



BOOK REVIEW: Interesting-Unique Waqf in History

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Books *Tarihte İlginç Vakıflar* (Interesting-Unique Waqf in History), published by Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü (Director General of Turkish Waqf) in January 2012 in Istanbul, Turkey. This book is the result of a collaborative study that highlights short stories, how the waqf institution system functions as a sustainable social policy by providing benefits in the fields of education, health and community welfare. Especially from the era of the Seljuk and Ottoman sultanates to be felt by modern society today. This book is packed with a simple story of daily life which aims to be a real illustration that waqf institutions can be applied to all aspects of life. *Tarihte İlginç Vakıflar* is a fascinating book in the study of Islamic social history, particularly regarding the unique and unusual practice of waqf (endowments) in the past. This book examines various types of waqf in the history of the Islamic world—especially the Ottoman Empire—which often sound "strange" but actually reflect a very high level of social civilization.

OPEN ACCESS

ISSN 2985-3257 (Online)

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Received: 27 July 2025

Accepted: 11 September 2025

Published: 29 October 2025

Citation:

(2025) BOOK REVIEW: Interesting-Unique Waqf in History. *Islamic Social Finance*, 5.1.

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Keywords: Waqf; Social Innovation; Ottoman; Sustainability; *Itsar*; *Merhamet*



The concept of waqf in Islam has long been understood as a philanthropic instrument that has a dimension of worship as well as a socio-economic dimension. However, in the context of Ottoman history, the endowment expanded beyond its charitable function to become the foundation of a civilization known as Vakıf Medeniyeti. Tarihte İlginç Vakıflar's book presents an empirical picture of how waqf is institutionalized as a complex and sustainable social system.

In Islamic economics literature, waqf is often understood as a philanthropic instrument that supports the construction of mosques, schools, or public facilities. However, this perspective tends to oversimplify the historical complexity of waqf as a social institution. Tarihte İlginç Vakıflar's book opens new horizons by revealing unconventional yet highly functional waqf practices that addressed societal needs. Especially during the Ottoman Empire, waqf developed into the backbone of the social welfare system. The state was not the sole agent of distribution; rather, civil society played a central role through the institution of waqf.

This article aims to examine the contribution of the book in explaining the relationship between individual moral values and the formation of social institutions through waqf. In addition, this article also places waqf as part of the contemporary discourse on social innovation and sustainable development.

The author wants to invite his readers to enter the world referred to as "*Vakıf Medeniyeti*". By offering the foundation of a system rooted in the dialectic between *merhamet* (compassion) and *edep* (systematic ethics), which converts the intention of the individual into a permanent institution that goes beyond the age of its establishment. Likewise, the uniqueness of this book lies in the interesting narrative with the inclusion of detailed sources of each purpose of the waqf established. Apart from that, all these books serve as a real picture to introduce noble moral values to the younger generation. One of them is *Itsar*, which as we put the interests of the people before personal interests. Because through waqf an individual will consciously release part of his wealth for the benefit of the people. Thus, readers are invited to understand how waqf institutions not only serve basic human needs, but also maintain the welfare of all living beings. As well as to understand the social mechanisms that are rooted in noble morals such as *Itsar* by making it a sustainable system.

Structurally, the book is designed in a didactic and visual style. The goal is to attract readers, especially the younger generation. Each story is presented with

unique illustrations in diverse colors but still informative. Starting from the introduction of the founder's information, the location of the waqf and the date of its establishment. And the most interesting thing in this book is that the author lists "*Vakıf Şartı*" (Waqf Terms) which is a direct quote from the original deed of establishment that affirms the purpose of the waqf.

One of the main contributions of this book is the emphasis on the dialectic between *merhamet* and *edep*. *Merhamet* represents the emotional and spiritual drive to do good, while *edep* refers to a system of values and rules that direct such actions to be structured and sustainable.

In this context, waqf can be understood as a mechanism for institutionalizing moral values. Individual intentions that are temporary are transformed into permanent social structures through legal devices such as *Vakıf Şartı*. This process shows that waqf is not just an act of charity, but a social system consciously designed to survive across generations. The concept of *itsar* is a key element in this framework. *Itsar* not only reflects individual sacrifice, but also serves as an ethical foundation for the equitable distribution of resources in society.

