

https://doi.org/10.24035/ijit.24.2023.267			
Received:	13 April 2023	Accepted:	3 July 2023
Revised:	15 June 2023	Published:	15 Dec. 2023
Volume:	24 (December)	Pages:	25-30
To cite: Ahmad Wira, Meirison & Elfia. The transformation of waqf in Turkey from the Ottoman to the contemporary period. 2023. <i>International Journal of Islamic Thought</i> . Vol. 24 (Dec.): 25-30			

The Transformation of Waqf in Turkey from the Ottoman to the Contemporary Period

AHMAD WIRA*, MEIRISON & ELFIA¹

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to provide an overview of the existence of waqf in Turkey and the changes that occurred during the Ottoman Empire, which for a long time sustained the existence of Islamic civilization, including community service in the fields of worship, education, social and military. Even though Turkey has been completely secularized, waqf still exists in various forms. Using literary methods, historical qualitative approaches, and descriptive analysis, the researchers attempt to reveal the conditions and types of waqf in Turkey during the Ottoman period and the modern era, namely after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. In general, the researchers found that waqf in Turkey was used for humanitarian purposes, both for Muslims and non-Muslims, and animals might also benefit from the waqf. In the post-Ottoman Turkish period, waqf emerged in other forms, such as special waqf to deal with earthquakes and natural disasters, as well as to help widows and children of war victims. Sufi orders also played a role in the development of waqf, which avoided direct conflict with the secular government of the time of Kemal Atatürk and his supporters. Sufi orders lived to develop Waqf in community services, hospitals, education, and other social activities—expansion of sufi waqf in the Balkans.

Keywords: Contemporary, Ottoman, Turkey, Waqf, Transformation

Handling waqf has been one of the Ottoman Empire's most prominent hallmarks since ancient times in the mosques of Europe and Islamic centers in America and worldwide. The Turkish Waqfs have been used for scholarships and made outstanding achievements from time to time. Furthermore, it also showed genuine interest in different aspects of life, and it was not limited to assisting mosques or students of legal knowledge. However, somewhat its services exceeded public facilities and human needs in its various forms, for example, a special waqf to feed birds, and waqf for taking care of horses, a waqf for blind people, and a waqf for workers and a stand

¹ **Ahmad Wira***, (Corresponding Author), Ph. D., Senior Lecturer, at the Faculty of Islamic Economics and Business, Islamic State University (UIN) of Imam Bonjol Padang, Karang Ganting Road, No 07 Ampang, Padang 25153, West Sumatra, INDONESIA. E-mail: ahmadwira@uinib.ac.id; **Meirison**, Ph. D., Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Ushuluddin, Islamic State University (UIN) of Imam Bonjol Padang, Prof. Mahmud Yunus Lubuk Lintah Road, Anduring, Padang 25153, West Sumatra, INDONESIA. E-mail: meirison@uinib.ac.id; **Elfia**, Ph. D., Lecturer at the Faculty of Sharia, Islamic State University (UIN) Imam Bonjol Padang, Griya Panca Road, Blok D no 1 B Cubadak Air, Kuranji, Padang 25153, West Sumatra, INDONESIA. E-mail: elfia@uinib.ac.id

for poets, etc. The waqf is a charitable association that collects money from donors or state support with a particular budget and is affiliated with religious affairs. It performs charitable works to help the vulnerable, the oppressed, and animals. There is, for example, a special Waqf for prisoners. Moreover, when the Justice and Development Party came up with the issue of Waqfs, it witnessed a big boom in Turkey. It had over a thousand centers both inside the country and in other countries, reaching 108 centers, mainly where Muslims are located.

Turkey has established 4000 schools for imams and preachers, where many reciters have graduated from, memorized the Quran, and mastered other sciences. Every area in Istanbul has a school for Imam Khatib, which teaches primary to secondary religious sciences at the university. It also owns religious TV channels; for example, there is a channel on the Turkish satellite that operates 24 hours a day, broadcasting the hadiths of the Messenger, both in voice and in writing.

