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The Development of Muslim Society during the Ayyubid Dynasty

Rina[1*], Zulkifli Musthan[2]

[1,2] Institut Agama Islam Negeri Kendari, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

Background: The development of society during the Ayyubid Dynasty marked a significant phase in the history of Islamic civilisation following the decline of the Fatimid Dynasty. Founded by Salahuddin al-Ayyubi, this dynasty is recognised not only for its success in confronting the Crusades but also for its role in establishing a more stable social, economic, and religious order. **Objective:** This study aims to analyse the dynamics of societal development and the factors influencing it. **Method:** The research employs a historical method with a qualitative approach, analysing primary and secondary sources, including chronicles, administrative documents, literary works, travel records, and archaeological and numismatic findings. **Results:** The findings indicate that political stability contributed to stronger governance and the enforcement of law. In the economic sector, the development of agriculture, trade, and craft industries enhanced public welfare. Support for education through madrasas and bimaristans also promoted intellectual growth. **Conclusion:** This study concludes that the Ayyubid Dynasty succeeded in shaping a stable and productive society. **Originality/Value:** This study fills a historiographical and analytical gap in the field of Islamic civilization history and medieval historical sociology by uncovering the tripartite synergy between post-Fatimid political consolidation, economic welfare revitalization, and the institutionalization of scholarship (*madrasas* and *bimaristans*) concerning the comprehensive socio-intellectual transformation of Muslim society within the context of Ayyubid governance during the Crusader period, an area that has predominantly focused on militaristic narratives. These findings enrich historical-empirical evidence and serve as a strategic reference for reconstructing conceptual frameworks of classical Islamic statecraft and modeling resilient socio-educational development strategies.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the study of Islamic civilisation, the development of society during a particular period of governance is not determined solely by political and military strength, but also by the state's capacity to establish social stability, a productive economic system, and sustained support for education and the advancement of knowledge (Adel et al., 2025). A stable government can create an organised social structure, ensure the security and welfare of its citizens, and provide space for intellectual and cultural development (Lubis et al., 2024). Beyond maintaining order, such governance enables the formation of institutional frameworks that regulate social interactions, economic exchanges, and cultural expression. These conditions serve as key indicators of a dynasty's success in building a sustainable civilisation, as they reflect a political system's ability to balance authority with social development and long-term progress.

* **Corresponding Author:** Rina, rinasaja142@gmail.com
Institut Agama Islam Negeri Kendari, Indonesia
Address: Jl. Sultan Qaimuddin No.17, Baruga, Kec. Baruga, Kota Kendari, Sulawesi Tenggara 93870, Indonesia

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In Islamic history, the Ayyubid Dynasty played a significant role in shaping the social and political dynamics of the Muslim world during the medieval period. This dynasty was founded by Salahuddin al-Ayyubi in 1171 CE following the decline of the Fatimid Dynasty in Egypt (Sulistiawati et al., 2025). The Ayyubid Dynasty is widely recognised for its success in confronting the Crusades and recapturing Jerusalem in 1187 CE. This achievement established the Ayyubids as a major political power in the Middle East at the time (Sahidin, 2022). However, the contributions of this dynasty extended far beyond military achievements, encompassing governance, economic management, educational development, and socio-religious organisation. These broader contributions highlight the Ayyubids' role not only as defenders of territory but also as architects of a structured and evolving society.

During the Ayyubid period, Islamic territories experienced a relatively stable process of political consolidation after previously being marked by fragmentation and internal conflicts (Amatullah et al., 2026). This stability created favourable conditions for institutional growth and societal reorganisation. Various social and intellectual institutions emerged and developed, including madrasas, hospitals (bimaristans), libraries, and waqf institutions that supported educational initiatives and public welfare. Major cities such as Damascus, Cairo, Aleppo, and Jerusalem became important centres of intellectual activity and trade in the Middle East (Roza, 2024). These urban centres functioned not only as administrative hubs but also as spaces for knowledge exchange, cultural interaction, and economic expansion. In addition, religious policies that reaffirmed the dominance of Sunni schools of thought played a significant role in-shaping society's religious identity and strengthening social integration within Ayyubid territories.

