



## Mahdist Movement Political Dimensions in Sudan: Islamic State Creation Religious Mentality during the Nineteenth Century (1884 -1881).

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### Abstract:

This article examines the religious mentality in the nineteenth century Middle with reference to Mahdi movement political dimensions in Sudan during the early eighties. The study is organized into four sections which cover, historical background of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Sudan, the emergence of the Mahdism in 1881 in Sudan, the political aspects of the Mahdist movement in Sudan, and local opposition against the Mahdist movement. The study key findings showed that the Sudanese Mahdi, Mohammed Ahmad, had been affected by number of factors shaping his religious mentality embodied in the idea of Mahdism. It was concluded that such mentality was evident in the political aspects the movement and local opposition. It was also revealed that those factors played such a vital role in the movement's prosperity that ordinary Sudanese people regarded Mohammed Ahmed, in sharp contrast to Mahdi-opposition loyal scholars (Ulama), as a savior capable of liberating Sudan from foreign rule.

**Keywords:** Mahdism, Political Islam, Sufiism, Sudan.

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## الجوانب السياسية للحركة المهديّة في السودان: العقلية الدينية في إنشاء الدولة الإسلامية خلال القرن التاسع عشر (1881-1884)

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### الملخص:

يتناول هذا المقال العقلية الدينية في الشرق الأوسط في القرن التاسع عشر من خلال المظاهر السياسية لحركة المهدي في السودان خلال أوائل الثمانينات. يغطي المقال أربعة عناوين فرعية: الخلفية التاريخية للسودان في القرن التاسع عشر، وظهور المهديّة في السودان عام 1881، والجوانب السياسية للحركة المهديّة في السودان، والمعارضة المحلية ضد الحركة المهديّة. ويخلص المقال إلى أن المهدي السوداني محمد أحمد تأثر بعدد من العوامل التي شكلت عقلية الدينية المتجسدة في فكرة المهديّة. ويمكن ملاحظة هذه العقلية في الجوانب السياسية للحركة والمعارضة المحلية. ولعبت تلك العوامل دوراً حيوياً في نجاح الحركة، حيث رأى السودانيون العاديون في محمد أحمد المنقذ القادر على إنقاذ المجتمع السوداني من الحكم الأجنبي. في حين أنهم رأوا العلماء المواليين بأئسين بسبب معارضتهم للمهدي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المهديّة، الإسلام السياسي، الصوفية، السودان.

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## 1. Introduction

Most regions of the Islamic world witnessed a number of reformist movements significantly characterized by religious elements during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Mahdist movement that took place in Sudan during the late nineteenth century was of paramount prominence. Undoubtedly, such reformist movements were influenced by the political, economic, and social conditions of their time. Therefore, those movements were not only religion-based, but also politically, socially, and economically driven. Therefore, leaders of those movements particularly utilized religion to accomplish their political purposes and/or to make social reforms. Mohammed Ahmed, who emerged in Sudan as the Mahdi in 1881, employed religious discourse to create a new politics in Sudan.

The Mahdist movement of 1881-1898 has been depicted as a religious-driven movement in most previous studies. Lidwien Kapteijns, focusing on Mahdist ideology, considers it a millenarian movement. As Kaptejin shows, its leader Mohammed Ahmed succeeded in persuading his followers to justify their rebellion as a holy war of independence against oppressive infidels in which every true Muslim should participate. Ahmad, Al-Mahdi, in this way legitimized his leadership of the holy war and later of the independent state in terms of his religious vocation, his *Mahdship*.<sup>(1)</sup> In another study, John Voll describes Al-Mahdi as the founder of a religiopolitical party in the third world, the leader of a millenarian revolt, an African rebel against alien rule, and a Semitic messiah in an African context, concluding that Islamic fundamentalism constituted the basis from which the movement's followers fought foreigners.<sup>(2)</sup> In the same lines, John Henrik Clarke argues that the Mahdi's popularity was based on his piety and that his deeply-rooted religious zeal was the main reason his followers revered him.<sup>(3)</sup> According to P. M. Holt, the most prominent Western figure who has written about the Mahdist movement, the Mahdi established his movement on a religious basis. Based on his analysis of the Mahdist leaders, Holt argues that Ahmed was clearly convinced he was the "Expected Mahdi," a conviction that prevailed at a late stage in his spiritual development. The Mahdist movement was thus a religious movement from its inception, born of a protest against the foreign government's failure to meet the needs of its subjects, and aiming to achieve the ideals of the Muslim faith.<sup>(4)</sup> In *The Mahdist State*, Holt expresses his surprise at the fact that religious sentiments acted as the driving force of the Mahdist movement against Egyptian rule in the Sudan, which, after all, has been regarded as a Muslim government. Rather than investigating additional factors other than religious ones, Holt interprets the conflict between the rebels and the government as triggered on the basis of, "the nature of the indigenous Islam which had developed since the Funj Sultanate (1504-1821)."<sup>(5)</sup>

Extensive research scholarly work was conducted as abovementioned focusing mainly on the religious aspects of the Mahdist movement in Sudan. However, Mahdist political and social aspects are still under-researched. Therefore, while considering the movement's religious characteristics, this study aims to



analyze the political dimensions of the Mahdi's religious discourse to explore its religious mentality in creating nation-state in Sudan. The study key objective here is to demonstrate how Islamic heritage religious mentality paved the way of early political foundations for what became known as an Islamic state throughout the Middle East, with particular focus on the political aspects of the Mahdist movement in Sudan during the late nineteenth century, previously projected in earlier research as a pure religious movement. Further analysis of the Sudanese Mahdi's discourse is essential for highlighting the mentality of some Muslim leaders, providing a deeper insight into the political consciousness of Mahdi and his political actions previously understood simply under the religious rubric. The significance of the study in investigating this movement does not stem only from the fact that it was the first religious revolutionary movement in the region that succeeded in threatening the Egyptian government in Sudan, but also due to its religiopolitical nature. The Mahdi's special connection to Islam (he saw himself literally as "The Divinely-Guided One") placed him in a unique position. He utilized Mahdism to reach out both religious and political leaders. As he claimed to have received Divine messages and was close to religious and political elites, his followers were forced to accept his vision or come under punishment.

The study is organized into four sections and a conclusion. Section one focuses on the historical background of the nineteenth century Sudan. It presents the influential political and social conditions triggered by Egyptian rule and British presence in the Sudan. The Sufi nature of Sudanese society in the nineteenth century was elaborated to understand the interconnection between religion and politics and how they paved the way to the Mahdi's emergence. Section two deals with the emergence of Mahdism in Sudan in 1881, shedding light on Mohammed Ahmed bin Abdullah's historical background in terms of his education and the impact of Mahdist books on his life. It discusses the "Expected Mahdi's" thinking and secret activities. The section turns to Mahdism declaration, Mahdi's most appropriate means for unifying Sudanese society under his leadership. Section three discusses the political dimensions of the Mahdist movement in Sudan in terms of coronation process, absolute obedience, abolishing Sufi orders, and immigration. The Mahdi invented the story of a Divine coronation to seize power. He believed that the absolute obedience was prerequisite for the seizure of both religious and political power. Section four explores the local opposition against the Mahdist movement including religious opposition and the British attitude towards the Mahdist movement and the Mahdi's response to opposition. Leading religious scholars refutation of Mahdi's claims and the British stance for dividing Sudan were also discussed.

## 2. Historical Background of the nineteenth century Sudan

### 2.1. Egyptian rule and British presence in Sudan

The political and social conditions that prevailed in Sudan during the nineteenth century have attracted attention among scholars in order to understand the movement's political aspects. Sudan remained



under Egyptian rule since 1821. Prior to Egyptian invasion, Sudan was ruled by several states, which fought one another, causing pervasive rioting across the entire country. This security vacuum allowed Mohamed Ali Pasha, the Egyptian ruler, to occupy Sudan in 1821.

Mohamed Ali Pasha interests in Sudan were primarily economic-driven in view of the country's natural resources, such as gold in Sinnar mines. To occupy Sudan was also to capture the sources of the Nile River located in the south of the Sudan. In addition, the dense Sudanese population was seen a source of military conscription. Mohamed Ali filled the ranks of his army with black people from Sudan. It was also a good place for merchant Egyptians to expand their trade, particularly Ali's Turkish devotees. The Egyptian government made use of two pretexts to justify their conquest of Sudan. First, they traced the ancestry of the masters of Egypt before Mohamed Ali through the Sudanese Mamluks. Second, they claimed that they wished to eradicate Sudan's slave trade. The Egyptian government conquered Fashoda in 1865, and in 1869 annexed Bahr al-Gazal, eventually.<sup>(6)</sup>

The Sudanese regarded the invaders as Turkish, not Egyptians for two reasons. First, the Sudanese realized Egypt was ruled by the Khedives who were the Turkish-speaking Ottomans, even though the Khedive virtually enjoyed autonomous rule in Egypt. Second, since the Egyptian invasion of Sudan in 1821, the Khedives of Egypt had traditionally sent a governor-general to serve as the head of the administration in Khartoum. Though these governors were of various nationalities, Egyptian, Turkish, and European,<sup>(7)</sup> the Turkish element was predominant. Therefore, the Sudanese people and the Mahdi himself had always regarded the government, whether in Khartoum or in Cairo, as a Turkish government.<sup>(8)</sup> Therefore, once Egyptian forces had conquered the Sudan, the government newly created in Khartoum was known as the Egyptian-Turkish government<sup>(9)</sup>.

Sudan was divided administratively into four main provinces (*hukmdaria*) under the Egyptian administration: First, *the hukmdaria* comprising the western regions included Darfur, Kardofan, Shaka, Bahr al-Gazal and Dungala, with its center of government in al-Fasher. Second, *the hukmdaria* of the central regions of the Sudan included Khartoum, Sinnar, Barber, Fashoda and Kat al-Istwa'a with its center in Khartoum. Third, *the hukmdaria* comprising the eastern regions included al-Taka, Suakin and Musawa'a. Fourth, *the hukmdaria* of Harar, Berbarh, and Zela'a, had its center in Harar.<sup>(10)</sup> The Mahdist movement took place in all four *hukmdarias*. However, the movement appeared stronger in the Western parts due to existing allied tribes, such as Bagarah tribe, to the movement. As for other region, they came under the control of the Mahdist leaders only after having defeated the governmental troops one after other.

