

Geostrategic Significance Of The Beleuli Caravansaray On Trade Routes Of The Lower Amu Darya Region

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Abstract: This article scientifically examines the geostrategic significance of the Beleuli caravanserai, located on the trade routes of the Lower Amu Darya region, its place in the system of ancient caravan routes, its defensive and defensive architecture, and its role in regional trade and cultural relations. The article highlights the significance of the caravanserai as a trade infrastructure connecting Kazakhstan, Karakalpakstan, and the Caspian region, and analyzes its prospects for modern tourism as a geocultural heritage site.

Keywords: Caravanserai of Beleuli, Lower Amu Darya, trade routes, geostrategic importance, architectural typology, geocultural heritage, Caspian region, Karakalpakstan, caravan architecture.

Introduction: The history and cultural heritage of the Lower Amu Darya region are closely associated with caravan routes and the monuments that developed around them. Trade and cultural processes in this area historically functioned as an integral continuation of connections between Central Asia, Khorezm, the Caspian region, and Northern Kazakhstan. Among such sites, the Beleuli caravanserai stands out as a significant architectural structure that defined the region's role as a key geostrategic point.

In its time, the Beleuli caravanserai served as a stopover and support facility for merchants, caravans, and diplomatic envoys. Its functions were not limited solely to economic activities; it also fulfilled military and hospitality-related roles. Furthermore, its defensive architectural features clearly demonstrate the caravanserai's importance not only within local contexts but also within transregional trade networks.

This study was conducted on the basis of a historical-geopolitical approach and the analysis of archaeological data. Its methodological framework consists of the comparative analysis of caravanserai architecture, the study of the geography of caravan routes, and source-based research methods focusing on regional economic relations.

Geographical location and strategic position. The geographical location of the Beleuli caravanserai was formed as one of the natural central nodes within the

trade route system of the Lower Amu Darya region. Importantly, this structure is situated along an ancient caravan route that connected the southwestern part of Karakalpakstan with the trade and pastoral areas of Kazakhstan, thereby functioning as a logistical point that facilitated economic connections across long distances. Due to its proximity to the lower basin of the Amu Darya, the caravanserai had favorable access to water resources, which was a crucial strategic factor for caravans moving through desert environments.

From a geographical perspective, the Beleuli caravanserai served as the northern commercial gateway of the Khorezm state, forming a key link in routes leading westward to the Caspian coast and northward through the Kazakh steppes toward Jetisu and Siberia.

Moreover, its construction near an elevated and defensively advantageous hill further enhanced its importance as a strategic control point. This location enabled military surveillance, guidance of caravans, the *обеспечение* of security, and the regulation of economic flows. Toponymic evidence from the Lower Amu Darya region also indicates that Beleuli functioned for centuries not merely as a transit point, but as a strategically significant structure with pronounced geopolitical importance.

Integral connectivity within the caravan route system. The significance of the Beleuli caravanserai within the trade route network of the Lower Amu Darya region is

primarily manifested through its integral role as a transport and communication hub. Within the historical system of routes crossing the Ustyurt Plateau from east to west and from north to south, Beleuli functioned as a key transit point. In particular, the Khorezm – Chimboy – Beyneu – Mangyshlak – Caspian coastal route passed through Beleuli, linking Central Asia with the trade centers of the Caucasus and Transcaucasia.

According to archaeological and cartographic evidence, the Beleuli caravanserai did not serve a single route alone, but rather functioned as a nodal point where several branched caravan routes converged. Specifically, the following routes were connected in its vicinity:

1. Khorezm – Beleuli – Mangyshlak – Caspian Sea ports (western route);
2. Beleuli – Karatau foothills – Aral Sea region – internal trade centers of Kazakhstan (northern route);
3. Khorezm – Beleuli – Karatau – historical observation routes through the pastures of ancient Sarmatian tribes;
4. Lower Amu Darya – Beleuli – Buzatau – Sarykamysh basin, facilitating internal regional trade relations.

The interconnection of these routes enhanced Beleuli's importance as a logistical center. The availability of water sources, fodder supplies for pack animals, and secure stopping facilities turned the caravanserai into a major exchange point for caravans. For this reason, nomadic tribes, local merchants, and long-distance traders from the Islamic world converged at this location.

Historical sources suggest that the Beleuli caravanserai may have functioned not only as a commercial hub but also as a diplomatic transit and direct communication point in relations with neighboring states. Its stable operation was closely linked to the political conditions of the region; particularly during the Khwarazmshah period, the security of these caravan routes was ensured at the level of state policy.

On this basis, the Beleuli caravanserai can be regarded as a site located at the intersection of regional branches of the Silk Road, with its integral connectivity further strengthening its position within the geo-economic space.

