

Historical and Cultural Foundations of Sudan-Türkiye Relation

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Abstract

This study examines the historical and cultural foundations of Sudan–Türkiye relations by analyzing the enduring legacy of the Ottoman Empire in Sudan and its transformation into a modern diplomatic partnership. Drawing on primary Ottoman archival documents (BOA) and recent academic sources, the research traces how Ottoman administrative, educational, architectural, and social institutions shaped Sudanese society between the 16th and 19th centuries. It highlights Sudan’s integration into the Ottoman imperial framework through soft governance based on Islamic unity rather than colonial domination, and explores the development of bilingual administration, urban modernization in Khartoum and Suakin, and the establishment of madrasahs reflecting Ottoman pedagogical models. The study further investigates how this legacy persisted during Sudan’s path to independence in 1956 and continues to influence contemporary Türkiye–Sudan relations through cultural diplomacy, humanitarian aid, and institutional cooperation. Findings reveal that Ottoman-era foundations such as social justice, education, and charitable institutions have evolved into modern mechanisms of Türkiye’s African engagement policy. This research contributes uniquely by connecting historical continuity with present-day diplomacy, demonstrating how shared civilizational memory forms a distinct model of postcolonial partnership with global relevance.

Keywords: Türkiye, Sudan, Ottoman-era, Culture, Diplomacy.

Introduction

Sudan–Türkiye relations are rooted in a historical experience that predates modern diplomatic frameworks and extends back to the Ottoman Empire’s presence in the Red Sea and Nile basins from the sixteenth century onward. Unlike the asymmetric relationships produced by European colonialism in Africa, Ottoman engagement in Sudan developed through a model grounded in Islamic legitimacy, administrative accommodation, and cultural integration. This historical interaction generated enduring institutional, educational, architectural, and social structures that continued to shape Sudanese society well beyond the end of formal Ottoman political authority. Sudan occupies a distinctive position within Türkiye’s historical memory of Africa, not merely as a former administrative territory but as a space of shared civilizational experience (Mohamoud, 2023).

Following Sudan’s independence in 1956, this deep-rooted historical and cultural familiarity facilitated the re-emergence of bilateral relations with the Republic of Türkiye in a manner largely free from the post-colonial tensions that characterized many African states’ relations with external powers. Contemporary cooperation in areas such as cultural diplomacy, education, humanitarian assistance, and heritage preservation, most notably the restoration of Ottoman-era sites in Suakin, reflects the transformation of this historical legacy into modern diplomatic practice. In this respect, Sudan–Türkiye relations provide an illustrative case for examining how historical continuity and collective memory can function as active components of foreign policy rather than as passive remnants of the past (Melis, 2024).

The primary objective of this study is to analyze the historical and cultural foundations of Sudan–Türkiye relations by tracing the institutional and social legacy of Ottoman rule in Sudan and examining how this legacy has been reinterpreted and operationalized in contemporary bilateral relations. Rather than ap-

proaching Ottoman rule solely as an imperial experience, the study conceptualizes it as a process of civilizational interaction that shaped administrative practices, educational networks, urban development, linguistic culture, and social welfare mechanisms in Sudan. By doing so, the research seeks to demonstrate that modern Sudan-Türkiye relations are not the product of short-term strategic interests alone, but are deeply embedded in a *longue durée* historical framework (Başkan, 2023).

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative historical and interpretive approach. Primary sources from the Ottoman Archives (Ottoman Archives - BOA) constitute the core empirical basis of the research, particularly documents related to administrative governance, education, urban planning, foundations, and correspondence between the Ottoman center and Sudanese provinces. These archival materials are complemented by secondary academic literature, including historical monographs, journal articles, and contemporary analyses of Türkiye's Africa policy. Through a comparative reading of archival evidence and modern diplomatic practices, the study establishes a link between Ottoman-era institutions and present-day mechanisms of cultural diplomacy, humanitarian engagement, and development cooperation.

The scope of the research spans from the sixteenth century when Sudan became integrated into the Ottoman imperial system following the conquest of Egypt to the twenty-first century, with particular emphasis on the post-2000 period in Türkiye-Sudan relations. While acknowledging political ruptures such as European colonial intervention and Sudan's independence process, the study prioritizes elements of continuity, especially in the domains of education, religious institutions, urban culture, and social solidarity (Collins, 2008).

