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Loan Charities and Cash Waqfs: Moral Credit in England and Ottoman Rumelia, c.1500–C.1800

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ABSTRACT

This article compares Ottoman ‘cash waqfs’ and English endowed ‘loan charities’ as pre-modern institutions turning charity into liquidity for households and small producers. Using close reading and corpus coding, it analyses 953 Rumelian cash-waqf deeds and 82 loan-related entries from London charities compilation, coding eligibility, security, repayment terms, and yield design. Both institutionalised moral credit, but with distinct governance and revenue logics. Ottoman cash waqfs embedded lending in waqf law and trustee succession to protect principal and fund recurrent payouts, while loan charities often combined interest-free lending with corporate trusteeship and investment in public funds.

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Cash waqfs; loan charities; charitable credit institutions; comparative economic history; Ottoman and English social history

1. Introduction

Credit is never merely a technical allocation device. In early modern societies, it also functioned as a language of status, reputation and belonging, what Craig Muldrew calls ‘a public means of social communication’, through which communities circulated judgements about the worth of their members.¹ This article examines how two distinct institutional worlds, Ottoman Rumelia and early modern England, attempted to render lending socially legitimate and administratively workable when ‘profit’ could be morally suspect, yet access to liquidity was essential for households, artisans and small producers. It argues that endowed lending became a key mechanism for translating moral expectations into enforceable rules, but it did so through markedly different fiscal architectures and governance logics.

In the Ottoman case, the central institution is the cash waqf (waqf al-nuqūd): an endowment whose principal was cash, deployed through legally structured contracts to generate a return, while the resulting income was earmarked for specific charitable and public purposes (mosques, schools, stipends, maintenance and local welfare). The controversy that surrounded cash waqfs is well known: jurists debated whether systematic lending and the generation of returns could be reconciled with the prohibition of ribā and with the

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¹Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (London: Macmillan, 1998), 2.

classical doctrine of waqf perpetuity.² Yet what matters for the present comparison is not simply the existence of a debate, but the way in which legal form and institutional design worked together to make ‘charitable finance’ both durable and governable at the local level. In Mandaville’s formulation, cash-waqf deeds operationalised the system by linking expenditures to ‘the interest earned by that sum’, thereby turning a cash principal into a predictable stream of earmarked outlays.³

The English case is more heterogeneous. Rather than a single canonical form, one encounters a spectrum of endowed charities, parish and corporate schemes, city company trusts, municipal charities, some of which included explicitly loan-based relief (often labelled ‘loan charities’). Classical accounts highlight how endowed charity could function simultaneously as poor relief, civic discipline and community reputation-building, while also intersecting with local credit conditions.⁴ Francis Godwin James, in a foundational statement, notes that ‘regular loan charities reveal a widespread concern’ with supplying small borrowers under socially supervised conditions.⁵ Crucially, however, loan charities are not identical to Ottoman cash waqfs: in many schemes the loan function was primarily distributive (temporary assistance through repayable loans), and it did not necessarily operate as a revenue-generating investment vehicle for the charity itself. The City of London evidence illustrates this mixed logic in a particularly explicit way: some schemes required that ‘loans are to be without interest’, while the fund, separately, was ‘to be put out to interest’.⁶ In other words, English endowed lending can combine (i) interest-free lending to beneficiaries with (ii) interest-bearing investment of the endowment to stabilise administration, an institutional separation that differs from the Ottoman pattern, where the lending mechanism is typically the direct engine of charitable revenue.

This article addresses a comparative gap that persists despite rich literatures on both worlds. Ottoman scholarship has examined the legal controversy, regional diffusion, contractual techniques and socioeconomic functions of cash waqfs (including their role in providing liquidity and financing local services).⁷ English scholarship has documented the institutional ecology of endowed charity, the governance of relief and the place of lending within broader repertoires of welfare

²Jon E. Mandaville, “Usurious Piety: The Cash Waqf Controversy in the Ottoman Empire,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 10, no. 3 (1979): 289–308; Emrullah Dumlu, “XVI. Yüzyıl Osmanlı Uleması Arasında Para Vakıfları Etrafında Cereyan Eden Tartışmalar (Ebusuud, İbn Kemal – Çivizâde, Birgivi),” *Yalova Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 10 (2015): 303–337; and Kaşif Hamdi Okur, “Para Vakıfları Bağlamında Osmanlı Hukuk Düzeni ve Ebusuud Efendinin Hukuk Anlayışı Üzerine Bazı Değerlendirmeler,” *Gazi Üniversitesi Çorum İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 4, nos. 7–8 (2005): 33–58.

³Mandaville, “Usurious Piety,” 299.

⁴Steve Hindle, *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c. 1550–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1–6, 17; and Ian W. Archer, “The Charity of Early Modern Londoners,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 12 (2002): 225, 234–235.

⁵Francis Godwin James, “Charity Endowments as Sources of Local Credit in Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century England,” *The Journal of Economic History* 8, no. 2 (1948): 158.

⁶*The Endowed Charities of the City of London; Reprinted at Large from Seventeen Reports of the Commissioners for Inquiring Concerning Charities. With a Copious Index* (London: Printed for M. Sherwood, 1829), 165. (Charities of John Rowe and William Garret).

⁷Hüseyin Çınar, “Osmanlı Döneminde Rumeli’de Vakıf Paranın Kullanılmasında Aranan Şartlar,” *ADAM Akademi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 7, no. 2 (2017): 149–165; H. Hüsnü Koyunoğlu, *Para Vakıfları: Muhasebe Defterlerine Göre 17. Yüzyıl İstanbul Uygulamaları Dinbilimleri Akademik Araştırma Dergisi* 8, no. 4 (2008): 253–303; Murat Çizakça, “Cash Waqfs of Bursa, 1555–1823,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 38, no. 3 (1995): 313–354; and Mehmet Gel, “Kanunî’nin Para Vakfı Yasağını Kaldıran 1548 Tarihli ‘Hükm-i Şerif’inin Yeni Bir Nüshası,” *Gazi Akademik Bakış* 4, no. 7 (2010): 185–192.

and credit.⁸ Yet these literatures rarely speak to each other at the level of institutional mechanics: how rules about borrowers, collateral, repayment, oversight and permissible returns were assembled into stable routines; how ‘charity’ and ‘credit’ were operationally linked (or separated); and how governance arrangements shaped what contemporaries understood as legitimate, fair and socially useful lending.

Methodologically, the article combines systematic source-based coding with case-study reconstruction, in order to satisfy two demands at once: breadth (to identify institutional regularities) and depth (to recover governance practice and local meaning). For Rumelia, the empirical base is a transcribed corpus of 953 cash-waqf deeds from Ottoman Europe, enabling the identification of recurring clauses and institutional patterns across regions and time.⁹ From this corpus, six cases are selected as analytically strategic vignettes, chosen to represent variation in governance arrangements, borrower eligibility, security requirements and revenue earmarking, rather than as ‘exceptional’ stories. For England, the article undertakes a systematic extraction of loan-related endowments from the 1829 City of London compilation of endowed charities; this yields 82 loan-relevant textual entries across the volume, which are then used to select three schemes for deeper institutional reading and to benchmark the case narratives against a broader documentary field.¹⁰ The purpose, on both sides, is not to force equivalence, but to compare how endowed lending was made to work as a rule-bound practice.