RESULTS

Results of archaeological research.

Although scholarly interest in the Beleuli caravanserai began in the second half of the nineteenth century through the observations of Russian travelers and

military topographers, systematic archaeological research was conducted in the mid-twentieth century. In particular, the Khorezm Archaeological and Ethnographic Expedition led by S. P. Tolstov carried out comprehensive excavations in the Beleuli area between the 1940s and 1960s, reaching important conclusions regarding the monument's function, chronology, and architectural layers.

Analysis of archaeological materials indicates that the active use of the caravanserai dates at least to the twelfth–thirteenth centuries. However, certain early constructive elements suggest the existence of a smaller guard or service post in this area as early as the ninth–tenth centuries. Thus, the Beleuli complex appears to have developed gradually in response to natural and geopolitical needs.

Ceramic vessels, seals, protective trade scales, fragments of fired bricks, and iron and copper household items uncovered during excavations confirm the presence of permanent life and a developed trade infrastructure within the caravanserai. The large quantity of animal bones, in particular, demonstrates that this site was not merely an auxiliary roadside stop, but a major logistical center.

Furthermore, the remains of hydraulic structures identified during excavations—including a preserved well and water reservoir—highlight the strategic importance of Beleuli under desert and windy conditions. The presence of water was a fundamental requirement for caravans, and the long-term functioning of the caravanserai was directly linked to this factor. Recent studies using aerospace imagery and georadar methods have also identified external defensive lines and possible additional structures associated with the site. Altogether, archaeological evidence confirms that the Beleuli caravanserai functioned not merely as a travelers' stop, but as a long-term transit center around which trade, labor, and material exchange processes were continuously sustained.

Defensive and architectural model of the caravanserai. The architectural structure of the Beleuli caravanserai was formed in accordance with the strategic defensive requirements of its time and belongs to the classical type of fortress-like caravanserais. Its external perimeter had an approximately rectangular plan measuring about 60x60 meters, with wall thickness averaging 1.5–2 meters. The walls were constructed mainly of rammed earth mixed with small stones and reinforced by a system of defensive towers. The presence of towers indicates that the caravanserai served not only as a resting place for travelers but also as a security facility.

The gatehouse constituted a key architectural element within the fortress typology. At Beleuli, the gate was oriented inward, allowing for rapid closure and effective defense. This feature also suggests that the caravanserai functioned as a military-logistical point. The main passageway from the gate led directly to the central courtyard, a layout consistent with the general architectural principles of medieval caravanserais.

The rooms surrounding the central courtyard served various functions: some were intended for merchants and travelers, while others functioned as enclosures for animals. This courtyard system ensured both the security of caravan movement and the continuity of internal infrastructure. Architectural excavations also revealed stable and storage structures, confirming that caravans could remain at the site for extended periods. Another important architectural element was the water supply system. The well and water reservoir identified within the caravanserai demonstrate that Beleuli was a vital resource point under eco-geographical conditions. The availability of water ensured the stable operation of the complex, further enhancing its strategic value.

Comparative architectural analysis shows that while the Beleuli caravanserai shares typological similarities with the Bozatau and Qiyat caravanserais, its defensive elements are more strongly expressed. This indicates that Beleuli functioned not only as a transit point but also as a frontier control facility.

Thus, the architectural model of Beleuli was closely linked to its geostrategic function, enabling it to ensure the security of caravan routes, control trade relations, and operate as a stable logistical center in a desert environment.

Geostrategic, economic, and cultural significance of the Beleuli caravanserai. One of the main factors defining the geostrategic importance of the Beleuli caravanserai was its role as a transit point connecting the Lower Amu Darya region with Khorezm, the Turkmen oases, Iran, and the internal trade centers of Central Asia. The intersection of caravan routes at this location indicates that the caravanserai functioned not merely as a resting and support facility, but also as a strategic control point. It played an intermediary role in providing access to additional economic resources and potential markets in regions with limited direct access to maritime routes.

The Beleuli caravanserai also played an important role in stabilizing trade circulation between Khorezm and the Caspian Sea basin.

Recommendations

1. To place the Beleuli caravanserai under

protection as a cultural heritage site of national significance.

2. To continue archaeological research in the surrounding area and introduce modern georadar technologies.
3. To restore the Beleuli caravanserai for tourism purposes and include it within cultural heritage routes.
4. To incorporate a dedicated section on the history of trade and cultural relations along caravan routes into educational programs.
5. To digitally reconstruct the geopolitical and infrastructural models of caravan routes in the Lower Amu Darya region on an integrated platform.

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