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Empire builders: Tracing the urban footprints of Seljuk women from Khorasan to Anatolia

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Abstract
In 1050 CE, the Seljuk dynasty entered Greater Khorasan and established a vast empire in Iran. Gradually, they also conquered some regions of Iraq and Anatolia. This dynasty was of Turkish origin, and they were sunni Muslims. The main objective of the current study is to discuss and explain the role of women under the Seljuk Empire in all three Seljuk regions: Iranian Seljuks (Seljuks of Greater Khorasan and Kerman), the Seljuks of Iraq and the Levant, and the Seljuks of Anatolia, in the development of urban settlements through identifying their civil construction activities. Moreover, the specifications of the buildings founded by court women and the reasons behind their construction are explored. Using a descriptive-analytical approach and relying on historical documents, the current study tries to present historical facts by collecting information, evaluating and validating this information, and combining documented foundations and analyzing them to obtain defensible results concerning the objective of the study. Historical sources show that in all three geographical regions, women were the founders of many buildings, and had an impact on the community in terms of both architectural value and their sheer number. In addition, the majority of buildings constructed by women were built for public benefit. The activities for public benefit in the Anatolia region have more diverse applications. The main applications were schools and aqueducts in Iran, schools in Iraq and the Levant, and caravanserai and khanqahs in Anatolia.

Keywords
Anatolia, Iran, Iraq and the Levant, Seljuk, Women.

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1. Introduction

The Seljuq Empire, founded by the Oghuz, was a Turkic and Muslim empire. The leader of the Seljuk confederation was Tughril Ibn Mikael, who defeated the successor of Masud I of Ghazni in 1050, founding the Seljuk Empire. They continued conquering the Greater Khorasan and other regions of Iran, and by defeating the remaining members of the Buyid dynasty, they entered Baghdad, the capital of the Abbasid Caliph (Bosworth, 2001; Boyle, 2002). After defeating the Byzantine Empire in the Battle of Manzikert, the Seljuqs conquered Anatolia (Ozgudenlı, 2014).

While numerous studies have explored the connection between rulers and architecture, researchers have not yet extensively explored the role of others, particularly women. During the Seljuk period, wealthy and influential women played a significant role in society. However, the limitations of historical sources make studying their role challenging (El-Shorbagy, 2020).

Medieval Islamic societies in the Middle East and Central Asia were deeply patriarchal, with men generally holding positions of power and influence. This patriarchal social structure influenced the creation and preservation of historical records, often prioritizing the perspectives and accomplishments of men over those of women. Consequently, Seljuk-era chronicles and waqiyas (documents outlining charitable donations) primarily focused on the activities of male elites such as sultans, nobles, and high-ranking religious figures. This leads to an incomplete understanding of society, where the contributions of ordinary people, including women, are often overlooked (Rahimpour Azghadi& Alasvand, 2017). Consequently, many aspects of women's lives were likely transmitted through oral traditions rather than formally documented. This scarcity of written records hinders the accurate reconstruction of their roles and contributions. In some instances, female patrons may have been deliberately excluded from historical records due to prevailing gender biases or an intent to diminish the contributions of female patrons. Due to cultural norms or modesty, women were hesitant to record their names as patrons. As a result, a limited number of female patrons such as donors or builders are documented in Seljuk building inscriptions, with an even smaller number appearing in other written sources. This documented information is often associated with the ruling house, wives, and daughters of Seljuk sultans (Blessing, 2014).

The vast Seljuk Empire spanned diverse climates and cultures, from the Hindu Kush to Anatolia. This necessitated region-specific approaches. This study explores and explains the role of women under the Seljuk Empire in three regions (Iranian Seljuks, Iraqi and Levantine Seljuks, and Anatolian Seljuks) in urban development through their activities contributing to public works. It examines the specifications and motivations behind buildings constructed by court women. This approach focuses on the meticulous collection, evaluation, and analysis of historical data to present a comprehensive and accurate picture of the past.

To investigate the role of women in Seljuk-era building projects, this research primarily relied on historical documents related to buildings documented as having female patrons. These documents included chronicles, endowment deeds, travelogues, inscriptions, legal documents, and scholarly articles. Following data collection, a source evaluation process assessed the credibility and reliability of the documents. This involved checking for potential biases in the source, examining the author's background, and verifying internal and external consistency. Documents were then selected for in-depth analysis. Subsequently, the information extracted from the documents underwent a structured analytical process. This analysis enabled the interpretation of information, extraction of results, and provision of explanations relevant to the research objective. Finally, the results regarding the extent of a woman's influence in building construction were presented based on the certainty level.

The descriptive-analytical approach provided tangible and clear information supported by evidence extracted from historical documents. This approach offered a reliable tool for studying a subject with limited physical evidence.

It also allowed insights into the social, political, and cultural dynamics of the Seljuk period, leading to a better understanding of the role of women in Seljuk society. Despite its advantages, this approach has limitations, including a heavy reliance on historical documents, which may be incomplete or biased.

2. The position of women in the Seljuk court

In the majority of societies, the presence of women in social spheres did not follow a consistent pattern, and it may have fluctuated depending on the political and cultural conditions. The status of court women also changed from one period to the next under the influence of social and religious factors. In addition to the religious beliefs of the rulers, the intellectual capabilities, the family position of the women, and the nature of their relationships with the rulers were among the factors determining their position in the government (Rabbani & Ghodrati, 2018). According to historical documents, the participation of women in the political structure of the Seljuk period was completely accepted. Several reasons can explain this, including specific traditions of Turkish ethnicities, the religious tolerance of the kings, the importance of the marital issue in the family, the nomadic lifestyle of the Seljuk tribes, and the significant role of Seljuk women in an economy that was based on animal husbandry (Rahimpour Azghadi& Alasvand, 2017).

Since Seljuk Turks did not believe in concentrated government power due to their tribal traditions, leadership was considered the right of all family and tribe members. Consequently, the system of Eghta (land grants to courtiers) and the participation of court women in governance became common (Dehghan, 2009).

