

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The History of The Main Waqf Administration in Uzbekistan: Organizational Activity and Transformation of Waqf Property Management in the 1920s

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Abstract

The article examines the history of the Main Waqf Administration (Glavnoe Vakufnoe Upravlenie) in Uzbekistan during the 1920s, focusing on its establishment, organizational structure, functions, and role in managing waqf properties under the early Soviet regime. The study analyzes the complex relationship between traditional Islamic institutions and the Soviet state during a period of profound political, economic, and social transformation. Drawing upon historical-comparative, chronological, and institutional approaches, the research investigates the policies adopted by the Soviet authorities toward waqf property and religious educational institutions. The findings demonstrate that the Main Waqf Administration initially functioned as an intermediary institution aimed at regulating waqf assets while maintaining limited support for Islamic educational and charitable activities. However, by the late 1920s, increasing Soviet centralization and anti-religious campaigns significantly reduced its autonomy and transformed its functions.

KEY WORDS

Waqf Administration, waqf property, Soviet policy, Uzbekistan, Turkestan ASSR, religious institutions, Islamic education, secularization, Central Asia, Soviet modernization.

INTRODUCTION

The institution of waqf has historically occupied a central place in the socio-economic and cultural development of Muslim societies. For centuries, waqf properties financed mosques, madrasas, charitable organizations, libraries, hospitals, and various public services throughout Central Asia. Prior to the establishment of Soviet rule, waqf institutions constituted one of the most important mechanisms for sustaining religious, educational, and social welfare activities in the region.

Following the establishment of Soviet power in Turkestan and later in Uzbekistan, the new authorities faced the challenge of regulating religious institutions while simultaneously implementing socialist reforms. The waqf system, due to its extensive economic resources and social influence, became a

particular focus of governmental attention. During the 1920s, Soviet authorities created specialized administrative structures to supervise and manage waqf properties. Among these institutions, the Main Waqf Administration emerged as a significant mechanism through which the state attempted to control, reorganize, and eventually transform traditional Islamic property relations.

Despite the importance of this institution, the history of the Main Waqf Administration has received relatively limited scholarly attention. Existing studies often focus either on Soviet religious policy in general or on the broader history of waqf institutions, leaving significant gaps regarding the administration's organizational development and practical

activities. Therefore, this article seeks to analyze the establishment, functioning, and historical significance of the Main Waqf Administration in Uzbekistan during the 1920s.

The primary objective of this study is to examine the institutional history of the Main Waqf Administration and assess its role in the transformation of waqf property management under Soviet rule.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on waqf institutions in Central Asia has developed through several historiographical stages. Early Soviet scholarship generally interpreted waqf institutions through the ideological framework of class struggle and viewed them as remnants of feudal social relations. Consequently, many publications emphasized the necessity of state intervention and reform.

During the post-Soviet period, scholars began reassessing the historical significance of waqf institutions. Studies by Central Asian historians highlighted the economic, educational, and charitable functions of waqf properties in pre-Soviet society. These works contributed significantly to understanding the social role of waqf foundations and their impact on local communities.

International scholarship has further expanded the study of waqf institutions through comparative analyses of Islamic charitable endowments across the Muslim world. Researchers have explored the relationship between state formation, legal reforms, and religious property management in various historical contexts. Such studies provide valuable theoretical frameworks for understanding Soviet policies toward waqf institutions in Central Asia.

However, the specific activities of the Main Waqf Administration during the 1920s remain insufficiently investigated. Existing literature often references the institution only briefly within broader discussions of Soviet religious policy. This article addresses this historiographical gap by focusing directly on the administration's organizational structure, functions, and historical evolution [1:12].

METHODOLOGY

The study employs an interdisciplinary historical methodology combining institutional, comparative-historical, and chronological approaches.