The core argument is that both contexts used endowed lending to transform moral claims into administrative routines, but they differed in where they located legitimacy and sustainability. Ottoman cash waqfs tended to stabilise charitable provision by making the financial return itself an integral part of the charitable machine: revenue from the deployment of cash principal was legally framed and administratively earmarked for public uses. English loan charities, by contrast, often stabilised legitimacy by keeping beneficiary lending non-profit (or explicitly interest-free) while shifting sustainability to separate investment income, rents or corporate oversight; the result is a distinct separation between charitable lending and charitable revenue. This divergence matters for how we understand ‘microfinance’ historically: not as a single trans-historical model, but as multiple institutional solutions to the same practical problem, how to lend under moral constraint, and how to govern lending without losing the charitable purpose.

The remainder of the article proceeds as follows. [Section 2](#) reviews the relevant scholarship on endowed credit and welfare governance in the Ottoman and English contexts and sets out the comparative design, corpus construction and coding strategy. [Section 3](#) revisits the Ottoman cash waqf controversy and specifies the contractual and governance techniques that supported durable endowed cash lending in Rumelia. [Section 4](#) maps the English ecology of endowed charity and identifies the subset of loan-based relief within the City of London documentary record. [Section 5](#) presents the

⁸Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, *The Culture of Giving: Informal Support and Gift-Exchange in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1–6, 12–13; John Broad, “The Parish and the Poor in England, 1600–1850,” in *Wealth and Poverty in European Rural Societies from the Sixteenth to Nineteenth Century*, ed. John Broad and Anton Schuurman (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 199–219.

⁹Mehmet Bulut et al., *Cash Waqfs in Ottoman Europe* (Istanbul: Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University Publications, 2020), 74–76. (In Turkish: *Osmanlı Dönemi Rumeli Para Vakıfları*, 12-vols, 2019).

¹⁰*Endowed Charities of the City of London (1829)*, furthermore, the results (82 loan-relevant entries) are a compilation of this study and are detailed in the methods section.

comparative findings from the coded corpus and selected case studies, focusing on eligibility rules, security arrangements, oversight and recordkeeping and the institutional linkage between lending and revenue streams. Section 6 concludes by clarifying what the comparison adds to debates on charity, welfare governance and the historical institutional variety of small-scale credit.

2. Literature review and methodology

2.1. Literature review

The historical literature on endowments and credit demonstrates that ‘charity’ and ‘finance’ were not mutually exclusive categories in early modern polities. In the Ottoman case, cash waqfs institutionalised a revolving credit mechanism whose legal permissibility was debated but whose social utility was widely recognised in practice, particularly when revenues were earmarked for education, worship, urban services and poor relief.¹¹ In the English case, endowed charities likewise supported schools, hospitals and relief, but the ‘loan charity’ was typically framed as a targeted welfare instrument, often justified as a means of preventing poverty, disciplining consumption or supporting labouring households during shocks.¹² These differences matter for comparative inference: Ottoman cash waqfs were designed to generate a stable stream of returns from the deployment of capital, whereas many English loan charities were structured as interest-free or low-yield revolving funds whose ‘return’ was partly moral and social rather than primarily financial.¹³

For the Ottoman historiography, the central interpretive problem remains the cash waqf controversy and the legal techniques developed to reconcile endowment permanence with cash-based investment. The debate is now well mapped, including the lines of objection associated with Birgivî and the counter-arguments associated with Ebussuud’s permissive reasoning.¹⁴ Beyond the controversy itself, scholarship has emphasised the operational logic of cash waqfs as a community-level credit channel that could mobilise savings, extend small loans and stabilise local provisioning through predictable, rule-bound disbursements.¹⁵ Primary evidence for the durability of this model is particularly strong for Bursa and other urban centres, while recent corpus-based work has expanded the geographic frame to Ottoman Europe (Rumelia) and made cross-regional comparison feasible at scale.¹⁶

In the English historiography, the study of charity has increasingly moved from normative narratives to institutional and informational analysis. Early modern governance depended on gathering, classifying and aggregating local knowledge, and social

¹¹Jon E. Mandaville, “Usurious Piety: The Cash Waqf Controversy in the Ottoman Empire,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 10, no. 3 (1979): 306–307.

¹²Wilbur Kitchener Jordan, *The Charities of Rural England, 1480–1660: The Aspirations and the Achievements of the Rural Society* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1962), 49, 141–143, 292.

¹³Wilbur Kitchener Jordan, *The Charities of Rural England*, 102.

¹⁴Emrullah Dumlu, “XVI. Yüzyıl Osmanlı Uleması Arasında Para Vakıfları Etrafında Cereyan Eden Tartışmalar (Ebussuud, İbn Kemal-Çivizâde, Birgivî),” *İlahiyat Tetkikleri Dergisi* 44 (2015): 310–326.

¹⁵Murat Çizakça, “Cash Waqfs of Bursa, 1555–1823,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 38, no. 3 (1995): 313, 324, 334–336.

¹⁶Mehmet Bulut et al., *Cash Waqfs in Ottoman Europe* (Istanbul: Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University Publications, 2020), 74–76.

provision was increasingly documented in forms that invited measurement and comparison.¹⁷ Within this environment, endowed charities and poor relief interacted with local credit cultures in which trust, reputation and reciprocity structured access to resources, including in urban contexts such as London.¹⁸ Loan charities, in particular, were frequently justified as enabling ‘industrious’ poor households to avoid distress without being reduced to parish dependence, and the ‘loan stock’ appears across localities in varied legal and administrative forms.¹⁹ At the same time, nineteenth-century developments shifted parts of the charitable sphere towards more explicit investment practices and portfolio logics, which is relevant for interpreting later charity reports and the language of ‘income’, ‘dividends’ and capital preservation.²⁰

This study therefore treats ‘loan charity’ and ‘cash waqf’ as adjacent institutional solutions to a shared governance problem: how to allocate resources to vulnerable households and local public services while preserving capital and sustaining legitimacy. The comparison does not assume functional equivalence. Instead, it isolates a limited set of comparable design features, including the source of the endowment, rules of eligibility, enforcement mechanisms, governance structure and the presence or absence of an explicit yield mechanism.

2.2. Sources, research design and methodology

2.2.1. Ottoman corpus (*Rumelia cash waqfs*)

The Ottoman evidence is drawn from a published corpus of 953 transcribed cash waqf deeds from Ottoman Europe (Rumelia), which enables systematic coding of endowment clauses, governance arrangements and credit terms across regions.²¹ The corpus is used in two complementary ways.

First, the full set of deeds is treated as the study’s primary dataset for descriptive and comparative analysis. Variables coded at the deed level include: (i) location and administrative unit, (ii) endowment size (where stated), (iii) stated purpose of expenditure (education, worship, relief, infrastructure and mixed allocations), (iv) governance and appointment rules (trustee selection and oversight), (v) credit mechanism and constraints (permitted counterparties, collateral, guarantors, maturity and repayment discipline) and (vi) any explicit language on permissible profit and enforcement.

Second, a smaller set of six case studies is selected from within the corpus for close reading. These cases are chosen to represent distinct institutional configurations (for example, education-focused endowments linked to medrese financing versus mixed-purpose endowments with broader urban allocations) and to illustrate how standardised clauses were adapted to local constraints. The case studies are not treated as the empirical ‘sample’. They are interpretive anchors used to explain the mechanisms that are then measured in the full dataset.

