles. While the European wing of 21st-century trade is represented by EU countries and the Asian wing by China, Turkey and Russia constitute the transit countries of the Silk Road. Considering that the quartet of countries holds about 46% of the global trade pie, the modernization of the Silk Road will bring diversity to the world economy. If necessary, the Silk Road will bring these countries together by assembling the pieces of the puzzle. The "One Belt, One Road" project recently shared with the public by China aims to revive the Silk Road and reach its low-cost products to the developed European market. The Silk Road, which has been accepted from ancient times to the present day, consists of three different corridors: North, Central, and South. While the northern corridor passes through Russian territories, the central and southern corridors reach the European continent through Turkish territories. The aforementioned central corridor is 2000 km shorter and safer compared to the northern corridor. The possibility of a new branch opening to the central corridor, with the potential activation of the Zengezur corridor coinciding with Azerbaijan's victory in the Second Karabakh War, has excited Turkey and the Turkic Republics. The operationalization of the Zengezur railway and

highway will shorten the central corridor by 340 km, resulting in a total transportation saving of 2340 km compared to the northern route. Since trade on this route will be conducted only through Turkish countries from China to Europe, the term "Turk Corridor" should be introduced into the literature. Turkey, which acts as the patron of the Turkic states in Central Asia, must be the pioneering country of the Turk Corridor. Among these countries, Turkey is the strongest in terms of its location, economy, and level of development. When political and ideological factors are set aside, this project, which encompasses many continents and heralds great economic gains, attributes value to Turkey's change, development, and most importantly, ascent. Countries that aim to increase their market share through production and trade transformation based on consumer habits should play a locomotive role. Turkey's inclusion in all trade equations is essential. Recent changes in the Turkish economic system appear as steps taken towards the formation of an export-oriented economic model. The significant indicators of this are the low labor costs and the policy of flirting with the European market through a low exchange rate. Although the size and impact of investments made in technology and information technology have not yet borne fruit, small steps are indicative of big steps to come. Regional security crises, defense expenditures resulting from the geography trapped in the grip of terrorism, and migrant problems based on these crises affect Turkey's economic outlook. From another perspective, the policy of conducting much of the trade between China and Europe by sea route remains valid. If the Republic of Turkey is to be involved in such a large-scale project, it must negotiate necessary quotas and incentives. It is the duty of the Turkish state to secure the investments of Turkish investors aiming to establish a strong logistics infrastructure. New initiatives to encourage domestic production and increase exports could be threatened by this project. The reduction in transportation costs will increase the availability of Chinese goods domestically, affecting the market. In such a scenario, the Turk Corridor could both increase the country's trade deficit and deeply hurt the national economy. From a broad perspective, and within the framework of resolving these problems, the implementation of the project will provide China with a safer and more complex transit route. The high security threat of alternative routes and the presence

of political chaos also highlight the credibility of the central corridor. In this vein, departing from the Ottoman tradition of merely facilitating trade and offering roads, and instead creating a project where production and trade are conducted jointly, and the domestic market and producers are supported, is of crucial importance for the future and rise of the Republic of Turkey.

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