Rebel and Saint: Muslim Notables, Populist Protest, Colonial Encounters (Algeria and Tunisia, 1800-1904)

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At the time of publication, author Heather J. Sharkey was associated with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Currently, she is a faculty member at the University of Pennsylvania.

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In Rebel and Saint: Muslim Notables, Populist Protest, Colonial Encounters, Julia A. Clancy-Smith considers rural responses to French encroachment in the pre-Saharan borderlands of Algeria and Tunisia. Sufi notables figure prominently in her narrative, as the molders or in some cases followers of public opinion, who on specific occasions in the nineteenth century organized movements to protest French colonialism. Illustrating this trend is an uprising that occurred in eastern Algeria in 1849. On this occasion, a leader named Bu Ziyan declared himself to be the Mahdi, or "Rightly Guided One" according to Muslim messianic belief, and launched a popular uprising against French rule. Although the exact motives for protest, on this occasion as on others, differed among villages and indeed among individuals, many were influenced by a general anxiety that arose from French attempts to tighten central control, often through taxation.

Rebel and Saint lavishes attention on particular Sufi leaders and their followers, in a region of eastern Algeria and western Tunisia that has been historically linked through patterns of trade, pilgrimage, and migration. While providing a regionally focussed and detailed study, this work also addresses broad themes in colonial African history, including anti-colonial resistance and accommodation, rural-urban (or core-periphery) relations, and religious and economic change. Through its attention to the adaptation of Muslim faith and Sufism to anti-colonial activity, this work contributes substantially to the comparative study of African jihad movements and mahdist.