¹⁷Paul Slack, “Government and Information in Seventeenth-Century England,” *Past & Present* 184 (2004): 33–68.

¹⁸Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (New York: Palgrave, 1998), 3–4; and Ian W. Archer, “The Charity of Early Modern Londoners,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 12 (2002): 223–225.

¹⁹Wilbur Kitchener Jordan, *The Charities of Rural England*, 102, 293.

²⁰Josephine Maltby and Janette Rutterford, “Investing in Charities in the Nineteenth Century: The Financialization of Philanthropy,” *Accounting History* 21, no. 2–3 (2016): 263–268.

²¹Bulut et al., *Cash Waqfs in Ottoman Europe*.

2.2.2. *English corpus (endowed loan charities)*

The English evidence is constructed from a systematic screening of a major nineteenth-century compilation of commissioners' reports for the City of London, supplemented by county-level materials and classic local studies of endowed charity forms.²² The London compilation is used as a structured entry point because it aggregates and standardises report material that otherwise remains dispersed across parishes, companies and trust records. From this volume, the study extracts and codes all instances in which the operative clauses explicitly establish a revolving lending mechanism (for example, 'loan stock', 'to be lent', 'lent out' or functionally equivalent language).

This screening yields 82 London-based endowed charities with an explicit lending clause in the excerpted operative description. Within these 82 cases, the wording permits a first-pass categorisation of yield logic: 18 cases explicitly reference 'interest', 'profits' or returns; 9 explicitly state that the loans are interest-free; and 55 describe lending without specifying the yield mechanism in the excerpted clause and therefore require contextual reading of the surrounding report text before classification.²³ This distribution is analytically important because it clarifies a recurrent interpretive confusion in the literature: 'loan charity' does not automatically imply that the loans were the income engine of the charity. In many cases, the welfare function lay in access to credit itself, while the financing of administration and ancillary relief could depend on separate rental endowments, fines or other income streams.

To prevent over-reliance on London alone, the analysis is triangulated with classic evidence on loan and stock charities in rural England. These materials show that endowed credit could be sustained through mixed asset structures, including land purchases whose rents supported administration or capital replacement, alongside explicitly interest-free lending to the labouring poor.²⁴

2.2.3. *Comparative strategy and transparency*

The comparative analysis proceeds by structured comparison, not by assumption of identity. The Ottoman and English materials differ in legal form, doctrinal language and administrative ecology. The methodology therefore focuses on a limited set of commensurable institutional design variables: endowment capitalisation, governance and accountability, eligibility rules, enforcement devices and the explicit presence or absence of a yield mechanism.

Empirically, the paper reports three layers of results. First, it presents descriptive statistics for the Rumelia corpus, including regional distribution and the frequency of key clause types. Second, it reports the distribution of English loan-charity clause forms and yield-language categories in the London material, supplemented by county evidence. Third, it integrates qualitative case studies from both contexts to explain why specific clause families appear, persist and mutate under local conditions. All coding rules and classification decisions are summarised in a codebook appendix to support replication and to address reviewer requests for clearer operationalisation.

²²*The Endowed Charities of the City of London; Reprinted at Large from Seventeen Reports of the Commissioners for Inquiring Concerning Charities. With a Copious Index* (London: Printed for M. Sherwood, 1829).

²³*The Endowed Charities of the City of London* (1829), based on the subset of entries with explicit lending clauses (loan stock and equivalent wording).

²⁴Jordan, *The Charities of Rural England*, 91, 102, 203, 420.

3. The Ottoman model: Cash waqfs as an endowed credit institution

Cash waqfs operated as a legally registered mechanism through which a founder endowed a dedicated cash principal, instructed its investment via sharia-compliant contractual forms and earmarked the resulting proceeds for specified charitable and public uses. In institutional terms, the model combined three elements: (i) an endowment logic that sought to preserve the principal, (ii) a credit logic that generated a recurring return and (iii) an allocative logic that channelled the return into pre-defined social expenditures. This section reconstructs the Ottoman model from the language of deeds and the internal classification of the published corpus, and it clarifies the contractual architecture that made the mechanism durable and enforceable in practice.

3.1. Corpus, unit of analysis and coding strategy

The empirical base for the Ottoman model is a large transcription corpus of Rumelia cash waqf deeds (Waqfiyyahs) published in the multi-volume series *Osmanlı Dönemi Rumeli Para Vakıfları*. The corpus contains 953 cash waqf deeds in total, separated into a Balkan subset (reported as 703 deeds across multiple Rumelian regions) and a Thrace subset (reported as 250 deeds for Tekirdağ, Edirne and Kırklareli).²⁵ The published introduction (Mukaddime) also provides tabulations that make the corpus analytically usable, including regional distribution and founder descriptors (for example, founders with formal titles, founders without titles and women founders).²⁶

Methodologically, the unit of analysis is the individual deed. Each deed is treated as a contractual instruction set that specifies at minimum: (i) the endowed principal (asl), (ii) the approved lending and investment language (such as *istirbâh* and *ribh*), (iii) the return convention, (iv) risk-mitigation conditions (collateral, guarantors, eligible borrower categories), (v) the governance rule (*mutawalli* and succession) and (vi) the allocation schedule for proceeds. In addition to close reading, the section uses targeted string searches across the transcription files to document how frequently standardised return formulas recur across regions. Importantly, these string counts are descriptive markers of formula prevalence, not a substitute for deed-level coding or for distinguishing unique contractual episodes.

3.2. Contractual architecture: Principal preservation, standardised returns and admissible borrowers

Across the corpus, the endowment logic is explicit: the principal is to remain intact while the proceeds finance the waqf's social purposes. The credit logic relies on standardised return conventions that are repeatedly written into deeds. The most common expression is the well-known formula 'onu on bir (ten to eleven)', which operationally corresponds to a 10 percent increment on the principal for the relevant lending cycle, as well as 'onu on bir buçuk (ten to eleven and a half)', which corresponds to a 15 percent increment.

²⁵ Mehmet Bulut et al., *Osmanlı Dönemi Rumeli Para Vakıfları: Mukaddime* (İstanbul: İstanbul Sabahattin Zaim Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2020), 70–72

²⁶ Bulut et al., *Mukaddime*, 70–72 (Table 1-2–3-4: corpus distribution and founder descriptors).

These conventions appear across multiple regional volumes and function as practical rules that reduced ambiguity about expected repayment and monitoring.

