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SOCIAL AND POLITICAL REFLECTIONS OF THE WAQF SYSTEM IN JERUSALEM UNDER OTTOMAN RULE

Kürşad Emrah YILDIRIM[1] Murat ERCAN[2]

Abstract

Waqfs, which are seen as a reflection of the Ottoman understanding of the state and the solidarity in the belief system, are an important political tool used in the implementation of state practices. Aimed at ensuring social balance in society by taking from the rich and distributing to the poor, waqfs were used in Jerusalem as in many other regions. Activities such as the protection of religious buildings, infrastructure activities, the construction and support of madrasas, and health services were carried out by integrating them with public policies. Waqfs have not only met social needs, but have also fulfilled many responsibilities to ensure social equilibrium. By providing aid to all those in need without discrimination based on religion or ethnicity, the social balance was maintained and the culture of solidarity was strengthened. The waqfs of the Ottoman Empire, which we have listed in the case of Jerusalem, but whose effects can be seen in all its borders, went beyond their philanthropic role and became an important tool used by the state to implement its social and economic policies.

Keywords: Ottoman Administration, Jerusalem, Waqfs, Public Policy, Palestine

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INTRODUCTION

The Ottoman Empire was a state that spanned vast geographies and left its mark on history in this respect. However, the expansion of the state did not always yield positive results. Especially disruptions in public services spanned vast geographies are an important problem for large states. In the Ottoman Empire, waqfs were used as an effective tool to prevent these problems and to spread public services throughout the state. Within the Ottoman state structure, important arrangements were made in the social and cultural life of the society through waqfs. With this role, it was seen that waqfs undertook important tasks especially in social justice and solidarity.

Waqfs are known as institutions that allocate resources held by wealthy individuals for public benefit. With the proper use of these institutions, it is possible to complete many activities that support public policies and the public budget, such as increasing social welfare, reducing social disparities, increasing efficiency in public services, fulfilling social responsibility duties, and eliminating deficiencies in areas such as education, health, infrastructure, and transportation where the state cannot reach. Therefore, waqfs are valuable institutions that both alleviate the burden of the state and provide social harmony, stability, and balance in society. By integrating public policies and waqfs and using them effectively, the Ottoman Empire was able to provide equal opportunities in education, keep income imbalance under control, expand health services, and strengthen houses of worship in many geographies. While doing these, ensured peaceful coexistence despite its multicultural structure, thus ensuring that people lived in peace, tranquility and security despite the multicultural structure.

Many of the Ottoman sultans supported the spread of the waqf culture. However, especially during the reigns of Fatih Sultan Mehmet and Suleiman the Magnificent, the effectiveness of these institutions was felt much more. In geographically strategic regions, social benefit was increased through this instrument. For example, in Jerusalem, a strategic region for Islam, the authority of the Ottoman state was strengthened through the activities supporting religious and social diversity carried out through waqfs. Operating in a wide range of activities, from the maintenance and protection of important religious buildings such as the Al-Aqsa Mosque to the construction of aqueducts, waqfs not only supported Ottoman public policies but also promoted the spread of social solidarity as a culture in society. A strong sense of collective responsibility was cultivated within society.

WAQFS AS AN INSTRUMENT OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

When analysed historically and especially with its social functions, it is seen that the concept of waqf is defined as structures that support and strengthen some structures in the society, operate for a social purpose, and contribute to this purpose by donating some elements of material and moral value of people and institutions to achieve this purpose. As a social purpose, it can be said that waqfs generally focus on education, health, religion, social welfare and cultural fields and carry out their activities in these fields. It is possible to say that waqfs make significant contributions to social developments and strengthen social solidarity in the geographies where they are applied (Özbek, 2002). The intensive activities of the waqfs, whose social effects we can observe in the historical process, are noteworthy during the Ottoman Empire (Akgündüz, 1996). These intensive activities spread over a wide range of areas; thus, the burden of public administrators was eased thanks to the contribution of waqfs to public services.

In Islamic societies, waqfs are considered a bridge between the rich and the poor. People can transform their personal assets into public benefit through the waqf system in order to provide a social benefit. Waqfs, which became widespread and institutionalised during the Ottoman Empire, were used as an important tool in meeting social services (Kaya and Koca, 2020). In this way, services such as many hospitals, schools, fountains, bridges, etc. were made available to citizens, thus increasing the level of social welfare.

