

Italy and the Sanusiyya: Negotiating Authority in Colonial Libya, 1911-1931

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ABSTRACT

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By Eileen Ryan

In the first decade of their occupation of the former Ottoman territories of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica in current-day Libya, the Italian colonial administration established a system of indirect rule in the Cyrenaican town of Ajedabiya under the leadership of Idris al-Sanusi, a leading member of the Sufi order of the Sanusiyya and later the first monarch of the independent Kingdom of Libya after the Second World War. Post-colonial historiography of modern Libya depicted the Sanusiyya as nationalist leaders of an anti-colonial rebellion as a source of legitimacy for the Sanusi monarchy. Since Qaddafi's revolutionary coup in 1969, the Sanusiyya all but disappeared from Libyan historiography as a generation of scholars, eager to fill in the gaps left by the previous myopic focus on Sanusi elites, looked for alternative narratives of resistance to the Italian occupation and alternative origins for the Libyan nation in its colonial and pre-colonial past. Their work contributed to a wider variety of perspectives in our understanding of Libya's modern history, but the persistent focus on histories of resistance to the Italian occupation has missed an opportunity to explore the ways in which the Italian colonial framework shaped the development of a religious and political authority in Cyrenaica with lasting implications for the Libyan nation.

As a latecomer to the European "Scramble for Africa", the Italian occupation of the Libyan territories has received little attention in Italian historiography or in larger works on late European imperialism. The perception that the Italian colonial project in North Africa was too short and insignificant to merit serious analysis persists in Italian intellectual and public

discourses, but the Italian occupation of the Libyan territories represented a critical moment of national formation in Italy. Coming just four decades after the territorial unification of the Kingdom of Italy in 1870, the movement to invade the Libyan coast and subsequent debates concerning methods of colonial rule reflected conflicting visions of the type of nation Italy should become as it attempted to expand overseas. In the years leading up to the invasion of the Libyan coast in 1911 and for the following decade, the Italian colonial administration largely adhered to a liberal ideal of indirect rule by appealing to Muslim elites even while the Occupying Forces engaged in a frequently brutal repression of armed rebellion. The attempts of Italian administrators to negotiate a power-sharing system with Sanusi elites placed them in an international competition among imperial powers jockeying for influence in Muslim North Africa. A perception of the Sanusiyya as a highly centralized and powerful organization capable of calling on the loyalties of Muslims throughout the region inspired the Ottoman Sultan Abdulhamid II to arm the Sanusi *zawāyā* or religious centers at the end of the nineteenth century in the hopes that the Sanusi elite would lead local populations against European expansion. Subsequent colonial administrations in the region courted the favor of the spiritual leader of the Sufi order, Ahmad al-Sharif, despite the widespread doubts concerning the extent and nature of his political authority among the region's tribal leaders.

When it became clear that the recognized head of the Sufi order, Ahmad al-Sharif, would not lend his support to pacifying the Cyrenaican interior, the Italian administration, with a strong push from British officials in Egypt, identified his cousin Idris al-Sanusi as an alternative intermediary who could generate consensus for Italian rule. From 1916 until 1923, the Italian

state cultivated Idris al-Sanusi's authority by providing him with armed forces and allowing him to adopt the symbols of government in a semi-autonomous emirate in the Cyrenaican interior.

An invitation from a group of Tripolitanian notables for Idris al-Sanusi to extend his emirate into the western region precipitated the decision of the fascist Ministry of Colonies, Luigi Federzoni, to denounce previous negotiations with the Sanusiyya in 1923, and he expressed concerns that the Italian state had created a political authority where one did not exist, rewarded Italy's enemies, and invested misplaced trust in a regional leader that proved unable or unwilling to generate consensus for Italian colonial rule. Idris al-Sanusi left the Libyan territories for Cairo where he remained in exile until the United Nations placed him on the throne of the independent Kingdom of Libya. With the departure of Idris al-Sanusi and the dissolution of the Sanusi emirate, Federzoni and his administration initiated a program of territorial expansion to fulfill the nationalist quest for land in the Libyan interior. In the late 1920s, Italy initiated a series of brutal military campaigns culminating in the capture and hanging of the Sanusi *shaykh* Omar al-Mukthar in 1931.

This dissertation explores the Italian approach to colonial rule in eastern Libya as a reflection of internal national struggles over the relationship between religious and political authority and as a formative moment in the political history of the Libyan nation.

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Abbreviations

ACS: Archivio Centrale dello Stato

ASMAI: Archivio Storico del Ministero di Africa Italiana

FR CAOM: Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer

AUSSME: Archivio Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito

BNA: British National Archives

FO: Foreign Office

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To the loving memory of my father, Eugene E. Ryan.

Introduction

When Italian troops landed on the shores of the Ottoman provinces of Tripolitania (*Trabulsgarp*) and Cyrenaica (*al-Barqa*) in what is today known as Libya in October 1911, officials in Rome expected the local populations to welcome them as liberators from Ottoman control. The commanding officer of the Italian Occupying Forces, General Carlo Caneva, issued a series of proclamations in Arabic and Italian declaring Italy's friendly intentions and promising to uphold local Islamic traditions. The troops under his command, he claimed, were there, "not to subdue and enslave the populations of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and other countries of the interior, which are now under the bondage of the Turks, but to restore to them their rights, punish the usurpers, make them free and in control of themselves, and to protect them against those very usurpers, the Turks, and against any others who try to enslave them."¹ Caneva targeted his public declarations to Muslim notables in the region, and he promised them positions of authority within the colonial administration, the institution of *shari'a* law, and the recognition of *waqf* properties or religious endowments. To encourage the peaceful submission of Muslim notables to the Italian state, Caneva emphasized the religiosity of the Italian population, a characteristic that, he claimed, would make the Italian administration a welcome change from Ottoman rule.²

¹ "non a sottomettere e rendere schiave le popolazioni della Tripolitania, della Cirenaica e degli altri paesi dell'interno, ora sotto la servitù dei turchi, ma a restituire loro i propri diritti, a punire gli usurpatori, a renderle libere e padrone di sé, ed a proteggerle contro gli usurpatori stessi, i turchi, e contro chiunque altro le volesse asservite." Ministero della Guerra, Stato Maggiore del Regio Esercito, Ufficio Storico, "Proclama del tenente generale Caneva alle popolazioni della Tripolitania, Cirenaica e regioni annesse - 13 ottobre 1911," *Campagna di Libia* (Rome: Poligrafico per l'Amministrazione della Guerra, 1922), 357.

² AUSSME L8/154/1, Caneva, "Agli Arabi della Tripolitania", 15 January 1912.

Caneva's proclamation reflected an attempt by Italian central authorities in Rome to institute what came to be known by its detractors as a "pro-Islamic" approach to colonial rule in the early years of their occupation of the Libyan territories. Calling on the establishment of a system of indirect rule through the mediation of regional notables, advocates of this approach sought to leverage dissatisfaction with the modernizing tendencies of the political elite in Istanbul among Muslim notables in the Libyan provinces to negotiate a power-sharing system to ease the extension of Italian state control into the region's interior.

In the eastern region of Cyrenaica, Italian officials focused these efforts on cultivating relationships with elite leaders of the Sufi *ṭarīqa*—way or order—of the Sanusiyya. The Sanusi *ṭarīqa* developed in Cyrenaica in the mid- to late-nineteenth century under the spiritual guidance of the Sanusi family, a line of descendants from the recognized founder of the Sanusi order, Muhammad 'Ali al-Sanusi. The Sanusi family and a select group of their adherents built a network of *zawāyā* with the support of regional tribal leaders affiliated with their religious cause. The *zawāyā* served as centers for education, prayer, and resting points along caravan trading routes, and by the end of the nineteenth century, they stretched from Benghazi on the coast down to the northern edges of what is today Chad and Sudan. As the Sanusi *ikhwān*—or brothers—spread a message calling for a return to the ways of the Prophet Muhammad among the Bedouin tribes of the Northern Sahara, state officials in the imperial centers of Europe and Istanbul eyed the expansion of Sanusi *zawāyā* as they tried to determine whether growing adherence to the new religious order signaled a threat to state authority or a possible ally in ruling the impenetrable interior of an increasingly important strategic area.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, Italian agents reached out to the grandson of Mohammad ‘Ali al-Sanusi and the recognized spiritual leader of the Sanusiyya, Ahmad al-Sharif, with the hope that he would help ease their eventual extension of commercial and state presence in the Libyan territories. But they were not alone in vying for his support; during the first two decades of the twentieth century, the Italians competed with Ottoman, French and British officials for an alliance with the Sanusi family by sending emissaries with gifts of money, arms, and ammunition. When the Ottomans won the support of Ahmad al-Sharif in military operations against the western border of Egypt in the First World War, Italian officials—with considerable encouragement from British authorities—identified an alternative Sanusi intermediary in Ahmad al-Sharif’s younger cousin, Idris al-Sanusi. In a process of formal negotiations, Italian and British officials committed their resources to cultivating Idris as the official head of the Sanusi order and granted him and the tribes affiliated to the Sanusiyya the right to maintain armed forces. The initial treaties between the Italian authorities and Idris limited Italian state presence in Cyrenaica to a few cities along the coast, and Italian officials celebrated the arrangement as contributing to the relatively peaceful situation in Cyrenaica compared to the western region of Tripolitania where regional notables fought a fierce civil war amongst themselves and against the Italian state for political control of the region’s interior.

The negotiations began to fall apart when state officials looked to deepen Italian control in the Cyrenaican interior in collaboration with Idris al-Sanusi in the interwar era. In 1920, they signed a treaty establishing a semi-autonomous Sanusi emirate in the Cyrenaican interior in exchange for Idris al-Sanusi’s assistance in gaining the consensus of Cyrenaican tribal leaders for the expansion of Italian state authority and the development of transportation infrastructure in the

region's interior. Over the next two years, the Italian-Sanusi alignment fell apart, and in January 1923 Idris al-Sanusi left for self-imposed exile in Egypt where he stayed until the United Nations named him as the first King of the independent Libyan monarchy in 1951. In the years following the departure of Idris al-Sanusi, the fascist administration initiated a series of military campaigns to expand state control that lasted throughout the 1920s. Italian troops—composed primarily of Eritrean soldiers—used increasingly harsh tactics to fight against a loose and shifting coalition of Sanusi and tribal forces, and they finally declared the interior pacified in 1931 with the capture and hanging of the Sanusi military leader Omar al-Mukhtar.

The process of negotiations between Italian officials and Sanusi elites and the subsequent disintegration of their alliance has received widespread attention in scholarship on the Italian occupation of the Libyan territories, but both Italian and Libyan scholarship on the issue has tended to reflect the political concerns of their national historiographies. Among Libyan historians, the weight of identifying national origins in anti-colonial resistance skewed scholarship during the Sanusi monarchy towards hagiographical accounts of the Sanusiyya as leaders of anti-Italian resistance. After the coup that brought Muamar Qaddafi to power in 1969, Libyan historians turned the focus away from the Sanusi elite to depict a less centralized populist account of anti-colonial resistance. Either case led to a homogeneous view of the Sanusiyya and missed the variety of ways in which social and political groups deployed the name of the religious order in the shifting tribal, regional, and international alliances of the early twentieth century. The occupation of the Libyan territories has attracted relatively little attention in the historiography of modern Italy. The majority of the work that has been done on the Italian colonial project has tended to maintain a clear distinction between the political and social

movements of the Italian peninsula and the events in the colonial territories; any connection between the two generally appears to follow a path from center to periphery, thus missing the ways in which the experiences of colonial rule in Libya shaped the Italian nation and the centrality of the colonial project in an emerging Italian nationalism.

This dissertation reexamines the relationship between Italian colonial state officials and the Sanusi family to consider how the attempt to incorporate the Sanusi elite within the Italian colonial system reflected the contested role of religion in the emerging national identities and political structures of the modern Mediterranean. Widespread assumptions among officials in imperial centers from Paris to Istanbul posited a necessary connection between religious and political authority in Muslim North Africa that informed the desire of Italian officials to establish an alliance with the Sanusi elite as a potential tool to generate consensus for Italian rule and promote a favorable image of Italy in the Muslim Mediterranean. But Italian officials disagreed over the nature of the Sanusiyya as a political and/or religious organization and their capacity to generate consensus for state rule in the region, and the politically charged historiography of the Sanusiyya has done little to clarify how the value of the Sanusiyya shifted as a religious movement, a proxy for state power, or as leaders of anti-state resistance during the colonial era. The popularity of the Sanusi flag as a symbol of nationalism and liberty in the anti-Qaddafi revolution pointed to the need to revisit the highly contested history of the Sufi *ṭarīqa* as a religious organization and a political force in the Libyan nation.

For Italian imperialists, debates over what they considered a pro-Islamic approach of an alliance with the Sanusiyya in the colonial state also reflected conflicting views of what kind of imperial power Italy should become and unresolved tensions concerning the proper role for

religion in Italian national identity. Coming at the end of decades of acrimonious relations between state officials and Catholic interest groups following the deposition of the Papal States, the popularity of the colonial wars in the Libyan territories accelerated the integration of Catholics into Italian national politics. In the years leading up to the invasion, the Catholic press sold the colonial war as an opportunity to spread a Catholic brand of Italian civilization, and Church funds helped finance the increased Italian influence in North Africa. As General Caneva's quote indicated above, the influence of the Catholic Church did not necessarily run counter to a liberal ideal of creating systems of indirect rule through the mediation of Muslim elites; on the contrary, some Catholic nationalists argued that their religiosity placed them in a unique position to act as a bridge between Europe and the Muslim world. But in the aftermath of the First World War, the inability of Idris al-Sanusi to gain consensus for increased Italian control over the Libyan interior revealed the limitations of a facile reliance on his uncertain authority, and a growing alliance between Catholic and nationalist interests, galvanized by Mussolini's first Minister of Colonies, Luigi Federzoni, pushed for what they considered the 'reconquest' of the Libyan interior to make it into a fully Italian space for demographic colonialism.

That the focus of this dissertation remains predominantly on the Italian colonial system reflects the nature of colonial state sources. Ideally, this dissertation would incorporate a wide range of Libyan documents tracing how the position of the Sanusi family as religious, political, and financial elite shifted in relation to the social and political context of the Northern Sahara, but the difficulty of even entering Libya under Qaddafi's regime and during a year of revolution prevented me from accessing more than a few documents from whatever source material might

remain in the Libyan state archives in Tripoli, in the national library in Benghazi, or in the Sanusi *zawāyā* of the Libyan interior. Nevertheless, this project moves significantly towards a goal of examining how the political authority and symbolic value of the Sanusiyya developed and shifted within the colonial system.

Historiography of Italian Colonialism

As a latecomer to the international competition for imperial influence, studies of the Italian colonial project have been absent from broader comparative works of the European “Scramble for Africa.” Like Germany, the expansionist policies of Italy in African territories seemed too small, too short, and too late to warrant much attention in the post-World War II reckoning of twentieth century European aggression. The focus on the Third Reich’s expansionist aspirations in Europe long overshadowed the earlier formation of German imperial ambitions in Africa, but in the past fifteen years, a number of historians have drawn attention to the longer continuities in the drive for international dominance through the expansion of German interests in Africa as a testing ground for later military practices and a central component in Germany’s territorial ambitions in the twentieth century.³ Historians of modern Italy have been slower to recognize the centrality of colonial ambitions in the political and social movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but the occupation of the Libyan territories merits further attention as a popular cause in the development of Italian nationalism and a symbol of contested visions for Italy’s future as a European power.

³ Matthew P. Fitzpatrick, *Liberal Imperialism in Germany: Expansionism and Nationalism, 1848-1884* (New York: Berghahn, 2008). Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); Sebastian Conrad, *Globalisation and the Nation in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

A reluctance to open colonial archives and an overarching drive to ignore the international crimes of the fascist regime in Italy's search for normalcy led to a general silence on Italy's colonial history in the first three decades after the Second World War.⁴ In the absence of a critical investigation into Italy's colonial past, popular memory conformed to the persistent myth of *italiani brava gente*, that is the characterization of the Italian people as good natured in contrast to German brutality in the twentieth century. The idea of Italians as *brava gente* developed primarily around stories of individuals protecting Italian Jews from deportation, supposedly for humanitarian reasons.⁵ The myth extended to the colonial context as an explanation for the failures of Italian expansionism that perpetuated a popular image of Italian imperialists as bumbling, ineffective, and therefore relatively harmless. The idea that the failure to fulfill Italian imperial ambitions mitigated any damage they could have inflicted in the process of colonial expansion continues to shade public opinion on the significance of Italy's colonial past.

In the 1970s, a handful of scholars began to correct these myths of national exceptionalism by turning attention to the violence and damage wrought in the name of Italian expansion. In 1973, Giorgio Rochat published one of the first critical assessments of the human costs of Italy's colonial wars in Africa based primarily on the private papers of military commanders found in the Italian state archives at a time when fascist military archives were

⁴ Angelo Del Boca, "The Myths, Suppressions, Denials, and Defaults of Italian Colonialism," in *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Unification to the Present*, Patrizia Palumbo, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 18-19.

⁵ The idea of the Italians refusing to hand over Jews for humanitarian reasons persists in part to emphasize the cruelty of Germans. See Davide Rodogno, *Il nuovo ordine mediterraneo: Le politiche di occupazione dell'Italia fascista in Europa (1940-1943)* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2003), 400.

inaccessible.⁶ The most widely recognized historian of Italian colonialism, Angelo Del Boca, also began writing about Italian colonialism in this early period. Credited with having provided the first historical examination of the archives of the Italian Ministry of Colonies, Del Boca's multi-volume series of books on Italian colonialism in Libya and East Africa established detailed narratives of Italian imperialism with a focus on Italian crimes committed against the Libyan people.⁷ Following the examples of Rochat and Del Boca, the numbers of scholars researching Italy's colonial past grew steadily in the 1980s. Their early efforts brought much-needed public attention to the topic of Italy's colonial past, but with little more than cursory attention to the local political and social contexts of Italian colonial rule—whether in Libya or East Africa—their works read as self-reflexive studies on the violent effects of expansionism that pitted colonizer against colonized in a simplistic dichotomy.

The past two decades have witnessed an effort among scholars of Italian colonialism to overcome linguistic limitations and expand beyond the narrow confines of a national self-reckoning. Exposing Italy's colonial crimes has continued to offer a potent topic,⁸ but historians have also branched out to examine a wider range of social, political, economic, and cultural aspects of the years of Italy's occupation of the Libyan territories. The publication of several edited volumes in English has provided a broad overview of the historiographical issues in the study of Italian colonialism to a general audience. These works combine impassioned pleas for

⁶ Giorgio Rochat, *Il colonialismo italiano* (Turin: Loescher Editore, 1973).

⁷ Angelo Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa orientale*, 4 vols (Rome: Editori Laterza, 1976); Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Libia*, 2 vols (Rome: Laterza, 1986).

⁸ Angelo Del Boca, *Le guerre coloniali del fascismo* (Rome: Laterza, 1991); Lino Del Fra, *Sciara Sciati: Genocidio nell'Oasi: L'esercito italiano a Tripoli* (Rome: Datanews, 1995); Nicola Labanca, ed. *Un nodo: Immagini e documenti sulla repressione coloniale italiana in Libia*. (Manduria-Bari-Rome: Piero Lacaita, 2002).

accountability for Italy's colonial past with sample studies of cultural and social histories from Italian East Africa and the Libyan territories.⁹ Before the publication of these volumes, only a few key studies in Italian foreign policy provided accounts of Italian colonialism in Libya in English, most notably the work of Richard Bosworth.¹⁰ The distinct focus on demographic colonialism in Italian expansionist themes inspired several early studies of Italian colonization schemes both in English and in Italian, and it continues to generate interest within the context of Italy's extraordinary emigration at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries.¹¹

The linguistic barriers to incorporating Libyan sources and historiography into Italian studies of the colonial period have proven more difficult to overcome, but the scholarship of a number of individuals among a new generation of Italian scholars who have dedicated the time and energy to learn Arabic and travel to North Africa will define the next wave of scholarship on Italian colonialism. Though not proficient in Arabic himself, Nicola Labanca has proven a vocal advocate for a new generation of historians to foster cross-Mediterranean ties. Labanca first

⁹ See Patrizia Palumbo, ed. *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan, eds. *Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005); Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller, eds. *Italian Colonialism* (New York: Palgrave, 2005).

¹⁰ Bosworth, *Italy, Least of the Great Powers: Italian foreign policy before the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). Also see William C. Askew, *Europe and Italy's Acquisition of Libya 1911-1912* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1942); Timothy W. Childs, *Italo-Turkish Diplomacy and the War Over Libya 1911-1912* (Leiden: Brill, 1990); Richard A. Webster, *Industrial Imperialism in Italy, 1908-1915* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).

¹¹ The earliest studies on Italian colonization schemes were written in English. See Martin Moore, *Fourth Shore: Italy's Mass Colonization of Libya* (London: Routledge, 1940); Claude G. Segré, *The Fourth Shore: The Italian Colonization of Libya* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974). For a recent work that examines the early discussions of colonial expansion as part of wider debates concerning Italian emigration, see: Mark I. Choate, *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008). Similar work in Italian: Federico Cresti, *Oasi di italianità: La Libia della colonizzazione agraria tra fascismo, guerra e indipendenza (1935-1956)* (Turin: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1996); Cresti, *Non desiderare la terra d'altri: La colonizzazione italiana in Libia* (Rome: Carocci, 2011).

established his career as a military historian of Italian colonialism in studies that largely followed the methods of Giorgio Rochat and Angelo Del Boca in his Italian-centric approach,¹² but he has lent his considerable weight in the hierarchies of the Italian academy to organize conferences and collaborative works in an attempt to bring Libyan and Italian scholars together in a common field of study. His collaboration with Pierluigi Venuta made available the first comprehensive account in Italian of the Libyan historiography of the colonial period.¹³ Among this new generation of Italian scholars, Anna Baldinetti looms increasingly large for her ability to incorporate Arabic source material and engage an international field of discussion. Baldinetti began her career with detailed studies of the early attempts of Italian agents in North Africa to establish ties with Libyan notables and gain consensus for the eventual occupation.¹⁴ Her awareness of broader trends in Middle East and Islamic studies distinguished Baldinetti's early works from the majority of Italian scholarship, but in her most recent study on the development of Libyan nationalism among exiles during the Italian colonial period, Baldinetti demonstrated a remarkably high comfort level with Arabic source material and Libyan historiography. As one of the most recent publications on Libyan nationalism in English, Baldinetti stands poised to engage a broad international audience beyond the narrow confines of Italian national history.¹⁵

¹² Labanca, *In marcia verso Adua* (Turin: Giulio Einaudi editore, 1993); Labanca, *Oltremare: Storie dell'espansione coloniale italiana* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2002).

¹³ Labanca and Pierluigi Venuta, eds., *Un Colonialismo, due sponde nel Mediterraneo. Atti del seminario di studi storici italo-libici (Siena-Pistoia, 13-14 gennaio 2000)* (Pistoia, Italy: Editrice C.R.T., 2000); Labanca and Venuta, *Bibliografia della Libia coloniale 1911-2000* (Florence: Leo S. Olshki, 2004).

¹⁴ Baldinetti, *Carte private di Carlo Alfonso e Maria Nallino* (Rome Istituto per l'Oriente, 1995) ; *David Santillana: L'Uomo e il giurista 1855-1931*, 2 vols. (Rome: Istituto per l'Oriente, 1995); Baldinetti, *Orientalismo e colonialismo: la ricerca di consenso in Egitto per l'impresa di Libia* (Rome: Istituto per l'Oriente, 1997).

¹⁵ Baldinetti, *The Origins of the Libyan Nation* (London: Routledge, 2010).

Despite a consistent focus among Italian colonial administrators on the religion of colonial subjects and their attempts to develop relationships with Muslim notables, few historians have examined the link between religion and politics in the Italian colonies of Libya. Cesare Marongiu Buonaiuti's study on the use of religion as a political tool in all of the Italian colonies of Africa represents a rare example. His analysis offers broad distinctions between the approach to colonial rule in East Africa and in the Libyan territories based on assumptions concerning the religious identities of the relevant populations. However, his intent on distinguishing a fascist mode of religious policies from the liberal predecessors overshadowed other regional, national, and international influences on the shifts in relations between the Italian colonial state and Muslim elites. In the discussion of Italian relations with the Sanusiyya in particular, he demonstrated little awareness of internal divisions within the Sufi *ṭarīqa* or of the Sanusiyya within broader trends of Islam.¹⁶ Vittorio Ianari has published more recent volumes on Islam and Christianity in the Libyan territories, and his work represents the only use I have seen of Italian missionary archives. But with a highly limited research focus, Ianari's works failed to place the Italian colonial religious policies in a wider context either in the colonial, national, or international levels.¹⁷

¹⁶ Marongiu Buonaiuti, *Politica e religioni del colonialismo italiano (1882-1941)* (Varese: Giuffrè Editore, 1982).

