

He in no way gained the general esteem of his colleagues by assentation as claimed by Hammer-Purgstall but, on the contrary, by raising arguments even in contradiction with the opinion prevailing at the Viennese Chancellery at the time, as happened in 1832. The validity of his opinions considerably improved his position and increased Metternich's respect. Consequently, though more well-disposed towards Mohammed Ali than the Austrian chancellor himself, Prokesch continued to play the role of Metternich's adviser in the following years, and he did so either by his written comments to Laurin's reports or through personal meetings with the chancellor in Vienna. With his two memoirs from late 1833 Prokesch also significantly influenced Metternich's Egyptian policy for several years to come. Prokesch's considerable reputation was so high that it survived Metternich's fall in March 1848 and later brought him to the diplomatic post in Constantinople where, as mentioned above, he represented the Austrian and later the Austro-Hungarian Empire from 1855 to 1871.

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The Sudanese life of General Charles George Gordon¹

Abstract

In early February 1885, the reports of the tragic fate of the General Charles George “Chinese” Gordon came out of the blue. The whole British society was suddenly shaken and in a state of shock. For a year’s time, they had been informed with vigorous regularity about Gordon’s defence of the civilization in Khartoum all by his self against the barbarous and fanatical Mahdi – and all of a sudden, everything was over. In the eyes of the British, in a single day, his demise made of him one of the best known heroes of the Victorian era, disposing naturally of all of the imperial virtues. As time went by, however, his personal legacy faded from the British consciousness as fast as the faith in British Empire with its values, ideals and symbols. The present paper focuses on the now forgotten Sudanese life of General Gordon, for whom the Sudan became fatal. In its opening part, the article analyses his time in Egyptian service in the position of the Governor of Equatoria (1874–1877) and consequently, the Governor-General of the whole of the Sudan during the late rule of Khedive Ismail. The fact that the growing Mahdist Revolt, which had caused destabilization of the standing Egyptian administration in the Sudan, could, under certain circumstances, be a threat for Egypt, too,

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forced British officials in early 1884 to use General Gordon's services as the Governor-General in Khartoum. However, Gordon's erroneous assessment of the situation soon led to his isolation from the surrounding areas. The Relief Expeditions sent afterwards did not succeed in saving General Gordon, whose heroic death passed into legend.

Key words: Charles George Gordon (1833–1885), Mahdi, British Policy in Sudan, Siege of Khartoum (1884–1885), Mahdist Revolt, Sudan, Egyptian African Empire

In the autumn of 1873, the Egyptian Khedive Ismail took the fatal step of offering the vacant Governor's post in Equatoria to General Charles George Gordon, a man of splendid international reputation. On the one hand, General Gordon marked indelibly the history of Sudan, but on the other, Khartoum became fateful to him. General Gordon was born on January 28, 1833, and joined Royal Engineers as a young man. During the Crimean War, he took part in the siege of Sevastopol. In the 1860s, he made remarkable accomplishments as a fighter in the Taiping Rebellion. It was then that he became generally known as the "Chinese" Gordon, or, less flatteringly, the "Monkey" Gordon. His life was inextricably interwoven with his faith in Christ, and it is no wonder that religious works predominated in his reading. He became a model of the eager Christian evangelist seeking justice and truth.²

In his lifetime, his disdain of money, ranks and titles earned him great moral credit. His character was a mixture of ardent Christianity, and idealism; his aspiration was to open "Black Africa" to civilization. According to the former Confederate officer in Egyptian services Charles Chaillé-Long, Gordon had occasional crises of melancholy, during which he usually sank to complete solitude for several days, doing nothing but reading the Bible and sipping on a glass of cognac, brandy or sherry. Also, his homosexual inclinations were generally known.³

Gordon reached Cairo on February 2, 1874, and made immediate proof of his unconventional character; he refused the governor's standing pay and contented with its mere fifth, i.e. £2,000. Ismail's instructions were not particularly different from those he had given to the previous Governor of Equatoria, Sir Samuel White Baker. The only novelty was the task of establishing decent relations between the Egyptian administration and the natives. Gordon, without further ado, set out on a journey to inner Africa, accompanied by a group of Europeans. Early on, he managed to paralyse considerably the slave trade on all the navigable sections of the White Nile. He did so despite the extremely harsh climate, unbearable insects, dangerous diseases, indifference of his subordinates, and hatred of the natives. Gordon realized that he could not fight the slave

trade efficiently without taking control over the surrounding desert areas, mainly Bahr el Ghazal, Kordofan and Darfur. In the early 1877, he therefore refused to go on working in Egyptian services unless the Khedive appoints him the Governor-General of the whole of the Sudan. Ismail complied with his conditions and in May 1877, Khartoum greeted its Gordon Pasha as the new Governor-General.⁴

Shortly after his entering the new office, Gordon had to deal with new challenges (British-Egyptian Anti-Slavery Convention), but also some on-going issues from previous years, i.e. the Egyptian-Abyssinian conflict (1874–1876) and the separatist tendencies of several desert provinces. Egypt did not have much money to spare; chronic financial difficulties prevented the administration of Khartoum from building the much-needed infrastructure in the Sudan, particularly railways.⁵

Egyptian expansion along the Red Sea littoral, going on in the years 1865–1875, and the vague border delimitation contributed to the rise of hostility between the Negus and the Khedive in 1874.⁶ Egyptian rulers traditionally interfered with Abyssinian matters and generally managed to enforce their will. Unlike the earlier periods, however, this conflict had a different development, for Negus Johannes had traded ivory for a significant amount of decommissioned weapons from France.⁷ The campaign of two Egyptian expeditions, of almost 5,000 men altogether, in the area of Harrar turned out disastrously. Even the newly and hastily recruited army of 11,000 men could not save the day in March 1876. The Abyssinians prevailed due to the incompetence of Egyptian officers and thanks to their own French armaments supplies. Costs of the failed war campaign climbed up to £3,000,000.⁸

Gordon spent most of 1877 in Massawa, where he was unsuccessfully trying to reach an agreement on the borders with Abyssinia. Negotiations got complicated with 1) plundering border gangs conducting raids from the Abyssinian territory into the areas nearby Egyptian possessions, and 2) Cairo's unwillingness to give up Massawa, which had been claimed by Negus Johannes. A deal could not be reached with the Abyssinians and in March 1878, Gordon went to Cairo for some time in order to back the Khedive up against the discontented foreign creditors.⁹

Among other issues Gordon had to face, there was the separatist tendency of the Darfur Sultanate that had maintained a certain level of independence on the Khedive.