When the concept of waqf in the modern sense is analysed, it is seen that the concept is not unique to Islamic societies. The existence of various institutions with similar functions in different religions and cultures is an indication of the globalisation of the waqf culture. Especially with the Renaissance, the development of waqfs accelerated in Western societies. When evaluated in its modern meaning, a waqf, which derives from the concept of endowment, the use of a property or resource for public benefit, allocation for public benefit, can be defined as a legal entity that ensures the sustainability of the resource to be used for public benefit (Temizer, 2021). Therefore, waqfs are institutions with legal existence that are established to ensure the use of a property or property by its owner for a social purpose in line with this purpose (Hatemi, 2020).

It is considered as a possible result that waqfs positively affect the economic structure of the society and reduce inequalities between individuals thanks to their contribution to ensuring social justice, which is one of the important social results of waqfs. In addition to the social benefits of waqfs, the fact that they alleviate the social service burden on the state with the services they provide is another issue emphasised. Thus, they contribute to the image of the state by cooperating with it in meeting the needs of society

(Özaydın, 2003). From this perspective, waqfs can be defined as a social service organisation beyond being charitable institutions (Singer, 2008).

THE ROLE OF WAQFS IN OTTOMAN HISTORY

Waqfs one of the main elements of the social, economic and cultural policies of the state in the Ottoman Empire. These institutions carried out activities especially related to religious buildings and infrastructure but also acted as economic actors and created a sustainable structure with income-generating properties such as agricultural lands, commercial houses and inns. Therefore, the waqf system came to the fore as an instrument supporting the social welfare policies of the Ottoman Empire (Yediyıldız, 2003).

Waqfs, which are one of the important symbols of social solidarity, have existed in almost every period of Turkish history, and especially in the Ottoman period, which represents the recent history, they have increased their influence much more. It can be said that in the Ottoman administrative understanding, waqfs were an administrative tool used in the provision and financing of public services and kept alive to ensure social welfare. It is seen that the waqfs, which provided access to public services for every member of the society and thus contributed to the social responsibility duty of the state, were much more active and used in major projects, especially during the reigns of Mehmet the Conqueror and Suleiman the Magnificent. In those periods, large projects were carried out in areas such as education, health and infrastructure through waqfs, and social structures such as külliye, madrasah, hospital and bazaar could be built in cities (Özbek, 2003). Thus, deep-rooted effects were created in the economic, cultural and social spheres of society, and competition in philanthropy was increased and the proliferation of aid was encouraged. Thus, a well-functioning system was established that provides services to all segments of society by taking into account the diversity of the society, strengthens the bond between the state and the citizens, and enables the state to fulfil its function of faster and easier access to public services (Kozak, 1985). When we look at the reflections of this system, it is noteworthy that there is a wide range from education to health, from social assistance to religious services (Akgündüz, 1996).

The waqf system, which was implemented in the Ottoman Empire and achieved successful results, was based on Islamic law. Thanks to this waqf, a large-scale solidarity was established and it was accepted by everyone as a tool that reduces social inequalities, ensures social justice, facilitates access to those in need and thus creates faith-based pleasure (Akgündüz, 2012). For this reason, waqfs were seen as a system formed with the awareness of the social responsibilities of the Ottoman people as a requirement of their religious beliefs. It has become an institution that overlaps with the waqfs of charity and solidarity, which are among the commandments of Islam (Çizakça, 2006). The waqf culture rising on the basis of these values

facilitated the role of being a social state, which became increasingly difficult in the ever-expanding lands of the Ottoman Empire, and played an important role in the healthy execution of public services (Koyunoğlu, 2017).

The waqf culture strengthened in the Ottoman Empire was a system that eliminated the status understanding between social classes and encouraged solidarity between these classes and contributed to their strengthening. Thus, social balance was achieved by helping those in need in the society. With this social function, waqfs became an important component of the social policies of the Ottoman Empire (Akgündüz, 1996). The establishment and functioning of waqfs, which were used as a tool in policy development, were also based on solid waqfs. In the waqf system, which found its place as a special field within the framework of the Ottoman legal system, the property owned by the waqfs had to be used for a specific purpose. The use of these properties for purposes other than those specified is prohibited. In addition, waqf properties were kept free from state intervention. However, the state has the authority to monitor and regulate the functioning of waqfs. In the social sense, it is integrated with the understanding of philanthropy, which is accepted as a culture. A strong social structure has emerged thanks to the widespread acceptance of this culture in society and its benefits reflected in society (Soysaldı, 2004). Waqf culture has been a system trusted and supported not only by Muslims but also by non-Muslims. Because not only Muslims were the target audience in the functioning of waqfs, other ethnic and religious groups also received services and assistance from waqfs. Waqfs were involved in the maintenance and repair of churches in Ottoman lands. Thus, waqfs received a passing grade from all segments of society in terms of inclusiveness and trust (Husic, 2011).