In discussing the issue of waqf, the researchers referred to an article written by Orbay, K. (2017)—Imperial Waqfs within the Ottoman Waqf System published in the journal *Endowment Studies*. The subject of whether Muslims have taken great care of waqfs has been raised frequently. Throughout history, the waqf has supported numerous institutions dealing with all aspects of life and it is not limited to mosques or scholars. The writer Muhammad Hassan Al-Quddo mentioned in a report published on the "TurkPress" website that the waqf is "imprisonment of the eye". It is about owning it, distributing it to one of the servants, and donating it to charity through a permissible bank.

Methodology

In writing this article, the researchers conducted a literature study related to waqf starting from the Ottoman period, which was an active supporter of Islamic civilization to the modern Turkish period. This research emphasizes descriptive analysis of historical studies based on verified existing documents holistically and reinterprets the waqf activities that have existed since the Ottoman Empire, which have continued in modern times and have undergone numerous changes.

One of the Ottoman Empire's most prominent features, and later the modern state of Turkey, was the extent to which it cared for the waqf. The waqf has grown into a massive institution for the Turks with their short and long-term projects and plans, in addition to their presence in various parts of the world. Many features are included in their programs, such as taking care of students of knowledge and scholars, taking care of the birds, and preparing the bride for her wedding. Islam has made the Turks the most charitable people in the world.

Discussion

The waqf can be distinguished from zakat and charity by its unique feature. It has continuity and permanence, which is due to a primary reason: it has transformed into an institution that can maintain its production and continuity (Orbay 2017). Waqf in Islam has its own position and uniqueness, which is part of the civilization of an Islamic country. Waqf is a facility that has provided social services to Muslims for centuries which has significantly reduced the state's burden. Waqf is a crucial icon of Islamic economics that still exists in contemporary times and has even progressed in several sectors of public service and banking.

The impact of the waqfs on the nature of people in Turkey can be seen in various television programs, particularly religious programs during Ramadan—such as the Çamlıca Mosque. TRT, Turkey's largest television network broadcasts the Noble Quran and praying during Ramadan. Among the Waqfs' contributions is the distribution of Qurbani meat to needy countries, such as Mauritania. It also built religious schools for the disadvantaged, and in 7 years, more than 500,000 copies of the Quran were distributed for free. There was also a new edition of two million copies of the Quran translated into ten languages distributed to people who have difficulty reading the Quran in Arabic.

In 2010, the city of Isla hosted the world's longest *iftar* table; its length was 10 km, and the number of tables was 7020, with 41,120 people participating. The waqfs in Turkey have a significant impact in assisting students with accommodation, expenses, and scholarships. The

Turks are always keen on scientific Waqfs supported by a group of businessmen to sustain and invest in 1000 science students. In 1189 in the city of Izmir, the Turks established a Waqf called the "Lilac Waqf" to feed the lilac birds. In 1483, a waqf called "The Waqf of Pine Trees" was established in Istanbul with the goal of planting and maintaining pine trees. In 1496, a special waqf was created to take care of bridges, clean them, and protect them from torrents and floods.

In 1574, a special waqf was established to care for horses and equip them for military use. There were many forms of waqfs, including a waqf for the distribution of shoes and a waqf for prisoners. In addition, a waqf for preparing the bride was allocated to provide materials for the poor bride who wanted to get married. Waqfs existed in Turkey in the past and still exist today, and every day, a new waqf is created to assist the charitable organization to help, for example, water maintenance in the streets, which made the Turks care about establishing a special waqf for the care of water sources, and this is evidence of their faith and their belonging to the homeland.

The waqf encompasses both fixed assets such as real estate, farms, and so on, as well as movable assets that do not change after use, such as industrial machinery and weapons. Those who help others with money, food, and so on are considered charities and will be regarded as good deeds even after death (Orbay 2019). The waqf can be distinguished from zakat and charity by its unique feature. It has permanence and continuity, and permanence is due to the main reason it has transformed into an institution that can maintain its production and continuity. At the same time, those in charge receive their wages from waqf funds (Nizri 2015).

