

**ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION THROUGH WAQF INSTITUTIONS IN  
OTTOMAN EMPIRE BETWEEN 15<sup>th</sup> UNTIL 17<sup>th</sup> CENTURY**  
(Peradaban Islam Menelusuri Institusi Wakaf dalam Kerajaan ‘Uthmaniyyah Pada  
Abad Ke-15M Sehingga Abad ke-17M)

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**ABSTRACT**

Waqf institution was a very significant building in the Islamic civilization developed by the Ottoman Empire around Eastern Europe during its rule in the 15<sup>th</sup> century until the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The spread of waqf practices at that time provided many benefits and good deeds to the society including for non-Muslims. Through this institution, the Ottoman Empire gradually brought Islamic civilization into many parts of Eastern Europe. Therefore, this research focuses on the role and contribution of the waqf institutions in expanding Islamic civilization during the Ottoman Empire over the region from the 15<sup>th</sup> century to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. This study was conducted using qualitative methods in the form of historical research while data collection methods used the method of analysis of documents from various primary and secondary sources as well as using interview method to strengthen the data obtained. The results show that the Ottoman Empire not only bring Islamic civilization but spreading the Ottoman civilization as well. There is no doubt that through this institution, there was a mixing of culture occurred led to the emergence of new culture in the region. In addition, the study found that the contribution of the *waqf* institutions covered various

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aspects such as economic, socio-cultural, educational, religious and humanitarian. In conclusion, the construction of *waqf* institutions had a positive impact on the society. The government not only expanded their power by conquering new territories but also wanted to spread the Islamic civilization and provide welfare to the people.

**Keywords:** Islamic Civilization; Ottoman empire; *waqf* institution; Balkan; Eastern Europe

### **ABSTRAK**

*Institusi wakaf merupakan binaan yang sangat signifikan dalam peradaban Islam yang dikembangkan oleh kerajaan 'Uthmaniyyah di sekitar Eropah Timur ketika penguasaannya pada abad ke-15M sehingga akhir abad ke-17M. Amalan wakaf yang tersebar ketika itu memberikan pelbagai kemudahan dan kebaikan kepada masyarakat termasuk golongan bukan Islam. Melalui institusi wakaf ini juga, kerajaan 'Uthmaniyyah membawa peradaban Islam masuk ke banyak bahagian di Eropah Timur secara beransur-ansur. Oleh itu, kajian ini memfokuskan berkaitan peranan dan sumbangan institusi wakaf dalam mengembangkan peradaban Islam semasa kerajaan 'Uthmaniyyah menguasai wilayah tersebut pada abad ke-15M sehingga abad ke-17M. Kajian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif yang berbentuk kajian sejarah manakala kaedah pengumpulan data pula menggunakan kaedah analisis dokumen daripada sumber primer dan sekunder serta kaedah temubual supaya dapat mengukuhkan data yang didapati. Hasil kajian menunjukkan peranan institusi wakaf kerajaan 'Uthmaniyyah bukan sahaja dalam membawa peradaban Islam ke seluruh wilayah Eropah Timur tetapi juga ia turut menyebarkan peradaban 'Uthmaniyyah. Tidak dinafikan melalui institusi ini, berlakunya percampuran budaya yang menyebabkan kewujudan budaya baru di wilayah tersebut. Selain itu, kajian mendapati sumbangan institusi wakaf yang dibangunkan turut meliputi pelbagai aspek seperti ekonomi, sosiobudaya, pendidikan, keagamaan dan kemanusiaan. Kesimpulannya, pembinaan institusi wakaf ini memberikan impak positif kepada masyarakat dalam wilayah taklukan kerajaan 'Uthmaniyyah. Pemerintah bukan sahaja meluaskan kuasa dengan menakluk wilayah baru tetapi juga mahu menyebarkan peradaban Islam dan memberikan kebajikan kepada masyarakat.*