The main part of *the book Tarihte İlginç Vakıflar* is that each page contains dozens of stories of unique waqfs of his time which include 4 parts; **In the field of health**, Sultan I Suleyman (canon) in Istanbul, he established the *Hastalara ilaç Yapan Vakıf* waqf foundation in 1547 with an operational structure that includes 27 specialized personnel including specialist doctors with a daily wage of 4 akçe and provides free medicines. Then as for the *Hastalara Evinde Bakım Hizmeti Sunan Vakıf* waqf in 1888 which was founded by Germiyanoglu Yakub Çelebi in Kütahya, this waqf adopts a home care model, with the aim of providing comfort to patients to avoid stigmatizing disability. (Çetin Aydın, 2020).

In the field of education and environmental protection, Mehmed Ragib Efendu was one of the mayors at that time, he established a smoking ban waqf *for teachers in elementary schools*. Uniquely, this waqf was established on the basis of his regret to see his grandson smoking for the reason of imitating his grandfather, at that time he realized that children were so quick to imitate what adults did. (Şengönül & Yildirim, 2022) In the field of environmental protection, no less interesting, the waqf was founded by Fatih Sultan Mehmed, namely *Duvar Yazılarını Silen Vakıf* in 1470. The Sultan hired special officers to remove graffiti

on the walls of city buildings, in order to preserve the beauty of the city and to protect environmental assets.

In the field of **Animal welfare**, one of them is *Sokak Hayvanlarına Ekmek Veren Vakıf* by Hacı Mustafa in Rümeli Hisarı. By collecting food from *Imaret* (public kitchen) and then giving it to animals, this system minimizes waste and balances the ecosystem. (Yıldırım, 2024) From several examples of the uniqueness of the waqf model told in this book, it proves that social innovation with *the approach of merhamet* (compassion) and *edep* (systematic ethics) offers comprehensive ecological welfare over a long period of time. (Aydemir, 2018).

The concept implicitly underlying waqf practice is the interaction between *merhamet* (compassion) and *edep* (social ethics). Waqf aims not only to meet material needs but also to safeguard human dignity. For example, waqf for the poor who do not want to be seen asking for assistance reflects sensitivity to the psychological aspects of the beneficiaries. Assistance is provided without diminishing individual dignity. This demonstrates that in the waqf system, welfare is measured not only by economic distribution but also by the protection of human values.

In the modern context, the state is often the primary actor in providing social welfare. However, historical experience shows that waqf (Islamic endowments) can create a decentralized welfare system. During the Ottoman Empire, various public services, such as education, health care, and water infrastructure, were managed through waqf. This reduced the state's fiscal burden while strengthening public participation. This model is relevant to reexamine in the face of modern state budget constraints, particularly in developing countries.

The findings in this book show that waqf has a strong compatibility with the concept of modern sustainable development. The integration between moral values and institutional systems allows for a balance between economic, social, and environmental needs. In this context, waqf can be positioned as a model of Islamic social finance that contributes to the achievement of sustainable development goals (SDGs), such as poverty alleviation, health improvement, quality education, and environmental protection (Rusydziana et al., 2022). Furthermore, waqf also offers an alternative to the state-based welfare model, by emphasizing the role of the community in the provision of public services in an independent and sustainable manner.

Theoretically, this book enriches the literature on waqf by emphasizing the dimensions of social

innovation and sustainability. Practically, the findings in this book can be a reference for policymakers and practitioners in designing contemporary waqf models. Digitization of waqf, integration with financial technology (fintech), and strengthening regulations can be strategic steps to adapt the concept of Vakıf Medeniyeti in the modern context.

The conclusion is that *Tarihte İlginç Vakıflar's book* succeeds in transforming History into a source of information that not only presents classic data but this book weaves it together with a light narrative story and interesting illustrations without leaving the source of the original document *Vakıf Şartı* (Waqf Deed). This book can be a reference material for ottoman waqf researchers who want to adopt a community welfare system that is truly centered on ecosystem resilience equally, starting from humans, animals and even the environment. (Karabulut, n.d.).

Tarihte İlginç Vakıflar's book demonstrates that waqf in Islamic history was more than just an instrument of philanthropy. It was a civilizational system that integrated values, institutions, and social practices within a single, sustainable framework. By understanding waqf as "social architecture," we can reconstruct its role in the modern context—not merely as a tool for economic distribution, but as a mechanism for the formation of a civilized society.

BOOK INFORMATION

Book title: *Tarihte İlginç Vakıflar* (Interesting-Unique Waqf in History)

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Publisher: *Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü Yayınlar*

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Number of pages: 120

ISBN: 978-975-19-5250-9

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