

TOLERANCE AND PEACE IN THE SILK ROAD: AN ASIAN PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Silk Road was a bridge of the cultural chance between Asia and Europe, There are beliefs, cultures, fashion and music been transported between the East and West. At the same time the silk roads are the Roads of faith through the discovery of a common heritage and shared values. Buddhism and Islam are the most significant religion along the Silk Road. Silk roads, historically and contemporary are the roads of religious pluralism and dialogue. Religious pluralism, dialogue and tolerance are one of the basic foundations of a civil society in the World. Religious pluralism establishes the possibility of tolerance and co-existence of followers of different religions and cultures. It may be correct to suggest that Muslims are at the side of dialogue. They certainly know that the only alternative available to mankind is dialogue in a framework of contact, communication and the free exchange of ideas. Islam does not look for the heart or the private behavior of any person: the prophet of Islam even recommended that individuals who deviate from religious norms-even when they commit adultery-should keep their sins to themselves and ask God for forgiveness. The most significant religion along the Silk Road is Islam. Islam has a dialogue and tolerance. As a matter of fact, historically and contemporary, Muslims Turkish people who have been living on the Silk Roads adopt dialogue and tolerance. According to Islam cultural diversity is a necessary part of human life.

Keywords: Silk Road, tolerance, pluralism, multi culturalism

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According to datum of UNESCO, history is not only a major drama, but also a key instrument for understanding, examining and promoting the interactions between peoples and cultures. Through the preparation of regional and general histories and through the launching of major projects of intercultural dialogue -the Silk Roads, the Routes of al-Andalus, The Slave Route, the Routes of Faith -UNESCO has highlighted the historical and contemporary processes that promote a positive understanding between cultures, through the discovery of a common heritage and shared values. Understanding of Silk Road may helped to increase to collective memory, which can fuel prejudice and incomprehension just as they can contribute to renewal of the dialogue among civilizations, cultures, religions and spiritual traditions.¹

Although Silk Road originated in a specific period of Eurasian history, it developed into a great source of contact between peoples of the East and those of the West. There were many ups and downs in this process of contact; many a time the roads were closed, or political and other hindrances stood in the way of communication, resulting in changes in the roads. Yet human desire for communication and contact continued to dominate men’s minds as they discovered different regions. Whatever was the channel of communication, the spirit of Silk Road never died.²

The Silk Road includes several routes of integration, exchange and dialogue between East and West that have contributed greatly to the common prosperity of various civilizations over more than two millennia. Thus the Silk Roads that criss-crossed Asia and the Middle East served not only as routes for the exchange of precious goods, but, and more importantly, as the meeting point of different cultures and a means of spreading knowledge, philosophy, art and religion. Silk roads are roads of commerce, certainly, but also roads of dialogue between the West and the East. Their location across so many countries with different legal and administrative systems, however, make it very difficult to ensure their conservation for future generations.³

As a sample of Silk Road’s Turkish culture Koroglu story is very interesting. Koroglu legend has been told for centuries among Turks of the Soviet Union. Absence of any early

1 Brian Hilton. *The Global Silk Road: Globalization, Islam and the Creation and Distribution of Knowledge Using the Internet* (Victoria, Canada: Trafford Publishing, 2006), 227-232.
2 Ahmad Hasan Dani, “Significance of Silk Road to Human Civilization: Its Cultural Dimension”, *The Significance of the Silk Roads in the History of Human Civilizations*, eds. Tadao Umesao and T. Sugimura (Japan, Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 1992), 21-26, 21.
3 UNESCO. *Silk Roads: A Dialogue Renewed* (Unesco Sources, 1990).

copies of these versions of the Koroglu legends and existence of more vivid and strongly defined Indian versions suggests that they originated in India and were adopted by Turks; it is an interesting example of cultural exchange among nations using Silk Road. In this respect Koroglu legend deserves inclusion in UNESCO’s Silk Road project.⁴

The silk road was not only the canal for the merchandise, but it was essentially a network of economic, politic and cultural roads between East and West. Silk Road was a bridge of the cultural chance between Asia and Europe, There are forms, styles, fashion and music been transported between the East and West. These are whale of networks carried more than just merchandise and precious commodities: the constant movement and mixing of populations also brought about the transmission of knowledge, ideas, cultures and beliefs, which had a profound impact on the history and civilizations of the Eurasian peoples.