The political influence of court women during the Seljuk Empire's dominant period was significant in its extent and methods. In this regard, historians believe that the governance of Muslim Seljuk women was a significant manifestation of the power and management of women in the history of Islam. These women exercised their influence in various ways. The close relationships between the women and the king, participation in meetings inside and outside the palace, and access to administrative documents and political news paved the way for their participation in the current affairs of the court so that they were able to change political plans in the direction of their benefit (Dehghan, 2009 ; Ucok, 1995). This issue worried some politicians, for example, Nizam al-Mulk, the Seljuk vizier, in his book Siyasatnameh acknowledged the importance of women in the family, he restricted their presence in some social spheres, especially politics, due to the potential for chaos and the disruption of male power. However, he made two exceptions: He believed women could advise kings on important decisions due to their finesse and prudence; also women could play an effective role in charity and public welfare due to their good nature and sense of altruism (Shahriari, et al. 2019).

Attention to and interest in scientific issues and respecting scientists were among the social activities of Seljuk queens. Altun-jan Khatun, the wife of Tughril Ibn Mikael (D: 1061) was consulted in educational and legal issues (Ibn al-Jawzi, 1991). Arslan Khatun (D: 1077), the daughter of Chaghri Beg bin Seljuk and the wife of sultan Malik-shah Seljuk, was an educated intellectual woman, and it is said that she wrote a book called "Natijat al-Tauhid" (Ghaffari Qazvini, 1964). Khatun Seljuk, the mother of Arslan Ibn Tughril, was a woman who educated scientists and would send money and gifts to the religious scholars (Ravandi, 2006). Accordingly, the economic assets of the women of the court, obtained through the Ighta gifted by the king and managing administrative resources, would be spent both for personal expenses and for scientific activities, such as supporting scientists and great scholars as well as social projects, including charity.

The Seljuk queens' influence extended beyond patronage of scholarship. They also actively participated in public infrastructure projects and charitable works. For example, the granddaughters of Arslan Khatun provided daily sustenance to widows and orphans by distributing ten sheep (Rahimpour Az-

ghadi& Alasvand, 2017).

Ibn Jubayr (d. 1217), a geographer, traveler, and poet from al-Andalus, documented the contributions of several noble Khatuns. In 1183, he described three particularly "famous and kind Khatuns" who participated in the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca. He detailed their characteristics and noteworthy activities.

The first Khatun, daughter of Emir Masud (king of Darband, Armenia) and wife of Nur al-Din, was renowned for her extensive charitable works along the Hajj route. These included numerous drinking fountains providing free water to pilgrims, maintained by approximately thirty camels and water carriers. Additionally, she provided around one hundred camels for transporting pilgrims' supplies, including clothes, food, and other necessities. Ibn Jubayr remarked that "It would take a long time to describe all of her good deeds" (Ibn Jubayr, 1955).

He similarly praised the second Khatun, mother of Moez al-Din (ruler of Mosul) and wife of Babak (Nur al-Din's brother and ruler of the Levant), for her numerous charitable acts. The third Khatun, daughter of Daghus (ruler of Isfahan), was also lauded for her impactful charity work. Ibn Jubayr marveled at the dedication to good deeds and the remarkable combination of royal dignity and compassion displayed by these three women.

Establishing mosques and schools around the Islamic world indicates women's efforts to facilitate education and the religious and cultural development of Muslims (Al-Nuaimi, 1989). A prime example is the Al-Qarawiyyin mosque, founded in 859 by Fatima al-Fihri, which later evolved into a renowned educational institution. In Damascus alone, historical records reveal that 160 mosques and schools were founded, with at least 26 receiving financial support from women through the Waqf system (Lindsay, 2005).

3. Iranian Seljuks

Altun-Jan Khatun, the wife of Tughril Beg, the first Seljuk ruler (reign: 1037-1063), was renowned for her wisdom and benevolence (Ibn al-Jawzi, 1991; Lambton, 1993). Ibn al-Athir, in his work "Al-Kamil fi al-tarikh" (The Complete History), attributes the construction of numerous buildings, including mosques and other public structures (though specific names are not provided), in major cities of the time to her patronage (1972). On her deathbed in 1061, she advised her husband to marry the daughter of the Abbasid Caliph, the religious and political leader of the Islamic community (Daneshjoo et al., 2019). This marriage likely served as a strategic alliance between the Seljuks and the Abbasid dynasty.

From the outset of their rule, the Seljuks recognized the importance of establishing amicable relations with the Abbasid Caliphs as a source of power and leadership in Muslim political and religious affairs. One key strategy involved forming marital bonds. Another Seljuk noblewoman involved in such political marriages was Khadija, known as Arslan Khatun, Tughril Beg's niece. At her uncle's behest, Arslan Khatun married the Abbasid Caliph in 1056. Following the Caliph's death, the Seljuk ruler granted the governorship of Yazd to Mansur, son of Ala al-Dawla Deylami, and subsequently married Arslan Khatun to him (Daneshjoo et al., 2019).

Arslan Khatun's social and charitable activities began upon her arrival in Yazd (Farokhzad, 2002). Her efforts brought prosperity to the city, and the people thrived under her and her husband's rule. She initiated her work by constructing a large mosque with a high minaret, which served as a guide for travelers, located in the today Fahadan neighborhood of Yazd. This tall minaret stood until 1428. During its construction, she placed a row of tiles around the minaret, inscribing her titles on them. Although this structure was later demolished, its land has been annexed to the Jameh Mosque today (Jafari, 1959). Subsequently, she devoted significant energy to developing the city by building numerous water channels and qanats, transforming it into a thriving urban center. Her court officials supported her in these endeavors. One of her officials constructed a large building in the Sar Rig neighborhood, and another official created a qa-

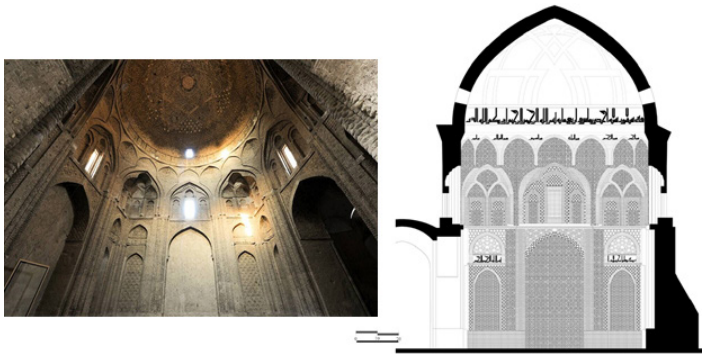

Figure 1. *Dome of Taj al-Mulk, (Haji Ghasemi, 1996).*

nat named Savab. She had two special female treasurers, one named Abr and the other Mobarakeh. They created two qanats named after themselves. Arslan Khatun also established qanats and watercourses in Ray and Qazvin. She ultimately passed away in Yazd and was buried in Do-Menareh madrasa (school) (Kateb, 1979).

