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The educational-mystical role of intermediate centers (Ribat) along the Silk Road from China to Iran

El rol educativo-místico de los centros intermedios (Ribats) a lo largo de la Ruta de la Seda de China a Irán

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ABSTRACT

The silk road path to the northern part from China to Europe and from southern paths to lateral paths of Iran-Mesopotamia to Antioch and Mediterranean, had been the place of construction the historical monuments and works such as castles, towers, mills, graves, and intercity Ribats. Sufi Ribats as the mystical orientation and educational centers had a special place in the Silk Road, these intermediate buildings are buildings that functioned militarily in the first centuries of Islam (8th, 9th, and 10th centuries AD), and over time have been used to mean monasteries. The architectural style of the Ribats was similar to that of a military castle, and most of them consisted of a rectangular building with four watchtowers. Examining the Ribats of the Silk Road, it will become clear that the architectural form and plan of the Ribats are very similar to those of religious schools and Caravanserais. The Sufi historians and researchers have recorded many reports over these Ribats, have investigated the introduction, application, and position of Ribats in detail and have left fairly invaluable information to the futures. In this regard, the historical books and Sufi educational books and mystical literature are endowed with reports over intra-city and intercity Ribats built mainly on the way of main paths, particularly the main path of the Silk Road and its lateral ways. In this article, these Ribats have been described in detail as well as their role on the Silk Road.

Keywords: Ribats; Silk Road; history of Iran; Safavid; educational centers.

RESUMEN

El camino de la seda hacia la parte norte de China a Europa y de los caminos del sur a los caminos laterales de Irán-Mesopotamia a Antioquía y el Mediterráneo había sido el lugar de fabricación de los monumentos históricos y obras como moteles, castillos, torres, molinos, tumbas y ribats interurbanos. Los Ribats Sufíes como centros de orientación mística y educación tenían un lugar especial en los territorios de la Ruta de la Seda, estos edificios intermedios son edificios que funcionaron militarmente en los primeros siglos del Islam (siglos VIII, IX y X D.C.), y con el tiempo se han utilizado para significar monasterios y caravasares. El estilo arquitectónico de los Ribats era similar al de un castillo militar, y la mayoría de ellos consistía en un edificio rectangular con cuatro torres de vigilancia. Examinando los Ribats de la Ruta de la Seda, quedará claro que la forma y el plan arquitectónico son muy similares a los de las escuelas religiosas y Caravasares. Los historiadores e investigadores sufíes han registrado muchos informes sobre estos Ribats, han investigado la introducción, aplicación y posición de los Ribats en detalle y han dejado información bastante valiosa para el futuro. En este sentido, los libros históricos y los libros educativos y místicos sufíes están dotados de informes sobre los Ribats intra e interurbanos construidos principalmente en la ruta de los caminos principales, en particular el camino principal de la Ruta de la Seda y sus caminos laterales. En este artículo, estos Ribats han sido descritos en detalle así como su papel en el camino de la Ruta de la Seda.

Palabras clave: Ribats; Ruta de la Seda; historia de Irán; Safavid; centros educativos.

INTRODUCTION

The Silk Road is one of the most reputed roads of the world that started from China and would pass Iran after passing the Central Asian regions and would eventually end up in the Mediterranean Sea. Over the long centuries, China, India, Iran, and Europe channels would be exchanged through this road. Particularly, silk and cinnamon are exported from China, fruits and textiles are exported from Iran, and crystal and glass goods are exported from Europe. Additionally, through this highway, many Asian flowers and plants were recognized by Europeans. Since Iran was on the Silk Road path, Iranian governments on Parthian and later, Sassanian, would acquire their income through the Silk Road. In the Islamic period, however, this very custom of the commercial transaction was flowing, with the difference that considerable evolutions took place at all the cultural, political, economic, and social realms with the emergence of the Islamic religion and its extension among the global nations. The novel architecture was formed through such worshipping places as mosques, monasteries, corners, and Ribats. Hundreds of Sufi Ribats were produced in the Silk Road route. This paper aims at introducing, recognizing these Sufi Ribats in the Silk Road routes.

