Part 4:
Case Studies:  Nov. 15-17: “The Sudan: the Mahdi, Egypt and the British”

Nov. 15 ‘Mahdism, Egyptian and British Imperialism’
The Rise of ‘The Mahdi’

“The history of the Mahdi, the Calipha and the Madiyya had enormous influence on British and Western perceptions of Islam as well as… of Sudan itself” [Robinson]

- Sudan Case study has implications for understanding longer-term colonial interactions with African Muslim societies
- today linked to ‘Fundamentalism’ in politicized and racialized terms [ie Darfur
- also key to emergence ‘Mahdist’ movements elsewhere [ie Nigeria, as seen in ‘Sokoto Caliphate’ case study]
So what was ‘Mahdism’?

- no one meaning
- for Shi'a Muslims: ‘the Mahdi’ was infallible leader, guided by special illumination from God
- would illuminate more of deeper meaning of Qu’ran, would go further to establishing ‘perfect law’
- in Shi’a terms, “an ever-living spiritual being who guides in the spiritual path those who ask him”: the last Imam

[see Voll, ‘The Sudanese Mahdi’, Add’l Resources]
The Rise of ‘The Mahdi’

Sunni Muslims:
- attracted to messianic themes but in no way connected to an Imam
- concept, especially among ‘commoners’ developed over time
- Sunni Mahdi believed to be divinely guided, chosen agent for renewal (*mujaddid*)
- greater emphasis upon revivalist aspects of Mahdi's mission: more restoration of past Golden Age (hence ‘fundamental’) than initiation of New Age
- Sunni Mahdi's function: support and restore the community, not transcend or destroy it
  
  [Voll, ‘The Sudanese Mahdi’]

- hence, range of ‘types’ of revolutionary Mahdism referred to in Lovejoy article on Mahdist revolt of 1905-6 [add'l rdgs, ‘Sokoto Caliphate’]
The Rise of ‘The Mahdi’

The Sudan in the 19th century [from Robinson]

- from 7th century, Islamic ‘north’ established trade relations with south
- gradually, influence Islam and Arabic spread upriver
- no deliberate conquest but in many places Christianity weakened
- Nubian language and culture gradually ‘isolated’ from north
- 19th century, region attracted Christian missionaries (as elsewhere in non-Islamic Africa)
- exacerbated differences North and South
Tied into regional, west–east relations by position on pilgrimage route:

- Muslims from Niger, Chad, Mauritania, Nigeria embarked across red sea to Jeddah

‘The Hajj’ through Sudan
Most pilgrims stopped *en route*, many settled upon return:

- whole ‘Shinquit’ (Mauritanian) quarter in Khartoum (for example)
- transplanted pilgrims source of many initial recruits to Mahdism
- most Qadiriyya, like those of Uthman dan Fodio’s family and followers

Turn of century, joined by those fleeing British protectorate who made pilgrimage, then settled in Sudan upon return: referred to as ‘*hijra*’

*reference to them in Lovejoy article on ‘1905-6 Mahdist Revolt, Nigeria*
Same time, in larger Islamic/Ottoman world:

- many new sufi orders developing in opposition to perceived ‘westernization’, secularization Ottoman rule
- centered Mecca/Medina
- spread easily to Sudan (pilgrimage route)
- became attractive to those living in shadow Ottoman Rule through Egypt [more below]

Many localized movements formed in direct rejection of/ contradiction to ‘formal’, ancient, conservative Egyptian Islamic University - al-Azhar in Cairo

‘The Mahdi’ combined learning, charisma, ability to tap into range of local grievances: became leader of one of these orders
The Mahdi: who was he? Why ‘him’? Why at this time?

