

THE TURKO-EGYPTIANS AND MAHDISTS IN SUDAN

Introduction

In 1820, Egypt's ruler Muhammad Ali, invaded Sudan with an army that had cannons. He conquered the country and joined it to Egypt. Thus, beginning the period of Turko-Egyptian Rule in Sudan, which lasted until 1885.

Muhammad founded the city of Khartoum and established a governor there to rule the Sudanese.

Muhammad Ali extended the empire all the way to Central Africa and included almost the whole of the Nile Valley.

This period of Egyptian rule in the entire Sudan region was called the 'Turkiya' because officially Egypt was part of the Turkish Empire.

Activity 1

The Turko-Egyptian Rule in Sudan

Source 1

a.

Who was Mohammed Ali Pasha?



- He is often referred to as the founder of modern Egypt.
- Muhammad Ali Pasha (c. 1769–1849) was an Ottoman Turkish military leader who ruled Egypt for much of his adult life.

b.



Pair work

1. What is similar between illustration A and B?
2. Observe cartoon strip B, who do you think are the people in that cartoon?

The region of modern time Sudan has a history linked with or influenced by Egypt which is its immediate neighbour to the north. It also has a strong identity as the eastern end of the great trade route stretching along the open Savannah south of the Sahara. It is important to note that Egypt was conquered by the Ottoman Empire (Turkish Empire) in 1517 following the Ottoman-Mamluk war of 1516 to 1517. Egypt was administered as a province of the Ottoman Empire from 1517 until 1867 hence the name Turko-Egyptian. Egypt became a semi-autonomous Ottoman province until the invasion by European countries of France and later Britain.

Turko-Egyptian rule in Sudan was between 1820 and 1885. Muhammad Ali, the Ottoman viceroy of Egypt annexed the country and his grandson Khedive Ismail completed this process of annexation.

Reasons for the Turko-Egyptian entry into Sudan

There are several reasons for the entry of the Turko-Egyptians into Sudan:

1. The **main motive** was to obtain slaves for a new army. Muhammad Ali wanted to rebuild his army with slaves from Sudan because he believed that a slave army will be loyal to him.
2. **He wanted to expand his territory.** Muhammad Ali harboured ambitions of finding an empire. This army of slaves would therefore be useful for the expansion of his territory. Muhammad Ali was interested in slaves whom he wanted to train into a modern army. He collected as many slaves as possible from South Sudan and sent them to Aswan for training. Those who were unfit for military services were put to work in his many agricultural and industrial projects. Between 1820 and 1821 for example, it is estimated that about 30,000 Sudanese were conscripted and sent to Egypt for training into the army. Many died because of diseases and unfamiliar climate.
3. Turko-Egyptian invasion of Sudan was also motivated by the need to **find new sources of revenue to finance his projects in Egypt.** Muhammad Ali craved for wealth and markets. He therefore invaded Sudan looking for commodities of interest such as slaves, gold, ivory and timber. South Sudan and her people became the main sources of these commodities. Egyptian soldiers destroyed pyramids looking for gold, ivory and slaves. Many Sudanese fled to escape slave traders.
4. **Muhammad Ali wanted to crush the survivors of the Mamluk massacre** who had established themselves at Dongola. This dates back to the time when he was appointed as the viceroy. He made his way up by forming alliances with one set of potential opponents against others and eliminating one group after the other in turn. His main obstacle was the Mamluks who were descendants of slave warriors from abroad. Muhammad Ali invited about 5,000 Mamluks notables in the citadel treating them to coffee and polite conversation. His soldiers opened fire and murdered all of them. Muhammad Ali continued to hunt down and kill Mamluks



Fig. 4.1 Muhammad Ali

in Cairo and elsewhere in Egypt totaling to about 3,000. Many of them fled to the south and established a state at Dongola (Dungulah) as a base for their slave trading.



Note!!!

The major aim for the establishment of Turko-Egyptian Rule in larger Sudan was to obtain black slaves for the Turkish army in Egypt.