¹⁷ Ianari, *Chiesa, Coloni e Islam: Religione e politica nella Libia italiana* (Turin: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1995); Ianari, *Lo stivale nel mare. Italia, Mediterraneo, Islam: alle origini di una politica* (Milan: Edizioni Angelo Gueirini, 2006).

Libyan Historiography of Resistance

Historiography in postcolonial Libya, like most postcolonial states, has been driven by an overwhelming focus on the imperatives of finding sources of resistance during the colonial era as a form of proto-nationalism. During the Sanusi monarchy (1951-1969), this imperative led to an exaggeration of the influence of the Sanusi elite during Libya's colonial past. As I will examine in more detail in the next chapter, the British anthropologist and official in the post-War British administration of Cyrenaica, E.E. Evans-Pritchard, published a highly influential study that provided historical legitimacy for the Sanusi monarchy to an international audience in preparation for the United Nations' creation of the unified Libyan Kingdom under the Sanusi monarchy, and his work continues to shape the historiography of the Sanusiyya and modern Libya despite having been widely discredited as an example of scholarship in the service of European domination. The Egyptian historian, Muhammad Fu'ad Shukri, served as a representative in the United Nations discussions on Libyan independence and subsequently wrote studies on the Sanusiyya that followed Evans-Pritchard's lead in finding historical precedent for Sanusi leadership over a unified Libyan nation. Muhammad al-Tayyib al-Ashhab, a descendent of a Sanusi *ikhwān* and a close adviser to Idris al-Sanusi, wrote studies of Libyan heroes of colonial resistance focused primarily on Sanusi notables like Idris and Omar al-Mukhtar. The pro-Sanusi literature looked for pre-colonial foundations for Sanusi political

authority in the nineteenth century and characterized the Sufi order as leaders of an anti-colonial resistance and a natural source of unity in the formation of a Libyan nation.¹⁸

Since the coup that brought Qaddafi to power in 1969, the new regime sponsored historical scholarship that condemned Idris al-Sanusi and the Sanusi family as collaborators with Italian and British colonial officials. The Libyan armed forces released three volumes of documents exposing the Sanusi family's ties to international organizations as a depiction of their betrayal of the Libyan nation for their personal gain.¹⁹ As I will examine in more detail, the Qaddafi regime and the newly minted Libyan Studies Center in Tripoli began collecting oral histories from former *mujahidin* who fought against Italian state expansion throughout the Libyan territories as an effort to create a new archive that gained a wider perspective on popular involvement in anti-colonial resistance and countered official Sanusi interpretations of centralized leadership during the colonial era. The oral histories turned away from the earlier focus on nationalist heroes and provided more complex social, political, and economic interpretations for the motivations behind individual decisions to resist the colonial state.

¹⁸ Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1949); Shukri, *Al-Sanusiyah, din wa dawlah* (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-'Arabi, 1948); Shukri, *Milad dawlat Libya al-Haditha: watha'iq tahrikhiya wa-istiqlaliya* (Cairo: Matab'at al-l'timad, 1957); On Shukri's career as an academic and statesman, see Anthony Gorman, *Historians, State and Politics in Twentieth Century Egypt: Contesting the Nation* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 26-27; al-Ashhab, *Barqa al-'Arabiya, ams wa al-yawm* (Cairo: al-Tabah, 1947); al-Ashhab, *Idris al-Sanusi* (Cairo: al-Tabah, 1957); al-Ashhab, *'Umar al-Mukhtar* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qahira, 1957).

For accessible summaries of Libyan historiography in English and Italian, see Lisa Anderson, "Legitimacy, Identity, and the Writing of History in Libya," in *Statecraft in the Middle East: Oil, Historical Memory, and Popular Culture*, Eric Davis and Nicolas Gavrieldes, eds. (Miami: Florida International University, 1991); Baldinetti, *Origins*, 11-26; Labanca and Venuta, *Bibliografia*; Knut Vikør, *Sufi and Scholar on the Desert Edge: Muhammad b. Ali al-Sanusi and his Brotherhood* (Evanston: Northwestern University, 1995), 15-19.

¹⁹ *Haqiqat Idris: wathaiq wa-suwar wa asrar* (Tripoli: al-Munshaah al-'Ammah li-Nashr wa-al-Tawzi wa-al-I'lan, 1983).

The end of the Sanusi monarchy inspired scholars in Europe and the United States to broaden the historical lens beyond the previous myopic focus on the leadership of the Sanusi elite in colonial Libya. The number of publications on modern Libyan history increased in the 1990s. Both Lisa Anderson and Ali Abdullatif Ahmida examined sources of national and regional identity beyond the involvement in anti-colonial resistance of religious affiliations. Anderson examined political structures while Ahmida looked for regional economic and social ties that predated the colonial era as the foundation for the formation of national identity.²⁰ Knut Vikør's use of early Sanusi writings tends to portray a hagiographic view of the early years of the Sanusiyya as a religious order, but his study is valuable in that it escaped the teleological approach of post-independence literature that read a militant anti-European program into the beginnings of the Sanusiyya. By making a distinction between 'the political' as an intellectual opposition to political forces and 'the political' as a formation of structures that set the conditions for later opposition to political forces, Vikør avoided a common problem in colonial sources that posited a necessary link between the political and religious in Islam. Though Vikør disputed the intellectual underpinnings for a politicization, anti-colonial, or nationalist movement in the Sanusiyya, he did argue that the Sanusiyya created the beginnings of a political structure in the nineteenth century through this network of *zaw*. Vikør argued that the Sanusiyya transformed from its beginnings as a religious organization into a political structure over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. "This happened through the merging of the spiritual particularity of the Sufi brotherhood with the ethnic identity of the Saharan beduin and

²⁰ Anderson, *State and Social Transformation in Tunisia and Libya, 1830-1980* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Ahmida, *The Making of Modern Libya: State Formation, Colonization, and Resistance, 1830-1932* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994.)

neighboring peoples into an entity that some may call a proto-nationalistic movement.”²¹ Since he did not explain how this process unfolded, we are left to assume that the process followed the patterns E.E. Evans-Pritchard described in *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica* according to which the Sanusiyya became a political structure by embedding themselves within regional Bedouin tribes, and they became political leaders through the opposition to colonial rule.²²

As valuable as these contributions have been to broadening our understanding of the political and social alliances at work throughout Libya during the Italian occupation, they have avoided the thorny issue of the position of the Sanusiyya during the colonial era and led thoughtful. Otherwise thorough historians have tended to revert to simplistic understandings of the Sanusiyya as leaders of a resistance movement or dismiss the Sanusi elite as colonial collaborators with no part in the formation of Libyan nationalism. In the historiography of Italian colonialism in Libya, the colonial state’s relationship to the Sanusiyya remains the most frequently mentioned but least understood element in the Italian approach to native policy in the Libyan territories.

Historiographies in Conversation

This dissertation represents an attempt to examine the Italian occupation of the Libyan territories within the broader trajectories of both Italian and Libyan national histories by bringing together historiographic traditions and documents from Italian, French, British, and—to a necessarily limited extent—Libyan archives. The primary narrative of the dissertation centers on the process of negotiations between the Italian colonial authorities and Idris al-Sanusi to

²¹ Vikør, *Sufi and Scholar*, 1.

²² E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1949).

establish a semi-autonomous Sanusi administration in support of Italian claims to sovereignty in the Cyrenaican interior during and in the years immediately after the First World War. My research builds on secondary literature on the Italian occupation of the Libyan territories, but it arrives at a deeper level of detail in the narrative of Sanusi-Italian negotiations to generate new perspectives on the contested nature of political and religious authority within the Sanusiyya in relation to the Italian colonial state. In a turbulent political and economic context marked by Italian occupation and international competition for control over the Cyrenaican interior, Sanusi elites struggled over the direction of the Sanusi *tarīqa*, access to resources, and control over regional trade routes, and at times they gained strategic advantages through alliances with European powers in the region.

My focus on divisions among the Sanusi elite within an international contest for a Sanusi alliance throws the conditional nature of Sanusi authority in the colonial era into sharper relief. As local intermediaries, the Sanusi family relied on the patronage of centralized powers for the influx of military and financial resources that aided the rapid extension of the influence of the Sufi *tarīqa* in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But the position of the Sanusiyya also depended on the ability of Sanusi elites to generate consensus among tribal leaders of the Cyrenaican interior. This dependence came into distinct focus in the collapse of the alliance between the Italian colonial authorities and Idris al-Sanusi resulting from their failed attempt to extend Sanusi-Italian control with associated infrastructural development projects into the Cyrenaican interior with the Treaty of Regima in 1920-1922. The breakdown of the Sanusi administration and the Italian renunciation of agreements with the Sanusi family in 1923 reflected the inability of Idris to secure the acceptance of a coalition of tribal leaders in western

Cyrenaica for an extension of the power-sharing system beyond the territorial limits defined in their original agreements in Acroma in 1917. The failure to generate consensus for the Regima Accords demonstrated that the ability of Idris to act as a local intermediary was contingent on the perception that his arrangement with the Italians acted as a firm restriction against the expansion of the Italian colonial state, the possibility of Italian mass colonization, and associated risks to the financial stability of tribes whose dominance in regional trade patterns stemmed from their control over access to camels and water supplies. When Idris al-Sanusi indicated his willingness to assist the Italian state in extending railway lines into the Cyrenaican interior, he lost the crucial support of tribal leaders and Sanusi elites who had previously championed the Sanusi administration as a form of regional autonomy and a source of protection against state demands.

The idea that the Sanusi family—and Idris in particular—negotiated a position as local intermediaries by balancing the demands and resources of central authorities and regional tribal leaders may seem self-evident, but it merits attention as a corrective to the persistent tendency of scholars to assume a uniformity in the Sanusi *tarīqa* and a related lack of awareness concerning the dependency of the Sanusi family on a network of alliances with tribal leaders and powerful Sanusi shaykhs throughout the region. I began my research hoping to generate a more complete social and political history of the Sanusiyya within regional tribal and economic systems, but such an endeavor would require the sort of documents this author has not been able to access, documents most likely held in the Sanusi *zawāyā* in the Libyan interior blocked by travel restrictions during the Qaddafi era and by the residual violence of the anti-Qaddafi rebellion since February 2011. This study relies primarily on colonial documents, and in so doing, it does not escape the framework of the colonial state. As much as possible, however, I try to amplify

the voices of Sanusi elites as actors in regional and international politics and as participants in the Italian colonial system, and the narrative I establish in the following chapters highlights the influence of several key tribal leaders and Sanusi military commanders in the opposition to an expansion of Italian control in conjunction with Idris al-Sanusi. My work goes further than previous studies of the Sanusiyya and the Italian colonial occupation to explore the relationships between Sanusi elites and regional tribal leaders as an underlying network of alliances and rivalries that shaped the development of a Sanusi political authority in connection to the Italian colonial state.

Nevertheless, Italian state officials retain a dominant position in the narrative of this dissertation as they engaged in the messy work of arranging systems of colonial rule in response to pressures from domestic expectations, international competition, and disputed understandings of local culture and politics. This dissertation de-emphasizes the division between the liberal and fascist administrations in Italy as a causal factor in the disintegration of the alliance between the Italian colonial state and Idris al-Sanusi both as a way to bring attention to the dependence of Sanusi authority on the support of regional power brokers and as a reflection of continuities I found in the discussions among Italian official and semi-official actors concerning the benefits and risks associated with using a Sanusi intermediary to generate consensus for Italian state control.

Of course, there were definite turning points in the direction of the Italian colonial administration of the Libyan territories associated with the rise of a political class committed to a nationalist agenda of territorial expansion. The 1922 March on Rome preceded the renunciation of accords with Idris al-Sanusi by a few short months and brought the nationalist leader and

outspoken advocate of aggressive colonial expansion Luigi Federzoni to the position of the Minister of Colonies. Despite the renunciation of previous agreements with the Sanusi family, Federzoni's administration continued to toy with the idea of resuming negotiations with either Idris al-Sanusi or Ahmad al-Sharif and retained officials from the previous administration with experience and expertise in dealing with the Sanusi elites. Mussolini's visit to the Libyan territories in 1926 signaled a more decisive turn away from negotiations with regional notables and the initiation of a period of intensified military operations to gain control of the Libyan interior, but the extension of a combination of state and private capital influence into the interior of the region from the narrow positions on the coast remained a constant objective between the liberal and fascist administrations. The key difference lay in the willingness and the ability of the fascist administration to resort to brutally repressive measures against Libyan populations, regardless of their involvement in armed rebellions against Italian forces. Most colonial officials in the liberal administration saw their negotiations with regional elites—especially Idris al-Sanusi—as a temporary measure that would eventually give way to the development of a strong state presence in the region. The end goals of the fascist colonial administration—to extend state presence into the interior and build infrastructure for the realization of mass settlement plans for Italian emigrants—had always been at the center of popular support for the colonial project in the Libyan territories. After 1922, the brakes came off as colonial administrators discredited the utility or necessity of a Sanusi intermediary and central authorities devoted increased resources to military operations to accelerate the process of state expansion and Italian settlement.

Throughout the dissertation, I bring archives from Italian Catholic missionaries in the Libyan territories into the narrative as indicative of how the attempt to formulate models of

colonial rule in a Muslim society fit into broader conflicts over the relationship between Church and state in an emerging sense of Italian nationalism. The impression that consensus for colonial rule required the support and moral authority of Muslim elites like the Sanusi family reflected conventional models of civilizational progress in North Africa as dependent on religious belief for political control and the widespread assumption of a necessary connection between religious and political authority in Islam. The Italian state's corresponding restrictions on missionary activities also fit into trends in European colonial rule in North Africa as an attempt to promote an image of religious tolerance to diminish local opposition. But for Italy, a rising tide of Catholic influence in national politics amplified the issue of religious identity in the expansion of the colonial state. Missionaries in the Libyan colonies were on the frontier of a rising focus in the connection between Italian nationalism and the Catholic Church in Italy's expansion abroad.

Chapter 1: Remembering the Sanusiyya in Libyan National History

When demonstrations broke out against Qaddafi's regime in eastern Libya in February 2011, the flag of the pre-Qaddafi Libyan monarchy suddenly appeared on television screens, the internet, and front pages of newspapers around the world as the rebellion's most prevalent symbol. A council of elite Libyans first adopted the red, black, and green flag as a symbol of national unity and independence in 1951 when the United Nations established the Kingdom of Libya following Italy's loss of its North African territories in World War II. In creating the new nation, the United Nations joined three regions—Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan—that had been governed as distinct districts by both the Ottoman Empire and the Italian colonial administration. The United Nations named as the first King of Libya Idris al-Sanusi, a British ally known as the head of the Sufi *ṭarīqa*—way or order—of the Sanusiyya that had a wide network of adherents stretching from Benghazi down into Wadai when the Italians invaded in 1911. The flag's central black band with a white crescent and star recalls the flag the Sanusiyya flew during the Italian colonial occupation.

Although there does exist a small pro-monarchy component to the opposition forces that toppled the Qaddafi regime, the adoption of the flag as the symbol of the rebellion and the post-Qaddafi government does not indicate a widespread desire for a return to the monarchy or the leadership of the Sanusi family; rather, it speaks to nostalgia for the relatively peaceful period Libya enjoyed immediately after it gained independence, an oasis of stability in a long century

marked by colonial occupation, war, and revolution.²³ The flag of the monarchy also sent a message of defiance to Qaddafi by highlighting a part of Libya's past that he actively suppressed. After World War II, British and Libyan scholars had a vested interest in promoting an image of Idris al-Sanusi and the Sanusiyya as leaders of a centralized, nationalist, anti-colonial resistance as a source of legitimacy for the post-independence government. Following the coup that brought Qaddafi to power in 1969, his regime sought to delegitimize Idris al-Sanusi as a leader of a nationalist movement during the colonial period by encouraging scholarship that depicted him as an opportunist collaborator in the European colonial project, but memories of Sanusi involvement in armed struggles against the Italian state persisted especially in the figure of the Sanusi shaykh 'Umar al-Mukhtar. The use of the Sanusi flag as the symbol of the anti-Qaddafi rebellion provides an opportunity to reexamine these conflicting images of the Sanusiyya in Libya's national history.

This chapter begins with an examination of the anti-Sanusi historiography of the Qaddafi regime as a starting point for a re-examination of the history of the Sufi *ṭarīqa* in modern Libya. Following a general movement in postcolonial historiography in the 1960s and 70s, Libyan historians recorded oral testimonies from former mujahidin—soldiers who had fought against the Italian occupation—from around the country to establish an alternative archive with the potential to generate a broader social history of the region during the colonial era. The Oral History Project and the historiographic traditions it typified offered a correction to the myopic focus of previous scholarship on the elite leadership of the Sanusiyya, and it continues to provide valuable source material for local histories. I argue, however, that it must be read against the

²³ Thanks to Professor Ali Abdullatif Ahmida for his clarification of the symbolic value of the flag in the panel discussion on the Libyan rebellion at Columbia University on March 3, 2011.

political imperatives of the Qaddafi regime as an attempt to canonize popular narratives of resistance and erase the Sanusi family from Libyan national history. Much remains to understand concerning development of the Sanusiyya as a religious and political authority during the colonial era.

The second part of this chapter looks at representations of the Sanusiyya and anti-colonial resistance in the pre-Qaddafi historiography. Fitting with general trends in postcolonial African historiography and the interests of the Sanusi monarchy, scholarship of the 1950s and 60s told the stories of Sanusi notables as national heroes and natural leaders of a monolithic anti-colonial resistance movement. A monograph by the British anthropologist E.E. Evans-Pritchard set the course for this literature; Evans-Pritchard naturalized the post-independence monarchy by finding roots for Sanusi political leadership in the nineteenth century. Relying on French and Italian colonial sources and in direct support of British geopolitical aims, Evans-Pritchard attributed the Sanusiyya with developing state structures in the mid-nineteenth century as an integral part of the pre-colonial social and political landscape. European and American scholarship, citing Evans-Pritchard as their primary source, perpetuated the characterization of the Sanusiyya in the nineteenth century as a Saharan state financed by their involvement in trade routes and directly responsible for governing the Bedouin tribes of the Libyan desert leading to an overemphasis on the Sanusi elites to the neglect of other social, economic, and political factors that shaped modern Libyan history.

Starting in the 1990s, a growing cadre of scholars has tried to correct the overemphasis on Sanusi leadership by examining other factors in the political, religious, and social landscape of the Libyan territories in the nineteenth century and the colonial era. Using a small pool of

evidence, historians have been slowly filling in the gaps by pointing to the involvement of Ottoman officials, notables in Tripolitania, and the activities of Libyans in exile in the development of Libyan nationalism and anti-colonial resistance.²⁴ Discussions of the Sanusiyya, however, continue to rely on a shaky scaffolding of secondary literature with Evans-Pritchard at the center. Scholars continue to focus on finding a point of transition when the Sufi *ṭarīqa* changed from a religious mission to a political-military organization. Assuming a strict division between the two, this focus misses the opportunity to examine the mutually constitutive nature of religious and political authority in a context of restricted access to resources.

In the final section of this chapter, I bring this scholarship together to examine what we know about the Sanusiyya as a religious, economic, and social force in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This chapter moves backwards through time to find the origins of the idea of a Sanusi state in nineteenth century literature by French explorers and imperialists who greatly exaggerated the influence of the Muslim notables in the region with little conception of how the Sufi *ṭarīqa* fit into a wider framework of regional political, economic, and tribal alliances. Recent research in the Ottoman archives suggests that almost as soon as the Sanusiyya began to develop as a religious mission, Ottoman and European states competing for the opportunity to present themselves as protectors of the Muslim world began to send weapons and

²⁴ Lisa Anderson, "Nineteenth-Century Reform in Ottoman Libya," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 16 (1984): 325-48, and "Ramadan al-Suwayhli: Hero of the Libyan Resistance," in *Struggle and Survival in the Modern Middle East*, Edmund Burke III, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Rachel Simon, *Libya Between Ottomanism and Nationalism: The Ottoman Involvement in Libya during the War with Italy (1911-1919)* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1987); Michel Le Gall, "The Ottoman Government and the Sanusiya: A Reappraisal," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 21 (1989): 90-106, and "Forging the Nation-State: Some Issues in the Historiography of Modern Libya," in *The Maghrib in Question: Essays in History and Historiography*, Michel Le Gall and Kenneth Perkins, eds. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997); Anna Baldinetti, "Italian Colonial Rule and Muslim Elites in Libya: A Relationship of Antagonism and Collaboration," in *Guardians of Faith in Modern Times: 'Ulama' in the Middle East*, Meir Haina, ed. (Leiden: Brill: 2009), and *Origins*.

funds to Sanusi centers, turning Sanusi *zaw* into arms depots and military training grounds. This research suggests the futility in looking for a transition point in the Sanusiyya from a religious to a political-military organization, but the widespread characterization of the Sanusiyya as a state within a state has oversimplified the complex nature of the relationships among centralized imperial authorities, the Sanusi elite, and the regional tribes who claimed adherence to the Sanusi *ṭarīqa* and, at times, used their weapons for or against state power.

I will not attempt to generate a detailed analysis of the social and political history of the Sanusiyya at this point; the opacity of the sources hardly allows the historian to scratch the surface. For now, it is more important to examine the stakes involved in how the Sanusiyya have been represented in terms of their position in Libyan society and their relationships with the Italian colonial administration. Competing perceptions of the Sanusiyya as a religious, political, or militaristic anti-European organization dominated Italian discussions over the possibilities of establishing a power-sharing system under Sanusi leadership in Cyrenaica. As I will demonstrate in subsequent chapters, arguments concerning the relative merits of a Sanusi alliance often rested on imperfect understandings of their religious beliefs and practices and their relationship to the Ottoman state, and the echoes of this colonial literature on the Sanusiyya continue to inform historical analysis of the position of the Sanusi elite in Libya's national history. What image of the Sanusiyya will take hold as Libyans come to terms with their colonial past in the post-Qaddafi era?

The Legacy of the Sanusiyya in Qaddafi's Regime and the Oral History Project

Following the coup that brought him to power in 1969, Qaddafi's regime promoted a reinterpretation of the history of the colonial period that delegitimized the political authority of Idris el-Sanusi by identifying the Libyan anti-colonial resistance as a movement originating from the Libyan people without Sanusi leadership. During Qaddafi's regime, the Libyan Studies Center in Tripoli took on a central role in this reinterpretation. Founded in 1977 by Muhammad Jerary, a Libyan native with a PhD from Northwestern University, the title of the Center in Arabic was first *Markaz Dirāsāt li-Jihad al-Libin dhad al-Ghazū al-Itali* or the Center for the Study of the Libyan Struggle Against the Italian Invasion. In 2009, the name changed to the *Markaz al-Watanī lil Mahfuthāt wa al-Dirāsāt al-Tārīkhiya*, or the National Center for Archives and Historical Study. The change in title accompanied an expansion of the Center's facilities and its growing importance as a depository for primary and secondary sources on Libyan history beyond the colonial period.

As its first major act, the new Libyan Studies Center in Tripoli launched an Oral History Project (*al-Riwayāt al-Shafawiyya*) in 1978 with the goal of recording oral interviews about anti-colonial resistance in Libya with people who took up arms against the Italian occupation. The project followed general trends in African studies which in the 1960s and 70s looked to oral sources as a means of escaping the history of elites found in the colonial archives following Dike's innovative use of oral sources in his work on the social and political history of Nigeria. Recognizing the weight of oral evidence in Islamic culture, the turn to oral sources accelerated in

Islamic Africa in the 1970s.²⁵ The Libyan Studies Center inaugurated the Oral History Project at the tail-end of this trend and in the process, created an archive with alternative narratives of resistance that focused on the stories of individual mujahidin and local histories instead of the leadership of Sanusi elites.

To oversee the project, Jerary invited his former professor from Northwestern University, the eminent Africanist and oral historian, Jan Vansina. Though he had little experience in North Africa and little familiarity with the Arabic language, Vansina spent about six months in Tripoli where he trained seventeen high school teachers to conduct interviews and helped them develop a list of questions to guide the conversations. Vansina and his team divided Libya into fourteen regions, and they traveled throughout the country to interview men (and a few women) who had been identified as former mujahidin in the struggle against Italian colonial occupation. The interviewers recorded their conversations on cassette tapes, many of which have been translated from highly localized dialects into standard Arabic and transcribed into over twenty volumes published by the Libyan Studies Center and housed in their library. Unfortunately, reading the transcriptions instead of listening to the recordings places an extra interpretive layer between the researcher and the original source, but the use of local dialects make the recordings inaccessible to any but a very small handful of historians. The staff at the Libyan Studies Center have told me that even urban Libyans find the dialects of the mujahidin so difficult to understand that the process of transcribing them continues to this day.