The British presence in the Sudan can be examined in the light of two interrelated factors. The first involves European colonial rivalry in the African continent. The nineteenth century saw extensive competition between Britain and France in North Africa. This colonial competition caused the two governments to



intervene in the internal affairs of many African lands in ways that supported their colonial purposes. To fulfill their colonial projects they occupied certain African countries; for instance, France occupied Tunisia in 1881 and Britain occupied Egypt in 1882<sup>(11)</sup>. The second has to do with British expansion in the Sudan under the pretext of anti-slavery idealism<sup>(12)</sup>. The British administration shared with Egyptian government in ruling the Sudan in the nineteenth century. Gordon Pasha and Baker were the most prominent British officers administering the Sudan during this period.

## 2.2. Sudanese society in the nineteenth century

There is consensus amongst the historical sources that the vast majority of the members of Sudanese society were indignant toward Egyptian governance. Historians have summarized the factors that contributed to the emergence of the Mahdist movement in Sudan as follows: maladministration, abolition of the slave trade, imposition of prohibitive taxes, monopoly over the ivory trade assumed by the local government, and the increasing number of crimes, particularly bribery, homicide and rape.<sup>(13)</sup> Sudanese society certainly suffered many injustices under the local government.

If the aforementioned factors are taken carefully into consideration, it is clear that though most of them are not religious in nature, they were nevertheless interpreted as an abandonment of Islamic precepts. At the time, in the nineteenth century, Mahdism was prevalent in Sudanese society. I argue here that Mahdism acted as the catalyst that enabled Mohamed Ahmed to reach the peak of religious, political and social power in Sudan. It is important to have an understanding of Mahdism in order to interpret how the concept of Mahdism was interwoven with Sudanese society and how Ahmed utilized religious sentiments to fulfill his political and social purposes.

Although there is no mention of the Mahdi or Mahdism in the Quran, there are many *Hadiths* (reports of the deeds and sayings of the Prophet Mohammed) related to the Mahdi. Such Hadiths are in fact a subject of controversy among religious scholars. Mahdists claim that the Prophet Mohammed "has prophesied about several events that will occur just before the advent of the Day of Judgment. Among these, [the] Prophet Mohammed has foretold the advent of one of his descendants, Al Mahdi (the guided one), who will materialize when the believers are severely oppressed in every corner of the world. He will fight the oppressors, unite the Muslims, [and] bring peace and justice to the world."<sup>(14)</sup> Isma'il Abdul Qader al-Kordofany, one of the Saints who believed that Ahmed was the Mahdi, adds that the "Expected Mahdi" will establish a great realm, and his ministers will be assigned by God through divine inspiration. Therefore, as al-Kordofany believed anyone, who does not believe in the Mahdi, is an infidel<sup>(15)</sup>.

Based on the *Hadith* above, Mahdism is founded upon three inseparable concepts: religious revival, political leadership, and social reform. Pro-Mahdism can be considered as an ideology because it had been allegedly predicted by the Prophet Mohammed. It aims to include the revival of Islam and the reformation of



societies according to Islamic precepts. In Mahdist thought, however, this reformation will not be accomplished until a new state is established under the Mahdi's leadership. This paper will now proceed to concentrate on the political aspects of the movement.

Mahdism in Sudan is informed by a few principal factors, the first of which is the political and social circumstances of the Islamic world. The Sudan, as part of this world, is influenced by the events taking place in its surroundings. In general, political, social, and economic conditions had deteriorated in many parts of Islamic world throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Consequently, certain reformist movements appeared such as that led by the Wahhabis in the Arabian Peninsula, the cultural movement led by Jamal al-Den al-Afghani and Mohamed Abdoh in Egypt, and Sufi movements such as the Senussi movement in North Africa<sup>(16)</sup>. Also, elsewhere in Africa, three religious reformist movements broke out during the nineteenth century, such as the 1804 movement of the Sheikh Osman Ibn Dan Fodio al-Fulani, the founder of Sokoto State in Nigeria, the movement of El Haj Omar Tall in Guinea and Mali during the 1860s, and the movement of Ahmed Humodo in the southern region of Senegambia. Such movements had a great impact on the Mahdist movement in the Sudan.<sup>(17)</sup> As a result, as Shalaby describes, the atmosphere in nineteenth-century Africa was generally fraught with the phenomenon of Mahdism<sup>(18)</sup>.

The influence of such movements on the Sudanese movement has compelled some historians to deduce that the Mahdist movement in Sudan was a straightforwardly religious phenomenon. Abdulwhab Ahmed Abdulrahman considers the Sudanese movement as a natural extension of the religious reformist movements pervading the Islamic World. As such, the Mahdist movement was both religious and reformist, finding its historical, intellectual, and spiritual roots in Islamic heritage and influenced by the political, economic, social, and psychological circumstances of nineteenth-century Sudanese society<sup>(19)</sup>. Though Abdulrahman argues in *Toshka* for a relationship between politics and religion in the Sudan, he omits the political aspect of the movement. My argument, in fact, does not deny the religious characteristics of the movement, but highlights its political aspects.

The second factor is discussed in certain books that dealt in detail with Mahdism, as in books of Muhe'a al-Den Bin Arabi and Ahmed Bin Idriss, highlighting the Mahdi's victories and his spiritual and political leadership. The "Expected Mahdi," as these books claim, will create a great empire that will control the Islamic world and threaten Europe<sup>(20)</sup>. Without doubt, these books drew a vivid picture of an imagined community and new polity in the imaginations of the Sudanese people and Mohamed himself. Mohamed Ahmed successfully made use of this imagined situation to persuade his followers to accept his Mahdship.

Various social forces within Sudanese society, under hard political and social circumstances, looked for any instrument that might redeem them from the injustice of the existing government. They considered



Mahdism to be the best way to unite the indignant society under one banner, regardless of its religious slogans.

### 2.3. Religion and politics interconnection

To understand how Ahmed used religion to achieve his political schemes, an attempt must be made to describe the three most important internal factors prevailing in Sudan at that time. The first factor has to do with the nature of Islam at that time. The Sufis, the prevailing Islamic sect in Sudan, was divided into two groups. The first group, called the Jurists, specialized in jurisprudence (*Ulama*) and laid no claims to having performed any miracles. The second group was known as the Saints (*Aulia*, sing. *Wali*). According to Sufi belief, certain Sufi saints have performed miracles through the grace of God. One of these miracles was that a few saints had been allowed to see the Prophet Mohamed in conclave (*al-Hadrah*). Mohamed Abu Salem defines the term *al-Hadrah*, as a direct communication between the Mahdi and the Prophet Mohamed, according to Sufi beliefs.<sup>(21)</sup> Most Sudanese believed in these miracles.<sup>(22)</sup> Ahmed merely exploited this belief, as we shall see, to reinforce his religious, political and social position within a broad portion of Sudanese society.

The second factor concerns the relationship between those accorded God-status mediator (*Wali*) and his students as based on reverence and sanctification in accordance with the Sufi order (*al-Tariqa al-Sufia*). The student traditionally submits to his teacher, obeying him without hesitation.<sup>(23)</sup> This religious culture greatly affected the Ahmed's personality in terms of administration. Within this order, obedience to the Saint is a religious obligation and the Mahdi occupied the supreme position of leadership. The Mahdi would control not only Sudanese society but the Islamic community as a whole. In this way, Ahmed could impose his political and social blueprints on a Sudanese society, which was eager for change.

The third factor involves the relationship between religion and politics. The Sufi saints enjoyed a great deal of respect during the reign of Funj Sultanate, with spiritual influence on both the common people and the Sultan himself. They exploited their influence to diminish the rights of the Sultan's subjects. However, this situation had changed during the time of Egyptian rule, beginning in 1821. The Egyptian government appointed a single judge-general who was linked to the government in Khartoum. The Sufi saints' spiritual influence faded gradually. The Egyptian government brought the *Ulama*, rather than the Saints, more closely in touch with the Egyptian administration in Khartoum. This policy created fierce competition between the *Ulama* and the Saints over their influence on the Sudanese. Therefore, as we shall see, the former supported the Egyptian government against the Mahdist movement while the latter group backed the movement.





### 3. Emergence of Mahdism in Sudan in 1881

#### 3.1. Mohammed Ahmed bin Abdullah's historical background: His education and the effects of Mahdist books on his life.

Mohammed Ahmed was born in Dengalah about 1843 (some historians say 1844<sup>(24)</sup>). He is descended from an Arabic tribe that had previously dwelled in Nuba. He became obsessed with studying the Quran in *al-Khtatib*, small classes usually held beside a mosque. He learned the Sufi order from Sheikh Mohammed Sharif. During his seven-year stay with Sheikh Sharif, he exhibited asceticism and austerity; his Sheikh trusted him, and recommended people to Mohammed Ahmed to learn the Sufi order<sup>(25)</sup>.

In 1871, Mohammed Ahmed moved to Abba Island where he established his reputation. He built a small mosque and *zawia* (a small room beside the mosque) to teach his students and soon had many followers<sup>(26)</sup>. Though Mohammed Ahmed strove to maintain contact with his Sheikh, a disagreement arose between the two men. There are two different accounts of this disagreement. According to Na'um Shuqayr, Sheikh Mohammed Sharif said to Shuqayr that once Mohammed Ahmed had acquired many followers, he considered himself the greatest person in the world, even regarding himself as "The Expected Mahdi." Sheikh Sharif said, "Mohammed Ahmed told me secretly that he is the Mahdi and offered me the position of minister and consultant, but I rebuffed him and prevented him from announcing his claim. This was in 1878." On the other hand, Mohammed Ahmed's students denied the truth of this narrative, claiming that Sheikh Sharif was jealous of Mohammed Ahmed because he had so many followers. Additionally, Mohammed Ahmed denounced some of Sheikh Sharif's acts, such as allowing people to dance at parties and allowing women to attend his meetings. Mohammed Ahmed regarded these actions as being contrary to Islam<sup>(27)</sup>.

Regardless of the truth of either the two tales, Mohammed Ahmed won the dispute, which played a key role in establishing his credibility as a religious leader. After having separated from Sheikh Sharif, Mohammed Ahmad joined Sharif's religious rival Sheikh al-Qurashi. His partnership with al-Qurashi provided Mohammed Ahmed with the unique opportunity of becoming an independent sheikh, which he capitalized on by beginning to freely disseminate his own notions concerning Mahdism, as he was free to do because there was no sheikh greater than him to contain his activities. Sheikh al-Qurashi died a short time later, upon which his followers swore allegiance to Mohammed Ahmed. This served as the catalyst for the announcement of Mohammed Ahmed's Mahdship<sup>(28)</sup>.

