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The Institution of Ribat Under the Sokoto Caliphate and its Relevance to Contemporary Muslims

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Abstract

Objective: This study explores the role of the Ribat institution within the Sokoto Caliphate, a significant Islamic empire in 19th-century West Africa. The research aims to analyze the historical context, functions, and impact of Ribat in the spread of Islam, Islamic education, and the defence of Muslim territories. Given the centrality of the Sokoto Jihad in transforming the socio-political and intellectual landscape of Hausaland and beyond, the study particularly examines how Ribat contributed to the development of learning and scholarship, making knowledge an essential tool in Islamic propagation. **Theoretical Framework:** The theoretical framework of this study is based on the concept of Islamic governance and educational institutions in classical and modern Islamic thought. It highlights the role of fortified religious centres in sustaining Islamic civilizations and their function as hubs of learning and social cohesion. **Literature Review:** A review of the literature includes prior studies on the Sokoto Jihad, the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate, and the role of Ribat in Islamic history. Previous research has largely focused on the political and military aspects of the Jihad, with limited attention to the institutional development of Ribat and its intellectual contributions. This study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing Ribat's role beyond military defence, particularly its influence on Islamic education and community development. **Methods:** The research employs a historical and analytical approach, utilizing primary sources such as manuscripts from Sokoto scholars and secondary sources on Islamic governance in West Africa. Through qualitative analysis, the study reconstructs the historical significance of Ribat and evaluates its implications for contemporary Muslim societies. **Results:** Findings reveal that Ribat played a crucial role in the dissemination of Islamic knowledge, strengthening Muslim identity, and ensuring the security of the Islamic state. It functioned as both a centre of learning and a defensive stronghold, reinforcing the Caliphate's intellectual and religious authority. **Implications:** The study's implications highlight the need for modern Muslim communities to revisit and adapt the Ribat model in addressing contemporary challenges, particularly in the fields of Islamic education, community empowerment, and faith preservation. **Novelty:** The novelty of this research lies in its comprehensive examination of Ribat beyond its conventional military function, positioning it as a cornerstone of Islamic intellectual and social development. This perspective contributes to the broader discourse on the historical and modern relevance of Islamic institutions.

Keywords: sokoto caliphate, relevance, defence Islamic centres, spiritual growth, community cohesion.

INTRODUCTION

The Sokoto Caliphate was an Islamic state, the most powerful in West Africa in the nineteenth century. It was founded during the Fulani War in 1809 by Uthman and Fodiyo. When the British took over the territory in 1903, they abolished the political authority of the Caliph and put the area under the Northern Nigeria Protectorate; however, the title of Sultan was retained [1]. Sokoto Caliphate remains an important religious position for Muslims in the region to the current day. The independent Sokoto Caliphate arose in 1804 and grew into one of the most significant empires in Africa in the 1800s. They developed in the context of multiple, independent Hausa kingdoms, creating an empire that linked over 30 different emirates and over 10 million people [2].

The Sokoto caliphate was a revolutionary movement that sought to establish an Islamic government in what is now Nigeria. The Caliphate headed by Muslim Scholars reformed the society by establishing governance based on Islamic Principles. Islam and literacy are intricately intertwined; they are tied up together [3]. This is because the more learned a person is, the more reformed he is expected to be, and the more distant he stays from animalistic life. The Islamic educational traditions are deeply associated with every aspect of human life. This made the Jihad Scholars pursue educational reforms in an accelerated mode [4].