4) See Strachey 1966, 239; Chenevix Trench 1975, 732–735; Moffitt 1935, 107–116; Thompson 2003, 141.

5) In 1878, only 28 miles of railways were constructed (Mowafi 1981, 85).

6) Marlowe 1965, 139–140.

7) Robinson 1927, 267–268.

8) Ibrahim 1998, 213; Robinson 1927, 271–277; Sabry 1924, 116.

9) See more Allen 1936, 130–142; Shukry 1938, 283–287.

2) Asher 2005, 73; Crabitès 1933, 19–21; Percy 1921, 64.

3) Cf. Baring 1908, Vol. 1, 431; Crabitès 1933, 24, 41–42; Strachey 1966, 240.

In October 1874, however, the Sultanate was conquered by the Governor of Bahr el Ghazal along with the implacable slave trader Zubayr Pasha. A year afterwards, as a sign of his loyalty, the latter moved to Cairo only to be imprisoned by the Khedive who wanted to prevent him from returning. In the meantime, Zubayr's son Suleiman took advantage of the dissatisfaction arisen in Darfur, Kordofan and Bahr el Ghazal due to high taxes and the anti-slavery efforts imposed by the administration of Khartoum; and became the leader of the anti-Khedive rebellion (1877–1879).¹⁰ It was not until March 1879 that a punitive expedition set off against him from Khartoum, commanded by Romolo Gessi, an Italian in Egyptian services. He managed to suppress the rebellion and to capture its leaders including Suleiman, whom he had immediately executed by a firing squad.¹¹

The rebellion of the western provinces made Gordon see that the slave trade could not be easily crushed by force.¹² He believed that appointing dutiful and laborious European Christians to the leading posts in the Sudanese administration would help to combat more efficiently the slave traders as well as the arms trade.¹³ These efforts, however, caused bad blood between him and Sudanese population. Replacing Egyptians with Europeans actually reduced the Khedive's administration prestige in the eyes of the Sudanese. The situation was even worsened by their animosity against Christians, whom the Sudanese blamed for the hardships over the past years. The Sudanese population assumed that their religion did not forbid slavery; the abolishment efforts were thus seen as an attack on their sacred faith. In their households and fields, slave labour was irreplaceable. The moment Gordon freed slaves without offering their masters any compensations was seen as a "plain theft" and the sentiments were all the stronger with the Khartoum administrative keeping taxes at the same level.¹⁴ The government's proclaiming its monopoly in the trade in ivory was another reason for considerable discontent.¹⁵ After Khedive Ismail had been removed, Gordon decided to resign from his post, for he disagreed with the action of the western states. Gordon's resignation and Ismail's dethronement were at the origin of massive slave trade recovery in Sudan, which was at that time at the verge of the Mahdist uprising, now supported by most of the population – unlike the revolt of Suleiman.¹⁶

10) Moore-Harell 1999, 31–33; Holt 1970, 28.

11) Moore-Harell 1998, 123.

12) Mowafi 1981, 86.

13) To the problems to employment of Europeans and Americans see more Moore-Harell (2010, 94–99) or Shukry (1938, 302).

14) Mowafi 1981, 87, 90.

15) Strachey 1966, 247.

16) Shukry 1938, 313.

At first, the Mahdist rebellion seemed to be just another common local revolt of the sort which the Khartoum administration had little trouble to handle. June 1881, when Muhammad Ahmad ibn Abdullāh was openly self-proclaimed the Saviour (the Mahdi), marked the beginning of an era during which he intended to restore an honest and fair government, to remove oppression and tyranny, establish order and lead the people the right way. Indeed, Mahdi's accession had been associated with the advent of an apocalypse and combat with infidels, Christians in particular. Muhammad Ahmad's action therefore meant the start of an ideological struggle against the government in office.¹⁷ The then Governor General of the Sudan, Muhammad Raouf Pasha, tried repeatedly to crush the Mahdist rebellion, which had occurred at a time when the administration in Cairo was dealing with matters of greater importance concerning Egypt as such and had no money or troops to spare in the Sudanese possessions.¹⁸ The reports of Egyptian failures spread fast across the country and the revolt, that was originally a regional matter, started gradually to get out of Khartoum's control. Each Mahdi's victory over well armed soldiers with modern armaments drew more and more loyal followers under his banners. His constant achievements were convincing the population of his genuineness as the Messiah.

In the summer of 1882, Mahdi with about 50,000 of his followers and twelve cannons launched an offensive against El Obeid, the rich administrative centre of Kordofan. That was the start of an offensive campaign that led eventually to the fall of Khartoum. Although the reinforcements from Khartoum tried to help the besieged city, in January 1883, Mahdi took it anyway, along with abundant booty.¹⁹ British officials in Cairo were aware of the seriousness of the situation, as the fall of El Obeid meant a direct threat for Khartoum. Despite all that, the Foreign Office did not wish to intervene. Instead, they preferred to send the British General William Hicks to stabilize the situation.²⁰ Several months later, Hicks Pasha introduced his ambitious plan for a military operation in Kordofan. The operation was launched in the early September of 1883, when Hicks set off on a campaign against Mahdi with an army of almost ten thousand troops and nine European officers.²¹ The Austrian Major von Seckendorff, a direct participant of the campaign and a member of Hicks' staff, anticipated the upcoming complications: "We hope to be in El Obeid in five weeks, if we do not die of thirst on the road [...] The lack of water is terrible; all the wells on the road are destroyed [...] but if they [the

17) Dekmejian and Wyszomirski 1972, 204–205; Holt 1970, 22–23; Nicoll 2005, 70–71, 77–78.

18) Asher 2005, 61; Colston 1885, 154–157; Dicey 1902, 320; Holt 1970, 47–50.

19) To the problems see more Colston (1885, 158–160) or Nicoll (2005, 121–132).

20) Holt 1970, 61–62.

21) Cf. Bermann 1932, 175; Shibeika 1952, 95.

