

## Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

## Ribât in Transition: Meaning and Function in Islamic History

## Ribât'ın Dönüşümü: İslam Tarihinde Anlamı ve İşlevi

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## Abstract

This article offers a philological and historical analysis of the term *ribât*, examining its semantic trajectory from an early Islamic military outpost to a polyvalent institution encompassing religious, social, and architectural functions. The study seeks to elucidate how a term originally rooted in frontier defense acquired complex connotations across diverse Islamic geographies, particularly within the contexts of Sufi practice, urban infrastructure, and architectural typology. Utilizing a methodology that integrates classical Arabic lexicography, Qur'anic hermeneutics, and historical-geographical accounts, the paper reveals how *ribât* functioned as a semantic and cultural node reflecting the evolving religio-political needs of Muslim societies. The findings underscore the term's transformation through linguistic adaptation, regional reinterpretation, and institutional repurposing, thereby illuminating broader dynamics of conceptual change in Islamic civilization.

**Keywords:** Islamic architecture, lexicology, *ribât*, semantic shift, semantic expansion.

## Öz

Bu makale, *ribât* teriminin anlamsal evrimini filolojik ve tarihsel bir yaklaşımla ele almaktadır. Erken dönem İslam tarihinde sınır karakolu olarak kullanılan bu kavramın, zamanla dinî, sosyal ve mimarî işlevler üstlenen çok işlevli bir kuruma dönüşümünü incelemektedir. Çalışma, başlangıçta askerî savunma bağlamında şekillenen *ribât* teriminin, farklı İslam coğrafyalarında tasavvufî uygulamalar, kentsel altyapılar ve mimarî tipolojilerle nasıl farklı anlamlar kazandığını ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Klasik Arap sözlükçülüğü, Kur'an hermenötiği ve tarihî-coğrafi anlatıları bir araya getirilerek, *ribât*ın Müslüman toplumların değişen dinî-siyasi ihtiyaçlarını yansıtan bir kavramsal ve kültürel odak noktası olarak işlev gördüğü gösterilmektedir. Bulgular, terimin dilsel uyarlama, bölgesel yeniden yorumlama ve kurumsal işlev değişimi yoluyla geçirdiği dönüşümü ortaya koyarak, İslam medeniyetinde kavramsal değişimin daha geniş dinamiklerini aydınlatmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İslam mimarisi, sözcük bilim, *ribât*, anlam değişmesi, anlam genişlemesi

## INTRODUCTION

The term *ribât* has undergone a significant evolution in both meaning and function across different periods and regions within the Islamic world, shaped by complex political, cultural, and religious dynamics (Chabbî, 1995; Khalilieh, 1999). During the early Islamic conquests of the 7th and 8th centuries, *ribâts* were established as military fortifications along frontier zones, particularly in Khurasan, North Africa, and the Byzantine borderlands (Marçais, 1936; Chabbî, 1995). These early *ribâts* primarily served as defensive strongholds, manned by the *murâbiṭūn* (faith-driven volunteer warriors) who played a key role in protecting the expanding caliphate's borders (Khalilieh, 1999).

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Over time, the role of *ribāts* expanded beyond their military origins to include religious, social, and economic functions. In the western Islamic world, especially North Africa and al-Andalus, many *ribāts* largely retained their martial character. In contrast, in Central Asia and Anatolia, *ribāts* increasingly transformed into spiritual retreats, *zāwiyas*, and waystations for Sufi travellers and merchants along major caravan routes (Masarwa, 2006; Akyol, 2024).

Despite a considerable body of research on Islamic military architecture and Sufi institutional history, few studies comprehensively trace the semantic and functional transformation of *ribāts* across diverse regions. Existing literature often focuses on *ribāts* as architectural structures or military sites, frequently overlooking their multifaceted socio-religious dimensions (Marçais, 1936; Chabbī, 1995; Sönmez, 2007; Pradines, 2020).

This study addresses this gap by adopting a multidisciplinary approach that integrates historical, linguistic, and architectural evidence. Combining textual analysis with material culture studies, it reveals how *ribāts* evolved from frontier military outposts into centers of spiritual practice, communal cohesion, and cultural memory. In doing so, it highlights broader socio-political changes underpinning this evolution and offers a more nuanced understanding of Islamic frontier institutions.

## 1. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a philological analysis and historical comparative methods. The philological analysis investigates the origin and semantic diversity of the term *ribāt* in Arabic sources. Concurrently, the historical comparative method is utilized to understand how the concept of *ribāt* evolved across different periods.

### 1.1. Ethical Approval and Procedure

The conceptual framework of this research was prepared, data collection tools were applied, data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted in full compliance with ethical rules. The ANKAD Editorial Board bears no responsibility for any ethical violations that may occur. All responsibility lies with the authors. I hereby declare that this work has not been submitted for evaluation to any academic publication medium other than ANKAD. This work complies with all rules specified in the “Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Guidelines.” None of the actions listed under the heading “Actions Contrary to Scientific Research and Publication Ethics” in the second section of the guidelines has been carried out. Publicly available sources were analyzed in this research. Since the document analysis technique was used in this study, it does not require ethical committee approval.