Mohammed Ahmed was deeply influenced by certain heritage books dealing with the issue of Mahdism such as those by Gazali, and Ibn Alarabi along with the writings of Sheikh Ahmed al-Ta'eb. He was fascinated by the practices of the strict Sufi order<sup>(29)</sup>. Mohammed Ahmed took from such books whatever served his purposes. For example, he focused on his lineage, claiming that he was descended from the Prophet Mohammed, "as you [his followers] know I am descended from the God's Messenger..."<sup>(30)</sup> Since the



abovementioned books prophesied that the Mahdi would appear upon Massa Mountain in Qder, located in the West of Sudan, he planned to immigrate to Qder to assert his Mahdship<sup>(31)</sup>.

Mohammed Ahmed also utilized these books to back his decisions in assigning his ministers. He aimed to kill in its cradle any attempt to oppose him in moving the populace by conforming to their image of the Mahdi, wooing them and enticing them away from any potential opposition<sup>(32)</sup>.

### 3.2. The "Expected Mahdi's" Thinking and Secret Activities

According to Sufi beliefs, the Mahdi must move to Abba Island to announce his Mahdship. For this reason, Mohammed Ahmed went to Abba and made his statement calling for a revival of religion in the Sudan. According to Shuqyar, Abdullah al-Taishi, the successor of the Mahdi, was the first person to announce clandestinely in some parts of the Sudan that Mohammed Ahmed was the "Expected Mahdi." The announcements were made clandestinely rather than openly for two reasons: First, Mohammed wished to sound out public opinion about Mahdism, and second to determine which places would be most suitable for the instigation of a revolution from which raids against the existing government might be launched<sup>(33)</sup>.

For Mohammed Ahmed, Mahdism was the most appropriate tool for the unification of Sudanese society under his leadership. Mahdism was useful to Mohammed Ahmed for several other considerations as well. First, according to the Mahdist books, the "Expected Mahdi" would be a Saint (a religious man), and as Mohammed Ahmed was considered a Saint who met this expectation. Second, the "Expected Mahdi" was to be descended from the Prophet Mohammed, and Mohammed Ahmed met this condition also, since his lineage allegedly showed that he was descended from the Prophet Mohammed. Third, because Mahdism is a divine commission, Mohammed Ahmed could legitimize any rule that reinforced his leadership; no Muslim could refuse to obey orders that Ahmed had received from God. Mohammed Ahmed contacted several Ulama, notables, and tribal leaders during this secret phase to secure their support and their promises to join him in his fight against the existing government<sup>(34)</sup>.

In reality, the political aspects of the Mahdist movement were apparent from the beginning. According to Shalaby, the first time Abdullah al-Taishi saw Mohammed Ahmed, he said, "My father was a Saint, and he told me that I would meet the 'Expected Mahdi' and that I would be his minister." This encouraged Mohammed to announce his Mahdship<sup>(35)</sup>. al-Taishi's request to be the Mahdi's minister indicates that he sought this position for political rather than religious reasons.

### 3.3. Mahdship Declaration.

Mohammed Ahmed proclaimed on July 29, 1881 that he was the "Expected Mahdi."<sup>(36)</sup> In his publication of August 28, 1881, he claimed that the Prophet Mohammed had announced to him that he was the Mahdi.



From God's slave Bin Sir Abdullah to Sheikh Daf'a Allah Bqwa ... I have contacted sheikhs and princes, but none of them have helped me, and so I have called upon God only to help me revive our religion, and the common people have agreed with me. The Prophet announced to me that I am the Expected Mahdi ... and therefore I believe in his message [of Mahdism].... As you all know, I am descended from God's Messenger.... wherein God has chosen His poor slave Mohammed Ahmed Bin Sir Abdullah. [Therefore, you must] take [God and His Messenger's order] for granted... Sheikh Ibn al-Arabi has said that having knowledge of Mahdism is as having knowledge of Doomsday; and no one has knowledge of Doomsday but God ... and Sheikh Ahmed Bin Adriss has said that [the Mahdi] will emerge in the place that people have rejected ...The Prophet has ordered us to emigrate<sup>(37)</sup>.

It appears that the Mahdi faced strong opposition at the beginning. This publication was designed to convince skeptics of his Mahdishp. The Mahdi also encouraged his followers to leave their homes and come to him. This emigration will be discussed in greater detail below. The next section examines the sources of the coronation ceremony and investigates in greater depth how the Mahdi utilized religious sentiments to reinforce his religious and political leadership.

#### 4. Political dimensions of Mahdist movement in Sudan

##### 4.1. Coronation process

The most important political aspect of the Mahdist movement in the Sudan was that it sought authority through religion. Mohammed Ahmed invented the story of a divine coronation to seize power. Two factors, in fact, worked in conjunction to shape his account of this coronation: The first to be considered is the effect on Ahmed of books that described the manifestation of the Mahdi. After having devoted himself for a long time to reading such books, Mohammed Ahmed began to imagine the formation of a Mahdist state. Second, he was fully aware of the Sufi beliefs shared by most Sudanese in "miracles" that had been attributed to Sufi saints. Most Sudanese people revered the Sufi saints as possessors of an active power of holiness (*Baraka*).<sup>(38)</sup>

Mohammed Ahmed's imagination was stirred by both the possibility of the establishment of a Mahdist State and the Sufi belief in miracles. Through his "divine coronation" he claimed that God had crowned him caliph (a successor of the Prophet Mohammed) in the presence of the Prophet Mohammed, *a-Khidhr* (the name of one of God's messengers) and the four caliphs (the successors of the Prophet Mohammed, Abu Bakr al-Sadiq, Omar Bin al-Khattab, Othman Bin Affan, and Ali Bin Abi-Talib). Mohammed



Ahmed claimed that the Prophet Mohammed pronounced him the "Expected Mahdi" in the course of this coronation. This story clearly exposes the political dimension of the movement, and reflects to what extent his imagination influenced his thought in his attempt to seize both religious and political power.

As God wanted, He deigned to give His lowly and poor slave [he means himself] a great caliphate and the Prophet informed me that I am the "Expected Mahdi." Then he [the Prophet] allowed me to sit on his chair with the caliphs and Khidhr attending [to witness the coronation]. God supported me through His angels and *awliya* [saints] .... God informed me that the Prophet will visit the battlefields [to support me against my enemies], and give me the sword of triumph [so that] no one will defeat me.<sup>(39)</sup>

To amount to the peak of the political leadership systematically, Mohammed Ahmed claimed that he had not known of his identity as the Mahdi until, to his surprise, God and His Messenger informed him of it. Ahmed made a pretense of humility and protested that he did not deserve to be the Mahdi, but maintained that God had chosen him and that the people had to obey God's orders. However, Ahmed did give his own interpretation of the reasons for his having been chosen as the "Expected Mahdi" by mentioning in his publication that he was a Saint who had been called upon to revive and defend religion, suggesting that he had the qualifications to be the "Expected Mahdi" despite his belief that he did not deserve the honor. In any case, he wanted in this way to delude his followers into believing that he did not desire leadership, thereby avoiding the arousal of the people's doubts or jealousy. Ahmed portrayed himself as a lowly man whom God had chosen; and God does anything He wants.

I did not know about this matter [Mahdism] until God and His messenger inspired me. Although I do not have the merit [to be the Mahdi], God's order must be obeyed; He does what He wants and chooses, and the order of His messenger, as it is His order, must also be obeyed.... [Therefore] I have obeyed God's order, and I acted as His courier for the revival of religion [he refers here to his efforts during his time on Abba Island in 1881].<sup>(40)</sup>

It seems that Mohammed Ahmed was afraid of arousing his followers' jealousy. In another publication, Ahmed asserted that he did not wish to be the Mahdi. "I am as one of you, and I wish that someone else, not me, would undertake it [to be the Mahdi], and that I would be one of his helpers, but God has chosen me to undertake the revival of religion."<sup>(41)</sup>



Ahmed faced no difficulties in having his followers accept his notion of a divine coronation. This acceptance can be illuminated through two effective factors, the first of which was the nature of the Sufi's beliefs. The people who believed in this divine coronation considered it as one of the miracles in which they believed. The Mahdi utilized the imaginations of the indigenous Sudanese to obtain the support of a large segment of Sudanese society. As a prophetic conclave is always a main feature of miraculous stories, the Mahdi claimed that the Sufi Sheiks in conclave attended to witness the divine coronation. According to Ibrahim, Mohammed Ahmed's purpose in promulgating the notion of Mahdism was to unite all of the Sufi sects under his banner.<sup>(42)</sup>

The second factor was the indigenous Sudanese's eagerness to dispose of the existing government. At that time, indigenous groups were waiting for the Mahdi's manifestation, as only he would be capable of redeeming them from the political, social, and economic injustices of the existing government. This eagerness had led most Sudanese to look for the Mahdi even before Mohammed Ahmed proclaimed his Mahdship, to such an extent that whenever they would see a saint who pretended to wisdom and to be a defender of religion, they would think that he was the "Expected Mahdi."<sup>(43)</sup>

#### 4.2. Absolute obedience

In Ahmed's religious mentality, the seizure of both religious and political power requires unquestioning obedience. The Mahdi, therefore, linked obedience to him to obedience of God and his Messenger, and claimed that any person who disbelieved in his Mahdship deserved torment because God will torment disbelievers. The Mahdi advised his followers to take a lesson from previous clans who had disobeyed the Prophets and had been tormented. According to Mohammed Ahmed's interpretation,

God Almighty imposed his orders and His Messenger's orders on us, and God said, "Take what the Messenger gives you, and refrain from what He prohibits you," and God also said, "O ye who believe! Obey Allah, and the Messenger, and those charged with authority among you." As with every Messenger, Prophet, and Imam who had existed previously, God ordered the people who witnessed those Messengers, Prophets, and Imams to obey them. Previously, God had tormented many people because those people did not obey their Messengers, Prophets, and Imams. Therefore, know that one who disobeys his Imam will lose his life in this world and hereafter. As long as the slave adheres to God's orders and prohibitions and obeys his Imam, God will give him a high rank."<sup>(44)</sup>



The reverential attitude of students to their saint played a pivotal role in facilitating the Mahdi's mission. In the traditions of the Sufi order, the student obeys his teacher unhesitatingly. Ahmed reinforced the obedience he required through claiming divine commission. As he wrote in one of his epistles, "It is known that every Muslim must obey the Mahdi."<sup>(45)</sup> By linking obedience to him with obedience to God and his Messenger, anyone who did not believe in his Mahdship was regarded as an infidel<sup>(46)</sup>.