A representative deed illustrates the model clearly. A Bosnian deed dated 1046/1636 endows 40,518 akçe and orders that the capital be lent ‘her onu on bir olmak üzere (in the ten to eleven convention – 10%)’, while explicitly cautioning against lending that would be contaminated by ribâ and emphasising disciplined administration and storage of the proceeds. The deed also articulates borrower selection and risk constraints: it discourages lending to categories framed as unreliable or predatory and directs the capital towards solvent merchants, subject to robust security. In the same document, the risk rule is explicit: loans should be placed only under strong collateral or a solvent guarantor (rehn-i kaviyyü'l-mâl veya kefil-i mâl), which functions as an enforcement mechanism aligned with the endowment’s principal-preservation objective.²⁷

The same architecture appears clearly in other regions. In Babadağı (Rumelia), a cash endowment of 300 guruş, dated 1136/1723, is to be operated under ‘onu on bir buçuk’ through legally framed transactions, restricted to lending backed by ‘rehn-i kavî ve kefil-i melî’, and oriented towards dealings with solvent merchants, explicitly linking principal preservation to reputational and collateral screening.²⁸ In the Rodosçuk/Tekirdağ district, a 300 guruş endowment, dated 1184/1770, is likewise conditioned on ‘rehn-i kavî ve kefil-i melî’ (or one of them), with the ‘onu on bir buçuk’ convention stated in the lending clause itself.²⁹ In the Serbia corpus, the governance dimension becomes especially visible: lending is coupled with explicit exclusion lists (including officials and groups framed as high risk), annual renewal and court registration requirements, periodic inspections and a liability rule that makes the trustee responsible if negligence leads to loss.³⁰ A further illustration of regional practice, dated 1074/1664, is found in Debre (Macedonia), where the return convention is specified as ‘onu on bir iki pul’, and the deed adds a noteworthy collateral constraint, instructing that the waqf capital should not be lent unless adequate collateral is taken, while also cautioning against accepting certain forms of pledged valuables as security.³¹ Taken together, these cases support the claim that Rumelian cash waqfs relied on a repeatable contractual and administrative template, rather than on isolated donor preferences.

Two implications follow. First, the Ottoman cash waqf deed is not merely a charitable declaration; it is a rule-bound credit program embedded in a legal-registration environment. Second, the moral economy language in deeds (including warnings about ribâ contamination and borrower types) is not incidental. It operates as a governance technology by narrowing the admissible borrower set and by establishing standards that the mutawalli can invoke when challenged.

²⁷Mehmet Bulut et al., *Osmanlı Dönemi Rumeli Para Vakıfları Vol. 4.* (İstanbul: İstanbul Sabahattin Zaim Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2019), 159–161. Archival Number: Sarajevo Gazi Husrev-beg Library, V-171358.

²⁸Mehmet Bulut et al., *Osmanlı Dönemi Rumeli Para Vakıfları Vol. 9.* (İstanbul: İstanbul Sabahattin Zaim Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2019), 407–409. Archival Number: VGMA, Register: 734, Page: 293, Serial: 147

²⁹Mehmet Bulut et al., *Osmanlı Dönemi Rumeli Para Vakıfları Vol. 3.* (İstanbul: İstanbul Sabahattin Zaim Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2019), 19–21. Archival Number: Shar’iyyah (Court) Records of Rodosçuk, 08606.00004, v. 54b-55a

³⁰Mehmet Bulut et al., *Osmanlı Dönemi Rumeli Para Vakıfları Vol. 9.* (İstanbul: İstanbul Sabahattin Zaim Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2019), 441–498. VGMA, Registers: 602, 604, 627, 730, 989, 990, 991

³¹Mehmet Bulut et al., *Osmanlı Dönemi Rumeli Para Vakıfları Vol. 10.* (İstanbul: İstanbul Sabahattin Zaim Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2019), 19–25. Archival Number: VGMA, Register: 623, Page: 145–147, Serial: 157

3.3. Governance, accountability and legal environment

The governance logic is centred on the mutawalli, who is charged with implementing the deed's lending conditions, preserving the principal, recording the proceeds and disbursing funds according to the allocation schedule. The corpus-level tabulations also indicate that founders were socially diverse, including a substantial number of titled founders, untitled founders and women founders, which suggests that the institution was not restricted to a narrow elite and that cash endowment could be used by different social groups to create durable local welfare arrangements.

At the doctrinal level, the Ottoman cash waqf system was debated because it required a legally defensible distinction between an admissible profit mechanism and prohibited ribâ. The controversy is well documented in the secondary literature, but its practical significance for this study is that the deeds themselves frequently contain 'compliance language' and risk constraints designed to protect the waqf from allegations of usurious practice. The broader legal context, including the debates around Çivizâde and later defences associated with Ebussuud's position, helps explain why deed language became careful, repetitive and procedural.³²

Crucially, the legal environment is not treated here as an abstract doctrinal field. The point is institutional: once the permissibility of the cash waqf mechanism was stabilised in practice and governance routines were normalised, the deed became a standardised instrument for mobilising small-to-medium cash endowments into structured credit and predictable charitable provisioning. The existence of an imperial legal resolution associated with the 1548 hükm-i şerif tradition, as discussed and reproduced in modern scholarship, is relevant because it signals that the mechanism's enforceability was not solely local custom; it could be defended within a recognised legal-political framework.³³

3.4. Why the Ottoman model matters for comparative analysis

For comparative purposes, the Ottoman model offers a historically grounded template of 'altruistic finance' in which credit and charity are institutionally co-produced. The model's distinctive features are: (i) an endowed principal protected by contractual and governance constraints, (ii) standardised return conventions that reduced uncertainty, (iii) explicit risk controls such as collateral and guarantors and (iv) earmarked social allocations that converted financial proceeds into local welfare outputs. These features will be used later to structure comparison with English endowed charity arrangements and loan-charity practices, not at the level of ideological analogy but at the level of institutional design: how funds were safeguarded, how returns were generated and how accountability was articulated.³⁴

³²Jon E. Mandaville, "Usurious Piety: The Cash Waqf Controversy in the Ottoman Empire," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 10, no. 3 (1979): 300–306.

³³Mehmet Gel, "Kanûni'nin Para Vakfı Yasağını Kaldıran 1548 Tarihli 'Hük-m-i Şerif'inin Yeni Bir Nüshası," *Gazi Akademik Bakış* 4, no. 7 (2010): 185–192.

³⁴Hüseyin Çınar, "Osmanlı döneminde Rumeli'de vakıf paranın kullanılırılmasında aranan şartlar," *ADAM Akademi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 7, no. 2 (2017): 149–165.

4. The English model: Endowed charity, corporate trusteeship and the logic of 'loan stocks'

The English experience with endowed charity offers a useful comparator for Ottoman cash waqfs, but only if it is treated on its own institutional terms. Early modern England developed a dense ecology of endowed gifts administered by parishes, municipal bodies and especially London's livery companies. Within this ecosystem, 'loan charities' and 'loan stocks' appear as one instrument among many, rather than as the dominant financing backbone of welfare and public services. The record is therefore best read as a portfolio of charitable techniques that combined (i) distributive doles in kind or cash, (ii) rent-based endowments attached to houses, shops and land and (iii) in some cases revolving credit that was lent out either gratis, at a modest fixed return, or through investment-style placement of principal with earmarked income streams.³⁵

4.1. Evidence base and identification strategy

This part is constructed from primary enumerations and commissioners' materials that were designed precisely to document endowed charity. The core London corpus is the nineteenth-century compilation *The Endowed Charities of the City of London*, which reprints (with index) the commissioners' reports on City charities and preserves donor stipulations, trustee arrangements and observed compliance issues.³⁶ Working from this compilation, we extracted and coded 82 entries in which the stated charitable purpose includes lending language (for example 'to be lent', 'loan', 'loan stock', 'apprenticeship stock', 'to be lent out at interest', 'gratis loans'). The coding differentiates three recurring designs: (1) interest-free social lending, (2) interest or return specified and (3) lending mentioned but terms unclear.