I. THE SILK ROAD AND MUSLIM TURKS

Buddhism and Islam are the significant religion in China and the length of the Silk Road. Other religions such as Christianity and Manichean don’t have as much persuades as Buddhism and Islam. Partly, due to the lack of artifacts of Christianity, it is difficult for archeologists to trace related works of Christianity along the Silk Road.

In Central Asia, Islam expanded from the 7th century onward, bringing a stop to Chinese westward expansion at the Battle of Talas in 751. Further spreading out of the Muslim Turks in Central Asia from the 10th century finished quashing trade in that part of the world, and Buddhism almost vanished. There are three major factors which caused the Islamization of the Central Asia. The places include Tajik, Uygur, and many other parts of the Silk Road. The three factors are discussed by Foltz, the author of Religions of the Silk Road. The first factor has to do with politics.

One of the most frequently cited an encouraging to religio-cultural transformation is the pursuit of patronage. Anyone directly dependent on the government for his livelihood might sense advantages in joining the cultural group of his patrons and accepting the norms and values of that ruling group.

The second factor is of economic reason. To make easy of the business relations between

4 Nejat Diyarbekirli. “Turkish Contributions to Cultural and Commercial Life” in *The Significance of the Silk Roads*, op. cit., 181.

local Muslims businessman and foreign traders, many foreigners had become Muslim. This way also would offer more favorable conditions to the traders by the Muslim officials. The third factor is assimilation. The children and future generations of a Muslim will also be nurtured with the same principles of Islam. Also, in a mixed marriage, the Islamic law requires that the children to be raised as Muslims.⁵

As soon as Islam had defeated the Sasanian Empire and was starting to move into the East Iranian lands beyond the Oxus, it encountered strongly entrenched Buddhist communities. The next ten centuries was to take Islam from those Iranian lands, progressively through the trading cities of the Silk Route like Kashgar, until it lost its momentum amidst the Chinese milieu. During this time the religious map of Asia was one whereby Buddhism was gradually giving way, with some temporary reversals under the Mongols, to Islam. Such an encounter for Islam was a striking one in many senses. Most obviously was the fact that in encountering Buddhism, Islam was moving out of the bounds of the traditional Islam religious universe. The Qur'an, bedrock of Islam, showed awareness and some knowledge of Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism, but nothing further east. Thus, although there was Qur'anic authority for treating Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism in a certain way as "People of the Book"⁶

There is substantial sign about the historic importance of Sufi orders in the increase of Islam along the Silk Road all the way into Xinjiang and also into Northern India. It will be discover notable examples in the *Tarikh-i Rashidi* a sixteenth-century history by Mirza Muhammad Haidar, who was born in Tashkent and whose family came from the Mongol Dughlat tribe that ruled in the northwestern part of the Tarim Basin. Mirza Muhammad's reason was to make available a history of his ancestors and related contemporaries, the Chagatayid descendants of Chingis Khan. Transubstantiation to Islam and interaction with Sufi religious orders was an important part of that history. The legacy of the Chagatayids was unspecified by Tamerlane and his successors, and then, in the sixteenth century, by the Mughals, whose empire was founded by Mirza Muhammad's contemporary Babur.

There are several important Sufi "orders" each of which traces its lineage back to a particular founding teacher. In the fourteenth century, the Yasawiyya (founded by Ahmad Yasawi in the 12th century) was the most important Sufi order in much of the Timurid realm; thus Tamerlane ordered built in the 1380s the imposing mausoleum complex at Ahmad

Yasawi's grave in Yas. It is now a Turkestan city, in Southern Kazakhstan. Yasawi's shrine attracts many worshippers today and is a kind of Central Asian "Mecca".⁷ The Sufis have a sui generis religious understanding of Islam. It has a way of religious tolerance. Especially Turkish Sufi Yasawi's method has a very richness religious dialogue and tolerance.