Structurally, the article is organized into three main sections following this introduction. The first section examines the social and cultural legacy of the Ottoman Empire in Sudan, focusing on governance prac-

tices, educational institutions, urban transformation, linguistic interaction, and foundation-based social welfare systems. The second section analyzes the role of this legacy during Sudan's independence process, highlighting the persistence of Ottoman institutional culture and its influence on the formation of modern Sudanese state structures (İnalçık, 1994). The final section explores contemporary Sudan-Türkiye relations, demonstrating how Ottoman historical memory has been mobilized through cultural diplomacy, humanitarian initiatives, educational exchanges, and economic cooperation. The conclusion synthesizes these findings and argues that Sudan-Türkiye relations represent a distinctive model of post-colonial partnership grounded in shared historical consciousness and reciprocal engagement (Adam, 2022).

By linking historical experience with contemporary diplomatic practice, this study contributes to the broader literature on international relations and sociology, offering an alternative framework for understanding Türkiye's engagement with Africa. It suggests that civilizational continuity and collective memory can function as durable diplomatic resources, shaping foreign policy behavior in ways that transcend conventional geopolitical calculations (Buzan and Lawson, 2015).

The Social and Cultural Legacy of the Ottoman Empire in Sudan

Sudan, a region historically shaped by the abundance of the Nile River and a site of one of the most powerful reflections of Islamic civilization in eastern Africa, underwent a multifaceted transformation under Ottoman rule. The region, annexed to Ottoman territory following Selim I's conquest of Egypt in 1517, became

the empire's administrative gateway to the African interior with the establishment of the Habesh Province in 1555 (Benli, 2023, p. 109). From this date on, the Ottoman Empire's political and cultural influence was felt not only along the Red Sea coast but also inland. It has been observed that Islamic identity, educational structure, and urbanization model were ingrained in Sudanese society, as they were in Ottoman centers. The foundations of this transformation deepened with the new administrative order established in 1821 with the expedition of Ismail Pasha, son of Kavalali Mehmed Ali Pasha, to Sudan. From this date on, Sudan was reconstructed economically and culturally under Egyptian rule under Ottoman rule (Milanlioğlu, 2023, pp. 10–12). The initial phase of Ottoman rule in the region aimed to reestablish the Islamic order, link tribal relations to central authority, and align local administrators with Ottoman rule. With the establishment of an administrative and fiscal order in Sudan, a new balance was established between traditional local structures and the Ottoman bureaucracy, which quickly led to a radical transformation in social relations (Çetin and Amid, 2022, p. 162).

The Ottoman Empire's approach to governance in Sudan was founded on a soft integration model based on the concept of Islamic unity, rather than a harsh colonial policy (Özkan, 2022). The Istanbul-centered administrative system was put into operation in Sudan with the support of local leaders and ulema, ensuring public participation in government. Provisions regarding the salaries and job assignments of Sudanese civil servants (BOA. HAT. 245/123, 15 Cemaziyelahir 1241) clearly demonstrate the Ottoman effort to integrate local elements into the state apparatus. A concrete example illustrating how this model operated in practice can be observed in the administration of Mahu Bey Urfalı. As one of the Ottoman representatives in Sudan, Mahu Bey preferred negotiation and alliance with local tribal leaders and prominent members of the ulema rather than relying solely on military force and taxation. Particularly in his relations with tribes such as the Kababish in the Nile Valley, mechanisms of

conciliation and consultation were emphasized over armed coercion, which contributed to the maintenance of temporary stability in the region. Mahu Bey's approach demonstrates an effort to secure political stability by incorporating key elements of Sudanese society into the administrative framework. Accordingly, Ottoman governance adopted an integration strategy in which central directives and local leadership operated collaboratively to address regional challenges (Collins, 2025). The reconstruction of Khartoum and its designation as the capital during the Ottoman period placed a modern understanding of order at the center of urbanization in the region. The city became a center of administration and a center of civilization through which imperial culture was brought to the African continent. The neighborhood layout, government buildings, and places of worship planned by Ottoman engineers created a new urban identity on both banks of the Nile, representing the empire's aesthetic and administrative approach. This identity also paved the way for the development of a bilingual administrative culture, where Turkish was used alongside Arabic in official correspondence (BOA. A.DVN. 17/232, 20 Dhu al-Qi'dah 1255). One of the most lasting impacts of Ottoman rule on social life in Sudan was in education. The modern school established in Khartoum during the reign of Abbas Pasha was one of the first examples of the Ottoman educational system in Africa. The decree establishing the school (BOA. İ.MVL. 45/2102, 12 Rabi' al-Awwal 1269) stipulated that the languages of instruction would be Arabic and Turkish, and that the curriculum would include courses such as jurisprudence, geography, arithmetic, history, and grammar. Therefore, this step reflects the Ottomans' desire to maintain the balance between science and administration in Sudan. With the expansion of educational activities, young Sudanese began to take positions in the Ottoman administrative system, cementing the cultural transmission. Steps were also taken to enhance women's education and participation in social life. The decision to open a school for widows and orphans to receive basic education (BOA. C..HR. 138/6882, 10 Dhu al-Hijjah 1274) was a testament to

the Ottoman understanding of social justice. Through these institutions, social cooperation and the teaching of Islamic sciences became widespread, and a direct link was established between Sudanese ulema and Ottoman madrasas.”