Mahdists] *succeed in taking us by surprise, then we must be prepared for the worst [...] If they defeat us once, not one of us will return home [...]*"²² On November 5, the Egyptian Army was almost entirely massacred.²³

The victory of the Mahdists called for a massive interior and foreign response, for the British government was forced to turn their attention to the Sudanese matters. The British public opinion was shocked at the information of the catastrophic defeat of Hicks expedition, bad news, however, kept on coming, for not long afterwards, Darfur and Bahr el Ghazal fell as well and the Suakin region faced Mahdist attacks.²⁴ Regarding the fact that after these defeats²⁵ the Cairo administration was not in condition to send another expedition, in the following weeks, the British government decided to evacuate the Sudan, of which they consequently managed to convince the Khedive's cabinet, too. At the same time, there emerged a plan to send Gordon to the Sudan in order to restore order from the post of Governor-General. Of all Europeans to have ever served in the country, Gordon was undoubtedly the one with the greatest experience with local matters.²⁶ The British Consul-General in Cairo Sir Evelyn Baring (the later Lord Cromer) and the then Egyptian Prime Minister Sharif Pasha were against the proposal, for they considered appointing a Christian into the religiously violent Sudan a potential threat.²⁷

After leaving the post in Khartoum, Gordon served in no prominent function anymore; his missions in the Cape Province, on Mauritius, in India, China and in Palestine were not of long duration. King Leopold II of Belgium decided to use the skills and experience of this "idling" British general in his own struggle to suppress slavery. In October 1883, he offered to Gordon to enter the services of the Congo Free State and Gordon accepted. The War Office was willing to release him, the Foreign Office, however, was not. The Foreign Office actually feared international complications, and in particular with France, and that is why they would not have any "lending" the General under any circumstances. For Gordon, this meant that had he intended to go to the Congo Free State, he would have to leave the British Army first, i.e. to give up his rank and general's rank. There were talks about his resignation going on and all the options were remaining

open. The British Secretary of State for War, Marquis Hartington, found the solution of this precarious situation in sending Gordon on a mission in the Sudan.²⁸

For the British public, Gordon and the Sudan became interchangeable terms or even equivalents. Each Briton interested in colonial matters wished to avenge the loss of General Hicks. On January 1, 1884, *The Times* published a letter by Sir Samuel Baker, articulating publicly the opinion of the majority, saying that Gordon should be sent to the Sudan.²⁹ Eight days later, the *Pall Mall Gazette* daily published an extensive interview headed by a bold headline saying "Chinese Gordon for Sudan".³⁰ On the same day, the journalist William Thomas Stead stated in his editorial as follows: "*We cannot send a regiment to Khartoum, but we can send a man who on more than one occasion has proved himself more valuable in similar circumstances than an entire army. Why not send Chinese Gordon with full powers to Khartoum, to assume control of the territory, to treat with the Mahdi, to relieve the garrisons, and to do what he can to save what can be saved from the wreck of the Sudan?*"³¹

On January 10, 1884, this opinion was adopted by most of the insular daily newspapers.³² Also, on the same day, the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Lord Granville, received a letter from the Queen, expressing her astonishment why the services of the British officers in the Sudan were not being used.³³ That was why on that same evening, Granville telegraphed to Baring, asking whether the General Gordon would be able to assist him by his presence in Egypt. As the Egyptian government did not have their own candidate, they asked the government in London via the Consul-General in Cairo to choose a qualified British officer that would take over the administration in Khartoum with the full civil and military powers. Subsequently, Sir Evelyn sent a private telegram to Lord Granville, talking of General Gordon as the most suitable man for the mission.³⁴

On January 12, 1884, the *Morning Advertiser* daily excited the British public opinion saying that everyone in Great Britain would like to see General Gordon's skills

22) Colston 1885, 165.

23) See Holt 1970, 65; Wingate 1912, Vol. 1, 101–114; Wilson 1953, 15.

24) Crabitès 1933, 163.

25) Since the beginning of the rebellion, Egypt had lost around 27,000 men, 56 canons, 20,000 rifles and 1,500,000 rounds of ammunition in the Sudan (Sabry 1947, 83–84).

26) Shibeika 1952, 146.

27) Baring 1908, Vol. 1, 423–424; Green 2008, 173; Roger 2004, 191.

28) Shibeika 1952, 149.

29) Crabitès 1933, 176.

30) Allen 1931, 215.

31) Green 2007, 155.

32) *Morning Advertiser*, for instance, expressed concerns about massacres that could be a collateral effect of a withdrawal from Khartoum, and called for the government to take action (Shibeika 1952, 158).

33) See more letter of Queen Victoria to Lord Granville, Osborne, 10th January, 1884, in: Buckle (ed.) 1928, 469.

34) Cf. Baring 1908, Vol. 1, 424–426; Judd 1985, 22; Owen 2004, 191.

put to use in the on-going Sudanese crisis.³⁵ The cabinet in London could no longer hesitate and therefore decided to delicately find out whether Gordon would accept the post in the Sudan. The right moment seemed to come with the upcoming appointment of General Gordon and Lord Wolseley, where the rent was to be discussed. Hartington and Granville agreed that should Gordon refuse to go to the Sudan, the objections to his service in the Congo Free State could be disregarded. The British government feared that he would give priority to his previous engagement he had given to the Belgian King and his African Empire, even though Gordon thought about it as a "big cesspool filled with moral corruption".³⁶ Several years afterwards, Lord Wolseley, who could not cope with the Empire's loss of a man such as Gordon, wrote about his intention to go to Congo as follows: "[...] *our very best man burying himself among niggers on the Equator.*"³⁷

On January 15, 1884, the scheduled appointment of Gordon and Wolseley took place in the War Office residence. As a proper British and a proper soldier, Gordon decided to comply with his obligations and go to the mission in the Sudan. He therefore hastily departed for Brussels where he asked King Leopold in person to put his "Congo-ese obligation" off to a time when the Sudanese matters would have been settled. In the morning of January 18, Gordon was back in London and in the afternoon of the same day he took part in the meeting of leading representatives of the War Office with foreign representatives in the War Office residence. There, he conformed to the government's policy, i.e. the evacuation of the Sudan. On the same evening, Gordon and his lieutenant, Colonel John Donald Hamill Stewart, went to the Charing Cross railway station and took a night train to Calais. They were escorted to the train by Lords Hartington, Wolseley, who carried Gordon's hand luggage, and Granville, who bought the ticket, along with the Commander-in-chief of the British Army, His Highness Duke of Cambridge, who held the carriage door for them. Rumour has it that at the last moment, Wolseley found out Gordon only had a few shillings in his pocket and therefore gave him his wallet with all the cash inside as well as his pocket watch, and wished him good luck. No one of them could know they would never meet Gordon again.³⁸

