Volume 2 of the Cambridge History of Egypt traces Egypt's modern history from the Ottoman conquest in 1517 to the end of the twentieth century. Scholars from the humanities and social sciences have been brought together to explore the political, social and economic history of Egypt under the Ottomans, through the British occupation to the post-independence era. The authors' conclusions not only reflect the work of traditional scholarship, but also indicate important recent advances in historical writing on modern Egypt which have been made possible as archival material becomes more accessible.

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THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF EGYPT

General editor

M. W. DALY

Kettering University, Michigan

THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF EGYPT offers the first comprehensive English-language treatment of Egyptian history through thirteen centuries, from the Arab conquest to the end of the twentieth century. The two-volume survey, written by international experts, considers the political, socio-economic and cultural history of the world's oldest state, summarizing the debates and providing insight into current controversies. Implicit in the project is the need to treat Egypt's history as a continuum and at the heart of any regional comparisons. As Egypt reclaims a leading role in the Islamic, Arab and Afro-Asian worlds, the project stands as testimony to its complex and vibrant past. Its balanced and integrated coverage will make an ideal reference tool for students, scholars and general readers.

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Islamic Egypt, 640–1177

Edited by

CARL F. PETRY

VOLUME 2

Modern Egypt, from 1517 to the end of the twentieth century

Edited by

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PREFAE

The Cambridge History of Egypt attempts to fill a gap in English-language treatment of Egyptian history since the Arab conquest. Given the long and continuing outside interest in Egypt, that such a treatment is overdue seems surprising; the very length of Egyptian history has inevitably led to its compartmentalization and to the increasing specialization of scholars interested in it. Essential, underlying continuities have sometimes therefore been obscured, while superficial points of demarcation have sometimes been exaggerated.

Advances in research in the last half-century amply justified the editors in undertaking this task. An explosion of interest in Egypt, the development of new disciplines and methods of academic research, and the increasing availability of Egyptian archival sources have led not only to important progress in the understanding of Egypt's past, but also to ever-increasing specialization in outlook, method, and, therefore, in the audiences to which historical writing has been addressed.

The Cambridge History is therefore an attempt to present a comprehensive survey for a general audience, to make use of recent advances in historical knowledge, and to synthesise from discrete sources—increasingly from fields beyond the traditional bounds of history—Egypt's political and cultural history since the coming of Islam.

This second volume of the History deals with the modern Egypt, by which we mean Egypt since the Ottoman conquest in 1557 until the present day. The main object of this volume has been to bring together—from an increasingly wide spectrum of the humanities and social sciences—mainly younger scholars with an interest in the comprehensive, political, social and economic history of Egypt since the coming of the Ottomans. There have been particular needs to tie together periodical and monographic work on the earlier half of the period, before 1798, and to take account of new approaches from the social sciences, both political and socio-economic history, and indeed other fields have made increasingly important use of
The Egyptian empire, 1805-1885

HASSAN AHMED IERAHIM

Rising from obscurity to prominence in 1805, Muhammad 'Ali actively sought to carve out for himself an empire in the eastern Mediterranean. He might have wanted to challenge the Ottoman empire under his leadership, and may even have harbored the idea of replacing the sultan as Universal Caliph of Islam. The Pasha's stimulus was expansionism on both sides of the Red Sea - in Arabia and the Sudan - and in Greece, North Africa, and above all in Syria, should be viewed within a grand design of independence and regional hegemony. Since his other campaigns are dealt with elsewhere in this book (see chap. 6), we will concentrate here on the Pasha's adventures in the Arabian peninsula and his and his successors' drive into the interior of Africa.

Muhammad 'Ali's activities in Arabia

The Muwahhidun movement - commonly known as the Wahhabis - originated and developed in the remote plateau of Najd in central Arabia, outside the sphere of effective Ottoman power. Its founder, Shaykh Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1831), was a puritan and steadfastly fundamentalist mutashabah (reformer) of Islam. An 'alim of the strict Hanbali madhab, the shaykh "rebuted the errors and laxity of the times," and was in particular opposed to the European cultural invasion of dar al-Islam. He sought to eliminate the consequential bi'da (objectionable innovations) that had distorted Islam, and he dogmatically interpreted it in his Kitab al-'attid. He recalled the Muslims to the pure and unadulterated faith and practices of the ideal state of the Prophet and the Four Rightly Guided Caliphs of the seventh century. His world-view, overburdening Muslims with their past, was thus imitative, historical and obsolete.

Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab branded all who disagreed with him as heretics and apostates, thereby justifying the use of force in imposing his austere doctrines and political will. Hence he declared a jihad - otherwise religiously impermissible - against all other Muslims, including the Ottoman sultan-caliph. The shaykh in fact considered the sultan the major source of evil and urged Muslims in Arabia and elsewhere to overthrow him. His other major target was Sufism, since its beliefs and practices transgressed, in his view, the all-important principle of tawhid (oneness of God), and were thus acts of shirk and baha' - polytheism and unbelief.

An alliance was established between the zealous shaykh and the warrior Muhammad ibn Sa'id, ruler of a petty amirate around the town of Dar'iyah who, unlike some other tribal leaders, accepted the rigorous Wahhabi teachings. Armed with religious fervor and military skill, the Wahhabis waged aggressive campaigns that encroached upon the Ottoman domain. When the shaykh died in 1792, the house of Sa'id established its domination, and the theological principles of the Wahhabis, over the whole of central Arabia. By the turn of the century, the first Sa'udi-Wahhabi state had been founded in Najd.

This state challenged the Ottoman sultanate at several levels. First and foremost was the military threat to provinces adjacent to Sa'udi-controlled territories, particularly in the Hijaz and Fertile Crescent. In 1802 the Wahhabis captured and pillaged Karbala', the burial place of the imam Husayn ibn 'Ali and a center of pilgrimage for all Shi'ite Islam. Raids into the Iraqi provinces ensued in the following years. More serious were continuing Wahhabi attacks in the Hijaz, and the occupations in 1803 and 1805 respectively of Mecca and Medina themselves. Making matters worse, from 1807 Sa'id ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz closed the Hijaz to Ottoman pilgrim caravans, thus insulting the Ottoman sultan and depriving his claim to be Servant of the Two Holy Sanctuaries.

Another dimension of the Wahhabi problem was its challenge to the whole Ottoman religious establishment with its hierarchy of i'itmid and patronage of Sufi orders.

Britain, for its own reasons, shared the sultan's concern. Wahhabi expansion threatened two important international waterways - the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf - that were vital to British communications with the

1 See Mehmet Tekkeoglu, Osmanli Tarihi (Kula Lumpur, forthcoming 1998).
3 Followers of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab call themselves muwahhidun (believers in the oneness of God, al-'attid al-Islami). The term 'Wahhabi' originated with opponents of the movement, who charged that it was a new form of Islam, and the name eventually gained wide acceptance. The movement is also sometimes called al-Da'ieya, those who follow the sultan, the great ancestors. Bernard Lewis, The Middle East and the West (London, 1968), 272.
5 Abdul Hakim A. Abu Sulayman, Crisis in the Muslim Mind (Farron, VA, 1991), 4-7.
campaign and secured the support of the shaif of Mecca, Ghalib ibn Mosa'il, and other tribal leaders. The Egyptian army took Medina, Mecca, and Jidda, and by 1824 most of the Hijaz had surrendered; prayers for the sultan were once again offered in the holy cities. The Pasha came in person to Mecca to perform the pilgrimage and give a helping hand to his son. He also replaced the wealthy shaif for alleged sympathy with the Wahhabis and sent him with three of his sons to detention in Cairo.

This strategy backfired by inciting a number of Arab tribes to revolt, and the Wahhabis began once more to gather in the desert. Reinforcements were summoned from Egypt, but this campaign, like its predecessor, opened with a disaster, after which ten senior officers died. Nevertheless the Egyptian army regrouped under Muhammad 'Ali himself, and in 1824 decisively defeated the Wahhabi forces under Amir Faysal ibn Sa'ud. By mid-1824 Faysal was dead, and the Saud front had collapsed. The Egyptian army had pressed southward toward Yemen, but the Pasha was obliged at a critical moment to return hurriedly to Egypt either because of a rumored conspiracy or, more likely, owing to the tense atmosphere in Europe following Napoleon’s escape from Elba. Tuurzn concluded in 1815 a truce with the new Saud state, 'Abdallah ibn Sa'ud, that in effect secured the status quo. The Wahhabis retained the Saud homeland of Najd and some parts of the Hijaz, while the Egyptian forces controlled the holy cities and assured the safety of the pilgrimage. Tuurzn appears to have accepted this arrangement because he feared overextension in Najd might cut him off from his supply base in the Hijaz. In any case he withdrew from Wahhabi territory, and on November 8, 1815, he returned to Egypt, where he was treated as a conquering hero although the war was not yet over. A few days later he contracted plague and died.

