

**ANATOLIAN RELIGIONS AND BELIEFS PLATFORM/  
CULTURAL HERITAGE CARRIERS VANGUARDS OF OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE/ Part 4**

Anatolian Seljuks with Hayri Fehmi Yılmaz

**TOPICS:** The arrival of the Seljuks in Anatolia, Seljuk architectural works, Christianity in Anatolia during the Seljuk period, the place of the Seljuks in world history.

*Art historian and tour guide Mr. **Hayri Fehmi Yılmaz** will tell us about the Seljuks in the fourth of our "Culturists of Our HeritageVanguards of Our Cultural Heritage" interviews., which wWe have prepared this series in order to get to know Anatolia's tangible and intangible cultural heritage accumulated in its multi-tribal history with its structural, social, cultural, and religious richness and to look at appreciate it from theseis perspectives.*

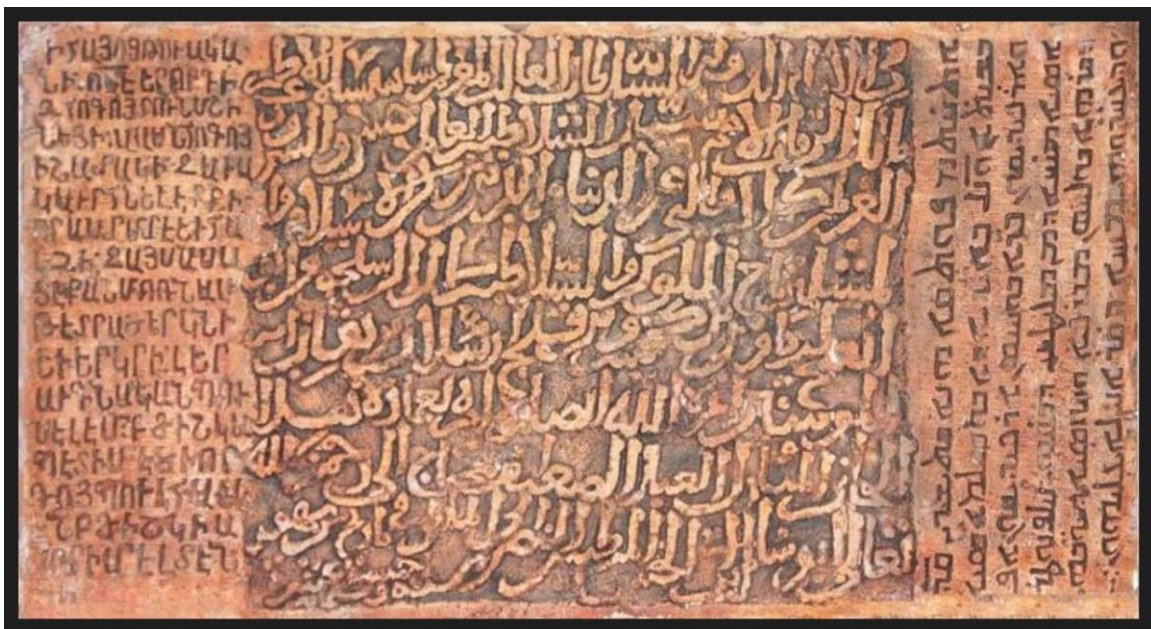


**"If we understand the Seljuks, it can help us to understand today."**

Telling history in TurkeyTürkiye is one of the biggest problems. Two major strands need to be followed. One is the history of the Turks, the most populous group in the country, which begins in the interior of Asia. But there is also the history of Anatolia before the arrival of the Turks. You need to learn about Mesopotamia on one side, the Aegean world on the other, the Balkans on one side, and the Caucasus on the other. In a study called the Cultural Atlas of the Turkish World, we see these first period principalities, which we define as the Seljuks and principalities of TurkeyTürkiye, and look, Izmit and Izmit were very close to Istanbul. The Anatolian side seems to be in the hands of Istanbul, the Seljuks.