In Central Asia, Muslim Turkish states that held control of Silk Road from the time of the Huns until the seventeenth century include Avars, Gokturks, Uighurs, Karakhans, Harezmshahs, Gaznavids, Timurids, Baburs and Seljuks, all of whom took responsibility for security of the caravans, imposing severe penalties for robbery, and even waging war if necessary. Contribution of Turks to trade along Silk Road may be classified under six main headings:

- Providing security.
- Providing a system of justice.
- Providing accommodation and other needs at caravansaries –Silk Road motels.
- Establishing markets –both open air and covered- for exchange of goods along Silk Road, and creation of Ahi mystic guild organizations.
- Minting Turkish coins for use as a common vehicle of exchange on the roads, which facilitated both trade and the accumulation of wealth.
- Cultural contribution.

The first five of these elements were vital prerequisites without which international trade along Silk Road would not have survived long. The sixth element, culture, was the natural outcome of trade-motivated contacts between peoples.⁸

There is very important role played by Turks was the administration of justice. Trade has always been susceptible to dispute: over payments, quality and quantity of goods, as well as orders and deliveries. A reliable system of justice for arbitrating in such disagreements was essential for expansion of trade along Silk Road. Merchants and transporters were secure in knowledge that commercial conflict would be solved justly, saving them from losses.

Various Turkish states maintained courts of law, presided over by kadis, or judges, responsible for reaching fair decisions in disputes between individuals, without discriminating on grounds of race, religion, sect or language. Kadis with command of several languages,

5 Richard C. Foltz. *Religions of the Silk Road: Overland Trade and Cultural Exchange from Antiquity to the Fifteenth Century* (Palgrave: Macmillan, 2000), 89-110.

6 David Scott, "Buddhism and Islam: Past to Present Encounters and Interfaith Lessons", *Numen*, 42 (1995), 142.

7 Kocumkulkizi, Elmira-Waugh, Daniel, "Religion", <http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/culture/religion/religion.html> (Accessed February 25, 2007).

8 Ibid, 174.

were appointed to courts in major commercial centers, and were assisted by interpreters from Turkistan, China and Europe.

Written records of court proceedings, known as Sheri’yye Sicilleri or Shari’a court records throughout the Turkish and Islamic worlds were kept in these court buildings. Seriyye records, still preserved in Turkey throw valuable light on research into Silk Road, revealing significant clues as to its functions, disputes that arose, how these were resolved and court procedures. We are convinced that, in this respect, Ottoman archives can make vital contributions to our knowledge of Silk Road, within the scope of the project initiated by UNESCO.⁹

II. SILK ROADS: ROADS OF PEACE AND TOLERANCE

Come, my friends
Dance and sing to our hearts content
Let our spirit once again enrich the land
May our friendship last forever?
May we build a new silk road with?
Our common efforts¹⁰

UNESCO’s Integral Study of the Silk Roads: Roads of Dialogue aims not only to tell the full story of these magical routes through the first systematic, interdisciplinary examination of them, but also to make the people aware of the need to renew the dialogue and understanding between the world’s different cultures. Help revitalize the dialogue.

The Silk Road from Khotan, Yarkand, Kashgar through Fergana, Samarkand, Bukhara and Mary and across the Caspian to the markets of Western world, or downward through Balkh, Hamadan, Mosul and Damascus to Aleppo and coastal towns of the Mediterranean world, or from China across the Great Wall of Mongolia and westward through Kazakhstan to the Caucasus and over to the Transcaspian countries and onward to Istanbul and Venice- all these overland routes kept up the spirit of the eternal Silk Road to promote continuity of dialogues between the peoples of East and West. It is this mutual contact and cooperation that facilitated peaceful growth of a civilization of humanity in which all peoples of the world-

9 Ibid, 175.
10 UNESCO 1998.

urban and rural, nomad and settled, lettered an unlettered, white, black or brown- joined hands to contribute to, and share in, the fruits that humans produce.

Silk Road has generated a spirit of closest collaboration between men and women of different climes, between strangers, friends and enemies, in times of peace as well as war, so that humanity survives and attains greater heights in the progress of the final goal of Man, which we term as human civilization. The step-by-step advance is reflected in the different cultural creations. A summation of all these little achievements is what makes up civilization of mankind.¹¹

III. DIALOGUE, TOLERANCE AND THE ASIAN MUSLIM TURKS

Come; come no matter what you are,
A polytheist, fire-worshipper or idolater,
Our dervish convent is not the assembly of hopelessness
Come, even though you have broken
Your repentance a hundred times (Mawlana)

Come; let us all be friends for once
Let us make life easy on us
Let us be lovers and loved ones
The earth shall be left to no one (Yunus Emre)

In 2007, UNESCO declared that is the Year of Mawlana Rumi and 1991 is the year of Yunus Emre. Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi (d. 672/1273), and Yunus Emre (d. 721/1321) are symbol figures for worldwide love, tolerance and dialogue.