One of the results of the Jihad activities of the nineteenth century was the spread of Islamic and mundane education in Arabic throughout the western Sudan. This had been important before the Jihad of the nineteenth century, but as a result of these Jihad activities, education spread at an unprecedented rate [5]. Education is one of the agents of development as it enhances empowerment which in turn leads to human development. Perhaps this explains why education occupies a central place in the Jihadists' building activities. They lamented how people in Hausaland were left in ignorance as a result of which illiteracy became prevalent. In many instances, they criticized Scholars of the region for neglecting the education of the people, particularly women. To remedy the situation, they adopted the Principle of mass literacy as an educational policy [6]. Through such efforts, they succeeded in creating a knowledge-based society. Scholars and students did not stop at pursuit of knowledge only but they passed it to others through its transmission. Through such a method education was made available to all seekers of knowledge. This endeared people to the Jihad leaders [7]. Ribats, masajids, open spaces, and residences of scholars and prominent individuals were used as learning centres. Home Schools, Qur'anic schools, and 'Ilimi schools flourished [8]. The Impact of such a comprehensive approach manifests itself in the level of literacy achieved. This is who they were rightly guided. This is because Islam is a knowledge-based system of life. Hence without education, hardly you get people organized.

What we now call the Sokoto Caliphate in the nineteenth century covered an area approximately 1,000 miles from west to east (from Dori in Burkina to Maroua or Tibati in Cameroun), and about 450 miles north to south (from Tahoua in Niger to beyond Ilorin in Nigeria). In nineteenth-century terms, that area was expressed as a month's journey west to east and two months north to south [9].

Sokoto Caliphate is in modern-day Northern Nigeria and was a major Islamic caliphate in West Africa with Ribat, which was established as a fortified stronghold that served as a centre for Islamic learning, spiritual growth, and military defence. Ribat was one of the most important institutions to the caliphate's survival, this is because Ribat played a key role in teaching Islamic ideals, building communal cohesiveness, and defending Muslim territory against external threats [10]. Despite its historical relevance, the Ribat institution during the Sokoto Caliphate has received little attention. Furthermore, its significance to modern Muslims has not been thoroughly investigated. This study seeks to close this knowledge gap by investigating the institution of Ribat under the Sokoto Caliphate and its relevance to modern Muslims.

This study will look at the Ribat's historical context, functions, and role in encouraging Islamic learning, spiritual growth, and community togetherness. Furthermore, it will look into the Ribat's relevance to contemporary Muslims, emphasizing its potential for promoting Islamic ideals, social justice, and community development. This study attempts to contribute to a better knowledge of Islamic history and culture in West Africa by focusing on the Ribat institution during the Sokoto Caliphate. Furthermore, it tries to shed light on the importance of Islamic institutions and ideals in modern Muslim societies [10].

Novelty. The study explores the institution of Ribat under the Sokoto Caliphate, a topic that has received limited scholarly attention, particularly its socio-political and educational functions. While previous studies have primarily focused on Ribat in the context of early Islamic history, this research uniquely examines its role in West Africa, specifically under the leadership of Usman Dan Fodio and his successors. It sheds light on how Ribat functioned as more than just a military outpost but also as a centre for Islamic scholarship, leadership training, and social welfare. Furthermore, this study bridges historical Islamic governance with contemporary challenges faced by Muslims, offering fresh insights into the revival of Ribat-like institutions for modern education, security, and community development [10].

Significance. Understanding the Ribat system in the Sokoto Caliphate provides valuable lessons for contemporary Muslims in addressing issues of religious education, leadership, and social cohesion. By analyzing its structure and impact, this study presents a model that could inform present-day Islamic institutions, particularly in developing holistic educational centres that integrate spirituality with socio-political engagement. Additionally, it contributes to discussions on sustainable Islamic governance and the role of faith-based institutions in promoting security and societal development in Muslim communities worldwide [11].

LITERATURE REVIEW

Marion in his work examines the meaning of Ribat in the context of Muslim lands. The term Ribat has been attributed meanings that vary according to period and place. It has often been studied medieval structures around the Mediterranean coastline and is generally defined as connected to the defence of Muslim lands [11]. Ribat is thus, first and foremost, territorial. From this perspective, it can be compared to *sumud*, usually translated as 'steadfastness' or perseverance [12]. Both Ribat and *Sumud* rely on a presence rooted in place and can be understood as territorial or 'habitational' [13], as they depend largely on people 'inhabiting' the land, which is incarnated in the home as well as in the national territory [14].