Because the Sudanese by tradition display greater loyalty to religion than any other contender for their loyalty, unsurprisingly, therefore, the Sudanese granted their loyalty to the Mahdi. As discussed in other scholarly studies, the Sudanese people's loyalty to Islam was stronger than their tribal sentiments and incomparably more vigorous than their allegiance to the Khedive.<sup>(47)</sup> Consequently, Ahmed did not have much trouble persuading his followers to accept his political leadership since he had covertly integrated his leadership with his religious discourse. Ahmed painted a vivid picture of the Mahdi's political leadership that would enable his followers to depose the existing government in Khartoum:

You knew that I am the successor of the Prophet, and that I have been reviving religion; therefore, you must listen to my instructions. I call upon you to occupy the highest ranks and to eliminate that which poses a risk for you ... nothing will secure you from doom and allow you to inherit an exalted position near God but to put aside your previous loyalties and listen to my instructions with an attentive ear when I tell you that you must adhere to me and dispose of your previous loyalties<sup>(48)</sup>.

In the quoted text above, Ahmed calls upon his followers to regard him as a political institution even though he does not mention politics at all. However, he orders his devotees to put aside their previous political loyalties. This example illustrates how he intended his movement to act as a political alternative to the existing government in the Sudan.

Indeed, the political and social conditions that were prevalent in Sudan at that time were working in Ahmed's favor. Under the weight of the Egyptian rule that caused outrage among the indigenous groups, Mohammed Ahmed took the initiative to present the Mahdi as a savior<sup>(49)</sup>, representing himself as not only a religious reformist but also as a political and social reformist.

The Egyptian government's imposition of exorbitant taxes on the Sudanese people was one of the key triggers of their resentment. The Mahdi announced that such taxation was not in accordance with al-*Sharia* (Islamic law) and accused the Turkish of introducing this kind of taxation through which they levied extra taxes on indigenous groups. In the eyes of the Mahdi, the Egyptian government did not practice al-*Sharia* and therefore disobeyed God's orders.



Those Turkish ... contradict the Messenger and the Prophets, and they fail to abide by what Allah has revealed and they have changed the Prophet Mohammed's *Sharia*, and they impose a poll tax (*al-jizya*) on you ... Allah and his Messenger did not order them to do so<sup>(50)</sup>.

The point to underscore here is that this tense religious discourse instigated the Sudanese masses to become politicized and in so doing deposing their Egyptian rulers (called "Turkish" in the Sudan) because they flouted God's law by imposing extra taxes on the Sudanese. According to Islamic law, no taxes are to be imposed on Muslims. Only *Zakah* (charity) is expected of Muslims, which God imposes on the wealthy to support poor Muslims.

Though Sudan's Mahdist movement was characterized by religious traits, its religious aspects were not nearly as significant as its political characteristics. The politicization of religion, therefore, was one of the most prominent characteristics of the Mahdist movement in Sudan.

Ahmed needed unquestioning obedience from his followers to implement his religious, political, and social projects. He said, "Know, my dears, that one sign of the proper way to act with God and his Messenger and trustee [he means himself] is that you should ask no questions about what they are doing or what they will do about crucial things such as invasion and so on." Mohammed Ahmed in many instances attempted to use religious precepts in a manner that suited his political purposes. He employed certain verses of the Quran to support his position and bolster his political position in Sudanese society and to ensure his followers' absolute acquiescence. For example, he quoted God's words from the Quran to his followers: "O ye who believe! Ask no questions about things which if made plain to you may cause you trouble." The Mahdi reminded his followers of the conversation between al-Khidhr and Moses as set down in the Quran in which al-Khidhr said to Moses, "If then Thou wouldst follow me, ask me no questions about anything until I myself speak to thee concerning it. The Mahdi continued, "Therefore, do not ask me questions henceforth and do not probe me at all about my intentions as long as you are with me"<sup>(51)</sup>.

Abu Salem argues that Mohammed Ahmed's practice of frequently citing verses from the Quran and the Hadiths indicates that he refused to abide by the views of other sects or interpretations offered by other clerics, but he insisted on the Quran and the Hadiths as being the only religious sources for Muslims. Only these two sources could give guidance, and only these two sources provided the rules and morals by which Muslims should live.<sup>(52)</sup> Though the sects that Abu Salem refers to are, in fact, Islamic and are likewise based on the Quran and the Hadiths, but the founders of those sects interpreted the writings in ways which did not serve Mohammed Ahmed in his claim to be the Mahdi. Therefore, Ahmed, not as Abu Salim explained, was citing verses from the Quran to neglect other Islamic sources concerning with the Mahdism.



#### 4.3. Abolishing Sufi influential rules

Ahmed did not give directives explicitly recommending the abolition of rival Sufi orders; rather, he implied that he did not approve of their existence. This was apparent in his response to letters sent to him by certain sheikhs. Apparently, Ahmed was anticipating local opposition to him during the first phase of his Mahdship. As Malik argues, the reason that his publication did not abolish these Sufi orders outright was that some of their sheikhs had led soldiers in battles against the existing government, and therefore it would have been impolitic to abolish them. The Mahdi, however, diminished the roles that these sheikhs had played and excluded them from assuming any important political positions in the movement.<sup>(53)</sup> It is clear that by not relying on the Sufi sheikhs' political power the Mahdi lent his movement a political character that allowed it to expand its significance beyond the purely religious.

In its attempts to abolish other Sufi sects, the Mahdist movement gave rise to a definitive battle in Sudan. The Mahdists considered it wise to abolish all other sects particularly because the Mahdi received his orders directly from the Prophet. They considered the Mahdi himself as a great broker between the people and the Prophet in laying down the rules of Islam<sup>(54)</sup>. Despite the strong opposition of rival Sufi sects such as the *a/-Tejania*, the Mahdists insisted on suppressing all opposing religious sects. This passage appeared in a letter written by Kalipha Abdullah al-Ta'ishi, the Mahdi's successor:

From al-Kalipha, Abdulah Bin Mohammed to all dear believers.... we have learned by your reply to Imam al-Mahdi that the brothers [believers in Mahdism] who were with you informed you that the Mahdi himself ordered you to leave the Tejania order, but that you hesitated to listen to them because you were not sure about this order.... know that we are asserting that the order the brothers reported to you is right and that it should be obeyed<sup>(55)</sup>.

Mohammed Ahmed had five purposes in abolishing all opposing religious sects in the Sudan. First, the Mahdi aimed to monopolize intellectual endeavors in the Sudan. He outlawed the religious sciences and obliged his followers to toe the line that he drew, ordering them to regard his instructions as religious sources. He imposed a severe ban on intellectual activities and prevented the circulation of any books aside from those that he had approved. This adversely affected the intellectual climate in the Sudan, and writing came to be considered a risky adventure.<sup>(56)</sup> He also prohibited his adherents from studying theology and jurisprudence and burned books that dealt with such subjects, aimed that he is an intermediary between them and the Islamic Prophet in delivering Islamic precepts.<sup>(57)</sup> On the other hand, he ordered his followers to return to the Quran and the Hadiths as the only true Islamic sources. In these ways, as Abu Salem contends, the Mahdi succeeded in channeling thought and culture in the direction that he wanted<sup>(58)</sup>.





Second, Ahmed's thought control guaranteed the subordination of Sudanese society to him. Banning books that might undermine the Mahdi's notions enabled him to disseminate his thoughts throughout Sudanese society. For example, his encouragement of a very ascetic lifestyle was one of the formative components of his political policies. To keep the masses on a tight rein, he encouraged his followers to avoid physical pleasures, to live very simple lives and to maintain a habit of worship. Ahmed (*al-Mahdi*) described this process as "self-struggle." Here, he attempted to restrict his followers to a single framework of worship cuffed by the shackles of asceticism. Once he had prepared his followers for an extremely ascetic life, he sought their complete submission through his doctrine of "the Soul and Money," his assertion that both the follower's soul and his money belong to God and His Messenger. In this manner, since, as he claimed, God and His Messenger had instructed him in these matters, his follower's souls along with their wealth were brought under *al-Mahdi's* control.

He who is with us should not see the world through the eyes of passion and pleasures... he must avoid affluence... the person who is unable to maintain the struggle himself should submit his affairs to us and accept the judgments of God and His Messenger regarding his soul and money. As you know, one who sincerely sells himself to God comes under God's rule, and the mark of his sincerity is that he cannot act by himself or make use of his money without our permission, allowing his affairs to come under our judgment.<sup>(59)</sup>

*Al-Mahdi* went far beyond religious admonishment to secure his followers' absolute obedience that enabled him to eliminate his political foes. Sheikh al-Munna Ismail, one of *al-Mahdi's* devotees, protested one of the Mahdi's ministerial appointments, feeling that *al-Mahdi* had ignored to appoint him as one of ministers. In response, *al-Mahdi* sent a force to arrest him and later executed him. *Al-Mahdi* interpreted this execution as a divine judgment, claiming that God had ordered him to kill al-Munna Ismail because he had disobeyed *al-Mahdi's* instructions. *Al-Mahdi* said, "You have seen what happened to al-Munna and his mates; they disobeyed my orders, and God [punished them]. Therefore, you must obey me"<sup>(60)</sup>.

Third, Ahmed (*al-Mahdi*) was determined not to miss any opportunity to eliminate all other religious teachings or claims to political leadership. Certain saints claimed that they had received divine messages. These claims disturbed *al-Mahdi* as they had the potential to spoil his political blueprint, as Ahmed had already chosen his ministers. For this reason, he abolished the other Sufi orders. His reasoning is apparent in *al-Mahdi's* letter to Fakhr al-Din Hassan al-Ma'alawi, who claimed that the Prophet Mohammed had appointed him *al-Mahdi's* successor.



Some eyewitnesses have repeatedly reported to us that you have claimed the caliphate, and the Prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him, has appointed you the Mahdi's successor, even though God has provided [me] as a boon for the community. He has caused the matter [Mahdism] to be subject to [me], and no one denies this but the unbeliever.... A report has come from al-Khidr that the Saints who have gathered in Jerusalem (*Bet al-Maqdes*) say, "Thanks be to God who has given us the Mahdi and who has appointed Abdullah [Abdullah al-Ta'ishi] the Mahdi's minister<sup>(61)</sup> .

Fourth, Ahmed (*al-Mahdi*) aimed to set himself up as the only true source of religious doctrine for Sudanese society. He wanted all political and religious power in his own hands, and nobody else's. His abolition of the other Sufi orders led to religious and political autocracy that allowed him to eliminate his political and religious rivals who might have impeded his political and religious projects.