²⁵ K.O. Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830-1885: An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956); Ghislaine Lydon, *On Trans-Saharan Trails: Islamic Law, Trade Networks, and Cross-Cultural Exchanges in Nineteenth-Century West Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 15.

Jan Vansina wrote about his involvement in the Oral History Project in his memoirs, *Living With Africa*, and I had the opportunity to ask him for more details in a personal interview in 2007. In both instances, Vansina agreed with the general thrust of the Qaddafi-era historiography in its rejection of the centrality of the Sanusi leadership in the anti-Italian armed resistance. Vansina claimed that the interviews contradicted accounts of the Sanusiyya as central leaders of a nationalist resistance movement by demonstrating that anti-colonial resistance arose organically in highly localized manifestations that the leaders of the Sanusiyya then usurped for personal gain. He along with the staff of the Libyan Studies Center intended the Oral History Project to provide “a history of the people, for the people” as a divergence from previous narratives of resistance that focused on elite leaders as national heroes.²⁶ In this sense, the Oral History Project followed Qaddafi’s general message of social empowerment and localized power as part of his revolutionary agenda to establish direct popular democracy.

The Oral History Project created an archive of individual memories and popular interpretations of resistance in post-colonial Libya, and the collection’s detailed descriptions of individuals’ involvement in particular battles have the potential to contribute to our understanding of the political and military landscape during the Italian occupation. However, the stories in the Oral History Project must be read against the political imperatives of the Qaddafi revolution during a time when an institution like the Libyan Studies Center required the approval of the regime to receive funding and continue its mission of supporting historical research in Libya’s colonial past. In creating a new lexicon of national heroes, the transcribed volumes of the Oral History Project failed to explain how they identified the anti-colonial mujahidin, thus

²⁶ Personal Interview with Jan Vansina, April 2007. See also, Jan Vansina, *Living with Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005).

eliding the complexity of the colonial past and the political consequences of claiming a legacy of resistance, and the format of the interviews contributed to a certain standardization of their accounts.

The majority of the interviews occurred in public settings, and the public display of their memories of resistance influenced the stories they chose to tell and the ways in which they told them. Consider, for example, a moment during an interview with a mujahid from the al-Shata' region in northern Fezzan. When asked to talk about what he knew about the Italians' arrival to the area, he told a story about a group of tribal leaders from his region who traveled to talk to Turkish officials soon after the Italians landed in Tripoli. When the group of representatives returned, the speaker said, "I was amazed at the return of Muhammad bin 'Amir," one of the tribal leaders in the group, but he did not explain why or what had amazed him. At this point, the dialogue in the text broke, and the researcher conducting the interview later inserted a note that the presence of Muhammad bin 'Amir's sons among the group of people gathered for the interview prevented the speaker from divulging more details about their father's return for fear that, "some of the young men were embarrassed by the remembrance or account."²⁷ In other instances, the interviews were conducted within a group leading to formulaic accounts of local histories.

Through this process of performative interviews, the Oral History Project collected certain versions of local histories as they were remembered in the popular imagination and lent them authority through the weight of repetition and public display. One can only imagine the arrival of interviewers from the Libyan Studies Center in Tripoli to small villages throughout

²⁷ *Al-Riwayāt al-Shafawiyya*, Vol. 12 (Markaz al-Jihad: Tripoli, Libya, 1991), 31.

Libya created a public spectacle and conferred prestige on those individuals selected for the interview process as representatives of local history and national heroes of anti-colonial resistance. Not all of the accounts went uncontested. The transcriptions include other moments of breaks in the dialogue when audience members interrupted to correct the speaker or provide alternative narratives for particular events. The interviewers were careful to note dissent from among the onlookers, but they gave clear preference to the narratives of those being interviewed, the official storytellers. The Oral History Project collected and reinforced particular ways of talking about anti-colonial resistance in the process of celebrating heroes of the resistance.

Because of their limited accessibility, only a small handful of scholars writing in English have made use of the recorded histories, and as far as I know, no one working primarily on Italian history has done so.²⁸ The collected testimonies represent an opportunity to trace local histories and tribal alliances during the colonial era. For example, the stories reveal greater details about Libyans like ‘Abd al-Nabi Balkhir, a leader of Libya’s largest tribe, the Warfalla, who helped the Italian troops in their initial invasion into Fezzan, but switched sides to help in the defeat of the Italians during an infamous battle at Qasr Abu Hadi in 1914. However, because the stories were collected as part of a nationalist project to remember the heroism of the Libyan people against a common enemy, the Oral History Project reads as a collection of reactions against a colonial aggressor, thus emphasizing the Italians as primary actors who, however, appear as monolithic and undifferentiated in the mujahidin’s accounts.

²⁸ For the most extensive use of stories from the Oral History Project, see Abdulmola S. el-Horeir, “Social and Economic Transformations in the Libyan Hinterland during the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century: The Role of Sayyid Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi,” UCLA, 1981. Ali Abdullatif Ahmida also cited the Oral History Project to a more limited extent in *The Making of Modern Libya: State Formation, Colonization, and Resistance, 1830-1932* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

Evans-Pritchard and The Sanusi of Cyrenaica

In collecting the individual stories of anti-Italian mujahidin, the historians of the Oral History Project hoped to escape the dominant interpretation of the anti-colonial movement in Libya as one led by the Sanusiyya established in the monograph from the British anthropologist E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica*, in 1949. The interpretation of the Sanusiyya as nationalistic political leaders in Evans-Pritchard's book provided a firm rationale for the British-backed decision by the United Nations to create a Sanusi monarchy under the leadership of Idris al-Sanusi in the Libyan territories after the Second World War, and it came to shape postwar Libyan historiography under the Sanusi king. Evans-Pritchard based his work on his experiences during the two years he spent as a Political Officer in the British Military Administration of Cyrenaica starting in 1942. Evans-Pritchard's task in the position was to recommend the best course of action for answering the needs of the Bedouin tribes in Cyrenaica as the United Nations developed plans for a future independent state, and he wrote his book as an examination of how the Sanusiyya functioned as leaders within Bedouin society. Mirroring ethnographic studies from the previous century, Evans-Pritchard argued in favor of a Sanusi state as the best solution for securing unity and stability in a region that he depicted as riddled with tribal factions.

Although it might not have been Evans-Pritchard's goal, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica* gave considerable weight to the British objective of establishing Idris as a head of state on Libya's independence. It was, as Lisa Anderson put it, "an illuminating example of scholarship in the

service of imperialism.”²⁹ The political stakes of determining the political and religious authority of the Sanusiyya heightened after independence; facing the prospect of a future independent state on Egypt’s western border, the British eagerly promoted the image of Idris as a centralized authority figure, certain that he would promote British interests in the region. Evans-Pritchard naturalized the leadership of Idris by depicting the Sanusiyya as the best possible leaders for the Bedouin population of Cyrenaica based on his conception of segmentary tribal structures. In Evans-Pritchard’s segmentary model, tribes developed as delicately balanced power systems in which no one individual could exercise permanent authority over the other members of society. He imagined that in this highly divided system of relations, the Sanusiyya served a mediating function in negotiating tribal disputes. Thus he claimed that the greatest number of *zawāyā* could be found in the territories of the most highly fragmented tribes; the more cohesive the tribe, the less use it had for Sanusi presence.³⁰

According to Evans-Pritchard’s analysis, the Sanusiyya made a complete transformation from a religious to a political organization gradually over the course of the late nineteenth century in opposition to the increased presence of European interests and out of the need to deal directly with European states, but he found the roots for the Sanusi’s political functions during the Ottoman era. The state structure of the Sanusiyya, in Evans-Pritchard’s account, worked in tandem with the centralized Ottoman state in what he called a “Turco-Sanusi condominium” in which the Sanusi elite collected taxes from the tribes of the interior in exchange for exemption

²⁹ Lisa Anderson, “Legitimacy, Identity, and the Writing of History,” 81.

³⁰ Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica*, 72.

from taxes on Sanusi properties. Evans-Pritchard claimed that the Ottomans depended entirely on the Sanusiyya to control the fragmented tribes of the interior.³¹

Evans-Pritchard established a precedent for subsequent studies of the Sanusiyya by identifying a transitional moment for the Sanusiyya from a religious-missionary organization into a nationalist and patriotic movement when the Sufi *ṭarīqa* faced the incursions of aggressive European imperialism. The essence of this national movement, he claimed, had been there from the beginning of the Sanusiyya's existence as a Sufi *ṭarīqa*; as a highly organized network of *zawāyā*, the Sanusiyya provided a political structure to a group of tribes that already shared a common culture. Given the highly fragmented nature of tribal society, Evans-Pritchard contended that Cyrenaican Bedouins required the leadership of an organization that could at once stand outside of the tribal structures and integrate with tribal leadership, and he held that the religious nature of the Sanusi movement allowed Sanusi shaykhs to serve that purpose. In his assessment, the Sanusiyya never stopped being a religious movement, but after the Italian invasion, the language used to express the "desire of a people to live according to their own traditions and institutions" had simply changed from religious to political in nature.

Evans-Pritchard's depiction of the Sanusiyya as centralized political and religious leaders and as the center of anti-colonial resistance and postcolonial nationalism echoed earlier colonial reports about the threat of the Sanusiyya while it supported British interests in establishing a Sanusi kingdom, but he was careful to distance the Sanusiyya from a reputation of Islamic fanaticism found in the vast majority of nineteenth century colonial literature. Though he attributed the emergence of political functions of the Sanusiyya to their resistance to European

³¹ Ibid., 98.

presence, he compared the Sanusiyya favorably to the eighteenth century Wahhabi movement in Saudi Arabia in terms of their attitudes towards Europeans as allies. Evans-Pritchard claimed that the Sanusiyya, unlike the Wahhabis, “have never shown themselves more hostile than other Muslims to Christians and Jews, and the Grand Sanusi and Sayyid al-Mahdi scrupulously avoided all political entanglements which would bring them into unfriendly relations with neighboring States and the European Powers.”³² Evans-Pritchard’s study instead favored a tradition of colonial literature about the Sufi *ṭarīqa* that characterized the Sanusiyya as a civilizing force in an otherwise ungovernable society, an intermediary step in the progression of North Africa to assist in the efforts of centralized powers to settle and educate the Bedouin tribes.

Since Evans-Pritchard wrote *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica*, scholars have criticized his interpretation of the Sanusiyya both for its methodological approach and for its clear complicity with British political interests, but few scholars have managed to escape his naturalization of the Sanusiyya as a state-like organization that presented a unified leadership in a highly divided region. A student of Evans-Pritchard, Emyrs Peters, first discredited the segmentary model for Bedouin society in his doctoral thesis in 1951. Peters criticized Evans-Pritchard’s segmentary-lineage model of Bedouin society as being excessively static, a structure of equilibrium that did not allow for change until the Sanusiyya transformed from a religious to a political structure. To counter this model, Peters examined networks of voluntary association in Bedouin society, like trade relationships, that did not follow tribal divisions to demonstrate greater flexibility in networks of association in the Bedouin society of eastern Libya. Evans-Pritchard’s myopic focus on lineage, he claimed, reflected ideological explanations for tribal relationships and obscured

³² Ibid., 8.

other social structures at work in the development of the Sanusiyya among the Bedouin tribes. By disproving the primacy of lineage as an organizing principle in Bedouin society, Peters called into question Evans-Pritchard's functional interpretation of the Sanusiyya as mediators in deep-seated tribal conflicts, and he opened up the possibility that other sources for regional allegiances besides religion shaped the development of social and political alliances during the Italian occupation.

In his analysis of the development of the Sanusiyya within regional tribal structures, Peters rejected Evans-Pritchard's insistence on the political motivations of the Sanusi elite in their movement into the southern oases of the late nineteenth century, and he pointed out that Evans-Pritchard lacked empirical data to support his claim that the Sanusiyya built *zawāyā* in regions with the greatest tribal divisions. Instead, Peters recognized that the expansion of the Sanusiyya followed the development of the trans-Saharan trade routes and their relationships with powerful tribal leaders who could provide resources and a social basis for the religious organization. Rather than developing where tribal divisions seemed to require the presence of an outside arbiter, Peters argued that the expansion of the Sanusiyya occurred where the Sufi *ṭarīqa* could find access to land and water and a community of potential converts and students.³³

A number of historians, anthropologists, and religious studies scholars have followed Peters' example in rejecting Evans-Pritchard's functionalist interpretation of the Sanusiyya, and some have gone on to examine the influence of other social structures in the history of Cyrenaica under Italian and Sanusi rule. The issue of whether or not or when the Sanusiyya developed state

³³ Emrys L. Peters, *The Bedouin of Cyrenaica*, Edited by Jack Goody and Emanuel Marx (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

functions or a state structure, however, remains unclear in most scholarship on the Sanusiyya in Libyan history. The political weight of finding precolonial legitimacy for the Sanusi monarchy continues to cloud scholarship on the development of the Sanusi *ṭarīqa* and the early relationship of the Sanusi elite to state and tribal authorities in the region.

The Sanusiyya in the Nineteenth Century

The Sanusiyya developed as a Sufi *ṭarīqa* in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, a period bookmarked by the end of the reign of the Qaramanlis and the second Ottoman occupation in 1835 and the French occupation of the Lake Chad region in 1901-02. Histories of the Sanusiyya credit Muhammad ibn ‘Ali al-Sanusi, Idris al-Sanusi’s grandfather, as the founder of the Sanusiyya. Born in Algeria, al-Sanusi studied in Mecca under Ahmad ibn Idris, a religious teacher in the Salafist tradition who advocated an Islamic revival through a return to the practices or *sunna* of the Prophet Muhammad.³⁴ A number of students of Ahmad ibn Idris established Sufi

³⁴ Due to the focus on connecting to the Prophet Muhammad instead of connecting to God, scholars have often labeled the Sanusiyya, along with other similar Sufi *ṭuruq* that developed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as ‘neo-sufist’ movements with a reformist social-political agenda analogous to the Wahhabi movement that emerged in Arabia in the eighteenth century. However, it is not entirely clear to what extent the early leaders of these newly emerging Sufi practices in North Africa in the early nineteenth century considered their focus on Muhammad a critique of earlier religious practices or social mores. Some scholars have pointed to the fact that religious practices searching for a connection to the Prophet Muhammad can be traced back much earlier than the nineteenth century Sufi movements and could be read as analogous to a connection to God to argue that the idea of ‘neo-sufism’ of the nineteenth century as reform or political movements stemmed from post-colonial interpretations that read back political intention into the early formation of religious practices. See Valerie J. Hoffman, “Annihilation in the Messenger of God: The Development of Sufi Practice,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31, no. 3 (1999), 364; Alexander Knysh, “Sufism as an Explanatory Paradigm: The Issue of Motivations of Sufi Resistance Movements in Western and Russian Scholarship,” *Die Welt des Islams* 42, no. 2 (2002), 142.

turuq after their teacher's death in 1837.³⁵ After a period of traveling back and forth between Mecca and Cyrenaica, Muhammad ibn 'Ali al-Sanusi settled with an entourage in Cyrenaica in 1853 where he began to build *zawāyā*—Sufi religious centers for teaching and prayer—with a headquarters in the oasis town of Jaghbub near the Egyptian border.³⁶ Like many religious leaders credited with founding *turuq* in the Maghrib, al-Sanusi never explicitly declared his intention to establish a Sufi *ṭarīqa* or used the term “Sanusiyya”; his son Muhammad al-Mahdi al-Sanusi began to refer to the family's collection of *zawāyā* as part of the Sufi *ṭarīqa* of the Sanusiyya when he assumed the spiritual guidance of the movement after his father's death in 1859.³⁷ Al-Mahdi initiated a period of rapid expansion of the Sanusiyya into the southern reaches of Fezzan and into the region of Wadai. By the end of the nineteenth century, the name of the Sanusiyya was attached to *zawāyā* stretching from Benghazi all the way down to Lake Chad, Wadai, and Darfur.³⁸

The religious practices of the Sanusiyya expanded quickly in part due to its syncretic merging with preexisting practices and beliefs among Bedouin tribes in the region who had a long history of venerating *murābitūn* or marabouts. The marabouts venerated in Cyrenaica generally came from outside the immediate region where they settled either on their way to or back from the hajj to Mecca, and they acquired reputations as holy men who accrued and distributed *baraka* to those who prayed at their tombs. They were known to act as mediators in

³⁵ Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, *Muslim Communities of Grace: The Sufi Brotherhoods in Islamic Religious Life* (London: Hurst, 1988), 143-147; R.S. O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint: Ahmad Ibn Idris and the Idrisi Tradition* (Evanston: Northwestern University, 1990) 58-70, 125-9.

³⁶ Abun-Nasr, *Muslim Communities*, 160-61; Evans-Pritchard, *Sanusi of Cyrenaica*, 14-22.

³⁷ Vikør, *Sufi and Scholar*, 143.

³⁸ Anderson, “Nineteenth-Century Reform”, 338.

disputes, and their tombs served as places of refuge.³⁹ In a pattern similar to other Sufi *ṭuruq*, the Sanusiyya established two levels of followers. Sanusi *ikhwān* or brothers lived in the Sanusi *zawāyā*, observed stricter practices, distributed *baraka* among their followers, and when they died, their tombs became sites of pilgrimage. For the majority of Sanusi followers, the Sufi *ṭarīqa* offered a relatively open framework that could fit easily with preexisting traditions. The only additional requirement for Muslims to follow the Sanusi path “was a communal *dhikr* ceremony, which consisted of reading passages from the Qur'an followed by the recitation of *al-Salat al-'Azimiyya*, the supererogatory prayer Ibn Idris said was taught him by the Prophet.”⁴⁰ In the two-tiered system of the Sanusiyya, European observers attributed the *ikhwān* with control over the workings of the Sufi *ṭarīqa* and access to trade routes throughout the region.

The direct ties of the Sanusiyya and their followers with a vibrant trans-Saharan trade route proved important in the Sufi *ṭarīqa*'s expansion, but the exact nature of the involvement of Sanusi *ikhwān* in regional trade remains unclear. By the second half of the nineteenth century, the Wadai-Benghazi route became the busiest artery for the trans-Saharan slave trade.⁴¹ The route first became active at the beginning of the nineteenth century when the Sultan ‘Abd al-Karim Sabun of Wadai (r.1803-13) sought a road to Egyptian and Mediterranean markets that avoided Darfur. The route fell into disuse with ‘Abd al-Karim Sabun’s death, but it picked up again under the Sultan Muhammad al-Sharif (1835-58) and renewed hostilities with Darfur. Official abolition of slaves and the slave trade in Tunis in 1841, the closing of the slave market in

³⁹ Ralph A. Austen, *Trans-Saharan Africa in World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 81; Abun-Nasr, *Muslim Communities*, 161; Evans-Pritchard, *Sanusi of Cyrenaica*, 62-89.

⁴⁰ Abun-Nasr, *Muslim Communities*, 162; Nicola A. Ziadeh, *Sanusiyya: A Study of a Revivalist Movement in Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1983), 9.

⁴¹ Dirk Vandewalle, *A History of Modern Libya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 20.

Istanbul in 1847, and French restrictions in Algiers spurred an uptick in activity along the Wadai-Benghazi route among slave traders nervous about their future prospects. The abolition of the slave trade in Egypt in 1877 (enforced following the British occupation of 1882) only increased the importance of the Wadai-Benghazi route. Trade along this route reached its height in the 1890s at about 2,000 slaves per year, and it remained active until the 1920s, longer than any other trans-Saharan path. Slaves were the most valuable but not the only commodity traded along the Wadai-Benghazi route; ivory, ostrich feathers, and esparto grass traveled north to European markets, and caravans returned with European commercial goods including beads, paper, and cotton.

In a pattern similar to other Sufi *turuq* in the Maghrib, the Sanusi *zawāyā* provided resting points and communication centers for trans-Saharan traders. The oasis of Kufra - the site of one of the most important Sanusi *zawāyā* and the headquarters of the Sanusi family after 1902 - fell in the middle of one of the most difficult portions of the route between Tekro in Borkou and the Cyrenaican oasis of Jalo, and caravans typically rested in Kufra for about ten days before heading north to Benghazi.⁴² In the spread of the Nasiriyya in eighteenth and nineteenth century Morocco, donations determined the status of adherents within the Sufi *ṭarīqa* and their subsequent access to the order's resources. Assuming a pattern of development similar to that of the Nasiriyya, it is likely that adherence to the Sanusiyya granted individuals and tribal leaders in Cyrenaica increased access to resources as the Sufi *ṭarīqa* grew in importance during the nineteenth century.⁴³ The Sanusi elites, as Islamic scholars, also served as primary agents of

⁴² John Wright, *The Trans-Saharan Slave Trade* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 104-112.

⁴³ David P.V. Gutelius, "The Path is Easy and the Benefits Large: The Nasiriyya, Social Networks, and Economic Change in Morocco, 1640-1830," *The Journal of African History* 43, no. 1 (2002): 32.

communication along the trans-Saharan trade routes in collaboration with the Bedouin tribes who served as guides and merchants in a pattern that could be seen throughout the Sahara in the nineteenth century.⁴⁴

Due to a lack of reliable documentation, however, we do not have a clear idea of the exact nature of the involvement of Sanusi elites in trans-Saharan trade in the nineteenth century. Traditional explanations have attributed the growth of trade along the Wadai-Benghazi route to the facilitation of the Sanusiyya, but while they might have eased regional communications and provided structural support to merchants, the involvement of the Sanusiyya in trade depended on the adherence of the tribes who controlled scarce resources and served as essential guides in the Northern Sahara. The Mogarba and Zuwaya tribes, two tribes linked through economic alliances and a shared history, dominated trans-Saharan trading patterns through their access to camels and water sources in the nineteenth century. The adherence of these tribes to the Sanusi *zawāyā* in the nineteenth century was crucial for the connection between the Sanusi *ṭarīqa* and regional commerce. Mogarba and Zuwaya notables gained powerful positions within the Sanusiyya, and as we will see further along, Mogarba elite helped shape Sanusi politics during the Italian colonial occupation.⁴⁵

As the Sanusi *ikhwān* constructed *zawāyā* along southward trade routes, they developed a reputation as mediators in intertribal conflicts that observers cited as evidence of their position outside of tribal affiliations and their ability to generate unity. However, the spread of the Sanusiyya and the role of the Sanusi *ikhwān* as mediators depended on the consent of the

⁴⁴ Lydon, *On Trans-Saharan Trails*, 12.

⁴⁵ Glauco Ciammaichella, *Libyens et Français au Tchad (1897-1914): La Confrérie senoussie et le commerce transsaharien* (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1987), 36.

Bedouin tribes, and contrary to customary explanations for the centrality of the Sanusiyya in spreading trade throughout the region, it was the development of trade routes by regional tribes that led to the spreading influence of the Sanusiyya into the Northern Sahara. The spread of the Sanusiyya into the oases of Kufra, for example, occurred in direct collaboration with the Zuwaya, traditionally a client tribe who paid tribute to a more powerful tribe of the Mogarba in eastern Sirte in exchange for access to water and land. In the 1840s, when drought conditions drove a group of the Zuwaya to move southward, they invaded the oases of Kufra and took possession of its rich palm groves from Tibbu tribes who continued to work the land and pay tribute to the Zuwaya. The move to Kufra allowed the Zuwaya to establish control over the portion of the trans-Saharan trade route from Wadai to Kufra and a vast network of trade through their traditional ties to the Mogarba of eastern Sirte.⁴⁶ The influx of Zuwaya inhabitants, however, generated a crisis with the Tibbu, and in 1895, Muhammad al-Mahdi al-Sanusi moved his headquarters of the Sanusiyya from Jaghbub to Kufra on invitation of the Zuwaya who asked them to mediate a truce with the Tibbu to solidify their control of the oasis and its connected trade routes.⁴⁷

Sanusi religious authority lent legitimacy to the Zuwaya and their dominance over the Tibbu population in Kufra, and their acceptance of the Sanusiyya was essential to the Sufi *ṭarīqa*'s expansion into the south. The Zuwaya and the Sanusiyya established a symbiotic

⁴⁶ Ahmida, *Making of Modern Libya*, 83; Peters, *Bedouin of Cyrenaica*, 40-41. British intelligence reported that the Zuwaya inhabitants moved into the oases of Kufra to escape punishment for the murder of Ottoman officers near Ajedabiya in 1890. BNA FO 101/84, British Consulate in Benghazi to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, 2 April 1894. It seems entirely plausible that there were two movements of Zuwaya inhabitants into the Kufra oases. The second influx could have precipitated a wider crisis with the Tibbu inhabitants, leading to the invitation of intervention by the Sanusiyya.