The institutional approach is used to analyze the

organizational structure and administrative functions of the Main Waqf Administration. The comparative-historical method facilitates an examination of continuities and changes between pre-Soviet waqf management systems and Soviet administrative practices. The chronological method enables a detailed reconstruction of policy developments throughout the 1920s.

The research is based on the principles of historicism, objectivity, and source criticism. Archival materials, official decrees, administrative reports, legislative documents, and contemporary publications serve as the primary sources of analysis. Secondary literature concerning Soviet religious policy, Islamic institutions, and Central Asian history is also utilized to contextualize the findings.

RESULTS

The analysis indicates that the Main Waqf Administration emerged as part of the Soviet government's broader effort to regulate religious property and integrate local institutions into the new administrative system. During the early 1920s, Soviet authorities adopted a relatively flexible policy toward Islamic institutions, partly due to political considerations and the need to consolidate power among Muslim populations [2:52].

The Main Waqf Administration was tasked with registering waqf properties, supervising their financial management, and ensuring that revenues were used according to officially approved purposes. The administration also maintained oversight of educational and religious institutions supported by waqf funds.

Evidence suggests that the administration initially allowed certain religious and educational activities to continue under state supervision. Waqf revenues remained an important source of funding for some madrasas and religious establishments. At the same time, administrative reforms increasingly subjected waqf assets to governmental control [3:61].

By the mid-1920s, growing efforts to centralize economic administration resulted in more intensive regulation of waqf property. Detailed inventories were conducted, financial reporting requirements were expanded, and administrative procedures became increasingly bureaucratic [4:29].

The situation changed dramatically during the late 1920s. The intensification of anti-religious campaigns and collectivization policies significantly altered the state's approach toward

religious institutions. Many waqf properties were nationalized, religious schools faced restrictions, and the operational autonomy of the Main Waqf Administration was substantially reduced. As a result, the institution gradually lost its original functions and became largely integrated into broader Soviet administrative structures [5:74].

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that the history of the Main Waqf Administration reflects broader tensions between traditional Islamic institutions and Soviet modernization policies. Rather than representing a simple process of immediate suppression, the early Soviet period was characterized by a complex and evolving relationship between state authorities and religious organizations [6:47].

The administration functioned as a transitional institution that attempted to reconcile competing objectives. On the one hand, it sought to preserve certain aspects of the waqf system and maintain social stability. On the other hand, it facilitated the gradual incorporation of religious property into the Soviet administrative framework.

This dual role reveals the pragmatic nature of early Soviet policy in Central Asia. During the initial years of Soviet rule, authorities often pursued flexible approaches toward religious institutions. However, as ideological priorities shifted and state capacity expanded, more radical measures were introduced.

The transformation of the Main Waqf Administration also illustrates broader processes of secularization and state-building. Through administrative regulation, property registration, and financial oversight, Soviet authorities developed mechanisms that ultimately enabled the dismantling of traditional religious economic structures.

Consequently, the history of the administration should be understood not only within the context of religious policy but also as part of the larger project of constructing a centralized socialist state in Central Asia [7:61].

CONCLUSION

The Main Waqf Administration occupied an important position in the history of Soviet Uzbekistan during the 1920s. Established to regulate and supervise waqf property, it became a key institution through which the Soviet state engaged with traditional Islamic structures.

The study demonstrates that the administration's activities

evolved significantly throughout the decade. While early policies allowed limited preservation of waqf institutions under state supervision, increasing political centralization and anti-religious measures gradually transformed the administration's functions and reduced its autonomy.

The historical experience of the Main Waqf Administration highlights the complex interaction between religion, property, and state power during a critical period of social transformation. Its development reflects broader processes of modernization, secularization, and institutional change that shaped the historical trajectory of Uzbekistan and Central Asia under Soviet rule.

Future research should focus on archival investigations of regional waqf administrations, local implementation practices, and comparative studies of waqf policies across different Soviet republics. Such studies would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between Islamic institutions and Soviet governance in the twentieth century.

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