Within this framework, Suakin Island functioned not only as a crucial hub for trade and maritime transportation but also as a central site for the dissemination of Islamic education and cultural interaction in the region. During the Ottoman period, the architectural complexes developed alongside its port functions, particularly mosques, madrasas, and social facilities contributed to transforming the island into a center of learning and culture for the study and transmission of Islamic sciences (Taha, 2014). Suakin's historical urban fabric enabled the coexistence of diverse religious structures representing different Islamic schools of thought, thereby facilitating the spread of Islamic knowledge in Sudan through local ulema and Sufi traditions. In this respect, Suakin should be understood not merely as an economic port but also as a powerful focal point of cultural and religious exchange. The multilayered role of Suakin's historical architectural and social structure demonstrates that the island functioned as a significant crossroads within the Islamic world, serving both commercial networks and educational/spiritual connections. These structures, constructed with stones obtained from the coral reefs surrounding the island, reflect the harmony of Ottoman stonemasonry with local materials (Petersen, 2002). The record of ten wells opened for water supply. Demonstrates that the Ottomans considered infrastructural and social needs together in urban planning. In the 19th century, under the administration of Khedive Ismail Pasha, the island was revitalized with the repair of houses and the construction of new mosques, mills, and a school. With the opening of the Suez Canal, Suakin became the Ottoman Empire's gateway to the Indian Ocean. During this period, the Ottomans consolidated their presence in Africa not only through military bases but also through cultural and economic centers (BOA. MAD.d. 18604, 10 Cemaziyelahir 9329).

The transformation Sudan underwent under Ottoman rule was not limited to administrative or religious institutions; it also brought innovations in fields such as agriculture, farming, and handicrafts. During the reign of Kavalali Mehmed Ali Pasha, the introduction of modern agricultural equipment to Sudan, the training of the local population in agricultural production, and efforts to increase agricultural productivity were seen as integral to Ottoman modernization. The decree issued to develop animal husbandry in the Kordofan region (Warburg, 1989). Demonstrates the adoption of a production-oriented structure at the center of economic life in the region. With the establishment of transportation and telegraph lines on the Nile, Sudan became an extension of the Ottoman communications network by the mid-19th century, revitalizing trade routes extending from Khartoum to the Red Sea. These developments demonstrate that modernization in Sudan began not only with European influence but also with the local implementation of the Ottoman system (BOA. MKT.UM. 45/26, 2 Muharram 1268).

The socio-cultural transformation that Sudanese society underwent under Ottoman rule was also evident in the areas of language and identity. The Ottoman administration's use of Turkish alongside Arabic as the official language of correspondence (BOA. A.DVN. 17/232, 20 Dhu al-Qi'dah 1255) led to the emergence of a bilingual bureaucratic culture in Sudan. This enabled the two languages to coexist not only in government positions but also in social interactions. Turkish words became part of everyday speech among the public, and terms such as “Pasha,” “Efendi,” and “Mektep” became concepts denoting social status. With the education of Sudanese scholars in Ottoman madrasahs, Arabic was preserved as the language of knowledge, while Turkish became established as administrative and military terminology (Shaw, 1976). This cultural unity facilitated Sudan's integration with the Islamic world and left a sustainable cultural identity after the Ottoman era. The Ottoman legacy in Sudan is also evident in the understanding of social solidarity and mutual aid. The organization of zakat, foundations, and

charitable institutions acquired an institutional character during the Ottoman period. Edicts sent from Istanbul encouraged public participation in education, mosque maintenance, and supporting the poor through foundations (BOA. Y.EE. 117/11, 27 Shaban 1315/21 January 1898). These documents demonstrate that the Ottoman administration in Sudan was based not only on financial or political grounds, but also on moral principles. Ottoman social welfare institutions paved the way for the establishment of Islamic principles of justice and equality among African societies and fostered public confidence in state authority.