We already remember them more or less from history books. But each of them is a charismatic leader and states built around him. And there are some that lasted until

the 15th century, which is very exciting. At the end of the Crusades, Byzantium lost its capital and a Latin kingdom was formed in Constantinople. In western Anatolia there was the Byzantine Kingdom of Nicaea. In Trabzon there was the Kingdom of Trabzon. In the rest of Anatolia, the Seljuk Empire ruled. At that time, there was a little bit of the Filikiye Armenian States around Çukurova. Iznik was the first capital of the Seljuks. The most interesting archaeological data of Anatolian Seljuk history starts from Iznik. Because something very opposite to what we expected happened. The Seljuks surrendered the city in Iznik and retreated towards Central Anatolia. But the Seljuks who lived in the city of Iznik during the time they stayed here, from the 1080s until 1097, were buried in this neighborhood. When they left, the Byzantine armies took the tombstones of the Seljuks and restored the damaged walls, damaged during the Crusader siege. Today, one tower of the walls of Iznik is covered with Seljuk tombstones. The inscriptions are in Arabic, but Byzantine craftsmen made tombstones for the Seljuks because their artists had not yet arrived. Since they do not recognize the writing on the inscriptions, they write the text given to them, but they do not recognize the alphabet. The character of the letters shows the triangular traces of ancient and medieval Greek-Latin inscriptions. The tombstone of a Seljuk from Isfahan is recorded with the name Isfahani. Therefore, these stones can connect very distant geographies.



Seljuk Anatolia is very pleasant... Malatya Hekim Han, a physician's caravanserai. In 1212, the **inscription of the physician** Abu Salim bin Abul Hasan al-Malati's **physician lady in Malatya** was made for a Seljuk physician, a Turkish physician. The center is in Arabic, the left side is in Armenian, the right side is in Syriac, and on the same slab he put the languages of all three peoples of the region. This shows the

atmosphere of tolerance. When we see a bilingual or trilingual inscription, we get very angry, or when we see inscriptions written by refugees coming to our country in their own language, it makes us very uneasy. In the 13th century, in 1218, the inscription of a Seljuk Caravan Palace in Anatolia could be written in texts that all the peoples of this geography could understand. The inscription of Sinop Castle in 1214-15 is an inscription in Arabic on the top and Greek on the bottom. The repair inscription of Sinop Castle. In the 13th century when these were made, we don't see such things in Western cities. In the East, all the peoples somehow manage to live in brotherhood. No matter how much we fight with each other today, in the past we have more or less managed to create a common civilization. I am not saying that there were wars, but we have created this common heritage. I mean, no one tells the Seljuk Sultan to write in Greek. But he did something like this to appeal to the Greek people.

But my favorite is the Kırkdamaltı Church in the Ihlara Valley. As I said, a lot of churches were built during the Seljuk era. We tell people who visit Cappadocia that early Christians took refuge here, but Kırkdamaltı Church is a Seljuk Church. Basileus was a Greek and his wife was probably Georgian. But they both prepared a church called Ayagör. Basileus looks like a Seljuk emir and we can see this gentleman with his turban on his head and Seljuk costumes on his back in Kırkdamaltı Church. The inscription bears the names of the Seljuk Sultan Mesut and the Byzantine Emperor Andronikos. Another example is from Konya. The Ak Monastery in Konya, the Monastery of St. Hariton, which lived its heyday in the 13th century, is today in a partially ruined military zone. The photographs are from the Gertrude Bell archive. A very beautiful inscription was seen there, unfortunately it does not exist today, but there was a Seljuk masjid inside this monastery. Since Mevlana, the famous saint of Konya, visited this place, Muslims also started to visit it. There were so many Muslim visitors that a masjid was built inside the monastery. Seljuk foundations donated the masjid. A monastery with a masjid inside is hard to explain to a westerner. A monastery near Konya, the names of the Byzantine Emperor, the Patriarch of Constantinople and the Seljuk Sultan are mentioned. In this monastery, a church carved into the rocks still stands. There are chapels. There is also a gravestone. It is the last memory of a prince who took refuge from Byzantium to the Seljuks. Emir Lanes, son of Johannes Komnenos, in the service of a Seljuk in 1297. The tombstone of the Byzantine prince was buried in Ak Monastery. Today it is preserved in the Konya Museum. The Seljuks surrounded Konya with city walls during the reign of Alaaddin Keykubat. Walls are the adornment of a city. It would have been very nice to see these walls, but unfortunately they disappeared in the 19th century. Laborun drawings add a lot to us. This is something that transcends civilizations. It is up to us to fight over who owns it, whether it is yours or ours. Animals, harpies, elephants, dragons, dragons,