The expansion of Ayyubid territories indicates that the dynasty played a crucial role in building the social and intellectual foundations of Muslim society during the 12th and 13th centuries (Saifulah, 2014). The social structure of this period comprised diverse groups, including political and military elites, religious scholars (ulama), merchants, farmers, and non-Muslim communities, all of whom coexisted within a relatively stable and functional social system (Urmilawati & Syarif, 2026). Each group contributed to the broader societal framework through distinct roles, creating a dynamic yet balanced social order. The waqf system developed rapidly and became a primary mechanism for supporting education, healthcare, and social services. This institutional development reflects a society that relied not only on state mechanisms but also on community-based contributions to sustain public welfare. Thus, societal life during the Ayyubid period was shaped not only by political dynamics but also by the evolution of social and economic institutions within the community (Annisa et al., 2025).

Several previous studies have examined the Ayyubid Dynasty from various perspectives (Sulistiawati et al., 2025; Al Ayyubi et al., 2024). Some studies highlight the role of the dynasty in reunifying the Islamic world after the decline of Fatimid power, particularly through the political and military strategies implemented by Salahuddin al-Ayyubi and his successors (Rahmadina et al., 2024; Akbar, 2024). Other research focuses on the Ayyubids' contributions to the development of Islamic education through the establishment of madrasas and support for intellectual activities in major Islamic cities (Azqia & Sudjatnika, 2025). Additionally, studies explore the roles of political elites and women in supporting the development of religious institutions and architecture during the Ayyubid period (Tamia, 2024). These diverse scholarly approaches demonstrate the richness of Ayyubid studies and reveal the multidimensional nature of the dynasty's historical significance.

However, most of these studies still emphasise political, military, or biographical aspects of key figures within the Ayyubid Dynasty. Comprehensive analyses of societal development during the Ayyubid period that integrate political, social, economic, and cultural dimensions remain relatively limited. As a result, a holistic understanding of how Ayyubid governance influenced broader societal dynamics has not been fully articulated in the existing literature. This gap suggests the need for a more integrative analytical framework that can capture the complexity of societal transformation beyond isolated variables, thereby offering a more nuanced interpretation of historical processes.

Based on this gap, a more comprehensive study is needed to understand societal development during the Ayyubid Dynasty by examining the various factors that influenced it. An analysis that integrates political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions is expected to provide a more complete picture of the characteristics of Muslim society during this period and of the Ayyubids' contributions to the development of Islamic civilisation. Such an approach also enables a deeper exploration of the interplay between governance structures and societal outcomes, highlighting how different domains collectively shape historical trajectories.

This study aims to analyse the development of society during the Ayyubid Dynasty and identify the main factors shaping the period's social, economic, religious, and cultural dynamics. Through a historical approach and careful analysis of diverse historical sources, this research is expected to contribute academically by enriching the study of Islamic social history. Furthermore, it seeks to broaden the understanding of the Ayyubid Dynasty's role in shaping

societal development and advancing Islamic civilisation during the medieval era, offering insights that may also be relevant for contemporary discussions on governance and social development.

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design with a historical approach. The historical approach is used to reconstruct and understand the dynamics of societal development during the Ayyubid Dynasty by examining relevant historical sources. This design enables the researcher to systematically analyse past events by exploring the relationships among political policies, social conditions, economic activities, and developments in education and culture during the period. This study employs a qualitative approach, emphasising in-depth interpretation of historical data to obtain a comprehensive understanding of societal life under the Ayyubid Dynasty.

2.2 Research Object

The object of this study is the development of society during the Ayyubid Dynasty, which spanned approximately the 12th to the 13th centuries CE. The focus includes various aspects of societal life during this period, such as social structure, political and governmental policies, religious life, the development of knowledge and education, and economic activities within Ayyubid territories, including Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and surrounding regions. The analysis aims to understand how Ayyubid governance influenced social dynamics and the development of Islamic civilisation during this period.