The importance of the topic and research

It is well known to all that Ribats are of special importance in the architectural history of Iran and the Islamic world. Regarding their educational and mystical functions, since the initial centuries of Islam, these Ribats had numerous impacts on the formation of Sufi educational centers, among whose most important and prevalent ones was their construction in the silk road route that is considered the expensive heritages of the history of architecture regarding their map and architectural functions. The recognition of these Ribats is very valuable and considerable in the Silk Road route.

OBJECTIVES

In the path of the commercial and business routes evolutions, Silk Road in particular, in the geographical region of China to Qafqaz realm, the identification of intercity Ribats is one of the major objectives of this type of researches. Investigating and identifying this invaluable heritage, the historical sequence of Ribats construction and functions can be accessed. Another objective is to describe the philosophy of constructing Ribats in the Islamic period in that width and number that had played a significant role in the social-cultural and educational evolutions of those eras.

Research hypotheses or question

the main hypothesis and question is that, in the great Khurasan and Transoxiana, what is the extent and order of the role of Iranian and other tribes residing in these regions in the route of the historical silk road over the expansion and construction of Ribats, as well as the cultural exchanges and the training of mystical principles and basis, particularly in the initial Islamic centuries and where did the function of these Ribats end up following the political- social evolutions resulted from Mongol attacks. This inquiry aims at finding a proper and scientific response and the identification of these architectural heritages.

METHOD

The research method has taken place as the library and field methods. In terms of collecting resources, in addition to using Nader Karimyan's private large library, the resources of major libraries of Tehran were also used. In the field realm, I have made a scientific journey to Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan on which an important part of the Ribats has been placed on the route of the Silk Road.

RESULTS

No important and deep research has been done over Ribats, save Sufi references and some monographs, such as the history of Ribats and schools. Also, Nader Karimian (2009, pp. 515-550) has published two detailed papers in the set of the papers of the second congress of the history of Iranian architecture and urbanization, encyclopedia of the Islamic world (2014, pp. 427-430) and has reported the function, application, position and history of Ribats during the history of Iran and the history of the Islamic world in details.

Sufi Ribats (educational and serving centers on the route of the Silk Road)

Like the monastery, schools, and areas of religious seminaries, Ribats had been one of the important educational centers of the intellectual- cultural Sufi systems. In the initial Islamic centuries when various groups would go to defend and battle in the Islamic Ribats and borders, its major people were composed of the individuals of the poor, singles, and unemployed people and who were not familiar with Islamic doctrines way it is ought to be. A group of promoters of religious teachings would necessarily recognize this opportunity, would go to Ribats, and would state the religious, humanity, and ethical issues as advice and address to them. Yaqut Hamouvi reported that several scientists and pious people were residing in the Levant for Ribat affairs and battling on the border city of Sourhema (2008, p. 433). In this way, Ribats were somehow converted into cultural focal and would be integrated with Great Jihad.

After the reduction of the attempts and endurance made over Islamic conquerors to some extent and the consolidation of the Muslim positions and reaching ensured borders, additional to maintaining their social centrality, some Ribat focal, made a variation of a notion from the initial meaning of the boundary base, converting into cultural centers, being employed by those with a desire to learn.

It has been stated in the states of Abdullah Mubarak (118-181 A.D.) that he established two Ribats in the city of Marv. One of them was established for people of hadith and the other one was established for people of vote and opinion and taught there himself (Hojviri, 1958, p. 119).

The term Ribat is in the meaning of this same scientific focal when Abu Saeid Kandi dropped the ink out of his sleeve upon collecting and taking notes of hadith in Sufi Ribats. He is ironically stated: cover your sexual organ (Ibn Jawzi, 1940, pp. 318; Zarrinkoob, 1984, p. 161).

Additionally, in the history of Islamic civilization, Gorgy Zeidan also counts the Ribats as one of the centers for education and teaching (Zeidane, 1966, p. 625). In addition to the fact that Sufi people were bound to Islam and Sharia, such books as the power of hearts by Abu Talib Makki, Al Taarof Kalabazi, relieve of religious sciences by Imam Qazali and Avaref al Maaref by Suhrevardi would always be counted as their textbooks on Ribats in terms of education and training. Also, they would often teach in the context of Hadith, interpretation of Quran, and jurisprudence as well.