Ribat in the Muslim lands context connects not only to a long tradition within Islam and the Arab world but is also found within the scholarly literature, where Ribat has been carefully studied from historical and archaeological perspectives. However, he also endeavours to demonstrate here that, while displaying a connection to these established definitions, the Ribat in the land of the Muslims claims a specificity of its own: it is strictly territorial and specifically designates a duty to defend and protect the holy spaces, most notably al-Aqsa, Jerusalem and Palestine, considered on different scales [15].

Muslim political discourse towards a strengthening of the religious aspect and its struggle. More importantly, as argued by Anderson, Ribat concomitantly allows for a territorialization of resistance and a 'territorialization of faith' [16]. Moreover, how this territorialization is connected to the perception and production of borders that are opposed symbolically to the omnipresent and ever-advancing frontiers of Israeli settler colonialism [17].

Lefebvre contends that the notion of Ribat, like that of *Sumud* is quintessentially territorial, but that it differs from *Sumud* first because of its religious connotation; and second, and perhaps notably, in that it implies a life lived 'on the frontier.' Indeed, Ribat involves the notion of limits, or borders, which in this case pervade every aspect of daily life, every space, from the domestic to the national. People performing or appealing to Ribat are indeed, as we will see, acknowledging their presence on a frontier or border that needs to be

guarded, while at the same time producing that very limit which is perceptible on various scales, from the micro to the macro [18].

METHODOLOGY

The methodological survey was utilized in the conduct of this research. There are a variety of ways to collect data for survey-based research, the most popular of which are interviews and questionnaires. However, the primary data used in this research is obtained through the interview methods and index review. Finding and gathering reference materials that are relevant to this research is the first of three processes the researchers adopted when putting this piece together. Secondly, several interviews have been conducted, analyzed, and elaborated to fully understand the intersections of this essay. Thirdly, the researchers conclude the research by giving a highlight and the outcome of the research for further study [19].

Table 1. Summarizing the Methodology Based on the Provided Text

Methodological Steps	Description
Research Approach	Methodological survey
Data Collection Methods	Interviews and index review
Step 1: Reference Material Collection	Identifying and gathering relevant reference materials for the research
Step 2: Interviews & Analysis	Conducting several interviews, analyzing the responses, and elaborating on key intersections of the study
Step 3: Conclusion & Findings	Summarizing key findings and providing insights for further research

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Concept of Ribat

The term "Ribat" refers to a fortified location or stronghold that is often utilized for military or defensive purposes. Ribat also means "tied" or "bound," suggesting a sense of commitment or dedication. Ribat can also refer to a station or outpost, which is commonly utilized for military or surveillance purposes [20].

In an Islamic context, Ribat refers to a frontier castle or stronghold established to protect Muslim areas from enemy attacks. Ribat can also refer to a spiritual retreat where Muslims can come together to worship, reflect, and grow spiritually. Ribat can also serve as an Islamic learning centre, where Muslims can come together to study the Quran, Hadith, and other Islamic disciplines [21]. The concept of Ribat is a fortified monastery in Islam that serves both religious and military purposes. The word Ribat comes from the Arabic word *Ribat*, which means "station", "inn", or "religious house".

The concept of Ribat dates back to the early days of Islam when Muslim warriors would gather in Ribats to defend the faith and expand the Islamic state. During the time of the Prophet Muhammad (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), Ribats were established along the borders of the Islamic state to protect against enemy attacks [22].

The institution of Ribat under the Sokoto Caliphate as observed, played a crucial role in promoting Islamic education, community development, and defence of the faith, and its significance extends to contemporary Muslim societies.

Historical Context of Ribat under the Sokoto Caliphate

Ribat was initially used to describe a frontier post where soldiers would stay during the early Muslim conquests and after, such as in al-Awasim. The term transformed over time to refer to a centre for Sufi. As they were later no longer needed to house and supply soldiers, Ribats became refuges for mystics [23].

Historically, Ribats were established as fortified stations along the frontiers of the Islamic realm, particularly during the early centuries of Islam. These outposts not only served military purposes but also functioned as centres of learning and spiritual growth. Scholars, warriors, and ascetics congregated in these places to fortify their knowledge and faith while preparing to defend against external threats, notably during the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates [24]. The act of staying in a Ribat was viewed as an act of piety, where participants were believed to earn spiritual rewards for their commitment to protect and promote Islam.