As a thinker Mawlana Jalal-ud-Din Rumi stays one of the greatest thinkers and scholars of Islamic civilization. He described humanity as an entire: “*I do not distinguish between the relative and the stranger*” Rumi, whose nature was intoxicated by the cup of love, embraced all of nature with a projection of that love. He was comprised in a dialogue with every creature, and all of these were a result of nothing but his deep love of God and his relationship with the Beloved.

11 Dani, op. cit., 26.

Great Turkish mystical poet Yunus Emre was stuffed with an awakening of the loving existence of God in the midst of creation. He sang of the common brotherhood of all human beings and of the power of love to transform human life into a psalm of praise to God. Yunus says:

With the mountains and rocks/I call you out, my God
 With the birds as day breaks/I call you out, my God
 With Jesus is the sky/Moses on Mount Sinai
 Raising my sceptre high/I call you out, my God.
 And he says: “We love the created For the Creator’s sake”.

Mawlana and Yunus are symbol of Islamic dialogue and tolerance. Tolerance, however, has a particularly limited signification. It connotes a refraining from prohibition and persecution. Nevertheless it suggests a latent disapproval and it usually refers to a condition in which the freedom, which it permits, is both limited and conditional. Tolerance is not equivalent to religious liberty, and it falls far short of religious equality. It assumes the existence of an authority which might have been coercive, but which, for reasons of its own, is not pushed to extremes.¹²

Tolerance is the attitude of mind which enables one to tolerate the existence of principles and practices of others despite desire or even dislike. These principles and practices might occur among individuals or institutions of which the ideas, ideals, habits and hobbies are different than one’s own. It does not imply genuine sympathy for what is tolerated; in fact it implies, indirectly, the absence of such sympathy.¹³

We can speak about tolerance for the things we do not like. Otherwise, it will not be tolerance. The motivation to behave in this way may be explained for our wish not to be aggressors or disturbers of peace; and secondly because we do not wish to impose our ideas upon others and thereby to evoke a hostile criticism against them; and finally, because we want to prove by giving a fair deal to all other religions that our religion is a perfect one and will be preferred to others through a peaceful presentation in a proper form. In order to put its preference over all other cultures and religions, it has to make a direct appeal to the heart and where it ought to be no resort or even reference to intimidation or force. It seems to appear a

different situation if we consider the issue of “tolerance” in Turkish Islamic culture.¹⁴ The term is always used in the reciprocal form.

On the other hand, most of religions set a limit to tolerance in some areas. For example Islam as a law tries to protect social order.¹⁵ Thus it orders to participate the good acts and to forbid evil. Indeed, no religion can be conceived as to be fully “tolerant”, as well as any legal system. During the present age lobbies and campaigns, Islam would not allow campaigning for the decriminalization of drugs or for the practices that will undermine the family system at the end: those who seek to spread scandals among the believers will have a grievous penalty in this life and the life hereafter.¹⁶ We recognize that Islam is a tolerance religion. It is very meaningful because of the many contemporary people and governments on the Silk roads are Muslims.

On the one hand, some can talk about the extremism in the course of the Islamic history. Perhaps the persons who believed in a system firmly, especially in those based on religious conviction, are in a way supremacist: believers are considered as having special rituals distinguishing them from adherents of other faiths. But the supremacist creed of the puritan groups is distinctive and uniquely dangerous. The supremacist thinking of Muslim puritans has a powerful nationalist component, which is strongly oriented towards cultural and political dominance. These groups are not satisfied with living according to their own dictates, but are disappointed with all other alternative ways of life. They do not merely seek self-empowerment, but aggressively seek to dominate, and/or destroy others. The crux of the matter is that all lives experienced out of the frame of the law are conceived an offense against God which must be actively resisted to and fought for.¹⁷

On the other hand, the existence of Islamic fanaticism is interesting. Most religious systems have suffered at one time or another from absolutist extremism, and Islam suffered from this too. Such as, religious extremists, historically known as the Khawarij slaughtered a large number of Muslims and non-Muslims, and were even responsible for the assassination of the Prophet’s cousin and companion, the Caliph Ali b. Abi Talib within the first century of Islam. The descendants of the Khawarij survive today in Oman and Algeria, but after

14 Wendy A. Brusse-J. Schoonenboom. “The European Union, Religion and Turkish Islam, *Turkey and the EU Enlargement*, ed. R. T. Grefiths, D. Ozdemir (Istanbul: Bilgi Universitesi, 2004), 79-83.