The conquest of Sudan

Ismil Kamil, first conquered the people of Nubia, Sennas, Kordofan and the Root sea. The Sudanese Kingdoms were conquered very fast. This is because they had inferior weapons compared to Egyptians. The Funj Kingdom and the Kordofan Kingdom were both conquered in 1895.



Group work

1. Research about Muhammad's and Ismail's conquest of Sudan.
2. Come up with a timeline of the main events and the battles fought like the one shown below.

| The Year | What happened |
|-----------|---|
| 1820-1821 | Turko-Egyptians conquered and controlled Sudan. |
| | |
| | |
| | |

3. Present your findings in class.

Activity 2

Turko-Egyptians administrative structures in Sudan

Turko-Egyptian rule in Sudan lasted for a period of about 60 years. The Sudan territories that initially consisted of kingdoms and tribal territories were put under one centralised administration. Northern Sudan was divided into 6 provinces. A governor general who was answerable to Cairo headed this centralised bureaucracy. During this period, Sudan was ruled by Turkish speaking elites and those they appointed. Top ranks in the army were meant for Turkish speaking Egyptians, while the South Sudanese provided slaves. Egyptian soldiers lived well and overtaxed the people. Muhammad Ali won allegiance of some tribal and religious leaders by granting them tax exemptions.



Fig. 4.2: City of Khartoum

Egyptians divided Sudan into provinces, which were further sub-divided into smaller administrative units that were based on tribal territories. Khartoum became the centre of Egyptian domain and served as a residence of the Egyptian deputy. Garrison towns became administrative centres. At local level, traditional chiefs assumed administrative responsibility. These changes increased tension that already existed between the centre and periphery especially the south. The seat of power moved to the central part, that is Khartoum. Slave trade enhanced the position of these northerners yet slaves came from the south. The Turko-Egyptians and north Sudanese collaborated against those of the south and exploited them into slavery.



Note!!!

The centralised government introduced by Muhammad was only used in North Sudan and among the Shilluk.

Reasons for the collapse of the Turko-Egyptian rule in Sudan by 1885

Source 2

'Ali Khurshid was given wide powers, but discovered his new domain was already in ruins after only five years of Turko-Egyptian rule. The hakimdar's rule, which lasted until 1838, was characterized by a number of important developments, including the establishment of Khartoum as the new capital of the Sudan, the introduction of a number of new crops, the growing cultivation of cotton, and the revival of the Gezira region. 'Ali Khurshid also worked hard at organising the slave trade, and mounted numerous raids on the Shilluk, the Dinkas, and the Hadendowa, many of which met fierce resistance.

(Hill 1959; Udal 1998; Douin 1944)

There were several reasons that contributed to the collapse of the Turko-Egyptian rule in Sudan. These reasons were:



Pair work

From the source above, discuss the key points that made the Turko-Egyptian rule collapse?

1. **Poor leadership**

As the Egyptian rule became more secure, government became less harsh. There was burdensome bureaucracy that was put in place that was expected to make the country self-supporting. Muhammad Ali's immediate successors Abbas (1849 to 1854) and Said (1854 to 1863) lacked leadership qualities and paid little attention to Sudan.

2. **Activities in the Ottoman Empire where slaves were mistreated**

Activities in the Ottoman Empire also contributed to the collapse of

Turko-Egyptian rule in Sudan. In 1865, the Ottoman Empire ceded the Red Sea coast and its ports to Egypt. Ismail made the Europeans provincial governors and appointed Sudanese to more important government positions. He attempted to eliminate slave trade. He made attempts to build a new army based on the European model instead of depending on slaves. This modernisation caused a lot of unrest and contributed to the collapse of the Turko-Egyptian rule. The army revolted (mutiny) and many Sudanese resented getting of troops among the civilian population.

3. *There was resentment of the use of Sudanese labour on public projects*

Efforts to suppress slave trade angered the urban merchant class who had grown prosperous by selling slaves.

4. *The killing of an Ethiopian priest*

Another incident that weakened Turko-Egyptian rule in Sudan was the killing of an Ethiopian priest in Sudan by Egyptian tax collectors in 1837. This incident prompted the Ethiopians to send a large force of about 20,000 soldiers and defeated the Egyptians in Sudan.