Finally, a few Sufi orders were linked to the governmental instrument in Khartoum during the Egyptian rule of the Sudan. As discussed above, the religious Sufi institution had been divided into two sects, the Ulama and the Saints. The Sudanese Ulama did not believe in Sufi miracles, regarding them as being no more than amusing stories. These Ulama received donations from the Egyptian government in Khartoum. During his service under Sheikh Mohammed Sharif, Ahmed (*al-Mahdi*) refrained from accepting such donations because, in his point of view, they had come from an infidel government.<sup>(62)</sup> *Al-Mahdi* realized that the Sufi orders that did accept these donations would constitute a real obstacle to his movement, so he wanted to eliminate them; this is elaborated below in the section dealing with local opposition.

Although Ahmed (*al-Mahdi*) had grown up as a member of a Sufi order early in life and had remained faithful to it, he gradually got rid of the other Sufi orders once he had announced his Mahdship. This decision to abolish rival Sufi orders may be considered one of the effects of that the Mahdist books had on Ahmed. He abolished these orders in accordance with the Mahdist writings stating that the Mahdi will abolish all orders and unite Muslims to bring them all within a single faith.<sup>(63)</sup> Nevertheless, the Mahdi was still influenced by Sufi beliefs, and he believed in miracles such as those described in the prophetic book *al-Haderah*.

#### 4.4. Immigration

In Islamic history, "immigration" refers to the Prophet Mohammed's journey from Mecca to Medina in 622; called the "*Hijrah*," it is regarded in Islamic thought as a religious concept. *Al-Mahdi*, naturally, considered it a religious task, and his journey from Abba Island to Qadir was interpreted as an imitation of the



Prophet Mohammed's *Hijrah*<sup>(64)</sup>. There were other political and social motives beyond *al-Mahdi's* journey, however.

It has been discussed above that Ahmed (*al-Mahdi*) utilized religion to fulfill his political ambitions. To Ahmed, Mahdism as an ideological concept constituted his best route to authority and so he had to prove his Mahdship to his followers. According to the Mahdist books, *al-Mahdi* will emerge upon "Massa Mountain;" therefore, Ahmed named one of Qadir's mountains "Massa" and claimed that the Prophet Mohammed had ordered him to journey there<sup>(65)</sup>. He portrayed *Hijrah* to his followers as an absolute requirement that brooked no discussion: "The Prophet has informed me to write to Muslims [exhorting them] to journey with us. It is a requirement, a [prophetic] order, which nobody is allowed to refuse"<sup>(66)</sup>.

Considering the Mahdist movement as being both politically and socially revolutionary, it was deeply rooted in the two concepts of *Hijrah* and *Jihad* (holy war). The movement was keen on utilizing the concept of *Jihad* to revive the Islamic religion on one hand, and on *Hijrah* to the movement's source on the other hand<sup>(67)</sup>. Apparently, the Mahdi saw *Hijrah* as the base from which to launch his political ambitions to replace the government in Khartoum with his movement through revolution. His demands that his followers undertake *Hijrah* grew increasingly strident after the battle of Abba, the first confrontation between the Mahdists and the Egyptian government in 1881. In this way *al-Mahdi* again politicized religion to help him carry out his political schemes by demanding that his followers obey his orders, which was linked to obedience to the Prophet. He warned his followers that anyone who refused to undertake *Hijrah* with him would be subject to punishment by the Prophet: "I have written and reported to all believers the prophetic orders, and warned them about possible punishment, so no servitor from these punishments but immigration to us. I wrote to you to escape from his [the Prophet's] punishment"<sup>(68)</sup>.

In fact, before announcing his Mahdship, Ahmed did not need to travel to Qadir; the government did not oppose his activities although many people had been seen visiting Ahmed on Abba Island. The revival of religion did not concern the Egyptian government. However, the government did begin to be concerned about it once Ahmed had announced his Mahdship, as they saw that Mahdism could threaten its political position in the Sudan. The reaction of the Egyptian and British governments is discussed below.

*Jihad* was, in fact, an integral component of *Hijrah*: "I have ordered all adults to journey to us for the *Jihad*," Ahmed (*al-Mahdi*) said<sup>(69)</sup>. The concept of *Jihad* played a key role in keeping the Mahdist movement on the ground and enabled the Mahdists to expand their authority over the Sudan. In the words of one scholar, the concept of *Jihad* was to serve as the foundation of the great Mahdist State that Ahmed dreamed about and so he used it as a tool to make concrete his notions of Mahdism and imposed it on his followers as a holy duty.<sup>(70)</sup> *Al-Mahdi* issued many publications describing the virtue of *Jihad* and encouraged his followers to



fight tirelessly against foreign troops: "The prophet promised me triumph, and said, "I disown those who flee from *Jihad*"<sup>(71)</sup>.

There were two further reasons for undertaking the journey to Qadir that should be considered. First, during the secret phase of Ahmed's wanderings from town to town near Abba Island, he became acquainted with many parts of the Sudan, particularly the western regions. He realized that this would be a suitable place for his revolution. There was a king in Qadir called Adam, the King of Teqly, who welcomed *al-Mahdi* from the outset and showed his willingness to support the Mahdist movement.<sup>(72)</sup> Second, Qadir was located far from the center of the Egyptian government in Khartoum. In addition, as Qadir is hill country and as such was inaccessible to horses and cannon, *al-Mahdi* chose the region "as the place of refuge for his infant community"<sup>(73)</sup>.

Beyond mimicking the Prophet's journey from Mecca to Medina, by traveling to Qadir *al-Mahdi* aimed to create a religious community that would breed men willing to be martyred for the sake of Mahdism, enabling him to build a new political system in the Sudan to replace the existing government. He commenced organizing his Mahdist state as soon as he arrived in Qadir. He appointed a number of his followers to take charge of the areas that began to come under his control, and sent men to several regions to incite the inhabitants to rebellion against the existing government<sup>(74)</sup>.

##### 5. Local opposition against the Mahdist movement

This section focuses on the reaction of the religious opposition vis-à-vis the Mahdist movement. It examines the Ulama's use of religion to refute Ahmed's claims to Mahdship and how Ahmed responded to them. It also investigates how Ahmed successfully outmaneuvered religious and political opponents alike. Military confrontations in Sudan have been sufficiently addressed in many previous studies; therefore, this section's scope will be restricted to the results of certain battles such as the Shikan, which crucially affected the internal opposition and particularly religious one.

The Mahdist movement accomplished remarkable advances in both the intellectual and military fields, and therefore became a great menace to the Egyptian government in Khartoum. Ahmed's notions of Mahdism influenced most Sudanese tribes on an intellectual level and they consequently were persuaded to join the movement. Governmental troops on the ground had been defeated in many battles with the Mahdist armies that consisted mostly of tribal men. This leads us to wonder how the Egyptian government confronted the movement.

One thing that should be considered before discussing the local opposition is that it was not only Ahmed who utilized religion to fulfill his political objectives, but the Egyptian government used it via the Ulama alongside its military power to religiously refute the Mahdist movement. This section bypasses most of



the military confrontations to concentrate on the use of religion in conflicts between the government and the Mahdists.

Why play the religious game? One may perhaps think that it was Ahmed (*al-Mahdi*) who brought the government to play this game. It is definitely true that Ahmed exploited Sufi beliefs in miracles and about the "Expected Mahdi", which were deep-rooted in the imaginations of the indigenous populace. He also took advantage of the eagerness of the Sudanese masses to eliminate the existing government. However, in tracing the policies of the Egyptian government since its occupation of the Sudan in 1821, it is clear that the government utilized religion to facilitate direct communications between the state and society. According to Shuqayr's narrative, Mohammed Ali Pasha sent three sheikhs (*ulama*) to accompany the Egyptian army in its march to the Sudan in 1820. He instructed the sheikhs to motivate people in the Sudan to be obedient to the Sultan of Muslims. Because they were a Muslim community, acquiescence to the Sultan's majesty, the Prophet's caliph, is a religious obligation<sup>(75)</sup>. Mohammed Ali Pasha came to the Sudan by the name of Ottoman Sultan, who was regarded among Muslims as the legitimate caliph. The use of religion is clear in the Pasha's instructions to the Sudanese to obey his army for religious reasons.

To clarify why the revolutionaries paid great attention to the religious game, particularly in Sudanese society, two points should be taken into account. The first point is that of the religious and social influences enjoyed by the Sufi saints. The Funj Sultanate's reign preceded Egyptian rule in the Sudan, and the relationship between the Sufi saints and the rulers was then built upon two pillars. The first of these is that both the common people and the sultans believed in the righteousness of the Sufi saints, and therefore people regarded them as not only men providing religious advice but also as social counselors. The second of these pillars was the Sufi saints' social function. The Sufi saints exploited their religious influence on the sultans to ward off political injustice and to protect social rights. As such, the Sufi saints presented themselves as representatives of the masses before the sultans who demanded social rights for the Sudanese<sup>(76)</sup>. Their intercession took the form of traditional social functions during the time of the Funj Sultanate. However, under Egyptian rule the power of the saints began to dwindle. The Egyptian administration established its *al-Ifa* and judicial systems in the Sudan, the purposes of which were to uphold the center of the Egyptian government and to confine the saints' functions to two things: *al-Ifa* (*Fatwa*, relating to the Mufti's opinions on Islamic judgments) and justice (*al-qada*, relating to Islamic judgments). The government wooed some of the *ulama* to their side, allocating monthly salaries and rewards for those who agreed to work within the *al-Ifa* and *al-Cada* systems. This policy caused a split to form between the *ulama* and the muftis who formed a large part of the government on one hand while the Sufi saints enjoyed spiritual influence over the common people on the other hand. The Egyptian government, as we shall see, hoarded these *Ulama* in its intellectual battles with the Mahdist movement.



The second point consists of the intellectual and cultural unconsciousness that characterized Sudanese society at the time. Compared to Egyptian society, the Sudanese suffered from a dearth of modern schools such as the *al-Azhar*. This resulted in a prevalence of backwardness in the Sudan. Consequently, the Sudan did not see the intellectual movements that Egypt saw in the second half of the nineteenth century. However, political corruption in Egypt pushed Egyptian thinkers such as Yaqub Sanu'a, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Mohammed Abduh to favor the Mahdist movement in their writings<sup>(77)</sup>. As al-Qaddal argues, the Egyptian government had politicized religion in the Sudan since its inception. The role of the loyalist Sufi saints was not restricted to the implementation of Islamic regulations but included the upholding of Egyptian rule. The people's homage to the ulama was tapped to secure Sudanese loyalty to the government. The common people were not by and large farsighted enough to distinguish between their homage to the ulama and the undeclared roles the ulama played in propping up Egyptian rule<sup>(78)</sup>.