⁴⁷ John Davis, *Libyan Politics: Tribe and Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 110.

relationship, but more work needs to be done to determine how their relationship developed with the expansion of the Wadai-Benghazi trade route. The expansion of the Sanusiyya and their particular form of Islam grew in direct correlation to the success of the Benghazi-Wadai trade route; in the late nineteenth century, merchants benefitted from adherence to the Sanusiyya by gaining access to resources and a vast social and religious network while the Sanusiyya benefitted from donations made by its increasing numbers of adherents. Through their dominance in regional trading patterns and their continued relationships with Zuwaya tribes in the interior oases, Mogarba elites in western Cyrenaica gained prominent positions within the Sanusiyya. As we will see, the opposition of Mogarba tribes who saw the Italian presence as a potential threat to their commercial interests represented a major stumbling block to attempts by Italian colonialists to expand into the Libyan interior. In their eventual negotiations with Idris al-Sanusi, Italian colonial officials hoped to gain the consensus of Mogarba notables, but their failure led to the dissolution of Sanusi-Italian treaties under the fascist administration.

French Encounters with the Sanusiyya

The expansion of the Sanusiyya as a religious organization with links to important trade networks attracted the attention of state observers in the region who eyed the Sufi *ṭarīqa* with a combination of apprehension and cautious curiosity for what the growing importance of the Sanusiyya could mean for political alignments in an increasingly important region. French explorers and imperialists in North Africa wrote the earliest reports observing the development of the Sanusiyya in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, and they exaggerated the potential for

Sanusi elites to pose a threat to French interests. In his comprehensive, two-volume study on the subject, Jean-Louis Triaud divided his analysis of French contact with the Sanusiyya into four periods. First, between 1855 and 1870, French explorers began to write about the Sanusiyya in their travels across the Sahara with a measure of curiosity and only marginal direct contact. Triaud identified Henri Duveyrier, the Vice President of the Société Géographique de France, as the author responsible for focusing public attention in France on the Sanusiyya during this period. Duveyrier introduced the Sanusiyya as a focal point for French colonial literature in a book about the Tuareg of North Africa in 1864.⁴⁸ In his descriptions of the Sanusiyya, Duveyrier likened the Sufi *ṭarīqa* to Jesuits or Freemasons, both of which carried negative connotations in French public opinion at the time as secret religious societies with dangerous political goals. According to Duveyrier, the Sanusiyya represented an aggressive group of religious fanatics who sought to establish Muslim dominance over the Christian world and who had the capacity to mobilize massive numbers of dedicated followers to their cause. He contrasted the supposed fanaticism of the Sanusiyya with what he characterized as the tolerant Sufi order of the Tijaniyya, one of the Sufi *ṭarīqāt* that had become a focal point for French concerns in West Africa by the end of the nineteenth century.⁴⁹

The dissemination of Duveyrier's negative image of the Sanusiyya led to a shift in former French attitudes towards Sufi *ṭarīqāt* throughout North Africa. Towards the beginning of French interest in the Sahara in the 1840s, prevailing opinion held that the French should adopt policies similar to what they believed to have been the approach of the Ottoman Empire towards the

⁴⁸ Jean-Louis Triaud, *La légende noire de la Sanûsiyya: Un conférie musulmane saharienne sous le regard français (1840-1930)* (Paris: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1995), 99.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 111-112.

Sanusiyya: treat them like friendly religious orders and allow them limited influence over local administrative decisions.⁵⁰ Following the warnings of Duveyrier, the French began to watch all Sufi *ṭarīqāt* with suspicion. Starting in the 1870s, French intelligence officers established surveillance on the Sanusiyya and followed communications between Sanusi elites and regional leaders in an attempt to determine the capacity of the Sanusiyya to influence the political climate and to prevent the widespread distribution of arms and ammunition through Sanusi trade networks. According to Triaud, this second period represented the height of French preoccupation with the Sanusiyya bordering on obsession with what was referred to in French literature as “*le légend noire*,” the black legend of the Sahara. At the height of the French hysteria over the supposed threat of the Sanusiyya to imperial interests in North Africa, Duveyrier published a pamphlet with the Société de Géographie in 1884 for a wide audience that depicted the spiritual guide of the Sanusiyya as an omnipotent force with a large army at his disposal. He claimed that the Sanusiyya represented a political and economic organization with a strong hierarchical structure and a tendency to assimilate other Sufi orders to create a network, two characteristics that, in combination, suggested that the spiritual head of the Sanusiyya could command vast numbers of followers. In a characteristic exaggeration, Duveyrier estimated that the leadership of the Sanusi *ṭarīqa* had 2.5-3 million followers ready to take up arms against Christian imperialists.⁵¹

French agents in the region often contributed to a sense of urgency concerning the Sanusiyya as a strategic move to gain more resources and prestige for their positions as colonial

⁵⁰ Ibid., 9.

⁵¹ Ibid., 331-346; Henri Duveyrier, *Le Confrérie musulmane de Sidi Muhammad Ben ‘Ali Es-Senousi et son domaine géographique, en l’année 1300 de l’hégire (1883 de notre ère)* (Société de Géographie: Paris, 1884), 12.

officers. According to Triaud, Eugène Ricard, a French consular agent in Benghazi, inflated the threat the Sanusiyya posed to Europeans as a strategic career move. From his arrival in 1866 until he left Benghazi in 1895, Ricard's correspondence with officials in France escalated in its hysteria over the threat of the Sanusiyya and monopolized the official discourse concerning North Africa.⁵² After Ricard's successor Édouard Bertrand arrived in Benghazi in 1895, the focus of official correspondence turned away from the threat of the Sanusiyya. During this third period in Triaud's chronology of French perceptions of the Sanusiyya, the correspondence concerning the Sanusiyya followed a more cautious line in fitting with the diplomatic background of the new French consul in Tripoli, Charles-Ferdinand Destrées, and French officials in Paris, Tripoli, and Benghazi undertook a reassessment of the Sanusiyya in the late 1890s that resulted in a more positive image of the Sufi *ṭarīqa* and a turn towards conciliatory policies.⁵³ Bertrand criticized the tendencies of Duveyrier and Ricard to exaggerate in their characterizations of Sanusi dominance in the region: "The importance of the house [*zāwiyya*] in Kufra has been a bit exaggerated and [...] except in Hedjaz and the Sudanic regions, [the Sanusiyya] does not elsewhere have influence over even half the action that has often been accorded them. In reality, we are the ones who made the name of the Senousi known and recognized."⁵⁴

The depictions of the Sanusiyya as a political power found in the French literature shaped all subsequent understandings of the Sanusiyya as the effective political leaders in the Cyrenaican interior. Following this foundational literature on the Sanusiyya as a form of

⁵² Ibid., 141.

⁵³ Triaud, *Légende noire*, 295.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 303.

religious and political authority in the Sahara, British, Italian, German, and Ottoman officials competed for an alliance with the Sanusi elite as a means of securing their influence in what became in the early twentieth century an increasingly important strategic region as a final battleground for influence in the “Scramble for Africa.” Disagreements over the relative strength of the Sanusi elite, their relationships to regional tribes, and their ties to pan-Islamic movements throughout the Muslim world informed official discussions over the relative possibility or desirability of negotiating an alliance with the recognized spiritual leader of the Sanusiyya after the death of Muhammad al-Mahdi al-Sanusi in 1902, Ahmad al-Sharif. To some extent, the French *legende noire* became a self-fulfilling myth as imperial officials began to send the Sanusi family members gifts of arms and supplies to try to win their favor, thus contributing to the militarization of the region and the dominance of the Sanusiyya as a political and social force.

Sanusi Authority in the Ottoman Empire

French, and later Italian, officials often imagined themselves to be following the example of the Ottoman Empire in their conciliatory approach to the Sufi *ṭuruq* of North Africa, but surprisingly little work has been done to explore what the Ottoman archives can tell us about the exact nature of the relationship between Sanusi leaders and the Ottoman government in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. Post-independence historiography perpetuated an interpretation of the relationship between Sanusi notables and Ottoman officials based on an illusory Ottoman firman from 1856 that, according to Evans-Pritchard, established the ‘Turco-Sanusi Compendium’ by exempting the Sanusiyya from paying taxes in exchange for their cooperation in collecting taxes

for the Ottoman authorities from Bedouin tribes of the interior. In his 1949 study, Evans-Pritchard cited this supposed agreement as further evidence of the legitimacy and necessity of Sanusi rule, claiming that the Ottomans depended entirely on the assistance of Sanusi notables for a task that would have been impossible otherwise because of the resistance of Bedouin tribes to outside interference.

More recent research in the Ottoman archives has demonstrated that Ottoman officials left the tribes of the Cyrenaican interior to their own devices through most of the nineteenth century until the late 1870s, and even after Sultan Abdulhamid attempted to integrate the Sanusi notables into a more centralized structure towards the end of the century, there is no clear indication that the Sanusi *ikhwān* accepted his appeals for their help—or that they were in a position to do so.⁵⁵ The *laissez faire* approach to the Bedouin tribes of the Cyrenaica interior until the 1870s reflected broader trends in Ottoman policies and the more specific effects of the region's political and economic landscape. The early years of the development of the Sanusiyya in the 1830s and 40s coincided with the first period of the *tanzimat* reforms in Istanbul that were intended to centralize authority in the empire while diminishing foreign interference by establishing equality of the empire's minorities before the law.⁵⁶ Despite the centralization policies, local notables continued to hold authority in the empire's outer provinces, and the Ottoman government had little financial motive to disturb the status in the interior of Cyrenaica in the early decades of the nineteenth century. They knew the tribes of the Cyrenaican interior to

⁵⁵ See Le Gall, "The Ottoman Government," 93. In the summer of 2011, Mostafa Minawi defended a dissertation on Ottoman policies in the Arab provinces at NYU with an in-depth analysis of some of the Ottoman documents concerning the Sanusiyya. I look forward to reading his findings when it becomes available.

⁵⁶ Mustafa Aksakal, *Ottoman Road to War in 1914: The Ottoman Empire and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 5-6.

be rebellious, and the Ottoman administration easily collected enough revenue from the more prosperous province of Tripolitania to cover the costs of its skeleton administration throughout the region.⁵⁷

In the 1870s and 80s, Cyrenaica and the Sanusiyya took on greater importance for Istanbul in the centralizing and pan-Islamic politics of Sultan Abdulhamid II (r. 1876-1909). After the French invaded Tunisia in 1881 and the British took Egypt in 1882, Tripolitania and Cyrenaica represented symbolic value as the last remaining Ottoman territories in North Africa and strategic value as a line of defense for access to the Red Sea and the Hejaz. Facing a crisis of confidence in Ottoman rule following the failed policies of the *tanzimat* reforms of the 1860s and the string of insurrections against Ottoman rule in the Balkans in 1875 and 1876, Abdulhamid called on Islamic unity to shore up support among Muslims in the Ottoman provinces, and the Libyan territories took on a central role as the Sultan tried to promote an image of strength and Islamic unity.⁵⁸ The Ottoman defeat by Russia in 1877-78 cost the empire a third of its territories and emphasized the futility of perpetuating the *tanzimat* idea of *Ittihad-i Anasir* or the “unity of Ottoman nations,” and Abdulhamid turned instead to an idea of Islamic unity to support his efforts at centralization.⁵⁹ Western observers coined the term “pan-Islamism” to refer to Abdulhamid’s campaign for Muslim unity in the mid-1870s, but Ottoman appeals to Islamic unity were far from new. The closest equivalent in Ottoman Turkish, *Ittihad-i Islam* or *Ittihad-i Din*, appeared frequently in requests for Ottoman aid and protection from

⁵⁷ Ahmida, *Making of Modern Libya*, 74.

⁵⁸ Vandewalle, *History of Modern Libya*, 17.

⁵⁹ Azmi Özcan, *Pan-Islamism: Indian Muslims, the Ottomans and Britain (1877-1924)* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 34.

Muslim rulers of India, Central Asia, and Indonesia in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, and the Ottoman Sultan replied to such requests with similar calls to Muslim unity.⁶⁰ In the mid-nineteenth century policies of Abdulhamid, however, the turn to an ideology of Islamic unity took on an urgent tone as an alternative to rising nationalist revolts against Ottoman rule.

Sultan Abdulhamid pursued strategic alliances with Sufi orders in the African provinces hoping to win their loyalties and use their resources against further French and British influence in North Africa.⁶¹ There is some evidence to suggest that Abdulhamid based his identification of the Sanusi elite as likely candidates for a consolidation of Ottoman authority in the region against the threat of European expansion on a reading of the early French literature which, if true, suggests a sort of inter-imperial feedback loop of information concerning the nature of Sanusi authority in the region.⁶² In a move that placed the late Ottoman Empire directly in line as a contender for the European “Scramble for Africa,” Abdulhamid’s approach to local elites throughout the Ottoman provinces made up part of a larger modernizing or civilizing mission which he hoped would secure central control over the remaining territories of the Ottoman empire against anti-Ottoman revolts and European invasions. Abdulhamid’s efforts to foster ties with Islamic leaders in the Ottoman provinces also reflected Germany’s new influence in the

⁶⁰ Ibid., 24-25.

⁶¹ Kemal H. Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 258; Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 19.

⁶² Selim Deringil, “‘They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery’: The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45: 2 (2003), 312.

Ottoman Empire and the enthusiasm of German emperor Wilhelm I for the possibility of using the ideology of pan-Islamism to encourage revolts against their shared enemies.⁶³

In a detailed plan for modernization and centralization from the 1890s, Abdulhamid called for “winning the affection of the local people [in Cyrenaica and Tripolitania] so that in the event of external aggression, say from Italy, it will be possible to defend the province without recourse to the sending of troops from the centre.”⁶⁴ Hoping to gain the support of Islamic notables, Abdulhamid increased funding for Islamic education throughout the Empire’s territories, increased salaries and pensions for *ulema* and other Islamic officials, funded the restoration and upkeep of mosques, and pushed for increased Arabic use throughout the Empire. Abdulhamid’s pan-Islamic propaganda also emphasized his claims to the position of the Caliphate or religious leader of the Muslim world, and Ottoman propaganda called for Muslims to respect their duties to a broader Islamic community and their duties to the Sultan as the Islamic Caliph. The ability to claim Islamic unity in association with the Sultan’s position as Caliph seemed to offer the Ottoman Empire a distinct advantage over regional rivals in the competition for political legitimacy among Muslim populations in North Africa and the Middle East.⁶⁵ As Selim Deringil has noted, “Abdulhamid was attempting to do precisely what he feared the British and the French would do to him that is to use Muslims of French or British allegiance as a political fifth column.”⁶⁶

⁶³ Donald M. McKale, *War by Revolution: Germany and Great Britain in the Middle East in the Era of World War I* (Kent, OH: Kent State University, 1998), 5.

⁶⁴ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 319.

⁶⁵ Michael A. Reynolds, *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires 1908-1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 89.

⁶⁶ Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire 1876-1909* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), 66.

In Abdulhamid's modernizing plans, the Sanusi *ikhwān* were to serve a civilizing function by spreading loyalty to the Sultan-Caliph along with Islam among the tribes of the Northern Sahara. Abdulhamid tried to gain full cooperation from the Empire's Arab provinces by inviting Arab notables to Istanbul and appointing them to high positions in the central government "so that they could act in enlisting and preserving the loyalties of their people to the state and the Sultan Caliph."⁶⁷ His attempt to incorporate Muslim notables in North Africa included an invitation to Muhammad al-Mahdi al-Sanusi, but it remains unclear to what extent Abdulhamid succeeded in incorporating the Sanusi elite in his attempt to retain dominance in the region. Michel Le Gall has suggested that the Sanusi leader rejected the Sultan's overtures in protest against his taxation policies. The diversion of trans-Saharan trade out of Tripolitania and the relative prosperity of the Wadai-Benghazi route inspired the Ottoman governor of Benghazi to pursue tax revenue from tribes in the Cyrenaican interior, in some cases requesting back-taxes from the previous ten years. Ottoman officials approach Sanusi shaykhs twice in 1883 and 1884 to request their assistance in collecting taxes, or at least in persuading the tribes who adhered to them to pay, but Muhammad al-Mahdi rejected both requests.⁶⁸ Over the following decade, the Ottomans pursued a series of armed campaigns against tribes loyal to the Sanusiyya. In 1888-1891, the Ottomans initiated an attack against the Zuwaya near the oases of Awjila and Jalo. This settlement of Zuwaya made up part of a larger tribe with direct control over the trade

⁶⁷ Özcan, *Pan-Islamism*, 24-25; See also: Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University, 2007), 110.

⁶⁸ Lisa Anderson has noted that the Ottomans also hoped the Sanusiyya could persuade the Bedouin tribes of the interior to relinquish their semi-nomadic pastoral practices and establish permanent settlements that would facilitate taxation. See: Lisa Anderson, "Nineteenth-Century Reforms in Ottoman Libya."

route from Wadai to Kufra and close allies of the leading Sanusi family. The Ottomans successfully extracted six years of taxes from the Zuwaya and established a garrison.

In the midsts of these attacks in the 1890s, the Ottoman government approached the Sanusiyya to recommend the idea of establishing an Ottoman *kaymacan* and garrison in Kufra, ostensibly to assist the Sanusiyya in defending against the encroaching presence of French troops in the south. In 1899, al-Mahdi decided to move his headquarters from the oasis of Jaghbub on the Egyptian border to the oasis of Kufra deep in the southern reaches of Cyrenaica. Observers at the time and postcolonial historians interested in finding origins of Libyan independence movements in the Sanusi leadership saw al-Mahdi's decision as an attempt to escape the control of the Ottoman government and defend his independence against the French government. Based on research in the Ottoman archives, Le Gall has argued that the Ottoman interest in Kufra had more to do with their desire to control the Zuwaya and the resources of the residual slave trade and large salt deposits in the region than retaining territorial integrity. In light of this context, the decision of al-Mahdi to move his residence and the headquarters of the *ṭarīqa* from Jaghbub to Kufra could represent an attempt to defend the economic interests of the Zuwaya while moving further away from the Ottoman garrison in Awjila and Jalo instead of a concern with the French movements in the Lake Chad region.⁶⁹

A recent dissertation by Mostafa Minawi based on research in the Ottoman archives could lead to a revision of Le Gall's reading of the Sanusi-Ottoman relations of the 1890s. Minawi argues that Le Gall misread the Ottoman documents, and that Abdulhamid and al-Mahdi established a clear agreement in which the Sultan supplied the Sanusi *zawāyā* with arms and

⁶⁹ Le Gall, "The Ottoman Government," 99-100.

training from Ottoman officers to defend against French attacks from their positions in the Sahara and the Sahel.⁷⁰ The suggestion of an alliance between al-Mahdi and the Ottoman Sultan after the mid-1890s could explain subsequent reports from British intelligence that the Sanusiyya had initiated a program in Kufra of unifying tribes under their leadership and the subsequent battles between troops fighting under Sanusi leadership and the French Senegalese troops in the Lake Chad region in 1901 and 1902.⁷¹

Whether or not Sultan Abdulhamid II gained the full support of Muhammad al-Mahdi for his calls to Islamic unity, consistent reports of increased arms supplies throughout the region by the mid-1890s pointed to a clear militarization of the Sanusiyya and their affiliated tribes by the end of the century. Though international treaties had outlawed trade in arms in North Africa, the Ottoman officials turned a blind eye to the trade in weapons and ammunition along the coast. As the trade made its way into the Cyrenaican interior, the Sanusi *zawāyā* collected large deposits of weapons and ammunition along caravan routes, leading one British officer in the region to assume by 1905, “that practically every Senussiite is in possession of some sort of fire-arm and ammunition.”⁷²

French Aggression and the Spread of Arms

In November 1901, French troops attempted to take possession of the southernmost *zāwiyya* of the Sanusiyya in the region of Kanem which served as a launching pad for attempts to

⁷⁰ Personal communication with Mostafa Minawi, 5 January 2012. The dissertation is not yet available for consultation.

⁷¹ BNA WO 33/354, General Staff, War Office, “Military Report on Tripoli in North Africa (Tripoli, Barka, and Fezzan)” 1905, pp. 83.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 85.

expand Sanusi influence into the Lake Chad region and present-day Sudan.⁷³ In his volume on French contacts with the Sanusiyya, Jean-Louis Triaud identified the battle in Kanem as a moment of dramatic militarization of the Sanusiyya that initiated a period of direct conflict between Sanusi and French forces in Chad, Algeria, and Niger for the following decade.⁷⁴ Sanusi affiliated tribes, reinforced by the recent arrival of Tuareg exiles pushed out from southern Algeria and Niger by French invaders, managed to repel the attack on the Sanusi *zawāyā*, but the French troops finally took control in January 1902. Following the French invasion, Muhammad al-Mahdi retreated from the Lake Chad region.⁷⁵

Coming just months before the death of Muhammad al-Mahdi and the subsequent recognition of his nephew Ahmad al-Sharif as the spiritual guide of the Sanusiyya, the struggles between French and Sanusi forces in 1901 and 1902 became a source of conflict between the Sanusi elite and French officials. In later attempts by French officials to negotiate a truce with Ahmad al-Sharif, he depicted the Sanusi *ikhwān* as persecuted by a relentless French war. After they moved from Bir Alali to Ain Galakka, Ahmad al-Sharif complained that the French pursued them and set fire to the Sanusi *zāwiyya* there causing the loss of seven hundred books and four thousand guns, a prized cache of Sanusi goods and symbol of their wealth and power in the region.⁷⁶

⁷³ On the establishment of the Sanusi *zāwiyya* in Kanem in 1898, see the collection of letters between Muhammad al-Mahdi then Ahmad al-Sharif and the Sanusi *ikhwān* in Kanem, al-Barrani in Jean-Louis Triaud, *Tchad 1900-1902: Une Guerre Franco-Libyenne oubliée?* (Paris: Editions l'Harmattan, 1987).

⁷⁴ Triaud, *Légende noire*, 669.

⁷⁵ BNA FO 101/92, British Consul in Benghazi to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 23 January 1902; BNA FO 101/92, British Consul in Benghazi to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 20 February 1902.

⁷⁶ FR CAOM, AEF GGAEF 5D/20, Ahmad al-Sharif to the French mission of Bonnel de Mezieres, 11 February 1911.

For the ten years following the French invasion of Bir Alali, European military, political, and economic presence in the region increased, and in this context of militarization and restricted access to goods, the ties of Sanusi *zawāyā* to regional trade routes made them a conduit for arms throughout the region and a natural ally of regional leaders seeking supplies in a context of increasingly limited resources. In particular, French military action in the region strengthened relationships between Ahmad al-Sharif, as the newly recognized leader of the Sufi *ṭarīqa*, and the Sultans of Dar Fur and Wadai. Among the few indications of the direct involvement of the Sanusiyya in the nineteenth and early twentieth century caravan trade, a collection of letters in the National Record Office of Sudan in Khartoum that British officers took from the palace of ‘Ali Dinar when they invaded the area and killed the Sultan in 1916 documents the development of a favorable relationship between ‘Ali Dinar and Sanusi shiekhs during the period of Sanusi expansion in the late nineteenth century, and they suggest that the Sanusi shaykhs’ status as educated elite enabled them to control communications along the Wadai-Benghazi trade route. Following the initiation of expansionist measures by French troops in Borkou and the Lake Chad region, the relationship between ‘Ali Dinar and the Sanusi *ikhwān* of the Saharan oases improved as transportation of arms between the two increased. The redactors of these documents, Jay Spaulding and Lidwien Kapteijns, characterized the relationship between ‘Ali Dinar and Ahmad al-Sharif and his local agents as a formal alliance based primarily on a shared religious identity and a commitment to anti-European action. Jean-Louis Triaud has argued, and I concur, that the characterization of their relationship as a formal alliance based on shared religious identity against European aggressors is probably an exaggeration derived from the biased interpretations

of British observers.⁷⁷ The letters from Khartoum establish a convincing history of an interdependent trade relationship between the Sanusi elites (on behalf of the Zuwaya and Mogarba tribes) and ‘Ali Dinar as the Sanusiyya relied on ‘Ali Dinar for food supplies and ‘Ali Dinar in turn depended on the Sanusiyya for arms and ammunition, but though they both faced a common source of anxiety in the increased presence of French troops, their relationship was based more on mercantile concerns during a period of restricted possibilities for trade rather than a sense of Islamic resistance to Christian expansion.