5. *Tension between traders and soldiers in the empire*

Egyptian rule in Sudan was undermined due to hostility and tension between the traders and soldiers that arose due to commercial expeditions organised by traders and missionaries to exploit natural and human resources in South Sudan. This hostility and tension increased violent confrontation since the traders viewed the Sudanese with contempt and a negative attitude. They regarded them as racially inferior. The invaders resorted to acquiring ivory by force leading to sequences of violence and conflict that undermined the Turko-Egyptian rule. As sources of commodities such as ivory depleted, the traders relied on intermediaries for example, the Bari who demanded higher prices for fewer tasks. All this undermined efforts to establish beneficial commercial relationship.

6. *Failure to end slave trade by Turko-Egyptian rulers*

Attempts made by leaders such as Viceroy Muhammad Said, Khedive Ismail, Sir Samuel Baker and others to suppress slave trade also undermined Turko-Egyptian rule in South Sudan. The leaders imposed heavy taxes on traders' employees in a bid to suppress the slave trade. Muhammad Ismail and Sir Samuel Baker even sent expeditions to South

Sudan to extend Khedive's rule there and suppress the trade but the expeditions failed. These revolts led to Sultan Abdal Hamud replacing Ismail. Gordon resigned as governor general of Sudan and was succeeded by Muhammad Rauf Pasha.

7. *The Mahdist Revolution*

The Mahdist war of 1881 to 1899 also led to the collapse of the Turko-Egyptian rule in Sudan. This was a revolt led by the Sudanese religious leader, Muhammad bin Abdullah who proclaimed himself the "Mahdi" or guided one. The war which shall be described later on in this unit, led to the decline of Turko-Egyptian rule in Sudan.

- 8. *British invasion*** of Egypt in 1889 making Egypt their protectorate led to the collapse of Turko-Egyptian rule. During this period, Khedive Ismail had put Egypt into a huge debt due to his exorbitant spending and corruption. This made his financing of the Suez Canal to crumble forcing Britain to step in as the Suez Canal was of paramount strategic importance to British imperial interests. Britain and Egypt therefore occupied Sudan as Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.

Sudanese response to the Turko-Egyptian rule

People of Sudan have been oppressed by different regimes that ruled the Sudan. Turko-Egyptian occupation was promoted by expansionist ambitions of the Ottoman Empire and its craving for wealth and markets. The commodities were slaves, ivory, gold and timber found in South Sudan. Turko-Egyptians and the North Sudanese collaborated in their raids against South Sudan for slaves. Many South Sudanese were taken into slavery in the Arab world and the new world. After consolidating their control over north Sudan, Egyptian forces began to move south. The South Sudanese resisted Turko-Egyptian invasion. Egyptian forces attempted to set up forts and garrison in the region but diseases and defections forced their abandonment. This is because the Turko-Egyptians were not familiar with the climate. The Khedives of Egypt had no real authority over the region.

Arab invaders who wanted to impose their culture and way of life on the people frequently bypassed villages in South Sudan. Many local rulers despised the Arab culture and encouraged the tribes to resist the invaders and protect their African culture and way of life. The invaders were met with stiff resistance.

Activity 3

Mahdist Revolution (1881 to 1889)

Source 3

AHMED IBRAHIM ABU SHOUK

The Sudanese Mahdiyya was a movement of social, economic and political protest, launched in 1881 by Muḥammad Aḥmad b. ʿAbd Allāh (later Muḥammad al-Mahdī) against the Turco-Egyptian imperialists who had ruled the Sudan since 1821. After four years of struggle the Mahdist rebels overthrew the Turco-Egyptian administration and established their own 'Islamic and national' government with its capital in Omdurman. Thus from 1885 the Mahdist regime maintained sovereignty and control over the Sudanese territories until its existence was terminated by the Anglo-Egyptian imperial forces in 1898.



Pair work

1. From the source above, what do you think was the main motive of the Mahdiyya.
2. Give reasons why you think it was necessary for South Sudanese to resist the Turco-Egyptian Rule.