2.3 Data Collection

Data for this study were collected through library research, including examination of various historical sources relevant to the research topic. The data sources consist of primary and secondary materials. Primary sources include historical chronicles, administrative documents, travel accounts, and historical works written during or close to the Ayyubid period. Secondary sources include academic books, scholarly journal articles, and previous studies on the Ayyubid Dynasty, the development of Muslim society, and the social, economic, and cultural conditions of the time. In addition, the study also considers archaeological and numismatic findings that provide supplementary information about societal life during the period.

2.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study is conducted using qualitative historical analysis through several stages. The first stage is data reduction, which involves selecting and categorising information from various historical sources relevant to the research focus. The second stage is source criticism, which evaluates the authenticity and credibility of historical sources through external and internal analysis. The third stage is data interpretation, which involves interpreting verified historical information by relating it to the social, political, and cultural context of the Ayyubid period. The final stage is data presentation in the form of historiography, which entails organising the findings systematically and thematically to produce a comprehensive account of societal development during the Ayyubid Dynasty.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

3.1.1 Political and Governmental Development

The findings indicate that the Ayyubid Dynasty successfully established relatively strong political stability across its territories through a combination of effective leadership, religious legitimacy, and military success. The dynasty was founded by Salahuddin al-Ayyubi following the collapse of the Fatimid Dynasty in Egypt in 1171 CE, marking the end of the previous regime and the beginning of a new era of Sunni governance in the region. Under Salahuddin's leadership, Ayyubid territories expanded significantly, encompassing Egypt, Syria, Palestine, the Hijaz, and several other strategic regions in the Middle East. This political stability was further reinforced by military victories over the Crusaders, particularly at the pivotal Battle of Hattin, which paved the way for the recapture of Jerusalem in 1187 CE. These successes not only enhanced the political legitimacy of the Ayyubids but also strengthened their position as a dominant power in the region.

The Ayyubid governmental structure was semi-autonomous, a factor that helped effectively manage its vast and diverse territories. The Sultan, as the highest authority, controlled political and military decisions. At the same time, regional governance was delegated to amirs or governors, who were typically members of the ruling family or close relatives. This system struck a balance between centralisation and decentralisation, allowing the central government to maintain strategic control while granting regional administrations flexibility. As a result, each region could adapt policies according to its social and geographical conditions without compromising loyalty to the central authority. This governance model proved effective in maintaining internal stability, minimising interregional conflicts, and strengthening overall political cohesion within the Ayyubid Dynasty.

3.1.2 Religious Life Development

In the religious sphere, the Ayyubid government established Sunni Islam as the official doctrine of the state, replacing the Ismaili Shi'a dominance that had characterised the Fatimid period. This policy was a strategic move by Salahuddin al-Ayyubi to realign society's religious orientation with mainstream Sunni Islam while simultaneously strengthening his political legitimacy within the broader Muslim world. By supporting educational institutions such as madrasas and Sunni scholars, the Ayyubid administration helped build a more unified religious foundation. This effort not only aimed to reinforce the unity of the Muslim community but also to reduce sectarian tensions that had previously arisen due to doctrinal differences. Consequently, socio-religious stability was better maintained, supporting the overall consolidation of Ayyubid rule.

In addition, the Ayyubid government demonstrated a relatively high level of tolerance toward other religious communities, particularly in strategic regions such as Jerusalem. Christian and Jewish communities were allowed to practice their faith, manage their sacred sites, and conduct pilgrimages without significant restrictions. This policy reflects a pragmatic and inclusive approach to governing a multicultural society. Such tolerance contributed to relatively stable interreligious relations, especially in the aftermath of the Crusades, which had previously generated prolonged tensions. By providing a secure environment for diverse religious communities, the Ayyubid administration maintained social harmony and reinforced its image as a just and moderate السلطة.