With some time's distance, Lord Cromer found that the British cabinet made two fatal errors in the Sudanese matter: 1) granting consent with sending out the poorly planned and ill-equipped Hicks expedition and 2) charging Gordon with the mission in Khartoum.³⁹ The British Consul-General in Cairo did not consider Gordon the

perfect man for the Sudan's evacuation; he preferred Sir Charles Rivers Wilson.⁴⁰ In 1908, he even wrote: "*Had I known General Gordon better, I should certainly never have agreed to his employment.*"⁴¹ For all the rest of his life, he strove to minimize the consequences of this error.⁴²

Gordon received the official instructions on the very day he was leaving London. His job was to keep the British government informed on the military situation in the Sudan, to suggest how to best protect the scattered Egyptian garrisons and Europeans in Khartoum and to consequently find the best way of evacuating them while keeping the control over the ports along the Red Sea littoral. All correspondence with London was supposed to be delivered via Sir Evelyn Baring; the British Prime Minister Gladstone did not wish Gordon give official advice to the government. The British cabinet was aware that it was virtually impossible to prepare a detailed plan in advance – and therefore relied on Gordon's intellect, restraint and familiarity with the environment. Gordon was on a mission which, by its very definition, ruled out any interference by the Egyptian government, including the Khedive himself.⁴³

General Gordon did not even intend to show in Cairo at first; he wanted to "eschew" meeting Khedive Tawfiq, whom he had publicly criticized. That was why he planned to move on through Suez to Suakin and further via Berber to Khartoum. That was, however, a route taken under control by the Mahdists, and for security reasons, Gordon had to travel via Cairo.⁴⁴ On his way to Egypt, Gordon elaborated a memorandum in which he proposed a schedule for the withdrawal from the Sudan. He suggested a reconstruction of the smaller sultanates that had existed before Muhammad Ali's expansion and whose ruling families still persisted.⁴⁵ He wished to let the sultans decide freely whether to accept or refuse Mahdi's primacy; he counted on their ambition of independence. At the same time, Gordon considered the transfer of power onto the original rulers as an act of justice towards them and their Sudanese populations.⁴⁶ After some time, however, it was clear that he underestimated Mahdi's power in every aspect and overestimated the influence of the sultans.⁴⁷

40) *Sir Charles R. Wilson's relations with the Khedive, however, were far from good; the third man on the list was Colonel John D. H. Stewart (Shibeika 1952, 154).*

41) *Baring 1908, Vol. 1, 439.*

42) *Owen 2004, 195.*

43) *Crabitès 1933, 188–189; Shibeika 1952, 153.*

44) *Shibeika 1952, 154, 159.*

45) *See more Mišek, Ondráš and Šedivý (2009, 54) or Šedivý (2006, 17–21).*

46) *Cf. Baring 1908, Vol. 1, 440–443; Crabitès 1933, 190.*

47) *In Khartoum, Dongola and Kassala, the original sultan families no longer existed; the future of these areas was to be decided later in accordance with the wishes of local*

35) *Crabitès 1933, 179.*

36) *Cf. Crabitès 1933, 180–183; Shibeika 1952, 150–151.*

37) *Green 2008, 176.*

38) *Allen 1931, 221, 227–229, 235.*

39) *Baring 1908, Vol. 1, 428.*

On January 25, 1884, via a letter from the Khedive, Baring handed to Gordon the instructions concerning the Sudanese mission. The British General was officially appointed the Governor-General of the Sudan and charged with the task of ensuring a safe return for not just the Europeans in Khartoum, but also for some 15,000 Christians and Egyptian employees and their families. It was assumed that the withdrawal of the Khedive's garrisons will be disciplined in order to minimize casualties. Carrying out and organizing the evacuation was assigned exclusively to Gordon. The Egyptian government approved Gordon's plan to restore the lesser sultanates that would then form a sort of "confederation", although without the assistance of the Khedive's army. He was given £100,000 for necessary expenses; in case of need more money was available.⁴⁸

The new instructions that Gordon received in Cairo were quite different from the original ones, i.e. those from London. Now Gordon's mission got a completely different character. Instead of keeping the British cabinet informed on the situation, he was now charged with the entire evacuation including the civilians wishing to leave. Gordon's assignment was a difficult one, and that was why the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Granville temporarily left the management of the Sudanese policy in the hands of the British Consul-General in Cairo.⁴⁹

Shortly afterwards, Gordon suggested to Baring in his memorandum to take advantage of the services of the "greatest slave-trader of all times", Zubayr Pasha, in Sudan. Zubayr, who had been dwelling in his luxury home confinement in Cairo for years, was according to Gordon one of the most competent Sudanese. Gordon also believed that the Mahdist rebellion was about to end in the months to come, and even more so with Zubayr's authority luring over Mahdi's supporters to his own side. Later in the afternoon of the same day, Gordon met Zubayr in the presence of Baring. During the tense conversation, the former Governor of Bahr el Ghazal expressed his approval of his son's rebellion; he however denied his own taking part in it or even encouraging it. The men then discussed Gordon's memorandum and ruled out Zubayr's leaving to Sudan.⁵⁰

In the following months the General was coming up with hardly doable schemes of the best ways to proceed. Sir Evelyn even ventured to call him openly the man who "consults with the prophet Isaiah on a regular basis".⁵¹ As for Baring, he had no personal reservations to the use of Zubayr's services, for he was fully aware that the absence of a strong local personality, which could be entrusted with the government in Khartoum, would not make Gordon's task any easier. The former slave trader was,

populations (Shibeika 1952, 163).

48) Baring 1908, Vol. 1, 444–446; Colvin 1906, 67.

49) Crabitès 1933, 199.

50) See more Archer (1886, 61–72) or Baring (1908, Vol. 1, 455–458).