Before commencing on the religious opposition, one further thing about the nature of the sources of the Mahdist myth should be briefly explained. There are many different sources for Mahdism written by various Islamic denominations, each one claiming that its sources are right. As a result, both the ulama and Ahmed made use of these sources in ways that served their own interests, as will be discussed below.

### 5.1. Religious opposition

Utilizing religion to control the populace is apparent in the policies of both the Egyptian government and Ahmed (*al-Mahdi*). In fact, the two sides resorted to religious debates before confronting one another militarily. This is made clear in the first meeting between Ahmed and governmental representatives. According to Shuqayr, Sheikh Mohammed Sharif reported to Ra'uf Pasha, the General-Governor of Sudan what Ahmed called for. He warned the Pasha, but the latter did not pay attention to this matter until he saw several publications inciting the populace to believe in *al-Mahdi*. Furthermore, Ra'uf Pasha attempted to find an excuse for Ahmed, saying in his letter to Ahmed, "Perhaps some foes wrote these publications and ascribed them to you." The Pasha meant to peacefully dissuade Ahmed from claiming to be *al-Mahdi*. However, Ahmed responded confidently that these publications had been written by him and nobody else and that he was the "Expected Mahdi." At this point, the Pasha, after consulting with some clerics in Khartoum, decided to send the Egyptian officer Mohammed Bey Abo al-Saud to Ahmed on Aba Island to convince him. Abo al-Saud resorted to religious discourse, asking Ahmed to come to Ra'uf Pasha in Khartoum; because the Pasha had been appointed by the Khedive he was the guardian of the Muslims and obedience to him was a religious obligation imposed upon all the Muslims in the Sudan. Ahmed, however, roughly rejected this invitation, answering Abo al-Saud by saying, "I am the guardian to whom obedience is a religious obligation for all Mohammedans."<sup>(79)</sup> The first military confrontation followed this meeting in 1881, which resulted in the defeat of the governmental troops at the hands of Ahmed's followers. The government's attitude here has been interpreted



by some observers as revealing one of its weaknesses as it did not deal resolutely with the Mahdist movement from the beginning.

The Egyptian government no doubt used all possible means to eliminate the Mahdist movement. One of these means was to employ religion to respond to Ahmed's claims to Mahdship. Ibrahim states that it was natural for the Egyptian government to empower the ulama to religiously confront Ahmed's mission, which took the revival of religion as its slogan.<sup>(80)</sup> The loyal ulama stood on the side of the government against the Mahdist movement. Some historical sources have provided two famous letters written by Sheikh Ahmed al-Azhari, the chief of the ulama in the western provinces of the Sudan, and Sheikh Shaker al-Gazi, the Mufti of the Council of appeal in the Sudan. Both sheikhs' letters<sup>(81)</sup> used two points to refute Ahmed's claims to Mahdship in attempt to prevent the masses from adhering to the Mahdist movement.

The first point was the obligation to obey the guardian of the Muslims. The two sheikhs were in agreement on the issue of forbidding disobedience to the guardian of the Muslims (*Imam al-Muslemeen*). Sheikh al-Azhari deemed Mahdism a dissension; its followers dissented from the legitimate authority of the Egyptian government entitled by the Khedive to rule the Sudan. Just as he portrayed the Mahdists as dissidents, al-Azhari, at the same time, emphasized obedience to the Khedive, the guardian of the Muslims in Egypt and the Sudan. Deposing him is forbidden by Islam law unless he is an infidel or has ordered someone to become an infidel. In al-Azhari's opinion, the Khedive was a Muslim, not an infidel, and the Khedive had not ordered any person to do anything that might have led to infidelity. Therefore, the Khedive and his authority were legitimate and no Muslim had the right to depose him or refute his authority without legitimate reason. In al-Azhari viewed there were no religious reasons to depose the Khedive.

Sheikh al-Gazi also believed in obedience to the Khedive because he was the legitimate guardian of the Muslims. He warned the citizens not to be deceived by what Ahmed (*al-Mahdi*) called for. Al-Gazi denied that Muslims in the Sudan or even in Egypt lived in poverty under the Khedive's rule; on the contrary, the people lived in affluence and safety. He asserted that the real Mahdi would emerge during a time of drastic ordeals but categorically denied that this time had come during the Khedive's tenure. Therefore, al-Gazi emphasized that there were neither religious nor legal reasons for deposing the existing guardian of the Muslims. He described Ahmed and his followers as ignorant riffraff, savage men who defied the guardian of the Muslims. He ascribed the Ahmed's triumphs to the incompetence of the Egyptian officers, not to miracles that God conferred upon the Mahdi as Ahmed and his devotees believed.<sup>(82)</sup> Both al-Azhari and al-Gazi saw Ahmed and his followers as dissidents that must be fought against by all Muslims.

The second points that both sheikhs stressed concerned the physical character of the real Mahdi, the location of his emergence and its attendant cosmic consequences. They asserted that the physical features listed in the Mahdist book did not apply to Ahmed, and that the real Mahdi will emerge in Medina, in Hejaz,



not in the Sudan. Al-Azhari denied that Ahmed possessed all the physical features of the "Expected Mahdi;" though Ahmed had a small black spot on his right cheek, this was not enough to demonstrate his Mahdship because he did not possess the rest of the expected features. Al-Azhari also claimed that cosmic consequences such as eclipses of the moon and sun did not occur as proofs of the time of the Mahdi's emergence. He says:

Mohamed Ahmed, in Abba Island, claimed that he was the Mahdi in *Shaban* [August, the month preceding Ramadan] and Ramadan has come. Yet, nobody has seen the eclipse of the moon at the beginning of Ramadan or seen a solar eclipse in mid-Ramadan. This is obvious evidence that Ahmed's claims to Mahdship are not true.

Al-Gazi maintained that what Ahmed claimed was far from credible. He emphasized that many hadiths stated that Ahmed is not the real Mahdi whose arrival the Prophet Mohammed had predicted. Sheikh al-Gazi depicted the Ahmed's claims as satanic.

This hostile attitude to the Mahdist movement was not only held by the ulama associated with the government, the ulama of Tagla took a similar position against the movement. The realm of Tagla was ruled by King Adam who enjoyed autonomy under Egyptian rule. As mentioned above, King Adam welcomed Ahmed at the beginning of the Mahdist movement and allowed Ahmed and his followers to fortify the Qader Mountains in the western region of Sudan on condition that Ahmed's activities would not negatively affect the king's autonomy when Ahmed conquered the governmental troops. However, the ulama of Tagla opposed this agreement and advised King Adam to kill Ahmed immediately. They saw the elimination of a man like Ahmed as a religious obligation because Ahmed was a "false prophet" in their eyes.<sup>(83)</sup>

The Mahdist movement apparently struggled with extensive religious opposition instigated by the ulama whether associated with the Egyptian government or not. The loyal ulama undertook intellectual and emotional opposition in an attempt to dissuade the local dwellers from believing in the movement. The Egyptian government had promptly established religious institutions associated with the central government in Khartoum soon after its conquest of the Sudan to justify their rule. Once the Mahdist movement appeared, those ulama set out to defend the existing government intellectually and emotionally. Regardless of the political motives of the loyal ulama, the ulama of Tagalla doubted the Mahdist movement in terms of its religious credibility.

## 5.2. British stance over Mahdist movement:

Since their occupation of Egypt 1882, the British authority realized that the situation in Sudan was chaotic. The Mahdist movement accomplished its victories over the Egyptian troops due to weakness of Egypt's armed forces. These victories threatened Egypt itself and thus the British presence in Egypt. For this reason, the British government proposed to send British officers to the Sudan to report about the situation





there. One of these officers was Colonel Stewart who reported that the Sudan constituted a financial burden for Egypt particularly after the appearance of the Mahdist movement. He suggested that Egypt should abandon many parts of Sudan, and demarcate new boundaries recognizing the Mahdist state. He also advised the British government to tell the Egyptian government to grant local tribal leaders autonomy and/or return former ruling families to the Sudan.<sup>(84)</sup> This suggests that Colonel Stewart wanted to divide the Sudan into several parts.

This reflects the position of the British government, which was less anxious than the Egyptian government over losing the Sudan. The British wanted Egypt to withdraw from some parts of the Sudan but not the whole country. They realized that the Egyptians had no funds to meet an emergency and for this reason, the British government insisted on the Egyptian's adoption of abandonment.<sup>(85)</sup> The advocacy of the British for the evacuation of the Sudan increased remarkably after the defeat of Colonel William Hicks, a British officer who worked for the Egyptian army, at the hands of Mahdist combatants in Shikan in the western region of the Sudan.<sup>(86)</sup> The British decision-makers saw that the Mahdist movement could not be crushed unless Egypt possessed a great army. This military weakness of the Egyptian army was deemed one of causes of the success of the Mahdist movement in the Sudan. Shuqyar suggests that the Egyptian army was reduced to decrepitude after the Orabi revolution of 1882.<sup>(87)</sup>

The Shikan battle adversely affected the attitudes of the government and the ulama. This battle gave Ahmed control over many parts of the Sudan and opened a route to Khartoum. The British government commissioned General Gordon Pasha to withdraw governmental troops from all regions of the Sudan. When Gordon arrived in Khartoum in 1884, he announced that the Sudan had been completely segregated from Egypt. He also proclaimed that he had appointed Ahmed (*al-Mahdi*), the ruler of Kordofan. At the same time, Gordon declared that he would establish a national government made up of indigenous residents who would control their own lands.<sup>(88)</sup>

Gordon did not succeed in having this policy adopted. In fact, after having defeated the Egyptian troops in Shikan, Ahmed became the ruler of West Sudan and not only of Kordofan province; therefore, as Shuqyar contends, it was natural for Ahmed to reject Gordon's political offer. Ahmed prepared to invade Khartoum instead. Shuqyar considers Gordon's announcement as evidence of the inability of the Egyptian government to stop the Mahdist movement.<sup>(89)</sup>

Any observer can see by tracing British policies toward the Sudan at the time that Stewart's report and Gordon's announcement represented the British government's attempt to divide the Sudan into a number of provinces to be ruled by local tribal leaders or returned former ruling families. Three things may be inferred from the British policy toward the movement. First, the British might have wanted to withdraw smoothly to avoid political and economic casualties while simultaneously placing the responsibility of organizing the



Sudan onto the shoulders of local leading families. In other words, the British wanted to return the Sudan to its state before the Egyptian occupation, which meant returning the Sudan to chaos. Second, the British government seemingly wanted to draw geographic boundaries detaching Egypt from the Mahdist State. The British through their military envoy to the Sudan, Gordon Pasha, appointed Ahmed the Sultan of Kordofan and followed Stewart's suggestions by relinquishing some of the Midrates, such as Fashoda and Darfur, to a few local leaders. On the other hand, the British government agreed with Stewart's report regarding the restriction of Egyptian control to some parts of northern Sudan along with the Sudan's eastern coast.<sup>(90)</sup> This geographic division kept the Mahdist State at a distance from Egypt. Egypt was Britain's main concern. Third, it seems that British politicians wanted to create more than two distinct sovereignties in Sudan. Apparently, the British desire to allow local leaders to assume positions in new regimes in the Sudan was meant to juxtapose monarchical or tribal and religious regimes.