## 2. THE BASIC MEANING OF RIBAT IN ARABIC DICTIONARIES AND ITS SEMANTIC EXPANSION

The term *ribāt* is derived from the Arabic root “ر ب ط” (right to left: r-b-t), which means “to bind,” “to secure,” or “to be prepared”. In his dictionary *Tehzibu'l-Lughā* (2001: 1964), the 10th-century linguist Ezheri also defined the term *ribāt* as “an area on the frontiers of Islam where Muslim cavalymen tied and gathered their horses”.

According to Ibn Manzur's *Lisan al-Arab* (Vol 12: 1265), *ribāt* is defined as: “Keeping horses in a safe place for jihad in the cause of Allah, and staying at the borders and protecting them from enemies.”

“الرِّبَاطُ: مُرَابَطَةُ الْخَيْلِ لِلْجِهَادِ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَالْإِقَامَةُ فِي الشُّعُورِ وَحِفْظُهَا مِنَ الْأَعْدَاءِ”

This definition reflects the original usage of the term, which generally referred to military outposts responsible for protecting the frontiers of Islamic states.

The term *ribāt* has a complex and contested historiography. The 20th-century lexicographer Dehkhoda (1953, 255-256) stated that the term *ribāt* in Persian was used with the meanings of border outpost, caravanserai, khanqah, house for the poor, guesthouse, fortress, temple, and madrasa, as well as in some other figurative senses.

Marçais (1936, 1150) said that “Different interpretations have been offered for this word and its derivation from the root *rabata* (to tie, bind). The closest of these interpretations to the original meaning is what is found in the Qur'an: ‘And prepare against them whatever strength you can muster and steeds of war.’ (Surat al-Anfal, 8:60) (Diyanet, 2025a). Originally, *ribāt* referred to a place where horsemen would gather, remaining prepared to engage in *jihād* (fighting in the cause of Islam) whenever needed. The word *ribāt* also became associated with communication routes, such as mail and caravan paths, conveying the idea of connection and readiness. Later, the term came to designate a fortified site where Muslim warriors would reside permanently, maintaining their religious duty to defend Muslim lands without needing to engage in constant battle. These sites were called *ribāṭs* (see *Mufradāt* by al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī), meaning ‘stations for the defense of Islam’, emphasizing both the expansion and protection of Islam through the sword and through continuous vigilance.

Its definition has been the subject of sustained scholarly debate. Jacqueline Chabbi (1995, 511), in one of the earliest and most detailed studies on the topic, emphasizes that *ribāt* cannot be understood as referring to a specific architectural type. Rather, it was initially a label applied to various pre-existing structures associated with danger and the need for vigilance: “It seems that what is involved is the simple imposition of a noun, probably denoting the existence of danger and the need to take precautions against it, upon various pre-existing constructions, without any suggestion that there is, at the outset, such a thing as a unique type of edifice which could be called *ribāt*.”

Wheatley (2000, 256) further elaborates on the development of the term, noting that during the Islamic conquests, the root “*r.b.t*” appeared in a variety of derived forms. Initially, *ribāt* functioned primarily as a *masdar* (verbal noun), referring to the practice of tethering or mustering cavalry mounts prior to a *ghazu* (raid). Wheatley points out that it was only later, in the late Umayyad or early ‘Abbasid period, that *ribāt* acquired an architectural meaning. This new usage referred to fortified structures situated in areas of strategic concern, often along frontier regions. These structures ranged from simple observation towers to small forts, substantial fortresses, or, in some cases, caravanserais. Wheatley also observes that *ribāt* became increasingly linked to the ideology of *jihād* and the religious merit of military activity *fi sabil Allah* (in the path of God), particularly along the frontiers of the Islamic world. As he notes, “the *ribāt* on the frontier became a stereotypical idealization of the past in the works of many medieval authors,” and that “uncertainties as to chronology then combined with ambiguities of meaning to confuse the implications of references to *ribāṭat* in numerous parts of the Islamic world”.

Pradines (2020, 512), in a more recent contribution, traces the term’s usage back to the 7th century, situating it within the context of intertribal warfare on the Arabian Peninsula. He highlights that *ribāt* initially did not refer to a specific architectural form but to practices of military organization and defense. Pradines argues that *ribāt* emerged in response to the need to regulate movement and secure territory during the early phases of Islamic state-building. His work underscores the continuity between earlier tribal conflict and the more formalized frontier systems that developed under Islamic rule, which would later influence the broader understanding of *ribāt*.