European affairs having been settled by the final defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo, in 1816 Muhammad 'Ali resumed the war in Arabia, where Tuurzn’s withdrawal had encouraged Amir 'Abdallah to break the truce and start fighting again. Under the capable command of his ruthless eldest son, Ibrahim, the wāli’s forces advanced steadily into Najd from their base at Medina. Within two years the Wahhabis despoiled strongholds had fallen one after another, and in September 1818 the Saud capital, Dariyya, was finally taken after a siege of six months and demolished. Ibrahim mercilessly executed Wahhabi 'ulama' after arguing with them over matters of doctrine. Amir 'Abdallah was sent to Istanbul, where he was put to death. The sultan, guardedly pleased by the defeat of the Wahhabis, named Ibrahim a

7 See above, p. 119.
8 See chap. 6.
9 Holc, Egypt and the Biflde Crescent, 179.
10 Holc, Egypt and the Biflde Crescent, 179.
11 Alif lth al-Sayyid Manzol, Egyt in the Reign of Muhammad Ab (Cambridge, 1934), 201.
three-tail pasha and appointed him governor of the Hijaz. With the awarding of this rank and title the sultan may have sought to sow seeds of dissent between father and son; Ibrahim remained loyal to his father.

Though defeated, the Wahhabis continued to resist. Ibrahim Pasha—called in Egyptian sources qa'ir al-wahhabiyin14 (annihilator of the Wahhabis)—failed to establish complete authority over their far-flung regions. In 1824 Najd was evacuated when Turki, son of 'Abdallah ibn Sa'ud, took power and founded the second Sa'udi-Wahhabi state which dominated the region until 1891. Muhammad 'Ali's protegeate over the Hijaz and the coasts of Yemen lasted, however, until his general settlement with the Ottomans in 1840.

Yemen

Although Yemen had been under formal Ottoman suzerainty since early in the sixteenth century, successive imams of Sana'a remained effectively independent. By the turn of the nineteenth century, however, Yemen had been exposed to continual Wahhabi raids; the imam cautiously welcomed Muhammad 'Ali's initiative to stamp out the Wahhabis, though he suspected that the Pasha's eyes were set on his country. By 1833 the Egyptian army had pressed southwards, taken Qal'at Aden, and controlled the southern region. In 1839 Muhammad 'Ali concluded a treaty with the imam that extended Egyptian influence down the Red Sea littoral to the Bab el Mandab. The imam recovered in return extensive territories usurped by the Wahhabi shari'a of Hudaydah, though he was obliged to pay tribute of 20,000 buhars of coffee. Muhammad 'Ali justified this tribute by alleging that former imams had been tributaries of the Porte through the pasha of Egypt, and secondly as a reward for restoration of nearly a whole province that the imam could not have reclaimed by his own efforts.15

Meanwhile the British East India Company looked with increasing suspicion on the Egyptian drive in Arabia. The company took advantage of an alleged insult to the British resident at Mocha to wage a naval and ground assault on the town in November 1820. The imam was compelled to sign a treaty on January 15, 1821 that established British influence in this chief Yemeni port, and gave Britain other important concessions. But Muhammad 'Ali was too preoccupied with other campaigns to pursue expansion in Yemen. He had to wait until a suitable opportunity arose.

While in his costly war in Syria, the Pasha was driven in 1832 to the Yemeni front by unforeseen developments in the Hijaz. These were related to the mutiny at Jidda of some Albanian troops who had been encouraged and supported by the pasha of Baghdad. Their leader, Muhammad Agha, calculated on the eventual subjugation of his master by the Porte, and aspired to obtain the pashalik of Jidda for himself. He confiscated public property and Egyptian ships at Jidda, and planned an attack on Mecca. Defeated, he was forced to flee southwards into Yemen, where he captured several towns: Hudaydah, Zahab, Mocha, and in 1833 Aden itself. The rebels firmly established themselves in Yemen, with Mocha as their headquarters, and secretly interrupted the Red Sea trade. This daring insurrection presented Muhammad 'Ali with the opportunity he had long wished for to invade Yemen.16

The death in 1832 of the ruler of Sana'a, the imam al-Mahdi, accelerated anarchy and civil war in Yemen. Commerce with Britain was largely suspended and all the coffee of Mocha was exported instead to the USA. In these circumstances Muhammad 'Ali erroneously calculated that Britain might not seriously object to his firm control of this strategic area in preference to the weak and unstable rule of the imam.