51) Owen 2004, 196.

however, an undesirable person for the British public opinion, Gladstone loathed him openly and Granville would have rather seen him deported to Cyprus than liberated and on his way to the Sudan.⁵²

On January 26, 1884, Gordon and Stewart left Cairo and set off up the stream of the Nile. That day, Gordon was happy.⁵³ During the time the British General was travelling to Khartoum, serious events were taking place in East Sudan, which in a way affected further development of Gordon's mission. Military authorities in Cairo had been of the opinion that a safe route from Suakin to Berber should be open again as soon as possible in order to facilitate the withdrawal of the Khedive's garrisons along with loyal civilians from the Sudan. After the defeat of Hicks, however, Egypt had no army available, except for the troops of the Generals Wood and Baker. Fearing that the Egyptian Army – which was going through an extensive reorganization – could turn out as badly as the Hicks expedition, Sir Valentine Baker and his gendarmerie acquitted themselves with the mission of pacifying the East Sudan region. Although Sir Evelyn Baring had his doubts concerning Baker's competence, he granted his consent with his departure, as there was no alternative. To do nothing would mean to let both besieged towns – Sinkat and Tokar – fall.⁵⁴

Baker's gendarmerie of almost 4,000 men had been well equipped, their discipline, moral and training, however, were deplorable and soon turned out to be the decisive factor.⁵⁵ Baker's task was to free the besieged garrisons and to try to open the Suakin-Berber route. In early February, Baker Pasha and more than 3,000 of his men were on their way towards Tokar. Near the El Teb wells, however, they were attacked by the Dervishes. The Egyptian units got frightened at the sight of an enemy three times weaker, threw off their weapons and scattered in all directions. The Mahdists massacred about 2,250 Egyptians; only two Europeans got away alive – Baker Pasha and the popular officer Fred Burnaby.⁵⁶ Baker's vain attempt to become famous did not turn out as planned. The Mahdist commander Osman Digna had no trouble to get hold of several cannons, about 3,000 Remington rifles and half a million rounds of ammunition.⁵⁷

52) Cf. Baring 1908, Vol. 1, 458–459; Crabitès 1933, 203–205.

53) Letter of General Gordon to his sister Augusta, Cairo, 26th January, 1884, in: Gordon (ed.) 1902, 282.

54) Cf. Asher 2005, 15–17; Baring 1908, Vol. 1, 399–401; Shibeika 1952, 113.

55) The number of Baker's troopers was quickly diminishing. First, 200 Turks would rebel in Cairo; then many Egyptian gendarmes "vanished" even before embarking. The troops were mostly ignorant of basic drill commands such as "eyes left", "by the right march" or "form the battle square" (Asher 2005, 24).

56) Ferguson 2007, 289.

57) Cf. Asher 2005, 35–41; Baring 1908, Vol. 1, 404; Crabitès 1933, 207.

Fielding a part of the British Army in Suakin, where the atmosphere was alarmingly quickly approaching hysteria, seemed to be the only resort. The government in London instructed the Vice-Admiral Hewett to take over both the military and civilian command in the port and along the entire Red Sea littoral. Baker was factually dismissed for incompetence.⁵⁸ In their reaction to the battle of El Teb, *The Times* published the report of their Cairo correspondent, quoting an alleged statement of a highly-placed British official commenting on the debacle: "*I am ashamed to call myself an Englishman.*"⁵⁹

In the meantime, Gordon was moving ahead to Khartoum. At the moment he was crossing Abu Hamed, it seemed to him as if there were no war at all; the population in the neighbourhood of the Nile was on his side, at least for the moment. He took it as a confirmation of his opinion that the Mahdists are actually separated rebels without any broader support. In early February, he therefore wrote a letter to Mahdi in which he reported that he was not escorted by any army and did not consider the existing mutual discords a cause to go to war; he also invited him to have a friendly talk. At the same time, Gordon decided to appoint Mahdi the sultan of Kordofan; that was why he also sent him a scarlet robe and a red tarbush as a gift and a symbol of his new ruling status. He also called for the release of European prisoners. Mahdi's only reaction to the offer was ostentatious mockery. The fact that Gordon was not in the lead of any army gave rise to his pride and confidence in his own success.⁶⁰

During his stop in Berber, the Governor-General made a serious political mistake. On February 12, 1884, he invited the local governor and a deputation of other prominent men to a meeting where he showed them the until-then confidential proclamation of the Khedive announcing the withdrawal of the Egyptian troops and their leaving the Sudan. He publicly declared null and void the British-Egyptian Convention on the Suppression of the Slave Trade from 1877 and granted general tax exemption for the year 1883. Later, the Governor of Berber informed him in private that he had made a mistake.⁶¹ By the revelation of his plans, Gordon opened the proverbial "Pandora's box". If they wished to save their lives, positions and properties after the Egyptian withdrawal, local elites as well as whole tribes had no choice but to rush as quickly as possible to join the Mahdists, as Mahdi was the only alternative for them at that moment.

On February 18, 1884, Gordon made a triumphant arrival to Khartoum and made a few populist gestures right away in order to boost the morale and loyalty of the population. He publicly burnt the old tax records, debentures, whips and other torture tools symbolizing the administration of Khartoum, he authorized to henceforth own

slaves and released all prisoners with the exception of murderers. No matter how cheerful were the celebrations in Khartoum, there was no cheering in Great Britain upon receiving Gordon's telegram in which he was reporting on the slavery situation; the abolitionists were now "on their feet". The Briton who had devoted the previous ten years to fight slave traders was, all of a sudden, on the "opposite side".⁶² Yet the cabinet in London and Baring still trusted him. In his defence, it should be said that the Governor-General did not approve of the slave trade, but he was well aware of the economic necessity of domestic slavery in the Sudanese context.⁶³

Gordon's stay in Khartoum was overshadowed by the seriousness of the Suakin situation for some time. Baker's defeat caused a considerable media upheaval in Great Britain and that was the reason why the British government appointed Sir Gerald Graham, a six-foot tall General Major, to the post of the commander of the British expedition forces in East Sudan. On February 26, 1884, Graham gathered 4,000 British soldiers near Trinkitat and set off towards Tokar to liberate it only three days afterwards. On March 13, he made an encounter with Osman Digna near Tamai. Although the Mahdists outnumbered three times the British, the latter won an easy victory thanks to their thorough drill.⁶⁴ Although Graham wanted to march fast towards Berber, the British representatives would not allow it, fearing too high casualties, and eventually, Graham had to withdraw from Suakin in early April.⁶⁵

Since the first days after his arrival to Khartoum, Gordon had been working on an evacuation plan. First, he gathered most of the until-then scattered Egyptian garrisons. After some time, however, the number of soldiers and civilians that would rather leave rose to the nearly 20,000 and complicated further the whole situation. Although Gordon was not directly responsible for civilians, he felt as his moral duty to evacuate everyone who wished so. Because of the interrupted connection between Berber and Suakin, the evacuation was only possible down the Nile. Even with the deployment of all vessels available, the whole process would have taken six months, the whole fleet would have had to manage the haul between Khartoum and Abu Hamed twelve times without an accident or technical defect.⁶⁶

The very first Gordon's telegram from Khartoum was already a sign to reopen the discussion on Zubayr, whom Gordon now wanted to be his successor. The former slave trader was supposed to rule the Sudan after Mahdi's fall as a British vassal

58) *Shibeika* 1952, 202.