Curiosities and Wonders of Waqfs in the Ottoman Era

The followers of the history of waqfs in Turkey since the beginning of the Ottoman Empire found uncommon waqf programs in various aspects of life, including:

1. The Waqf of the Bird House in Istanbul: It was a shelter and nest for birds, built of stone in a beautiful engineering manner as if it was a rare masterpiece in shape and purpose. This Waqf is still a pleasure for onlookers and tourists in the Ottoman civilization.
2. The Khan of the Travelers (Karawan Saray): It was a shelter that provided the wayfarer and travelers with comfort, livelihood, and security, including shelter, food, drink, and bathing.
3. Waqf (for those who need fruit): This waqf was allocated to provide baskets of fruits for people in need and sick person because fruits were abundant in its season, and those who had money can afford the fruit (Orbay 2019). Meanwhile, this waqf provided the poor people and their children with a basket of fruit from time to time.
4. A waqf for feeding the birds during snow: This waqf was devoted to providing corn and spreading it on the snow so that the birds would not die of hunger in the winter season, and when snow covered the ground, and the birds had no means of catching food, some of them would die. This waqf complied with the Prophet's words (May God bless him and grant him peace): "And in every good heart there is a reward."
5. The waqf for the bride: This waqf was designated to provide materials for the poor bride who wanted to get married and yet could not afford anything to make her like other women (Nizri 2015).
6. Waqf of Ink: It was a waqf program dedicated to providing ink to scholars and scribes with ink so that they continued to compose and copy books.
7. Waqf for boat owners and porters: This waqf program was allocated to help elderly boat owners and porters who were unable to work due to age. This waqf preserved their dignity and fulfilled their needs.

This variety of waqf programs provides the readers with a vivid picture of the extent of waqf's concern for the needs of animals. This can be seen in Waqf programs for birds, food, and housing, in addition, there are also waqf for human needs such as the bride preparation and the scholars' need. Inseparable from his interests (Khan 2007), waqf in Islam is for the benefit of Muslims whereas a similar act to waqf in the West aims initially to avoid taxes in England (Abdullah 2020).

What are the Most Critical Waqfs in Modern Turkey (Post-Ottoman)?

After the demise of the Ottoman Empire and the end of the state that ruled the scholars for nearly 600 years, did the waqf end with its fall, or did the descendants carry on the tradition of their ancestors? The Turks have continued the path of their Ottoman ancestors and remained creative in developing waqfs, and Turkish waqfs have spread worldwide:

1. **Kimse Yok Me:** It is the name of one of the Turkish solidarity institutions established in 2002. It aims to provide relief to the poor and needy and stand with them to alleviate their suffering and provide for their needs by collecting donations from charitable people. Waqf in Turkey is not limited to the Turkish region; it has expanded to most parts of the world, providing aid to people in need or the victims of natural disasters. The most prominent project of this Foundation is the Fraternal Families, which is a program that pairs a well-off family and a low-income family to provide them with assistance and alleviate their suffering (*Kimse Yok Mu - kanalkaltim.com*, n.d.).
2. **Investigation and Rescue Waqf:** This waqf was established following the August 1999 earthquake, when thousands of volunteers from all over Turkey arrived in the earthquake zone, including women, children, factory workers, company owners, and men of all professions. This waqf was not organized but rather the result of an individual action. However, after this program, they decided to establish the Investigation and Rescue Waqf. It ranked first in Turkey in rescue operations in terms of organization, continuous movement, uniform, and long experience in rescue operations. The waqf had 25 teams in different regions of the country, and it expanded from seven volunteers to 1200 volunteers.
3. **Waqf for assessing women's efforts:** This waqf was established in 1986 with the goal of improving the conditions of women with low expectations. It entails supporting women in their work and helping them to improve their needs, the needs of their children, and their status in their society, as well as assisting them in their leadership position both in work and society. This waqf project involves aid for preschool kindergartens in poor areas and nurseries (women and childhood centers) in poor neighborhoods.
4. **The Waqf of two-point machines for people who are blind** was established to help the visually impaired. The waqf established an electronic library so that the blind could read books, and the volunteers read books to the blind. The idea of the library waqf was inspired by the Sulaymaniyah Library endowed by Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent (Öncel 2022).
5. **IIH: Waqf for humanitarian relief, rights, and freedom:** This waqf was established to extend a helping hand and material and moral support to orphans, refugees, widows, and the wounded affected by wars and battles worldwide, as the waqf provides service based on its faith and humanitarian principles without prejudice to color, religion, or gender. It is spread across 120 countries, 57 are Islamic countries, and the rest are not (Alashari, 2022). This waqf operates with permanent and continuous activity. The waqf participated in the "Fleet of Freedom" to break the siege on the Gaza Strip in 2008, and it has distinguished activities and works worldwide that continue to this day (Orbay 2017).