Although Ottoman influence in Sudan began to wane with European interventions in the late 19th century, it persisted in the people's collective memory as a period of order, justice, and prosperity. The decree concerning the unification of the people of Kordofan and Darfur around Islamic brotherhood (BOA. İ.DH. 121/6021, 14 Cemaziyelahir 1278) is a clear indication of the Ottoman policy of preventing tribal conflicts and strengthening religious solidarity in the region. This approach endured in Sudan not only as a model of governance but also as an ideal of civilization (Buzan & Lawson, 2015). This social structure, formed under Ottoman rule, continued to influence Sudan's identity after independence; the foundations of a national consciousness based on Islamic values were laid during this period. In this continuity, the traces of Ottoman administrative culture and social organization did not vanish with the political ruptures of the late nineteenth century; instead, they survived as reference points that shaped both the collective memory of Sudanese society and the framework of later political relations (Adam, 2022).

Some of the Ottoman monuments in Suakin still stand today and have been restored as part of the cultural diplomacy activities of the Republic of Türkiye. The reuse of two mosques, a customs building, and a port, undertaken by TİKA in 2014, represents a contemporary continuation of the Ottoman legacy. These restorations demonstrate that the structures built during

the Ottoman period, as well as the social and cultural values they represent, serve as a vibrant reference point in contemporary Sudan-Türkiye relations (Yeni Asya, 2014).

Ottoman rule in Sudan signified not only a political era but also a multifaceted civilizational transfer. This interaction, ranging from the planned urbanization of Khartoum to the coral-stone architecture of Suakin, from the courses taught in madrassas to bilingual administrative correspondence, left a lasting mark on Sudan's identity (Assmann, 2011). Ottoman reforms in education, architecture, agriculture, law, and religion prepared the region not only for the 19th-century administrative order but also for the process of modern statehood. Many administrative terms, architectural forms, and social institutions still used in Sudan today are legacies of the Ottoman era. The Ottoman presence in Sudan served as a bridge to the Islamic world of Africa, both historically and culturally; this legacy formed the cornerstone of the historical closeness between the two countries (Alçı, 2023).

Bilateral Relations During Sudan's Independence Process

From the second half of the 19th century onward, the Ottoman Empire's influence over Sudan was reshaped by the dynamics of international politics and colonial competition in Africa. The semi-independent administrative structure established by Kavalali Mehmed Ali Pasha in Egypt created a complex balance between loyalty to the Ottoman center and local autonomy, with Sudan at the center of these balancing acts (Holt & Daly, 2014). During this period, Sudan's administration, while ostensibly subordinate to the Egyptian governorship, retained its legal status as a province

of the Ottoman Empire, and sermons continued to be delivered and coins minted in the Sultan's name. This meant that the Ottomans maintained both their political sovereignty and religious authority (Adam, 2022). From the 1850s onward, increasing British influence in the region challenged the classical structure of Ottoman administration. International competition over Sudan intensified as the Red Sea trade routes grew in importance, particularly after the opening of the Suez Canal. During this period, the Ottoman Empire sought to maintain its dominance in Sudan not only through military means but also through diplomatic and cultural means. Edicts sent from Istanbul demanded that local administrators maintain their loyalty to the sultan and avoid any foreign influence that might undermine the idea of Islamic unity (BOA. Y.EE. 117/11, 27 Şaban 1315/21 January 1898).

While Khartoum's establishment as an organized city under Ottoman rule led to the establishment of modern institutions, the increasing influence of the British in the region from the 1880s onward altered the course of relations between the Ottomans and Sudan. The Mahdi movement, which began in 1881, challenged the authority of both the Ottoman and Egyptian governments, and this uprising was considered the first expression of Sudan's quest for political independence (Hamdan, 1960). However, the legitimization of this movement through Islamic discourse did not constitute a direct rebellion against the Ottoman caliphate. On the contrary, the Mahdi leadership maintained its loyalty to the Ottoman caliph but opposed the corrupt practices of local administrators. Without eliminating the religious legitimacy of this movement, the Ottoman Empire sought to reestablish order in the region in harmony with Egyptian administration (Özdağ, 2018). In parallel with these internal developments, the implications of the Mahdi uprising and the shifting balance of authority in Sudan began to reverberate beyond local governance and entered the realm of imperial diplomacy, compelling the Ottoman state to reassess its administrative and legal position in the region (Holt, 1958).