Tarkan Khatun had a keen interest in construction projects in the capital city, largely driven by her political motives. Known as Khatun Jalaliyah, Tarkan Khatun (d. 1094) was the most influential Seljuk woman, daughter of Tafghaj Khan, ruler of Samarkand, and wife of Malik-Shah I, the third and greatest Seljuk sultan. Qutb al-Din Abu Bakr Rawandi, in his work (1202), mentions the Queen Khatun School named after Tarkan Khatun, built under her patronage alongside the caliph's court and caravanserai in Isfahan. He writes: "Tarkan Khatun asked Caliph Moghtada to grant the reign to her son Mahmud. He refused. Tarkan Khatun then declared Emir Jafar, Caliph Moghtada's son, the emir of all Muslims. She planned to build a court and harem for him in Isfahan's Lashkar Bazar, near the present location of the Malika Khatun madrasa, to make him caliph. The caliph, worried, conceded the throne to Mahmud" (Bar Hebraeus, 1943; Mustawfi, 1960). Information regarding this school is unavailable. Her influence was such that she intervened in court intrigues to support her son Mahmud's reign against Barkiaruq, another son of the sultan, during court appointments and dismissals. Many historians consider her a pivotal figure in the dismissal and subsequent assassination of Nizam al-Mulk, Sultan Malik-Shah's vizier, and the appointment of Taj al-Mulk (Mustawfi, 1960).

In 1088, at the behest of this Khatun, a dome was built behind the northern iwan (portico) of Isfahan's Grand Mosque, known as Sofeh Darvish. Taj al-Mulk, the vizier of Malik-Shah, oversaw the construction. To rival the dome built by Khaje Nizam al-Mulk, Malik-Shah's other minister, on the opposite side of the mosque, this dome was named the Taj al-Mulk dome. Located outside the mosque at the time of its construction, the Seljuk king used it for rituals before Friday prayers. Though smaller than Nizam al-Mulk's structure, the Taj al-Mulk dome is praised for its elegance and proportions. The artistic brickwork, decorations, and motifs employed in its construction have made this dome highly valuable and prestigious. The dome transitions from a square to an octagonal and then a sixteen-sided shape, resting on a cylindrical base similar to the Nizam al-Mulk dome. It has a diameter of 10.5 meters and a height of 19.5 meters. The dome has two shells: the outer shell features brickwork decorations, while the inner shell bears an inscription dating its construction to 1101 AD and crediting Taj-al-Mulk as the founder. Notably, two sides of this building are open; only the north and west walls are closed, and it lacks a traditional prayer niche (mihrab) (Pirnia, 2013).

Despite Tarkan Khatun's success in securing the throne for her son Mahmud against Barkiyaruq, Mahmud's reign was short-lived. He died of illness after only a year and a half in power. Barkiyaruq then ascended the throne (1079-1104). After his death, Barkiyaruq was entombed in a mausoleum built in Isfahan by his favorite consort. According to Ibn al-Athir in "Al-Kamil fi al-tarikh," a woman who died shortly after Barkiyaruq was buried beside him (1972).

In Kerman, a region governed by a Seljuk branch, a period of remarkable prosperity and stability flourished. The Seljuks of Kerman, led by King Qavurt Ibn Choghri Beg, played a crucial role in establishing a strong local government. Characterized by political stability and economic growth, this gov-

ernance encompassed various regions of Kerman.

Turan-Shah I (r. 1084-1097), the ruler of Kerman, was a significant patron of architecture within the Seljuk domains of Kerman. His daughter, known by the titles Bemanad Khatun, Malik Khatun, and Mastoureh Khatun, followed in her father's footsteps. Like him, she was a philanthropist dedicated to public service. One of her contributions was the construction of a qanat for worshippers to perform ablutions. The watercourse ran through her father's mosque, Masjid-e Malik (Hemat Kermani, 1999). Unfortunately, the qanat is no longer functional. Zaytun Khatun, wife of Arslan Shah, the sixth Seljuk ruler of Kerman (r. 1067-1142), also dedicated herself to education and public services. Her notable contributions include the Darb-e-Mahan madrasa, an institution she generously endowed (Lambton, 1998). Zaytun Khatun's legacy extends to the construction of the Rabaz Yazdian, a roadside caravanserai. Later, it became known as Ismatieh, reflecting her title, Ismat al-din (Kermani, 1947). These two noblewomen played a crucial role in the development and prosperity of Kerman through their charitable acts and public services.

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In the realm of the Atabegs of Fars, Zahedeh Khatun (D: 1148), the wife of Atabak Bouzabeh (R:1137-1147), was renowned for her benevolence and philanthropy. She established a prestigious school in Shiraz, known as the Zahedeh madrasa, and endowed several plots of land for its expansion. After Atabak was killed by sultan Masud at the gates of Isfahan, Zahedeh Khatun transported his body to Shiraz and buried him in this school (Beizavi, 1949; Hamadani, 2010; Joneid Shirazi, 1949). Today, there are no remains of this building. Besides founding this school, she was actively involved in numerous charitable activities (Nasiri, 2005).

The Seljuks of Khorasan, a branch of the Seljuq Empire, flourished under the reign of Ahmad Sanjar, son of Malik-Shah I, from 1118 to 1157. Revered as the dynasty's last powerful ruler, Sanjar's reign was marked by notable contributions from three women associated with him who were patrons of significant buildings in Khorasan. The first was the sultan's sister, Mahde-Iraq, also known as Gawhar Khatun or Gawhar Malik. Mahde-Iraq is the name of a school with a large library in Neyshabur, built by this lady. In the book "Tazkereh Lubab ul-Albab", it has been quoted by the author of "Tarikh-i Bayhaqi" that among the thirty editions of the book "Tarikh-i Naseri", some were in the library in Sarakhs, while some were in the library of the Mahde-Iraq Khatun madrasa in Neyshabur (Aufi,1982). There is no trace of this school today.

Another influential figure, Tarkan Khatun, wife of Sultan Sanjar Seljuk (r. 1117-1157), was another influential figure known for her strength on the battlefield and role in military campaigns. In 1148, she ordered the reconstruction of Khosrogerd Castle of Sabzevar (Bayhaqi, 1996). The first reconstruction of Ribat Sharaf caravanserai in Sarakhs was done by Tarkan Khatun, and some of the decorations in the caravanserai go back to this period as well (Godard, 1992). The names in the inscriptions and the repairs made to the building indicate centuries of upkeep by charitable figures. As the third builder, a gypsum inscription inside the Iwan dated 1154 names the sultan's mother, Taj al-Din Khatun, as the patron behind the caravanserai's repairs, likely undertaken after the Guz attacks on Khorasan (Hosseini, 2000).