### 5.3. Mohammed Ahmed (*al-Mahdi*)'s Response to local opposition

Naturally, Mohammed Ahmed defended his Mahdship by presenting religious evidence to prove his claims and to respond to his opponents. Even though Ahmed ordered the abolition of all Sufi orders, he ordered his followers to regard the Quran and the Hadiths as the only sources of religious truth and to forsake others. He relied mainly on a few Mahdist books and Sufi beliefs in holiness, miracles, the "prophetic conclave" (*al-Hadrah*) and "divine revelation" (*al-Kashif*). Ahmed utilized certain verses of the Quran to serve his Mahdist project.

As a response to the ulama who based their opposition on the time of the Mahdi's emergence, Ahmed described that Mahdi's emergence is identified as a manifestation for the approach of the Day of Resurrection. Ahmed wanted to convince his skeptics that no one knows when the Mahdi will emerge but God, as no one knows the time of the Day of Resurrection but God, a speech he took from Ibn al-Arabi's books. Ahmed also responded to his skeptics regarding the place that the Mahdi will appear; he cited the writings of Sheikh Ahmed Bin Idress to the effect that the Mahdi would emerge from a direction people had not anticipated.<sup>(91)</sup> Abu Salem points out that Ahmed refused to confine himself to the requirements of time and place of the Mahdi's appearance to be found in some religious sources.<sup>(92)</sup> Ahmed saw such requirements as restricting God's will. God does what He wants, Ahmed said. Ahmed persuaded his followers that the Mahdi is a metaphysical being that no person knows about but Allah.

Depicting Mahdism as a prophecy served Ahmed as he used certain verses of the Quran that deal with prophecy even though there is no mention of Mahdism in the Quran. He attempted to employ a number of verses to reinforce his calling, citing "Nor shall they compass aught of His [Allah's] knowledge except as He willeth." This verse is unrelated to Mahdism or to the Mahdi; rather, it refers to prophecy and asserts that no one knows the future but Allah. Ahmed used this verse and similar verses to respond to his opponents and to



demonstrate his Mahdship for his followers. He used such verses to refute claims that the time and place of the Mahdi's emergence is known.

Regarding his secession from the legitimate Imam, Ahmed built his theory through his approach to the "prophetic conclave" and "divine revelation." He claimed that he saw the Prophet and received divine messages from God and His messenger. He claimed that the Prophet had informed him that the Turkish, meaning the Egyptian government, was infidel and that obedience to them after the Mahdi's emergence would be deemed an infidelity and aberrance. In *Toshka* Abdulrahman analyzes Ahmed's statements in which he depicted himself as receiving divine messages from Allah just as the Prophet had received, and as receiving religious doctrine from the Prophet. Ahmed did these things to impart sacredness to himself.<sup>(93)</sup> In this way, he created his religious opponents. Indeed, the ulama did not believe that Ahmed received divine messages, but Ahmed did not care as much about convincing them as he did about convincing the general populace.

Ahmed justified his hostile attitude toward Egyptian rule and convinced his followers that he was on the right side by harshly criticizing the existing government.<sup>(94)</sup> He justified fighting the legitimate Imam of the Muslims based on these grievances which caused suffering for Sudanese society. Ahmed expressed his indignation against Egyptian rule of the Sudan in many of his publications. In one of his publications, he ordered his followers to refrain from wearing Turkish clothes under the pretext that the Turkish were unbelievers. He regarded all governmental things as Turkish. "You must eliminate everything that might lead to imitating the infidel Turkish, God says, "Say to my slaves, do not [imitate] My enemies and do not wear their uniforms so that you will not be My enemies as they [the Turkish] are My enemies."<sup>(95)</sup>

As discussed above, though the ulama attempted to refute Ahmed's claims, they denied that the people of the Sudan suffered from economic and political injustices. They were not fair in their judgment of the situation; rather, they aligned with the government at the expense of the local community. Indeed, ignoring the grievances caused by their alignment with the government worked in Ahmed's favor. Most Sudanese were convinced that the existing government was corrupt and must be overthrown.

#### 5.4. Result of rivalry

Certain factors helped Ahmed successfully outmaneuver his rivals, the loyal scholars Ulama and the existing government, both intellectually and militarily. The most significant of those factors was injustice. Ahmed Amin argues that the success of the idea of Mahdism in the Sudanese community was due to their need for revolution to redeem them from the suffering caused by the existing government, and to fulfill their need for social justice. However, the Sudanese community failed to do so before 1881, and consequently, they looked forward to the breakout of an uprising. They would be more enthusiastic about it if it came through religion, because religion had a great emotional effect on the Sudanese community, and they therefore found that Mahdism fulfilled their hopes.<sup>(96)</sup>



The Sudanese were generally emotionally nearer to the Sufi scholars than to the Ulama, because most Sudanese believed in Sufi tenets such as divine messages. Ahmed utilized those tenets depending largely on the "prophetic conclave" and "divine revelation" to bolster his position in his intellectual war against the loyal ulama. The reverence with which the saints were held by the Sudanese populace constituted one of the factors that helped Ahmed in his confrontation with the ulama, which made the ulama's task more difficult. The ulama faced difficulties in dealing with the populace in trying to persuade them that Ahmed's claims were false. Moreover, the ulama were allied with the existing government and did not work for the peoples' benefit in the eyes of most of the Sudanese. In contrast, the Sufi saint was not only a religious man, but was also a social counselor. He taught people and practiced folk medicine to help them. In addition, the Sufi saint contributed to the provide solution for Sudanese people's social problems.

The Sudanese saw the Egyptian rulers as foreigners who levied exorbitant taxes and who brought into being a new non-Sudanese merchant class who tended to disturb the markets in the Sudan. This commercial competition negatively affected the Sudanese community in general. Egyptian rule also contributed to the piecemeal debilitation of tribal loyalty in order to replace it with a centralized state government.<sup>(97)</sup> For many Sudanese, therefore, Mahdism represented a rescue from foreign rule. Seen in this way, the loyal ulama took the side of the foreigners while Ahmed took the side of the indigenous populace.

All these factors played a role in helping Ahmed win his religious game against the ulama. In fact, Sudanese society represented the wager of this game. As discussed above, all circumstances tended to favor Ahmed. It could be said that Ahmed succeeded in exploiting most of those circumstances to win this game.

#### Conclusion:

Mohammed Ahmed (*al-Mahdi*) realized that Mahdism was the best way to unite the socially and communally diverse Sudanese society. Ahmed definitely succeeded in persuading many Sudanese people to follow him in his fight against the existing government. This success can be attributed to three main factors: The Sudanese people's eagerness to get rid of the existing government, the nature of Sufi beliefs, and the gross weakness of the existing government.

Several factors vividly played a major role in shaping the personality of Ahmed (*al-Mahdi*), which are reflected in his religious and political mentality. The political, social, and economic conditions of the time are of primary importance. Ahmed witnessed the political and economic decay of the existing government, as well as the remarkably pervasive Sufi tenets and the nature of religiosity in the Sudan. Indeed, the books dealing in detail with Mahdism and the "Expected Mahdi" formed Ahmed's religious and political mentality. This is made clear in his religious and political zeal to create a nation-state in the nineteenth century. Therefore, the Mahdist movement had political as well as religious objectives.



The political aspects of the Mahdist movement and local religious opposition to it expose the religious mentality behind the creation of a nation-state in the late nineteenth century. Ahmed's religious mentality is embodied in the idea of Mahdism. This mentality can be illuminated through Ahmed's religious discourse. Utilizing religion to fulfill his political purposes was one of the predominant features of Ahmed's publications. The political aspects of the movement can be clearly seen from four perspectives.

The first perspective is that of the divine coronation. Ahmed exploited the Sudanese's beliefs in the possibility of meeting the Prophet and receiving divine messages, which were considered by the vast majority of the populace as miraculous abilities that some Sufi saints possessed. Ahmed used this belief to successfully engage with the Sudanese people's mentality by inventing the story of the divine coronation. This coronation put Ahmed at the forefront of his followers' religious and political leaders because the Sudanese believed that Ahmed had been chosen to be the Mahdi and commissioned by God and His Messenger to revive Islam. Through the story of this coronation, Ahmed succeeded in breaking and penetrating the tribal and religious traditions which existed in the Sudan at that time. People's loyalties in the Sudan were divided by affinities to their tribal leaders and to religious scholars such as the ulama and the saints. As a result, Ahmed succeeded in uniting many Sudanese tribes and Sufi orders under his banner.

The second perspective is that of absolute obedience. Ahmed sought to gain the obedience of the Sudanese so as to be able to achieve his religious and political projects. Ahmed employed some Qur'anic verses to persuade the populace to follow him. He also linked obedience to him to obedience to Allah and the Prophet Mohammed. This, according to Sudanese religious mentality, means that any person who disobeys *al-Mahdi* deserves punishment from God and His Messenger. In this way, Ahmed gained possession of the Sudanese people's loyalty. He was seemingly not satisfied with only the job of religious reformer but sought to become a political leader as well. The political aspect of the movement is made obvious in his order to his followers to put aside their previous loyalties to the Egyptian government. Ahmed and many Sudanese regarded the Egyptian government as Turkish and he depicted them as infidels in many of his publications. Through depicting them in this way, he argued that loyalty to the existing government must be put aside for religious reasons. It is clear that religion was used as a cover for the political objectives, Ahmed aimed fulfill and to deceive the populace into thinking that the movement had no political objectives.

The third perspective is that of the abolition of the Sufi orders, which exposes Ahmed's autocratic religious mentality. Ahmed abolished the existing Sufi orders to monopolize intellectual endeavors so as to guarantee the subordination of the Sudanese community to him. He was determined not to miss any opportunity to encourage the belief that he was in contact with the Prophet and received divine messages from Allah in order to set himself up as the only true source of religious doctrine for Sudanese society.