The impact of developments in Sudan on Ottoman foreign policy became particularly pronounced between 1880 and 1890. Decisions regarding the administration of Sudan in documents in the Ottoman archives reveal that the region was not merely a part of Egypt but a province under direct Ottoman sovereignty (BOA. A.DVN. 17/232, 20 Dhu al-Qi'dah 1255). These documents state that governors in Sudan were appointed in the name of the sultan and that administrative correspondence was conducted in accordance with Ottoman state protocol. This legal framework demonstrated that Sudan continued to be considered Ottoman territory under international law. However, the *de facto* balance of power in the region shifted as Britain increased its control over Egypt. The occupation of Egypt by British troops in 1882 paved the way for Sudan to fall within the British sphere of influence; This situation led to the weakening of direct administrative ties between the Ottoman Empire and Sudan (Robinson and Gallagher, 1961).

Although the Ottoman Empire's influence in Sudan began to wane, cultural and religious ties persisted. Declarations of allegiance from Sudanese ulema to the Ottoman Caliph and letters sent by religious authorities to Istanbul are strong evidence of this spiritual connection. The order issued in the BOA records (İ.DH. 121/6021, 14 Cemaziyelahir 1278) to unite the peoples of Darfur and Kordofan through the love of Islam reveals the Ottoman policy of keeping the Muslim communities in Sudan around the Caliph. This policy was developed not only for the purpose of religious unity but also as a defense mechanism against the Anglo-French rivalry. The ideology of the Caliphate became the most effective tool for the Ottomans to maintain their influence over African Muslims in the late 19th century. By the beginning of the 20th century, the Ottoman Empire's *de facto* control over Sudan had largely ceased, and the region was administratively reorganized under the Anglo-Egyptian joint administration of 1899. However, even within this new administrative model, the bureaucratic structure, language, and institutional culture inherited from Ot-

toman rule persisted (Weiker, 1968). A large portion of the civil servants serving in administrative positions in Khartoum were trained during the Ottoman era. Arabic and Turkish terms used in education were preserved in administrative correspondence for many years. This continuity demonstrates that the Ottoman legacy was not merely a historical memory but a cornerstone of the pre-independence Sudanese state structure (Göksoy, 2019).

The Ottoman Empire's alliance with Germany during World War I further strengthened the British position in Sudan. The Darfur Sultan Ali Dinar's declaration of allegiance to the Ottoman Caliphate in 1916 can be considered the Ottoman Empire's last political manifestation in Africa. The Darfur Sultanate's declaration of allegiance to the Ottoman Sultan (BOA. İ.HR. 176/8058, 20 Shawwal 1258) demonstrates that the caliphate was perceived as an anti-colonial symbol. However, this initiative was suppressed by British forces, and the annexation of Darfur eliminated the last significant Ottoman influence in the region. Despite this, the Ottoman religious and cultural legacy was remembered among the Sudanese people through its understanding of just administration and respect for the Caliph became a symbol intertwined with national consciousness (Vaughan, 2015).

One of the areas where Ottoman influence was most clearly felt throughout Sudan's independence process was the continuity of religious educational institutions. Sudanese scholars, trained in Ottoman madrasahs in the 19th century, assumed both religious and political leadership roles until the mid-20th century. In this context, the institutionalization of Islamic institutions in Sudan during the Ottoman period significantly contributed to the establishment of the idea of a modern state during the period of independence (Kaptein, 1989). The foundation system, established during the Ottoman period, became the primary institution the Sudanese state modeled itself on in terms of organizing social services. The foundations' functions in education, healthcare, and mosque maintenance were

also continued in the social policies of the modern Sudanese government (BOA. C..HR. 138/6882, 10 Dhu al-Hijjah 1274). This represents the transformation of the Ottoman legacy into a post-independence institutional culture.

With Sudan's official declaration of independence in 1956, these social and cultural structures inherited from the Ottoman period formed the cornerstones of the modern state mechanism. The use of administrative terms of Turkish origin, the retention of some elements of legal regulations from the Ottoman period, and the continuation of the madrasa-based approach to education in the education system represent a continuity extending to the period of independence (Beshir, 1982). Mosques, madrasahs, and administrative buildings constructed during the Ottoman period in Sudan became symbols of national identity after independence. The Ottoman monuments in Suakin and Khartoum are not merely architectural relics but also an expression of the Sudanese people's cultural attachment to the Ottoman Empire (Sharkey, 2003).