These cultural activities were more extensive and considerable over Ribats in the Baghdad area. That is because Sufi Ribats would be administered as religious schools with a slight difference as supported by Abbasi caliphs. It was such that the Ribat of Ez al-din Abul Hassan (500 A.D.) would also be called the school of happiness due to abundant academic activity (Ibn Fouti, 1995, p. 89).

also, in the Ribats of Iran, Fars region, in particular, teaching would be attended due to closeness and getting influence from the scientific realm of Baghdad. As Joneid writes, the Shirazi tongue would be taught in some Ribats of Shiraz. It is such that Sheikh Rokn ul din, known as pious and Mulana Saed ul din Kazerouni and Sheikh Naser ul din Abu Ishaq (756 A.D.) Had been teaching in their Ribats and monasteries. In this same book, by Honeid Shirazi, it has been repor-

ted that Sheikh Abdul Salam Kazerouni, would teach in Amini Ribat and Molavi Fakhr ul din Ahmad ul Shashi and Molavi Saeid ul din Maliani and others would teach in Sheikh Kabir Ribat (Junaid Shirazi, 1950).

With this explanation, therefore, like a monastery, Ribat had Sheikh and master and teacher and reciter. Its prevalent sample, as reported by MOQRIZI was Ribat of works in Egypt. MOQRIZI writes in KHETAT: the most reputed Ribat where circles would be established to teach reading, writing, religious problems, and mysticism is Ribat of works, which Taj ul din Muhammad ibn Fakhr ul din Muhammad repaired it and made it prosper. He assigned lessons for Shafeie jurists therein, along with assigning a teacher therein and students would spend times therein (Maghrizi, 2003, p. 296).

it should be added that Ribat was one of the places which the mobile and traveling scientists and students were migrating from a point to another one to acquire the sciences and would survey the various parts of the globe within their scopes and facilities and would tend to Ribats to learn the religious sciences, hadith and Arab literature.

Until the 5 century B.C., the Ribat would also be considered as the deployment place of Qazian and fighters attempting to expand Islam among the non-Muslim wilderness. This place was another of the places gathering knowledge-friendly people (Naji, 1999, p. 351).

Within Transoxiana in the Samanid era, in the Silk Road route, in particular, the number of Ribats was very high when many of them got vacant with Turk wilderness people becoming Muslims and lost its military importance (Samanid, 1998, p. 434) and lost its boom (Suzani, 1959, p. 23). However, in the textbooks following Samanid, the name of several Ribats with the educational application has been brought (Samanid, 1998, p. 616). Any Ribat had a specific tenure that would make a decision over financial issues and the evolutions and transformations of the Ribats (Qazi Khan, 1973, p. 313-315).

Square Ribat was one of the most reputed Ribats with an educational application. The existing addresses display that in this Ribat; too, the scientists were busy teaching and spelling the hadith. Abu Sahl Saeid Ibn Omar Ibn Muhammad Ibn Ibrahim Qaznavi would spell hadith in square Ribat on 429 A.D. when he came to Samarkand (Nasafi, 1999, p. 24).

Eighty years later, Syed Waez Abu Samsam Zulfaqar Ibn Muhammad Ibn Maebad Hassan on 509 B.C. would tell hadith to public and scientists at the same place (p. 158). Also, Sheikh Imam Abul Hassan Ali Ibn Usman Kharrat Samarghandi (died at 510 A.D.) had a spelling session therein (p. 564). Musses Ribat was one of the large Ribats of Samarkand where only one report over holding advice session therein on the first half of the 5th century A.D. is available. According to Nasfi, the father of Abul JASAAN Dizaki Lahazi (died in 448 A.D.) would give advice therein (p. 555). The ILAK Ribat (Zahiri, 1983, p. 16), Khar Tank Ribat in VAZAR village four miles from Samarkand (Samanid, 1998, p. 581), the shrine of Imam Muhammad ibn Esmail Bokhari, owner of Sahih and MAYAN Ribat in Qaverjak, the subordinate of Samarkand (p. 318), were among the other known Ribats of the region.

Some places have also been named as a monastery and had been mentioned along with the name of Sufi. The existence of numerous Sufi tribes in Transoxiana had caused the emergence of many monasteries and Ribats. These centers were active in the fifth and sixth centuries B.D. and would provide Sufi, strangers, and the interested people residing there with religious and Sufi training. One monastery in Samarkand in Gazran River district has been named that was located across from a mosque (Nasafi, 1999, p. 560).