Muhamed Ahmed:
- son of boat-builder, moved up and down river, studied with various teachers
- joined one of new sufi orders, Sammaniyya
- read about ‘the coming’ (of the Rightly Guided One – the Mahdi) and claimed a ‘connection’
- students (especially Kalipha, close ‘disciple’, *talmidh*) convinced that he was being ‘called’
- used power of visions (sufism) to support legitimacy
- undertook ‘hijra’ with followers (called them *Ansar* like name given prophet’s followers)
'The Sudanese Mahdi'

Photo n.d. (above)

Drawing of imagined Ansar, listening to the ‘Rightly Guided One’ (right)
The Mahdi (like dan Fodio) was not accepting of ‘customs of the country’ that might endure from pre-Islamic, attacked wide range of activities, many of which were ‘cultural’ or economic, as much as religious:

- upset by having been approached by a prostitute in a city: vowed to purify the towns

- said to be why he moved center of devotional life to isolated, rural Aba Island [hijra]

- outraged by 'marriage ceremony' between man and young boy; vigorously protested about it to local officials

- strongly opposed smoking tobacco and drinking alcohol in any form: as punishment commanded smoker receive eighty lashes, seven days in jail
- forbade various forms of music, especially at celebrations, prohibiting the beating of drums or the playing of horns for 'vain amusement

- concerned with correct behavior of women, forbidding them from going into the markets, or being unveiled in public

- insisted women not wear jewelry: suggested punishment that their hair be plucked out if they were caught.

- prohibited lavish expenditure for weddings

- tried to abolish wearing of amulets

- objected to women wailing at funerals

These were all deeply embedded in the popular customs

[Voll, ‘The Sudanese Mahdi’, Add’l Resources]
The Mahdi began to challenge authorities directly:

Robinson quotes 1882 ‘letter’ to Khartoum showing how followers attracted, British/Egyptian authorities provoked:

You say that Our only followers are the ignorant Baqqara [a pastoral group of the Kordofan] and the idolaters. Know then that the followers of the apostles before Us and of our Prophet Muhammad were the weak and the ignorant and the nomads, who worshipped rocks and trees. As for the ulama and the rich and the people of power and luxury, they did not follow them until they had ruined their places, killed their nobles and ruled them by force....And whereas you say, ‘Arise and come to us, that you may go to the place of guidance, Mecca,’ know that Our going is only by the command of the Apostle of God, in the time that God wills. We are not under your command, but you and your superiors are under Our command..., for there is nothing between Us and you save the sword....
Robinson notes references to Prophet Mohamed, similarities to dan Fodio:
- but why was this effective, here and nearly a century later?
- need to understand role of region in Ottoman-Egyptian-British strategy of development

Key here: Muhammed Ali Pasha
- important in ousting Napoleon, assisting Ottomans against Greeks in 1820s: ‘Governor of Egypt’
- large amount of autonomy
- established Khartoum as Upper Nile base, extended influence to interior
- taxation system in place: payment slaves, gold, ivory
- built up army, incorporated slaves into army
- traders became raiders became … uncontrolled: exploitation and violence associated with regime
Mohamed Ali Pasha’s Empire in Africa

Mehmet (Mohamed) Ali (1769 – 1849)
Ismail Pasha

Ismail Pasha:

- Khedive 1863-79
- revitalized grandfather’s empire
- forced by British to end slave trade (not totally successful)
- put more emphasis on trading ivory and gold through former slave-trade network
- direct taxation exploitation farmers, pastoralists, even some of own ‘Turkish’ regime/administrators
- ironically, forced to put British General Gordon in place in Khartoum to create stability – and to ensure that taxes were paid!
Social, Religious Context for ‘Mahdi’-

"My country [Egypt] is no longer in Africa; we are now part of Europe.

It is therefore natural for us to abandon our former ways and to adopt a new system adapted to our social conditions."

(Ismail Pasha, 1879)

Popular ‘rallying cry’ to Mahdist cause:
- ‘Kill the Turks and cease to pay taxes!’