Contemporary Sudan-Türkiye Relations and the Ottoman Empire's Place in Sudan

The Ottoman Empire's centuries-long legacy in the Red Sea and Nile basins has served as a significant historical legacy and potential diplomatic bridge for the Republic of Türkiye, particularly for Sudan. It is no coincidence that Türkiye was the first country to recognize the new state immediately after Sudan declared its independence in 1956 (Göktaş and Karataş, 2022, p. 27). The political, religious, and cultural ties established during the Ottoman period fostered a

continuing public sympathy. During the years of British colonial rule, intellectuals in Sudan perceived Türkiye as a symbol of independence and resistance, interpreting Atatürk's anti-imperialist struggle as a symbol of honor for the Islamic world. This intellectual affinity, despite the Republic's secular and modernist identity, positioned Türkiye as a cultural brother country in the eyes of the Sudanese people (Yılmaz, 2018, p. 93).

Diplomatic contacts with Sudan, which began in the 1950s, contributed to the revival of the Ottoman legacy in the historical memory of both countries. The administrative traditions and urban culture that developed in Sudanese society during the Ottoman period followed a similar trajectory to the modernization projects of the Republic of Türkiye. This similarity was one of the main reasons for the interest in the Turkish reform model in Sudan. The intellectual circle that developed around the University of Khartoum during this period viewed Türkiye not only as a political model but as the continuation of a historical continuity, holding it up as an example, particularly in matters of modernization, education, and women's rights (Bruce, 1964, pp. 47–50).

The slowdown in Türkiye's African policy in the 1970s can be explained by the influence of global economic conditions. However, relations with Sudan did not cease during this period. The memory of the commercial ties established during the Ottoman period paved the way for the reestablishment of economic relations between the two countries. From the mid-1970s onward, Turkish construction companies operating in Khartoum and Port Sudan were seen in the modern era as heirs to Ottoman-era merchant and artisan communities. During this period, Türkiye began to view Sudan as a gateway to Africa, and the Sudanese government, with its Muslim identity and its aversion to colonialism, perceived Türkiye as a close ally (Tirab, 2022).

In the 1980s, Turgut Özal's foreign policy vision opened a new chapter in Sudan-Türkiye relations. During Özal's tenure, Türkiye adopted a multidimensional foreign policy approach grounded in its historical heritage in its relations with African countries. During this period, economic and technical cooperation agreements were signed with the Khartoum government, and Sudanese students were provided educational opportunities in Türkiye (Adam, 2022, p. 104). These initiatives are seen as a reflection of the education-based relations implemented during the Ottoman period in the Republican era (Özkan, 2011). Considering the presence of scholars and madrasahs, which Evliya Çelebi noted during his travels through Sudanese cities in the 17th century (Çelebi, 1938, pp. 52–55), Türkiye's efforts to re-establish relations through education in this century demonstrate a historical continuity.

By the 1990s, the transformation in the global system opened up a new diplomatic avenue for Türkiye in Africa. With the end of the Cold War, Türkiye viewed Africa not merely as an economic market but as a partnership area where historical and cultural ties could be reestablished. The Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement signed during this period institutionalized the economic ties between the two countries (Türkiye-Sudan Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement, 1982).

The 2000s were a period of true transformation in Türkiye's African policy. Beginning with the declaration of 2005 as the Year of Africa, Türkiye gained observer status in the African Union and deepened its relations with Khartoum. During this period, Sudan became one of Türkiye's strategic partners in Africa. TİKA's projects in Sudan reflect both the symbolic and practical dimensions of cooperation between the two countries. The restoration of Ottoman-era structures on Suakin Island is the most striking example of Türkiye's policy of preserving its historical heritage (Göktaş and Karataş, 2022, pp. 27–28). These restoration efforts were based on plans and documents from Ottoman

archives, thus representing a project grounded in both historical awareness and cultural diplomacy. Furthermore, it is known that the Hanafi-style mosque plans seen in the architecture of Ottoman cities persisted in the interior regions of Sudan, synthesizing with local culture to create a unique identity. Even after Ottoman rule weakened in the late 19th century, these structures were referred to by the local population as “Turkish mosques.” This observation strengthens the historical significance of TİKA’s restoration work in the same region centuries later. (Nour, 2005, p. 152).

In the post-2000 period, Türkiye’s presence in Sudan has become evident not only in the cultural sphere but also in humanitarian aid and education. The Nyala Sudanese-Turkish Training and Research Hospital, opened in 2014, is a concrete demonstration of Türkiye’s transformation of the foundation concept inherited from the Ottoman period into a modern healthcare system. The hospital is not only a medical institution but also a symbol of the “brotherhood” bond between the two countries, as Türkiye’s humanitarian diplomacy strategy expanded in the 21st century with large-scale health infrastructure projects in Africa (Devecioğlu, 2024).

