



# Caravansaries of Iran: Antiquated Inns At The Ancient Silk Road or-

*Dr. Hossein Manoochehri*

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Caravansaries in Iran were built mainly during 17th and 18th century in many places inside as well as outside of major cities of Iran. Some have linked the idea of building resting places for the caravans to the pre-Islamic (pre-A.D. 7th century) chapaar khaanehs ( --resting places for the carriers of Kings' messages among different satraps ( --administrative represent of the Kings) in the Persian Empire. After the conquest of the Persian Empire by Moslems in the A.D. 7th century, however, the administration was replaced by the Caliphite dynasty. Merchants and pilgrims from all parts of the Moslem empire ( --from China to Syria) were traveling by means of camels via caravans were traveling in the empire. While the caravans could stop and rest in major cities, but a stop in the deserts or the roads between cities were not easily possible. In the 17th and 18th century, therefore, Shah Abbass Safavi ordered the construction of 1000 caravansaries in Iran. While the ancient Silk Road from China to Syria were the main location to build caravansaries, they also were built in other cities and towns. Inside a city, a caravansary was functioning as a place to load and upload goods that the caravans were carrying in their path from China to Syria and from Syria to China. By the invention of cars, trains, and airplane, the ancient caravans were cancelled and the caravansaries in the Silk Road as well as in other parts of the country were abandoned. Today, the caravansaries are just historic sites and visited by different tourists as they represent the style and the plan of different indigenous architects of Iran. Since the plans of caravansaries were mainly in the mind of the indigenous builders at the time of construction (17th and 18th centuries), who had zero or little reading and writing ability, it is stated by a lecturer in the architecture department , that no two caravansaries look similar. From this point of view, the architecture of caravansaries is regarded as one of the best samples of the indigenous (or the clay) architecture of Iran that is rooted from the talents and tastes of the Iranian builders. Lasting for more than 3 centuries, by such traditional materials as clay, sun-baked or half-baked bricks, some of the caravansaries of Iran should be considered as masterpieces of the clay or traditional architecture in Iran. For the first time, the introduction of Iranian caravansaries are made in the English language after many years of data collections in the trips by authors to different historic cities of Iran. In order to impart to readers that the caravansaries were functioning as inns at the time when modern features such as cars, trains, and airplanes did not exist, the expression Ancient Silk Road was included in the title of the work, but the samples collected in the present work include many caravansaries at or outside of the ancient silk road.

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