Also, the monastery of Sheikh Josef Hamedan was among the active monasteries of this city when once Sultan Sanjar sent 50000 Dinar to be spent therein. Some resources have written

it in the name of the monastery of Qasem Ibn Jokey (Samarkand, 1955, p. 197-503). In several parts of the book the selection of Ronaqul Majales, the monasteries of Samarkand had been named (Neyshabouri, 2011, p. 55-76) without addressing any specific name. Several monasteries also existed in Bukhara (Qafrani, 2008, p. 198).

Moein al Foqara names a monastery called chain monastery where Khaje Namad Poush spent 10 years therein through eternal fasting. This place had been built by a person called Imam Sharaf ul din Abdul Rahman. Sufi monasteries were other reputed monasteries of Bukhara (Moein, 1960, p. 54-60). Also in Kasan, a monastery is named where Abuhafas Omar Ibn Muhammad Andkani, the jurist and Sufi, would serve jurists therein (Samaani, 1975, p. 532; Yaghoot Hamavi, 1966, p. 262).

A sample of Islamic era buildings on the various regions of the Silk Road route, central Asia, Transoxiana, and Khurasan realms was the monasteries. In the past, these places were constructed to deploy fighters who would come to boundary points for the expansion of Islam and for penetrating the borders of infidels. With Islamic expansion and penetration among the Turks and the wilderness of boundary regions, and the subsequent reduction of Jihad in Samanid time, the Ribats lost their religious necessity and became empty from fighters. As a result of this, these districts gradually became the deployment place of Sufi and Salekan and later, the resting place of commercial conveys and travelers and strangers.

In terms of the replication of the Ribats of this region, according to Narshekhi, in the Bikend district in western Bukhara, there were more than a thousand Ribats (1984, p. 25). Samanid has mentioned the number of Bikend Ribats as three thousand (1988, p. 434). Various resources have written the number of Transoxiana Ribats in the third century up to 10000 as well. After the collapse of Samanid, the old Ribats were used and Kara-Khanid Khanate constructed new Ribats. Some of the old Ribats were the tomb of many subordinates and fighters martyred in the way of holy Jihad and the Muslim people of Transoxiana would go for their pilgrimage.

There were many such places around the Noor city of Bukhara and the people of Bukhara and other nearby cities would go for their pilgrimage (Narakhshi, 1984, p. 17). In the sixth century, A.D. Bikend city was destructed. Many ruins, however, had remained around it of old Ribats. The wildernesses were residing in those places and the surroundings would go for the pilgrimage of those tombs of martyrs that had been buried there since old times (Samanid, 1988, p. 434).

The Khar Tank Ribat was near Wazar village, four miles from Samarkand. Samanid, the possessor of Al Ansab, made a pilgrimage to the tomb of Imam Muhammad Ibn Ismail Bukhari, the famous narrator of the Islamic world, buried there, in sixth-century B.D. (1988, p. 381).

Also, some Ribats constructed near or inside the cities were the accumulation place of Sufi people. It was used by both business people as a place to sell their goods and it was used by passengers and strangers to rest from the journey and the route (Suzani, 1955, p. 23). A Ribat had also been constructed for strangers in Askajkat a subordinate of Bukhara in Arsalan Khan Era, in the early 6th century A.D. beside the grand mosque (Narshakhi, 1984, p. 20). Maban Ribat was constructed in Qorjek village, a subordinate of Samarkand, between two mountains. It was used both as an inn and the accumulation place of Sufi and the homeless people (Samanid, 1988, p. 318).

In the large Ribats of Transoxiana, tenures would be assigned to precede the affairs therein, along with doing repairs. Besides Jeyhoon near Ferabr city on the route from Bukhara to Marv, there was a large Ribat that had a special tenure in the sixth century B. D. There was also a prayer's call that would say the call to prayers on sharia times (Qazi Khan, 1973, p. 315). Also, some four-legged animals would be kept inside the Ribats of this region to be used by those residing

in Ribats that were Sufi and homeless. In the great jurisdiction book of Fatawa by Qazi Khan that had been written in the late 6th-century B.D., many issues and lateral things had been mentioned over these districts, implying their abundance in Transoxiana and the efforts of the people and the rulers of that land in constructing Ribats (1973, p. 313).

