

## **The Mahdi revolution in Sudan**

### **What is the Mahdi revolution in Sudan?**

The Mahdi revolution in Sudan refers to a series of uprisings and rebellions led by the religious leader Muhammad Ahmad bin Abd Allah, who proclaimed himself as the Mahdi (the Guided One) and sought to establish an Islamic state in Sudan in the late 19th century. The revolution ultimately led to the defeat of the British-Egyptian forces and the establishment of Mahdist rule in Sudan from 1885 to 1899.

#### **1. Who was Muhammad Ahmad, the Mahdi?**

Muhammad Ahmad, commonly known as the Mahdi, was a religious and political leader who emerged in Sudan during the late 19th century. He claimed to be the long-awaited Mahdi, a messianic figure in Islamic eschatology. The Mahdi's movement, known as the Mahdist Revolution, aimed to establish an Islamic state in Sudan and overthrow the Ottoman-Egyptian occupation.

Muhammad Ahmad was born in 1844 in the region of Dongola, which is now part of Sudan. He grew up in a religious family and received an education in Islamic studies. As a young man, he became disillusioned with the corruption and moral decline he witnessed in society.

In 1881, Muhammad Ahmad declared himself the Mahdi and began attracting followers from various tribes in Sudan. His movement gained momentum, and by 1883, he had captured the capital city of Khartoum, which was under the control of the Ottoman-Egyptian forces.

Under the Mahdi's leadership, Sudan underwent significant changes. He implemented strict Islamic laws, abolished slavery, and sought to unite the different tribes under a common cause. The Mahdi's government faced several military campaigns from European powers and local resistance, but it managed to maintain control until his death in 1885.

After the Mahdi's death, his successor, the Khalifa Abdullahi, continued his rule until 1898 when British forces defeated the Mahdists in the Battle of Omdurman. Sudan subsequently came under British colonial rule.

The Mahdi's movement had a lasting impact on Sudanese society and politics. It fostered a sense of national identity and resistance against foreign occupation. The memory of the Mahdi and his revolution continues to influence Sudanese culture and politics to this day.

## **2. What were the main causes of the Mahdi revolution?**

The Mahdi revolution, also known as the Mahdist revolution, was a significant uprising that took place in Sudan during the late 19th century. It was led by Muhammad Ahmad, who proclaimed himself as the Mahdi, a messianic figure in Islamic eschatology. The revolution aimed to overthrow the Egyptian and British colonial rule in Sudan.

The main causes of the Mahdi revolution can be attributed to several factors:

1. **Socio-economic grievances:** The Sudanese population suffered from harsh economic conditions, including high taxation and land dispossession under the colonial rule. These grievances fueled resentment and discontent among the Sudanese people, providing fertile ground for a revolution.
2. **Religious fervor:** Muhammad Ahmad's claim of being the Mahdi resonated with many Sudanese Muslims who were disillusioned with the perceived corruption and oppression of the ruling elites. His message of religious revival and social justice gained widespread support, particularly among rural communities.
3. **Anti-colonial sentiment:** The Mahdi revolution was also driven by a strong desire for independence and the rejection of foreign domination. Sudanese nationalists sought to liberate their country from Egyptian and British control, which they viewed as exploitative and oppressive.
4. **Tribal and regional tensions:** Sudan is a diverse country with various ethnic groups and regional divisions. The revolution provided an opportunity for different tribes and regions to unite against a common enemy, creating a sense of solidarity and collective identity.
5. **Leadership and charisma of Muhammad Ahmad:** Muhammad Ahmad's leadership qualities and his ability to inspire and mobilize people were crucial in galvanizing popular support for the revolution. His charisma and religious authority played a significant role in attracting followers from different backgrounds.

These factors combined to create a potent revolutionary movement that ultimately succeeded in overthrowing Egyptian rule in Sudan and establishing an independent state under the Mahdist regime.