The Commissioners record explicitly gratuitous lending, but also designs in which trustees preserved the capital and funded distributions through returns on invested principal. Thomas Waade's bequest, for example, directed parish officers to lend small sums for fixed terms 'without paying any interest' on 'good security', yet the Commissioners noted that they 'could not discover any trace' of this part of the endowment by the early nineteenth century, underscoring the fragility of enforcement and record-keeping in small-scale schemes. In contrast, other gifts were administered through public-funds investment (including three percent consols) with dividends earmarked for relief. A further hybrid design used corporate governance as a credit conduit: Richard Fishborne's Mercers' Company endowment required the Company to lend £1,000 'gratis' in £200 tranches to five young freemen for five years on bond with sureties. Consistent with this variation, only about one-tenth of the 82 coded entries use unambiguous interest-free language, while roughly one-fifth reference interest or return and the majority foreground eligibility and security rather

³⁵Wilbur Kitchener Jordan, *The Charities of Rural England, 1480–1660: The Aspirations and the Achievements of the Rural Society* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1962).

³⁶*The Endowed Charities of the City of London; Reprinted at Large from Seventeen Reports of the Commissioners for Inquiring Concerning Charities. With a Copious Index* (London: Printed for M. Sherwood, 1829).

than the yield mechanism. This distribution situates the three English case studies as representative clause-types rather than exceptional anecdotes.³⁷

We also draw on the Herefordshire abstract, which records loan charity arrangements outside the capital and allows us to test whether the London patterns are metropolitan exceptions.³⁸ The main analytical claims below are tied to donor clauses and commissioner observations, and where interpretive framing is required it is anchored to established scholarship on English endowed charity and credit cultures.³⁹

4.2. Loan charity as philanthropic credit, not a universal welfare finance engine

A first and central point is that English ‘loan charity’ cannot be treated as an automatic analogue to the cash waqf mechanism. In Ottoman cash waqfs, the financing logic is structurally oriented towards generating a sustainable stream for specified public services through a legally articulated perpetuity regime. In England, by contrast, many loan charities were framed primarily as philanthropic credit directed towards apprentices, ‘young men’ within a company, or local householders, with preservation of principal pursued through bonds and sureties rather than through a dedicated waqf-style legal architecture.

The London material preserves cases where donors required lending without interest and tied the mechanism to screening through security and parish oversight. A clear instance is Thomas Waade’s charity in the parish of Christ Church: the bequest was to be lent in small portions for fixed terms ‘without paying any interest’, conditional on ‘giving good security’ to the parish officers. The same entry also exposes a recurrent vulnerability in loan-based benefactions, namely institutional discontinuity and documentary opacity. The commissioners report that they ‘could not discover any trace’ of the portion of the charity relating to the intended loan fund. For the comparative argument, this matters because it shows that loan charity existed and could be normatively designed as disciplined credit, yet its practical continuity could be fragile even when formally recorded.⁴⁰ This is important for the comparative argument. Loan charity existed, but the documentary record itself frequently foregrounds discontinuity, opacity or erosion of institutional memory.

Livery companies, as corporate trustees, also administered explicit revolving loan stocks. In the Mercers’ Company, a donor’s ‘£ 1000’, was recorded as ‘to be lent, £ 100 at a time, to young men of the company for ever, gratis, on bond with three good sureties’.⁴¹ Even where the intention was perpetual revolving credit, enforcement depended on company governance and on the borrower’s ability to mobilise credible sureties. This is an institutional logic of trust and screening rather than a cash waqf-style legal finance logic anchored in a dedicated charitable jurisprudence.

³⁷*The Endowed Charities of the City of London* (London, 1829), 4, 58, 272.

³⁸James Whishaw, “An Account of the Endowed Charities in Herefordshire,” *Journal of the Statistical Society of London* 2, no. 4 (1839): 249.

³⁹Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1998; repr., 2016), 1–7; Ian W. Archer, “The Charity of Early Modern Londoners,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 12 (2002): 223–226.

⁴⁰*The Endowed Charities of the City of London* (London, 1829), 58 (Thomas Waade’s Charity).

⁴¹*Endowed Charities of the City of London* (1829), 272.

4.3. Mixed revenue architecture: *Gratis loans, interest-bearing placement and rent-backed charity*

A second point, ‘how charities were funded’, is that English endowed charity often separates the social purpose of lending from the income base that finances broader distributions. In many cases, the charity’s distributive work relied on rents or other endowment income, while lending served a narrower moral or occupational objective. For example, under the Clothworkers’ Company, ‘Rogers’s gift’ is recorded as a tenement-backed endowment: houses in Glasshouse Yard generated rent, which after repairs and charges supported ‘distribution among the poor’ and a preacher, with no necessary dependence on a lending return.⁴² This aligns with that some English cases do not fund charity through the loan instrument itself.

At the same time, it would be inaccurate to suggest that English loan charity ‘never’ relied on a return. The London compilation includes donors who specified a fixed payment associated with lending. Under the Clothworkers’ Company, ‘Heydon’s gift’ records ‘£ 100 to be lent to young men of the company’, accompanied by an expectation of ‘£ 3 6s. 8d. for interest thereof’ alongside additional earmarks for parish distributions (including bread) tied to the endowment’s operation.⁴³ This is not Ottoman cash waqf finance, but it demonstrates an English hybrid: lending is deployed with an explicitly stated return and distributive earmarks.

A further variant resembles investment placement rather than ‘microcredit’. In the Goldsmiths’ Company material, ‘Richard Croshaw’s gift’ records ‘a capital sum of £41 16s. 8d. being the sum lent for the church stock’, with ‘interest at 5 per cent’ used for church repair, and a note that the principal was in fact ‘the surplus of the church stock’.⁴⁴ Here, the scheme is essentially an endowed stock whose income is channelled to maintenance of ecclesiastical infrastructure. It still belongs to the world of endowed charity finance, but it is analytically distinct from apprentice-style or household-level loan relief.

Taken together, these variants support a more precise typology of the English model. The record does not sustain a single claim that ‘loan charities were interest-free and therefore did not fund charity’. Rather, it supports a structured interpretation: (i) many loan charities operated as *gratis* social lending, (ii) some were explicitly return-bearing with earmarked distributions and (iii) some were better read as endowed funds placed at interest for parish or institutional maintenance.⁴⁵

4.4. Governance, enforceability and the problem of continuity

A third point concerns governance and enforceability. Ottoman cash waqfs developed in a legal environment where waqf validity, perpetuity and permissible contractual forms became matters of juristic controversy and institutional adjudication. In England, endowed charity governance relied on corporate trusteeship (companies), parochial administration and later the growth of formal oversight and reform narratives.

⁴²Ibid., 181.

⁴³Ibid., 184.

⁴⁴Ibid., 319.

⁴⁵Wilbur Kitchener Jordan, *Charities of Rural England; Endowed Charities of the City of London* (1829).

The primary sources repeatedly reveal that compliance and continuity depended on trustees' administrative capacity and on the durability of recordkeeping. The Thomas Waade charity in Christ Church parish is particularly stark. The donor clause specifies small loans 'without paying any interest', conditional on 'good security', yet the commissioners report, 'We could not discover any trace of that part of the testator's charity' relating to the loan fund. Even where lending rules are clearly specified, the arrangement is not self-enforcing; it relies on local institutions and custodianship practices that can weaken over time, leaving intended loan mechanisms difficult to trace or to operate as originally designed.⁴⁶

County evidence underscores that loan charities were also present outside London and could be integrated into broader municipal and county frameworks. Wishaw's Herefordshire account records that Hereford 'participates' in Sir Thomas White's charity and provides 'loans of £ 25' without interest, but it also notes that this credit form had been 'rendered less beneficial' by the changing scale of capital needs, implying a structural mismatch between fixed nominal loan sizes and evolving economic conditions.⁴⁷ This kind of observation is valuable for the comparative logic because it makes explicit a constraint that Ottoman cash waqfs confronted differently through scale, diversification and juristic adaptation.