The early Ribats were often linked to the idea of Jihad, though not solely in a military sense, but as something encompassing both the internal struggle against one's baser instincts (Jihad al-Nafs) and the external defence of the community and faith. This dual approach highlights an essential aspect of the Islamic ethos: that the struggle to uphold justice and righteousness is inseparable from the broader communal and personal responsibilities of believers [25].

Ribat, in the context of the Sokoto Caliphate, was a walled military settlement established for defending and protecting the frontiers and settled agricultural hinterland of any major population centre. This type of institution was well-known in the history of other Islamic societies [26]. The Sokoto Caliphate established an extensive system of Ribats as part of Muhammed Bello's consolidation policy [27]. These Ribats were crucial for expansion through developing new cities and settling of the people. They featured walled fortresses, schools, markets, and other buildings [28].

Indeed, the ninth Century has been identified as the "golden age" of classic Ribat construction in the early Muslim world, and during this period several of these structures were established in North Africa and Central Asia. After this early "golden age," Ribat continued to be built in Muslim lands, but it was only during the nineteenth century that they became widespread in Sokoto Caliphate. The leaders of this Muslim state, the largest state in nineteenth-century West Africa, drew inspiration from this history to foster the expansion of the new state [29].

The first of these fortified towns were built during the lifetime of Uthman Ibn Fodio (1754–1817) Sokoto's first Sultan while his successor and son Muhammad Bello (1817–1837) intensified this effort. Bello's prospering Ribat became landmark architecture for other rulers: armies were systematically moved from the centres to the peripheries of the Emirates within the frontier zones, where the settlements, in turn, became walled towns, or birane in Hausa [30]. As Bello's sister Nana Asmau described this empowerment of the frontiers in a poem: "Then, he stationed all [soldiers] far away in the bushes. He stationed men in all Ribat towns. So understand this foresight" [31].

On the one hand, this political agenda was motivated by military tactics, but on the other hand, Muhammad Bello explicitly referred to a moral and sacred architecture. In his treatise *Kitāb al-ribāt wa al-hirāsa*, for example, he outlines the Ribat euphorically as the model city of the future Sultanate [32]. Bello claimed that "humans are urban by nature" and that there was only human progress in religious urbanization. For example, in Bello's new cities, Ribat walls and gates were arranged rectangularly and aligned with the qibla direction towards Mecca to reflect the mosque sites at large [33]. This is also exemplified by cartographies from the Central Sahel, depicting mosques, palaces, and cities as rectangular fields in a sacred geography. In many regions of the Sokoto Empire, this rectangular model challenged existing round houses, compounds, and cities.

The establishment of Ribats was part of the policy of establishing frontiers and providing strongholds around which settlement could flourish. Likewise, Sultan Muhammad Bello encouraged the building within frontiers of walled towns where Masjids and schools could be opened and trade and workshops started; with scholars appointed to these towns as Imam, judges, Muhtasibs (legal inspectors) as teachers, Bello hoped to maintain both the practice of Islam and the military control of the area. Since much of Sultan Bello's support had come from cattle owing Fulani, the Fulani clans were persuaded to join the community of the Shaikh Uthman bn Fodiyo [34].

The Ribat, often understood as a frontier fort or a religious outpost, played a significant role during the Sokoto Caliphate (1804-1903) in what is now northern Nigeria. The Sokoto Caliphate was established by Uthman bn Fodiyo and was characterized by its focus on Islamic revivalism, reform, and the establishment of a caliphate based on Islamic principles [35].

The establishment of Ribats under the Sokoto Caliphate represented both a military and cultural strategy to expand Islamic influence in the region, combining the roles of spiritual education and defence. They contributed to the organization of the caliphate and supported its expansion throughout the region, significantly impacting the religious landscape of the area [36].