Some of the buildings constructed by Iranian Seljuk women are now located outside Iran's borders. For example, a caravanserai was built in the 5th century AH (11th-12th centuries CE) by Dayeh Khatun Shams al-Malik in Agh-Kotal, along the road connecting Samarkand and Khujand. After her death, Shams al-Malik was buried in this caravanserai. The caravanserai featured large rooms and ample warehouses for merchants and traders (Grube, 1978; Zamani Mahjoub, 2013).

Another example is the Shah-e Mashhad School, located in the northeastern part of Afghanistan, which

Figure 2. *Remains of Shah-e Mashhad School (Glatzer, 1971).*

was probably related to the historical region of Ghur and Herat. The Ghurid dynasty, known for its patronage of religious education, established numerous schools. This school (in 1175) was built by a woman of the Ghurid dynasty, as evidenced by the inscriptions on the building. These inscriptions, though partly damaged, reveal feminine pronouns throughout the text, indicating a female patron. The inscription reads: "She, the honorable intellectual queen, gave the order to build this sacred school..." According to al-Juzjani (1984), she was Mah-Malik, the unmarried daughter of Ghiyath al-Din Muhammad Ibn Sam, Ghurid sultan (1163-1164). Following her father's death in 1202, she reportedly spent seven years in seclusion devoted to prayer before passing away in 1209 (Habibi, 1976). An inscription mentioning prayers for light to be shed on a man's grave suggests the person buried here might be male, despite the earlier indication of a female patron. This inscription also hints at the deceased's high status. In terms of architecture, this school is completely similar to other typologies of Seljuk buildings of the second half of the fifth century and the whole of the sixth century. The plan of Shah Mashhad's school is almost square, with dimensions of 20.44 x 44 meters, and the style of brick and plaster decorations of the arches is the same as the common style in Khorasan during the Seljuk period. The script used in the school's inscriptions, in addition to Kufic, Naskh, and Thuluth styles, reflects the common styles found in mosques, schools, and tombs of the Seljuk period. These styles typically incorporate baked bricks measuring 25x25x5 centimeters (Habibi, 1976).

4. Seljuks of Iraq and the Levant

Gawhar Khatun, wife of Sultan Muhammad Ibn Malik-Shah (r. 1104-1117), wielded significant influence during this period. Amassing considerable wealth, she is believed to have played a role in key events that transpired between the reigns of Alp Arslan and Malik Shah. She was the source of important events. She remained highly popular among the people of Baghdad, commissioning numerous public buildings in the city and earning their respect (Kahala, 1999).

Safwat al-Mulk, a Seljuk princess and widow of Abu Sa'id Taj al-Dawla Tutush, who conquered Syria, commissioned a remarkable funerary dome for herself and her son. The Mausoleum of Safwat al-Mulk, known also as Al-Khanqah al-Tawusiyya was built between 1110 and 1111, located outside the walled city of Damascus. It was the only surviving Seljuk monument in Damascus before its demolition during the French mandate (Archnet, 2024).

The Khatunieh Baranieh School of Damascus was built in 1132 by Zumurrud Khatun, wife of Taj al-Mulk Buri (ruler of Damascus, 1128-1132). It seems that Zumurrud Khatun tried her best to build this school since it was known as one of the wonders of the time (Badri, 1962; Badran, 1960). Historical documents also mention a Khatunieh Mosque in Damascus attributed to Zumurrud Khatun. Though no trace of the mosque remains, some scholars believe it stood near the school, or perhaps they were one and the same, as references sometimes designate it as a school and other times a mosque (Al-Nuaimi, 1989; Shahabi, 1999). The title "Khatunieh" for schools or mosques appears repeatedly throughout the history of the Arab Seljuks.

The benevolent intentions of women during the Seljuk period often seem to reflect the world view of the rulers they were associated with. Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi, the sultan of Egypt and Syria, exemplifies this connection. In the fourth volume of "The Story of Civilization," Will Durant writes about Salah al-din's moral qualities and character, noting that he was a righteous and devout man during his reign. He pro-

moted architecture and built numerous public institutions, such as mosques, hospitals, Sufi lodges, and schools for religious education (1950). Both Salah al-din's wife and sister were also committed to constructing buildings for public welfare.

Ismat al-Din Khatun (Hanifeh Khatun), wife of Saladin and previously the wife of Sultan Nur al-Din Zangi, assumed control of the palace after the death of her first husband. Around 1174, she built a school with numerous facilities in the Hajar al-Zahab neighborhood of Damascus near the Bath and beside the hospital, which became known as Khatunieh School or Khatunieh Javanieh or Ismatieh (Shahabi, 1999). Moreover, she built a Khanqah (A space of privacy austerity, and contentment) with a lot of facilities for Sufi Muslims. This Khanqah which became known as Khanqah-e-Khatun or Khatunieh was built on the outskirts of Damascus in a place called Bab al-Nasr (Al-Nuaimi, 1989; Ibn Kathir, 1986; Ibn Khallikan, 1968). Upon the order of Ismat al-din Khatun in 1181, four years before her death, a tomb was built for her and she was buried there. In 1255, a small mosque near her tomb was built, this mosque became known as the new Jami Mosque in the Levant, while it was also known as Khatuniyeh Mosque (Javadi, 2005). The frequent use of the name "Khatunieh" for various buildings raises questions about their differentiation. Due to the absence of these structures, a definitive answer remains elusive.

The sister of Salah al-din, Rabia Khatun (the queen of the Levant and the wife of Saad al-din Unur, the son of Muin al-din Unur) also built a school in Damascus upon the encouragement of a lady named Umm al-Latif, known as Alemeh, who was one of her servants. The school was given to Hanbali Muslim scholars and was considered one of their most beautiful schools. Rabia Khatun was buried in this same school (Ibn Kathir, 1986). This building is known as Madrasa Rabia Khatun or Sahibiya. Umm al-Latif, the servant who is described as an intellectual and modest woman, was the founder of a school that became known as Alemeh Madrasa, after her name (Al-Nuaimi, 1989).