**Tablo 1:** Related Words and Derivatives (URL-4)

| WORD                         | MEANING   |
|------------------------------|---|
| رَبَطَ (rabṭ)                | tying, binding  |
| رَبِيطَ (rabīṭ)              | tied  |
| رَبِيطَةٌ (rabīṭe)           | the feminine form of Ar. rabīṭ “tied”                   |
| مَرْبُوطَ (marbūṭ)           | tied, bound, devoted                                    |
| مَرْبُوطِيَّةَ (marbūṭiyyet) | the state of being devoted, commitment                  |
| ارْتِبَاتَ (irtibāt)         | affiliation, attachment                                 |
| تَرَاطَبَ (tarāṭub)          | conspire, take mutual obligations                       |
| مُرَابَطَةٌ (murābaṭa)       | garrisoning, guarding                                   |
| مُرَابِطَ (murābiṭ)          | a stationed soldier or someone steadfast in their faith |

### 3. THE USAGE OF RIBĀT IN THE QURAN AND ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY

In the Quran, the term *ribāt* is used particularly in the contexts that express military preparedness and endurance.

\*Surah Al-Anfal (8:60)- Military and defensive preparation

وَأَعِدُّوا لَهُمْ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ مِنْ قُوَّةٍ وَمِنْ رِبَاطِ الْخَيْلِ تُرْهِبُونَ بِهِ عَدُوَّ اللَّهِ وَعَدُوَّكُمْ

“And prepare against them whatever you are able of power and of tethered horses (*ribāt al-khayl*) to strike terror into the enemy of Allah and your enemy.” Diyanet, 2025a)

Semantic Analysis:

The phrase رِبَاطِ الْخَيْلِ (*ribāt al-khayl*) refers to the tying up and readiness of warhorses, symbolizing both physical preparation for battle and mental steadfastness.

The broader meaning of *ribāt* here extends to preparedness, vigilance, and strategic foresight.

This verse suggests that *ribāt* is not just a passive stationing but an active, disciplined state of readiness.

\*Surah Al-Kahf (18:14)- Steadfastness and strength of heart

وَرَبَطْنَا عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ إِذْ قَامُوا فَقَالُوا رَبُّنَا رَبُّ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ “And We bound (*rabatnā*) their hearts when they stood up and said, 'Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth.’” (Diyanet, 2025b)

Semantic Analysis:

The verb رَبَطْنَا (*rabatnā*) here means to strengthen, fortify, or bind firmly.

The binding is not physical but spiritual and emotional, indicating divine reinforcement of faith and resilience.

This demonstrates that *ribāt* is not just external readiness but also internal steadfastness, reinforcing the concept that patience and conviction are as crucial as military preparation.

When examining the use of *ribat* in Hadith literature, it becomes evident that the term's meaning shifts depending on its context. In some Hadiths, *ribat* denotes the vigilance and readiness of border guards against enemy incursions. In others, however, it conveys a broader, more spiritual

dimension—signifying patient perseverance in the path of Allah, ongoing worship, and inner resistance. Yücel (2016) highlights this layered interpretation, noting that *ribat* encompasses not only a military posture but also a state of devout patience and continuous spiritual struggle (pp. 230–231).

Emine Durmuş's thematic analysis (2024) offers a systematic presentation of the textual variations among *ribat*-related Hadiths. By examining the term through both linguistic and thematic lenses, Durmuş underscores the semantic richness of *ribat* and the nuanced shifts in its usage across different narrations. Nonetheless, a more in-depth analysis, particularly one that incorporates the isnad quality of the Hadiths and explores the variants of transmission, remains essential for a fuller understanding.

The Iranian Islamic philosopher and founder of the intellectual movement known as *Ishraqism*, Shahab al-Din Suhrawardi, in his work *Avârifü'l-Ma'ârif*, under the title “The Virtue of Staying in Ribats and Sufi Lodges,” defines *ribât* as follows:

Ribat originally refers to the place where horses are tied for the purpose of jihad. Later, it came to denote any fortress or similar place built to protect its inhabitants from impending dangers. The fighter (mujahid) who stays in these places and watches over the enemy prevents the enemy from advancing towards the people behind and repels them. Similarly, the dervishes who stay in Sufi lodges and obey Allah, through their obedience and prayers, become a means for the removal of calamities and misfortunes that may befall the people and towns. (2010, 130)

#### 4. THE HISTORICAL DEFINITION OF RIBÂT IN WESTERN DICTIONARIES

In early Western lexicons, particularly during the 19th and early 20th centuries, *ribât* was predominantly defined in military terms, reflecting its original Arabic usage. For example, in *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (1869, 1014), Edward William Lane defines *ribât* as “tied, bound, or made fast,” capturing the term's initial associations with binding or securing. Lane also notes the term's later adaptation to denote religious retreats, marking the beginning of a semantic shift. This broader usage signified the term's evolution from its military connotations to encompass places of religious seclusion, particularly in the context of Sufi traditions. Lane further elaborates:

The word رباط (*ribât*) can also refer to a horse or a similar animal. Other words derived from the same root carry related meanings, such as to bind, to fasten, or to secure. However, the meaning of *ribât* is not limited to physical binding; it also has metaphorical applications. For instance, it can denote keeping a group of horses together or maintaining them under regular supervision. Furthermore, رباط (*ribât*) can signify a military outpost or standing guard in a border region. In Islamic history, *ribât* refers to fortified structures established along frontiers for defensive purposes. These structures served both as military garrisons and religious centers. The term also conveys a sense of strong devotion to one's beliefs or community. As it appears in the Qur'an, *ribât* symbolizes patience, perseverance, and steadfastness (Lane, 1869, 1014).