3.1.3 Development of Education and Knowledge

The study also finds that the Ayyubid Dynasty placed strong emphasis on education as part of its strategy to build a robust and sustainable civilisation. Ayyubid rulers actively established numerous madrasas in major urban centres, including Damascus, Cairo, Aleppo, and Jerusalem. These institutions functioned not only as centres of formal education but also as hubs for disseminating Sunni teachings, which formed the ideological foundation of the state. The curriculum included Islamic sciences such as jurisprudence (fiqh), hadith, and Qur'anic exegesis, while also fostering intellectual traditions among scholars and students. With strong state support, madrasas became essential instruments for producing educated individuals who contributed to governance, religious outreach, and the advancement of knowledge in the Islamic world.

In addition to madrasas, the Ayyubid government established bimaristans (hospitals) that served dual functions as healthcare institutions and centres for medical education. These institutions reflect significant advancements in medicine, as they provide not only patient care but also practical training for aspiring physicians. Within bimaristans, students studied various aspects of medical science, including disease diagnosis, pharmacology, and systematic patient care. The existence of these institutions demonstrates that intellectual development during the Ayyubid period extended beyond religious sciences to include medicine, pharmacy, and other social sciences. Thus, the Ayyubid Dynasty fostered an integrative intellectual tradition that connected religious values with practical societal needs.

3.1.4 Economic Development

In the economic sphere, the Ayyubid Dynasty demonstrated considerable capacity to promote the growth of agriculture, trade, and craft industries as the foundation of public prosperity. Major cities such as Cairo and Damascus emerged as strategic trade centres due to their positions along key trade routes connecting the Middle East, North Africa, and parts of Asia. Trade activities involved valuable commodities such as spices, textiles, metals, and handicrafts. The political stability maintained by the Ayyubid government created a secure environment for merchants and economic actors, thereby encouraging the movement of goods and services. This condition directly contributed to dynamic economic growth and increased interregional economic interactions.

In addition to trade, significant attention was given to agricultural management as the primary source of food security. The Ayyubid administration optimised land use through well-planned, sustainable irrigation systems, thereby increasing agricultural productivity. Effective water management enabled the cultivation of various crops, including wheat, fruits, and other essential food supplies. Furthermore, relatively organised agrarian policies helped

maintain a stable distribution of agricultural products in the market. This increase in production not only strengthened food availability but also contributed to overall economic growth and improved living standards during the Ayyubid period.

3.1.5 Social Development

The social structure of Ayyubid society consisted of various groups, each playing distinct roles in daily life. The elite class included political and military leaders who controlled governance and territorial defence. At the same time, religious scholars (ulama) held significant authority as intellectual and spiritual leaders, influencing social and educational policies. Merchants played a key role in driving economic activities, whereas farmers formed the backbone of food production. The presence of non-Muslim communities living alongside Muslims further reflects the pluralistic nature of Ayyubid society. Interactions among these groups occurred within a relatively stable social framework, supported by strong religious values and a collective commitment to maintaining societal continuity, particularly in the face of external pressures such as the Crusades.

Within this social framework, the development of the waqf system emerged as a crucial pillar in supporting public welfare. Waqf functioned as both an economic and social instrument, financing various public needs such as the construction of madrasas, hospitals (bimaristans), mosques, and other public facilities. Through this mechanism, resource distribution could be carried out more equitably without complete reliance on state funding. This system enabled members of society, including elites and philanthropists, to directly contribute to social development. The waqf system not only strengthened social solidarity but also ensured the sustainability of educational and healthcare services. Thus, waqf became a vital instrument for reinforcing social cohesion and advancing civilisation during the Ayyubid Dynasty.

3.2. Discussion

The findings indicate that an interconnected combination of political stability, religious policies, support for education, and economic growth shaped the development of society during the Ayyubid Dynasty. These elements did not operate independently but functioned in a mutually reinforcing manner, creating a comprehensive framework for societal advancement. The political and military successes of Salahuddin al-Ayyubi not only elevated the Ayyubids as a dominant political force in the Middle East but also laid the groundwork for a more structured and stable society. This environment enabled the emergence of organised social systems, facilitated institutional growth, and encouraged intellectual and cultural activities that contributed to the broader development of Islamic civilisation during the medieval period.