eagles adorn the walls of the Seljuk capital. This is a harpy, a mythical creature with the body of a bird and the head of a woman. It adorns the Seljuk fortifications. Konyans both make and protect this harpy. Like the Seljuks, they all have a round face and slightly slanted eyes. I think this is Tulpar, the winged horse of the Turks. And dragons, but these are not the fighting bad dragons of the West. These are the good dragons of Asia. They came here with the Seljuks. They are not fighting, they are not evil. A couple of dragons surround something that defines the world, the cosmos.

Unlike the Ottomans, all Seljuk rulers are buried in a kumbet on Alaaddin Hill in Konya. There is a palace in front of it. Right next to it is their madrasah, **the Karatay Madrasah**. Every Ottoman sultan is buried in a tomb, but the Seljuks were all buried side by side in this Sultan Kılıç Arslan kumbet in Konya, which is called Kumbethane. The mummies there were restored with a serious restoration in recent years. This is a very important point for Anatolian history. This magnificent palace was decorated with magnificent tiles. Today, there are a number of examples in the Chinese Pavilion, Istanbul Archeology Museums and Karatay Madrasah. And this is the Kubadabad Palace. The palaces of the Seljuks are also full of horses, round-faced, slant-eyed lions, tigers and mythical creatures with female heads and bird bodies,



which we always see in Islamic palaces. One of the most important peoples and civilizations connecting this whole geography to the modern world today is the Seljuks. A tribe migrates westward from Asia. First in Iran and Azerbaijan, then in Anatolia, it establishes a very strong presence. It carries the settled cultures of the regions it came from and the nomadic traditions of the great

steppe geography in the north of the geography it came from to this geography. As the heir of many peoples in this geography, it continues its existence until the modern world. One of the most important events in world history is the westward migration of the Seljuks. There is a great interaction and a great process begins in this geography with the Seljuks. They managed to create a great civilization with their language and culture.

It is difficult to understand why they came to this geography. Some modern researchers say that they were gathered in the east of the Caspian Sea, that the Turkish-speaking peoples, the Oghuz branch, started to migrate westward after they were gradually Islamized, and that they were even looking for a new homeland and that is why they came. These mostly nomadic peoples were squeezed by some

peoples in the east and they had to migrate southwards. But after a while, Iranian geography was not enough for them. The regions of Eastern and Central Anatolia, especially the steppes, were very favorable for these peoples to live. It had many features parallel to their homeland in Central Asia. So they migrated to this region. And an interesting state was formed in this geography. In modern times, we call it the Anatolian Seljuks. We also call them the Seljuks of TurkeyTürkiye, but they preferred to call themselves the Seljuks of Rum, the Seljuks of Rome.

From the 11th century they entered this geography. But contrary to what we think, they came to this region, especially to the highlands, not in 1071, but before that. They were more interested in the countryside, especially in the highlands, rather than the cities. Therefore, they stayed away from written cultures. But recent excavations in TurkeyTürkiye have yielded very interesting data. In Akarçay Höyük or Olus Höyük, our archaeologists are now able to carry out excavations in a very systematic and broad perspective. In fact, our professors, who excavated completely different periods, gave us incredible data about the Seljuks. They came to this region long before the Battle of Malazgirt, settled here and even started burying their dead here. Of course, after the Battle of Malazgirt, very large Turkmen groups migrated to the region. Some of them formed around their own charismatic leaders and established a number of states in this geography. We prefer to call them principalities, and these are in every different region of Anatolia. Some of them are very short-lived. We know one or two rulers. Many principalities were established, some of which turned into great states that would last for several centuries. It is customary to call them principalities, but they are really states in their full form. Artuqids, Saltuqids, Mengujekids, Danüşmendliler were among the biggest. The Maçoğulları, perhaps the very interesting Çakah and Tanrı Vermiş principalities in Western Anatolia. These suddenly developed rapidly in Anatolia and interestingly, right after the Battle of Malazgirt, they managed to reach the western shores of Anatolia. Their rapid advance towards the west led to the conquest of the Anatolian geography. Both Iranians and Arabs organized long campaigns. They fought great battles but they could not stay in this geography. But the Seljuks, interestingly, managed to conquer the whole Anatolian geography in a very short time. This is one of the most important events in world history. It triggered many other events. The Crusades started during this process. The Seljuks had a capital in Iznik in 1080s. The Crusaders surprised the Seljuks, but they also surprised the Byzantines. Because the peoples of this geography had more or less accepted living with the other. They were in constant interaction with each other. But those who came from the West seemed to them both very rude and intolerant in many ways. As a result, a very interesting process began, which gave birth to the Crusades. This led to the disruption of the state established by the Seljuks in Anatolia. The first city that the Crusaders captured in this geography was Iznik. The Seljuks had just conquered this