Education is one of the fields in which waqfs were most active. Thanks to services such as meeting the needs of madrasas and providing the resources needed by students and educators, the education system was strengthened. In this way, waqfs played an important role in the delivery of educational services to much wider segments of society (Turan, 1947). Another public service in which waqfs were active was the field of health. Most of the hospitals operating in the Ottoman lands were built with the financial resources obtained from waqfs. Ottoman hospitals contributed to the spread of social solidarity and solidarity in this field with the free health services they provided (Yediyıldız, 2003). Thanks to the waqf culture, the Ottoman Empire ensured that public services were not interrupted in its expanding territories, strengthened spiritual values in the social sense and strengthened the awareness of unity by combining the concept of philanthropy with activities carried out for the benefit of society (Tokol and Alper, 2012).

REFLECTION OF THE UNDERSTANDING OF WAQF IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE ON PUBLIC POLICIES

Waqfs, which ensured social justice in the Ottoman state and brought the rich and the poor together, should not be seen only as an individual philanthropic activity. Beyond these activities, waqfs, which fulfilled a significant part of public services, also played an important role in shaping state policies. Co-operation between waqfs and the state has developed especially in the fulfilment of education, health, infrastructure and religious services. Thus, waqfs partially assumed the social responsibility role of the state and became the locomotive of continuity in public services (Akgündüz, 1996). This relationship was not limited to the provision of public services. Madrasahs, hospitals, bridges and waterways, which were built with the financial support of waqfs and then financed for their functioning, met the basic needs of the people and provided the state with a part of the income needed for the realisation of public services (Taşkesen, 2003). Thus, while the public benefited from public services, the state budget was also relieved and its efficiency was increased. While increasing social welfare with this double-sided benefit mechanism, public expenditures were supported by waqf revenues and contributed to the financial structure of the state (Ertem, 2011).

Another contribution of waqfs to public policies was realised through the establishment of social order and the provision of social order. Waqfs played an important role in meeting the needs and demands of various segments of the society and ensured social stability and balance (Öztürk, 1995). Thus, waqfs have become one of the social policy tools that promote social justice and solidarity (Akgündüz, 1996). In addition, waqfs ensured the sustainability of public services and improved their quality. These contributions made waqfs a fundamental element of the relationship between public policies and social welfare in the Ottoman Empire (Barnes, 1987). In particular, distributing the income of some waqfs to various social groups and supporting projects aimed at raising the living standards of low-income individuals were considered important activities for economic policies (Tuğrul and Bulut, 2017).

The 16th and 17th centuries were the most active period for waqfs in the Ottoman Empire. In this period, waqf revenues accounted for approximately 12 per cent of the state budget. Therefore, waqfs played an important role in the financial system. By the 17th century, the proportion of waqf revenues in the budget increased up to 20 per cent. Thus, Ottoman waqfs became more effective in financing public services such as social services, education, health and infrastructure (Sırım, 2018). Public policies, which were financially strengthened by waqfs, provided services not only to Muslims but also to non-Muslims. In order to reduce economic imbalances, money waqfs contributed to the society economically, especially by providing

financial functions such as interest-free debt system (Tuğrul and Bulut, 2017). Public policies carried out through waqfs and waqfs increased the trust of the people of different origins and religions in the state. This situation contributed to the strengthening of the Ottoman political authority in the region. The strengthening of social peace and trust was the reason behind the Ottoman administration's lasting influence in Jerusalem. This effect was reinforced by the continuity of the waqf system (Faroqhi, 2004).