A similar continuity is observed in education. Hundreds of Sudanese students study in Türkiye thanks to scholarships provided by the YTB, and some, upon their return, take up positions in public administration, diplomacy, and education. This situation bears resemblance to the role of judges and professors sent to the region during the Ottoman period. It is noted that the Ottoman administration did not directly oversee religious educational institutions in Sudan, but established scientific ties by sending scholars from Anatolia to these institutions. Today’s scholarship programs can be considered a contemporary form of the same tradition (Anadolu Agency, 2022).

In terms of economic relations, Türkiye’s approach to Sudan represents a model of “equal partnership” rarely seen in post-colonial Africa. Türkiye carries out its development projects not as a means of grants or

loans, but within a framework of cooperation based on mutual benefit and fraternity. This approach is a modern version of the Ottoman policy of patronage in Africa. For the Sudanese people, Türkiye is not a coercive force of the past Ottoman administration, but a representative of a legacy remembered with justice and compassion. (Hazar, 2016, pp. 15-16)

Preserving Ottoman artifacts in Sudan does not merely mean the restoration of historical buildings; it also contributes to the process of rebuilding a shared identity. Sudanese scholars are examining Ottoman-era documents in Turkish archives and, drawing on these documents, contributing to the rewriting of Sudanese history. In other words, while Türkiye revives its past presence through academic collaborations, Sudan is rereading its own history beyond the post-colonial era, incorporating Ottoman memory.

Since the mid-2000s, Türkiye’s policy of opening up to Africa has gained an institutional framework, and the reinterpretation of historical ties has been central to this policy. Sudan emerged as one of the first and strongest links in this process. It is noteworthy that, as the effects of the Arab Spring began to shake North Africa in 2011, the continued stable diplomatic communication between Türkiye and Sudan was significant. This stability was maintained not only at the intergovernmental level but also thanks to the historical closeness between peoples (Devecioğlu, 2017). Sudanese leaders have frequently emphasized that Türkiye has transformed the tradition of justice, foundations, mutual aid, and education inherited from the Ottoman Empire into a model of contemporary development cooperation. This emphasis parallels their assessment of the function of Ottoman cities in Africa; for Ottoman cities were not merely administrative centers but also sites of social solidarity and cultural transmission. This historical definition forms the basis of the discourse Türkiye uses today in its approach to education, healthcare, and cultural heritage projects in Sudan. (Nour, 2005, p. 153).

The institutionalization of the strategic partnership between Türkiye and Sudan has been instrumental in the acceleration of Türkiye-Sudan relations in the post-2010 period. Numerous protocols signed in Khartoum in 2014 have expanded relations between the two countries beyond a purely cultural or economic framework, extending them to areas such as defense, transportation, and energy (Fidan, 2023). However, the strongest legitimacy behind these relations lies in the shared historical consciousness that stems from the Ottoman era. He notes that the Sudanese people's remembrance of the Ottoman Empire as a system of justice serves as a moral foundation in Türkiye's contemporary diplomatic discourse. In this context, the restoration project of Suakin Island has become a symbolic highpoint in relations between the two countries (Yılmaz, 2018, pp. 93–94). Suakin Island served as the heart of Red Sea trade during the Ottoman period and became both the administrative and religious center of the region in the 17th and 18th centuries. In his *Seyahatname* (Travel Book), Evliya Çelebi describes the island as an Islamic city surrounded by domed mosques and adorned with stonework. Today, the island's reconstruction and restoration demonstrate that the Ottoman legacy is not merely an archaeological relic but a diplomatic form of remembrance. With the Suakin project, the Republic of Türkiye fulfilled a historical responsibility while also placing this heritage at the center of its soft power strategy in Africa. During the project, Türkiye recreated original building materials based on archival documents and revitalized administrative buildings and mosques built on the island during the Ottoman period (Haşıl, 2019).