For the nineteenth century, the English reform and accountability discourse becomes unavoidable context. Scholarship on the Charity Commission and charitable accountability shows that the Victorian period increasingly treated endowed charity as an object of state-supervised reform, with reporting, rationalisation and consolidation pressures.⁴⁸ This study does not need to reproduce this literature in detail, but it is important to note that English charitable finance was progressively embedded in a modern regulatory culture that reclassified, reorganised or redirected older endowments.

4.5. Comparative implication: What the English record can and cannot support

The English evidence supports two comparative payoffs, and it also sets limits.

First, it demonstrates that revolving credit within charitable frameworks is not unique to the Ottoman case. England clearly possessed loan stocks that targeted apprentices and householders, used surety-based enforcement, and were often administered by corporate bodies with reputational screening capacity.⁴⁹ This is the strongest point of contact with cash waqfs as 'social finance' and it helps justify the article's broader argument that early modern societies built financial instruments for welfare functions long before contemporary microfinance discourse.⁵⁰

Second, the English record clarifies why direct equivalence would be methodologically misleading. In Ottoman cash waqfs, lending returns are typically the financing channel

⁴⁶ *Endowed Charities of the City of London* (1829), 58.

⁴⁷ Wishaw, "Endowed Charities in Herefordshire," 249.

⁴⁸ James J. Fishman, "Charitable Accountability and Reform in Nineteenth-Century England: The Case of the Charity Commission," *Chicago-Kent Law Review* 80 (2005): 723–778; Josephine Maltby and Janette Rutterford, "Investing in Charities in the Nineteenth Century: The Financialization of Philanthropy," *Accounting History* 21, no. 2–3 (2016): 263–265.

⁴⁹ *Endowed Charities of the City of London* (1829), 272; and Wishaw, "Endowed Charities in Herefordshire."

⁵⁰ Aidan Hollis and Arthur Sweetman, "Microcredit: What Can We Learn from the Past?" *World Development* 26, no. 10 (1998): 1875–1877; Parker Shipton, "Three Faces of the Loan Charity, Usury, . . . and Fantasy," in *Credit Between Cultures: Farmers, Financiers, and Misunderstanding in Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 36–51.

that sustains designated services within a waqf logic of perpetuity. In England, many endowed charities were rent-backed or stock-backed and the loan instrument frequently appears as a targeted social intervention rather than as the central fiscal engine of welfare. The English side therefore strengthens the study when it is used to refine typologies and mechanisms, not to force a one-to-one institutional mirror.

5. Comparative analysis

A credible comparison between Ottoman cash waqfs and English endowed charity lending requires two distinct layers of evidence. The first is descriptive scale and representativeness. In Rumelia, the edited court-register based corpus identifies 953 cash waqfs across the Balkan provinces, and the geographic distribution is reported explicitly in the compilation's introductory apparatus.⁵¹ The second layer is institutional texture, captured through close reading of selected cases and the administrative record. For England, the present study relies primarily on the commissioners' compilations and related institutional documents, especially *The Endowed Charities of the City of London*. A systematic keyword-led extraction from that volume, followed by manual verification, yields 82 discrete entries that contain explicit lending language (for example, 'to be lent', 'on bond', 'sureties', 'without interest' and specified interest or return terms).⁵² This does not claim that the London compilation is a census of English charity, but it does establish that revolving lending schemes were sufficiently common to be repeatedly recorded, while also revealing heterogeneity in how lending was structured and justified.

Table 1 summarises the empirical footing of the comparison by reporting the composition of the Rumelia cash waqf corpus and the clause-level visibility of lending terms in the London endowed-charity material. Panel A shows that the Rumelian sample is geographically concentrated in regions. Panel B reports the results of the coded extraction from *The Endowed Charities of the City of London* (1829) among the 82 loan-relevant entries. Taken together, the table both clarifies the corpus base of the Ottoman side and demonstrates a key asymmetry in the English documentation, namely that lending is frequently recorded without systematically specifying its yield mechanism, which has direct implications for how enforceability, oversight and institutional continuity are assessed in the comparative analysis.

5.1. Legal form and the governance problem: Endowment discipline versus trustee capacity

The Ottoman cash waqf is anchored in a dedicated charitable jurisprudence and a standardised endowment grammar: capital is endowed, conditions are written into a Waqfiyyah, trusteeship is defined through tevliyet, and lending practice is constrained by enforceable stipulations that are legible to a court environment. The well-known controversy over cash waqfs in the sixteenth century did not merely concern theology. It concerned whether a cash endowment could preserve capital while generating distributable income

⁵¹Mehmet Bulut et al., *Cash Waqfs in Ottoman Europe* (Istanbul: Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University Publications, 2020), 71–72.

⁵²*The Endowed Charities of the City of London; Reprinted at Large from Seventeen Reports of the Commissioners for Inquiring Concerning Charities* (London: Printed for M. Sherwood, 1829).

Table 1. Corpus composition and clause visibility (Ottoman Rumelia cash waqfs and London endowed loan charities).

| Panel A. Rumelia cash waqf corpus by region (N = 953) | | |
|--|------------|--------------|
| Region | n | Share (%) |
| Bosnia | 197 | 20.7 |
| Greece | 193 | 20.3 |
| Bulgaria | 146 | 15.3 |
| Tekirdağ | 143 | 15.0 |
| Edirne | 90 | 9.4 |
| Macedonia | 85 | 8.9 |
| Kosovo | 33 | 3.5 |
| Albania | 31 | 3.3 |
| Kırklareli | 17 | 1.8 |
| Serbia | 12 | 1.3 |
| Romania | 6 | 0.6 |
| Total | 953 | 100.0 |
| Panel B. London endowed loan-charity entries by yield-language visibility (N = 82) | | |
| Clause visibility category | n | Share (%) |
| Unclear (yield not stated in entry text) | 55 | 67.1 |
| Interest/return mentioned | 18 | 22.0 |
| Explicitly interest-free | 9 | 11.0 |
| Total | 82 | 100.0 |

Note: Panel B is based on clause-level coding of 82 loan-relevant entries, recording whether the entry text explicitly states a yield mechanism (interest/return), explicitly states gratuity (interest-free) or is silent/ambiguous on yield while specifying eligibility/security and administrative arrangements.

without violating the prohibition of *riba*/interest. The controversy and its resolution produced a durable legal pathway for structured lending, commonly framed through legally cognisable forms that aimed to preserve principal while generating a predictable yield.⁵³

English endowed charity lending, by contrast, is generally embedded in trust-like arrangements and corporate or parish governance rather than a specialised legal-finance doctrine for endowed lending. Commissioners' records repeatedly emphasise that the apparatus is not self-enforcing. Lending rules could be clear on paper, yet implementation depended on local administrative capacity, continuity of recordkeeping and the ability of officeholders to monitor compliance across time. The Thomas Waade entry under Christ Church demonstrates both sides of this dynamic: it specifies interest-free loans with 'good security', yet the commissioners also report that they 'could not discover any trace' of part of the scheme in practice.⁵⁴ The implication is not that English charity lacked discipline, but that discipline was contingent on trustee competence and institutional memory.