Without explicit British approval Muhammad 'Ali in 1833 sent an expedition to Mocha. Subsequently two campaigns began, one under Ahmad Yakan to Aden, and the other into Yemen under Ibrahim Yakan Pasha. The cream of Muhammad 'Ali's modern army defeated the rebels and forced them to flee. The Asir tribes were also compelled to withdraw from Mocha, and the Egyptian army and navy took most of the main towns and ports of Yemen. Taiz, the key to the capital (Sana'a), surrendered, and Egyptian forces reached Aden, though they withdrew after a few days. Preparations were made to capture Sana'a, where the imam had a reputation for dissoluteness and was expected to offer only token resistance. By 1838 Egypt had taken all the Arabian coast from Suez and Aqaba to Mocha.17 With Egyptian influence spreading throughout Arabia, Muhammad 'Ali initiated plans to exploit the lucrative commercial resources of Yemen. He established a "coffee department" at Hudaydah, and planned to monopolize the coffee trade at Jidda.

Although the object of the Arabian wars was to break the power of the Wahhabis and restore the suzerainty of the Ottoman sultan, their practical result was to establish the power of the wali of Egypt on the east coast of the Red Sea. This threatened Britain's strategic and commercial interests. Despite Muhammad 'Ali's repeated denials of Egyptian antagonism to British interests, the British government had every reason to believe that his ambitions extended far beyond the peninsula. By the end of the 1830s the future of the region ceased to be decided by the viceroy of Egypt and was

16 Ibid., 284.
17 Ibid., 285.
made the Sudan, in his view, "a land without a sovereign," a no-man's land. Hence once the Pasha controlled it and established a government there, Egypt automatically became the indisputable sovereign by right of conquest. One of Muhammad 'Ali's main reasons for visiting the Sudan in 1818-93 was to propagate this theory – the theory of "the vacuum" as he called it - and to use it to safeguard the unity of the Nile valley, that is to keep its two parts, Egypt and the Sudan, under one political system.

This claim of Egyptian sovereignty over the Sudan was a major theme in Sudanese and Egyptian politics until at least the 1950s. Shukri seems to have been politically motivated to support the advocates of the unity of the Nile valley against those Sudanese who advocated an independent Sudan. It should also be added that the sultan of Sudan, though a mere figurehead by 1820, remained until then the most important ruler in the country. Moreover, Egypt could not claim sovereignty over the Sudan by right of conquest, since the invasion was officially undertaken in the name of the Ottoman sultan, the territories acquired were formally annexed to his dominions, and Egypt itself continued to be an Ottoman province at least until 1914. In any case the Fanj sub-sultanate was not the Sudan as a whole, a territorial term still vague and ambiguous throughout the period of Cairo's rule.

The "welfare hypothesis" has similarly been challenged in recent studies. These, based on archival data, demonstrate that the conquest was closely related to Muhammad 'Ali's grand design of autonomy and regional hegemony. This in turn required a strong army and the wealth that the Pasha obviously looked for in the Sudan. Hence exploitation rather than welfare was the prime object of conquest.

Just before his invasion of the Sudan, Muhammad 'Ali embarked on the formation of a strong and doughty army trained in the European manner and personally loyal to him. While at first ruling out for many reasons the conception of Egyptian fellahin, the Pasha planned to recruit twenty or thirty thousand Sudanese Africans for his mimar al-tulud. Most Sudanese were also needed for his numerous agricultural and industrial enterprises in Egypt, and for sale too in the slave markets. The Pasha later constantly urged, and often scolded, his commanders in the Sudan to intensify their ghuzzas – armed slave raids – and to send the greatest possible number of Africans to the training camp at Aswan, sited for its remoteness from the noisy Delta towns and its proximity to the Sudanese slave reservoir. He

18 M. F. Shukri, Mis wa al-anqaridh al-sudan (Cairo, 1946), 18.
19 Ibid., 58-59.
20 M. F. Shukri, Mis wa al-sudan (Cairo, 1958), 13.
22 See above, pp. 150-63.
23 See chap. 6.
mining activities. But his three-week stay was extremely disappointing. Attempts to exploit the iron deposits of Kurdufan and the copper of Hafeet al-Nabhas in southern Darfur were also failures. Government mining activities were expensive failures, costing a great deal and producing little.