15 Ahmad Mubaraq. “There Shall Be No Coercion in Religion”, *Religious Traditions and Limits of Tolerance*, ed. M. MCTighe (Pennsylvania: Anima Books, 1988), 83.

16 M. Abdel Haleem. “Tolerance in Islam”, *Islamic Quarterly*, XLII: 2 (1998), 96-97.

17 Khaled Abou el-Fadl, “The Place of Tolerance in Islam”, *Boston Review*, (Boston, 2001)

12 A. Lalande. *Vocabulaire Technique et Critique de la Philosophie* (Paris: Presses Uni. de Frances, 1980), 1113.

13 A. Temimi. “Tolerance Islamique et Tolerance Chretienne: Est-ce Une Equation Impossible”, *Etudes sur les Relations Islamo-Chretiennes*, (Zaghuan, 1996), 9.

centuries of bloodshed, they became moderates. Similarly, the Qaramites and Assassins, for whom terror became a purpose for life, earned unadulterated notoriety in the writings of Muslim historians, theologians, and jurists. Again, after centuries of bloodshed, these two groups learned moderation, and they continue to exist in small numbers in North Africa and Iraq. The essential lesson of Islamic history may be expressed in the form that extremist groups have been discarded out of the mainstream of Islam; they have been marginalized, and eventually processed as heretical heresies to the Islamic message.¹⁸

Thus, the terrorist attacks occurred in the world focused a public attention on the Muslim theology. They know that Islam is the name given to the religion in the Qur'an by God himself, means "devotion to God". God, in Islam is not the Lord of the Muslims but the Lord of all human beings and all the worlds (*Rabb al-'âlamîn*), Who states in the Qur'an, "We have honored the Children of Adam" (Q. XVII: 70) all the Children of Adam are "chosen by God" to be honored.

God addresses Muslims and the followers of other religion to "We have ordained a law and assigned a path to each of you. Had God pleased, he could have made you one nation, but it is his wish to prove you by that which he has bestowed upon you. Vie, then with each other in good works, for to God you shall all be returned, and He shall declare to you what you have disagreed about" (V: 48)

This command for leaving differences aside in order to be settled down on the Day of Judgment is repeated many times in the Qur'an. Even in their relations with polytheists, who stand as the extreme opposite of the fundamental Islamic belief of monotheism, the Muslims are instructed in the Qur'an: "God does not forbid you, to be kind and equitable to those who do not fight you for (your) faith, nor drive you out of your homes: God loves those who are just" (60: 8). Also God said: "O mankind! We created you from a single pair of a male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other. Verily the most honored of you in the sight of God is the most Righteous of you, made God has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)" (XLIX: 13).

The variety of colors, tongues, and races is declared in the Qur'an as to be a sign of God's power and mercy (XXX: 22; also 49 and 13), which should lead to closeness, rather than to discrimination or intolerance. These two verses are supplementary to each other. They try to express that where God is recognized as majesty and major dominion, then there should be no compulsion in religion. Men choose their own paths -allegiance or opposition- and being

away from the light of truth are a sufficient punishment for those who oppose (Q. II: 225-256). These instructions are repeated many times in the Qur'an and are part of the whole fabric of the message of Islam. On this basis, tolerance has been a natural and inseparable part of Islam from its beginning on. It did not tolerate non-Muslims grudgingly, but welcomed them to live freely in Muslim society. At the height of its success, the Qur'an sets the principle, *la ikraha fi al-dîn* "There is no compulsion in religion" (II: 256). So, the decision to be a believer on Islam is a completely personal choice.