Figure 3. *The Zumurrud Khatun Mosque and Mausoleum, Baghdad (Waad Saeed, 2017).*

In the Seljuk era of Iraq and the Levant, there were at least two known women named Zumurrud Khatun. Both wielded considerable power. The first, Sayyida Zumurrud Khatun (d. 1202), was the mother of the Abbasid Caliph, Al-Nasir al-Din Allah (r. 1179-1225). A powerful figure in Iraq, she was a notable patron of architecture. She commissioned the construction of the Al-Khafafin Grand Mosque in Baghdad in 1202. This mosque stands near the Khafafin Bazaar and the famed Nizamiyya school founded by Nizam al-Mulk Tusi (Ghomi, 1998; Faqih Bahr al-Oloum & Khameyar, 2016). Sayyida Zumurrud Khatun's tomb is located near the famous Karkhi Cemetery, itself an important Islamic cemetery and a significant architectural landmark of the Abbasid period. Close to her tomb, she also built a mosque and school. This complex was destroyed over time. During the Ottoman period, Suleiman Pasha, the ruler of Baghdad, repurposed the remaining materials from the mosque to construct the city walls (Faqih Bahr al-Oloum & Khameyar, 2016). As a result, only her tomb remains as a testament to Sayyida Zumurrud Khatun's architectural legacy.

The other Zumurrud Khatun, daughter of Ayyub, ruled as regent of Damascus under the Seljuks between 1135 and 1138. Regarding her constructions, it is said: "Zumurrud Khatun was a kind and virtuous woman known for her honesty, modesty, and good de-

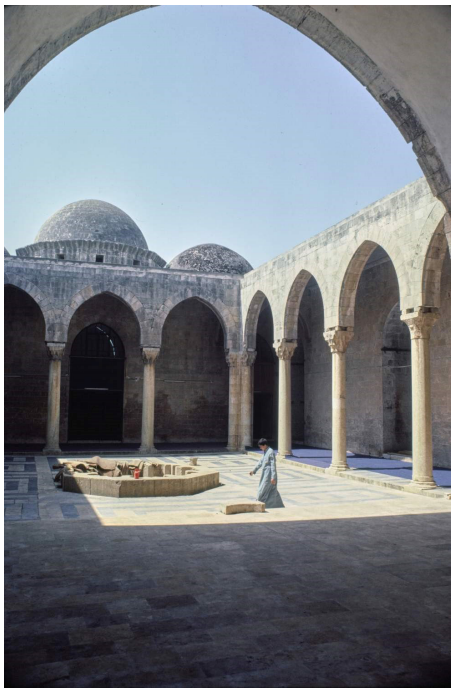

Figure 4. *Courtyard of al-Firdaws Madrasa (1236), Aleppo, Syria (Archnet, 2024).*

eds. She was one of the leading philanthropists of her time and undertook the construction of numerous mosques, shrines, schools, qanats, and caravansaries. Many public works remain as a testament to her legacy." (Mahalati, 1989).

The dedication inscription of the al-Firdaws Madrasa (founded in 1235) honors its benefactor, Dayfa Khatun, as an Ayyubid queen and regent of Aleppo (1236-1242). The inscription praises her as "the virtuous veil and the chaste lady" (al-sitr al-rafi wa l-hijab al-mani) (Tabbaa, 2000). Dayfa Khatun was renowned for her godly actions, particularly her philanthropy in supporting the impoverished. Additionally, she distinguished herself as a significant patron of architecture. Her lasting legacy includes the establishment of several remarkable structures, including two educational institutions dedicated to fostering and advancing learning in Aleppo (Tabbaa, 2000). Her inaugural charitable initiative materialized in the form of al-Firdaws Madrasa, erected in 1236, specializing in Islamic studies and jurisprudence. The Khanqah-Madrasa, another testament to her commitment to education, concentrated primarily on the Islamic legal system. Situated near Bab al-Makam in Aleppo, al-Firdaws Madrasa adhered to the prevailing educational framework of its era. The institution comprised a teacher, an Imam (spiritual leader), and a cohort of twenty scholars. Its architectural ensemble included diverse structures such as the school building, a mosque, and residential quarters. The lasting legacy of these educational foundations underscores Dayfa Khatun's multifaceted contributions to the intellectual and architectural landscape of her time. In his research, Hatim Mahamid demonstrates that princesses and other women of the Ayyubid dynasty played a significant role in establishing educational institutions in Syria. Of the 19 madrasas founded by women in Damascus, 18 were constructed during the Ayyubid period. The same is true for Aleppo (2013).

5. Seljuks of Anatolia

During the Anatolian Seljuk period, it was common to construct architectural complexes that included mosques, caravanserais, mausoleums, bridges, baths, Zawiyah (A building and institution associated with Sufis in the Islamic world), khanqahs, and more in one location. These buildings were placed together to meet various social, cultural, and commercial needs simultaneously, which could be attributed to effective use of space, convenience for the people, preservation and promotion of local culture, and symbolizing power and stability. Some of these complexes are associated with the names of female patrons.

Melike Mama Hatun ruled the Seljuk dynasty from 1191 to 1200 (Sinclair, 1989). During her reign, she constructed significant buildings in Tercan, Turkey, including a caravanserai, mosque, bridge, and bath. These structures, still standing today, are named after her. Her caravanserai, built for travelers to rest, featured a rectangular courtyard surrounded by two-story buildings (Sinclair, 1989). The caravanserai had a large and high gate for animal entry, identical rooms for merchants, storage areas for goods, and stalls for animals (El-Shorbagy, 2020; Sims, 1978).

In historical texts, the mother of Ala

al-din Kayqubad, known as "Umm-i Han" is credited with locating the burial site of Seyyid Battal Gazi, a heroic figure and martyr of the Umayyad army in the Byzantine wars. According to some sources, it was at her initiative that a mosque and a shrine were built in honor of Seyyid Battal Gazi (Kelebeki, 2011). Convincing evidence in Zeynep Yurekli's study links textual records with the architectural elements of this complex (2012). The current structure comprises domed stone buildings surrounding three sides of a porticoed courtyard. The Umm-i Han's funerary madrasa is situated in the southwest corner, while Seyyid Battal Gazi's tomb, a Khanqah, mosque, and sama_ Khana (Sufi dance space) occupy the southeast corner. These sections are connected by an L-shaped portico to the dervish rooms on the eastern side of the courtyard. The northern wing includes a kitchen, bakery, and ceremonial rooms. The inscription above the single-domed mosque indicates its establishment in 1207-1208, during the second reign of the Seljuk sultan Ghiyath al-din Kaykhusraw I. Although no founding inscriptions exist for Umm-i Han's funerary madrasa, it is believed they were constructed concurrently with the mosque.