### **3. How did the Mahdi revolution impact Sudanese society and politics?**

The Mahdi revolution, also known as the Mahdist revolution, had a significant impact on Sudanese society and politics. It was a religious and political movement led by Muhammad Ahmad, who claimed to be the Mahdi (a messianic figure in Islam) and aimed to establish an Islamic state in Sudan. Here are some ways in which the Mahdi revolution impacted Sudanese society and politics:

1. **Religious Transformation:** The Mahdi revolution brought about a religious transformation in Sudan. Muhammad Ahmad's claim to be the Mahdi attracted a large following, and his movement emphasized the importance of Islamic law and practices. This led to the spread of Islamic teachings and a revival of traditional Islamic values in Sudanese society.
2. **Political Change:** The Mahdi revolution resulted in a significant shift in political power in Sudan. Muhammad Ahmad's forces successfully overthrew the Egyptian administration, which had controlled Sudan at the time. The establishment of an Islamic state under the Mahdi's leadership brought about a new political order in Sudan.
3. **Resistance against Colonialism:** The Mahdist movement also became a symbol of resistance against colonial powers. Under the leadership of Muhammad Ahmad's successor, Khalifa Abdullahi, the Mahdists fought against British and Egyptian forces in the Sudanese-Egyptian War (1881-1899). This resistance played a role in shaping Sudanese nationalism and anti-colonial sentiments.
4. **Social Reforms:** The Mahdi revolution brought about social reforms in Sudan. The Mahdists implemented policies that aimed to address social inequalities and promote justice according to their interpretation of Islamic principles. These reforms included land redistribution, abolition of slavery, and attempts to establish a more egalitarian society.

5. Legacy: The Mahdi revolution had a lasting impact on Sudanese society and politics. It laid the foundation for future political movements and ideologies in Sudan, such as the nationalist movement and subsequent independence from colonial rule. It also influenced the development of Sudanese identity and shaped the country's religious and cultural landscape.

Overall, the Mahdi revolution had profound effects on Sudanese society and politics, bringing about religious transformation, political change, resistance against colonialism, social reforms, and leaving a lasting legacy in Sudan's history

### **the concept of Al-Mahdiyyah:**

Religious movement in the Sudan (1881–98), established by Muḥammad Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Mahdī with the aim to reform Islam. The movement, which succeeded in overcoming the unpopular ruling Turco-Egyptian regime in the Sudan, resulted in the establishment of a Mahdist state (1885). After Muḥammad Aḥmad's death shortly thereafter, Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad succeeded to leadership of the movement and the nascent state, which was conquered by the British in 1898.

### **The Mahdī and the origins of al-Mahdiyyah**

Muḥammad Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd Allāh was the son of a Dunqulahwi boatbuilder who claimed descent from the Prophet Muhammad. Deeply religious from his youth, he was educated in one of the Sufi orders, the Sammāniyyah, but he later secluded himself on Ābā Island in the White Nile to practice religious asceticism. In 1880 he toured Kordofan, where he learned of the discontent of the people and observed those actions of Sudan's Turco-Egyptian government that he could not reconcile with his own religious beliefs. Upon his return to Ābā Island, he clearly viewed himself as a *mujaddid*, a “renewer” of the Muslim faith, his mission to reform Islam and return it to the pristine form practiced by the Prophet. To Muḥammad Aḥmad the orthodox ulama who supported the administration were no less infidels than Christians, and, when he later lashed out against misgovernment, he was referring as much to the theological heresy as to secular maladministration.

In 1881 Muḥammad Aḥmad announced his manifestation as the awaited divinely guided one (Arabic: *al-mahdī al-muntazar*), marking the beginning of the Mahdiyyah movement. Once he had proclaimed himself Mahdī, Muḥammad

Aḥmad was regarded by the Sudanese as an eschatological figure who foreshadowed the end of an age of darkness (his arrival coincided with the end of a century—in this case, the 13th—of the Muslim calendar, a period traditionally associated with religious renewal) and heralded the beginnings of a new era of light and righteousness. Thus, as a divinely guided reformer and symbol, Muḥammad Aḥmad fulfilled the requirements of *mahdī* in the eyes of his supporters.