Indicative examples of Ribats in Silk Road route

Malek Ribat

It had been built in a dessert near KERIMINE village, along the path from Bukhara to Samarkand, under the command of Shams ul Mulk Nasr ibn Tamqach khan around 1078 and is considered one of the best architectural works of 5th-century B.D. (Qafur, 1998, p. 668). This monument was completed and rebuilt in 549 B.D (Moein, 1960, p. 38). The region this Ribat was placed therein had been named Malek Ribat dessert in the 6th century B.D. the construction of the monument is in square and brick had been used in the internal view of its walls and raw clay had been used in the inner section of the wall (Qafur, 1998, p. 668).

Just like Sharaf Ribat, the building map had two yards. This building had been used for the usage of passengers and a set of low-width and identical sized rooms had surrounded the inner part of its yard. It also has a doomed hall. Therefore, it can rarely be considered for the daily usage of businesspeople. Such things remind the point that these buildings have educational, religious, and non-commercial functions. Helen Brand, however, believes: these buildings can be mentioned as palaces in the desert. They were the palaces that had also been considered stops along the way for commercial conveys and would provide a desirable convenience for the passengers of Samarkand and Bukhara roads (Hillenbrand, 1960, p. 409-411). Kroeber states, on the other hand, this building visually had a palace and had been named under the same title in tablet as well. However, the previously indented view of it is the reminder of the previous palace-like buildings in the same region. Its angular towers and semi-circle bases do not resemble military fortifications and its interior arrangement with the rooms connected to the central yard display that it had been an inn with the established plan (Kerobe, 2001, p. 261).

Its exterior walls might be the most outstanding section of this building that has been magically connected with a series of cylindrical columns bonded on the upper part by arches. Some parts of that have remained so far (Knobloch, 1970, p. 143). According to Keno Balouch, this palace alone is sufficient to show a prominent and large building had been constructed as the boundary palace with plain bricks (Knobloch, 1970, p. 143). This saying of Kenobalouch is not free of fault. That is because this building had not been constructed in the boundary region. Rather, it is located between two great cities of the SOQD region, namely Bukhara and Samarkand, and on the Silk Highway. Ornaments composed of brickwork and plastering had been applied in this building (Hill, 1967, p. 64).

There had been brick minarets that show its religious and Sufi character on the corners of the building. Another important part of this building is its entrance that has various ornaments of various types of brick reliefs, carved pottery, and Persian tablets (Qafur, 1998) written by building the Kofi line (Homayoun, 1971, p. 764). It is said the external ornaments of the gate of this ornament are similar and contemporary to Afrasiab palace decorations. A constrained ornamental tablet implies simple plastering (Knobloch, 1970, p. 143).

Sharaf Ribat

This place is one of several monarchial inns constructed in 1154 and has remained almost safe and healthy. This palace-like building, located on the route from Bukhara to Samarkand on the Silk Road route, is one of the most beautiful brick Ribats of the Seleucid era. It has taken the shape of a great Sufi Ribat. This building that has currently remained in a place away from

the road and abandoned, is a rectangle-shaped palace with an assayed and computed plan. The inside section of it has been divided into two unequal four-porch yards. This Ribat that has with it the accumulation, remembrance, and training place for the Sheikhs and managers is explained by Helen Brand that has been unfamiliar with these applications as such:

The outer yard is usually like an inn. Whereas the inner yard looks like a palace considered for the king and his servants or other official purposes (Hillenbrand, 1998, p. 409-411). There is a dome of the house in between the inner and outer yards that separates them from each other. The internal yard of Ribat has a mosque, stables, and a large, luxurious home with domed halls that were used for listeners and formal meetings.

The outer yard has two mosques and a large reservoir in the basement in front of the main entrance door that would supply the water of Ribat throughout the year. The entrance door with the outer sanctuary would enable the passengers to easily find the direction of the Qibla after the closure of the gates (Kerobe, 2001, p. 102). All the components of the building have been implemented with the highest degree of conventional quality. For this reason, it is proper to consider this building a museum of the ornamental technologies created at that time (Hillenbrand, 1998). The ornaments of the building are fairly rich and the brick, plastering, and portrayal mud have been used in an imaginative string of combinations.