The Kuluk Mosque in Kayseri, which holds a special place among the architectural monuments of Kayseri, was built during the period of the Danishmendid. It originally included a mosque, a school, and a bathhouse, of which only the mosque and school remain today. This complex lacks an inscription to specify its construction date and founder. One of the two inscriptions on the building, older and located on the northeast corner of the dome over the entrance, was added later. According to this inscription, written in three lines with Seljuk Thuluth script, these structures were restored in 1211 by Atsuz Alti Mamun Bint Mahmud Ibn YaghibaSan, the granddaughter of Danishmendid amir YaghibaSan (R: 1142-64))Durukan, 1998 , and the niece of sultan Muhammad Malik Ghazi. The mosque of the complex was either founded or restored by Atsuz Alti Khatun) Blessing, 2014).

Mahbari Khatun, the first wife of Ala al-din Kayqubad, was one of the most prominent female patrons of the Seljuk court, known for establishing numerous public welfare buildings in Anatolia. Notably, she founded the Hunad Hatun Complex in Kayseri, which includes a mosque, a school, her tomb, and a double bath, built around 1237-38. The mosque's inscription highlights her significant role as a benefactor.This mosque features a central nave and two domes, one in front of the mihrab and another in the middle of the mosque. The side naves run parallel to the qibla wall and perpendicular to the central nave.

Many structures linked to Mahbari Khatun were caravanserais, including the Hatun Han in Pazar near Tokat (1238-39) and the Cimcimli sultan Han in the region of Yozgat (1239-40). Other attributed caravanserais based on stylistic evidence are the Cekereksu Han (1239-40?), the Tahtoba Han (1238-46?), the İbibsa Han (1238-46?), the Ciftlik Han (1238- 40?) and the Ezinepazar Han (1238-40?) (Erdmann, 1961-1976).

The Hatun Han caravanserai, built in 1238-39, features an open courtyard followed by a covered section, a robust facade with cylindrical corner towers, and a central entrance. The inscription above the entrance highlights Mahbari Khatun's patronage and her status during her son's reign. This building is situated on an important caravan route (Durukan, 1998). the Cimcimli sultan Han is directly linked to Mahbari Khatun through inscription fragments found in a nearby mosque, likely originating from the caravanserai (Erdmann, 1961-1976).

The power and influence of women during the Seljuk period were directly related to their position within the ruling dynasty. The queen mother wielded the greatest power and influence in society, while women who did not hold this position had fewer opportunities to influence social and cultural affairs (Blessing, 2014). For example, Among Ala al-din Kayqubad's wives, Mahbari Khatun was the most notable patron of architecture, assuming this role after her son became the ruler. In contrast, Ismat al-Dunya wa al-din bint al-Malik al- Adil Abu Bakr b. Ayyub,

was killed soon after Ghiyath al-din Kaykhusraw's accession in 1237 and did not have the opportunity to act as a patron (ibid). Years after her death and following Ghiyath al-din Kaykhusraw's demise, her daughters anonymously commissioned a mausoleum for her in Kayseri, known as the Cifte Kunbet. The inscription on this monument praises her as the "Zubayda of the Age," highlighting her piety and good deeds, referencing Zubayda, wife of the Abbasid caliph Harun al-Rashid, known for her charitable works (Abbott,1946).To emphasize their late mother's status, the daughters remained unnamed.

The third wife of Ala al-din Kayqubad, known as Ismat al-Dunya wa al-Din, was a daughter of Mughith al-din Tughrilshah b. Qilij Arslan, the ruler of Erzurum (Crane, 1993). Based on the remaining fragments of the foundation inscription, Scott Redford identifies her as the patron of the Great Mosque of Uluborlu, dated 1232 (2013), a structure that no longer survives. Since she had separated from the ruling sultan, the inscription emphasizes her royal lineage by referring to her grandfather, Qilij Arslan, rather than her husband. It stresses that the construction costs were independently financed by her, aiming to clarify that the funding did not come from the ruling sultan and to ensure that her charitable act was not overshadowed by his influence. In addition to the Great Mosque of Uluborlu, Ismat al-Dunya wa al-din also established several caravanserais (ibid).

Another female patron, Ruqiya Khatun, is known only from a partial inscription on the Kadın Han caravanserai. This caravanserai was established between 1223 and 1224 on the road between Konya and Aksehir (Durukan, 1998). Her identity remains uncertain, but Konyalı has suggested that she might be the same person as Devlet Khatun, one of the wives of Ghiyath al-din Kaykhusraw I (1964).

During the 12th century, Anatolia boasted a plethora of hospital complexes. Emineddin Darussifa (Hospital) in Mardin and several structures in Silvan, Hatay, and Antakya stand as notable examples (Cantay, 1992). The hospital buildings have always been built by sultans and their families, because the construction of the health building was considered as a kind of task, mission for the rulers (Eser, 2000).

Two hospitals, as public welfare, are directly attributed to the female patrons of this dynasty.The stone complex of the Gawhar Nasiba School or the Cifte (Double) Medrese in Kayseri is not only the first Seljuk school in Kayseri but also the oldest hospital in Anatolia. The Cifte Medrese consists of two adjoining courtyard buildings with a north-south orientation, measuring a total of 60 by 40 meters. Based on functional evidence, the eastern building served as a hospital and the western building as a school. According to the foundation inscription, the hospital was built on the estate of Gawhar Nasiba sultan, daughter of sultan Qilij Arslan (1156-1192) and sister of Ghiyath al-din Kaykhusraw I (1192-1197 and 1205-1211). However, it is possible that Gawhar Nasiba was only responsible for the hospital mentioned in the inscription, while her brother, sultan Ghiyath al-din, may have established the school (Crane, 1993). This attribution is based on a local tradition that refers to the school section as "Ghiyathiya", since no inscription for it has been preserved (Gabriel, 1931). The connecting walls between the two sections indicate that both parts were constructed simultaneously or around the same time (Ibid). On the eastern side of the courtyard, integrated into the structure of the hospital, there is an octagonal tomb, an early Seljuk funerary building. This structure, with a pyramidal roof visible from the outside with a squinch-supported dome on the inside, is likely the tomb of Gawhar Nasiba sultan, though there is no inscription to confirm this. The hospital has a main southern entrance portal that is not aligned with the main axis of the courtyard. The portal leads to a rectangular stone-paved courtyard surrounded by a arcade. A pool is located in the center of the courtyard (Cantay,1992; Ertug,1991). A large iwan spans the entire width of the northern side of the courtyard. The plan is irregular, with rooms of various sizes accessible from the arcade. An entrance and a small corridor in the northwest corner of the hospital courtyard lead