In *Steingass's Persian-English Dictionary* (1884, 397), *ribât* is described as “a boundary stone towards an enemy's country; a troop of armed horses, tied-up horses,” further reinforcing its association with military contexts. Additionally, the plural form “*ribâta*” is defined as “firm building, caravanserai, block-house, garrison town, barracks, hospice of monks.” Steingass also defines it grammatically as “v.n. 3 of ربط,” noting that *ribât* includes meanings such as “equipping a horse for a holy war,” “a troop of horse (five or more) armed for war,” “taking up a station on the confines of an enemy's country,” “a frontier station,” “an inn,” and “a monastery” (1892, 567). These early definitions clearly reflect the term's military function.

By the time of the *Redhouse Turkish/Ottoman-English Dictionary* (1879: 962), compiled by Sir James Redhouse, *ribāt* had expanded in its meaning to reflect a broader range of roles. Redhouse includes 13 distinct meanings for *ribāt*, showing how the term had come to represent not only military stations but also religious and social institutions. These meanings include:

1. A bond, band, tie
2. A surgical bandage
3. A nerve or tendon
4. The heart, mind, or spirit
5. Plural: *rabatat*
6. A convent for dervishes
7. A collage
8. A poor house
9. A military station on a frontier
10. A snare for game
11. A love charm
12. A name of places
13. The stationary point of the apparent course of a planet.

The expanded list of meanings demonstrates how *ribāt* evolved from a term with a primarily military connotation to one with broader, multifunctional applications.

By the mid-20th century, the term *ribāt* had become more firmly associated with both military defense and spiritual retreat. In *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (1976), Hans Wehr defines *ribāt* as a “garrison” or “fort” and as a “Sufi retreat,” marking a clear shift in its dual role as both a defensive and spiritual institution (Wehr, 1976). The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED, 2025) further solidified this dual meaning, defining *ribāt* as “a fortified place for the defense of the frontier in Islam,” while also acknowledging it as “a Sufi retreat or a place for spiritual training”.

Similarly, contemporary digital dictionaries continued to reflect this evolution. The *Collins English Dictionary* defines *ribāt* as “a building housing a community of Sufis” (2025), and *Merriam-Webster* offers a definition as “an Islamic monastery,” both emphasizing the term's shift towards its religious and communal functions (2025).

The term *ribāt* is used in Spanish in the form *rebato*, *rápita* and *rávita*, which indicates “a sudden attack carried out by a body of horsemen accordance to Muslim tactics.”

These dictionary entries illustrate the gradual shift in the conceptualization of *ribāt*.

## 5. RIBĀT IN TURKISH DICTIONARIES

*Diwan Lughat At-Turk*, compiled by Mahmud al-Kashgari in the 11th century, is the earliest known dictionary of Turkic languages. As a linguistic bridge between Turkic and Arabic, it provides Arabic explanations for Turkic terms. However, the term *ribāt* is not explicitly listed, possibly because no direct equivalent existed in Turkic at the time, particularly in relation to Islamic military infrastructure (Ercilasun vd, 2014).

“In the dictionary *Mirḳāt al-Luġa*, compiled in the Anatolian region in the 16th century, the word *ribāt* is defined as meaning “caravanserai” (Hassan, 2017, 148)

In the 2nd volume of *Lehce-i Osmani*, the entry for *ribât* encompasses both its primary and secondary meanings, which are as follows: 'a bond, an arch, an arched building, a fortress, a tekke, an inn, and certain nerves in the body' (1876, 1138). These varied meanings indicate the multifaceted nature of the term, reflecting its use in both concrete and metaphorical senses.

As an architectural term, *ribât* is specifically described as an arched building. Within this context, the term *hisar* is used to refer to a military structure, typically a fortress or stronghold; *tekke* denotes a religious structure, often a place for Sufi or religious gatherings; and *han* is associated with an establishment for accommodation, akin to an inn or caravanserai. From this, it can be deduced that *ribât* served as a versatile term for different types of buildings, which performed varying roles but shared common architectural features, particularly the presence of arches.

In the *Lugat-ı Naci* (Naci's Dictionary), a Turkish lexicon, the primary meaning of *ribât* is initially described as 'something that will bind or connect- essentially a bond or tie.' Its secondary meanings extend to *tekke*, *inn*, *station*, and *caravanserai* (1884, 430), emphasizing its association with both religious and secular spaces of communal gathering or lodging. Once again, this reinforces the notion that *ribât* was a broad, all-encompassing term for structures serving different functions, ranging from spiritual and social to logistical needs.