The political stability established during Ayyubid rule had a direct and far-reaching impact on various aspects of societal life (Nurhidayah et al., 2025). A secure territorial environment reduced internal conflicts and external threats, thereby allowing economic and commercial activities to flourish, particularly in major urban centres that became hubs of regional and international trade. In addition, this stability created favourable conditions for the establishment and expansion of social and educational institutions, which played a critical role in disseminating and developing knowledge (Yumitro, 2022). The relationship between political authority and societal development becomes evident here: strong governance not only ensures order but also lays the foundation for cultural and intellectual progress.

In the religious sphere, the policy of establishing Sunni Islam as the official doctrine played a crucial role in shaping society's religious identity (Huda & Rahim, 2023). This policy functioned as both a political and social strategy, reinforcing the legitimacy of Ayyubid rule while simultaneously promoting cohesion among diverse Muslim communities (Andhika et al., 2024). By standardising religious orientation, the government was able to minimise doctrinal fragmentation and strengthen collective identity. At the same time, the Ayyubid administration maintained a relatively tolerant stance toward non-Muslim communities, allowing them to practice their religions and manage their own affairs (Yarli et al., 2024). This balance between religious consolidation and tolerance reflects a pragmatic governance approach that contributed to long-term social stability and harmonious interreligious relations.

The development of education and knowledge during the Ayyubid period further highlights the rulers' strong commitment to intellectual advancement (Mursyada, 2023). The establishment of madrasas and other educational institutions served not only to disseminate Sunni teachings but also to lay the foundation for cultivating scholarly traditions and intellectual discourse within society (Azqia & Sudjatnika, 2025). These institutions became centres for the study of religious sciences and other branches of knowledge, thereby fostering a culture of learning and inquiry. With sustained state support, major cities within Ayyubid territories evolved into vibrant intellectual

centres, attracting scholars, students, and thinkers from various regions (Putra et al., 2025). This intellectual climate significantly advanced knowledge and reinforced the role of education as a central pillar of societal development.

In the economic domain, the growth of trade and agriculture indicates that Ayyubid economic policies were effective in promoting public welfare (Dieke, 2023). The combination of political stability and the strategic geographic location of Ayyubid territories along key international trade routes enabled the expansion of commercial networks. It facilitated the movement of goods across regions (Hawary et al., 2024). Agricultural productivity also improved through better land management and irrigation systems, ensuring food security and supporting population growth. These developments not only strengthened society's economic foundation but also enhanced social mobility and improved living standards. The integration of trade and agriculture within a stable political framework underscores the importance of economic policy in sustaining long-term societal prosperity.

Furthermore, the development of the waqf system emerged as a crucial factor in reinforcing society's social structure. Waqf functioned not only as a philanthropic mechanism but also as an institutionalised system that supported essential public services, including education, healthcare, and social welfare (Mursal et al., 2024). Through waqf, resources could be allocated more equitably, allowing communities to benefit from sustained funding for public institutions. This system also encouraged active participation from various social groups, including elites and philanthropists, in contributing to societal development. As a result, waqf became a key pillar in maintaining social cohesion and ensuring the continuity of public services, thereby strengthening the overall resilience of Ayyubid society (Kasdi, 2018).

The findings demonstrate that the Ayyubid Dynasty was not merely a military power during the Crusades but also a significant contributor to the development of the social, economic, and intellectual structures of medieval Muslim society. The integration of political stability, religious policies, educational support, and economic development created a dynamic and sustainable model of governance. This combination enabled the Ayyubid era to emerge as a pivotal period in the history of Islamic civilisation, characterised by balanced progress across multiple dimensions of societal life.

4. IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

4.1 Research Implications

The findings of this study provide important implications for the development of social history studies in Islamic civilization. The results demonstrate that political stability, organized religious policies, support for education, and economic growth are interconnected factors that shape societal development during the Ayyubid Dynasty. This indicates that the formation of a stable and civilized society does not rely solely on political power but also on social institutions such as madrasas, waqf institutions, and healthcare facilities that support public welfare. Therefore, understanding the patterns of social development during the Ayyubid period can serve as a conceptual reference for examining the relationship between governance, social stability, and civilizational development in Islamic history.