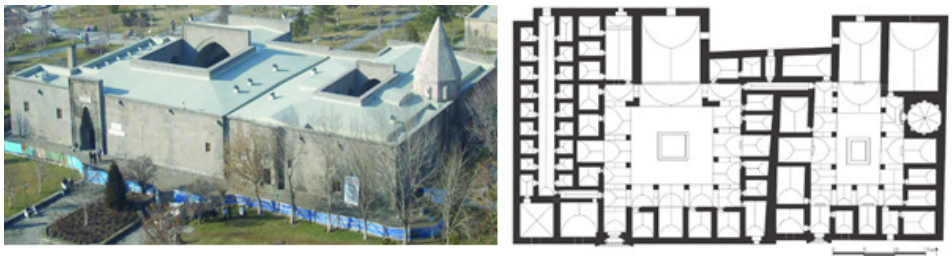

Figure 5. *Documents of Cifte Medrese in Kayseri (Kutlu, 2017).*

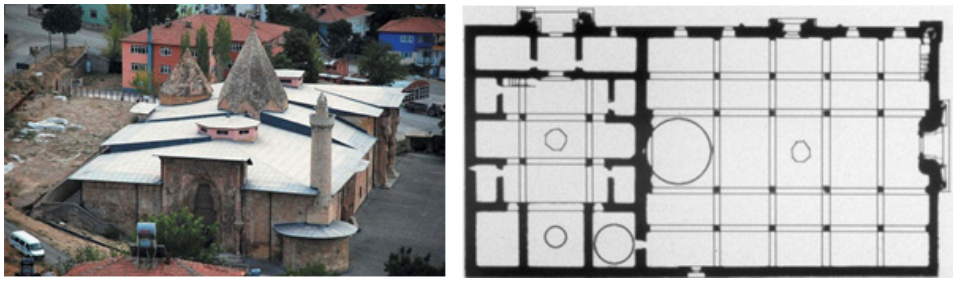

Figure 6. *Documents of Divrigi Hospital (El-Shorbagy, 2020).*

to the adjacent school, which also has an irregular plan with a arcaded courtyard, a pool, and an off-axis entrance (Aslanapa, 1971).

Turan Malik sultan was the daughter of Fahred al-din Behram Shah, ruler of Mengujek in Erzincan (1162–1225), and Ismeti Hatun, known for her charitable works (Aslanapa, 1971). Renowned for her philanthropy, Turan Malik sultan dedicated her entire fortune to constructing the darussifa (hospital), part of the Great Mosque and Hospital complex in Divrigi. Her husband, Ahmet Shah, began building the mosque in 1228, and Turan Malik commissioned the hospital around the same time (Aslanapa, 1971).

The hospital, located south of the mosque, follows a rectangular design with an east-west orientation, typical of Central Asian Turkish architecture. Built from stone blocks, it features an enclosed courtyard divided into nine sections by decorative columns and double vaults. The west wing includes two stories and three iwans, while the central section is marked by an octagonal spire made of wrought iron and glass with vaults on either side. The main entrance, a small door set within a grand arched portal, dominates the western faCade. This portal projects from the hospital wall and is adorned with intricate decorative details (El-Shorbagy, 2020; Erturk & Karakul, 2016).

Among the women associated with the ranks of sultans and government officials, many were devotees of Sufi orders. These women supported their spiritual leaders by establishing various centers such as khanqahs and Zawiyahs, and by providing donations and endowments.

Ismeti Gawhar Hatun, the wife of Emir Fahred al-din Behram Shah Mengujeki ruler of Mengujek in Erzincan (1162–1225), and the aunt of Ala al-din Kayqubad I, was a woman of great virtue and intelligence, recognized as the first patron of Molana's family in Anatolia. She owned a khanqah in Erzurum where she hosted scholars and men of knowledge such as Baha Walad, and she was deeply committed to constructing madrasas and khanqahs.

Gurji Khatun, the wife of Ghiyath al-din Kaykhusraw II and the daughter of the Georgian queen Rusudan (R 1223-1245), also played a significant role in supporting Molana's family and was a patron of the construction of Molana's mausoleum in Konya.

Ilkhanid ruler Abaka Khan ordered the execution of Anatolian Seljuk sultan Rukn al-din Qilij Arslan IV. Following this, the sultan's daughter, Hudavent Hatun , was taken and married to Abaka Khan's son (Argun Khan) in 1276. Hudavent Hatun was a learned woman and a follower of Molana, who was praised by sultan Walad. She ordered the construction of her tomb

in Nigde in 1312, 20 years before her death (Rabbani and Ghodrati, 2018), and was personally involved in its design and construction to ensure it met her specifications. The tomb, featuring an octagonal prism body, pyramidal conical roof, elevated basement, and intricate architectural details, stands as a remarkable example of Turkish tomb architecture. It includes unique images and symbols, such as human facial masks integrated into plant motifs, and a crowned female head with a tear, symbolizing Hudavent Hatun (Parla, 2019).

Aarife Hos Lakaai Qonyaei in the Mevlevi Order and Fatima Baji, the daughter of Ohad al-din in the Bektashi Order, also had Zawiyahs where they accommodated travelers. Aarife was the first female caliph who hosted both men and women in her khanqah and had many followers (Aflaki, 2006).

In various buildings, women have been co-founders alongside a man (Blessing, 2014). A woman with the title "Malika Safwat al-Dunya wa al-din " is mentioned in the inscription of Abu l-Shams Zawiyah in Tokat (1288). This building is also known as the tomb of Ahmed Pasa. Ethel Sara Wolper suggests that this patroness might have, with the help of a male agent, established another building in Tokat (2000).

The rectangular inscription over the doorway of the Sunbul Baba Zawiyah in Tokat provides a more precise indication of the female patron. «During the time of the greatest sultan Ghiyath al-Dunya wa al-din bin Kaykawus, may God extend his rule, the manumitted slave of the great, brilliant, generous queen venerated for her double ascendance Safwat l-Dunya wa ldin, daughter of the late amir Muʿ in l-din Pervane, may God have mercy with him, and preserve her, the ornament of the pilgrimage and of the two sacred precincts, Sunbul bin Abdallah may God accept from him." (Blessing, 2014).