With the spread of the waqf culture, social solidarity and solidarity have increased. This situation led to the emergence of strong relationships in the society (Çizakça, 2000), and people's sense of trust in each other increased. Thus, a strong social security network was created and the burden of the state in security policies was eased. Since waqfs touched almost every level of life in different socio-economic strata of society, they also made significant contributions to the shaping of the economic, religious, political and social landscape of urban areas in the Islamic world. In particular, waqfs have been used to consolidate religious and political power. For example, through waqfs, governments transferred the aid received from some sectarian groups to other sectarian groups, creating a social bulwark against each other. Waqfs were also used as a means of creating and strengthening religious and thus political waqfs for the new ruling elite groups in the city, which established waqfs to consolidate the power of certain groups within the Islamic community. Again, through the waqfs, governments aimed to establish religious and educational institutions, to create cadres such as imams, khatīb, muhaddithis, etc. working in these institutions, and to create local support networks and power bases among religious scholars, thus paving the way for a cosmopolitan atmosphere in the city (Deguilhem, 2008).

WAQF ACTIVITIES IN JERUSALEM AND JARUSALEM IN THE OTTOMAN PERIOD

The Ottoman Empire captured Jerusalem in 1516 and developed the city as a religious, cultural and economic centre. Especially during the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent, infrastructure and reconstruction works, mosques, madrasahs, inns and hospitals increased the number of public buildings, thus the city gained a new face (Köse, 2015). These buildings, which were built with the contribution of waqfs in Jerusalem, mobilised social life and met the needs of the people of the region (Karaman, 2015).

The city, which showed significant developments throughout the Ottoman period, underwent social and economic changes towards the end of the Ottoman rule. Especially with the increasing Jewish immigration in the 19th century, the population structure of the region became differentiated. This differentiation led to changes in the structure of religious and social institutions. Afterwards, the opening of consulates by European powers in order to gain influence in the region played an important role in the complete transformation of the region. Jerusalem started to turn into an area of international competition.

These negative developments also negatively affected the administrative and social structure of Jerusalem and weakened the Ottoman authority in the city (Köse, 2015).

The Ottoman Empire was an important state that ruled over a large part of the world. Although it was difficult for the state to provide public services to large groups of people in large geographies, there were no major problems in the geographies where the Ottomans ruled, and public services were provided continuously and regularly. Waqfs, which played an important role in the provision of these services, carried out activities in most of the Ottoman lands and became the hand reaching out to those in need. During the years it was within the Ottoman borders, Jerusalem was one of the geographies where waqfs were active. Waqfs supported the social and religious structures in the region and tried to meet the needs of the people here. After the conquest of Jerusalem, the rebuilding of the city walls eliminated the security problem, which was one of the most important problems for the people of Jerusalem. Before the Ottoman rule, the region was threatened by Bedouins and Crusaders. Thanks to the renovation of the walls with Waqf revenues, this fear that kept the city in captivity was reduced, and the economic decline that occurred before the conquest was steadily increased as the city became more secure (Avcı, 2002). It is seen that waqfs played an important role especially in the construction and protection of religious buildings in Jerusalem, which had religious importance for the Ottomans. The waqfs, which were especially active in the protection of religious buildings in and around Al-Aqsa Mosque, also supported public needs such as mosques, madrasahs, inns and waterways, and worked to meet these needs (Singer, 2008). Waqfs operating in Jerusalem undertook the maintenance of holy sites such as the Haram al-Sharif and contributed to the city's infrastructure. They supported the city economy with projects such as the supply of water resources and the establishment of a bazaar (Memiş, 2020). In particular, the construction of a total of eight wells in and around the Haram al-Sharif has met a large part of Jerusalem's need for clean water (Rosen-Ayalon, 1989).

It is known that about three hundred waqfs were established in Jerusalem between the 1700s and 1800s, of which about 20 were charitable waqfs and the rest were established as zurri waqfs (Memiş, 2016). It is seen that the Ottoman waqfs operating in the region were also active in increasing social welfare. Waqfs were supported in meeting the various needs of the people. During the construction of aqueducts and fountains built by Suleiman the Magnificent in the 16th century, waqf revenues were used in addition to public resources (Peri, 2001). It is known that the understanding of supporting social and religious diversity, which is the general purpose of waqfs and its reflection in the Ottoman Empire, also manifested itself in this region and waqfs played an active role in the region in this regard. In this way, both the needs of the people were met and their loyalty to the state was strengthened (Faroqhi, 1999). The waqfs operating in Jerusalem carried out activities especially for the preservation of Islamic culture and strengthened social solidarity by

providing education and social aid in Nablus and Gaza (Tamari, 2002). While these waqfs were an indication of the strategic importance of Jerusalem and Palestine for the Ottomans, they were also a reflection of a management approach that showed responsibility towards the people of the region (Faroqhi, 1999). The social needs of Muslim, Jewish and Christian communities in Jerusalem were met through the waqf system. These aids provided to the poor and social aids provided without discrimination of religion and ethnicity constituted one of the cornerstones of the socio-economic structure of Jerusalem (Güneş, 2015).

