

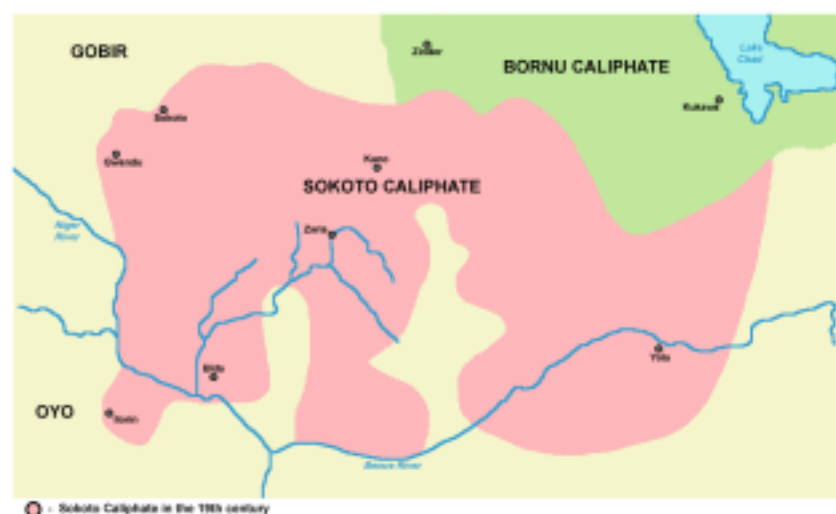
Usman Dan Fodio's Biography

Shaihu Usman dan Fodio (Arabic: عثمان بن فودي ، عثمان دان فوديو), born Usuman bii Foduye, (also referred to as Shaikh Usman Ibn Fodio, Shehu Uthman Dan Fuduye, or Shehu Usman dan Fodio, 1754–1817) was the founder of the Sokoto Caliphate in 1809, a religious teacher, writer and Islamic promoter. Dan Fodio was one of a class of urbanized ethnic Fulani living in the Hausa States in what is today northern Nigeria. A teacher of the Maliki school of law and the Qadiriyyah order of Sufism, he lived in the city-state of Gobir until 1802 when, motivated by his reformist ideas and under increased repression by local authorities, he led his followers into exile. This exile began a political and social revolution which spread from Gobir throughout modern Nigeria and Cameroon, and was echoed in an ethnically Fula-led Jihad movement across West Africa. Dan Fodio declined much of the pomp of rulership, and while developing contacts with religious reformists and Jihad leaders across Africa, he soon passed actual leadership of the Sokoto state to his son, Muhammed Bello.

Dan Fodio wrote more than a hundred books concerning religion, government, culture and society. He developed a critique of existing African Muslim elites for what he saw as their greed, paganism, or violation of the standards of Sharia law, and heavy taxation. He encouraged literacy and scholarship, including for women, and several of his daughters emerged as scholars and writers. His writings and sayings continue to be much quoted today, and is often affectionately referred to as Shehu in Nigeria. Some followers consider dan Fodio to have been a Mujaddid, a divinely inspired “reformer of Islam”.[2]

Dan Fodio's uprising is a major episode of a movement described as the Fulani (Peul) hegemonies in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It followed the jihads successfully waged in Fuuta-Bundu, Fuuta-Jalon and Fuuta-Tooro between 1650 and 1750, which led to the creation of those three Islamic states. In his turn, Shehu inspired a number of later West African jihads, including those of Masina Empire founder

Seku Amadu, Toucouleur Empire founder El Hadj Umar Tall (who married one of dan Fodio's granddaughters), and Adamawa Emirate founder Modibo Adama.



Training

Dan Fodio was well-educated in classical Islamic science, philosophy and theology and became a revered religious thinker. His teacher, Jibril ibn ‘Umar, argued that it was the duty and within the power of religious movements to establish the ideal society free from oppression and vice. His teacher was a North African Muslim alim who gave his apprentice a broader perspective of the Muslim reformist ideas in other parts of the Muslim world. Dan Fodio used his influence to secure approval to create a religious community in his hometown of Degel that would, dan Fodio hoped, be a model town. He stayed there for 20 years, writing, teaching and preaching.

In 1802, the ruler of Gobir and one of dan Fodio's students, Yunfa turned against him, revoking Degel's autonomy and attempting to assassinate dan Fodio. Dan Fodio and his followers fled into the western grasslands of Gudu where they turned for help to the local Fulani nomads. In his book *Tanbih al-ikhwan 'ala ahwal al-Sudan* ("Concerning the Government of Our Country and Neighboring Countries in the Sudan") Usman wrote: "The government of a country is the government of its king without question. If the king is a Muslim, his land is Muslim; if he is an Unbeliever, his land is a land of Unbelievers. In these circumstances it is obligatory for anyone to leave it for another country".[3] Usman did exactly this when he left Gobir in 1802. After that, Yunfa turned for aid to the other leaders of

the Hausa states, warning them that dan Fodio could trigger a widespread jihad.[4]

The Fulani War

Usman dan Fodio was proclaimed Amir al-Muminin or Commander of the Faithful in Gudu. This made him political as well as religious leader, giving him the authority to declare and pursue a jihad, raise an army and become its commander. A widespread uprising began in Hausaland. This uprising was largely composed of the Fulani, who held a powerful military advantage with their cavalry. It was also widely supported by the Hausa peasantry who felt over-taxed and oppressed by their rulers. Usman started the jihad against Gobir in 1804.

The Fulani communication during the war was carried along trade routes and rivers draining to the Niger-Benue valley, as well as the delta and the lagoons. The call for jihad did not only reach other Hausa states such as Kano, Katsina and Zaria but also Borno, Gombe, Adamawa, Nupe and Ilorin. These were all places with major or minor groups of Fulani alims.