city. They have been there for 10-15 years. Christians make up a significant part of the city's population. A large Christian army from the west is besieging this city. The Christians of the city, together with the Muslim Seljuks, try to defend their city against the besiegers. They did not surrender. This is very interesting to me. They learned how to use arrows from the Seljuks. But let me remind you that contrary to popular belief, many people from the Seljuks also went to the West, to Byzantium. So many Seljuks went to the west that a group of them are called Turcopol. Some of them are Turkish-speaking peoples from the Balkans. The first mention of them is in the war of 1097.

In the Seljuks, if a prince is disturbed and loses a power struggle, he seeks refuge with Byzantium, and if a Byzantine loses, he seeks refuge with the Seljuks. There is no doubt that there were great wars between them. They are in competition with each other, in a state of struggle. At times they seem to be each other's enemies, but often they are allies. Sometimes the Seljuks and Byzantium come together against the Danismentes. Sometimes the Danishmentals and Seljuks come together and attack the Crusaders. So it is not easy to keep track of who came together when and how. The lines are not very clearly defined. But do not forget this. Thousands of people from inside Europe are coming to Anatolia. Several crusades pass through Anatolia. It brings a lot of things here and it takes a lot of things away from here. Meanwhile, in the 13th century, the Mongol danger starts from the east. In 1243, a second great empire that started in the interior of Asia became a part of this geography again. This time the Seljuks turn into a state subject to the Mongols. One of the brightest ages of Anatolia is experienced. It is politically and militarily troubled, but magnificent buildings are built. Extraordinary people grow up. Indeed, a lot of things that shaped today's TurkeyTürkiye emerged in those centuries. The



Seljuk country is always remembered as a land of compassion and mercy. Yes, no doubt there were wars, there were struggles, there was bigotry, but in the meantime there was incredible interaction and very interesting people were shaped in the Seljuk geography. Many things that have a very special place in the culture of the people of TurkeyTürkiye today emerged in these centuries. For example, Ibnul Arabi came from Andalusia. Even today, when we talk about "Sufism in Anatolia", what an important name he is... From the east, from modern Afghanistan, Mevlana and his family

came to this geography under the pressure of the Mongols.