**Kata Kunci:** Peradaban Islam; kerajaan 'Uthmaniyyah; institusi wakaf; Balkan; Eropah Timur

### **INTRODUCTION**

Human civilization and civilization itself have begun since the first human being in the world was created. Since then, many different civilization exists and eventually disappeared. It is because, the continuity of civilization is also influenced by many

factors. According to Mustafa al-Sibaie (2011), scholars in history of civilization defines the term of civilization refers to a social system which helps human beings to increase their cultural output. Thus, a civilization has four important elements that include economic resources, political system, moral and arts as well as science. Meanwhile, Noorazlan & Aiza (2014) stated some of the most important elements in civilization is the human being.

If viewed closely, the emergence of civilization such as Greek civilization, Mesopotamia civilization, Malay civilization, ancient China civilization, ancient Indian civilization and European civilization are associated with a matter of geographic and race. It is not denied that all the civilization has given significant contributions in the modern world nowadays. In fact, some of the achievements in this civilization are better and more fabulous than the present. For example, the construction of the pyramid in Egypt built during the Mesopotamia civilization and it became one of the miraculous creation in the world. Therefore, various discussions and theories are in the deal of matters pertaining to civilization. For example, the theory of *Umran al-'Alam* introduced by Ibnu Khaldun in his work, *Muqaddimah*. According to Mahayudin Hj. Yahaya (2011), this theory works in addressing political and socio-economic tension among the Muslim community in Western Asia. In addition, the Muslim philosophy figure, al-Farabi also explained on the development of good nation through theory *al-Madinah al-Fadilah*, the concept of eternal happiness in the world and the hereafter. It focuses on the quality of leadership, social cooperation, etc. (Idris Zakaria 1995).

Yediylidiz & Öztürk (1996) wrote that al-Farabi theory can be attributed to the *waqf* system in urban development of town during the Ottoman classical era. Among *waqf* practice in Ottoman era was the reconstruction of Istanbul after the conquest of the city. The establishment of a *waqf* complex including mosque, public kitchen, hospital, library, education institution at all levels, public bath, covered market, cemetery and shops. The Ottoman thinker, Kinalizade Ali Çelebi said the theory of *al-Madinah al-Fadilah* actually have been realized during the reign of Sultan Suleyman I (1520-1566) who is the 12<sup>th</sup> Ottoman ruler and called as the lawgiver (*al-Qanuni*).

The existence of *waqf* institutions played a major role in the development of Islamic civilization during the Ottoman era. It is not only seen from the point of view of the practice of Islamic culture, but also highlighted through architecture. The features of Islamic and oriental buildings are carefully constructed by combining spiritual aspects and have their own aesthetic value. For the most important things and emphasized in Islam, the institution of *waqf* is also a place in spreading knowledge and Islamic civilization as well as Ottoman culture indirectly. According to Husić (2019), the practice of *waqf* is implemented in fulfilling the needs of society in every Islamic government even in different environments and places.

Therefore, this research focused on period between 15<sup>th</sup> century until 17<sup>th</sup> century which is categorized as golden ages for the Ottoman Empire by historians such as Suraiya Farouqi and Halil Inalcik. These two centuries have been significant in the development of the Ottoman civilization during their rule in classical era. Moreover, during this period has shown the revival of Muslim power in part of Europe region especially Balkan.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research was conducted using qualitative methods in the form of historical research while this research was carried out through data collection methods by using the method of analysis of documents from various primary and secondary sources. The *waqf* documents analyzed were obtained from few institutions and libraries in Turkey and Bosnia & Herzegovina such as IRCICA library and ISAM library in Istanbul and Gazi Husrev Beg library in Sarajevo.