After only a few short years of the Fulani War, dan Fodio found himself in command of the largest state in Africa, the Fulani Empire. His son Muhammed Bello and his brother Abdullahi carried out the jihad and took care of the administration. Dan Fodio worked to establish an efficient government grounded in Islamic law. After 1811, Usman retired and continued writing about the righteous conduct of the Muslim belief. After his death in 1817, his son, Muhammed Bello, succeeded him as amir al-mu'minin and became the ruler of the Sokoto Caliphate, which was the biggest state south of the Sahara at that time. Usman's brother Abdullahi was given the title emir of Gwandu, and he was placed in charge of the Western Emirates, Nupe and Ilorin. Thus, all Hausa states, parts of Nupe, Ilorin and Fulani outposts in Bauchi and Adamawa were all ruled by a single politico-religious system. From the time of Usman dan Fodio there were twelve caliphs, until the British conquest at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Religious and Political Impact

Many of the Fulani led by Usman dan Fodio were unhappy that the rulers of the Hausa states were mingling Islam with aspects of the traditional regional religion. Usman created a theocratic state with a stricter interpretation of Islam. In *Tanbih al-ikhwan 'ala ahwal al-Sudan*, he wrote: “As for the sultans, they are undoubtedly unbelievers, even though they may profess the religion of Islam, because they practice polytheistic rituals and turn people away from the path of God and raise the flag of worldly kingdom above the banner of Islam. All this is unbelief according to the consensus of opinions.”[5]

In Islam outside the Arab World, David Westerlund wrote: “The jihad resulted in a federal theocratic state, with extensive autonomy for emirates, recognizing the spiritual authority of the caliph or the sultan of Sokoto.”[6]

Usman addressed in his books what he saw as the flaws and demerits of the African non-Muslim or nominally Muslim rulers. Some of the accusations made by him were corruption on various levels of the administration along with injustice regarding ordinary people’s rights. Usman also criticized the heavy taxation and obstruction created in the business and trade of the Hausa states by the legal system.

Folio of *Iqtibas’l Ilm* of Shaykh Uthman Dan Fodio



“He was the Shaykh of Islam, the most learned among the scholars, the regal erudite, perpetual deliverer, the scholar of humanity, the one who realized the highest stations, Abu Muhammad Sa`d Uthman ibn Muhammad ibn Uthman ibn Salih ibn Harun ibn Muhammad Ghurtu ibn Muhammad Jubbu ibn Muhammad Sanbu ibn Maasiran ibn Ayyub ibn Buba Baba ibn Abu Bakr ibn Musa Jokoli ibn Imam Danbu. He was famous as Dan Fuduye’. He was my father. The protected friends of Allah (al-awliya) foretold of his coming before his appearance... From that is what was related from sound narrators on the authority of Umm Hani al-Fulani, the righteous saintly women when she said: “There will appear in this region of the land of the Blacks, a waliy from among the protected friends of Allah. He will renew the deen, revive the Sunna and establish the religion. The fortunate people will follow him and his remembrance will be spread throughout the horizons. The common people and the elite will obey his commands. Those connected to him will be known as the Jama`aat. Among their signs is that they will not heard cattle, as is the custom of the Fulani. Whoever encounters that time should follow him.” In short, many of the protected friends of Allah recognized him and informed us of his affair even before his appearance and at the time of his appearance as well.

Realize that this shaykh was reared from the time he was young to invite people to Allah. The Shehu said: “As for as the matter of protected friendship with Allah is concerned, for the most that I know about myself is that Allah ta`ala had established me in a spiritual presence which manifested from a divine state, from the time I was a young boy up until the time I reached the age of thirty-one years. I was seized by an instantaneous spiritual magnetic gravitational orbit that emerged from the lights of the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, due to the baraka of sending blessings upon him. I was extracted up until I was in the very presence of the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, which caused me to continuously weep. In that presence I had an intense desire to recite the poem by Abu Sufyan ibn al-Haarith, may Allah be pleased with him, where he eulogized the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace after his death. Then the

Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace ordered me to recite it in his presence, so I began to recite it... When I had recited the poem and reached the point in the poem where I said: ‘And he guided us and now we do not fear misguidance among us, while the Messenger is our guide on the Path’; the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace then said: “Stop there.” So I stopped. He then gave me the good news by his words to me: “I am your guide on the Path of the religion, for you will not go astray.” This good news was better to me than the entire world and what it contained.” Sultan Muhammad Bello

<http://www.siiasi.org/index.html>

Sultan of Sokoto, Amir al-Muminin

Reign

1804-1815

Born

1754

Birthplace

Gobir

Died

1817

Place of death Sokoto

Buried Hubare, Sokoto.[1]

Successor

Eastern areas (Sokoto):

Muhammed Bello, son.

Western areas (Gwandu):

Abdullahi dan Fodio, brother.

Wives

Maimuna

Aisha

Hauwa

Hadiza

Offspring 23 children, including:

Muhammed Bello

Nana Asmau

Abu Bakr Atiku

Dynasty

Sokoto Caliphate

Father

Muhammadu Fodio (Legal and Religious teacher)

Writing

Usman dan Fodio wrote about 480 poems in Arabic, Fulfulde and Hausa.

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4. [^ *The Islamic Slave Revolts of Bahia, Brazil: A Continuity of the 19th Century Jihaad Movements of Western Sudan?*, by Abu Alfa Muhammed Shareef bin Farid, Sankore' Institute of Islamic African Studies, \[www.sankore.org\]\(http://www.sankore.org\).](#)

Also see Lovejoy (2007), below, on this.

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See Also

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Usmanu_Danfodiyo_University

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