59) *Crabitès* 1933, 208.

60) Cf. *Allen* 1931, 316–323; *Holt* 1970, 85; *Wingate* 1912, Vol. 1, 125–126.

61) *Asher* 2005, 132.

62) Cf. *Asher* 2005, 135; *Strachey* 1966, 273.

63) *Crabitès* 1933, 213–216.

64) *There were about 24 killed and 147 injured on the British side; the Dervishes were left with 2,000 dead troops* (Cf. *Colston* 1885, 181; *Harvie* 2001, 22–24).

65) *Asher* 2005, 104–107, 145–158.

66) *Asher* 2005, 138.

promoted to knighthood and disposing of adequate subsidies. Zubayr's engagement in Khartoum was a reason for a sharp division inside the Gladstone cabinet. The until-then secret negotiations on Zubayr were however revealed by Gordon to the local correspondent of *The Times*, Frank Power. The public on the British Isles, who had not quite recovered from his authorization of slavery, was now learning about Zubayr and was immediately concerned that Gordon might have been serious about his previous steps. Among the British ministers, the voices against Zubayr now prevailed.⁶⁷

On March 11, 1884, there was an interruption of telegraph connection with Cairo due to Mahdist progress to the north of Khartoum, complicating considerably Gordon's position. It was the onset of a time when messengers usually delivered the messages sent to the Cairo government but not in the other direction. Only on rare occasion was the Governor-General lucky enough as to receive a letter from Baring. Withdrawing Graham's forces from Suakin caused that the until-then hesitating North Sudanese tribes joined Mahdi. Gordon was stuck in Khartoum "imprisoned", and any evacuation of troops or civilians was then out of the question.⁶⁸

At that time, Khartoum was a fluvial, caravan and commercial junction. In the late 1870s, the city had about 50,000 inhabitants, half of which were slaves. The crooked streets of Khartoum full of thatched houses and mud huts were something one could call a labyrinth. The Central Mosque with its minaret, the building of the Roman Catholic mission and the General-Governor's palace dominated the city, protected by four miles of ramparts.⁶⁹ Gordon could hold out without help only for some months, even though he reinforced the defence with a sophisticated system of ditches and embankments along with primitive mines and chain-linked barricades. His troops had an abundance of ammunition available, food supplies, on the other hand, could only last for six months.⁷⁰

As the time went by, there was still greater pressure on the British Prime Minister Gladstone and his cabinet Ministers to provide efficient help to the "cut-off" Gordon. For all of the summer 1884, they had been afflicted not only by the press and opposition, but also by the Queen's reprimands; protest meetings were gathering on a daily basis, too.⁷¹ Also, a few British officers-adventurers emerged, aspiring to rescue Gordon from Khartoum.⁷² In late July, the situation in the British cabinet reached a point

where the Secretary of State for War, Marquis Hartington, made an open threat of his own resignation unless the Prime Minister gave an authorisation for an operation to rescue Gordon. Hartington was one of the leading members of the Whig aristocracy exerting significant influence and Gladstone ergo yielded in the early August. After that, the cabinet had no difficulty to obtain £300,000 from the Parliament in order to cover the expenditures on the upcoming Sudanese campaign.⁷³ Some of the ministers even thought, Gordon was "a naughty chap that would not leave the siege". Gladstone himself was not deeply convinced of the necessity of Gordon's rescue for he believed he was in no actual trouble.⁷⁴

The post of the commander of the rescue expedition was assigned to the experienced Lord Wolseley, whose plan was to reach Khartoum from the north. He found that the way up the Nile would be easier than the Suakin-Berber route. That was why he chose the town of Korti as the new British base for its location beyond the fourth cataract. From there, he planned to send a part of the army on boats up the Nile⁷⁵ in order to take Abu Hamed and Berber before the local tribes would have joined Khartoum's besiegers. The other part of the army was to cross the Bayuda Desert to Metememeh where both groups were supposed to be reunited. After that, a unit chosen beforehand was supposed to embark the steamers sent over to Metememeh by Gordon some time before and set off immediately to save Gordon.⁷⁶

On September 9, 1884, Lord Wolseley reached Cairo and started taking necessary organisational steps right away. The Egyptian troops were charged with the task of securing communication. As for scouting and intelligence gathering, Wolseley assigned the job to Captain Horatio Herbert Kitchener and his unit of 1,500 troops of the Abada tribe. Kitchener, who was fluent in Arabic and Turkish, was travelling disguised as an Arab. Having verified the accuracy of the maps available, he advised to take the route through the Bayuda Desert.⁷⁷

While attempting to establish regular connection with Gordon, Kitchener found out that on September 10, 1884, a steamer called *Abbas* had left Khartoum with the following passengers aboard: Colonel Stewart, the British consul and *The Times* correspondent Frank Power, and his French colleague from the consulate service and the

67) Cf. Crabitès 1933, 224–227; Garrett 1974, 207; Strachey 1966, 275–276.

68) Cf. Barthorp 1984, 111; Clarke 1961, 161.

69) Asher 2005, 6–8.

70) Strachey 1966, 277.

71) Asher 2005, 163–164.

72) Gordon's great admirer and adventurer Colonel Fred Burnaby asked his superiors to let him and his 2,000 volunteers break through into Khartoum and save Gordon. See more Allen (1931, 337).

73) Cf. Allen 1931, 348; Barthorp 1984, 93; Crabitès 1933, 274; Strachey 1966, 296–298.

74) In September, Gladstone even ordered Granville to obtain a new decree of the Khedive via Baring that would put Gordon under Wolseley's command. See more Compton (1974, 128–129).

75) Wolseley ordered a total of 800 boats for £75 each. Indians and Canadians were hired as pilots along with 300 natives from the Niger basin (Alford and Sword 1898, 17).

76) Barthorp 2002, 99–100.

77) Barthorp 2002, 172–173.