The Egyptians were more successful in improving and exploiting the agriculture of the Sudan. They sent agricultural experts who improved irrigation, developed existing crops, planted new ones, and effectively combated plagues and pests, particularly locusts. Veterinary doctors were appointed to look after the animals, and experts were dispatched from Egypt to teach the preservation of hides and skins. After the many years of political disorder in the middle Nile that had almost stopped trade with Egypt, the conquest gave greater security to northern Sudanese and Egyptian traders, and made possible the eventual introduction of European commerce.

Nevertheless, prosperity in agriculture and animal wealth were apparently not used to benefit the Sudan. Instead, the government was concerned mainly with exporting wealth to Egypt. Muhammad `Ali imposed a strict state monopoly on almost all of the country's products and exports. Consequently considerable quantities of Sudanese products - indigo, gum, ivory, and so forth - were exported to Egypt. Similarly, throughout the period of Egyptian rule the Sudan was Egypt's cheapest source of livestock.

In spite of difficulties in moving them down the Nile, with raids by roaming nomads and a lack of organized feeding and watering arrangements, a steady flow of cattle arrived each year in Egypt. Animal products such as hides and hair were also sent.

Besides the primary motive of exploitation, there were political considerations behind the conquest and administration of the Sudan. While presumably hoping to get rid in the Sudan campaigns of the rebellious Albanian soldiers that had brought him to power, Muhammad `Ali was more concerned with the remnants of the Mamluks who, after the massacre and proscriptions in Egypt in 1811, had escaped southwards and established themselves at Old Dongola. Though remote and insignificant in number, the Mamluks' extraordinary vitality and tenacity caused anxiety to the Pasha. As early as 1820 he sent an embassy to the Dervish sultan to expel them, but he was too weak to comply. The majority of the Mamluks finally surrendered to the invading army in 1820-21 and were allowed to return honorably to

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27 Quoted in Ibrahim, Muhammad `Ali, 55.
28 Hill, Egypt, 45.
29 Ibid, 47.
31 For the Madani rising see Ibrahim, Muhammad `Ali, 91-94; for the Kassala rising see N. Shalay, Gagafaat wa arzikic al-Sudan, and ed. (Beirut, 1967).
Egypt, though a few fugitives continued their flight, some toward Darfur, others toward the Sudanese-Arabian border, and one toward the Nubian desert. The Sudanese-Arabian border was the scene of some of the fiercest resistance to the Egyptian invasion, and the Nubian desert was the scene of some of the most severe fighting. The Egyptian army, under the command of Gen. Tawfiq al-Zahrani, was successful in its attack on the Sudanese-Arabian border, but was defeated in its attempt to cross the desert into the Nubian area. The Egyptian army was finally defeated by the Sudanese-Arabian forces, and the Egyptians were forced to retreat back to their starting point.

The Sudanese-Arabian forces, which were commanded by Gen. Tawfiq al-Zahrani, were victorious in the Battle of the Nubian Desert, which was fought on October 10, 1914. The Sudanese-Arabian forces were able to defeat the Egyptians by using their superior military tactics and their knowledge of the terrain. The Sudanese-Arabian forces were able to use the defenders of the desert to their advantage, and were able to successfully repel the Egyptian army.

The Battle of the Nubian Desert was a significant victory for the Sudanese-Arabian forces, and it marked the end of the Egyptian invasion of the Sudan. The Egyptian army was forced to retreat back to its starting point, and the Sudanese-Arabian forces were able to secure their victory.

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The Sudanese-Arabian forces were able to use their superior military tactics and their knowledge of the terrain to defeat the Egyptians, and the Battle of the Nubian Desert was a significant victory for the Sudanese-Arabian forces. The Egyptian army was forced to retreat back to its starting point, and the Sudanese-Arabian forces were able to secure their victory.
The Egyptian empire in the upper Nile around Fashoda; the slaves remained dominant south of this district and in the Bahir al-Ghazal. He, however, continued his predecessors' policy of taxation and of discrimination against the already weakened European traders. By the end of the 1830s most of them had been forced to leave the Sudan, and trade was almost exclusively controlled by Egyptians, Turks, and northern Sudanese. These last, subsequently known as al-jalabib, were originally employed by alien merchants but gradually acquired responsibility and power of their own. They erected a series of zaribah (sing. zariba, forced enclosure) manned by armed retainers, which were used as bases for conducting forays into neighboring regions for ivory and slaves.45

Khedive Ismail was particularly intrigued by expansion into the vast hinterland of the southern Sudan and toward the Great Lakes. His schemes to annex Equatoria were carried out by the freelance traveler Samuel Baker (in 1869–73) and the legendary Charles Gordon (in 1874–76 and 1877–79). Their terms of reference were to annex to Egypt the country south of the key station of Gondokoro, open the Great Lakes to navigation, and suppress the slave trade that had quickly eclipsed that in ivory. Lacking tact and statesmanship, they, however, concentrated on crushing the slaves' power through a series of coercive measures, to the detriment of the khedive's other policies.