Islam tolerates and acknowledges the liberty of other religions; it decrees to respect the beliefs and all the rights of members of those religions and gives assurances to treat them justly.¹⁹ The principle of secularism appeared in Europe in the 17th century and the liberty of conscience and faith, which resulted from that principle, had, certainly, been able to find its very effective application in the Islam for a very long time.

Muslims who obey to the decrees mentioned above did not adopt malicious treatment towards those from the other religions in the course of the history. In the conquered lands, both Christian and Jews easily went to their temples and accomplished their worship. As Arnold said "The tolerance of Muslims showed after they defeated the Christians in the first century" is an example worthy of mention.²⁰ We can also cite the meaning of a hadith on this issue: "Anyone who hurts a Christian and a Jew should find me opposing him".

We would like to go on with the historical facts that in Spain under the Umayyads and in Baghdad under the Abbasid governments, Christians and Jews were admitted to the Schools and universities like the Muslims-not only that, but were boarded and lodged in hostels at the cost of the state. When the Moors were driven out of Spain, the Christian conquerors held a terrific persecution of the Jews. Those who were fortunate enough to survive fled either to Morocco or to the Ottoman Empire, where their descendants still live in separate communities, and still speak among themselves an antiquated form of Spanish (Judeo-Spanish). The Muslim empire was a refuge for all those who fled from persecution by the Inquisition.

The principles of Islam on "justice" deserve a sophisticated level of attention. Since Prophet Mohammed and the four caliphs, are on one hand, the "executive" heads of the state, and, from the other hand, are subjected to the laws of the country like any ordinary citizen. The tradition, which was established by Mohammed himself, grants the head of Islamic state is not "supra-law", and we can detect in history some instances for this very fact. For instance,

¹⁹ Mehmet Aydın. "Türk Toplumunda Dini Hoşgörünün Temelleri", *SUIFD* (Konya, 1998), VIII, 7.

²⁰ T. W. Arnold. *The Preaching of Islam* (London: Constable and Co. Ltd Arnold, 1986), 48.

¹⁸ Ibid, 48.

the first caliph Abu Bakr has been invited to the presence of the Law court by the most humble subjects or even by a non-Muslim.²¹

Islamic tolerance allows non-Muslims to live according to their customs, even if these are forbidden by Islamic creed. Thus, Christians are allowed to breed pigs, eat pork, make and drink alcohol in Muslim countries even though such things are forbidden in Islam. In fact, it would not be asking Christians too much to refrain from such practices to respect Islamic society, especially as they are not obligatory for Christians. Moreover, the Ottoman judges judged non-Muslims according to their own religious laws, which are all incorporated as part of Ottoman law.²²

The multiplicity of socio-cultural groups within the territories of Muslim state is in fact a counterpart of the ontologically defined political power structure, which assumes a horizontal segmentation of governed people according to their ontological approaches. I Islamic state may be considered as a confederation of several socio-cultural groups under the benefaction of the political center where power is determined. The privilege of becoming a protected minority via an act of dhimmiship was only given to the followers of a prophet to whom a holy book was revealed. Therefore these communities have been called as *ahl al-kitab*. This demonstration and the rights of these communities have been specified by Qur'an.

One of the basic elements of Islamic civilization during the middle Ages was its liberal and tolerant attitude towards members of other religions. The subject peoples were treated as *ahl al dhimmah*. They enjoyed freedom of faith and protection of the Muslim in return for the payment of a very moderate tax called *jizyah* (poll-tax). At the early centuries of Islam this has been applied only to people of the revealed religions, as the Jews, Christian and Sabians, but was later extended to include the fire-worshipping Zoroastrians, the heathens of Harran, pagan Berbers of North Africa and followers of other creeds. Hindus also were included among the *dhimmis*.²³

Some people in the West quote, as an example of Muslim intolerance, the fact that in the past they called Jewish and Christians *dhimmis* (distorting the meaning of the term which means “those who enjoy protection”) and the fact that Muslims collected *jizyah* tribute. Even in levying the poll tax the Muslims fully exhibited their humane and tolerant attitude towards the non-Muslims because of the fact that it was payable only by such of them as were capable

of military service at the moderate rate of one to four dinars per year. It varies sometimes according to the size of their income, and that it was not levied upon females, children, monks, the old, the crippled, blind and also not on paupers and slaves. In return, the Muslim state assumed full responsibility for the protection of their lives and properties and also gave them full religious and cultural freedom. They were also excused from military service, and were exempted from the poor-tax payable by the Muslims for community charity.²⁴