Also, a woman named Azmat al-Dunya wa al-din Saljuqi Khwand, the daughter of Qilij Arslan is mentioned in the inscription of the Halef Gazi Zawiyah in Tokat, which was constructed by Khalaf b. Sulayman (Wolper, 2000). However, her presence alongside one or two other female patrons in Tokat at the same time indicates the support of elite local women for Sufi communities.

6. Discussion and conclusion

A comparative examination of women's involvement in civil construction throughout history reveals the Seljuk period (1040-1153 CE) as a significant turning point. The migration of Turkic tribes and the prominent role women played in the animal husbandry-based economy likely contributed to their active participation in the social sphere alongside men. This influence extended to higher levels, potentially granting some women executive power in governing affairs.

Uniquely within this period, the presence of tolerant Seljuk rulers fostered a more inclusive environment for women's contributions to society. Historical accounts and building inscriptions provide evidence of a distinct "civil construction movement" undertaken by Seljuk women (Rahimpour Azghadi& Alasvand, 2017). These women primarily focused on constructing public buildings that served essential needs of the community, such as mosques, caravanserai, and baths.

The terminology used in historical documents to describe these women is noteworthy. They are consistently referred to as "believers" and "generous," suggesting a strong association between their patronage and religious devotion. Notably, the authors of these documents often included prayers for the women who commissioned these structures.

The architectural landscape of Seljuk Anatolia exhibits a greater diversity of building types compared to other regions of the empire. This may be partly due to greater female freedom in the territory's west, which is documented by historical accounts. For example, Ibn Battuta describes Anatolia as a society where women have a higher status than men (1997). This freedom from societal restrictions likely allowed powerful women to participate in a wider range of philanthropic endeavors. Evidence suggests that women patrons in Anatolia not only commissioned religious structures but also contributed to the construction of hospitals. The

involvement of women in supervising the operations of these medical facilities further highlights their active role in shaping the social fabric of their communities.

A significant obstacle in comprehensively documenting the architectural contributions of Seljuk women lies in the nature of historical records. Many documents offer general descriptions rather than detailed lists of constructed buildings. Phrases like "a number of schools" or "mosques and public buildings in important cities" create ambiguity for researchers. This is further compounded by the absence of inscriptions naming female patrons in many structures. Several factors might explain this lack of specific attribution. The modesty of female founders, coupled with Islamic attitudes towards self-promotion, may have discouraged detailed inscriptions (El-Shorbagy, 2020). Additionally, the qualitative nature of some historical records makes it difficult to quantify the exact number of buildings each woman sponsored. This underestimation is particularly evident in regions like Iran, Iraq, and the Levant.

Another challenge arises from conflicting information in historical sources. For example, while some documents credit Mahbari Khatun with constructing six caravanserais, others question this attribution. These discrepancies necessitate a critical evaluation of available evidence.

Based on these considerations, the buildings constructed by the women of the Seljuk court in Iran include schools and qanats (at least 6 of each), caravansaries (at least 3), mosques (at least 2), and tombs and castles (1 of each). The buildings constructed by women of the Seljuk court in Persian Iran include schools (6), tombs and mosques (3 of each), and khanqah (1). The buildings constructed by women of the Seljuk court in Anatolia include caravansaries (at most 8), khanqah and Zawiyahs (7), mosques (5), tombs (4), schools and hospitals (3 of each), bathhouses (2), and bridge (1).

An examination of documented constructions reveals that in Iran, Iraq, and the Levant, schools were among the prioritized construction projects of the women of the court. In Iran, building qanats was of equal or greater importance than building schools. Since the majority of the above-mentioned qanats were constructed in arid and desert regions, constructing qanats was among the first steps toward developing a town or village.

The focus on building schools by Seljuk women in Iran, Iraq, and the Levant might be linked to the historical context of the region. During this period, education was highly valued, and the Seljuk court itself may have emphasized scholarly pursuits, potentially influencing the philanthropic endeavors of female patrons. Further research could explore this connection in more detail. Additionally, the importance of education for women due to their maternal roles could be another factor.

The expansion of the Seljuk Empire brought central Anatolia's trade routes under the control of the Anatolian Seljuks, transforming the region into a vital crossroads between the East and West, particularly along the Silk Road. To support this burgeoning trade, subsidiary roads were constructed and a stable political and military environment was fostered under Seljuk rule. However, traversing the mountainous terrain remained perilous for trade caravans.

Addressing these security concerns, the Seljuks strategically erected caravanserais along trade routes. These structures provided essential rest and services for travelers. Notably, women in the Anatolian courts played a significant role in the construction of these caravanserais. Their involvement could have been influenced by both the rulers' policies promoting trade and the societal needs of the time. Additionally, their participation in such large-scale projects might have served as a symbol of their competence and influence within Seljuk society.

Anatolian caravanserais differed from those built in other regions like Iran, Iraq, and the Levant. Designed to withstand harsh climates and potential bandit attacks, they were characterized by imposing stone walls devoid of windows and a single entrance for enhanced security (Yavuz, 1997). Typically

arranged around a central courtyard with rooms along the periphery, these structures also incorporated a large, enclosed hall for shelter during the harsh Anatolian winters.

During the Seljuk of Rum, Sufi movements and schools were among the most influential cultural forces. Within these communities, Sufi teachings fostered a more inclusive environment, allowing women from various social classes to participate actively. Their good deeds and spiritual contributions were recognized and celebrated by Sufi leaders and followers. In some cases, women attained the esteemed title of "Shaykhah" (the feminine form of Sheikh) and led rituals, with both men and women attending their classes for instruction and discussion. Sufi teachings emphasized the value of good works, including construction projects. Women's participation in such endeavors was directly related to their access to resources and power (Rabbani & Ghodrati, 2018). This can explain the focus on building Khanqahs and Zawiyahs by Seljuk court women in Anatolia. These structures served educational and spiritual purposes, potentially replacing the focus on schools that was observed among women of the court in Iran, Iraq, and the Levant.

The construction projects undertaken by Seljuk court women demonstrably extended their influence beyond the court, playing a significant role in the cultural and religious development of their communities. By financing the construction of schools, mosques, and qanats, these women utilized their personal wealth and assets to contribute to the expansion and development of cities and towns. Furthermore, their focus on educational and service centers suggests a deliberate effort to support the intellectual and social well-being of their communities.

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