Thus, *ribât* can be understood as a common term for buildings that served multifaceted roles, especially in the context of the Ottoman and broader Islamic world, where architecture often blended military, religious, and societal purposes.

In *Qamus-i Turki* (Turkish Dictionary) compiled by Şemsettin Sami (1889:658), *ribât* is explained as:

1. Bond, rabita (synonyms)
2. Solid structure
3. A building intended for temporary accommodation, such as a tekve (dervish lodge) or caravanserai.

Based on the definition in this dictionary entry, it can be noted that the meaning of *ribât* has expanded to be used as an architectural term. Furthermore, by saying "like a tekve or caravanserai", it is also pointed out that ribats are different from these types of buildings.

In his *Qamus-i Fransevi (Dictionnaire Français-Turc)*, an Ottoman Turkish-French dictionary, Şemsettin Sami (1911, 614) defines *ribât* as 'édifice ou logement des caravanes' (a building or lodging for caravans), meaning 'a building where caravans are accommodated.' As we will discuss in later sections of the article, particularly in Anatolia, *ribâts* were structures used for accommodation purposes.

In Kubbealtı dictionary (2025), a well-known Turkish dictionary that offers detailed definitions and explanations of words, including their historical, cultural, and semantic meanings, the following meanings are provided in the entry for *ribât*:

1. Bond: "Ribât-ı aşk": The bond of love
2. Solid structure, palace, mansion.
3. Place of accommodation, inn, caravanserai, hospice, etc.
4. At the borders, in the mountain passes, for warriors and mujahideen, a fortified place resembling a fortress within the walls.
5. Extension: Tekke, hankah:

6. Anatomy: The bond between organs. Ribat beyne'l-mafsal: The joint connection.

## 6. RIBATS IN THE ACCOUNTS OF MUSLIM GEOGRAPHERS AND TRAVELERS

In the early phases of Islamic civilization, the term *ribāt* acquired two distinct meanings, which can be observed in the writings of 9th- and 10th-century Muslim geographers and travelers.

In his *Futūh al-Buldān*, al-Balādhurī refers to the *murābiṭūn* stationed in defensive outposts along the Byzantine frontier, like Sugur and Awasim, although he does not directly use the term *ribāt* (Balādhurī, 2013).

In the 10th century, geographers describe *ribāts* in areas like Abadan, Khurasan, and Transoxiana. These were often defensive structures, sometimes funded by wealthy individuals for jihad, and served as refuges during invasions. Al-Makdisi (2015), in *Ahsan al-Taqaṣim*, further elaborated on *ribāts* in Mesopotamia and along the Palestinian coast, where they functioned as fortresses and safe havens during times of conflict.

In the 14th century, Ibn Battuta, in his travelogue, provides important insights into the continued role of *ribāts* in Islamic society. He mentions *ribāts* in Mecca and Wasit, specifically noting that the Rabi Ribat in Mecca was considered one of the most beautiful, with a sweet water well regarded as unparalleled in the city. He also recounts visiting a large *ribāt* in Revak, Wasit, where “perhaps thousands of dervishes” resided (Ibn Battuta, 2000, 260). These accounts indicate that by this time, *ribāts* had evolved into significant religious and social institutions, housing not only military personnel but also ascetics, scholars, and dervishes.

Throughout the 9th and 10th centuries, Muslim scholars used the term *ribāt* to describe military, religious, and defensive structures. While some, like al-Balādhurī, did not use the term directly, others, such as Ibn Khurradādhbih and Ibn Hawqal, noted that *ribāts* served both military and religious purposes, particularly as spaces for ascetics and Sufis. These structures often acted as fortresses, marking defensive lines in frontier zones between *Dar al-Islam* and non-Muslim territories. Ibn Battuta’s 14th-century accounts further emphasize the enduring religious and social significance of *ribāts*...

## 7. SEMANTIC SHIFTS OF RIBĀT IN RESPONSE TO HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL DYNAMICS

The term *ribāt*, while originally signifying a military frontier post in early Islamic usage, underwent significant semantic expansion influenced by historical circumstances, regional dialects, sociocultural developments, and linguistic contact. These shifts reflect broader mechanisms of language change that occur over time in response to evolving collective experiences.

### 1. Frequency of Use and Functional Reapplication

As *ribāts* became widespread across the Islamic world during the Umayyad and Abbasid periods, the term began to absorb the diverse functions these structures fulfilled. In regions such as Central Asia and Anatolia, where *ribāts* served both as fortifications and as waystations for travelers or dervishes, the frequent use of the term in those broader contexts encouraged its redefinition. For instance, under the Seljuks, *ribāts* built along caravan routes often combined architectural features of fortresses and inns, leading to their association with caravanserais and spiritual lodges. (Wheatley, 2000; Chabbi, 1995; Pradines 2020).