The final perspective is that of migration. Ahmed meant to imitate the Prophet Mohammed's migration from Makkah and al-Medina al-Menora in the seventh century. He also meant to prove that he was indeed the Mahdi by migrating to the place that the Mahdist books had indicated as the location of the Mahdi's manifestation. However, a political aspect to his migration can be discerned. Before proclaiming his Mahdship, Ahmed made sure of the security of this sanctuary for his movement just in case. He formed, at the beginning, an alliance with the king of Taqla far away from the center of the Egyptian government in Khartoum.

Local religious opposition exposes the religious mentality of some of the ulama at that period. They had constituted a religious cover for the political autocracy since the Egyptian occupation of the Sudan. Therefore, some of them did not hesitate to back the government against Ahmed. They, as Ahmed did, utilized religion to refute Ahmed's claims to Mahdship. They assiduously attempted to dissuade the populace from following Ahmed. They also employed some Quranic verses to argue that obedience to the Khedive is an obligation for all Muslims because he is their only legitimate guardian in Egypt and the Sudan. They conceived of Ahmed and his adherents as dissidents from the legitimate authority.

However, the ulama failed to dissuade the people from following Ahmed. The Sudanese saw Ahmed as a savior capable of rescuing the Sudanese community from foreign rule. Many of the Sudanese's saw the loyal ulama as miserable owing to their opposition to *al-Mahdi*.

#### Footnotes:

<sup>(1)</sup> Kapteijns, Mahdist Faith and the Legitimation of Popular Revolt in Western Sudan: 390-399.

<sup>(2)</sup> Voll, The Sudanese Mahdi: Frontier Fundamentalist: 145-166.

<sup>(3)</sup> Clarke, "Mohammed Ahmed, (The Mahdi) Messiah of the Sudan: 156-162.

<sup>(4)</sup> Holt. P. M. "The Sudanese Mahdia and the Outside World: 276-290

<sup>(5)</sup> Holt, *The Mahdist State in the Sudan*: 16.

<sup>(6)</sup> Shuqayr, Na' 'um. *Ta'rikh Al-Sudah* (Matb'at al-Ma'arf. 1903: 35.

<sup>(7)</sup> Holt. P. H. *The Mahdist State in the Sudan, 1881-1898*, 14.

<sup>(8)</sup> Shbikah, *al-Sudan wa al-thourah al-Mahdiyya*: 1, 5.

<sup>(9)</sup> Holt, *A Modern History of the Sudan*: 37.

<sup>(10)</sup> Shuqayr, Na' 'um., III, 108.

<sup>(11)</sup> For the European colonial rivalry in Africa during the nineteenth century, see Robinson, Ronald & Gallagher, and John. *African and the Victorians* (United States of America: Anchor Books, 1968).

<sup>(12)</sup> Holt., *Modern History of the Sudan*: 66.

<sup>(13)</sup> Shuqayr, Na' 'um., III, 109-111. F. R. Winggate. *Mahdism and the Egyptian Sudan*: 7. Shalaby, *Al-Usool al-Fikryya le Harakt al-Mahdi al-Sudani wa da'wath*: 12.



- (14) See <http://www.irshad.org/islam/prophecy/mahdi.htm>.
- (15) Al-Kordofany, *Sa'adt al-Mustahdy be Seerat al-Imam al-Mahdi*: 69-72.
- (16) Malik, *al-Muqauamah al-Dakiliah le Harkat al-Mahdyah*: 21.
- (17) Shalaby: 57-58.
- (18) Ibid:13.
- (19) Abdulrahman, *Toshka*: 11-14.
- (20) Maki, I, 17-20.
- (21) Abu Salem, *al-harakah al-fikryya fi al-Mahdyya*: 68.
- (22) Maki, part I: 12.
- (23) Ibid:13-15.
- (24) Al-Qaddāl, *Tarikh al-Sūdan al-ḥadith*: 116.
- (25) Fawzi, *Al-Sudan ben ydee Gordon wa Kitchener*: 84-78.
- (26) Shuqayr, *Ta'rikh al-sudah*. Part 3: 114.
- (27) Shuqayr, III: 118.
- (28) Shalaby: 27-29.
- (29) al-Qaddāl, *Tarikh al-Sūdan al-ḥadith*: 117.
- (30) Manshur al-Bayyane on 28 July 1881, *Manshur al-Mahdi*: 21.
- (31) Abu Salem, *al-harakah al-fikryya fi al-Mahdyya*: 22.
- (32) Ibrahim, *al-Sera'a bean al-Mahdi wa al-Ulama*: 48.
- (33) Shuqayr, Na'um: 121.
- (34) Shuqayr, III: 121. Fawzi, *Al-Sudan ben ydee Gordon wa Kitchener*: 92.
- (35) Shalaby: 29.
- (36) Ibid: 32.
- (37) Manshur al-Da'wah on 28 August 1881, *Manshur al-Mahdi*: 23-27.
- (38) Holt, *The Mahdist State in the Sudan*: 17.
- (39) Mahdi, *al-Juz' al-awwal min manāshir al-Mahdi*: 11.
- (40) Ibid: 6.
- (41) Mahdi, *al-Juz' al-awwal min manāshir al-Mahdi*: 18.
- (42) Ibrahim, *al-Sera'a ben al-Mahdi wa al-Ulama*: 49-50.
- (43) Ibid: 30.
- (44) Mahdi, *al-Juz' al-awwal min manāshir al-Mahdi*: 15.
- (45) Ibid: 6.
- (46) Mahdi, *Manshur al-Mahdi*: 8.
- (47) Holt, *The Mahdist State in the Sudan*: 16.



- (48) Mahdi, *al-Juz' al-awwal min manāshir al-Mahdī*: 188.
- (49) Ibrahim, *al-Sera'a ben al-Mahdi wa al-Ulama*:45.
- (50) Mahdi, *al-Juz' al-awwal min manāshir al-Mahdī*: 15.
- (51) See Mahdi, *al-Juz' al-awwal min manāshir al-Mahdī*: 59-60.
- (52) Abu Salem: 67.
- (53) Malik: 151.
- (54) Al-Kordofany: 82.
- (55) Mahdi, *Mansurat al-Mahdī*: 61-62.
- (56) Abu Salem: 51.
- (57) Shuqayr, III: 364.
- (58) Abu Salem: 51.
- (59) Mahdi, *Mansurat al-Mahdī*: 162,163.
- (60) Ibid: 162.
- (61) Letter from the Mahdi to Fakhr al-Din Hassan al-Ma'alawi : 76,77.
- (62) Malik: 152
- (63) Abu Salem, M. I. *al-harakah al-fikryya fi al-Mahdiyya*: 51.
- (64) F. R. Winggate. *Mahdism and the Egyptian Sudan*: 17.
- (65) Abu Salem: 22.
- (66) Mahdi, *al-Juz' al-awwal min manāshir al-Mahdī*: 6.
- (67) Hasan, *Imārat al-Islām "al-Mahdiyyah" fi al-Sūdān*:121
- (68) Mahdi, *al-Juz' al-awwal min manāshir al-Mahdī*: 6.
- (69) Ibid: 14.
- (70) Abdul Rahaman, *Toshka*: 17.
- (71) Mahdi, *al-Juz' al-awwal min manāshir al-Mahdī*: 44.
- (72) Maki, I: 47.
- (73) Holt, *The Sudanese Mahdia and the Outside World*:53.
- (74) Abu Salem: 22.
- (75) Shuqayr, III: 3,4.
- (76) Ibrahim, *al-Sera'a ben al-Mahdi wa al-Ulama*: 14.
- (77) Powell, *A different Shade of colonialism*:96.
- (78) al-Qaddāl, *Tārikh al-Sūdān al-hadith*: 95.
- (79) Shuqayr, III: 127,128.
- (80) Ibrahim, *al-Sera'a ben al-Mahdi wa al-Ulama*: 23.
- (81) Cited in Abu Salem: 40,41.





- <sup>(82)</sup> Mohammed Ahmed achieved his first triumph against governmental troops in the first military confrontation on Abba Island, 1881; this triumph was interpreted as one of the Mahdi's miracles which confirmed the credibility of the Ahmed's Mahdship, see, Fawzi, Ibrahim Pasha. *Al-Sudan ben ydee Gordon wa Kitchener*, l: 93.
- <sup>(83)</sup> Ibrahim, *al-Sera'a ben al-Mahdi wa al-Ulama*: 25.
- <sup>(84)</sup> Report on the Sudan; State Papers, vol. LXXXIY, Egypt. No II (1883). (c. 3670.), cited in Yahya, Jalal, *al-thaworah al-Mahdiyya wa Usul al-Syyasah al-Biratanyya fi al-Sudan* (Cairo, Maktabat al-Nahthah al-Miseryyah,; 53.
- <sup>(85)</sup> Telegram from Sir E. Baring (Cairo) to Earl Granville. No. 90. November 9, 1883, cited in *Affairs of Egypt, Egypt. No. I*: 92-93.
- <sup>(86)</sup> Ibid: 94.
- <sup>(87)</sup> Shuqyar, III: 184.
- <sup>(88)</sup> Ibid, III: 217.
- <sup>(89)</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>(90)</sup> Yahya, Jalal: 55.
- <sup>(91)</sup> Manshur al-Da'wah on 28 August 1881, Mahdi, *Manshurat al-Mahdi*: 25.
- <sup>(92)</sup> Abu Salem: 42,43.
- <sup>(93)</sup> Abdulrahman, *Toshka*: 19.
- <sup>(94)</sup> Ibrahim, *al-Sera'a ben al-Mahdi wa al-Ulama*: 52.
- <sup>(95)</sup> Mahdi, *Manshurat al-Mahdi*: 166.
- <sup>(96)</sup> Ahmed Amin. *Al-Mahdi wa al-Mahdiyya* (Cairo, Kalimat Arabyya, 2012), 2.
- <sup>(97)</sup> al-Qaddal: 110, 111.

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- 9) Shuqayr, Na‘üm., III, 109-111. F. R. Winggate. *Mahdism and the Egyptian Sudan* (London. Frank Cass & Co. LTD, 1968.
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- 11) See <http://www.irshad.org/islam/prophecy/mahdi.htm>.
- 12) Al-Kordofany, I. A. *Sa'adt al-Mustahdy be Seerat al-Imam al-Mahdi*. Edited by Mohammed Ibrahim Abu Salim ,Beirut: Dar al-Jeel. 1982.
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- 15) Abu Salem, M. I. *al-harakah al-fikryya fi al-Mahdyya*, Sudan. University of Khartoum Press,
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