The *jizyah* sometimes was one dinar a year for every able-bodied male who could fight in the army except monks. As non-Muslim they were not obliged to fight for the Muslim armies, but the *jizyah* was their contribution to the defense of the state they lived in. This is comparable with the much higher *zakah* tax obligatory to Muslims as a pillar of Islam, male or female, young or old, part of which is spent on defense. Muslims, moreover, had the obligation to serve in the army. When non-Muslims chose to serve in the Muslim army they were exempted from the *jizyah*.²⁵

Qur'an, hadiths and the historical practices require the non-Muslims to have their own law, to be sentenced by their own judges in their own courts without the interference of Muslim authorities, either in religious or social cases.²⁶ Indeed in the period of time of Mehmet the Conqueror, it had been allowed to establish a court in the structure of the Fener Rum Orthodox Patriarchate, and the Ottoman government considered itself obliged to fulfill the sentences of that court.²⁷

The Bishop of Mikou, Jean (464-575-6) has also confirmed the Muslim's tolerance against the members of other religions during the reign of Omar. He witnessed the conquest of Egypt. He said that: “Amr b. al-As did not take anything out from the churches and did not plunder and not seize the properties of the churches. And the Muslim state did not interfere in the business of the Christians.”²⁸ After conquering Jerusalem, Caliph Omer wrote a “proclamation of warrant” to declare rights and justice to its people, as follows:

1-Their churches are not to be replaced into residence; their homes and buildings are not to be destroyed because of their faith.

2-Christians are not to be oppressed because of their faith.

24 Will Durant. *The Story of Civilization* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1954), I: IV, 218.

25 Gunay, op. cit., 11.

26 Hamidullah, op. cit., 45.

27 Nejat Goyunc, “Türk Toplumunda Hosgoru”, *Akademik Araştırmalar Dergisi*, Vol. 5 (2000), 165.

28 Mustafa Fayda, *Hiz. Omer Zamanında Gayr-i Muslimler* (İstanbul: M.Ü. İlahiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, 1989), 171.

21 M. Hamidullah. *Introduction to Islam* (Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, 1961), 83.

22 Unver Gunay. “Tendance de Tolerance Religieuse Dans la Culture Turque”, *EUIF Dergisi* (Kayseri, 1990), 12-13.

23 P. Hitti. *History of Arabs*, (London: Marble Hill Books, 1937), 139.

3-It is to be permitted to their inhabitancy with Jews.²⁹

The governors after Omar also followed his attitude. When Ottoman sultan Yavuz Selim seized Jerusalem in 1517 he suggested an edict to protect the rights of the non-Muslim inhabitants.³⁰

CONCLUSION

It is possible that modern silk road as a dialogue and tolerance road as defined by UNESCO. The Silk Road was a vital connection between China, Central Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. The “road” itself was a series of intertwined routes passing through some of the world’s most hospitable regions. There are many culture and religions on the Silk Road, one of them is Islam. Trade with the East along Silk Road, main highway linking East and West, across Europe and Asia, ended up entirely in the hands of Islamic and Turkish traders.

The Silk Roads have highlighted the fruitful dialectic and give-and-take in the unending dialogue between civilizations and cultures. They show how the movement of people, and the flow of ideas and values, have served to transform cultures, and even civilizations, whether it be through the spread of Buddhism, Christianity or Islam between East and West, the transfer of technologies or the dissemination of scientific knowledge.

Interfaith dialogue in a must today and the first step in establishing those are forgotten values of the past, ignoring polemical arguments, and giving precedence to common points, which far outnumber polemical ones. Silk Road is very useful occasion for the interfaith and culture dialogue today. In fact Islam is a dialogue and tolerance religion. So, Muslims are supposed to help UNESCO project as: “Silk Road: Dialogue and tolerance road.”

29 Abu Jafar et-Tabari, *Tarikh al-umam wal muluk*, (Beyrouth, 1967), I, 2405; Mawlana Shibli, *Asr-i Saadet* (Istanbul: Eser Neşriyat 1974), 416.

30 Armanian Serkez Karakoc, *Kulliyat-ı Kavanin*, (Ankara: TTK Kutuphanesi), nr. 2599.