This difference in governance architecture matters for comparative claims. Ottoman cash waqfs institutionalise lending as the normal route from endowed capital to charitable expenditure. The English materials show lending as one permissible mechanism among several, and often one that could weaken or disappear when administrative continuity failed.

⁵³ Jon E. Mandaville, "Usurious Piety: The Cash Waqf Controversy in the Ottoman Empire," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 10, no. 3 (1979): 289–308; Mehmet Gel, "Kanûni'nin Para Vakfı Yasağını Kaldıran 1548 Tarihli 'Hükm-i Şerif'inin Yeni Bir Nüshası", *Gazi Akademik Bakış* 4, no. 7 (2010): 185–92; and Emrullah Dumlu, "XVI. yüzyıl Osmanlı uleması arasında para vakıfları etrafında cereyan eden tartışmalar," *İLTED* 44 (2015): 303–37.

⁵⁴ *The Endowed Charities of the City of London* (1829), 58.

5.2. Financial mechanism: How capital is preserved, and how revenue is produced

Ottoman cash waqfs are structurally designed to convert endowed capital into a stable distributable stream while maintaining principal. The secondary literature has long emphasised that a key operational feature of cash waqfs is the explicit attention to capital preservation and predictable return, including the widespread appearance of standardised rates in the archival record and in empirical studies of cash waqf operation.⁵⁵ Rumelian materials also show that lending conditions were not arbitrary: they frequently specify eligibility constraints, collateral or guarantor requirements and procedural rules intended to protect the endowment against default and dissipation.⁵⁶

In Figure 1, Panel A illustrates the Ottoman Cash Waqf model, where a fixed return (ribh/profit) creates a surplus that funds both charitable services and capital re-investment ensuring perpetuity. Panel B illustrates the English Loan Charity model, where prohibition on interest and lack of re-capitalisation leaves the principal vulnerable to inflationary erosion over time.

English loan charity, however, is heterogeneous in its revenue logic. Some entries specify interest-free lending, explicitly described as ‘gratis’ or ‘without paying any interest’.⁵⁷ Others plainly incorporate return terms. Francis Godwin James’s classic study shows that ‘loan charities’ could function as local credit, including cases where loans were made at an expressed rate, and he links this to the broader English culture of endowed provision as a supplement to local credit markets.⁵⁸ This variety is visible within the primary record as well. In the London compilation, corporate trusteeship could administer a revolving stock lent to insiders on bond with sureties, including the

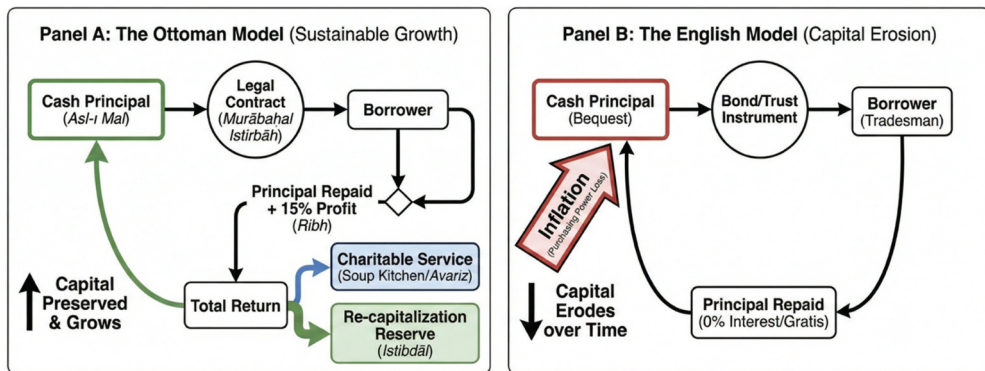


Figure 1 Divergent cycles of philanthropic credit.

⁵⁵Murat Çizakça, "Cash Waqfs of Bursa, 1555–1823," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 38, no. 3 (1995): 313–54; and Çiğdem Gürsoy, "The Financial Analysis of the Ottoman Cash Waqfs," in *Global Approaches in Financial Economics, Banking, and Finance* (Cham: Springer, 2018), 389–413.

⁵⁶Hüseyin Çınar, "Osmanlı döneminde Rumeli’de vakıf paranın kullanılırılmasında aranan şartlar," *ADAM Akademi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 7, no. 2 (2017): 149–65.

⁵⁷*The Endowed Charities of the City of London* (1829), 58.

⁵⁸Francis Godwin James, "Charity Endowments as Sources of Local Credit in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century England," *Journal of Economic History* 8, no. 2 (1948): 153–70.

Mercers' Company material recording '£ 1000' to be lent 'gratis' to young men 'on bond, with three good sureties'.⁵⁹

The comparison therefore should not be framed as 'Ottoman profit-generated' versus 'English interest-free'. The more defensible contrast is institutional: in the Ottoman model, the endowment is typically structured so that lending and yield are integral to the charitable budget. In the English model, lending may be integral in some cases, but it can also be peripheral, episodic or subordinated to other endowment strategies, particularly as investment norms evolve.

5.3. Documentation, oversight and the nineteenth-century turn towards auditability

A further divergence concerns the evolution of oversight mechanisms. In England, the long nineteenth century is associated with an increasing emphasis on standardisation, transparency and investable forms, including the routinisation of auditing expectations and the preference for instruments considered safe and administratively legible.⁶⁰ The institutional record reflects this shift towards a governance regime in which charity is expected to be traceable, reportable, and compatible with a modern regulatory state.⁶¹

This is important for the comparative argument because it clarifies why commissioners repeatedly highlight discontinuity in older lending schemes. Where the archival voice states that a scheme cannot be traced, the problem is not only local neglect. It also reflects the fact that informal or semi-formal revolving credit practices were comparatively hard to govern through standardised reporting. The Ottoman cash waqf archive, by contrast, is produced within a court-centred documentary ecology in which endowed terms and trustee duties are repeatedly restated, recorded, and re-verified through legal instruments that are designed to persist.

5.4. Targeting, discipline, and screening: Surety, reputation, and community membership

Both systems rely on screening, but they operationalise it differently. In Rumelian cash waqfs, screening is often embedded in written lending conditions and legal enforceability, including requirements concerning collateral, guarantors and the trustee's duty to avoid risky borrowers.⁶² The logic is to protect the endowment so that the distributable surplus can fund long-lived public services. In England, screening can be explicitly reputational and corporately mediated. The Mercers' Company example shows how 'bond' and 'three good sureties' are the core enforcement technology, and how access is routed through membership and reputation within a corporate community.⁶³

This difference has analytical consequences. Ottoman cash waqfs are frequently used to finance durable public goods, including education and religious services, by stabilising

⁵⁹*The Endowed Charities of the City of London* (1829), 272.

⁶⁰Josephine Maltby and Janette Rutterford, "Investing in Charities in the Nineteenth Century: The Financialization of Philanthropy," *Accounting History* 21, no. 2–3 (2016): 263–280.