The waqfs in the Ottoman Empire and modern Turkey are an important element for research and writing, particularly because the experience is distinctive and useful in terms of management and organization, as well as the element of permanence and continuity for successive ages without interruption or disruption (Gürsoy 2018).

Waqf institutions run by sufi groups in Turkey provide many services to Turkish society. Their role also emerged after the country's transition from the Ottoman era to the Republic and the accompanying political and social changes that affected the state's identity. The "Aziz Mahmud Hadi Association" is one of those institutions that are active in providing relief, health, and educational services, as it has adapted to the volatile circumstances during the past nine decades, and its counterparts in sufi waqfs have participated in preserving Turkey's Islamic identity (Başpınar, 2018). According to Adam Argol, the general director of educational services in the association, the name is attributed to "Sheikh Aziz Mahmoud Hadai, who had close relations

with four Ottoman sultans, of whom he lived, and during his life, he endowed waqfs for spiritual, scientific and social education (Gürsoy 2018)."

Avoid Clash

Sheikh Hadi'i's Waqfs were confiscated according to the decree banning writers issued by the founder of the modern Republic, Kemal Atatürk, in 1925, as were the group of schools and educational institutions (Orbay 2017). The sufi orders avoided clashing with the "Kemalists" who banned their activities, and preferred to continue working silently and with individual efforts in the fields of education and relief, and the secret education houses that they set up turned into places frequented by students of forensic science, and female students who wore a veil that the Turkish government banned in its schools (Aşlamacı & Kaymakcan 2017).

The reforms pursued by previous Turkish President Turgut Ozal in the eighties of the last century contributed to the re-emergence of sufi associations, which took advantage of the limited freedoms at that time. In 1985, the Hadai Association was re-established for relief and education. Argul explained that Hadi's Waqf was established in the Uskudar region of Istanbul that year as a charitable restaurant for the poor, then turned to provide education to them, and expanded until today. It operates seventy centers in Turkey, serving thousands of needy people and charitable activities in 35 other countries, including Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Afghanistan.

Regarding the political role of the waqf, Argul stressed that the Hadi's Waqf - which is a branch of the Naqshbandi order - does not engage in political activity, "and its workers avoid steering towards any rudder in its boat, leaving the members of the Waqf with the opportunity to choose according to what is in line with their convictions." He added, "We will not be a backyard for any political party, and we are politically neutral. We deal with nationalists, liberals, centrists, and Islamists and are interested in raising awareness of Islam away from politics."

According to the researcher and historian Nizam al-Din Ibrahimoglu, the roots of the sufi orders dated back hundreds of years and they continued to maintain their existence among the members of society and its classes despite all attempts to eliminate it, and their mission was to preserve Islamic culture as a law, including beliefs, morals and worship rulings in it. The souls of the Turkish people were reflected through various forms and religious rituals (Altinyelken & Sözeri 2019).

Some sufi orders were distinguished by expressing their identity through zikr, rituals, chants, invocations, and other methods that devoted themselves to memorizing the Quran for people in the homes of their sheiks or private homes that they established for this purpose, and some others were content with expressing their spirituality through the "Drusha" that some media portrayed as an expression of mysticism (Arberry 2013).

The number of sufi order followers in Turkey is vast and they serve Turkish society in the first place by raising generations on the Islamic religion and virtuous morals, which helped to preserve Turkey's Islamic identity during the Republican era (The Republican People's Party (CHP) was the only party between 1923 and 1945 when the National Development Party was established). Some sufi orders also played a significant role in the life of the Turkish state in the Ottoman and modern era, claiming that some of these ways contribute to the state's policy clearly by agreeing with the parties on political gains in the elections. The sufi believes that some of them are hostile to the secular system of the modern state (Abdullah 2020).

