



Foundations and Functions of Waqf in Khorasan and Transoxiana in the Samanid Period

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Extended abstract

In Transoxiana and Khorasan, the hospitality offered to travelers, the construction of bridges and caravanserais (ribāts), and the endowment of revenues from estates for these structures were integral to the cultural fabric of the region. Wealthy and philanthropic individuals built numerous ribāts and endowed their assets for their upkeep. In urban areas, drinking water was made freely available to passersby, and some of the city canals were endowed for aqueducts and public fountains. Affluent and learned individuals devoted their resources to public services and charitable works, including the provision of food to travelers.

Initially, ribāts served military purposes and were established along border regions to house frontier guards. Transoxiana marked the frontier between Muslim and non-Muslim territories. Ribāts and sabīl hostels in these regions were supported by endowments, and their construction was regarded as a form of participation in jihād. Volunteer frontier warriors (ghāzīs) would lodge in these ribāts, and even the Samanid amirs endowed villages to support them. Although the original rationale and primary function of ribāts—especially those along the frontier—differed from those of caravanserais, there was a degree of overlap in their semantic scope, as well as in their military, economic, social, and educational roles. Endowed caravanserais were constructed both in border zones and within the interior regions of Transoxiana.

On the northwestern frontier of Khorasan, which bordered the land of the Ghuzz (Oghuz Turks), military guards were stationed in Farāvah (Afrawah) in the district of Nasa. Part of the income from the markets of Damghan was endowed to support the ribāts of Afrawah. Near Abiward, the Kufkan ribāṭ had been built, and behind it, Abū al-Qāsim Mikā'īlī endowed two ribāts and several settlements. Abū al-Qāsim 'Alī ibn Ismā'īl Mikā'īlī, a scholar from Nishapur, participated in military campaigns and later took residence in one of these endowed ribāts, where he passed away. Khorasan's southeastern frontier bordered the non-Muslim region of Ghūr. At the frontier of Ghūr stood the Varūnak caravanserai, where guards and volunteer border troops, mounted on endowed horses and equipped with weaponry, were stationed. Transoxiana and Khorasan were situated along major trade routes connecting India, China, Khwarazm,

and the lands of the Turks and Khazars. This strategic geographical position necessitated the construction of ribāṭs and caravanserais with economic functions. Philanthropists constructed ribāṭs and waystations along these routes and in urban centers, endowing land for their maintenance. Some ribāṭs served specific purposes for travelers, while others provided hospitality to the destitute. These structures contributed to the safety and convenience of travel and commerce.

With the growth of crafts, relative security, and general prosperity, interest in learning expanded. Cities such as Bukhara and Nishapur experienced periods of intellectual flourishing. After the decline in military conquests, ribāṭs began to acquire educational functions. The ribāṭs of Bikhund, Samarqand, Nasaf, Khān-i Ḥanzala in Nishapur, and Afrawah became centers for the teaching of ḥadīth and the dissemination of knowledge. Some benefactors provided stipends for students and jurists. These ribāṭs also served as residences for Sufis and ascetics.

In the mosques of cities like Bukhara, Nishapur, and Marv, jurists taught religious sciences and ḥadīth. Some scholars held their lessons at home, and after their death, these homes were converted into schools or khānqāhs, such as the madrasa of Abū Ḥafṣ in Bukhara, which was endowed during his lifetime. The endowment of lands in Afshana, a district near Bukhara, for the benefit of students highlights how educational institutions relied on endowed estates. Muḥammad ibn Luqmān ibn Naṣr, a Samanid prince, constructed facilities for scholars and dedicated endowments to fund the education and sustenance of students. Nishapur was a major intellectual hub with organized institutions of learning. Shāfiʿī schools in Khorasan—especially in Nishapur—saw considerable development. Imām Abū al-Ḥasan Muḥammad ibn Shuʿayb Bayhaqī established a school in the Sīyār quarter of Nishapur. Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Ishāq Ṣibghī also founded the endowed Dār al-Sunna school and appointed his student Abū ʿAbd Allāh Ḥākim Bayʿ to oversee it.

These schools appointed administrators who managed endowed book collections, supplied writing materials for teachers and students, oversaw building maintenance, and distributed charitable donations from benefactors to those in need. Ministers, military officials, and wealthy individuals supported scholars. Some scholars endowed their homes, schools, or libraries to promote learning and provided students with stipends, wages, clothing, and even wheat. Other manifestations of *waqf* included the construction of mosques, bridges, canals, and water supply systems—financed through revenue from endowed properties. In these endeavors, rulers, scholars, the wealthy, commoners, and even non-Muslims all played a role.

The construction of hospitals and prisons, funded through endowed lands, was another domain of social engagement for elites and jurists. Some military officers built markets and allocated the proceeds to feed the poor. Endowments for the destitute were commonplace. The Mikāʿīlī family of Khorasan possessed extensive endowments and devoted their wealth to charitable causes. The Samanid rulers paid particular attention to groups such as the ʿAlids, dervishes, and their mawālī, endowing lands, orchards, and residences for their benefit. A government bureau of *waqf* supervised these affairs. Judges, appointed by the bureau, oversaw the administration of endowments. Revenues



were kept in the *waqf* treasury, and donors designated administrators for their endowments. These properties were managed in accordance with the stipulations of the endowers and could neither be sold nor gifted. Official documents were prepared for waqf properties, and their conditions were recorded in formal deeds.

Keywords: Samanids, Waqf, Khorasan, Transoxiana, Social Services, Promotion of Knowledge, Trade.

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