The Mahdist war, as stated earlier in this unit was a war fought between the Mahdist Sudanese religious leader, Muhammad Ahmad bin Abdullah, who was the proclaimed "Mahdi" of Islam (the guided one) and forces of Khedive of Egypt initially and later the British. Muhammad Ahmad was the son of a Dongola boat builder. He spent several years in seclusion and gained reputation as a teacher.



Fig. 4.3: Muhammad Ahmed bin Abdullah (the Mahdiya)

The Suez Canal was opened in Egypt in 1869 increasing immensely Egypt's economic and strategic importance. Many European imperialists became attracted to the region. During this time around 1879, Ismail Pasha's government was replaced by his son Tewfik Pasha as the ruler of Egypt. Ismail's government had incurred huge external debts for Egypt due to poor spending bureaucracy and corruption. He was unable to sustain the construction of the Suez Canal and so Tewfik who ascended to power at the hands of foreign powers replaced him. Tewfik yearned to get British occupation to secure the monarchy.

Course of the Mahdist Revolution

Source 4

"Described in secular terms, the Mahdia was a revolt which occurred in the Sudanese dependencies of the Khedive of Egypt which overthrew the existing administration and which established an indigenous territorial state, mainly in northern parts of those dependencies. The consequence of this revolt with the establishment of the British control over Egypt itself resulted in the confrontation of the Mahdist state with British military power and ultimately in its destruction, incidentally to the development of British foreign and imperial policy at the end of the nineteenth Century".



Pair work

1. Draw a frame diagram showing the sequence of events as outlined in the source above.

In June 1881, Muhammad Ahmed declared himself the Mahdi of the Turkiyya. By January 1883, Kordofan capitulated. Other areas followed suit. The most demoralising defeat was at the Battle of Shaykan when 10,000 Egyptian forces were defeated. From that point, other provinces like Darfur, Bahr el-Ghazal started falling. In January 1888, Khartoum fell. This marked the end of the Turkiyya regime.

The Equatorial province under the leadership of Amin Pasha was the only province which had fallen under the Mahdiyya rule.

Reasons for the Mahdist Revolution

1. Resentment to the activities of Tewfik by the Sudanese and Egyptians. They resented the ever-increasing influence of European governments and merchants in the affairs of the country. Heavy presence of Europeans in Egypt to protect Cairo, Alexandria and the Suez Canal also limited British and Egyptian presence in Sudan. This led to the Mahdi, Muhammad bin Abdullah declaring the revolt.
2. The Mahdi war broke out because Abdullah wanted to expel the British and overthrow the monarchy, which he viewed, as secular and leaning to the west. He wanted to replace it with a pure Islamic government. This made him attract the support of many Sudanese people and even Egyptians catching Tewfik and the British off guard.
3. Another reason for the Mahdi revolution was ethnic Sudanese anger at the foreign Turkish Ottoman rulers. Muslims were annoyed with the Turks lax religious standard and willingness to appoint non-Muslims such as Charles Gordon to high positions.
4. Mahdi revolt occurred because, the people of Sudan and segments of Egyptians were not happy with perceived corruption and mismanagement that characterised Tewfik's government.
5. The slave traders of South Sudan were also not happy with abolition of slave trade, which was one of the main sources of income in Sudan at the time. General Charles Gordon initiated an intensified anti slavery campaigns. Attempts made by Egyptian and British leaders to suppress this trade immensely contributed to the outbreak of the Mahdi revolt.
6. The Mahdi war was caused by the Turko-Egyptian rule in Sudan. During the Turko-Egyptian rule in Sudan and South Sudan, segments of the population suffered extreme hardship. There was heavy taxation imposed on Sudanese people by the central government. Flat tax was imposed on the farmers and small traders and collected by government appointed tax collectors from Sha'igiyya tribe of northern Sudan. Farmers were many times unable to pay this high tax during times of drought and famine. Besides, the tax was collected with brutal and unjust methods making many farmers to flee their villages in the fertile Nile Valley to the remote areas of Kordofan and Darfur. Turko-Egyptian rule saw this masters having absolute control over all Sudanese trade and this destroyed livelihoods and indigenous practices. During forceful military conscription of slaves to the Egyptian army, thousands of

Sudanese men and boys died on their long march from the Sudanese hinterlands to Aswan, Egypt.