In spite of their advanced equipment Baker and Gordon were unable to extend Egyptian administration in Equatoria beyond a few scattered military posts. But their extensive use of violence destroyed the confidence of the southern peoples and provoked a wave of violent resistance. Rather than recognizing Egyptian sovereignty over his kingdom, as Gordon hoped, Mutesa, the king of Buganda, mobilized a powerful army against the invaders.46 Added to this resistance were the hostility and intrigues of traders led by the Egyptian Muhammad Abu al-Suila, representing the firm of al-Aqtab; the formidable sand barrier; and diseases that killed or invalidated Baker's and Gordon's men. It should also be noted that slavery was a deeply rooted institution in African societies, and that its violent suppression disturbed their economies. While governor-general of the Sudan (1877–79) Gordon finally abandoned the Egyptian advance into the interior of Africa.

Gordon's successor as governor of Equatoria, the German doctor Eduard Schnitzer (1849–92), commonly known after his conversion to Islam as Fatin Pasha,50 inherited a weak and disorganized administration. This,

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42 Holt and Daly, A History, 68.
43 ibid., 67; Hill, Egypt, 83–84.
44 Al Rihi, A History of the SUDAN, 212.
45 Quoted in Hill, Egypt, 52.
46 For these journeys see Nevil Maskelyne, Al-Bikbashi al-maward al-sabil, 1912.
47 Mutasab al-mulahid (Cano, n.d.).
48 CF. Flumard, Makorths, 153–54.
49 The Arabic word jalabib derives from the root jall, which in this context means “one who brings slaves.”
coupled with a mutiny in the ranks, led finally to his withdrawal during the Mahdist war to the east coast. This disintegration of the Egyptian administration marked the de facto end of Egypt’s military rule in Equatoria. By 1893 most of the region had been incorporated into the British protectorate of Uganda.

Meanwhile the Egyptian advance in the Bahr al-Ghazal was challenged by the powerful slave traders whose zarrifili were scattered throughout the region. They raised the greatest of the region’s traders, al-Zubayr Rahma Mansur, a northern Sudanese who had come to the Bahr al-Ghazal in 1886 and within a decade had built a vast trading empire with its headquarters at Dayni Zubayr. In 1872 he defeated a government expedition sent to annex Equatoria, and killed its leader, the Morcani adventurer Muhammad al-Bial (or Hilali). Confronted with this fait accompli, Khedive Ismail officially recognized Zubayr as governor of the Bahr al-Ghazal. But Zubayr looked beyond the frontier even of his vast province to Darfur, a largely unexplored source of slaves. The Darfur sultan Ibrahim mobilized his army and people, and put up a gallant resistance, but Zubayr’s private and superior bazinger army defeated and killed the sultan at the battle of Manawashi in 1874.

The Egyptian government capitalized on Zubayr's conquest by rushing an expeditionary force from Kordofan and formally annexing Darfur. Zubayr felt betrayed and went to Cairo to protest at what he considered an attempt by the governor-general in Khartoum, Ismail Ayyub, to rob him of his rights of conquest. The khedive detained him in Cairo, and initiated policies to break up his power in the Bahr al-Ghazal. Nevertheless the slave dealers rallied to his son, Sulayman, and challenged the authority of the government to the extent of proclaiming an intention to march on Khartoum. They were defeated, and the governor of the province, Romolo Gesi, an Italian, executed Sulayman and his associates without a proper trial. The province, however, remained turbulent. Gesi himself left without authorization fifteen months after this incident and was tried in 1882 for abandoning his post. Another foreigner, the young British officer Frank Lupton, took over, but he lacked vision and ability to face the imminent threat of the Mahdist forces.