Relevance of Ribat to Contemporary Muslims

The concept of Ribat holds significant historical and spiritual weight in the Islamic tradition, representing a multi-dimensional approach to faith, community, and defence against adversities. Originating from the Arabic term "Ribat," which means to tether or link, this concept evolved to signify fortifications along the borders of the Islamic empire and, more broadly, the establishment of spiritual and military outposts for the defence of Islam. In contemporary times, the relevance of Ribat extends beyond its historical context, embodying essential themes such as resilience, community solidarity, and the pursuit of a spiritual connection with the divine.

Ribats were central to the Sokoto Caliphate's military planning, serving as both defensive and offensive hubs. They acted as centers of defense and staging points for military expeditions. Ribats were fortified settlements used to defend the frontiers, trade routes, and major cities of the Caliphate [37]. The military aspects of Ribats included warfare practised by a large slave population during the dry season [38]. Ribats also served as a base for capturing more slaves through warfare. Takai, a small town, was given the unusual right to keep royal kettle drums because of its importance as a Ribat [39].

In contemporary society, Muslims face several challenges that jeopardise their faith, identity, and their way of life. Despite these challenges, the concept of Ribat remains extremely important to Muslims today. Ribat, which refers to a fortified fortress or a bastion utilized for military, spiritual, or educational purposes, is an important component of Islamic history and culture. Notwithstanding the passage of time, Ribat continues to motivate Muslims to defend their faith, seek knowledge, and seek spiritual growth.

The emphasis on protecting the faith is one of the main reasons Ribat is still relevant to Muslims today. It has been observed by the researcher that in an age when Islamophobia and anti-Muslim prejudice are on the rise, Muslims must be alert in defending their faith and dispelling myths about Islam. Hence, Ribat is a potent emblem of Muslim resilience and fortitude, reminding Muslims of their responsibility to safeguard their faith and community. By embracing the spirit of Ribat, Muslims can have the fortitude and conviction to fight for their rights and defend their faith against all forms of persecution.

Another reason Ribat continues to be relevant to Muslims today as Sulayman Muhammad observed is that during the period of the Sokoto Jihad and after, the focus of the Ribat was on seeking knowledge [40]. Allah emphasizes the significance of seeking knowledge and

wisdom in the Qur'an 96:1-5. He further avers that the relevance of Ribat, as a center of learning and intellectual inquiry, exemplifies the Qur'anic commandment. By creating Ribat-like institutions, Muslims can foster a culture based on learning and intellectual curiosity, providing themselves with the knowledge and skills needed to manage the complexity of modern life.

Furthermore, according to Muhammad Abdullahi Maigari, Ribat is still relevant to Muslims today because the main reason for its establishment was to focus on the spiritual growth and development of the Muslims. For that, in an era dominated by materialism and secularism, Muslims must acquire a stronger sense of spirituality and closeness to Allah. Ribat, as a place of spiritual retreat and reflection, offers a haven for Muslims to focus on their spiritual growth and development [41]. By embracing the spirit of Ribat, Muslims can gain a stronger sense of faith, purpose, and direction, allowing them to face current difficulties with confidence and conviction.

Not only that, Ribat continues to remain relevant to Muslims today since it promotes community cohesion and social solidarity. In a day when Muslims are increasingly split and divided, Ribat stands out as a potent symbol of Muslim togetherness and solidarity. Muslims can build a sense of community and belonging by establishing Ribat-style institutions, resulting in more cooperation and collaboration among Muslims.

In the spiritual context, Zayyanu Mustapha Dankani avers that the relevance of Ribat transcends its historical roots. In modern interpretations, the concept invites Muslims to create personal and communal "Ribats" that focus on nurturing spiritual resilience and communal bonds. In an age characterized by globalization and rapid change, the values associated with Ribat serve as a reminder for Muslims to engage in the creation of spaces dedicated to worship, learning, and the sharing of knowledge (Zayyanu Mustapha Dankani). According to him, these spaces whether physical Masjid or virtual communities allow for a continuity of Islamic teachings and emphasize the necessity of solidarity among Muslims in the face of contemporary challenges [42].