According to historical sources, the most important waqf that comes to mind when it comes to waqfs in Jerusalem is the Haseki Sultan Waqf. Founded by Hürrem Sultan and operating especially in Jerusalem, the waqf came to the forefront with its services for the poor and needy. As one of the most active waqfs in the city, it established almshouses that distributed aid to the poor and provided important support in the fields of health and education. In addition, activities related to the city infrastructure such as the construction of waterways, the establishment of covered bazaars and the provision of security services were carried out through these waqfs. With the activities of the Haseki Sultan Waqf, Jerusalem became an important religious, social and economic centre in the Islamic World (Buhl, 1977). In order to carry out the activities of Haseki Sultan Waqf, Hürrem Sultan gave many villages and lands in Syria and Palestine to the Waqf. As a result, the Waqf was able to carry out its projects in a strong and uninterrupted manner. After the death of Hürrem Sultan, Sultan Süleyman continued to support the activities of the Waqf and gave four more villages and lands in Sayda to the Waqf (El-Asali, 2002).

The most important field of activity of the waqf was the distribution of free food to the public through its darülaceze (shelter) and imarethane (soup kitchen) functions. The waqf, which has an important place in the field of social aid, is also considered as an important example of philanthropy without any discrimination in the Islamic World (Singer, 2012). The building in which the waqf operates was designed by Mimar Sinan. In its architecture, the building consists of a soup kitchen and a külliye design, and also includes buildings such as a mosque, madrasah and guest house. This is accepted as an indication that the waqf provided religious and educational services in addition to financial aid. The sustainability of the waqf's activities was realised through the allocation of income-generating properties to the waqf by Hürrem Sultan. The Haseki Sultan Waqf, which was accepted as the representative of social aid and solidarity in Jerusalem with its activities, also made significant contributions to the scientific and cultural life in the region with its educational institutions.

CONCLUSION

The concept of waqf and waqf culture are concepts shaped by the principles of charity and solidarity, which are fundamental concepts in Islamic law, and are defined as individuals allocating their assets for public benefit. In the Ottoman Empire, these concepts were used in a wide range of areas such as the dissemination of education, the construction and maintenance of religious buildings, and the financing of infrastructure services such as waterways and bridges, serving the society and contributing to the strengthening of the state image.

The Ottoman Empire, which ruled over large geographies, also had waqfs that were active in Palestine. These waqfs strengthened the state's presence and acceptability in the region by providing the necessary financing for religious buildings as well as the healthy execution of social services in the region. Thanks to the waqfs, the basic needs of the people in Palestine, especially in Jerusalem, could be met. The strong waqf system played an important role in ensuring social solidarity and social justice by affecting the social structure of the city. These outputs reflected positively on the society strengthened the Ottoman social policies. In addition, it also gave the empire a positive image in terms of policies towards the region, which is considered the spiritual centre of the Islamic world. In addition to this, since people of different religions and ethnic origins living in Jerusalem were assisted through waqfs, religious tolerance and multiculturalism were reflected in state policies. Another example of this reflection was the protection and strengthening of the structures of different religions in the region through waqfs. These examples contributed to the strengthening of the Ottoman administration's policies reflecting interreligious tolerance and peace in Jerusalem.

The waqf activities aimed at strengthening the economic welfare of the people of Jerusalem contributed to the state administration, especially in terms of ensuring economic balance. Ensuring the income balance between individuals in the society is considered a positive result in terms of contributing to economic policies. Again, waqf activities in the fields of education and health supported the policies of the administration in ensuring equal opportunities in education and the right to health, which is a social right. The importance of madrasahs in education is indisputable. The human resources trained by these institutions financed by waqf revenues provided significant benefits to both society and the state. The human resources needed by the state could be provided, and a more productive economy and a higher quality of life became possible with a qualified and productive labour force. In addition, social stability has been ensured by contributing to the social cohesion of different ethnic and religious groups.

AUTHOR STATEMENT

Researchers have jointly contributed to the article. Researchers have not declared any conflict of interest.

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