I am a consultant for some restorations. An excavation is taking place under the

control of the Archaeology Museum. The working craftsmen speak a language that is partly familiar and partly distant. I asked them where they were from. We are Afghans, Tajiks, we came from Afghanistan. "Ours," they said, "a very famous fellow countryman of ours came to TurkeyTürkiye from Balkh, maybe you know him." They came from Balkh, the city of **Mevlana**. Afghan workers excavating Byzantine ruins during the restoration of a late Ottoman business inn in Istanbul. One of the most important names that shaped today's Anatolia is Hacı Bektaş Veli, a name that came out of the Seljuk cultural geography. And of course, we should not forget Nasreddin Hodja, who lived in the 13th century, from Akşehir or Sivrihisar. All of these turn into anonymous names of this geography. It also affects neighboring peoples. As Molla Nasreddin, he goes to the Uyghur geography, China, Uzbeks and Uyghurs. Those who live beliefs similar to Hacı Bektaş's teachings are scattered and dispersed as far as the Balkans on one side and Afghanistan on the other. The Seljuks are a people who managed to leave very deep traces behind them. I was involved in a project called "Anatolian Seljuk Building Inventory." We aimed to introduce the Seljuk buildings and the Seljuk civilization. We prepared a website. We found many interesting stories about the Seljuks. Medieval Islamic sources like to describe countries. Syria, for example, is a land of might and splendor. Egypt, a land of wealth. Iraq is also a land of wealth and power. And the Seljuks, the land of the Seljuks of Rum, they describe it as a land of mercy. Muslims live in this country in peace, no doubt, but so do Christians. A considerable number of churches are being built. In fact, many of the churches in Cappadocia are relics of the Seljuk era. We have a very valuable professor named Tolga Uyar. He is in France, for example. He studied 13th century Cappadocian monasteries. If the churches of the Seljuk country were studied, it would attract a lot of attention. The sources tell us very interesting things. They tell us that the Assyrian patriarch of Malatya welcomed the Seljuk sultan with great tolerance, that when the Sultan approached Malatya, the Patriarch came out with his entourage carrying crusader banners, and that some of the ulema were even disturbed by this. But the Sultan was silent, because the Patriarch prayed during the Sultan's struggles against Byzantium. They have a different consciousness brought about by sharing the same geography, a common geography. The Seljuks continued their presence in this geography until 1308. In the century when the Seljuks disintegrated, many local states emerged in this geography. Most of them were founded by Turkmens. There are about 50 states formed with the support and cooperation of local peoples. Among these, the Ottomans excelled over time and managed to unite the other states under their own structure towards the 16th century. While we bring modern history to our republic, we take Turkish history from the Huns in Asia. In Anatolia, we love the Seljuks and the Ottomans. These two are the continuation of each other, and of course the last one is the

Republic of Turkey Türkiye. We remember the others as naughty brothers. But in fact, the settlement of Turkmens in those regions is very important in terms of relations with the peoples of that region. They mint money, their rulers have khutbas read in their name. They have many relations. They sign agreements with neighboring states. Therefore, it is possible to see them as a state. For example, the Mengüceklis, one of the smallest of these states, created magnificent things in Divriği.



**The Divriği Great Mosque and Healing Center is almost unique.** This creative power of the Seljuk era is very interesting to me. Neither the Seljuks nor the older peoples of this geography have this unimaginably beautiful structure of the Mengüceklis. The Armenians, the Georgians, the Byzantines. Neither in Iran, where they come from, nor in the Caucasus. There is a great group of artists and a leader who believes in them. It is not easy to order something that does not exist anywhere. They bring tombs called kumbets to Anatolia. These are very interesting tombs from the interior of Asia, mixed with Islam and reminiscent of pre-Islamic Turkish traditions. They are mummified and buried. They are both Muslims and mummies. In other words, one of the few great mummy traditions in the world is kept alive in this geography. A Muslim is buried in the ground and is expected to mix with the soil immediately, but the Seljuks did not wait. They embalmed their elders and wanted them to stay in places called funerary or mummies under the tombs. Anatolian embalming is very interesting in this sense. Madrasahs are being built. Seljuks are building magnificent mosques, but frankly, if you want to call them masterpieces, in the Middle Ages they built caravanserais that were almost unique. It is very attractive to the secular people of the modern world. Their tiles are also magnificent. They have their own unique tile tradition. They bring a lot from Asia,



Iran and Iraq. The Seljuks of Syria are very influential. Many Syrian artists work in the Anatolian Seljuk geography.

In the modern era, Syrians came to this geography once again. Some people say all kinds of things as if they are very distant people. However, as I said earlier, it is the fate of this geography, people come from everywhere. Today, we have guests from the north of Africa, from the interior of Asia, from everywhere. Who knows what Ibnul Arabis and Mevlana's are among them. I hope we learn to treat our refugees well. Because these sufferings and hardships sometimes help the human species to create extraordinary things. If we understand the Seljuks, I think it can help us a lot to understand today.

We have many sources, beautiful theses have been done. Everyone can download and look at them from [gok.gov.tr](http://gok.gov.tr). I also recommend it to our friends.