

# The Wilson Art Gallery & Museum

## Information Sheet



### Shaykh al-Din

These tunics come from the museum's costume collection. Stitched onto one is a label with the words SHAIKH EL-DIN written on it. Who was this man and how did this tunic end up in Cheltenham?

The story starts in 1881 with the rise of the Mahdi, a Muslim leader who united the people of Sudan to overthrow their government which was run by Egyptians and Turks, backed by Britain. In 1885 the Mahdi seized Khartoum and his troops killed the British hero General Charles Gordon.

The troops of the Mahdi, and his successor, the Khalifa, were known as *Ansar*, 'helpers'. They wore a particular type of patched cotton tunic, or *jibbeh*, based on the ragged clothes worn by the Dervishes or *darawish* meaning 'poor men'. It signified their holiness.



Patched cotton tunic, or jibbeh, worn by the Mahdist forces



Sudanese sword or kaskara, used by the Mahdist forces

The fall of Khartoum had given the British a thirst for revenge; by 1898 an Anglo-Egyptian force was advancing on Omdurman to face the Khalifa and his *Ansar*. The battle that took place at Karari was disastrous for the Sudanese who lost about 11,000 troops compared to less than a 100 from the Anglo-Egyptian force. The Khalifa escaped with his son, named 'Uthman Shaykh al-Din, and some of his troops, but he was tracked down by Sir Reginald Wingate. In November 1899 the Khalifa was killed and his son was captured and later died in an Egyptian prison cell.

Most of the Sudanese artefacts in the exhibition were donated by Dr Curling Hayward MBE. In a letter written to the museum in July 1933, he explained that the artefacts came from Wingate, the man who had captured Shaykh al-Din. It seems likely that Wingate had given the *jibbeh*, along with the other artefacts, to Dr Hayward who passed them to the museum in the 1930s. Its significance has only recently been recognised.

To find out more about the collections held by the museum contact:  
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