The association between Sanusi *ikhwān* and ‘Ali Dinar intensified from 1904 to 1911 as constraints on traditional trade routes made them increasingly interdependent, thus contributing to the influence of the Sanusi *ikhwān* and the control of Sanusi *zawāyā* over arms supplies throughout the region. After 1904, the new Sultan of Wadai, Dudmurrah, blocked ‘Ali Dinar’s access to Mediterranean trade through central Saharan routes because ‘Ali Dinar refused to end his protectionist practices of placing high tariffs on goods from Wadai. At the same time, the rise of a young shaykh from the Kababish tribe on the North-Eastern frontier of Darfur with the full backing of the Anglo-Egyptian officials in Khartoum blocked ‘Ali Dinar’s access to Mediterranean markets on the old Forty Days’ Road.⁷⁸ As a result, ‘Ali Dinar relied increasingly on his Sanusi contacts for supplies of arms and ammunition in exchange for a steady stream of food supplies (an increasingly valuable commodity considering the drastic level of drought in the Central and Western Sudan between 1903 and 1915) and commercial goods from the south like ivory and ostrich feathers that enjoyed heightened popularity in European markets at the end of

⁷⁷ Jean-Louis Triaud, Review of *An Islamic Alliance* by Jay Spaulding and Lidwien Kapteijns, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 29, no. 2 (1996): 349-53.

⁷⁸ Spaulding and Kapteijns, *Islamic Alliance*, 21.

the nineteenth century. The alliance between Ahmad al-Sharif and ‘Ali Dinar soured after 1911 when the invasion of Italian troops on the coast of Libya redirected the focus of the Sanusi leadership northward. In 1914, ‘Ali Dinar complained to Muhammad Abid about a shipment of arms that never reached him because the Sanusi leaders decided to divert them to Fezzan to help in the expulsion of Italian troops led by General Miani in the famous battle of Qasr Bu Hadi which successfully drove the Italians out of the interior until the military campaigns of the 1920s.⁷⁹

Documentation on the relationship between the Sultan of Wadai and the Sanusiyya has been more scattered and has resulted in less clarity concerning the involvement of the Sanusiyya in the internal affairs of Wadai. A series of succession conflicts and a subsequent civil war in Wadai prevented the establishment of Sanusi *zawāyā* or a strong level of cooperation between Sanusi *ikhwān* and merchants in Wadai in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. However, after the French invasion of Kanem, the proclamation of a new Sultan Dudmurrah in Wadai in 1902 initiated an era of increased cooperation between the Sultan of Wadai and the Sanusiyya. Communications between Sultan Dudmurrah and Sanusi *ikhwān* in Borkou increased in frequency as they recognized their mutual dependency given the presence of French troops and their restrictions on trade in the Central Sudan. Ahmad al-Sharif saw the presence of a strong Sultanate in Wadai as a check on French ambitions, and by the height of tensions with French troops in the region in 1910, the Zuwaya and Mogarba troops of the Sanusiyya attacked French forces alongside Dudmurrah, then the ex-Sultan of Wadai.⁸⁰ As I will demonstrate in more detail

⁷⁹ Ibid., 46.

⁸⁰ BNA FO 881/9909, British Consul-General in Tripoli to Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Sir Edward Grey, 30 June 1910.

in subsequent chapters, Ahmad al-Sharif later called on the French to abandon Wadai as preconditions for possible negotiations, a sign of his continued recognition of the importance of the region for the Sanusi *ṭarīqa* and the trade routes of their affiliated tribes.⁸¹

Conclusions

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Sanusiyya represented a force of frightening proportions in the imaginations of officials in imperial centers from Paris to Istanbul. In an era of international rivalry to gain control of the last remaining territories of the Ottoman Empire in North Africa, the possibility of gaining the support of the spiritual guide of the Sanusiyya, Ahmad al-Sharif, seemed to represent the best means of gaining control of a strategic area where limited access to water and communication routes dictated control over regional trade on routes that took weeks to travel. The extent of the control of the Sanusi *ikhwān* over the region's tribal affiliations and associated trade routes in the mid- to late-nineteenth century remains a matter of debate with direct political consequences for the political legitimacy of the postcolonial Libyan state, and the stakes in determining the political authority of the Sanusiyya's religious leaders has clouded the historical inquiry into the *ṭarīqa*'s development in the region.

By the end of the nineteenth century, however, the links between the Sanusi *zawāyā* and regional trade in arms led to an increased militarization of the region. The widespread perception that the Sanusiyya represented a political authority with the capacity to mobilize powerful tribal affiliations in the region, especially the Zuwaya and the Mogarba, inspired Ottoman officials to increase the movement of arms and ammunition through the Sanusi *zawāyā*

⁸¹ FR CAOM, FM SG AEF VI 6, Merlin, Governor General of Afrique-Équatoriale Française to the French Minister of Colonies, 28 June 1916.

in the hopes that they could depend on an alliance with the Sanusi elite to prevent further loss of territory in the Northern Sahara. Though further research in the Ottoman archives could clarify the exact progression of the militarization of the region, the involvement of the Sanusi *zawāyā* in spreading arms throughout the region and organizing or even training armed forces seems to have become a clear component of the Sufi *ṭarīqa* and the relationships between the Sanusi *ikhwān* and regional leaders by the end of the nineteenth century.

The death of Muhammad al-Mahdi al-Sanusi and the succession of his nephew as the recognized leader of the Sanusiyya in 1902 occurred in a moment of heightened tensions between Sanusi *ikhwān* and French forces in the region of Lake Chad and the Central Sudan as French military presence threatened the security of Sanusi *zawāyā* and access to trade routes. Over the next decade, Sanusi *zawāyā* and a large-scale displacement of people from the French military territory diffused weapons that entered the territory with the consent of Ottoman officials on the coast and perhaps even with the explicit approval of the Ottoman Sultan eager to retain a presence in North Africa through Sanusi mediation. It was precisely during this time that Italian imperialists began to focus their attentions on the prospect of claiming the Libyan territories as their own, and in the preparation for their eventual invasion of the coast in 1911, Italian regional experts began to look to the Sanusiyya as a possible threat or a potential tool to assist in Italy's imperial ambitions.

Despite the critical reassessment of reports concerning the Sanusiyya voiced by French officials at the end of the nineteenth century and a subsequent attenuation of the image of the Sanusi leaders as highly centralized and virtually omnipotent, the earlier literature of Duveyrier and Ricard created a lasting tradition. As I will analyze in detail in the next chapter, the Italian

administration accepted the characterization of the Sanusiyya as the most important power structure in the region and its leaders as the key to gaining control over the populations of the interior. Early Italian imperialists, however, adopted a more conciliatory view of the Sanusiyya, and they felt hopeful that they could persuade the Sanusiyya to support Italian rule.

Chapter 2: Religion and Nationalism in the Italian Colonial Project

Historians have often overlooked or underemphasized the Italian colonial project due to its relative brevity, but ambitions for an overseas empire emerged as a defining force in political and social debates in the early decades of Italian unification as a dominant aspiration among nationalists hoping for Italy to join the ranks of Europe's Great Powers. Domestic concerns bolstered the nationalist calls for territorial expansion as a possible outlet for Italy's growing emigrant populations fleeing the restive South. Italian interest in the Libyan territories as a possible sphere of influence emerged in the 1880s after the French occupation of Tunisia in 1881 and the British invasion of Egypt in 1882 threatened to exclude Italy from the "Scramble for Africa" and stymie national influence in the Mediterranean.⁸² Italy secured international recognition of a claim over the Libyan territories in the event that the region's status as Ottoman provinces should change in 1887.⁸³

The rising popularity of colonial expansion as an opportunity to spread *italianità* and prove Italy's worth on the international stage shored up waning support for the government of Prime Minister Giovanni Giolitti and prompted new political alliances, and after decades of tensions following the fall of the Papal States, the popularity of expansionist goals generated a new level of enthusiasm among Catholic interest groups for Italian national politics. Catholic elites and the Catholic popular press sold the idea of the imperial project as an opportunity to spread Italian culture and commercial interests in conjunction with the missionary objectives of the Vatican. The liberal ruling class stood to benefit from the increased alignment of Catholic

⁸² Askew, *Europe and Italy's Acquisition of Libya*, 6.

⁸³ BNA FO 101/94, Italian Ambassador to Britain to Secretary of State, 12 February 1887.

interests in shoring up popular support against socialist opposition at home, and preexisting missionary and financial networks of the Catholic Church in North Africa eased the initial expansion of Italian state presence in the region. In the decade leading up to the invasion of the Libyan coast, the Italian state provided direct funding to Italian Catholic missionaries as a means of promoting national culture, and the Catholic Banco di Roma invested heavily in North Africa in direct collaboration with Giolitti's Minister of Foreign Affairs. But the popularity of colonial expansion as an opportunity to engage in a civilizing mission and secure land for Italy's emigrants conflicted with the Giolitti administration's plans to cultivate relationships with local Muslim elites, both as an immediate necessity and as a part of a large ambition to affirm Italy's authority in the Muslim world. In the years leading up to the invasion, both models of colonial expansion informed attempts to expand Italian presence in the region and at times worked to contrary purposes.

As latecomers to the European "Scramble for Africa," Italian colonialists leaned heavily on the pre-existing body of primarily French literature emphasizing the power of the Sanusi *tarīqa* as a religious and political organization as they sought to deepen ties with Libyan elites. Italian experts began to develop their own body of literature concerning the Libyan territories and the Sanusiyya in response to the increasing interest in occupation in the decade leading up to the invasion in 1911. A handful of government agents in Cairo were given responsibility for organizing projects to generate good will among elite Libyans living abroad and for ascertaining the possible reactions to an eventual occupation. One Italian expert in particular, Enrico Insabato, went to Cairo as a personal agent of Giolitti to act as his ears and eyes in the region. Through the use of a local informant in Cairo, Insabato established contact with the recognized

head of the Sanusi family, Ahmad al-Sharif. Insabato's early reports of the Sanusiyya established a representation of the Sufi *ṭarīqa* that countered French fears of a possible Sanusi-led pan-Islamic revolt. Like the French literature, Insabato characterized the Sanusiyya as a highly centralized religious organization that enjoyed extensive control over a devout population. But where French explorers and officials painted the Sanusiyya as a group of religious fanatics eager to rise up against Christians, in Insabato's reports, the Sanusiyya appeared more as a potential tool that, if used correctly, could help increase Italian prestige and authority in the Libyan interior and even throughout the Muslim world. Insabato portrayed the Sanusi *ṭarīqa* as a conservative civilizing force in North Africa, a form of Islamic orthodoxy the Italians could use to bolster their interests against the pressures of the French and the British and related reform movements among their Muslim allies.

The idea of cultivating relationships with Sanusi elites as colonial intermediaries dominated Italian strategies for increasing their economic influence in Cyrenaica and generating consensus for the occupation. Even critics of what came to be known as the 'pro-Islamic' approach to colonial rule advocated by Enrico Insabato recognized the utility of a favorable relationship with Ahmad al-Sharif for the initial occupation, but in the subsequent development of an Italian colonial state, the emphasis on methods of indirect rule through an alliance with Muslim elites clashed with popular schemes for mass colonization calling for a cultural expansion to make the Libyan territories a fully Italian space. The debates over the relative merits of direct or indirect forms of colonial rule often reflected competing interests of state or private capital or the influence of domestic political pressure, but the debate also reflected a national anxiety over the position of religion in national politics and imperial expansion as

Italians struggled to deal with the thorny issue of the Catholic Church in a new national order and colonial officials sought to define their administration in relation to a predominantly Muslim population.

Early Italian Imperial Ambitions

The territorial unification of the Kingdom of Italy and the fall of the Papal States in 1861-1870 occurred in an age of heightened liberalism when imperialists throughout Europe rejected formal power in colonial expansion in favor of more subtle forms of indirect influence. The political elite in Rome, hoping to increase Italian influence and prove Italy's worth as an imperial power, followed suit by favoring a form of national expansion that avoided direct state domination.⁸⁴ In the 1870s, a small class of Italian explorers, capitalist adventurers, and missionaries began to call for territorial expansion, but ambitions among political actors in the Italian state focused primarily on an informal process of increasing Italian influence through the establishment of Italian trading posts and a combination of cultural and economic projects among Italian emigrants abroad.⁸⁵ Italy's failure to gain colonial possessions in the Congress of Berlin and the subsequent French occupation of Tunisia in 1881 and the British invasion of Egypt in 1882 fed popular perceptions that the liberalism of the 1870s had served as a superficial cover for maintaining British and French hegemony in the international competition for overseas dominions, and it precipitated the development of a nationalist discourse focused on territorial

⁸⁴ For an explanation of the humanistic nationalism of the liberal political elite, see: Emilio Gentile, *The Struggle for Modernity: Nationalism, Futurism, and Fascism* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 1-5.

⁸⁵ Del Boca, *Gli Italiani in Africa orientale*, 3-4.

aggrandizement in Italian popular press and among political elite in Rome.⁸⁶ Mass emigration of Italians in the decades after unification, especially from Italy's restive South, became a potent symbol of the inability of the nation to provide for its people, and colonial expansion seemed to offer a possible solution by providing land for agricultural workers while utilizing Italy's supposed excess population to the nation's advantage on the international stage as the Italian state claimed the right to protect Italian communities around the world.

At the end of 1887, Francesco Crispi came to power as the first Sicilian Prime Minister of Italy with a foreign policy platform focused on proving Italy's worth as a Mediterranean power and a domestic interest in trying to ease unrest in the South's agricultural regions, two issues he linked in his colonial ambitions.⁸⁷ The French occupation of Tunisia in 1881 dashed the hopes of Italian imperialists for what seemed like a natural expansion across a small stretch of the Mediterranean and had the embarrassing consequence of placing a large community of Italian emigrants in Tunisia under French sovereignty.⁸⁸ Facing the prospect of being locked out of the Mediterranean's southern shore, Italian diplomats began a series of negotiations with European powers to obtain recognition of Italy's right to claim Tripolitania and Cyrenaica in the event that the Ottoman Empire should lose control of its remaining North African territories.⁸⁹ At the same time, Crispi initiated a project intended to use a collection of Italian commercial posts in East

⁸⁶ Giuseppe Maria Finaldi, *Italian National Identity in the Scramble for Africa* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), 30-31.

⁸⁷ For an analysis of Crispi's expansionist policies as an extension of the process of territorial unification in Southern Italy, see Pasquale Verdicchio, "The Preclusion of Postcolonial Discourse in Southern Italy," in *Revisioning Italy: National Identity and Global Culture*, ed. Beverly Allen and Mary Russo (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1997).

⁸⁸ The Italian community in Tunisia see Julia Clancy-Smith, *Mediterraneans: North Africa and Europe in an Age of Migration, c. 1800-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

⁸⁹ Choate, *Emigrant Nation*, 149.

Africa to expand Italian influence while avoiding what promised to be a costly colonial war in North Africa. With the successful conclusion of an alliance with Emperor Menelik in the Treaty of Wuchale in 1889, Crispi announced the creation of an Italian protectorate in Ethiopia and generated a new level of enthusiasm for African adventures among former opponents of the colonial project.⁹⁰

As a mark of the link between the expansionist foreign policy and Italian emigration, Crispi reorganized the Foreign Ministry in 1887 and created a new section in the Ministry dedicated to dealing with the issues of Italian emigration, expatriate colonies, and Italian schools abroad.⁹¹ Crispi's inability to pass a bill to reform Sicily's *latifondisti* system—in which a few land owners controlled access to agricultural holdings—in 1894 buttressed his resolve to engage in a colonial war both as a solution to the problems in the South and to answer the nationalists' cry to unify the Italian nation through a "baptism of blood," and he popularized the idea of broadening Italy's claims over Eritrea and Ethiopia by claiming that its value lay in territory for Italian settlement.⁹² The defeat of Italian troops by African forces in the Battle of Adwa in 1896 signaled the failure of Crispi's colonial project and coincided with a surge in the rate of Italian emigration abroad, primarily to the Americas. More Italian soldiers died in Adwa than during the entire process of Italian unification, and the disaster contributed to the fall of Crispi's government.⁹³

⁹⁰ Christopher Duggan, *Francesco Crispi 1818-1901* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 573.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 515.

⁹² Labanca, *In marcia*, 308.

⁹³ Choate, *Emigrant Nation*, 43-44.

Insabato and the “Pro-Islamic” Approach

After Crispi's fall from power, colonial wars and attempts at territorial aggrandizement fell into disfavor, and nationalist interest groups focused on spreading Italian cultural and financial presence through emigration and commerce.⁹⁴ The 1901 Law on Emigration signaled state commitment to a form of demographic colonialism through the protection of Italian communities abroad in programs that sought to use Italy's high rate of emigration to the nation's advantage while avoiding the costly and risky business of territorial expansion. The law established a new independent entity to maintain contact with Italian emigrants around the world and created an emigration commissariat under the aegis of the Foreign Ministry. Instead of seeing emigration as a sign of national weakness, Giolitti's administration recast the movement of Italians abroad as an expansion of Italian strength and an opportunity for commercial development.⁹⁵ Publications like the *Rivista Coloniale* took up the cause and wrote about investment opportunities among the growing ranks of Italian communities in foreign lands, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs promoted education programs for Italian emigrants to encourage them to maintain ties to the homeland.

In this context of a turn away from the territorial aggrandizement of the Crispi era, liberal politicians returned to their previous agreements with British and French authorities recognizing Italian claims to the Libyan territories with an emphasis on the desirability of indirect forms of colonial rule through local intermediaries.⁹⁶ After his election as Prime Minister in 1902,

⁹⁴ Douglas J. Forsyth, *The Crisis of Liberal Italy: Monetary and Financial Policy, 1914-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 23.

⁹⁵ Choate, *Emigrant Nation*, 59-61.

⁹⁶ BNA FO 101/94, British Ambassador to Rome, Lord Currie, to the British Secretary of Foreign Affairs, 24 April 1902.

Giovanni Giolitti sent agents to Cairo to establish contacts with notables in the Libyan territories to deepen Italian ties in the region and try to determine possible reactions to an eventual Italian occupation. Picking up on the importance of the Sanusiyya in French literature, Giolitti's administration identified the Sanusi elite as less of a threat to Italian imperial ambitions than a potential tool in an agenda of generating good will for Italy in North Africa and selling the Italian nation as friendly to Muslim interests on the international stage.⁹⁷

One of the most important figures in Giolitti's outreach to Libyan elites was Enrico Insabato. Insabato first went to Cairo in 1902 to attend a conference on colonial medicine, and he remained for the next decade as a personal agent reporting directly to Giolitti to develop programs of intellectual, cultural, and economic exchange meant to improve the image of Italy among Libyans in Cairo, particularly among theological students planning to become judges or officials upon their return to Tripolitania and Cyrenaica.⁹⁸ Insabato became an outspoken advocate of what his detractors called a "pro-Islamic" approach to Italian colonial rule, calling for the establishment of shari'a law in Italian-controlled territories, the construction of a mosque in Rome for Arabic instruction, and active outreach to the leaders of Sufi *ṭuruq* in North Africa to generate support for an eventual Italian occupation. Insabato tried to form an alliance with the recognized head of the Sanusi family, Ahmad al-Sharif, through an intermediary, Muhammad 'Ali 'Alawi, an Egyptian adherent of the Sanusiyya who worked as an interpreter first for the Italian consulate in Cairo starting in 1899 and then for the Italian diplomatic agency starting in

⁹⁷ For a discussion of the ways in which the French literature on the Libyan territories inflected Italian studies see Gianni Albergoni, *Variations italiennes sur un thème français: La Sanusiya* (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1984).

⁹⁸ Vikør, *Sufi and Scholar*, 12; Baldinetti, *Orientalismo e colonialismo*, 34.

1901.⁹⁹ The Italian office in Cairo first sent a mission to establish contact with Ahmad al-Sharif by sending gifts to the Sanusi leader when his uncle died in 1902, and based primarily on the information Muhammad ‘Ali ‘Alawi provided, Insabato advanced a more favorable view of the Sufi *ṭarīqa* than the one found in French literature.¹⁰⁰ Arguing against the dominant French interpretation of the Sanusiyya as fanatically anti-European, Insabato claimed that the Italians could harness the power of the Sanusiyya to work in their favor, both in the Libyan territories and in improving Italian relations with the Muslim world at large.

Insabato’s identification of the Sanusiyya as potential allies in Italian expansionist projects hinged on his characterization of the Sanusi *ṭarīqa* as a civilizing force that promoted stability in the region. Whereas French colonial ethnographers of the nineteenth century depicted the Sanusiyya as dangerous anti-Europeans, Insabato understood the structure and religious practices of the Sufi order to be promoting a pure form of Islamic orthodoxy pitted against reformist tendencies in the Muslim world that, he argued, diluted the strength of Islam through a weak imitation of modern European mores.

Insabato’s unofficial status as a personal agent of Giolitti allowed him the freedom to associate with an unconventional cross-section of anti-British and anti-modernist activists and intellectuals in Cairo who supported his particular interpretation of Islamic orthodoxy. One of the more colorful characters involved in Insabato’s projects was Ivan Aguéli, a Swedish artist and author who wrote about mystical practices in Islam and Sufism for the Parisian journal *Le*

⁹⁹ ASMAI II 136/1/1, “Senussia - varie sul suo atteggiamento”, 1912.

¹⁰⁰ Daniel J. Grange, *L’Italie e la Méditerranée (1896-1911)* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1994), 1495; Carlo Gotti Porcinari, *Rapporti Italo-Arabi (1902-1930): Dai documenti di Enrico Insabato* (Rome: E.S.P., 1965), 76.

Gnos under the direction of the renowned anti-modernist René Guénon.¹⁰¹ Guénon dedicated *La Gnose* to seeking a “primordial doctrine” through the protection of “the tree of tradition” against what he considered “the parasitic vegetation” of the Catholic church and the bourgeois values of the Western Enlightenment. The contributors to the journal wrote about a variety of non-Western religious traditions to search for esoteric truths, and Ivan Aguéli became the journal’s expert on Sufi mysticism.¹⁰² After an initial meeting in Paris, Aguéli accompanied Insabato to Cairo to help him create two Italian-Arabic magazines: *Il Commercio italiano* about Italian commerce in the Arab world and *Il Convito*, known as *Al-Nadi* in Arabic.¹⁰³

Insabato and Aguéli’s publications promoted an image of Italy as a champion of conservative Muslim interests in an age of secularization driven by imperialism. In the first issue of *Al-Nadi* in 1904, Insabato introduced the magazine as an effort to support orthodox Islam against reformist and modernizing movements in the Muslim world which he argued were directed by and for the benefit of British interests in the region. He characterized modernizing movements in Islam as “a mongrel, restless, pretentious, and ridiculous world, composed of grotesque imitators of Europe. I have seen them conserve Islam in name only, trying to change it into a type of Protestantism in *tarbush*.”¹⁰⁴ Insabato promoted the idea that orthodox Islam served an essential civilizing role in the region, and he declared it his mission to show Europeans

¹⁰¹ Marie-France James, *Esotérisme, occultisme, franc-maçonnerie et christianisme aux XIXe et XXe siècles: explorations bio-bibliographiques* (Paris: Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1981), 85.

¹⁰² Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 69.

¹⁰³ Angelo Scarabel, “Una rivista Italo-Araba d’inizio secolo: An-Nadi (Il Convito),” *Oriente Moderno* 58, no. 1/3 (1978), 56.

¹⁰⁴ “L'altro mondo che io trovai in Oriente è un mondo misto, inquieto, pretenzioso e ridicolo, composto di grotteschi imitatori dell'Europa. Ho visto conservare loro dell'Islam solo in nome, e desiderosi di cambiarlo in una specie di protestantismo in *tarbusc*.” Quoted in Gocci Porcinari, *Rapporti Italo-Arabi*, 19.

a side of Islam that was neither fanatical nor anti-European while he demonstrated a pro-Islamic side of Europe to the Muslim world. He identified Sufism as the best example of “true” Islam and Sufis as Muslims who resisted the nefarious effects of reformist movements calling for modernization in Islam.