Besides, Zayyanu further states that the tenet of Ribat encourages individuals to engage in their personal Jihad, prompting a commitment to the spiritual and moral dimensions of Islam. Not only that, Ribat in this sense, becomes a metaphorical call to action for Muslims to fortify their inner selves against the turbulent winds of modernity, including ethical dilemmas and moral relativism. It urges believers to seek knowledge, engage in community service, and promote justice elements that are vital for the sustenance of a vibrant Muslim identity (Zayyanu Mustapha Dankani).

Analysis and Discussion

The institution of Ribat within the Sokoto Caliphate played a multifaceted role in the advancement of Islamic governance, education, and societal cohesion. While traditionally perceived as military fortresses designed to defend Muslim territories, Ribat in the Sokoto Caliphate evolved beyond this function, becoming centers for religious learning, scholarship, and social organization. This study highlights the significance of Ribat in fostering Islamic intellectual traditions and shaping the socio-political framework of 19th-century West Africa [42].

One of the primary contributions of Ribat was its role in the dissemination of Islamic knowledge. As fortified religious institutions, these centers served as both spiritual retreats and academic hubs where scholars, students, and Sufi orders engaged in Islamic jurisprudence, theology, and Arabic literacy. The Sokoto Caliphate, under the leadership of Usman Dan Fodio, heavily emphasized the necessity of education as a tool for both personal spiritual growth and societal transformation. Ribat facilitated this process by producing a class of Islamic scholars who played key roles in governance, lawmaking, and community leadership [42].

Furthermore, Ribat reinforced Muslim identity by creating spaces where religious and cultural values were preserved. In the face of external threats and socio-political changes, these institutions ensured that Islamic teachings were maintained, strengthening the spiritual and intellectual resilience of Muslim communities. This model of religiously guided community development remains relevant today, particularly for addressing challenges such as secularization, cultural erosion, and the declining influence of traditional Islamic learning [41].

The findings of this research also reveal that Ribat was instrumental in ensuring the security and expansion of the Sokoto Caliphate. By integrating military preparedness with religious education, it provided a comprehensive framework for Islamic governance. In contemporary Muslim societies, the adaptation of this model can contribute to faith-based community development programs, fostering both security and intellectual empowerment. In conclusion, this study underscores the broader significance of Ribat as a historical and intellectual institution that extends beyond its conventional military role. By revisiting the principles of Ribat, modern Islamic communities can draw valuable insights into sustainable educational models, religious cohesion, and social empowerment in addressing contemporary global challenges [42].

CONCLUSION

This study glanced at the institution of Ribat under the Sokoto Caliphate, highlighting its importance in encouraging Islamic learning, spiritual growth, and community togetherness. The Ribat was crucial in protecting Muslim areas, promoting Islamic ideals, and providing a platform for Islamic research and intellectual discourse. The study also investigated the Ribat's relevance to modern Muslims, emphasizing its potential for promoting Islamic ideals, social justice, and community development. The Ribat's emphasis on Islamic learning, spiritual development, and community service serves as a significant example for modern Muslim communities looking to promote Islamic ideals and practices. To summarise, the institution of Ribat under the Sokoto Caliphate remains an important component of Islamic legacy and identity, with relevant lessons for modern Muslims. Its importance goes beyond historical relevance, as it provides a framework for advancing Islamic ideals, social justice, and community development in modern Muslim societies. Recommendations. Based on this study, the following recommendations are made: 1. Contemporary Muslim communities should build Ribat-inspired institutions that provide venues for Islamic learning, spiritual growth, and community service. 2. Islamic educational institutions' curricula should include the study of Islamic history and culture, as well as the institution of Ribat. 3. Muslim scholars and intellectuals should conduct research and publish on Islamic institutions and principles, underscoring their relevance to modern Muslim countries. By adopting Ribat's lessons, modern Muslims can promote Islamic ideals, social justice, and community development, thus helping to revive Islamic civilization and improve Muslim societies.

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Author Contribution

Tambari Abbas Bashar Ph.D: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – review & editing.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declare no conflict of interest.

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