To conclude, two primary sources have supported waqfs: the first is waqf institutions based on state resources, which are primarily waqfs established by politicians led by the Sultan and the sons of the Ottoman family, and the main advantage of these waqfs lies in the transfer of part of the money allocated to bureaucrats by the state and using them in special waqf activities. The formation of waqf institutions that continue their bids to meet the religious, scientific, health, and cultural needs of cities has become a tradition followed by politicians. The second source of the waqf system includes the waqfs of good Ottoman citizens who seek to please God and pursue good deeds that benefit the people and society. Although these waqfs are small in financing, they play a significant role in the advancement of social and economic life.

In the post-Ottoman modern era, the legacy of the past, which consists of spirit, culture, and thoughts, has developed. Some modern waqf institutions as a continuation of past waqf thinking are: Kimse Yok Me, which is the name of a solidarity waqf foundation that assists people in need worldwide, and; The Investigation and Rescue Waqf was established following the 1999 earthquake. This waqf body comprises all layers of society, including women, students, factory workers, entrepreneurs, and professionals. Aside from that, there were also waqf for women's empowerment, waqf for people with physical and mental disabilities, waqf for refugees and victims of the war and waqf of education and hospitals. Sufi waqf also played a significant role in developing education and physical and spiritual health services in Turkey. They founded schools and hospitals scattered throughout the area.

References

- Abdullah, A. 2020. Waqf and state interference: a phenomenology study in Al-Azhar University, Egypt. *Journal of Finance and Islamic Banking* 3(1): 38–56. <https://doi.org/10.22515/jfib.v3i1.2625>
- Alashari, D. M. 2022. The endowment devoted to the kiswah of the Kaaba: A historical study. *AZKA International Journal of Zakat & Social Finance* 125–133. <https://doi.org/10.51377/azjaf.vol3no1.97>
- Altinyelken, H. K., & Sözeri, S. 2019. Importing mosque pedagogy from Turkey: an analysis of contextual factors shaping re-contextualization processes in the Netherlands. *Comparative Education* 55(1): 47–65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2018.1541666>
- Arberry, A. J. 2013. *Sufism* (0 ed.). USA and Canada: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203706848>
- Aşlamacı, İ., & Kaymakcan, R. 2017. A model for islamic education from Turkey: the imam-hatip schools. *British Journal of Religious Education* 39(3): 279–292. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2015.1128390>
- Başpınar, Z. 2018. Gevherhan sultan vakfi'nin haremeyn hizmeti: numaralı surre defterleri örn. *The Journal of Social Sciences* 24(24): 386–397. <https://doi.org/10.16990/SOBIDER.4234>
- Gürsoy, Ç. 2018. The financial analysis of the ottoman cash waqfs. In H. Dincer, Ü. Hacıoğlu, & S. Yüksel (Eds.), *Global Approaches in Financial Economics, Banking, and Finance* (pp. 389–413). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78494-6_19
- Karataş, M. 2020. Making decisions in foreign languages: weaker senses of ownership attenuate the endowment effect. *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 30(2): 296–303. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcpy.1138>
- Nizri, M. 2015. 2 The religious endowments of şeyhülislam feyzullah efendi: the waqf institution and the survival of ottoman elite households. In, D. Ze'evi & E. R. Toledano (Eds.), *Society, law, and culture in the middle east* (pp. 31–43). Toledano Warsaw, Poland: De Gruyter Open. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110439755-004>
- Öncel, F. 2022. Imperial landed endowments (vakıf çiftlik) in the nineteenth-century ottoman empire: the case of pertevniyal valide sultan's endowments in thessaly. *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 65(4): 648–673. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685209-12341578>
- Orbay, K. 2017. Imperial waqfs within the ottoman waqf system. *Endowment Studies* 1(2): 135–153. <https://doi.org/10.1163/24685968-00102002>
- Orbay, K. 2019. Coping with institutional and financial crises in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: ensuring the survival of ottoman royal waqfs. *The Medieval History Journal* 22(2): 229–252. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0971945819890444>