Insabato saw his efforts simultaneously as an outreach to potential Muslim allies in the Libyan territories and as part of a broader program to improve Italian relations with the Muslim world at large. He used his contacts in the region to distribute *Al-Nadi* to Sufi *zawāyā* in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica in the years leading up to the Italian occupation as propaganda to encourage a favorable opinion of the Italian administration, but he also intended the periodical for consumption by Muslim elites in Constantinople to encourage them to resist French and British pressure to rebel against the Ottoman Sultan’s claims to the role of Caliph. Insabato championed pan-Islamic sentiment in his publications, though with a different emphasis from that promoted by Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876-1908). “*Al-Nadi* preached a more federative unity presided over by the Ottoman dynasty, in contrast to ‘Abd al-Hamid’s centralized concept of unity. Ultimately, *al-Nadi* and Insabato had a political agenda as well: a diffused Islamic system, rather than a centralized system, would better aid in establishing an Italian presence in the Mediterranean basin.”¹⁰⁵

Insabato began to focus on the Sanusiyya at the center of his projects in the region starting in 1905-1906, an era when the opening of the Banco di Roma branch in Tripoli signaled an increased interest among Italian elites in expanding their commercial presence in the Libyan territories. In 1906, Insabato produced a long report for Giolitti and the Foreign Ministry in

¹⁰⁵ Meir Hatina, “Where East Meets West: Sufism, Cultural Rapprochement, and Politics,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 39 (2007): 394.

which he posed the Sanusiyya as a growing force in Islam that the Italians could use against other European powers. Citing their dominant position in regional trade routes as potentially beneficial to Italian economic penetration in both Cyrenaica and Tripolitania, Insabato recommended measures to further ties with the Sanusi family included a plan to send the sons of the previous spiritual leader of the Sufi *ṭarīqa*, Muhammad al-Mahdi, to universities in Italy for a European education.¹⁰⁶ Insabato's insistence on the utility of an alliance with the Sanusi elite shaped the Italian approach to colonial rule in the Libyan territories for years to come.

Controversy surrounding Insabato's attempts to cultivate ties with Muslim notables in Cairo led to his temporary expulsion from the region and a pause in Italian efforts to form an alliance with the Sanusi elite in Cyrenaica. Insabato's outspoken support of what he considered anti-modernist orthodoxy in Islam carried with it a critique of British policies that brought him into conflict with British officials and suggested the heightened international tensions surrounding the attempts to develop ties with Muslim notables in North Africa. Through his collaboration with Aguéli, Insabato formed a connection to 'Abd al-Rahman 'Ilaish, the head of the Sufi *ṭarīqa* al-'Arabiyya al-Shadhiliyya in Egypt.¹⁰⁷ 'Abd al-Rahman 'Ilaish was the son of Muhammad 'Ilish, the Egyptian Maliki mufti in the 19th century who led opposition to Western reforms instituted by the Khedive Isma'il (1863-79) and one of the leading figures in the 'Urabi revolt (1881-82) against growing foreign influence in Egypt and the predominantly Turkish control of the Ottoman army. Muhammad 'Ilish died in prison following the British repression

¹⁰⁶ ASMAI II 102/1/7, The document has no clear name or date, but Daniel Grange has argued that it can be dated to 1906, and later references to the report indicate that Insabato was most likely the author. See Daniel J. Grange, *L'Italie e la Méditerranée*, 1495.

¹⁰⁷ In 1907, Aguéli changed his name to 'Abd al-Hadi and converted to Islam as a disciple of 'Abd al-Rahman 'Ilaysh, and he later returned to Paris where he converted Guénon and established a branch of the Shadhiliyya in Paris. Grange, *L'Italie e la Méditerranée*, 390.

of the ‘Urabi revolt, and Abd al-Rahman ‘Ilish probably saw his involvement with the Italians and the journal *Al-Nadi* as a way to further the anti-British and anti-reformist activities of his father.¹⁰⁸

In 1906, Abd al-Rahman ‘Ilish marked his goodwill towards the Italians in a highly controversial commemoration of a small mosque in Cairo to the memory of Umberto I, Italy’s former king. The construction of the mosque inspired Insabato to declare Italy a pro-Islamic country, but it induced writers for Rashid Rida’s journal *Al-Manar* to portray Abd al-Rahman ‘Ilish as a handmaiden to Italian plans to take control of Libya and Somalia. The issue even went to court in Cairo, and Insabato was found guilty of conspiring against Muslims despite his pro-Muslim rhetoric.¹⁰⁹ The controversy surrounding the Umberto I mosque prompted British officials to request the Italian diplomatic agency in Cairo to eject Insabato from the region in 1907. Anxious to avoid antagonizing the British until they could clarify the uncertain border between Egypt and Cyrenaica, the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Tommaso Tittoni, instructed the consulate in Cairo to comply with the request, and Insabato was forced out of Egypt in 1908.¹¹⁰ The Italian Minister of Colonies sent Insabato back to Cairo in 1910 in preparation for the occupation of the Libyan coast, but his ejection from North Africa in 1908 underscored the volatility of international competition for alliances with Muslim notables in the first decade of the twentieth century. Insabato hoped to leverage Italian influence in the Libyan territories and an alliance with the Sanusi elite to increase Italian prestige throughout the Muslim world. As I will demonstrate further below, Insabato lost credibility as a regional expert after the

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Hatina, “Where East Meets West,” 392-393.

¹¹⁰ Grange, *L’Italie et la Méditerranée*, 1498.

Italian invasion of the Libyan coast when Ahmad al-Sharif and the Sanusi *ikhwān* refused to support Italian claims to sovereignty in the region, but his advocacy of the Sanusiyya as effective colonial intermediaries continued to influence Italian approaches to colonial rule, especially among Italian officials who saw the colonial project as part of a broader strategy for foreign policy focused on presenting Italy as a bridge across the Mediterranean linking Christian Europe with Muslim North Africa.

Territorial Expansion in National Politics

While Insabato stirred controversy in Cairo, a renewed interest in colonial expansion developed among a wide cross-section of political and financial elites in Italy. In an era of mass politics and universal male suffrage, shifting political alliances increasingly featured the popular call to territorial aggrandizement as a central theme. Opponents to Giolitti's government began to cite the inability of the Italian state to protect Italian interests in the Mediterranean as a sign of the state's weakness, adding weight to complaints among Italians with commercial ties to the Libyan territories that they faced increased discrimination from Ottoman officials after the Young Turk revolution of 1908.¹¹¹ Renewed demands for direct territorial expansion also shaped the populist rhetoric of the group of intellectuals and political activists who founded the *Associazione Nazionalista Italiana* (ANI) in Florence in December 1910 and then began to publish *L'Idea Nazionale* in March 1911 to mark the fifteenth anniversary of the Battle of Adwa. Calling for the development of a strong state presence in international affairs, the founding

¹¹¹ Bosworth, *Least of the Great Powers*, 140.

members of the ANI criticized liberal democracy as being “incompatible with modernity and the need for expansionism.”¹¹²

Support within the ANI for colonial expansion centered on the call for increased territorial space to mitigate the international embarrassment of mass emigration, a call that became a popular national cause and spurred the Italian invasion of the Libyan territories. Enrico Corradini, the original founder of the ANI and a widely-recognized intellectual father of twentieth century Italian nationalism, seized on emigration as a key sign of liberalism’s failures.¹¹³ The nationalist desire for territorial expansion resonated in the speech Corradini made at the first congress of the ANI in 1910: “It is necessary either to conquer colonies, or to emigrate, or to become Malthusian. But to become Malthusian is vile, to emigrate is servile, and only the conquest of colonies is worthy of a free and noble people.”¹¹⁴ The younger generation of primarily Roman nationalists involved in the ANI did not necessarily stand against the goals of the liberal elite; in the case of the occupation of Libya, for example, they shared an interest in expanding Italian presence in the region. The distinction lay more in their enthusiasm for state expansion and their celebration of violent war as a means of unifying the Italian nation.

The invasion of the Libyan coast in 1911 had a galvanizing effect in Italian domestic politics in generating support for Giolitti’s ministry and in the formation of new political alliances with long-term effects for Italian nationalism and the development of colonial policies in the Libyan territories. Prominent politicians and Freemason lodges joined the call for state

¹¹² Bosworth, *Least of the Great Powers*, 40; Gentile, *The Struggle for Modernity*, 6.

¹¹³ Choate, *Emigrant Nation*, 148.

¹¹⁴ Quoted in Childs, *Italo-Turkish Diplomacy*, 31.

protection of Italian interests in North Africa.¹¹⁵ The popularity of the expansionist project among Catholic interest groups contributed to the success of the Gentiloni Pact in the 1913 general elections in which liberal and Catholic interests joined forces against the Socialist party, already weakened by divided reactions to the colonial project. The increased involvement of Catholic interest groups in the 1913 elections led to the election of Luigi Federzoni to the Chamber of Deputies. One of the founding members of ANI and later Mussolini's Minister of Colonies, Federzoni won his seat on a platform against Freemasonry and in favor of colonial war that gained him the support of pro-Catholic elites and secured his position as a vocal proponent of colonial politics and Catholic involvement in Rome.¹¹⁶

Italian Expansion and the Catholic Financial Interests

An increase of Catholic participation in national politics in support of the invasion of the Libyan territories represented a significant shift after decades of bitter public disputes between the Holy See and Italian state officials in Rome, but it also reflected an increase in Vatican reliance on overseas investments that stood to benefit from Italian state intervention. The involvement of Catholic politicians and voting blocks in the 1913 elections reflected an informal easing of Vatican directives against Catholic participation in national elections. After the liberal state nationalized a large portion of Papal lands in 1860, the Holy See embraced an intransigent attitude against the Italian politics. Starting with Pope Pius IX's encyclical *Syllabus Errorum* in

¹¹⁵ Fulvio Conti, *Storia della massoneria italiana dal Risorgimento al fascismo* (Bologna, Italy: Mulino, 2003), 211-213. At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, membership in Freemason associations "was the nearest thing to a universal factor shared by all members of the Liberal political elite." Bosworth, *Least of the Great Powers*, 31.

¹¹⁶ Bosworth, *Least of the Great Powers*, 43.

1864, church officials declared the Italian nationalism anathema to Catholic interests and recommended against Catholic participation in national elections. Leo XIII turned his predecessor's recommendation that Catholics abstain from national politics into a prohibition against voting in Italian national elections that lasted until Pope Benedict XV declared an end to the *non expedit* in the elections of 1919.¹¹⁷

The inflammatory rhetoric of Catholic intransigency masked a gradual incorporation of moderate Catholics into the national political hierarchy largely through investment of Church capital in state projects and corresponding state protection of Church debts.¹¹⁸ The continued influence of Catholic elites in Rome and international support for the Pope gave weight to moderate voices in the negotiations for a post-unification Law of Guarantees in which the state offered to recognize the Pope as a spiritual authority with the "personal prerogatives of a sovereign" and exemption from taxes in papal territories in exchange for his renunciation of the Papal States. Determined not to lend credibility to the Italian state and convinced of the fundamental instability of parliamentary acts, the Pope denounced the Law of Guarantees and rejected the state's corollary offer of financial assistance to maintain his staff and properties.¹¹⁹

The Pope's refusal of state funding put the Holy See's already weakened finances in a precarious position and eventually led the Church to increase its capital investments in Rome and abroad. During much of the nineteenth century, the Papal States experienced weak economic

¹¹⁷ Alice A. Kelikian, "The Church and Catholicism," in *Liberal and Fascist Italy 1900-1945*, ed. Adrian Lyttelton, *The Short Oxford History of Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 46; John Pollard, *Catholicism in Modern Italy: Religion, Society, and Politics since 1861* (London: Routledge, 2008), 29, 47.

¹¹⁸ Luigi Ganapini, *Il nazionalismo cattolico: I cattolici e la politica estera in Italia dal 1871 al 1914* (Rome: Laterza, 1970), 15-18.

¹¹⁹ Owen Chadwick, *A History of the Popes 1830-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 228.

growth due, in part, to an ideological imperative to avoid direct involvement in liberal capitalism.¹²⁰ By the time of Italian unification, the Holy See had accrued sizable debts that compounded when the state seized over two-thirds of papal land. The loss of these properties led to a drastic reduction in revenue from taxation for the Holy See, but the Pope refused to reduce the pomp and ceremony in the Vatican or the Holy See's diplomatic missions abroad as he sought to maintain an international presence to support his claims to political authority. With a reduction in revenue from the loss of papal properties and no corresponding reduction in expenditures, the Vatican became almost entirely dependent on the income generated from donations. Though funds poured in from Catholics as a sign of piety and a symbol of protest against state policies towards religion throughout Europe, the revenue could not cover the Vatican's heavy costs. In 1864, the Italian state took responsibility for two-thirds of the Vatican's debt in a secret agreement to compensate for the properties lost by the Holy See during Italian unification.¹²¹

The late 1870s witnessed a changing of the guard in the Vatican with the election of Pope Leo XIII and the appointment of a new head of Vatican finances, Enrico Folchi who proved more willing than his predecessors to invest the surplus from Catholic donations in Italian state and private enterprises leading to an increase in direct financial involvement of Vatican funds in state development on the peninsula and throughout the Mediterranean. Previous financial advisers to the Holy See considered investments in Italian industry and commerce too risky, but under Folchi's guidance, Vatican finances largely funded the Rome building boom in the 1870s and

¹²⁰ John Pollard, *Money and the Rise of the Modern Papacy: Financing the Vatican, 1850-1950*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 25.

¹²¹ Pollard, *Money and the Rise*, 30.

early 80s. Between 1870 and 1914, the Holy See invested on average about 5 million Lire of its income from Peter's Pence in the local economy.¹²² During this period, members of the Papal aristocracy also tied up their fortunes to the massive construction projects around the new capital city, and their financial contributions gave them political weight in local elections. When the building boom collapsed in 1887, the Holy See lost a large portion of its patrimony, but the finances of the Holy See and the Catholic nobility were deeply intertwined with the Italian national economy.

A network of personal interests tied the financial fate of the Holy See to the successful expansion of the Banco di Roma in North Africa, and in the years leading up to the Italian occupation of the Libyan coast, the Vatican used its media outlets to generate support for Italian state intervention in the Ottoman territories. The connection between the Holy See and the Banco di Roma originated with the bank's founders, Borghese princes who counted among the aristocracy of the Papal States. The two founded the Banca di Roma in 1884 with direct assistance from Pope Leo XIII who instructed Folchi to make a sizable investment in the bank from the Vatican's coffers.¹²³ As one of the new forms of Italian mixed banks that developed in the 1880s, the Banco di Roma collected capital from deposits then invested that capital, mostly in real estate construction in Rome. After the building bubble collapsed, Folchi was forced out of his position in control of Vatican finances, and Leo XIII turned to the advice of Ernesto Pacelli. The president of the Banco di Roma until 1916, Pacelli came from the same family as the later Pope Pius XII, and he directed the investments of the Holy See to help drive the expansion of Italian economic and political influence in North Africa.

¹²² Ibid., 64.

¹²³ Ibid., 65.

Through its ties to the Banco di Roma and a network of personal and political connections, the Holy See gained a clear interest in the Banco di Roma's investments in North Africa and the eventual Italian invasion of the Libyan coast. The Banco di Roma became directly involved in national politics by backing the election of Tommaso Tittoni, the Foreign Minister from 1903 to 1905 and the brother of one of the directors of the bank. Soon thereafter, the Banco di Roma began investing in banking, shipping lines, agricultural projects, and commercial enterprises on the Libyan coast with the explicit support of the Italian Foreign Ministry.¹²⁴ In 1905, the Banco di Roma opened a new branch in Alexandria with Vatican funds as an attempt to outmaneuver its competitors by focusing on international expansion instead of Italian industries.¹²⁵ Pacelli worked closely with Italian authorities and became an outspoken advocate for Italian expansion in Libya as he looked to North African shores for investment opportunities.

Ultimately, the Banco di Roma and Vatican finances suffered losses from the Libyan war which it never recovered. The terms of the ultimatum the Italian state issued to the Ottoman Empire on the invasion of Tripoli and Benghazi implied that the war was being fought at least in part to defend the interests of the Banco di Roma, but in the peace negotiations following the Ottomans' capitulation in 1912, the Banca Commerciale—the Banca di Roma's primary competitors—gained the upper hand in investing in Italy's new colonial territories.¹²⁶ However, the early involvement of Vatican funding expanded Italy's foothold in the Libyan territories, and

¹²⁴ Webster, *Industrial Imperialism*, 153; Habib al-Hesnawi, "Italian Imperial Policy towards Libya, 1870-1911," *Modern and Contemporary Libya: Sources and Historiographies*, Anna Baldinetti, ed. (Rome: Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente, 2003), 61.

¹²⁵ Pollard, *Money and the Rise*, 99; Webster, *Industrial Imperialism*, 152; Giorgio Candeloro, *Il movimento cattolico in Italia* (Rome: Riuniti, 1974), 343.

¹²⁶ Pollard, *Money and the Rise*, 105-106.

the vocal support of an associated Catholic press helped sell the idea of colonial expansion to the Italian public as a civilizing mission and a confirmation of the nation's Catholic identity.

Italian Expansionism and the Catholic Press

The Vatican maintained an official position of neutrality towards the issue of Italian expansion abroad, but the Catholic Press joined a wider media campaign calling for the Italian occupation of the Libyan territories that pushed Giolitti to declare war in Libya sooner than he intended.¹²⁷ During the last decades of the nineteenth century, the Holy See established two media outlets: *L'Osservatore Romano* opened in 1861, and *La Civiltà Cattolica* opened in 1854 and came under direct control of the Vatican in the 1880s.¹²⁸ These semi-official publications constituted a small part of a wider spectrum of mostly regional popular Catholic newspapers. After widespread alliances between clerical and liberal interests in regional elections in 1904, the majority of these pro-Catholic newspapers and journals adopted conciliatory tones towards national politics, and they championed the invasion of the Libyan territories as an opportunity to promote cooperation between the Church and the liberal elite against socialist and Freemason influence. Catholic enthusiasm for the Italian occupation of Libya spread on a massive scale as priests called for holy war in the pulpits and the Catholic Press extolled the benefits of nationalist expansion.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Mark I. Choate, *Emigrant Nation*, 170-171.

¹²⁸ Pollard, *Money and the Rise*, 8.

¹²⁹ Webster, *The Cross and the Fasces*, 29.

The Catholic Press propagated a widespread expectation in Italy that the Libyan population would approve of the Italian occupation as a welcome change from the Ottoman administration, and seized on the opportunity to extol the virtues of projecting a decidedly Catholic form of Italian nationalism as a means of securing the support of local populations through a shared recognition of the centrality of religion in Italian and North African culture against a rising secularism in Istanbul. Having developed ties with Hassuna Caramanli and the Muntasser families—prominent merchant and political elites who suffered from a loss of influence after the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) came to power in Istanbul in 1908—the director of the Banco di Roma in Tripoli widely reported that the local population had no opposition to the prospect of an Italian occupation, and a call to help the local elite rid themselves of an oppressive regime became a standard theme.¹³⁰ Voices in the Catholic Press urged Italian state intervention in the region to counter what was characterized as Muslim hatred towards Christians in Ottoman restrictions on Italian property ownership and regional trade practices, but the appeals for state assistance escalated with the murder of Giustino Pacini, an Italian missionary sent to Derna in 1903 to build a new station on behalf of the Franciscan order of the Frati Minori di Lombardia. Pacini died in March 1908 in suspicious circumstances, and *La Civiltà Cattolica* accused Ottoman officials in Derna of ordering the murder of the Franciscan missionary as part of a pattern of consistent anti-Christian behavior.¹³¹

With public sympathy for the plight of Catholic missions at a height, the Catholic Press used the murder of the Italian missionary as an opportunity to extoll the benefits of a Catholic

¹³⁰ Hesnawi, “Note sulla politica coloniale,” 35.

¹³¹ P. Costanzo Bergna, *La missione francescana in Libia* (Tripoli: Nuove arti grafiche, 1924), 169-170; *La Civiltà Cattolica*, “Cronaca Contemporanea” 59, no. 2 (April 18, 1908): 238.

form of Italian national identity in facilitating imperial expansion. *La Civiltà Cattolica* argued that in embracing their religious identity, Catholic Italians could appeal to the religiosity of Muslim populations in North Africa as a favorable contrast to secularizing inclinations among political elites in the CUP to undermine the influence of the Ottoman administration. “The lack of religion is not in fashion in the Orient, and they know well of the burning of the churches and of those who scoff at the clergy in Italy, their sacrilege dissolves the patria at its frontiers and defames it abroad, stopping its impulses and initiatives.”¹³² In January 1911, the Catholic daily of Turin, *Il Momento*, went a step further and depicted Catholic Italians as true nationalists and imperialists struggling against the pernicious influence of anti-clerics, socialists, and Freemasons. The paper claimed to have uncovered a plot involving members of the CUP and Freemasons in the Italian government who agreed to refrain from challenging Ottoman sovereignty in North Africa out of loyalty to their mutual ties to Freemason lodges. The editors of *La Civiltà Cattolica* cited the story as evidence of a confluence of international and national interests pitted against increased Italian presence in Ottoman territories.¹³³

Though the Catholic Press celebrated Italian annexation of the Libyan territories, *La Civiltà Cattolica* proved less supportive of the occupying forces’ attempts to gain the trust of religious notables by promising religious toleration. Soon after the invasion, the commanding officer of the occupation, General Caneva, issued a declaration promising that Italian troops would defend Islam in the territory and guarantee the rights of Muslims to continue their

¹³² “L’irreligiosità non è di moda in Oriente, e ben lo sappiano gl’incendiari delle chiese ed i dileggiatori del clero in Italia, la loro sacrilega brutalità dissolve la patria nelle sue frontiere, e diffamandola all’estero, arresta i suoi slanci e le sue iniziative.” *La Civiltà Cattolica*, “Cronaca Contemporanea,” 59, no. 2 (2 May 1908): 377.

¹³³ Cordova, *Agli Ordini del serpente*, 17-18, 27.

traditions and practices under Italian rule.¹³⁴ Caneva's proclamation reflected a fairly conventional claim to religious tolerance from European imperial powers in Muslim territories in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but an article in *La Civiltà Cattolica* criticized Caneva's attempt to appease the religious sensibilities of the local population for falsely representing Italian culture and denying Italian religious identity. "The Italian authorities also tried, and please excuse the term, to 'muslimize' themselves, using phrases from the Qur'an and appropriating Muslim religious sentiments that in their mouths are a fiction and an ugly and misleading political action."¹³⁵ Efforts of colonial officials to cultivate relationships with Muslim notables and to claim a role as defenders of Islam in the Libyan territories proved a constant source of tension for political figures and media outlets in Italy as they engaged in debates over the nature of religious and national identity in Italian overseas expansion. For Italian missionaries in the Libyan territories, these debates posed immediate consequences for their mission and the possibilities of their alignments with Italian state activities.

Catholic Missionaries and Crispi's Colonial Project

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, Church and state officials in Rome found common ground over the issue of Italian emigration abroad as Italian political leaders of the Crispi administration enlisted the help of Catholic missionary networks to maintain a sense of

¹³⁴ AUSSME L8/154/1, Caneva, "Agli Arabi della Tripolitania," 15 January 1912.

¹³⁵ "Le autorità italiane han cercato anche, ci sia permesso il termine, di mussulmanizzarsi esse stesse, andando a prendere le frasi del Corano, e appropriandosi sentimenti religiosi musulmani che in bocca loro sono una finzione ed una brutta azione di politica obliqua." *La Civiltà Cattolica*, "Cronaca Contemporanea," 62, no. 4 (27 October 1911), 362.

Italian identity among emigrant communities around the world.¹³⁶ Missionary groups also collaborated in Crispi's expansionist programs in East Africa, though the relationships between colonial officials overseeing the tentative extension of Italian influence and missionary groups often depended more on the political and religious persuasions of the particular individuals working in the region rather than on an overarching plan. Among the predominately Christian populations of East Africa, Italian state officials and missionaries expected to face less opposition to Catholic missionary work compared to Muslim North Africa, and their collaboration seemed to offer the possibility of carving out a zone of Italian-Catholic influence. Several local Italian officials, however, blocked effective expansion of Catholic missions in territories of Italian influence; citing the need to prevent local opposition often served as an easy excuse for an ideological impulse to prevent Church involvement in the colonial project.

