Frontiers and Fortifications

Thinking about the Periphery
al-thughur and al-awsim
O people of Tarsus, I am addressing you, so listen!
This is where God’s exalted Book was recited;
From here the expeditions against the Byzantines were launched;
Here is where the whole affair of the frontier towns [al-thughūr] had their origin;
Here the Friday congregational worship and the Feasts were celebrated;
This is where those wrapped in supplication took refuge;
This is where those who were restrained and upright would crowd together;
Here delegations would make their way to God;
Here worshipers and ascetics engaged in pious exercises;
(and so it continued with such expressions).

(‘Abbās 1988: 455-6 my translation)
Lower town of Qurus (Cyrrhus) - Northern Syria
Ribat of Monastir and Sousse
(later period and restoration)

Monastir

Sousse
What is a ribat?

- Does not designate a specific architectural form
- Institution supporting the activities of the *murabit*
  - Seeking *baraka* (divine blessing) by taking up residence on the frontier
  - Engaged in worship and warfare
Identifying the *ribat* archaeologically

- Relating emic institutional typology from the texts with archaeological structures
- No clear distinction of formal attributes between institutional categories:
  - *Husn* (fortress)
  - *Ribat*
  - *Khan* (caravanserai/hostel)
- Focus on activities rather than architecture
- Linkages are tempting but require clear articulation of bridging arguments
Frontiers and Conversion

The Five Ss:

- The Sword
- Settlement
- The Scholars
- The Sufis
- The Soil

...And the Sixth S:

Syncretism
Citadels (al-qala’) and the internal frontier

Entrance gate to the Aleppo Citadel
Cairo citadel founded by the Ayyubid dynasty