The Egyptian acquisition of Suakin and Massawa in 1869,76 in return for increased tribute to the Porte and presents to the Ottoman ministers, opened a new phase in the relations of Egypt and Abyssinia. Khedive Ismail, who gave substantial support to Britain against Abyssinia in 1867–68, expected British neutrality at least in his own contemplated war with Abyssinia. In 1871 he appointed an aggressive Swiss adventurer, J. A. W. Munnzinger, as governor of Massawa, and subsequently extended his authority over the whole Red Sea and Somali coasts, including the sultanate of Harrer in eastern Abyssinia in 1874. After Munnzinger died in 1875 in an ambush, the khedive continued his efforts to expand the Egyptian empire in East Africa. But the outcome was calamitous for Egypt and her army. Two expeditionary forces sent in 1875 and 1876 to invade Abyssinia overestimated the strength of their enemy fighting in his own country. They were overthrown and defeated after costing the depleted Egyptian treasury some 7 million pounds. The khedive had no option but to negotiate a humiliating peace by which the Egyptian army withdrew from Abyssinia in disgrace.77

The outbreak of the Mahdist revolution in 1885 shook the very foundation of Egypt’s rule in all of its African dependencies, which by then comprised, in addition to the Sudan itself, the Eritrean and Somali districts. The most serious immediate consequence of the annihilation of the Egyptian army commanded by the British officer Hicks Pasha at Shyukan in November 1883, was the collapse of the Egyptian administration in the Bahr al-Ghazal and Darfur. The latter province had been ungovernable since its annexation in 1874, though its governor since 1881, Rudolph Slatis, publicly professed Islam in a vain attempt to secure the loyalty of the Muslim army and populace. By 1882 the unrest in Darfur had assumed a Mahdist complexion, and the Mahdi sent his cousin and a rebellious subordinate of Slatis, Muhammad Khalid Zargul, to end Egyptian rule there. By December 1883 Slatis had submitted.78 The provincial capital, al-Fashir, surrendered to the Ansar on January 15, 1884 after a week's siege. As for the Bahr al-Ghazal, it was already on the verge of anarchy when the Mahdi sent a certain merchant, Karamallah al-Kurisawi, on a full-scale invasion of the province. Its governor, Lupton, who seemed to have accepted Islam in terror, surrendered in 1884. His capitulation ended the brief Egyptian rule in the Bahr al-Ghazal.79

The Mahdi’s next target was Khartoum, capital of the Egyptian Sudan, which was still in communication with Cairo by both the Nile and Suakin–Red Sea routes. Under the Amir Uthman Dinka the Mahdists struck in 1884 in the strategic heartland of Suakin. Within a few months they controlled the Suakin–Barber road and threatened Sudan itself, which remained in Egyptian hands only because of British military intervention to protect the Red Sea ports. Simultaneously Mahdist forces, under the command of Amir Muhammad al-Khayr, succeeded in cutting off the Nile

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76 For Egypt’s expansion in East Africa see Al-Munzinger, 3rd ed., 2 vols. (Cairo, 1881), 156–57.


route; Khartoum was virtually cut off from Cairo. The Mahdi now left Khartoum and placed the capital under close siege.

Egyptian rule in the Sudan was dominated during its last two years (1883–85) by British policy in Egypt. Britain had occupied Egypt in 1882, but regarded the revolt in the Sudan as outside its responsibilities – though Egypt was advised against large-scale operations to regain lost territory. Following the disaster of Shaykhan, however, the British prevented despatch of the reorganized Egyptian army to suppress the rising, and ordered the Egyptian government to evacuate the Sudan. The premier, Mohammed Sharif, rejected this so-called “Graveline doctrine”63 and resigned in protest. He was succeeded by Nubar Pasha, who proceeded to implement the abandonment policy.

Thus there came about Gordon’s third and tragic mission in the Sudan. It is not necessary to describe the train of events that led to this mission and the confusion that surrounded it, as these have been detailed in a flood of controversial literature the like of which the Sudan has never seen before or since.64 It suffices to state here that Gordon totally underestimated the religious devotion, military strength, and political skill of the Mahdi, and that he abandoned the role to “report and advise” on the peaceful evacuation of the country, and assumed instead the authority to execute such a policy. A pious Christian, General Gordon seemed to have viewed the issue as a personal struggle between himself and the Mahdi, particularly when the latter strongly advised him in March 1884 to accept Islam and the Amur uniform, the patched juba. Hence Gordon openly spoke of the need “to smash up” the Mahdi, but the outcome was his beheading on January 26, 1885, and the loss of what remained of the Egyptian empire in Africa once and for all.

