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CHAPTER 8

The Issue of Waqf Institutions in the Kingdom of Serbia: The Example of the Münderise Waqf Register of Ottoman Provenance from the Ex-Sanjak of Skopje

IRENA KOLAJ RISTANOVIĆ*

The term *waqf* (foundation) comes from Arabic and refers to the “endowment, waqf in Islamic Law, so inalienable property and economic capital.” This term also relates to “property which is segregated from traffic by the owner and whose income is given in charitable purpose in accordance with Religious Law.”¹ The first Muslim endowment in Skopje (Üsküp), which was conquered by the Ottoman Turks in 1392, was the mosque of Sultan Murad II (r. 1421–1451) founded in 1436. The oldest existing document on the establishment of waqfs (*evkâf*) is the *vakfname* or *wakfiye* (document stating the terms of the waqf) of İshak Bey from 1445 related to the foundation of the waqf of Ahmed Ağa ibn Hacı Hasan

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1 Teufik Muftić, *Arapsko-bosanski rječnik* (Sarajevo: El-Kalem, 1997), 1665; Mehmedalija Hadžić, “Vakuf i vakufname-definicija i implementacija”, in *Vakufi u Bosni i Hercegovini*, ed. Mustafa Hasani (Sarajevo: Islamska zajednica u Bosni i Hercegovini, 2011), 11–19; Ирена Колај Ристановић, *Статус вакуфских добара у Кнежевини Србији 1878–1882: прилог проучавању османске бахитине* (Београд: Друштво за урбану историју, 2020), 7.

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“Buyurdum ki....”
The Whole World of
Ottomanica and Beyond

Studies in Honour of Claudia Römer

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“A Man You Do Not Meet Every Day”

*The Waqf Founder as a Benevolent Employer and the Waqf as a Sinecure
for the Founder's Retainers*

Kayhan Orbay

Historians who do not specialize in waqf studies often present waqf institutions as ‘religious’ or ‘pious foundations,’ perhaps in an effort to make them more intelligible to their readers. This is also the case for some waqf historians who are lackadaisical about waqf sources other than endowment deeds. Annexing the adjectives ‘pious’ and ‘religious’ to these institutions is similar to another misleading intellectual construction: the coining of inept terminological categories such as ‘Islamic city’ and ‘Islamic accounting.’ Eastern Mediterranean and Middle Eastern societies were not incapable of establishing an economic and social institution for its own sake or an institution running solely for the material interest of its founder. Insisting on overemphasizing the religious aspect of the waqf institution has overshadowed the economic, commercial, and social functions performed by these institutions, and impeded the application of a thorough institutional and economic analysis grounded in theories of sociology, management science, and economics. Waqf literature in Turkish has defined the waqfs as charitable institutions, a description employed increasingly in mainstream waqf studies in recent decades. That a waqf had to be devoted to a charitable purpose was a legal obligation for establishing a ‘true waqf’ or ‘legal waqf’ (*vakf-ı sahih*). Hence, the foundation of a waqf involved perforce a charitable act, and the waqfs developed as an institutional form of charity. Yet, this does not come to mean that the founders were so munificent as to donate all their fortune to an array of charitable services, that the return from the endowment was to be spent fully on a charitable purpose, or that the waqf concealed the political and pecuniary advantages that the founder stood to gain.¹

This paper looks at the patronage provided by the waqfs through diverse mechanisms which constructed the image of founders as benefactors and

¹ Astrid Meier, “For the Sake of God Alone? Food Distribution Policies, Takıyyas and Imarets in Early Ottoman Damascus,” in *Feeding People, Feeding Power*, eds. Nina Ergin et al. (Istanbul: Eren, 2007), 121–47, here 123.