During this period, Türkiye's humanitarian aid and social responsibility projects to Sudan also increased. In particular, following the drought and floods in Sudan in 2017 (Anadolu Agency, 2017), aid efforts coordinated by the Turkish Red Crescent, TİKA, and the Diyanet Foundation were met with great satisfaction by the local population. The Sudanese local press has dubbed these aid efforts the modern tradition of foundations

(Türkiye Diyanet Foundation, 2019). Considering that foundations, madrasahs, and soup kitchens were institutions that strengthened social solidarity in cities like Suakin and Dongola during the Ottoman era, Türkiye's contemporary aid practices are a direct reflection of a historical continuity.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's visit to Khartoum in 2017 represented one of the most intense periods in relations. Twelve agreements signed during this visit envisioned comprehensive cooperation in agriculture, energy, education, and security. During the meetings, it was agreed to restore Suakin Island in accordance with its historical identity, and Türkiye was also granted priority partnership in the modernization of Sudanese ports (Republic of Türkiye MFA, 2017). Immediately following these diplomatic contacts, Türkiye was referred to in the Sudanese press as a friendly country that revived the legacy of the Ottoman Empire, further reinforcing the positive public perception. This diplomatic momentum not only expanded the political and economic dimensions of bilateral relations but also paved the way for deeper cooperation in cultural and religious spheres, where shared historical memory and institutional continuity became more visible (Yılmaz, 2018, p. 93).

A notable aspect of Türkiye-Sudan relations is their shared approach to protecting religious and spiritual heritage. The cooperation agreement signed in 2015 between the Presidency of Religious Affairs and the Sudanese Ministry of Religious Affairs covers mosque restoration, religious education, and scholarly exchange. The intellectual basis of this agreement is based on the tradition of unity between the Ottoman ulema and scholars established with the Islamic world. In this context, recalling how the madrasah networks extending from the Hejaz to Khartoum functioned during the Ottoman period reveals the historical basis for today's cooperation models. (Burckhardt, 1819, pp. 77–79).

Economic relations have expanded in both volume and diversity in the 2020s. Türkiye's investments in Sudan are concentrated in the construction, energy, mining, and agriculture sectors. These investments, unlike the asymmetrical relationships often seen in countries with a colonial past, are based on the principle of mutual benefit. The most striking difference in Türkiye's African policy is the preservation of a moral framework while transforming historical ties into political and economic tools. The activities of Turkish companies in Sudan contribute to the development of local production capacity and increased employment (UNCTAD, 2022).

All these developments demonstrate Türkiye's awareness of the historical continuity in its Sudanese policy. The Ottoman presence in Sudan has become, beyond being a foreign policy legacy for Türkiye, a founding element of its diplomatic identity. Türkiye's approach to Sudan is not a quest to re-establish historical administrative dominance, but rather an effort to carry a shared cultural heritage into the future (Tepeciklioğlu et al., 2024). This can be explained through the concept of the two-way construction of collective memory; This is because both Türkiye is reinterpreting its past and Sudan is re-interpreting its own history within the Ottoman context. This mutual reading of history constitutes an example of cultural depth rarely seen in contemporary international relations (Adam, 2022, pp. 327–329).

In the 21st century, Sudan-Türkiye relations have developed within a multidimensional structure of continuity. Administrative, architectural, linguistic, and cultural traces from the Ottoman period reproduce the ties between the two countries through modern institutions. Here, history is not merely a reminder of the past, but a diplomatic language used in building the future (Voll, 1994). In its relations with Sudan, Türkiye treats the Ottoman legacy not as a tool of superiority, but as the foundation of a common identity; Sudan, on the other hand, embraces this legacy as part of its own historical self-respect. This mutual understand-

ing is a model in which the idea of brotherhood, which has endured throughout history, finds new life in contemporary diplomacy (Wendt, 1999).

Conclusion

The historical foundations of Sudan-Türkiye relations reveal a continuity that extends from the Ottoman period into the present. Ottoman administrative and educational practices, the institutionalization of social welfare through foundations, and the development of urban and linguistic structures in cities such as Khartoum and Suakin formed a cultural framework that persisted beyond the end of formal imperial authority. This legacy, remembered in Sudanese society as a period marked by justice, institutional order, and Islamic unity, later enabled Türkiye to reestablish relations without the post-colonial tensions seen in many African contexts.

In the modern era, this shared memory has evolved into concrete cooperation. Cultural diplomacy, heritage restoration projects, educational exchange programs, humanitarian initiatives, and sector-based economic agreements illustrate how historical familiarity has been transformed into practical diplomacy. Türkiye's investments in Sudan, structured around mutual benefit rather than asymmetrical dependency, demonstrate a contemporary reinterpretation of earlier principles of social responsibility and partnership.

Ultimately, the case of Sudan-Türkiye relations shows how historical experience can operate as a diplomatic asset. The interaction between memory and policy has produced a model distinct from conventional geopolitical approaches in Africa: neither a revival of imperial authority nor a purely strategic engagement, but a partnership grounded in shared heritage and reciprocal interests. In this respect, the Sudan-Türkiye relationship offers a meaningful example of how civilizational continuity can shape foreign policy in the twenty-first century.

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