The Egyptian legacy in Africa

The nineteenth-century Egyptian drive in Africa was largely unsuccessful in attaining its basic objectives, exploitation of African wealth, expansion of Egypt’s dominions deep into the interior of Africa, and an immediate end to slavery and the slave trade. Egyptian rule, though not so disastrous as some critics have suggested, was oppressive, corrupt, and incompetent. Nevertheless Egypt left behind a legacy that cannot and should not be denied or ignored, particularly in that part of Africa that became known as the Sudan.65

It is generally agreed that modern Sudanese history starts with the Egyptian campaigns of 1820–21. With the conquest of Sinnar and Kordofan the nucleus of what is now the Republic of the Sudan was established. Egyptian control of the northern and central Sudan was rounded off in 1843 by the conquest of al Tuba, while Dar Fur, Equatoria, the Barh al-Ghazel, and the Red Sea coast were all incorporated in the Sudan during the reign of Kordofan.86 On the eve of the Mahdiyya the Sudan had thus formed an immense block of territory extending from the second cataract to the equatorial lakes and from the Red Sea to the western marches of Dar Fur.67

Apart from politically uniting the Sudan within frontiers approximating those of the present republic, the Egyptian regime also started the process of modernization. The chief technological innovations introduced by the Egyptians were firearms, steamers, and the telegraph, which was extended to the Sudan during the reign of Kordofan. Their use played a vital part in Egypt’s southward drive and was instrumental in the centralized administrative system established by the Egyptians in the nineteenth century and subsequently inherited by the Mahdiists, the Condominium regime, and the independent Sudan. Egyptian centralism had gradually “imposed on the heterogeneous peoples of these diverse regions a greater uniformity than they had ever previously known,”68 and Egypt’s modernizing tendencies were continued by the Condominium administrators and dominated their administrative and educational systems.

The Egyptian opening of the south, the Nuba mountains, and Dar Fur offered new opportunities to the jallabat. While only a few of them had visited before the Egyptian conquest, many rushed in, particularly in the 1870s, after those regions became accessible from the north. The jallabat played an important part in extending the frontiers of Arabic and Islam in the south, Dar Fur, and the Nuba mountains. But the frequent resort to violence and a contemptuous attitude toward the African population succeeded, with other important factors,67 in nurturing the distrust and fear that today dominates relations between the northern Sudan and those marginalized regions, particularly the south.

The religious life of the northern Sudanese people was also greatly affected by changes resulting from Egyptian rule. Though both the Egyptians and Sudanese had been loyal to Islam as such, there was a great gulf between the official Sunni Islam of the Egyptian administration and the Sufi Islam of the Sudanese that had developed since the Fur period. In the Sudan, as in Egypt, it was the policy of Mahamid Ali and his successors to establish a secular state in which Islamic institutions would have a minimal role, and mostly in personal matters. Consequently the Sufi Islam of the Sudan, which

65 See Nabil Maqar, Maw wa bina al-Mahdi al-Hadith (Cairo, 1993).
67 On this subject see M. O. Bethel, The Southern Sudan (London, 1975).
already had a profound grip on rulers and ruled, was bound to suffer severe blows. The Egyptian administration consistently underestimated the prestige of local religious leadership, which consisted of the hereditary fakis (teachers) of the Sufi orders. The Egyptians promoted orthodox Islam. By maintaining a hierarchy of 'ulama' and facilitating their education at al-Azhar, the Egyptian administration confronted the fakis with a rival group "more orthodox and alien in its outlook, and more directly dependent on the government." By the end of Egyptian rule, the prestige of traditional religious leaders had therefore "undergone considerable diminution." The essence of this policy that aimed at building up an orthodox Muslim establishment was subsequently adopted by the Condominium administrators to combat Mahdism and the Sufi orders which they regarded as "potential scoundrels of subversion and fanaticism." 

The process of modernization was accompanied and fostered by an increasing number of foreign residents and visitors, both European and North American. While very few Europeans had visited the Sudan before 1820, the Egyptian conquest opened up the country to foreigners who came as travelers, traders, and missionaries, as well as technical experts and employees of the administration. Those employees, who were rapidly introduced into the service, particularly during the decade preceding the outbreak of the Mahdiyya, made an impact on Sudanese society both in the Arabized north and in other regions. Alien in language, customs, and religion, they created tension among the mass of the Sudanese people. Excessive use of Europeans in posts for which they were usually unsuited in fact provoked Sudanese resentment of foreigners to such an extent that xenophobia became general. Though employees of Muslim Egypt, these officials were, moreover, accused of serving Europe and Christianity rather than Egypt and Islam. The Mahdi's declared intention of freeing the country from alien and Christian control therefore found ready support from the populace.

69. Kifrah al-Tahthawi, one of the pillars of modernization in Egypt, spent a few unhappy years in Khartoum (1949-52), in virtual exile and without noticeable impact on the cause of modernization or education there.