Bosphore Egyptien correspondent Henri Herbin. With little success, Kitchener sought his superiors' authorization to go to Berber and escort the group across the desert to a safe refuge. In fact, Gordon had taken advantage of the late season deluge of the Nile and had sent Stewart and co. off to Dongola along with documents, journals of the siege and a personal appeal in which he called for the help of all the powers. On September 18, however, the steamer crashed into a rock some 60 miles down the Nile beyond Abu Hamed. A local chieftain used a trick to lure the group ashore only to wilfully kill them there. He also took the valuable Khartoum documents and sent them over to Mahdi as a sign of allegiance.⁷⁸

Gordon had started to keep a journal shortly after Stewart's departure in order to fill the emptiness that was surrounding him.⁷⁹ Together with a few Europeans, he had decided to stay in Khartoum until the end. Six volumes of his journal (September 10 – December 14, 1884), containing cartoons of Baring, maps, detailed descriptions of the defence along with religious passages, have been preserved. In September, the population of Khartoum disapproval of and alienation with Gordon deepened; the latter tried to reverse the situation by introducing titles and medals and issuing uncovered banknotes.⁸⁰ Mahdi's letter exhorting the British General and his close co-workers to give up did not raise the defenders' morals either.⁸¹ In late October, Mahdists launched somewhat more intense operations against Khartoum's defenders.

It was only in mid-December that Wolseley arrived from Korti. The Secretary of State for War, Marquis Hartington, strictly forbade him moving on directly with troops.⁸² In the late December of 1884, General Sir Herbert Stewart therefore set off towards the Jakdul Wells situated deep in the Bayuda Desert.⁸³ The troops were limited by a lack of camels and that was why they were not as numerous as originally intended. On their 176-mile way to Metemneh, there were two major water sources: the Jakdul Wells, collecting only rain water, and a system of flowing artesian wells called Abu Klea. It was only on January 12, 1885, that Stewart managed to gather all his men at the Jakdul Wells.⁸⁴

However, this time-consuming displacement of troops cost Stewart the element of surprise. The Mahdists detected the British displacement, joined their garrisons of Metemneh and Berber in a total of 8,000–14,000 men and then took hold of the

Abu Klea wells that Stewart had to pass through in order to refill his water supplies. More Mahdist reinforcements were on their way from the just-conquered town of Omdurman, situated opposite Khartoum. At the moment when, after a long march, the exhausted and thirsty British troops arrived to Abu Klea, an army of Mahdists was waiting for them, outnumbering them six times. Stewart had not expected to encounter the enemy there. As a retreat was made impossible due to the lack of water, fight was the only resort.⁸⁵ On January 17, 1885, a battle took place and the 1,900 British forced the Dervishes to retreat.⁸⁶

Stewart feared that more reinforcements could come from Omdurman and therefore decided to set off on a risky 23-mile march to the Nile. At the dawn of January 19, 1885, the British fought off a Mahdist attack near the river and got to Gubat on the following day. Gordon's steamers had been waiting for them, there. During the last clash, General Stewart got seriously injured and the command had to be taken over by Sir Charles Wilson, a man with little experience, but, compared to Stewart, greater caution. Since seven days earlier, when the army had left Jakdul Wells, the number of troops fit to fight had decreased by a fifth. The soldiers had only had 16 hours of sleep those days, one and a half litres of water a day and minimal food rations; even the horses and camels showed signs of weariness yet.⁸⁷

Wilson had to make amendments to Wolseley's original plan as the prerequisite of getting to Metemneh without losses was not fulfilled. Wilson, struggling with a lack of senior officers and stocks, therefore decided not to attack on the well-defended city of Metemneh and preferred to fortify his positions in Gubat. On January 23, 1885, he set off with two steamers and a British infantry unit in the direction of Khartoum. The original plan of British soldiers coming to set Gordon free in their red coats did not actually happen, as the garments got somehow "lost" during the march. Further delay was caused by reparations of the steamers that had broken in the process.⁸⁸

In late December, 1884, Khartoum ran out of food rations, which caused a massive outflow of inhabitants to Mahdi. The remaining starved soldiers (9,000) and civilians (20,000) were trying to keep alive at all costs, eating, little by little, all the dogs, donkeys and rats, and ended up trying in vain to eat animal skin, various kinds of rubber or palm fibres. The defenders were starving to death by hundreds; urban workers heaving neither the time nor the muscle to bury all. In the atmosphere of absolute despair,

78) See more Asher 2005, 172–181; Baring 1908, Vol. 2, 3–4; Crabitès 1933, 282–285; Hake (ed.) 1885, 272–274, 546; Strachey 1966, 298; Symons 1965, 150–152.

79) To the problems of Gordon's diary see Bass (2007, 449–469) or Nicoll (2010, 21–46).

80) Cf. Crabitès 1933, 287; Strachey 1966, 291, 299–305.

81) See Sverdrup 1911, 375–382.

82) Asher 2005, 185.

83) Preston (ed.) 1967, 100–101.

84) See more Symons 1965, 173–186.

85) Cf. Asher 2005, 201–208; Bsrthorp 1984, 107.

86) There were 105 injured and 74 killed on the British side. The Dervish lost 800–1,100 men (Cf. Alford and Sword 1898, 18; Archer 1886, 271; Marling 1936, 146; Preston (ed.) 1967, 121).

87) Asher 2005, 232–241.

88) Cf. Asher 2005, 246; Crabitès 1933, 311–313.

petty disputes were turning to vendettas and simple distrust was seen as treason. Gordon, whose hair had greyed considerably in the previous weeks, was still working tirelessly on allocating the more and more meagre rations or on ammunition preparations. He was the symbol of resistance. He kept on persuading the soldiers and the population that the help was coming any moment. He also kept putting up posters saying that British, Indians and Turkish were on their way, had it been in Kassala, Berber or Dongola. He was making claims such as that the British were coming with 800 steamers and the like; he even pre-booked houses and pre-ordered service for them.⁸⁹ Although Mahdi had been offering him a “safe” way out to join the British troops, Gordon decided to stay.⁹⁰ On November 9, 1884, he made the following highlighted entry in his journal: “*I will not obey it, will stay here, and fall with city, and run all risks.*”⁹¹