### 2. Loss of Original Meaning through Obsolescence

In areas where the military use of *ribāts* became obsolete -such as in urbanized Ottoman territories- the original meaning related to jihad and frontier defense gradually faded. As the



function of these buildings shifted toward housing Sufi communities or acting as dervish lodges (tekke), the original connotation of military readiness was either forgotten or replaced. This semantic attrition is observable in sources like the *Qamus-ı Turki* and *Lehce-i Osmani*, where the dominant meanings align more with accommodation, spirituality, or architectural utility, rather than defense.

### 3. Misunderstanding and Folk Etymology

As the word passed into non-Arabic languages, partial understanding sometimes led to reinterpretation. In Persian, *ribāt* was rendered as inn, fortress, monastery, or madrasa, leading to its integration into secular architectural lexicons. Similarly, in Western sources such as Lane's *Arabic-English Lexicon* and Steingass's *Persian-English Dictionary*, *ribāt* was translated with a strong emphasis on military or religious buildings, but without the nuanced religious connotations it carried in Sufi usage.

### 4. Influence of Foreign and Regional Languages

Cross-linguistic influence played a substantial role in expanding the term's meanings. Persian and Turkish speakers adapted *ribāt* according to the cultural and architectural frameworks familiar to them. In Persian, the term overlaps with *khanqah* (Sufi lodge), while in Turkish sources, especially in Ottoman times, it is used interchangeably with *tekke*, *han*, or *zawiye*. These influences helped naturalize the term in diverse regions and reorient its semantic emphasis.

### 5. Diversification through Dialects and Geography

Different parts of the Islamic world emphasized different aspects of the term. In North Africa, *ribāt* retained strong associations with military outposts, particularly during the Aghlabid and Almohad periods.

Beginning in the Aghlabid period and continuing until the late 12th century, approximately 78 ribats were constructed along the North African Mediterranean coastline as a defensive measure against potential maritime attacks. These structures were typically fortified with towers and buttresses integrated into their outer walls (Halm, 1992, 132-146).

In contrast, in Anatolia and Khorasan, ribāts often evolved into Sufi religious institutions, emphasizing spiritual discipline and hospitality. The Almoravid movement itself took its name from *murābiṭūn*—those who dwell in ribāts—thus embedding a spiritual-political identity in the term (Khalilieh, 1999; Halm, 1992, Sanchez 2004).

Historical sources indicate that, following the 9th-century conquests by Islamic forces, structures similar to ribats were established in the Mediterranean region, including in the settlements of Rabat, west of Mdina on the island of Malta, and Rabato on the island of Gozo. These conclusions are derived from toponymic studies (Khalilieh, 1999; Kurtulmuş, 2018).

### 6. Sociological and Religious Shift

With the rise of Sufism in the Islamic world, particularly from the 10th century onward, the spiritual reinterpretation of ribāts gained traction. Notably, Suhrawardi described the ribāt as a space not just of physical defense but of spiritual safeguarding, where dervishes, through obedience and prayer, protect society from moral or divine harm. In this conceptual shift, the *murābiṭ* transforms from a soldier on the border to a spiritual warrior engaged in inner jihad (*jihādu'l-nafs*).

According to Pradines (2020, 502). "As a Sunni religious institution, the ribat was supposed to spread orthodox Islam. The ribat does not correspond to a specific building. A whole city could be the home of devotees or Murabitun and therefore could be called a *ribat*."

## 7. Changing Social Needs and Symbolism

As *ribāts* began to accommodate not just warriors but also travelers, pilgrims, and mystics, the word accrued symbolic meaning beyond its material function. By the 14th century, Ibn Battuta referred to *ribāts* in Mecca and Wasit as places housing “perhaps thousands of dervishes”, with descriptions that emphasize beauty, water access, and spiritual activity rather than militarization. This evolution illustrates how social utility and symbolism reshaped the semantic field of *ribāt* (İbn-i Battuta, 2000, 260)

The evolution of *ribāt* illustrates how a single lexical item can become a microcosm of broader historical, religious, and cultural transformations. What began as a term of military vigilance ultimately came to symbolize spiritual discipline, architectural innovation, and social cohesion. This semantic fluidity not only reflects the adaptability of language but also the shifting needs of the Islamic communities that used the term across time and space.

## 8. CONCLUSION

The semantic evolution of *ribāt*, traced through Qur’ānic usage, classical lexicons, travelers’ accounts, and architectural typologies, reveals how a term originally denoting a locus of frontier defense was gradually reconfigured to meet the spiritual, social, and logistical imperatives of changing Islamic societies. As the historical case studies introduced in the opening section demonstrate, this evolution was neither linear nor uniform across regions. In the Maghrib, the military connotations of *ribāt* persisted well into the late medieval period, whereas in Anatolia and Khorasan the term acquired new resonances, becoming closely associated with Sufi hospitality, spiritual retreat, and the infrastructural networks of urban piety.

