Messianic Legitimacy: the case of Ahmadiyya and Mahdiyya Movements

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The Ahmadiyya and Mahdiyya are contemporary Islamic messianic movements emerging in the late nineteenth century during a period of general Muslim discontent. This study aims to see how the respective leaders of these two movements, Ghulam Ahmad and Muhammad Ahmad, sought to legitimize their claims while addressing the problems they perceived to exist in their societies. It is found that the originality and magnitude of Ghulam Ahmad’s messianic message, which aimed to address the claims of Christian missionaries as well as other religious groups by drawing on the example of the prophet Jesus for legitimacy and the abolishment of jihad, made the movement relatively inflexible doctrinally, but with focus on proselytization gained greater global influence. Muhammad Ahmad’s message and practice, by contrast, though highly unorthodox in its treatment of prophetic hadith, emulated to a greater degree the example of Prophet Muhammad, was more humble in its claims, and achieved relatively greater domestic popularity and doctrinal flexibility, paving the way for eventual political power in Sudan.

Anahtar Kelimeler

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More broadly, the Mahdiyya, as Muhammad Ahmad’s movement was called, was influenced by earlier Mahdist movements in West Africa, as well as Wahhabism and other puritanical forms of Islamic revivalism that developed in reaction to the growing military and economic dominance of the European powers throughout the 19th century. From his announcement of the Mahdiyya in June 1881 until the fall of Khartoum in January 1885, Muhammad Ahmad led a successful military campaign against the Turco-Egyptian government of the Sudan (known as the Turkiyah). During this period, many of the theological and in Ahmadiyya belief the terms “Messiah” and “Mahdi” are synonymous terms for one and the same person. Like the term Messiah which, among other meanings, in essence means being anointed by God or appointed by God the term “Mahdi” means guided by God, thus both imply a direct ordination or commissioning and a spiritual nurturing by God of a divinely chosen individual. According to Ahmadiyya thought, Messiahship is a phenomenon, through which a special emphasis is given on the transformation of a people by way of offering suffering for the sake of God instead of givi... Islam, Sectarianism and Politics in Sudan since the Mahdiyya. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003. pp. 30-42.