

Making African Connections: Sudan and the Mahdiyya

History

- The period of the 'Mahdiyya' (1885 to 1899) was the first time that the entire territory of what we now call Sudan came under a single indigenous leadership.
- In 1881 Muhammad Ahmad bin Abd Allah, a Sufi religious leader, declared himself *al-Mahdī al-Muntaẓar* (the Expected Rightly-guided One).
- Mohammed Ahmed al-Mahdi enlisted the people of Sudan in a jihad against the Egyptian and Turkish occupation that held power in Khartoum.
- The Khartoum government initially dismissed the Mahdi's revolution; he defeated two expeditions sent to capture him in the course of a year.
- Mohammed Ahmed al-Mahdi's power increased, and his call spread throughout the Sudan, his followers were known as ansar.
- Britain appointed Royal Engineer Charles Gordon to assist with the evacuation of Egyptian troops from Sudan. However, he decided instead to defend Khartoum. Months after his arrival in Khartoum and after several battles with the ansar, Mahdist forces captured Khartoum, and Gordon was killed in his palace.
- By 1885 Mohammed Ahmed al-Mahdi had seized power from Ottoman-Egyptian occupiers.



Drums

- Nihass/nihās/nehās is a term used for Sudanese kettle drums. They are generally a little larger than the ones on display in the exhibition but are very similar.
- The drums are made of copper and animal hide, probably camel but possibly something else. Drums are made by stretching raw hide across the metal part and pinning it in place before it dries out.
- Drums are used for formal ceremonies and are signs of power and sovereignty. During the wars they would have been used in battle and to rally troops.
- One of the drums in the exhibition has two names inscribed on it:

*Alhaaj Hasan ibn Saalih
waAllah Amin ibn Asultan Ahmed-ie*

Alhaaj means pilgrim - someone who has performed the Hajj which is the trip to Mecca asked of all Muslims. Hasan ibn Saalih-i is probably the name of the person who made or played the drum.

The second name, Allah Amin son of Sultan Ahmed is likely to be the name of the person who paid for and owned the drum. Owning a drum is a sign of status so this may explain why he wanted his name on it.

Why not write your name on your drum and a place you would like to travel to.

*Don't forget the bowl you used to make your drum can be re used and popped in the dish washer.