Reasons why the Mahdist revolution was successful

Source 5

“A revolutionary movement is most likely to be successful when there is a general discontent, not confined to one class or territorial group but spread throughout the society as a whole, arising from specific grievances and not merely from a vague malaise or resentment. Secondly, this must coincide with a consciousness of material or moral weakness in the existing government, which hinders it from crushing the revolution at its outset. Thirdly, there must be a revolutionary army of persons ready and able to use force to attain their aims. Fourthly, there must be a revolutionary high command fulfilling a double function: both of disseminating propaganda which will inflame and make articulate the discontent while suggesting a renewed social and political order, and of organising revolutionary activities evoked by this propaganda.”
(Holt: Mahdist State.)

Individual work

1. Briefly summarise in bullet point the author's view about the factors necessary for a revolutionary movement to succeed.

The Mahdist revolution scored success after another even though its supporters possessed traditional weapons compared to the government's modern and sophisticated weapons.

There are several reasons that contributed to the success of the Mahdi revolt. These were:

1. Many Arab tribes rose in support of the revolt as they considered it a Jihad (religious war) against Turkish oppressors.

Source 6



Pair work

What do you think is the main message in this modern day cartoon strip. Discuss with your friend.

2. Religion motivated people to join the movement. Abdallah (Mahdi) legitimised the revolt by drawing parallels to the life of the prophet Muhammad. For example, he called his followers “**Ansar**” after the people who greeted Prophet Muhammad in Madina. He also appointed commanders to represent three of the four religious Caliphs. He announced that Abdullahi bin Muhammad, his eventual successor, represented Abu Bakri Al Sidiq, the prophet’s successor. He collected zakat (tax on wealth) instead of the range of colonial taxes. He strove to impose Sharia prohibitions and punishments.
3. The Mahdi rebels had vast stores of arms and ammunition, military clothing and other supplies captured from their battles. The Mahdi waged several successful battles against the Egyptians. For example, the Mahdi had a well-organised army compared to the Egyptian army. In the summer of 1883, the Egyptian troops that encountered the rebels were disorganised. The force was placed under the command of a retired British Indian staff corps officer William Hicks and twelve European officers. The force was in the words of Winston Churchill “perhaps the

worst army that has ever marched to war” as it was unpaid, untrained and undisciplined.

4. Internal problems in Egypt. Egypt was groaning under a huge debt. The British under the control of a “Financial Advisor” placed the Egyptian treasury crippled by corruption and bureaucracy. This office in a bid to regulate Egypt’s financial affairs maintained that the garrisons in Sudan were costing the Egyptian government unmaintainable expense. It was therefore decided that Egyptian presence in the Sudan should be withdrawn and the country left to some form of self-government likely headed by the Mahdi.

There was also a revolution going on in Egypt (Urdbi Revolt) at the same time. Therefore Khedive of Egypt refused to send troops to Sudan.

Activity 4

Mahdist administration

The Mahdiya (Mahdist regime) imposed traditional Islamic laws (Sharia laws). This, according to Muhammad Ahmed, would promote religious unity unlike the old order which was believed to promote tribalism. The Mahdi maintained that his movement was not a religious order but a universal regime. To him, this was a genuine Sudanese nationalist government. Initially, the Mahdiya (Mahdi state) functioned as a Jihad state run like a military camp. After the death of Muhammad Ahmed on 22nd June 1885 due to typhus, the state fell in the hands of Khalifa Abdullahi. The Khalifa instituted an administration and appointed “Ansar” (usually Baqqara) as emirs of the provinces he established in his kingdom. He established the military and organised workshops to manufacture ammunition and maintain steamboats. There existed a department of finance or treasury which kept detailed records, taxed the subjects and distributed wealth. The state minted its own coins for the local economy.