In addition, this research also used interview method in obtaining information and to understand well the roles of *waqf* institutions in Eastern Europe region. This interview was conducted by interviewing Dr. Aladin Husić in Oriental Studies Institute, University Sarajevo in April 2019. The view of scholar who study the practice of *waqf* directly provide a better perspective in discussing the role of *waqf* in the development of Islamic civilization brought by the Ottoman people. Specifically, his opinion is more focused on the *waqf* institutions located in the Balkans and the provinces of Bosnia & Herzegovina which is the place where the *waqf* institutions are the important instrument of the development in the region.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Islamic Civilization in Ottoman Empire**

One of civilization that gives impact to communities around the world is Islamic civilization. It has a significant difference with other civilization that ever existed in this world because it is not lean on any factors such as race and place. In fact, there are many communities with different background and life in the East and the West underneath it. Islamic civilization is inherited from Prophet Muhammad SAW in Medina and lasted until now. According to Mustafa al-Sibaie (2011) and also Baloch (2006), two important cores that make Islamic civilization is slightly different with other civilization are the oneness of God and also raised value of humanity. For example, Islamic civilization has brought Europe out of the Dark Ages to the enlightenment period (renaissance) with various knowledges. Thereafter, the work and knowledges founded by Islamic scholars in the 12<sup>th</sup> century was later developed by Europeans after the fall of Baghdad in 1258.

Islamic civilization was continued by the Ottoman rule over 600 years in the reign of their Sultan (Ahmad Fuad Fanani 2013). The Ottoman Empire is not only expanding their power but also bringing their civilization and culture to enter the territory conquered by them. Indirectly, they also bring Islamic civilization and introduced it to the local community. This is because, the Ottoman ruled its territory based on Islamic law in addition to accept the culture that does not contradict with Islamic law. The diversity of ethnicity, race, religion and social background were honoured by the government especially after the conquest of Constantinople in 1453. Through this event, Sultan Mehmed II has succeed to change the landscape of the city not only become the administrative centre of the Ottoman Empire but also as a centre of knowledge development and trade activity from West and East.

As the first action for reconstruct the city, Sultan Mehmet II substitute its name to Islambol which means the city of Islam (Mohd Roslan 2011). This is an initial action in spreading Islam and bring Islamic civilization in his region. According to Shaw (1976), the situation in the city is filled with the poor before the Ottoman conquered it. In fact, most of the population had fled due to the arrival of the Ottoman army. Therefore, Sultan Mehmet II immediately implement *sürgün* policy which led to the increase of the population in Istanbul in a short time. Those who are willing to move to Istanbul will get the property and safety guarantees for themselves. This leads to the existence of various races and religions in the city consisting of Muslims, Jews, Greeks, Slavs and Armenians. This openness led to the practice of different cultures in a society.

Shaw (1976) also explained that various buildings were established to meet the needs of local communities such as housing, water vessels, roads and markets. Therefore, in 1455 Sultan Mehmet II ordered the construction of a covered market (grand bazaar), the castle and the *Fatih* Mosque in the vicinity there are public facilities under the management of his own charitable institutions *waqf*. Among the *waqf* buildings provided are *medrese* (schools and higher education at each level), hospital, library, public kitchen, public bath, accommodation and fountains. The entire *waqf* fund allocated for maintaining the building provided by Sultan Mehmet II. This endowment complex (*külliyeye*) completed in 1470 and became a landmark of Istanbul at that time. It became the first endowment complex (*külliyeye*) in Istanbul and later was followed by another sultan.

### ***Waqf* Institutions in the Ottoman Empire**

Charitable endowment or *waqf* is an action of a person who used their personal assets in a form of charity institution and it can be beneficial to the others. This is also one concept of *sadaqah* as mentioned in al-Quran (Yediyildiz & Öztürk 1996). If we go

deeply, we can see that the functions of *waqf* are very wide and also related to many aspects such as health, education, religion and also charity. According to Masters (2009), *waqf* in the Ottoman Empire refers to the assets that had been endowed such as shops, factory products such as textile and soap, public bathroom (hammam) and also the entire bazaar if the owner was a wealthy person. Besides, gains from house rental, crops and also taxes such as *jizyah*. All these things were categorized as *waqf* properties which can be used for the benefit of society. Among the institutions that got benefits from this *waqf* including mosques, hospitals, public kitchens, fortresses, bridges, food for birds, fountains and dowry for marriages.