Philological evidence presented in Section 2 underscores the dual semantic axis of *ribāt*, encompassing both vigilance (*murābaṭa*) and steadfastness (*ṣabr*), thus uniting martial and moral dimensions within a single conceptual field. The comparative lexical analyses in Sections 4 and 5 further reveal that this semantic transformation was mediated by processes of cross-linguistic adaptation. Persian and Turkish sources reinterpreted *ribāt* through integration with indigenous architectural categories -such as *khān*, *tekke*, and *zāwiya*- while Western lexicographical traditions tended to flatten this semantic richness, translating *ribāt* reductively as either “fortress” or “monastery.” This contrast not only highlights the portability and adaptability of Islamic architectural terminology but also exposes the semantic narrowing that often accompanies cross-cultural transmission.

Accounts by medieval geographers and travelers, examined in Section 6 -most notably Ibn Battuta’s descriptions of *ribāts* in Mecca and Wāsiṭ- illustrate the lived realities of this semantic shift. By the fourteenth century, many *ribāts* had evolved into large-scale religious and social institutions: providing shelter for dervishes and wayfarers, serving as loci of instruction and devotion, and maintaining symbolic continuity with earlier notions of martial vigilance.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that the transformation of *ribāt* was neither incidental nor merely lexical. It emerged from the interplay of geopolitical realignments, the institutional expansion of Sufism, and regional architectural practices. This study contributes to broader scholarship by showing how the *murābiṭ* -once a sentinel of the frontier- was reconceptualized as a guardian of spiritual and communal welfare, exemplifying a larger process through which martial ideals were reoriented toward non-military ends.

Ultimately, the case of *ribāt* underscores that semantic change within the Islamic architectural lexicon cannot be understood in isolation from the historical contexts that animated it. By integrating philological, historical, and architectural methodologies, this research proposes a comprehensive model for examining other Islamic terms whose meanings, like that of *ribāt*, have traversed intricate cultural and geographic trajectories.

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## Araştırma Makalesi

# Ribât'ın Dönüşümü: İslam Tarihinde Anlam ve İşlev Değişimi

## *Ribât in Transition: Meaning and Function in Islamic History*

Pelin EKŞİ

### GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

#### Giriş

*Ribât* terimi, İslam medeniyetinin erken dönemlerinden itibaren hem fiziksel yapılar hem de kurumsal/kavramsal bağlamlar içinde anlam kazanmış, tarihsel süreçte farklı coğrafyalarda çeşitli işlevler üstlenmiş çok yönlü bir yapılar ve kurumlar bütünü ifade eder. Arapça “رباط” (r-b-t) kökünden türeyen bu kavram, sözlüklerde “bağlamak, sabitlemek, hazır hâle getirmek” gibi anlamlarla açıklanmakta; ilk dönem İslam tarihinde ise özellikle sınır boylarında yer alan askerî savunma yapılarıyla özdeşleşmektedir. Bu bağlamda Kur’ân-ı Kerîm’in Enfâl Suresi 60. ayetinde geçen “الْخَيْلِ رِبَاطٍ وَمِنْ” (*ribât al-khayl*) ifadesi, doğrudan askerî hazırlık ve caydırıcılığa işaret etmektedir.

Zamanla İslam coğrafyasının genişlemesiyle birlikte ribâtlar, yalnızca askerî işlevlerle sınırlı kalmamış; sûfî geleneklerin, sosyal ihtiyaçların ve mimarî gelişmelerin etkisiyle farklı işlevlerde kullanılmıştır. Böylece ribât kavramı, bazı coğrafyalarda karakol ya da menzil, diğerlerinde ise bir tür sûfî inziva ve eğitim yapısı olarak anlaşılmıştır.

Bu çalışmanın amacı, *ribât* teriminin filolojik kökeninden başlayarak tarihsel gelişimi ve mimarî yansımaları çerçevesinde geçirdiği dönüşümleri incelemektir. Bu kapsamda klasik Arap sözlüklerinde yer alan tanımlar, Kur’ân’daki kullanımlar, sûfî geleneklerdeki yansımalar ve coğrafi farklılaşmalar değerlendirilmiş; ayrıca Batı dillerindeki sözlüklerde ve Türkçe kaynaklardaki karşılıkları da karşılaştırmalı olarak ele alınmıştır.

#### Yöntem

Bu araştırma, filolojik analiz ve tarihsel karşılaştırmalı yöntem esas alınarak yürütülmüştür. Filolojik inceleme kapsamında, ribât teriminin Arapça kökeni, klasik sözlüklerdeki tanımları ve semantik alanı değerlendirilmiştir. Tarihsel karşılaştırmalı yöntem ise, terimin farklı dönemlerde ve coğrafyalarda nasıl işlev değişikliğine uğradığını tespit etmek amacıyla kullanılmıştır.