In the early hours of January 26, 1885, Mahdists got through a security gap opened by a drop in the Nile’s level, entered the city⁹² and immediately started to plunder, rob,⁹³ rape and murder.⁹⁴ Allegedly, Mahdi had ordered that Gordon be brought alive, for he had been considering trading him for Arabi Pasha. There are five different versions of the events of Gordon’s death. The accounts by eyewitnesses differ not only in the place, but also in the way he died.⁹⁵ The best-known is the “imperial version”, in which the British General is standing on the stairs of his palace, fully dressed in his uniform, holding a sabre and a discharged gun when his heroic life is cut short by a Mahdist spear.⁹⁶ After that, Gordon was beheaded and his head brought to Mahdi to Omdurman, where it was attached to a tree so that every passer-by could “cast a stone” at it.⁹⁷

On the morning of January 28, 1885, Wilson emerged in front of Khartoum. By then, there was no flag flying over the General-Governor’s palace and everything was in ruins; General Charles George Gordon was dead. Help came some sixty hours late. The reports of Gordon spread around the world; naturally, the reactions were the

strongest in London. The British nation was shocked at first, then furious.⁹⁸ *The Times* even wrote: “*The news of the fall of Khartoum is the worst that has reached this country for many years [...]*”⁹⁹ All media of the British Isles were flooded with patriotic contributions.¹⁰⁰ In the following three weeks, the population was on the verge of hysteria; the country was in general mourning. It was the time of accusations and explanations why the expedition had been sent so late. The British blame neither Wolseley nor Wilson, in their eyes they had both done all they could, given the circumstances. The general rage, however, turned against Gladstone; the Grand Old Man (GOM) became the Murderer of Gordon (MOG) overnight.¹⁰¹ As for Gladstone, he explained the British failure in the Sudan with a divine intervention punishing the British for their previous sins – i.e. the occupation of Egypt.¹⁰²

On February 8, 1885, the British government decided that the Sudanese campaign was to go on in the following months. Although in February, the British saw a series of partial upturns, their attempts to reverse the situation in Sudan were vain as such. Meanwhile, the crisis of the Panjdeh oasis broke out in Afghanistan. In late July, Wolseley had to withdraw the entire British forces from the Sudan because of “imperial interests”. In addition, the Gladstone cabinet fell in June.¹⁰³ By coincidence, Mahdi died in Omdurman that same month.¹⁰⁴ Sir Evelyn Baring went through a major self-reflexion as well, coming to the conclusion that he had made a mistake: 1) sending a British to Khartoum, 2) approving of Gordon, 3) not using Zubayr’s services, and 4) having an unpardonable delay of the rescue operation.¹⁰⁵

Gordon’s name was not forgotten, neither after the fall of the Gladstone government, nor after the death of Mahdi. General Gordon became a hero of the British nation; his courage, modesty and charismatic character impressed virtually every Briton, had they been soldiers or civilians. The General stood for Victorian Britain, imperialism and the “best of” what the Empire had to give to the rest of the world. The mind of the

89) Cf. Asher 2005, 253–255; Baring 1908, Vol. 2, 10; Strachey 1966, 313–314.

90) Holt 1958, 280–281.

91) Hake (ed.) 1885, 307–308.

92) Allen 1941, 331–332.

93) *The Mahdists were in a particular rush to the church of the Austrian mission and Gordon’s palace, for they hoped to find hidden treasures there* (Wingate 1912, Vol. 1, 174).

94) *The number of the massacred Egyptians and Christians drew near 10,000* (Cf. Asher 2005, 266; Fahmy 1917, 39; Wingate 1912, Vol. 1, 183).

95) *To this problems compare Crabitès 1933, 316–327; Johnson 1982, 285–310.*

96) *This version served as a model to George William Joy’s famous painting General Gordon Last Stand or the Khartoum movie (1966) with Charlton Heston starring as General Gordon* (Berenson 2011, 118).

97) Cf. Beatty 1954, 283; Brook-Shepherd 1972, 73; Baring 1908, Vol. 2, 14.

98) Elton 1955, 369.

99) Colston 1885, 225.

100) Auchterlonie 2001, 18.

101) Berenson 2011, 113.

102) Magnus 1958, 63–64.

103) Cf. Asher 2005, 282–284; Baring 1908, Vol. 2, 21–27; Crabitès 1934, 19–29; Dicey 1902, 386–390.

104) *Some authors quote typhus as the cause of Mahdi’s death, others say it was pox, poison or obesity* (Cf. Asher 2005, 284; Bond 1967, 285; Grew 1916, 130; Kramer 2010, 25–26; Wingate 1912, Vol. 1, 204).

105) Baring 1908, Vol. 2, 33.

Britons was generally overrun by the idea of a re-conquest of the Sudan to avenge General Gordon and “wash away the shame” of the failed rescue mission.

Gordon died in Khartoum, but his personality was revived on several occasions. His name drew important attention during four subsequent periods. The first fifteen years were spent in glorification of his life, acts and ideas and it correlates with the re-conquest of the Sudan by General Kitchener, i.e. the metaphoric revenge for Gordon. The second period (1908–1920) is characterised by an effort of a rational and prudent approach to the legend that had developed around his person. The year 1933 marked the centenary of Gordon’s birth, bringing a temporary recovery of historians’ interest. The last of the four periods came in 1954–1966, when a re-edition of Gordon’s journals was published and a movie epic *Khartoum* (1966) was made with Charlton Heston in the lead role.¹⁰⁶

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¹⁰⁶ See more Behrman 1971, 48–58.

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Roman Kodet

Yamada Torajirō and Japanese Influence in Istanbul¹

Abstract

During their history the Ottoman Empire and Japan had almost no mutual contact and were hardly aware of each other. This situation changed at the end of the 19th century, when the Ottomans were interested in Japanese modernization according to the western model in order to apply the Japanese model on their own crumbling empire. On the other hand, some Japanese viewed the Ottoman Empire as an exotic oriental country and were eager to discover its history and culture. On this basis the relations between both countries were established. One of the most important proponents of Ottoman-Japanese relations was Yamada Torajirō, who came to Istanbul in 1892. He was to stay there for next 22 years. Although he wasn’t able to secure any radical political or economic interests for Japan in Istanbul, his activity brought a period of intensifying contacts between both countries. He also introduced Japanese culture and customs to Istanbul and after his return to Japan he wrote a lot of books about Turkey, in which he promoted the idea of Japanese-Turkish friendship. His work is therefore considered to be the fundamental basis of the good relations of Japan and Turkey up to the present time.

Key words: Japan, Ottoman Empire, diplomacy, economy, culture

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