⁶¹James J. Fishman, "Charitable Accountability and Reform in Nineteenth-Century England: The Case of the Charity Commission," *Chicago-Kent Law Review* 80 (2005): 723–78.

⁶²Çınar, "Osmanlı döneminde Rumeli'de vakıf paranın kullanıldığında aranan şartlar," 149–65.

⁶³*The Endowed Charities of the City of London* (1829), 272.

a revenue stream. English loan charity, in many recorded cases, appears as a targeted instrument for particular social categories (poor men, apprentices, ‘young men of the company’), where discipline is achieved through surety and local knowledge rather than through a dedicated charitable finance jurisprudence. The overlap is functional, but the institutional foundations differ.

5.5. Comparative implication: Functional similarity is not institutional equivalence

The evidence supports a careful conclusion. Both the Ottoman and English materials preserve real instances of endowed credit deployed for social provision. Yet the Ottoman cash waqf is a system-level charitable finance institution, reproduced at scale and anchored in a specialised legal framework that normalises lending as the default channel from capital to welfare. The English record demonstrates that endowed lending existed, sometimes in explicitly revolving form, but it also reveals high heterogeneity in return terms, heavy dependence on trustee capacity and continuity of local recordkeeping, and a nineteenth-century movement towards more standardised and auditable forms of charitable asset management. A claim of functional similarity is therefore defensible. A claim of institutional equivalence is not.

Table 2 summarises the comparison as an institutional design matrix. It shows a defensible functional similarity: in both contexts, endowed capital could be used for small loans to socially defined beneficiaries, typically with screening and ‘good security’ requirements. The divergence is institutional. Ottoman cash waqf lending is embedded in waqf law and the founder’s waqfiyyah conditions, with stronger traceability through formal registration and a waqf-specific legal framework. English endowed loan charity operates under trust and charity governance (parishes, livery companies, corporate trustees), where lending rules and enforcement depend much more on trustee capacity and organisational continuity. The table also explains why ‘equivalence’ is too strong a claim. Ottoman yield logic is more standardised around principal preservation and stipulated return conventions, while the English record is heterogeneous: some cases are explicitly interest-free, others specify interest/return, and many omit yield terms in the entry text. These differences map onto failure modes: Ottoman problems centre on trustee misconduct or compliance disputes, whereas English schemes more often show discontinuity, administrative drift or loss of traceability.

6. Conclusion

This article has compared two early modern regimes of endowed credit that are often placed in separate historiographies: the Ottoman cash waqfs, reconstructed here through a large Rumelian corpus, and English loan charities, reconstructed through commissioners’ printed investigations and institutional records. The comparison does not rest on a simple contrast between ‘religious charity’ and ‘secular philanthropy’. Instead, it foregrounds how different legal and administrative designs shaped whether endowed funds could operate as durable, repeatable instruments of welfare and local credit.

The Rumelian material indicates that cash waqfs were not marginal experiments. The corpus used in this study records 953 cash waqfs in Rumelia, distributed across multiple

Table 2. Comparative institutional design: Ottoman cash waqfs vs. English endowed loan charities.

| Dimension | Ottoman cash waqfs (Rumelia) | English endowed loan charities (London) |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| Legal foundation | Waqf law; founder's <i>Waqfiyyah</i> conditions; court registration | Trust/endowment under English charity governance; parish and corporate (livery-company) trustees |
| Capital form | Cash principal constituted as a waqf asset | Cash bequests and endowment funds administered by trustees/companies |
| Core credit instrument | Structured lending via <i>Waqfiyyah</i> terms and recognised contractual forms | Small loans to eligible persons; sometimes repeated relending, sometimes single-cycle or discontinued lending |
| Yield logic | Designed to preserve principal and generate regular allocations through stipulated return mechanisms | Heterogeneous: explicitly interest-free loans in some cases; interest/return or investment-income funding in others; often yield language is absent in entry text |
| Borrower targeting | Often artisans, small producers, local people (varies by deed) | Poor householders, apprentices, 'young men' of a company, parish residents; eligibility often tied to reputation and status |
| Security and enforcement | Sureties/collateral; trustee oversight; enforceability anchored in waqf jurisprudence and court forums | 'Good security' clauses, bonds with sureties; enforcement depends on parish/company governance and capacity to monitor borrowers |
| Documentation | <i>Waqfiyyah</i> detail and court registration support traceability of conditions and succession | Commissioners' reporting and trustee records; traceability can be uneven and, in some cases, the Commissioners note discontinuity |
| Typical failure mode | Trustee abuse or misalignment; enforcement slippage; disputes over compliance | Loss of traceability, discontinued relending, conversion into passive distributions, administrative drift |
| Analytical payoff | Credit as welfare infrastructure embedded in a legal-financial charitable architecture | Credit and charity as financial infrastructure under plural trustee regimes, with high dependence on organisational continuity |

provinces and localities, which allows the analysis to treat cash waqfs (vakf-ı nukūd) as a region-wide institutional pattern rather than an exceptional practice. Across these foundations, sustainability was pursued through a regulated return logic that preserved the principal and kept the endowment economically operative over time. The key point for the comparative argument is not merely that Ottoman founders permitted revenue generation, but that revenue generation was integrated into a recognisable charitable jurisprudence and into documentary routines that linked founders' stipulations to enforcement forums.

The English material demonstrates that endowed credit also existed, and in explicit, carefully specified forms. Donors and trustees used bonds, sureties, and corporate governance to structure lending as a disciplined practice rather than as informal neighbourly help. At the same time, the same sources repeatedly show that continuity depended on trustees' administrative capacity and on the durability of recordkeeping. In Thomas Waade's charity, the lending terms are expressed with unusual clarity, including the requirement that small sums be lent 'without paying any interest' on the condition of 'good security', yet the commissioners report, 'We could not discover any trace' of the relevant part of the charity in operation. In the Mercers' Company material, revolving loans are likewise specified as perpetual and 'gratis', but they are tied to bonds and multiple sureties, highlighting how strongly the mechanism depended on organisational oversight and on borrowers' ability to mobilise credible guarantors. These are not presented here as representative of all English charitable practice, but as primary evidence for a recurrent problem in loan charity: the rules could be legible on paper while the mechanism could weaken in

practice through administrative drift, institutional change, or the simple erosion of traceable memory.

Taken together, the comparison clarifies both similarity and difference. Both systems used screening devices, and both embedded lending within moral languages of deservingness and discipline. The decisive divergence lies in the legal-financial architecture that connected charitable intent to capital preservation. In the Rumelian cash waqf, the operating logic is designed to keep the endowment financially alive while remaining within an explicitly articulated normative framework. In the English loan charity examples highlighted here, the operating logic often prioritises gratuity and moral economy, but that choice can intensify vulnerability, because an interest-free revolving fund is not self-enforcing and requires stable trusteeship to remain visible and functional.

The main contribution of this article is therefore empirical and conceptual. Empirically, it places a large Ottoman dataset and concrete English primary materials into the same analytical frame. Conceptually, it proposes that the durability of philanthropic finance should be analysed as an institutional design problem, not as a civilisational ranking of 'financial sophistication'. The evidence assembled here suggests a research agenda that moves beyond isolated case studies. Future work can widen the English evidentiary base beyond London, trace the life-cycle of particular revolving funds across successive investigations, and align those trajectories with Ottoman examples where court registration, stipulation structure and enforcement mechanisms can be followed across time.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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