4.2 Research Contributions

This study contributes academically by enriching the field of Islamic historical studies, particularly by offering a more comprehensive socio-historical perspective on societal development during the Ayyubid Dynasty. Unlike many previous studies that primarily focus on political and military aspects, this research highlights societal dynamics through an integrated analysis of social, economic, educational, and religious dimensions. As such, it provides a more holistic understanding of how Ayyubid governance contributed to the formation of a relatively stable, religiously grounded, and intellectually oriented society within the broader context of Islamic civilization.

5. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

5.1 Research Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, it relies on a historical method based on library research, meaning that all analyses depend on the availability and interpretation of existing written sources. The limited availability of primary sources that directly depict the social life of Ayyubid society also poses a challenge to achieving a comprehensive understanding. Second, the study focuses on general patterns of societal development across Ayyubid territories and does not examine in detail the variations in social conditions across different regions under Ayyubid rule. Furthermore, the study does not incorporate a comparative

analysis with other contemporary dynasties, leaving broader contextual dynamics of societal development insufficiently explored.

5.2 Recommendation for Future Research

Given these limitations, future studies are recommended to expand the scope of analysis by incorporating a wider range of historical sources, including manuscripts, administrative records, and archaeological and numismatic evidence, to provide more detailed insights into societal life during the Ayyubid period. Future research may also adopt a comparative approach by examining societal development during the Ayyubid Dynasty alongside other contemporary dynasties, such as the Seljuks or Mamluks, to gain a broader understanding of social dynamics in medieval Islamic civilization. In addition, more focused studies on specific aspects, such as the role of women, the waqf system, trade networks, or the development of educational institutions, have strong potential to enrich the literature on Islamic social history further.

6. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that societal development during the Ayyubid Dynasty was closely linked to the political stability established under the leadership of Salahuddin al-Ayyubi and his successors. This stability created relatively secure and organized social conditions, enabling the growth of various aspects of societal life across Ayyubid territories, including Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and the Hijaz. Military success in confronting the Crusades, along with political achievements in consolidating key regions of the Islamic world, provided a strong foundation for the formation of a more stable and integrated society.

Furthermore, the Ayyubid administration played a significant role in advancing religious life, education, and intellectual development. The establishment of Sunni Islam as the official doctrine, along with the construction of educational institutions such as madrasas and bimaristans, reflects a strong commitment to intellectual cultivation. State support for education and scholarly activities enabled cities such as Cairo, Damascus, and Aleppo to emerge as major centres of intellectual life during the period. This development not only reinforced religious identity but also enhanced the intellectual quality of Muslim society.

In the social and economic spheres, the Ayyubid Dynasty successfully promoted the growth of trade, agriculture, and social institutions such as waqf, which played a vital role in supporting public welfare. The social structure comprising scholars, merchants, farmers, and non-Muslim communities reflects a relatively harmonious social dynamic under Ayyubid rule. Thus, the Ayyubid Dynasty contributed not only in military and political terms but also played a crucial role in shaping a religiously grounded, stable, and knowledge-oriented society within the history of Islamic civilization.

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Author Contribution Statement

All authors discussed the results, contributed to the final manuscript, and approved the final version for publication. Rina: Conceptualization and Design, Methodology, Writing - Original Draft. Zulkifli Musthan: Writing - Review & Editing, Performed data collection and Analysis, Interpretation of the results.

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In preparing this article, the authors used QuillBot in a limited capacity to assist with grammar checking, sentence structuring, and manuscript refinement. All ideas, analyses, data interpretations, and academic content presented in this article are entirely the responsibility of the authors. The authors confirm that the use of QuillBot did not replace the scientific analysis process or compromise the academic integrity of the research. All instances of Generative AI usage in this article were conducted by the authors in accordance with the IJRIS GenAI Tool Usage Policy, with the authors assuming full responsibility for the originality, accuracy, and integrity of the work.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that this research was conducted without any financial, commercial, or personal relationships that could influence the results or interpretation of the study.

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