It then developed and undergone some innovations during the age of the Ottoman Empire until it came with the establishment of *waqf* institution today. However, it still has the core of what had been taught by Prophet Muhammad SAW and his companions during the early age of Islam in Medina and also it still accordance to Islamic teachings. There are two examples of the *waqf* established during the Ottoman period. Firstly, in a form of a complex and it was called imperial *waqf*. It was usually from the sultans, governor and also aristocrats (Singer 2008). There also another *waqf* by personally and just only in a form of mosques, hospitals, bridges or the water fountains. Besides, usually there are two ways to do this that are by providing his assets for *waqf* himself whether in the type of moveable assets or it can be done by endowing his money or salary for charity purpose. Secondly, it was called cash *waqf* or cash endowment (nukud vakif) and it was introduced by the Ottoman Empire widely during the 15th century until now although there are some controversies regarding this matter (Razali 2015).

The cash endowment was usually come from the salary of a person whether from their jobs or gaining from housing and mill facilities rental. This money was used in many ways such as to fund education for poor students, food for stray animals, marriage dowry, fund for avoiding infectious diseases, providing houses for poor people and old citizens, funding for performing hajj, beautifying cities, funding and take care of orphans, building hajj stop center, releasing Muslim servants and many more (Anon 2014). By focusing to the important manifestation of *waqf* in Istanbul, Maksudoğlu (2006) said the 2/3 of the city properties were endowed whether from the sultans or individuals.

From the establishment of *waqf* institutions, it can be seen where the important aspect of Islamic Civilization been uphold and it was humanity value. Baloch (2006) also said that this aspect is very important in Islamic Civilization itself. According to Yediyildiz & Öztürk (1996), the establishment of *waqf* institution such as in a form of complex (külliye) in the Ottoman Empire had a very significant message of humanity and social responsible toward citizens. Their establishment also did not totally related

to the government fund only but also given by any personal individuals. This shows how *waqf* of endowment for charity purposes was been a culture in the Ottoman society and it also taught its people to help each other especially for the needy. According to Razali (2015), the charity given to the needy citizens was described by a Turkish scholar, Bahaedin Yediyildiz:

A person who was born in a waqf house, sleep in waqf cradle, eat and drink from waqf money, reading waqf books, getting education in a waqf school, getting salary from waqf administration and when he dies, he will be put in a waqf coffin and been buried in a waqf cemetery.

Based on the statement above, we can see clearly that there is a connection between some individual to the *waqf* institutions around them. This is because, these institutions were established in a populated area or sometimes these will be the base for a new settlement. So, there, people can get what they need such as food, drink, education, shelters, money and anything needed around that place.

The citizens in the Ottoman Empire also tended to make endowment or *waqf* as their culture. The interesting part was not only the Muslims who involved in this activities but also Christians. This can be seen from a sultan decree to the Mount Athos Monastery in 1430 which was during the reign of Sultan Murad II (1421-1444, 1446-1451) after he conquered Salonika. Also written in a tax record during the reign of Sultan Suleiman I (1520-1566) showed an endowment record from a Christians church (Kotzageorgis 2011). Singer (2008) also explained that the scholars had agreed that this culture is important and plays a significant role in Muslims life.

While Minkov (2004) said that *waqf* institutions played a big role for the Islamization of Anatolian (now Turkey) people while Omerci (2018) explain that it also happened to other region such as Bosnia. By focusing wealth to social institutions among Muslims, it can also attract non-Muslims citizens to join them. Thus, culture, social interaction and religion can be spread among them as all citizens can use the same facilities whether Muslims or non-Muslims from different background. Association and interaction among them occurred everywhere in these institutions such as *bazaar*, public kitchen and others.

