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## **FBM INSIGHTS**

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## BRIEF HISTORY OF WAQF: THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

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There was general agreement among scholars on the importance of waqf in modern Muslim society, where it can help reduce government spending and reduce the government's deficit. Directly, it has the potential to improve the growth of government investment. The waqf system will fulfill this function through voluntary donations from wealthy individuals. In a community with a more equitable distribution of wealth, voluntary donation is intended to benefit the community. During the Ottoman Empire, waqf had played a significant role in its socioeconomic growth prior to the 20th century. As a result of the waqf's funding, this empire's civilization was established. When the Ottoman Empire was in power, the imaret system<sup>1</sup> was developed and controlled by the waqf system. Most hospitals in the 11th century were funded by waqf funds.

Over a period of decades, the Ottoman Empire set a precedent for poverty eradication by waqf. In the past, the waqf of the Ottoman Empire was a major contributor to its economy. According to Saduman and Aysun (2009), Istanbul, Bursa, Edirne, Amasya, and Manisa are new districts of old cities formed by the waqf system. In addition, both researchers agreed that the waqf played a crucial role in the Ottoman Empire's rise to prominence. Senkaya (2012) mentions that the waqf built houses, shops, inns, storerooms, orchards, bakeries, and agricultural property in the eighteenth century. During this time, these establishments served approximately 30,000 people. In Istanbul, the Suleymaniye Kulliyesi, the Kirkcesme Water Channels, and the Selimiye Mosque are examples of waqf-financed public works. Waqf was granted for their construction in the years 1558, 1564, and 1574.



Selimiye Mosque  
Source: Tapan (2020)

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<sup>1</sup>Imaret system is public soup kitchens established in the Ottoman Empire between the 14th and 19th centuries. Various types of people and unfortunate individuals received free food from the imarets (Singer, 2005).



Kirkcesme Water Channels  
Source: Cermen (2017)

In spite of its benefits to society, the waqf institution was almost abolished from the middle of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th century. First was when a close friend of the Sultan mismanaged the lands of the Sultanate converted 90 % of Arab lands belonging to the states into waqf status. The second problem was the interference of non-local religious authorities such as France and Russia in the waqf welfare. To prevent religious authorities from interfering in the affairs of the waqf, Ottoman statesmen began to impose restrictions. However, due to Crimean War<sup>2</sup>, the Ottoman Empire failed to regulate the intervention of external forces when the British demanded that foreigners be allowed to own Arab lands in exchange for an external loan to save the Ottoman Empire from bankruptcy. The situation became worst when Sultan Abdul Hamid was removed from his throne in 1909 which brought the western powers further attack on the waqf institution. At the same time, the Ottoman statesmen needed to control nationalism activities that threatened their powers. As such, the centralization of the waqf institution became a prominent agenda to the Ottoman Empire (Cizakca, 2000). Nevertheless, the centralization of the waqf had led to more misused and mistreated of waqf among the state officials.

In short, the Ottoman Empire's waqf scenario has left a mark on the 21st century. In the majority of Muslim countries, the waqf system has been plagued by corruption and mismanagement. The enormity of its problems leads to struggles in revitalizing it. Thus, many researchers are interested in the waqf management problems and have conceptually explored issues ranging from the management of the waqf. Countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia intensively put a lot of effort to transform their waqf institutions by looking into its management as well as its ability to reach the intended beneficiaries. As of present, there is a lot of new products/concept such as cash, share, and corporate waqf being introduced to society as a way to revamp the waqf institutions.

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<sup>2</sup>Crimean War is an alliance of France, the Ottoman Empire, the United Kingdom, and Sardinia defeated Russia in a war fought from October 1853 to February 1856 ( Crimean War, n.d).

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