When Crispi declared Eritrea an Italian colony in 1890, he appointed Oreste Baratieri, a devoted Catholic, to the position of its first military governor, and in line with a politics of reconciliation, Baratieri promoted the involvement of Catholic missionaries in the Italian colonial project throughout his tenure. Baratieri collaborated in this cause with Geremia Bonomelli, a moderate Bishop who founded the *Associazione nazionale per soccorrere i missioni cattolici italiani* (National Association to Aid Italian Catholic Missions) in Florence in 1886. Bonomelli's Association sought to end the reliance of Italian missionaries on subsidies

¹³⁶ Italian emigration from 1880 to 1914 reached about thirteen million, the highest rate of emigration in recorded history. Choate, *Emigrant Nation*, 130.

from foreign governments by increasing Italian state funding.¹³⁷ His project reflected an attempt to decrease the influence of French state funding, which had sustained Catholic missionary activity for much of the nineteenth century, and it provoked a confrontation with French missionaries in the region. When Italy declared Eritrea a colony in 1890, the Catholic missions there fell under the jurisdiction of the Vicariate of the French Lazarists in Ethiopia, and Baratieri and Bonomelli worked together to try to remove the French control as a means of solidifying Italian claims to the region. Citing concerns that the disparity in language between the missions and state officials would confuse the native populations, Baratieri enlisted Bonomelli's assistance to request the Vatican to transfer the mission in Eritrea to Italian control. Initially, Propaganda Fide refused out of deference to the Missionary Institution of Lyon, but in 1894, the Vatican finally placed the missionaries in Eritrea under the control of Italian Capuchins.¹³⁸ Having achieved their initial goal of nationalizing the Catholic mission, Baratieri and Bonomelli organized a Catholic settlement program to bring Italian agriculturalists to Eritrea in 1895 to compete with a similar Parliamentary project under the direction of the conservative Baron Leopoldo Franchetti. Both projects failed after Baratieri's disastrous defeat at Adwa in

¹³⁷ U. Chilati Dirar, "Church-State Relations in Colonial Eritrea: Missionaries and the Development of Colonial Strategies, (1869-1911)," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 8, no. 3 (2001): 400; Horst Gründer, "Christian Missionary Activities in Africa in the Age of Imperialism and the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885," in *Bismarck, Europe, and Africa: The Berlin Africa Conference 1884-1885 and the Onset of Partition*, edited by Stig Förster, Wolfgang J. Mommsen, and Ronald Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 95.

¹³⁸ Choate, *Emigrant Nation*, 35, 139; Chilati Dirar, "Church-State Relations," 401; Lucia Ceci, *Il vessillo e la croce: colonialismo, missioni cattoliche e islam in Somalia (1903-1924)* (Rome: Carocci, 2006), 13-14; Claudio M. Betti, *Missioni e colonie in Africa Orientale* (Rome: Edizioni Studium, 1999), 227. Note that Chilati Dirar had it that the National Association to Support Catholic Missionaries sought the support of the Italian state for the project to replace the French Lazarists with Italian missionaries in Eritrea. According to Choate's research, the impetus for the project came primarily from Governor General Baratieri, and Ceci characterizes the shift in control of the mission as a victory for Crispi's government.

1896 led to the withdrawal of Italian troops and settlements, but they presented contrasting visions for the link between religious and national identity in Italian expansionist policies.

The collaboration between Baratieri and Bonomelli in Eritrea stemmed in part from their mutual dedication to reconciliation in national politics, but it also reflected a widespread belief that, in contrast to Muslim North Africa, the Christian populations of Ethiopia and Eritrea would prove fertile ground for Catholic missionary activity. In 1889, the journalist Filippo Tolti founded the *Società antischiavista d'Italia* [The Italian Anti-Slavery Society] in Rome and began to advocate the establishment of Italian missions in the territories under Italian protection in East Africa as a means of both promoting the unification of Church and state interests in Rome and defending the region against the linked threats of the slave trade and Muslim expansion.¹³⁹ Lucia Ceci has pointed to the language of the Vice Secretary of the *Società antischiavista d'Italia*, Gennaro Angelini, on the occasion of its first meeting in 1892 as promoting the hopes of conciliatory circles for the potential of colonial expansion to unify Church and state interests against the influence of Islam or secular imperial state in Africa:

Convinced that colonial expansion in Africa will be providential for opening the black continent to the Christian civilization and to rescue from the predominant and fatal Islamic influence, frankly I declare myself happy that for Italy as well, more faithful for the most part to the old religion, there has been reserved a part of this glorious crusade against barbarity offering thus to our valorous Missionaries a most extensive field of action for the benefit of the civilization of the Patria.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Ceci, *Il vessillo*, 13-14.

¹⁴⁰ Lucia Ceci, "Missioni e colonialismo italiano in Somalia (1903-1906)," *Studi Storici* 43, no. 1 (2002): 42.

Soon after, Angelini, on behalf of the *Società antischivista d'Italia*, proposed that Propaganda Fide establish an Italian mission in Benadir in the Italian-controlled portion of the Somalian coast under the direction of the Trinitarians, an order that dated its origins to the end of the twelfth century when it was dedicated to freeing Christians held captive during the Crusades.

Propaganda Fide followed his recommendation in 1904 and formally declared the creation of an apostolic prefecture of Benadir within the Vicariate of Zanzibar under the direct control of Trinitarians, but they faced a long and difficult road in gaining the approval of state officials who cited Muslim opposition as justification for blocking the proposal. The head of the mission, Padre Leandro, waited two years before colonial officials gave him permission to enter the region. The refusal to grant him entry surprised Vatican officials given that the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Tomasso Tittoni, was known for his familial ties with the Catholic hierarchy and the Banco di Roma. Tittoni did approve of the establishment of a small mission with the hopes that it would promote “agricultural development, medical services, and aid to freed slaves,”¹⁴¹ but the consul general of Zanzibar, Luigi Mercatelli, blocked the mission’s entry into Italian Somaliland and convinced Tittoni that the presence of a Catholic mission in the colony at that time would inflame anti-Italian sentiment by provoking Islamic fanaticism.

The subsequent standoff between Mercatelli and Padre Leandro inspired bitter disputes in ministerial communications, popular press, and parliamentary debates over the relationship between colonial expansion and missionary activities. Like many military and state officials at the time, Mercatelli self-identified as a Freemason and anti-cleric, and when Padre Leandro

¹⁴¹ Ibid.: 50-51.

established a mission just over the border of British Somaliland without causing any sort of negative reaction, the absence of an Islamic backlash revealed the underlying personal and political grounds for his prevention of the mission. The account of the Italian explorer Enrico A. D'Albertis, who happened to arrive in the region on the same ship as Padre Leandro, further challenged the rationale of the Italian authorities for their refusal to allow entry to Padre Leandro. D'Albertis argued that the hostility of the native population towards the Italians stemmed not from the possibility of a Catholic presence in Benadir, but was the result of the ineptitude of the colonial administration. He claimed that Italian colonial officials were hiding behind the mission as an excuse for their own failures to generate local consensus, and he pointed to examples from French, British, and German cooperation with missions as evidence of the potential benefits of collaboration in helping increase national influence abroad.¹⁴²

In Rome, political opponents seized on the events surrounding Padre Leandro as a political instrument to denounce Mercatelli and by extension Tittoni and the entire liberal approach to Italian colonial administration he represented in debates in the Italian House of Deputies. The introduction of a new Minister of Foreign Affairs, Antonino Di San Giuliano, in December 1905 introduced a general shift in attitudes among central officials in Rome in favor of using missionaries for the benefit of Italy's imperialist ambitions, though the relationship between Italian missionary activity and colonial expansion remained fraught with tension in the Libyan territories where European officials feared the potential of religious convictions to derail attempts to generate consensus for colonial rule.¹⁴³

¹⁴² Ibid., 74-80.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 93.

Missionaries in Libya and the Italian Occupation

A variety of factors paved a smoother path of cooperation between missionaries and state officials in Rome in the preparations for the Italian invasion of the Libyan territories. By the time Giolitti initiated the occupation of Tripoli and Benghazi in 1911, moderates on both sides of the Roman Question were eager to find a path to reconciliation in domestic politics. The future of the liberal government depended on maintaining the support of Catholic voters against a Socialist opposition. The popularity of the colonial project in Libya proved to be a key factor in securing Catholic support in the 1913 elections as the Catholic Press sold the invasion as the opportunity to cooperate in spreading a particularly Catholic brand of Italian civilization in Africa. The personal attitudes of the church and state officials involved in the region also facilitated cooperation, at least at the beginning of the colonial occupation. Tittoni served a second term as Foreign Minister under Giolitti's third cabinet (1906-1909), but he had learned the risks of excluding missionaries from the colonial project in the public debacle caused by Mercatelli's conflicts with Padre Leandro in Benadir. This time around, Tittoni advocated state support of the Franciscan mission as a reliable and relatively inexpensive source of education and health care and as a means of increasing Italian presence in the region. The Catholic mission in Tripoli and Benghazi under the control of the Franciscan order of the Frati Minori di Lombardia possessed the further advantage of having already firmly established a monopoly on missionary activity in the region by the time the Italian forces arrived. The Franciscan order claimed to be able to trace its presence in the region back to the seventeenth century, but its activities relevant to the current story began in 1810 when the order instituted a school in Tripoli.

In the decade preceding the invasion of the Libyan coast, the mission of the Frati Minori di Lombardia in the Libyan provinces sought increased financial and political ties to the Italian state as they signaled their support for the expansionist project. Like other Catholic missions, the Frati Minori received political protection and financial subsidies from France in the nineteenth century. As part of an effort to extend French cultural influence in the Middle East and Africa, the French state fostered positive relationships with missionaries through direct material support. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the mission steadily increased its educational activities in the region by opening a girls' school in Tripoli and another boys' school in the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi, all with French financial backing. In 1882, the Franciscan mission signed a contract with the Frères Maristes, a French lay order dedicated to educating young Catholics, to bring them in as the primary instructors and managers of the mission's schools for boys.¹⁴⁴ The formation of a new government in France in 1899 under the republican Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau marked an end of France's official protection of Catholic missionaries when Waldeck-Rousseau severed ties between Church and State, expelled religious orders from France, and broke diplomatic ties with the Vatican. The French government stopped short of expelling missionaries from French Africa, but they severely curtailed their subsidies.¹⁴⁵

The repeal of French political and economic support at the turn of the century left the Italian Franciscans in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica looking for new patrons for both financial and diplomatic assistance, and the lack of state support provoked clashes with Ottoman officials in the province. At the beginning of 1901, the Apostolic Prefect of Tripoli, Giuseppe Bevilacqua,

¹⁴⁴ Archivio Storico De Propaganda Fede, Nuova Seria (NS) Vol. 193, Rubrica 141/1900, Padre Giuseppe Bevilacqua in Tripoli to Card. Gotti at Propaganda Fede, 31 December 1899.

¹⁴⁵ Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa 1450-1950*, ed. Henry Chadwick and Owen Chadwick, *The Oxford History of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 430.

complained in his annual report to Propaganda Fide that the mission did not receive the support they needed from the French, especially when it came to dealing with the local Ottoman government. The point of contention centered on a request the Prefect had been making for three years for the French Ambassador in Constantinople to obtain the necessary permission from the Ottoman government for the mission to buy land and construct a new Church in al-Khoms, a city about 100 kilometers southeast of Tripoli.¹⁴⁶ Once they received permission, the lack of funding prevented its construction. Propaganda Fide sent the mission 1000 Lire in response, but it was far less than what was needed.¹⁴⁷ By 1904, the Apostolic Prefect reported a severe financial situation due to the lack of funds and overextension of their activities, and they began to receive extraordinary subsidies from Propaganda Fide on a regular basis.

Recognizing the increased interest in expanding Italian presence in the region, the Apostolic Prefect began writing requests to the Italian consulate in Tripoli in November 1905 asking that the Italian state assume official protection of the Franciscan mission. Bevilacqua pursued an aggressive tactic of nationalizing the mission and promoting increased Italian presence in the region to garner favor for the mission's work. When the mission officially renounced French backing in 1908, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Tittoni agreed to grant Italian protection and promised to pay the Franciscan mission an annual sum of 12,000 Lire in exchange for an increased emphasis on teaching Italian language in its schools and promoting a positive image of Italy through the provision of medical services.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Archivio Storico De Propaganda Fide, NS Vol. 214 Rubrica 141/1901, Padre Giuseppe Bevilacqua in Tripoli to Card. Gotti at Propaganda Fide, 31 January 1901.

¹⁴⁷ Archivio Storico De Propaganda Fide, NS Vol. 237, Rubrica 141/1902, Padre Giuseppe Bevilacqua in Tripoli to Card. Gotti at Propaganda Fide.

¹⁴⁸ ASMAI II 121/1/3, Governor of Tripolitania Garioni to Minister of Colonies Ferdinando Martini, "Missione Francescana - Pagamento di Sussidio," 19 August 1914.

With state funding secured, the Franciscan missionaries became vocal advocates of the Italian occupation and called for projects for mass emigration of Italian settlers to increase the Catholic presence in the region. In their support of settlement schemes in the Libyan territories, missionary leaders denounced the influence of the Sanusiyya for promoting a uniform and exclusionary culture that threatened to impede the joint expansion of the Italian state and the Catholic mission. The new Prefect of the Franciscan Mission, Buonaventura Rossetti, favored projects for Italian settlement in part as an opportunity to assist the mission in its plans to convert freed slaves, mostly subsaharan Africans. According to Rossetti, local Muslim populations, especially those affiliated with the Sanusiyya, refused to integrate or employ former slaves because of their religious and racial status, and the danger that they would face isolation impeded the mission's connected efforts at conversion and abolition. Besides the risk of inciting religious opposition, Rossetti believed converted ex-slaves would find it near impossible to secure employment or start families. Being "moretti," they would never find wives among the Maltese, Italian, and French Catholic population of Cyrenaica, and being Catholic, they would never find wives among anyone else. They would be trapped in a no-man's land of race and religion.

The best solution, Rossetti speculated, would be if the Banco di Roma could complete a proposed project to colonize territories it had purchased in the area around Benghazi by bringing in Italian families who could then hire the baptized former slaves to work in their homes. As part of their increased financial investments in North Africa, the Banco di Roma began acquiring land in Cyrenaica in the first decade of the twentieth century. Initially, they focused on fertile oases thought to be abandoned in the vicinity of Benghazi with the intention of renting or selling plots to Italian emigrants who were to cultivate crops for consumption in the urban centers along the

coast. Opposition from Ottoman officials forced the Banco di Roma to renounce its settlement schemes, though the territory they acquired initially later became one of the first planned agricultural villages of Cyrenaica under state management.¹⁴⁹ Rossetti cited the opposition of Ottoman officials as further evidence of the need for state occupation of the region to support the financial and civilizing missions of Catholic interests against the opposition of what he called “Arab-Turco fanaticism” exacerbated by the presence of the Sanusiyya.¹⁵⁰ In identifying the influence of the Sanusiyya as a barrier against the Italian occupation, Rossetti voiced a popular perspective on the opposition between the Sufi order and the expansion of European presence and aligned himself and the mission with advocates of mass emigration. The move positioned the mission against the relatively small body of political elites in the colonial administration who continued to follow the prescriptions of Enrico Insabato intent on promoting an image of Italy as a pro-Islamic colonial power and developing an alliance with the Sanusi family to facilitate state expansion in the Libyan interior.

Like nationalist advocates of Italian settlement schemes, the Franciscan mission saw itself as engaged in a campaign to carve out a position for Italian and Catholic interests against the influence of rival religious and national groups with competing claims to influence in the region. In trying to carve out a position for the mission in the Libyan territories, the Franciscans at times tempered their advocacy of a strong state expansion with a recognition of the need to accommodate local religious sensibilities to assuage fears among Italian state officials of the risks of associating with the Catholic organization. The mission sought to strike this balance as a means of edging out potential competition for the missionary territory by assuring their relative

¹⁴⁹ Cresti, *Non desiderare la terra*, 60-61.

¹⁵⁰ Frati Minori, Busta 6, Bonaventura Rossetti to Card. Gotti at Propaganda Fide, 9 June 1911.

cooperation with the goals of state officials to minimize local opposition to the Italian presence. The Congregation of St. Joseph represented the most immediate threat for its conversion activities among freed slaves in the region of Benghazi, and Rossetti requested the Propaganda Fide prevent them from expanding their practices beyond aid work to active proselytizing.¹⁵¹ As part of the strategy for securing their position, Rossetti assured Italian central officials in Rome that the Frati Minori would respect the difficulties of governing a Muslim population, and he characterized his mission as uniquely capable of preventing the level of anti-Christian fanaticism among local Muslim elites the Congregation of St. Joseph threatened to engender with its abolitionist activities. In contrast, Rossetti suggested that the Franciscan mission would abstain from active proselytizing or engage in abolitionist projects to reduce opposition to Italian influence. The Franciscans's willingness to abstain from anti-slavery activities helped solidify state support, and an increasing in Italian funding induced the Franciscans to issue a new set of regulations to confirm their monopoly over the mission and its schools in the face of a new wave of Catholic populations.

The Franciscan mission's support for Italian expansionist programs generated a prolonged conflict with the community of Catholics in the region made up primarily of Maltese fishermen and their families who objected to the mission's turn towards Italian nationalism.¹⁵² In

¹⁵¹ Frati Minori, Busta 6, Annual Report from Bonaventura Rossetti to Card. Gotti at Propaganda Fide, 19 December 1908.

¹⁵² Clancy-Smith. *Mediterranean*, 250. In the years preceding the occupation, the Italian population of the Libyan territories was small. The only census data for the population for years 1909-1911 distinguished by faith instead of nationality, but representatives of the Maltese community in Tripoli estimated that they made up around 3,500 out of a total Catholic population of 6,000. For the estimate of the Maltese population in 1909 see Archivio Storico De Propaganda Fide, NS Vol. 490, Rubrica N. 141/1910, Petition signed by representatives of the Maltese community, 11/6/1909. For the estimate of the Catholic population in general in 1910, see Archivio Storico De Propaganda Fide, NS Vol. 520, Rubrica N. 141/1912, P. Bonaventura Rossetti to Card. Gotti at Propaganda Fide, November 1911.

February 1905, the Franciscan Prefect wrote to Propaganda Fide complaining that the mission faced challenges not only from the local government and the exigencies of international politics, but also from the very Catholics the mission served because they represented different nationalities.¹⁵³ The opposition of the Maltese community presented an unexpected source of hostility towards the Italian occupation that underscored the commitment of the Franciscan missionaries to the agenda of Italian expansionism. In his clashes with the Maltese community, the Apostolic Prefect, Giuseppe Bevilacqua, envisioned a future of Italian expansion that would negate the Maltese influence in the prefecture, and towards that goal, he instituted reforms of Church services and education to promote the use of Italian language in the Libyan territories by eliminating masses in Maltese and replacing French education with Italian in the mission's schools. The Maltese community complained about the lack of Rosary and mass services in Maltese, but Bevilacqua assured Propaganda Fide that the issue would be resolved naturally with time as the Maltese children learned Italian in the mission schools. The Prefect called the desire of the Maltese community to maintain services in their language "pure fanaticism" since the most common language in the region after Arabic, he claimed, was Italian. "If the mission has Maltese priests," he added, "it is just to satisfy these fanatics and maintain peace in the Christian colonies."¹⁵⁴ Complaints from the Maltese community against the Prefect continued to pour in from the summer of 1904 through 1906 and contributed to the hesitancy of the Italian Foreign Ministry to provide state funding to the Franciscan mission as they tried to minimize local opposition to Italian influence. The upheaval informed Propaganda Fide's decision to replace

¹⁵³ Archivio Storico De Propaganda Fide, NS Vol. 406, Rubrica 141/1907, P. Giuseppe Bevilacqua to Card. Gotti at Propaganda Fide, 3 February 1905.

¹⁵⁴ Archivio Storico De Propaganda Fide, NS Vol. 406, Rubrica 141/1907, P. Giuseppe Bevilacqua to Card. Gotti at Propaganda Fide, 18 May 1906.

Bevilacqua with a new Prefect, Bonaventura Rossetti, in the summer of 1907 which paved the way for the Foreign Ministry's subsequent agreement to provide state funding in 1908.¹⁵⁵

To reflect the mission's official reliance on the patronage of the Italian state, the Frati Minori established new regulations that further nationalized the mission's activities and provoked the opposition of the Maltese community. The new directives called for an increase in Italian instruction, a decrease in French instruction, and a diminished role for the French Marian Brothers who had been managing and teaching in the mission's schools since 1882. The Franciscan's regulations called for a mix of Franciscan and Marian Brothers as teachers, but the Marian Brothers chose to leave the colonies instead of accepting a reduction of their control over the mission schools. The dispute between the Marian Brothers and the Franciscans worked in favor of increased ties between the mission and the Italian administration as officials in the Italian state sought to discourage French influence in the region in the years preceding the Italian occupation. In December 1909, the Undersecretary of State Scalea recommended continuing the monthly stipend to the mission as a way to diminish the threat of French presence as a possible erosion of Italian influence despite questions within the Foreign Ministry concerning the utility of the state subsidies for Church activities.¹⁵⁶

The changes in the mission schools invoked further protests from the Maltese community and a general strike of the mission's students. In a failed attempt to appease the Maltese, the new regulations for the mission included a clause warning against nationalization of the mission's work and admonished the missionaries to, "avoid every discourse of nationality and do not get

¹⁵⁵ Archivio Storico De Propaganda Fide, NS Vol. 406, Rubrica 141/1907, Secretary General of the Frati Minori to Card. Gotti at Propaganda Fide, 16 July 1907.

¹⁵⁶ Frati Minori, Busta 6, Undersecretary of State Scalea to Consul General of Tripoli, 22 December 1909.

involved in things that are even broadly political; but instead concern yourself with the politics of Jesus Christ ... looking on those near you as brothers no matter what nationality they belong to.”¹⁵⁷ As an attempt to accommodate the exigencies of the Italian Foreign Ministry to minimize opposition to the expansion of Italian influence, the new regulations called on younger missionaries to learn both Maltese and Arabic to make themselves useful to the Maltese Catholics in the colonies and a signal of their recognition of local culture. Despite these measures, the Maltese in Tripoli signed a petition in 1909 asking for the Archbishop of Malta to fund the construction of an exclusively Maltese church to break away from the Italian mission.¹⁵⁸ Propaganda Fide sent a representative to Tripoli to consider the possibility of establishing an exclusively Maltese church in the region, Father D’Aprea, and he supported the Maltese claims, emphasizing the Maltese status as British subjects in an Ottoman territory. “The Church is not Italian, much less the land,” he wrote. Then he argued, “If Propaganda really wants to save its sons, it should give [the mission] to the Maltese Franciscan Province.”¹⁵⁹

The arrival of the occupying forces in the fall of 1911 put an end to any debates over the national identity of the mission or its commitment to spreading Italian linguistic and cultural influence through the mission schools and medical services. Of course, the mission’s leadership complained of a new set of challenges to the Franciscans’ control over Catholic services in the

¹⁵⁷ “Evitino pure con ogni cura discorsi di nazionalità e non s’immischino in cose che fanno pur lontanamente di politica; ma facciamo piuttosto la politica di G.C., considerandosi tra loro stessi e riguardano i prossimi come fratelli, a qualsiasi nazionalità appartengano.” Archivio Storico De Propaganda Fide, NS Vol. 478, Rubrica 141/1909, “Regolamento per la missione francescana della Tripolitania 1908”, approved by Dionisio Schuler, General Minister of the Frati Minori.

¹⁵⁸ Archivio Storico De Propaganda Fide, Vol. 490, Rubrica N. 141/1910, Mons. Pietro Pace, Arc. Vescovo of Malta to Card. Gotti at Propaganda Fide, 10 January 1910.

¹⁵⁹ Archivio Storico De Propaganda Fide, NS Vol. 490, Rubrica N. 141/1910, Padre Valerio Aprea to Card. Gotti at Propaganda Fide, 13 March 1910.

region with the increased military and state presence. The notoriety of anticlerical sentiment among military officials was cause for concern in the Catholic Press and among the Franciscan mission as they tried to secure a position in Italian expansionism. In parliamentary debates preparing for the invasion of the Libyan coast, the Italian Minister of War spoke against state provision of religious education or chaplains to accompany the Occupying Forces as a presence of Church representatives that he argued would threaten to undermine national unity in the colonial war. *Civiltà Cattolica* celebrated the final decision to send Catholic chaplains into the Libyan invasion as recognition of the prevalence of Catholic soldiers in the Occupying Forces and the patriotism of Italian priests.¹⁶⁰ The provision of army chaplains represented a triumph for Catholic influence in Rome, but it posed a challenge to the Franciscan mission. Eager to maintain the predominance of the Franciscan mission, Rossetti complained about the quality of some of the chaplains, claiming that many of them seemed to have gone to Libya “more to take a pleasure jaunt than to lend their spiritual work for the benefit of our soldiers.” Since he did not have control over the selection of military chaplains, Rossetti required them to present themselves to the mission as recognition of the Franciscans’ authority in the region.¹⁶¹

The Italian occupation led to a sizable increase in the Catholic community in the Libyan territories that seemed to promise a growing field of activity for the Franciscan mission. According to the mission’s data, the number of Catholics they served increased from 4,000 in November 1911 to 15,000 in December 1912.¹⁶² The mission incurred damages due to the war

¹⁶⁰ “Lo spirito religioso nell’esercito,” *Civiltà Cattolica*, Anno 61, Vol. 3, 1910: 38; “Cose Italiane,” *Civiltà Cattolica* 62, no. 4, 1911: 244.