Together: reveal context for success of ‘The Mahdi’
Similarities to/differences from Sokoto Caliphate:

- essentially ‘fundamentalist’ objections to pre- or non-Islamic custom, behaviour; deterioration morals, values similar
- but less accommodating to women’s lack of restrictions in pastoralist society (Baggara in Sudan, Fulani in Nigeria)
- also difference in ‘timing important: late 19\textsuperscript{th} as opposed to late 18\textsuperscript{th} century
- religious became political much more quickly
- activities, accusations, rhetoric directed increasingly against ‘external’ and imperial power structures
- escalated beyond convincing local people they were ‘bad muslims’
Also crucial: Muhamed Ahmed took the title of ‘Mahdi’ (unlike dan Fodio)

Therefore, his actions engaged larger Islamic World:

- Cairo responded with letters: intellectuals from al-Azhar
- not denying the validity of the ‘rightly guided one’ – just denying the authenticity of Muhammed Ahmad’s claims to be that person
  - denied his Sharifan descent
  - denied his claims that Sudanese exploited
Tawfik Pasha

Also drew on: impact Suez canal

- pulled Egypt into debt justifying British/French financial control
- Ismail was deposed
- son Tawfik made Khedive (1879 -92)

Large-scale resentment of British led to 1882 riots in Alexandria:
- several Europeans killed
- British retaliated
- Egyptian army rebelled (1852 – 1892)
Meanwhile, General Gordon sent by Pasha to evacuate troops from Khartoum and other garrisons safely in face of Mahdi uprisings in Upper Nile region

- sought assurance from Mahdi they would not be attacked
- arrogance blinded Gordon to real threat

[Listen to BBC Dramatization
Mahdi – Gordon correspondence
In Add’l Readings]
Mahdi took advantage of uprisings in Egypt:

- attacked Khartoum before reinforcements could help

- 1885 General Gordon killed

['Romantized' depiction of Gordon’s Death]
The Mahdi died soon afterwards (possibly of typhus)

Kalipha Abdullahi (former student, disciple) already named as successor:

- family objects, saying successor must be ‘Sharif’
- Mahdi’s sons challenged Kalipha directly
- then whole region faced drought, famine
- also suffered regenerated attacks by British and Egyptians
- unlike Sokoto Caliphate, no time to consolidate, educate, build state or unify people
Britain seized the Suez Canal and formally ‘occupied’ Egypt 1882:
- end of co-operation with French over Suez

Tawfik continued as ‘titular’ head of state:
in principal still ‘ruled’ by Ottoman Sultan, in fact deferred increasingly to British

Battles against Mahdists in southern regions continued: not always victorious

[Map shows extent of Mahdist control in 1891]
Imperialist Views Battle for Sudan

Rudyard Kipling poem written on occasion of battle Abu Klea (1885):

So 'ere's to you, Fuzzy-Wuzzy,  
  at your 'ome in the Soudan;  
You're a pore benighted 'eathen  
   but a first-class fightin' man;

An' 'ere's to you, Fuzzy-Wuzzy,  
  with your 'ayrick 'ead of 'air  
You big black boundin' beggar  
   for you broke a British square!

Colonial View ‘War in Sudan’

Actual Photos Sudanese Warriors:
Kipling’s ‘Fuzzy-Wuzzies’
Imperialist Views of Battle for Sudan

Men-at-Arms

The Sudan Campaign
1881-98

Robert Wilkinson-Latham • Illustrated by Michael Roffe

The War in the Soudan

Scene 37: War in the Soudan with Terrific Encounters, Assails, Naval Convoys, and Warlike Episods
Queen Victoria’s ‘Sudan Medal’, 1896-97

British continued to move upriver:
- building railway into Upper Nile
- engaging with, defeating Khalipha’s armies at strategic points

“The obverse bears the bust of Queen Victoria and the legend 'VICTORIA REGINA ET IMPERATRIX'. The reverse has the winged figure of Victory seated with her arms outstretched holding a palm branch in her left hand and a laurel wreath in her right. In the background are the Royal Standards and below her feet is the word 'SUDAN'.

[http://www.acepilots.com/medals/brit-victorian2.html]
Capture of Omdurman

1898: British General Kitchener captured Kalipha’s capital Omdurman
1899: Kalipha’s armies attempted to re-take town
- Kalipha killed

British established joint administration with Egypt – ‘The Condominium’:
- Arab-Muslim north
- distinct from Nubian/pagan (and increasingly, Christian) south

‘Arab’ view of the Condominium: ‘Orientalism’ not limited to the West!