Then, as we talk about Islamic civilization during the era of the Ottoman Empire especially regarding this issue, we also have to discuss about the art and architecture in that time. This is because these two aspects are the proofs of Islamic Civilization on a particular place. As for the monuments related to *waqf* institutions, we are not only can see their art and architecture on religious buildings such as mosques but also *medrese*, hospitals, streets, waterways and many more. Furthermore, to beautify the city, we can see the elements of Islamic arts and architecture also applied in every *waqf* buildings

in Ottoman's style. According to Husić (2019) and Gürbüz (2012), endowments or *waqf* also gave a huge influence and impact on spreading the Ottoman's cultures and arts. In addition, it was also a symbol of civilization built by the government that ruled a certain territory.

Among them are the Mostar Bridge in Bosnia & Herzegovina, al-Azhar University in Egypt and Zubaidah water irrigation system ('Ain Zubaidah) in Mecca (Razali 2015). According to Singer (2008), the culture of *waqf* also affected the physical structure of the cities and villages. For example, if there was a new city opened in Bosnia & Herzegovina, there must be some *waqf* institutions such as mosque or public kitchen. After that the citizens will settle there until more settlements built in that area. Husić (2012; 2019) said that how important role played by *waqf* institutions in the development of cities clearly can be seen at their names such as Gornji Vakuf, Donji Vakuf, Kulen Vakuf, Skender Vakuf dan Vrcar Vakuf. So, this shows all these cities were established from the fund of *waqf* institutions built there.

### ***Waqf* Institutions in the Eastern Europe**

The power expansion by the Ottoman Empire in the Eastern Europe (which is Balkan Peninsula) was very fast especially after the decline of the Byzantine Empire. At the same time, Islam also spread widely in that region (Mohd Roslan 2011). According to Inalcik (2017), the Ottoman Empire played a very important role in shaping the history of Europe beginning from the half of 15<sup>th</sup> century. However, Husić (2014) and Todd (2015) said that the most impact on civilization brought by the Ottoman Empire in Balkan can be seen clearly in Bosnia and Albania. So, many policies, laws and Islamic practices been assimilated into the region where majority Christians locals lived. One of the practices was *waqf*. It was not only a symbol of the Islamic government which ruled that lands but it was also a symbol of universal humanity brought by the Muslim Ottomans. The reason is, every institution there provided free services for basic needs such as food, shelter, medical services and others to all citizens regardless their background.

Car-Drnda (2002; 2006) explains that one of the regions where the development of Islamic civilization through the practice of *waqf* in the Balkan Peninsula is Bosnia & Herzegovina. This can be seen from the existence of 80% of the nowadays cities in the region founded in the 16th century by the basis of *waqf*. Besides, it also change the cities into an important trading center in Eastern Europe. Therefore, it is called the land of *waqf* because almost the entire infrastructure were built using *waqf* funds. So, it is undeniable that during the Ottoman era there were development in terms of civilization and socio-economic (Omercic 2017; 2018).



If we go deeper, there are some important role from this culture and its institutions in the Eastern Europe. Firstly, through this institutions, it helping in Islamization process to become faster. By build these *waqf* institutions by the local Muslims and also by the Ottoman sultans and their governors had attracted the local citizens to accept Islam. Maksudoğlu (2006) also explains that this culture not only commissioned by the sultans but their *vezirs* and officers (*beylerbey* and *sanjakbey*) as well. This had increased the population of Muslim locals in the 15<sup>th</sup> century until the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The proof was mentioned by Alibasić (2007) that majority of the Bosnian locals had accepted Islam during the first two decades when Bosnia was ruled by the Ottoman Empire.