Daye Khatoon Ribat

one of the reputed Ribats on the path of Silk Road is Daye Khatun that has been constructed on the half-way of Bukhara to Hiwe beside Jeyhoon River in the 5th century B.D. the structure of this building had been square and with a four-porch yard surrounded by a firm and brick wall. Behind the four-porch yard, large rooms, reservoirs section with two dome halls, and lighting on the ceiling are observed.

Brick ornaments have granted strength on the middle entrance door and sidewalls. In some parts, it also has damaged plastering and brick arches protrude and two domes on its thick roof have been placed. False arches with tablets of building Kufic lines have forced a diagonal set of bricks towards itself. The other external walls have been covered by simple brick RAJS with upper tape, plastering effects and the unite brick scheme as outstanding (Kerobe, 2001, p. 260-261).

MAHI Ribat

It is one of the ancient Ribats of the southern Silk Road of Iran on the route of Neishabour to Sarakhs. It is located in between Sang Bast Ribat and the Sharaf Ribat on the 75 kilometers to the east of Mashhad, on the northern edge of Kashf Rood. Kiani and Claise have considered it since the primitive Islamic courses and as one of the most ancient Iranian Ribats remained (Kiani, 1994, p. 2). The MAHI Ribat has been registered in 1975 under the number 1223 in the list of the national works of Iran (Pazouki, 2005, p. 154). From the perspective of Pir Nia and Afsar, the creator of the first building of this surrounding has been Abul Hassan Muhammad Ibn Hassan Mah and the Ribat has been called Mahi due to its ascription to him (Pir Nia, 1991, p. 119; Labaf, 2005, p. 13). According to Ibn Huqal, this good willing man had created many Ribats in Khurasan and Transoxiana such as in Ghobadian, Tarmaz, and Choqanian (Abu Hoqal, 1967, p. 454). Regarding the date of the composition of the book Ibn Hoqal, called Mousel Kurd in the second half of the fourth-century B.D., this Abul Hassan can be considered one of the great people or subordinates of Samanid dynasty. According to Andre Godar, it is said that like Sharaf Ribat, this building had also been damaged in the attack by Oghuz Turks and Turkan Khatoon, wife of Sultan Sanjar (ruling 511- 552 B.D.) had reconstructed it in the sixth-century B.D. (Golchin, 2014, p. 443-444).

CONCLUSION

As the educational, training, and scientific centers of Sufi in the initial Islamic centuries, since the second to 7th-century B.D., the Ribats had always been active and boomed in the route of the main highways, including the Silk Road. In Rabats, cultural and educational activities were extensive and significant, as the Sufi rabbis were run by religious schools under the auspices of local governments and rulers, and in the field of education, books such as Qowwat al-Qulub Abutaleb al-Makki, al-Ta'arof Kalabazi and Ehyya Oloum Al-din Mohammad Qazali and Awarif Al-ma'arif Sohrevardi, It was taught. In the Ribat, in addition to teaching and learning, the establishment of a library was also of special importance, and the books were collected, donated, and donated by the founder of Ribat or the people. The replication of the establishment of Ribats all implies the value and importance of the construction and the function of these buildings in the creation of the cultural, moral, and behavioral ties among various Sufi and Mystical tribes and nations. The Silk Road trade caravans sometimes rested and landed in the same Ribats, and this establishment led to cultural exchanges between the Sufis and the merchants of the tribes and nations. Had it not been for the Mongol attacks, followed by the domination of the Safavid dynasty in Iran and other rulers foreign to the culture of Mysticism and Sufism, the function of these Ribats would be maintained and protected from any damage until the late centuries. The architecture of the Ribats, having mosque, Minaret, the ablutions and the place of the corner and the Chelleh Khaneh, and other religious marks and the mystical culture (such as the tablets and sanctuary of the mosque) would distinguish them all from the function of the inns, called Khan in Arabic. Nowadays, on the route of the Silk Road that has remained in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan, relieving and regenerating, again with the same functionality has continued living and will attract the intellectual property tourists more than ever before.

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