Fig. 4.4 Khalifa Abdullahi

At the top of the Mahdist administration was the Khalifa. He often delegated his authority to his brother who commanded the largest division within the

Mahdi army, the Black Standard. The army (Black Standard) was divided into four divisions led by a Chief Officer (Amir) who oversaw a number of smaller units organised by tribal clan, ethnic or other affiliation. These units were divided into groups of 100 which were further divided into groups of 25. At every level of command, authority was derived from pre-existing social hierarchies, tribal clans or family leaders. These leaders had several functions including **settling disputes, overseeing matters of public health and sanitation, mobilising people for communal labour projects** and **explaining directives by the Khalifa**.

There existed courts administered through the Sharia law. The main court was located at the mosque headed by a chief judge. A number of smaller courts existed to listen to cases involving inheritance, taxation and slave ownership among others. Much of the wealth of the Mahdist elite was dependant on labour of their slaves. Most of these slaves were drawn from the non Arabic, non Muslim people of the South Sudan identified by the Ansars as “Blacks.” South Sudanese slave labour often taken by force formed the productive base of the society. Families of the elite Mahdist could possess up to 100 slaves. Slave soldiers performed several functions such as guards and labourers at the Khalifa house.

The decline of the Mahdi rule

Source 7

“the Mahdist movement was short-lived, and in the long run, unsuccessful, but its history of less than twenty years shows a rapid political development from the proclamation and establishment of a messianic Islamic community in the Sudan to the creation of an autocracy, based on the hegemony of one Islamic Studies (Islamabad) 17:3 (1978) © Dr Muhammad Hamidullah Library, IIU, Islamabad.



Pair work

Can it be true that the Madhist movement was unsuccessful but that it had an impact? Discuss with your partner and be prepared to contribute to class discussion.

He used the Jihad to extend his version of Islam in the region. As stated earlier,

the initial Mahdiya state was run on military lines with courts enforcing the Sharia law.

Later, the Khalifa established a more traditional administration. He continued his invasion of neighbouring areas invading Ethiopia and defeating them in March 1889, where the Ethiopian emperor Yohannes IV was killed. These invasions strained his state economically. This coupled with crop failure weakened by the Mahdiyya.

He was also unable to overcome tribal leanings to unify Sudan in as much as he was an able general and administrator.

Many times he was forced to employ Egyptians to provide the trained administration and technicians he needed to maintain his self proclaimed Islamist military caliphate.

His state was also threatened by the Italian, French and British imperial forces that surrounded it.

In September 1896, Khalifa Abdullahi lost Dongola. In 1898, in the Battle of Atbara River, his army was defeated and he moved his new capital to Omdurman, his army was destroyed by the Anglo Egyptian forces, forcing the Khalifa to flee to the south. He was finally caught and killed by Sir Reginald Wingate.



Fig. 4.5 Battle at River Atbara



Work to do

Research and draw a timeline of the event leading to the Mahdi Revolution and its decline.

| Keywords | |
|----------------------|---|
| Annex: | add territory to one's own territory by appropriation. |
| Harboured: | a part of a body of water along the shore deep enough for anchoring a ship and so situated with respect to coastal features, whether natural or artificial, as to provide protection from winds, waves, and currents. |
| Mamluks: | is an Arabic designation for slaves. The term is most commonly used to refer to Muslim slave soldiers and Muslim rulers of slave origin. |
| Elites: | a small group of powerful people that control a disproportionate amount of wealth, privilege, political power or skill in a society. |
| Bureaucracy: | a system of government in which most of the important decisions are taken by state officials rather than by elected representatives. |
| Forts: | defensive military constructions. |
| Garrisons: | a group of troops stationed in a particular location. |
| Imperialists: | people who support the rule of one country over others especially through force. |
| Hinterlands: | a German word which means land behind. |
| Jihad: | a holy war against infidels or non-believers in Islam. |

End of Unit Exercise

1. Explain the nature of Sudan before the Turko-Egyptian entry?
2. With your friend, discuss how the Mahdist administration was organised.
3. How did Sudan respond to Turko-Egyptian and Mahdist administration?