In addition, the *waqf* institutions also providing facilities to local communities especially in the areas that had been devastated after involved in war. In fact, it was an instrument of socio-economic development in the Islamic civilization (Omercić 2017; 2018). According to Inalçik (2000), during the reign of the Ottoman Empire in Bosnia and Herzegovina between the 15<sup>th</sup> until 16<sup>th</sup> century, there were 232 settlements, 18 *karavanserai*, 32 hostels, 10 closed *bazaar* and 42 bridges were built there. Besides, there were also *waqf* institutions in the other cities such as Belgrade, Sofia, Salonika, Sanjak, Novi Pazar, Kosovo and Albania that attracted people to build their settlements there until all the cities became the most important cities in Balkan Peninsular. By these institutions, there were mosques, *medrese*, hospitals, public kitchen, public bathroom, library, waterways and bridges that facilitated locals.

In term of economic growth, cash *waqf* was practiced in the Eastern Europe under the Ottomans rule. This helped everybody who wants to start doing business as *waqf* institutions also play a role as a bank that provided money laundering with a lower rate of interest (Demirhan et al. 2012). Furthermore, this activities functioned and gained income that will be back to facilitate people (Özdemir & Özdemir 2017). In addition, the *waqf* institutions such as shops and *bazaars* built by the owner to provide an opportunity for traders for selling their goods in the particular place provided with a lower rental rate. For example, like *bazaars* in Sarajevo and Visoko in Bosnia & Herzegovina. By giving everyone the same opportunity to earn money, *waqf* can reduce the big gap between the rich and the poor.

The practice of *waqf* in Eastern Europe, especially Bosnia, has its own uniqueness where it also benefits non-Muslims in matters related to non-religious purpose. In fact, *waqf* is also practiced by non-Muslims especially in taking care of their churches. In this regard, Mujić (2019) states that there were *waqf* records and documents related to *waqf* practices performed by three sblings from Sarajevo for the Christian church and its surrounding in Jerusalem. Meanwhile, Husić (2019) in his view explains that

non-Muslims, which are Christians and Jews, are also allowed to borrow money from *waqf* funds and rent *waqf* shops to run their business same like Muslims.

## CONCLUSION

*Waqf* is a form of welfare and social practice that can provide to the public and indeed it is an Islamic practice. During the Muslims rule from the era of the Prophet Muhammad SAW in Medina until Islam finally expanded further into the Europe, *waqf* is still practiced. It was also widely implemented and become a culture during the Ottoman Empire era. It was not only implemented by the government for its people as an obligatory duty. In fact, it is a manifestation of humanity among the members of society, regardless of their background. Islam also teaches Muslim to help each other especially those are unfortunate. Finally, the social gap between rich and poor people can be reduced as all individuals in the community get their opportunity to get education, health cares, food and also the same facilities provided. In addition, it provides jobs for the locals in various sectors such as in management and administration sectors.

Through this practice, a wide variety of charitable institutions established to cover the basic needs of individuals from their birth until death. In fact, when we view this matter in a broader sight, actually this institution is an important symbol and evidence relating to the Islamic Civilization during the Ottoman Empire era. Through a combination of knowledge, humanity and spiritual values that are applied through these institutions can help in spreading Islam faster. Also, we can see some of the positive impacts of this culture in the economic development, science and technology as well as sociocultural and universal human values. Despite some of the *waqf* institutions were destroyed or converted by today's government, it is recorded in the history of Islamic civilization as a very significant monument and is synonymous with the values of social justice. This is because it arises from the human desire to get closer to Allah and determination to do good things to all mankind.

Certainly, knowledge and research related to *waqf* need to be studied more widely, especially in aspects of *fiqh* such as fatwas that have been issued by previous scholars. Various other angles can be explored to ensure that the practice of *waqf* is implemented as much as possible because it is more flexible compared to *zakat* which also belongs to the charitable practices in Islam. In Malaysia, the development of *waqf* over the past 10 years has been actively done by various parties, especially the Islamic Religious Council in each state, in fact, several universities and individuals have also taken the initiative to develop their respective *waqf*. Through historical exposure related to the practice of *waqf* in the Ottoman empire will further expand the point of view of the community about *waqf*. It is also important to be able to see this practice that can be adapted to the local '*uruf* (custom) in Malaysia.

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