Çalışmada başta İbn Manzûr’un *Lisân al- ‘Arab*’ı, Ezherî’nin *Tehzîb al-Luğa*’sı gibi klasik Arap sözlükleri; ardından Edward Lane, Steingass, Hans Wehr gibi Batılı sözlük yazarlarının tanımları; ayrıca Türkçedeki *Lehçe-i Osmanî*, *Kamus-ı Türki*, *Lugat-ı Naci* ve *Kamus-ı Fransevî* gibi Osmanlı dönemi sözlükleri kaynak olarak kullanılmıştır. Kur’an’daki ribât kullanımına dair hermenötik analizler yapılmış ve tasavvufî gelenekte ribâtın nasıl içselleştirildiği incelenmiştir.

#### Bulgular

Çalışma, ribât kavramının coğrafya, mezhep, dil ve tarihî bağlamlara bağlı olarak eşzamanlı işlev çeşitlenmelerine uğradığını ortaya koymaktadır. Bir başka deyişle aynı anda farklı coğrafyalarda farklı ribât tipolojileri ve anlam dünyaları oluşmuştur:

- Arapça ve Kur’anî Bağlamda: Ribât hem savaş hazırlığı hem de manevî sabır anlamında çift yönlü bir kavramdır. Enfâl Suresi’nin 60. ayetinde askeri gücü, Kehf Suresi’nin 14. ayetinde ruhsal gücü temsil eder.

- Klasik Sözlükler ve Tasavvufî Literatür: Ezherî'ye göre ribât, sınırda atların bağlı olduğu askerî alanlardır. Ancak Şihâbeddin Sühreverdî, ribâtı tasavvufî bir merkez olarak tanımlar: "Cihad için yapılan yapılar, zamanla sûfîlerin duâ ve zikir yoluyla halkı musibetlerden koruduğu mekânlara dönüştür" (Avârifü'l-Ma'ârif, 2010:130).
- Batı Sözlükçülüğü: Lane (1867), ribâtın öncelikle "bağlamak" anlamına geldiğini belirtir ve terimi hem askerî hem de manevî merkez olarak tanımlar. Steingass ise ribâtın anlamlarını "manastır, han, garnizon, bağ" gibi çok sayıda yapıyla ilişkilendirerek geniş bir çerçeveye sunar.
- Türkçe Sözlükler ve Osmanlı Literatürü: Kamus-i Türki'de ribât, "bağ, konaklama yeri, tekke" gibi anlamlara gelir. Lehçe-i Osmanî'de ise ribâtın hem "hisar", hem "tekke", hem de "han" anlamında kullanıldığı görülür. Bu sözlükler, ribâtın mimarî anlamının Osmanlı bağlamında nasıl çeşitlendiğini gösterir.
- Seyyah ve Coğrafyacı Anlatıları: İbn Battûta, Mekke ve Vâsıt'taki ribâtları "binlerce dervişin kaldığı yapılar" olarak tanımlar (İbn Battûta, 2000: 260). El-Makdisî ve diğer coğrafyacılar, ribâtların hem askerî garnizon hem de dinî inziva yeri olarak işlev gördüğünü belirtir.
- Modern Akademik Yorumlar: Chabbi (1995: 511), ribâtın belirli bir mimarî formdan ziyade, "tehlike ve tetikte olma" durumuyla ilişkilendirilen işlevsel bir adlandırma olduğunu söyler. Pradines (2020: 502), "bir şehrin tamamının bile ribât sayılabileceğini" öne sürerek, kavramın mimarî sınırları aştığını ifade eder.

### **Tartışma**

Ribât teriminin anlam alanındaki genişleme, sadece semantik bir genişleme değil, aynı zamanda İslam toplumlarının dönemsel ihtiyaçları, dinî yaklaşımları, coğrafi güvenlik algıları ve sûfilik gibi manevî yönelişleri ile şekillenmiştir. Kavramın sınır karakolundan zâviyeye, konaklama yapısından içsel cihada kadar farklı alanlara sirayet etmesi, onu sadece bir mimarî tip değil, bir zihniyet kategorisi hâline getirmiştir.

### **Sonuç**

Sonuç olarak ribât, İslam medeniyetinde yalnızca bir yapı türü değil, aynı zamanda bir zihniyetin, bir dinî pratiğin ve bir sosyal organizasyon biçiminin yansımasıdır. Bu terimin geçirdiği anlam dönüşümü, İslam toplumlarının tarihsel gelişimi içinde dinî yükümlülüklerin, sosyal gereksinimlerin ve mimarî ihtiyaçların nasıl bütünleştiğini göstermektedir. Ribât hem maddî hem manevî bir sınır muhafızlığını temsil eden bir sembol hâline gelmiş; zaman içinde içsel cihâdın, toplumsal hizmetin ve dinî birlikteliğin mekânı olarak öne çıkmıştır.

Bu bağlamda ribât, anlam değişimi örneği olarak yalnızca sözlük bilimsel değil, aynı zamanda mimarlık tarihi, dinler tarihi ve kültürel antropoloji açısından da incelenmeye değer bir kavramdır. Onun semantik evrimi, İslam medeniyetinde dilin, yapının ve inancın nasıl iç içe geçtiğini gösteren örneklerden biridir.