¹⁶¹ Frati Minori, Busta 6, Bonaventura Rossetti to Card. Gotti at Propaganda Fide, 17 October 1911.

¹⁶² Archivio Storico De Propaganda Fide, NS Vol. 520, Rubrica N. 141/1912, Data on status of the mission, 16 December 1912.

between Italian and Ottoman forces, in particular damage done to the mission's school in Benghazi, but by March 1912, the immediate danger to missionary properties in the coastal region seemed to have quieted and the mission's Prefect asked Propaganda Fide permission to travel to Rome to secure permits and funding from the Church and from military personnel to build new missionary stations in Tobruk, Misurata, and Zlitan to serve the military population and the expected rise in Italian settlers.¹⁶³ The Prefect's excitement over the mission's potential for expansion and his enthusiasm for state programs of colonization infused his official correspondence as he formulated programs in line with expectations for the Libyan territories to become a fully Italian space with a dominant class of Italian settlers.¹⁶⁴

Catholic Missionaries and the Pro-Islamic Approach

The establishment of a more permanent Italian colonial administration in 1912 and 1913 brought welcome resources to the Franciscan mission, but it also led to tensions between the missionaries and officials trying to promote an image of the Italian administration as friendly to Muslim interests. As a sign of the region's increasing importance for the Catholic Church, the region was elevated from an Apostolic Prefecture to an Apostolic Vicariate in the summer of 1913. To fill the new role of Titular Bishop, Propaganda Fide decided not to keep Rossetti, but instead chose Ludovico Antomelli, a Milanese Franciscan who proved less eager to embrace the Italian colonial project than his predecessor. Antomelli's tenure as Titular Bishop then full

¹⁶³ Archivio Storico De Propaganda Fide, NS Vol. 520, Rubrica N. 141/1912, Bonaventura Rossetti to Card. Gotti at Propaganda Fide, 12 March 1912.

¹⁶⁴ Rossetti's proposals after the initial occupation included ambitious plans to construct a new technical school to train native workers for future industrial enterprises and to establish a local Catholic newspaper for the Italian population. Archivio Storico De Propaganda Fide, NS Vol. 520, Rubrica N. 141/1912, Bonaventura Rossetti to Card. Gotti at Propaganda Fide, 9 May 1912.

Bishop in Tripolitania from 1913 to 1919 was marked by incessant conflicts with state authorities as the colonial administration tried to cultivate relationships with Muslim leaders and local notables to support Italian rule. Antomelli's conflicts with colonial authorities began before he even landed in Tripolitania when the Minister of Colonies, citing political and safety concerns, prohibited the mission's plans for public festivities to celebrate his arrival. In a letter to the Director of the Fondo pel Culto, the Minister of Colonies claimed that just the preparations for a procession from the port to the church and related festivities had made the local Arab population "uneasy" as a sign of Italian disregard for local customs.¹⁶⁵ Antomelli's conflicts with the colonial authorities took on bitter personal tones at times, especially in his tumultuous relationship with General Ameglio who served as Governor of Cyrenaica and Governor of Tripolitania during the Bishop's stay in Tripoli.¹⁶⁶

Though state and military officials on the ground in the Libyan territories often saw the presence of the mission as an impediment to their more immediate political objectives in generating local consensus, the central administration in Rome took steps to reaffirm their financial and logistical support of the mission after signing of the Treaty of Lausanne and the establishment of the new Italian Ministry of Colonies. In August 1913, the Minister of Colonies increased the regular state funding for the mission in recognition of its value as a source of education, medical services, and as a representation of Italian culture abroad. The Minister of Colonies also cited the examples of other imperial powers providing subsidies to religious

¹⁶⁵ ASMAI II 121/1/3, Minister of Colonies to Barone Carlo Monti, Direttore Generale del Fondo per il Culto, 24 August 1913.

¹⁶⁶ Vittorio Ianari has traced their conflicts in one of the few books to discuss the role of missionaries in the Italian colonial experiment. Ianari, *Chiesa, Coloni e Islam: Religione e politica nella Libia italiana* (Turin: Societa Editrice Internazionale, 1995).

missions in the colonies as a model for his decision to increase state funding for the Franciscan mission. “Other Nations, and especially Germany and France, spend considerable sums in subsidies of this kind in the certainty that doing so they benefit from expanding the influence of the motherland abroad.”¹⁶⁷ Maintaining positive relations with the Franciscans served as part of an arsenal for increasing Italian presence in the region and proving Italy’s stature as one of Europe’s imperial powers.

The affirmation of support from state officials in Rome did little to preclude the conflicts between local colonial administrators and the Franciscan missionaries in the Libyan territories who clashed not only over the issue of religious politics in a Muslim population, but also over the provision of services in the colonial territories under Italian state control. For the missionaries, the biggest threat the Italian administration posed was the prospect of a competing state-run system of education that would eliminate Catholic influence and detract from the mission’s services. As early as 1910, the mission began to complain about secular state schools diverting students away from the mission. Rossetti proposed a solution whereby the mission schools would be responsible for elementary education while the state schools would take the lead in education after the sixth grade.¹⁶⁸ State officials advocated maintaining both to allow a choice between the two parallel school systems, but in 1911, Rossetti complained that the Italian consulate had pressured Italian families to attend the state schools, revealing what he

¹⁶⁷ “Le altre Nazioni, e specialmente la Germania e la Francia, spendono comme considerevoli in sussidi del genere nella certezza che così facendo si giovi all’espandersi della influenza della madre patria all’estero.” ASMAI II 121/1/3, Minister of Colonies Colosimo to Minister of Foreign Affairs San Giuliano, 1 August 1913.

¹⁶⁸ Frati Minori di Lombardia, Busta 1, Bonaventura Rossetti to the Italian Ambassador to Constantinople Barone, 8 May 1910.

characterized as a pervasive obstruction of the Catholic mission including efforts to attract the Maltese students to state schools and thus fomenting discord among the Catholic population.¹⁶⁹

The Franciscan missionaries frequently voiced their suspicions that references to the need to project an image of religious toleration and sensitivity to local custom served as a facile cover for anti-clerical sentiments and Freemasonry among Italian officials and military officers in the colonies. The Catholic Press claimed that the rationale behind state restrictions on missionary activities in the Libyan territories as provided by state-affiliated experts on Islam and the region masked an anti-clerical agenda. The *Civiltà Cattolica* published an article in 1912 to dispute a study by Leone Caetani, a frequent consultant to the Italian colonial administration and a famous expert of Islamic history, that focused on conflicts between Islam and Catholicism as two uniquely universal religions with opposing missions to spread through the world. Caetani's argument explained and justified the decisions of state officials to prevent the Franciscan mission from constructing new churches or schools in the initial years of the occupation as a measure to prevent such a conflict, but the *Civiltà Cattolica* argued that the study revealed the widespread anti-clerical biases of state officials and their semi-official advisers in the Libyan territories. The article devolved into a derogatory lecture on Islam as a religion that threatened civilization and promoted war, a common theme in Catholic literature on the culture of Islam in colonial territories, but it is instructive in the impression it gives of Catholic interest groups in Italy embattled against a political culture they saw as hostile to the Church and thwarting their attempts to take part in the nationalist expansion abroad.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Frati Minori di Lombardia, Busa 1, Bonaventura Rossetti to Minister of Foreign Affairs San Giuliano, 20 May 1911.

¹⁷⁰ "Islam e cristianesimo," *Civiltà Cattolica* 63, no. 3, 1912.

Conclusion

After the Ottoman Empire renounced sovereignty over the Libyan territories in October 1912, the opposition against the Italian occupation from Arab and Bedouin forces with continued Ottoman financial and strategic backing curtailed the mission's plans for expansion. For the rest of the decade, Italian colonial officials employed a combination of military campaigns and attempts to appeal to the political and financial interests of elites in the region to expand state presence into the Libyan interior. After the outbreak of the First World War, the Italian state officials—with substantial pressure from British officials in Egypt—became increasingly reliant on a series of agreements with Idris al-Sanusi to establish Cyrenaica as a buffer against the threat of Ottoman-Arab attacks from Tripolitania and to prevent a total loss of Italy's claims to sovereignty in the Libyan territories.

Broadly speaking, the Franciscan mission's agenda correlated to a popular understanding of the Italian occupation of the Libyan territories as a means of obtaining land for Italy's emigrant population, and it conflicted with the political and financial objectives of the Italian colonial administration as it attempted to negotiate with Idris al-Sanusi and other Muslim notables in the Libyan colonies. The messy business of trying to infiltrate regional political and financial networks, however, often muddied the distinctions between state and missionary objectives. Conflicts between Church and state officials did not necessarily focus on attempts to incorporate Muslim notables into the Italian colonial state or the broader efforts to promote an image of Italian rule as friendly to Islamic culture. I have pointed to moments when prominent Catholics called for greater Church involvement in Italian expansionist projects precisely

because they believed evidence of Italian religiosity would endear the Italian financial and state enterprises to the Muslim elites of North Africa, and as we will see further along, some military and state officials subscribed to models of state expansion in the Libyan territories that excluded further involvement of the Church. For the majority of the first decade of Italian occupation of the Libyan coastal region, state and Church authorities clashed over issues of education, proselytizing, public celebrations, and the building of churches as the political elite of the liberal administration promoted an image of the Italian occupation as friendly to Muslim elites in an attempt to incorporate them in Italian development schemes in the region. But the expansionist rhetoric of the Catholic press and the Franciscan mission conformed to a rising movement among nationalists in Rome and military officials in the colonies in pitting the transformation of the Libyan territories into a fully Italian space against the influence of the Sanusi elite in the Libyan interior. As we will see, those calling for direct state control of the region often envisioned a distinctly secular nature for an eventual colonial state, but by the time of the disintegration of the Sanusi-Italian agreements and the growing momentum for military operations in the interior of the 1920s, Catholic politics and the Franciscan mission had secured an integral role in national expansion abroad.

Ch. 3. The Italo-Turkish War and International Competition for a Sanusi Alliance

As popular opinion moved in favor of an Italian occupation of the Libyan territories, the Ministry of the Interior sent Enrico Insabato back to Cairo to resume his attempts to negotiate with Libyan notables in 1910, this time in an official capacity. Insabato produced reports that circulated widely among personnel in the Foreign Ministry and the Political Office of the military forces recommending an alliance with the Sanusiyya to generate consensus for an Italian state, and he renewed contact with Ahmad al-Sharif in the year leading up to the Italian invasion.¹⁷¹ After the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) came to power in the Young Turk revolution of 1908, the relationship between religious elite and the central Ottoman government grew strained as the inner circles of the CUP sought to curtail the political influence of Islamic institutions as part of a broader movement for modernization.¹⁷² As a result, Insabato saw the Young Turk revolution as an opportunity to convince Ahmad al-Sharif to support Italian rule as a defense of orthodox Islam against reformist tendencies in Istanbul. While popular calls for Italian expansion in Rome centered on programs for direct territorial control and eventual settlement of Italian emigrants, Insabato's recommendations as an expert with direct contacts in the region molded an expectation among the political elite of the colonial administration that the Sanusiyya would facilitate the Italian occupation.

The attempt to negotiate with Ahmad al-Sharif fit into a broader strategy to appeal to high profile political figures and merchants, many of whom felt marginalized after the Young Turk

¹⁷¹ Baldinetti, *Orientalismo e colonialismo*, 58.

¹⁷² Amit Bein, "Ulama' and Political Activism in the Late Ottoman Empire: The Political Career of Seyhülislâm Mustafa Sabri Efendi (1869-1954)," in *Guardians of Faith in Modern Times: 'Ulama' in the Middle East*, ed. Meir Hatina (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 71-75.

revolution and seemed willing to support the Italian occupation. Italian agents secured the support of financial and political elites in the coastal cities, but the Italian Occupying Forces faced stronger armed opposition than they expected from a coalition of Ottoman and regional forces in the rural interior. After the Sultan renounced Ottoman sovereignty in the Treaty of Ouchy in 1912, a succession of tribal leaders declared their formal recognition of Italian sovereignty in ceremonies of submission or *sottomissione*, but a number of powerful tribes in the interior refused to hand over their arms or negotiate with Italian representatives. The Italians cited the Mogarba in the areas along the border between Cyrenaica and Tripolitania as a major impediment to gaining control over the region's interior; a large tribe with cultural and commercial ties to the Zuwaya in the interior oases, the refusal of the Mogarba to submit to Italian authority prevented state officials from checking the continued movement of arms and ammunition either from the coast or across the Egyptian border and represented a significant block against attempts to extend Italian state presence from the coastal region into the interior.

In the first few years of the Italian occupation, the newly created Italian Ministry of Colonies and the Occupying Forces combined diplomatic and military tactics as they tried to cultivate alliances among regional elites to alternatively encourage and force the submission of the tribes of the interior to state sovereignty. The strategy worked to greater effect in Tripolitania where Italian agents managed to play regional rivals against one another to establish garrisons in the Fezzan and the region of Sirte which, besides securing the interior of Tripolitania, they hoped would serve as a launching pad from which they would gain control of the Mogarba stronghold in western Cyrenaica. But the Italian territorial gains proved short-lived; their attempts to play regional rivalries against one another backfired at the end of 1914 and the beginning of 1915

when a series of military losses forced the Italian military out of the interior to a few holdings along the coast.

In Cyrenaica, the Occupying Forces made more modest territorial gains. Officials in the Ministry of Colonies and the Governor in Benghazi continued to focus on the possibility of cultivating an alliance with Ahmad al-Sharif to encourage the formal submission of Sanusi-affiliated tribes in the Cyrenaican interior, though the strategy conflicted with a growing chorus of interests in the region that objected to a coalition with Islamic notables as an abdication of Italian state authority with little reward for the security of the colonial state. A body of official reports and colonial ethnographies from Italian military officers based on their direct contact with regional opponents of the Sufi *ṭarīqa* developed a more critical view that rejected Insabato's recommendations and challenged dominant European characterizations of the Sanusiyya as a highly centralized political power. The military reports pointed to internal and regional divisions as a sign of weakness that could be used to Italy's advantage, and they advocated simultaneous negotiations with individual Sanusi shaykhs and tribal leaders throughout the region to undermine the moral and political authority of Ahmad al-Sharif and the Sanusi family with the eventual goal of replacing the Sanusiyya with a strong Italian state. Contrary to Enrico Insabato's characterization of the Sanusiyya as a civilizing force, these military reports depicted the Sanusi elite as a parasitic organization that misused the resources of the pious masses for their own material gain, and they called for Italian intervention to save Libya's Bedouin tribes from the nefarious influence of the Sanusi hierarchy.

The negative views of the Sanusiyya played into a strategy to seek out alternative regional leaders and Sanusi family members who might be more willing than Ahmad al-Sharif to

lend their moral and political weight to the Italian colonial state, and Italian agents began compiling detailed charts tracing tribal affiliations to particular *zawāyā* and the relative influence of various Sanusi family members. Nevertheless, the strategic value of an alliance with Ahmad al-Sharif only increased in the years between the Treaty of Lausanne and the outbreak of the First World War as Ottoman military officials became dependent on the Sanusi leader to lead opposition to the Empire's rivals in the region. The international competition for an alliance with the Sanusi family only raised the stakes for the Italian administration to consolidate their hold on the Libyan territories with Sanusi support as they tried to secure their tenuous claim to sovereignty in the Libyan territories.

The Italian Invasion and the Production of Knowledge

During the Italo-Turkish War, conflicting reports on the attitude of the Sanusiyya towards the Italian occupation emerged from informants in the region and in Ottoman press, but Enrico Insabato continued to claim success in negotiating with Ahmad al-Sharif. Soon after the Italian invasion, Insabato managed to secure a limited agreement from Ahmad al-Sharif via Muhammad ‘Ali ‘Alawi—the Egyptian Sanusi adherent who had served as an intermediary in Insabato’s previous communications with the Sanusi family. While Ahmad al-Sharif did not declare his support of an eventual Italian administration, he promised to instruct the shaykhs of Sanusi *zawāyā* throughout Cyrenaica to refrain from engaging in anti-Italian combat. Insabato insisted on his continued good intentions even after reports circulated that Ahmad al-Sharif supported the Ottoman war against the Italian occupation, and his informants recommended that the Italians be “indulgent” with the Sanusiyya until the situation had stabilized, assuring the Italians that years

of shortages in goods and resources had undermined Ahmad al-Sharif's relationship with Ottoman state officials. Insabato reported that after an initial period of neutrality, the Sanusi family would support the Italian occupation as a welcome change from Ottoman rule and as an opportunity to ally with the Italians against Ibadiyya forces under Suleiman al-Baruni in the Nafusa Mountains of western Tripolitania.¹⁷³ As evidence of Ahmad al-Sharif's good intentions, Insabato even brought Sanusi representatives on a trip to Rome in November 1912 to meet with central authorities.¹⁷⁴

The arrival of officers from the Italian Political Military section in the Occupying Forces during the war for occupation introduced competing sources for information concerning the Sanusiyya and regional politics as they generated a series of reports meant to fill in gaps in their understanding of the kind of political situation they faced in the Libyan territories. The assessments of Italian military officials, based on their initial experiences on the ground, projected a more nuanced understanding of regional and tribal divisions in the region and challenged Insabato's interpretation of the Sanusiyya as a civilizing force promoting Islamic orthodoxy with the potential to general broad consensus for Italian rule. The analyses of military commanders in the Occupying Forces instead portrayed the Sanusi elite as a parasitic force using the religious beliefs of the Bedouin tribes for their personal financial gain, and they focused on divisions within the Sanusiyya and between Sanusi elite and tribal leaders to find the potential weaknesses to undermine the Sufi *ṭarīqa*. Though they did not deny the utility of an initial

¹⁷³ "Ha poi assicurato Mohmmmed Ali che il Gran Senussi favorirà in qualsiasi modo le iniziative italiane e che la pace non sarà mai turbata. Inoltre i senussiti si metteranno a nostra disposizione per combattere gli Abadita a Tripoli caso mai essi resistessero all'Italia." ASMAI II 136/1/1, Insabato, Report on communications with the Sanusiyya, 15 April 1912.

¹⁷⁴ French Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Minister of Colonies, "Présence à Rome d'envoyée du Grand Senoussi," 16 November 1912.

alliance with Ahmad al-Sharif to promote stability, the military command advocated a more direct form of colonial administration by gradually weakening Sanusi authority and replacing it with a strong Italian state presence.

The development of a plan to divide and conquer the Sanusiyya reflected the increased contact with regional notables who opposed the influence of the Sanusi elite, but the identification of divisions within the Sanusi *ṭarīqa* also pointed to the nature of Sanusi authority as contingent on generating the consent of tribal leaders throughout the region that would eventually weaken the attempts of the Italian administration to use the alliance with Idris al-Sanusi to extend control into the interior. In March 1912, the commander of the Second Division of the Occupying Forces, Captain Bianco, wrote a report on Sufi *ṭuruq* in Cyrenaica based primarily on information from members of the Madaniyya, a Sufi *ṭarīqa* that developed in Tripolitania, Fezzan, Egypt, and Tunisia during the nineteenth century as followers of Muhammad bin Hasan bin Hamza Zafir al-Madani. Captain Bianco's report called into question dominant characterizations of the Sanusiyya among European experts as a unified source of centralized authority in the region with the potential to generate political consensus; according to the Bianco's Madani informants, this representation of Sanusi authority originated from Sanusi adherents who wanted to convince colonial authorities to value the Sanusiyya and bolster their power in the region. Bianco's report also criticized European scholarship on the Sanusiyya for depicting the head of the Sufi *ṭarīqa*, Ahmad al-Sharif, as having absolute authority over the *zawāyā* and through their religious adherents, over the entire region. "Around this individual has been created a proper legend that depicts him almost like a star around which moves, in a fixed, immutable orbit, this entire world. This simplistic and almost mechanical idea of the society in

which we live does not correspond to the truth of the matter.”¹⁷⁵ Captain Bianco agreed with the assessments of Enrico Insabato and others that the Sanusiyya had enormous moral authority as religious leaders in Cyrenaica, but he pointed to divisions within the Sanusiyya and within broader structures of Cyrenaican society that could effectively nullify any agreement the Italians might make with the Sanusi leader and eventually serve Italy’s advantage to circumvent and eliminate the Sanusiyya as a potential threat.

Captain Bianco identified three sources of divisions that could undermine the authority of Ahmad al-Sharif both within the Sanusi hierarchy and in the relationship between the Sanusiyya and tribal leaders of the region. First, within the Sanusiyya, Bianco claimed that Ahmad al-Sharif, in his position as the “Grand Senusso,” did not possess the level of power over the *ikhwān* and the network of Sanusi *zawāyā* that European observers attributed to him. As evidence of Ahmad al-Sharif’s incomplete hold on authority within the Sanusiyya, Bianco cited the inconsistency of reactions among the Sanusi *ikhwān* to the Italian invasion. After conversations with Abd al-Aziz, the shaykh in charge of the *zāwiyya* of Benghazi and one of the few Sanusi elites with whom the Italian administration had developed a relationship during the Italo-Turkish war, Bianco confirmed that Ahmad al-Sharif had assumed a position of neutrality towards the Italian occupation and had told the shaykhs of individual *zawāyā* to neither fight against the Italians nor accept them. But Ahmad al-Sharif’s neutrality generated a variety of responses from individual Sanusi shaykhs. Bianco argued that, “while an order of hostility against [the Italian

¹⁷⁵ “Intorno a questo personaggio si é creata una vera leggenda che lo raffigura quasi come un astro attorno al quale si muove, in un’orbita fissa, immutabile, tutto questo mondo. Questa idea semplicista e quasi meccanica della società in cui viviamo non risponde alla verità dei fatti.” AUSSME L8/233/10, Captain Bianco, “Relazione sulle confraternite in Cirenaica e specie su quella Senussita,” 15 March 1912, p. 24. The same document can also be found in ASMAI II 147/1/2. Copies were sent to the Ministry of War, the Commander in Chief of the Military, the Prime Minister, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The Commander of the Occupying Forces, General Caneva, attached a note of support.

occupation] would certainly have provoked a concordant action, the order instead to “remain in place” did not induce all the heads of the *zawāyā* to a position of neutrality, but rather prompted several leaders to rule differently, some in a sense weakly favorable, other in a sense of open hostility.”¹⁷⁶

The variety of reactions, Bianco claimed, reflected the relative independence of individual *zawāyā* to respond to local issues rather than answering to a centralized authority and suggested dissatisfaction with Ahmad al-Sharif among the Sanusi elite. Some Sanusi notables in Benghazi compared him negatively to his uncle, Muhammad al-Mahdi, and accused him of acting more in self interest than for the good of the Sanusi community as a whole. Captain Bianco also pointed out that some of the Sanusi shaykhs had accumulated wealth and authority around their individual *zawāyā* to the extent that Ahmad al-Sharif depended more on their support for his own position of authority rather than the other way around, as in, for example, the shaykh in the *zāwiyya* of Tilimun, in the region of Benghazi. The reliance of Ahmad al-Sharif on individual Sanusi shaykhs and the possibility of widespread dissatisfaction with his activities suggested an avenue for acquiring Sanusi support for the Italian occupation without depending solely on Ahmad al-Sharif.

Bianco identified tension in the relationships between the Sanusi elite and tribal leaders in the Cyrenaican interior as a second potential point of division that could weaken Sanusi power. Bianco characterized the Sanusiyya as a “parasitic organization” in the region that had consistently wronged tribal leaders resulting in an undercurrent of opposition to Sanusi authority.

¹⁷⁶ “...mentre l’ordine di esserci ostili avrebbe certamente provocato un’azione concorde, unanime dei capi della zauie, l’ordine invece di “restare al proprio posto” non ha indotto tutti i capi delle zauia alla neutralità, ma ha lasciato adito a parecchi capi di zauie di regolarsi diversamente, alcuni in senso debolmente favorevole a noi, altri in senso apertamente ostile,” Ibid., 5.

In Bianco's analysis, this tension stemmed from the interdependence of the Sanusiyya and the Ottoman state who used the religious organization to control local tribal politics. While Insabato and other pro-Sanusi officials in Rome hoped to emulate the Ottoman authorities in using Sanusi intermediaries, Bianco advocated a destruction of the Sufi *ṭarīqa* so that the Italian state could gain the alliance of tribal leaders anxious to get out from under the weighty demands of the Sanusi elite. "The true friends of the *zawāyā* were the Turkish government and the bullies who leaned on it to govern and misgovern, the poor who found aid there, the troublemakers and thieves who took advantage of the right of asylum and the camel drivers who went undisturbed under their watch along their long travels."¹⁷⁷ Bianco identified opposition to the Sanusiyya among "healthy" and relatively sedentary populations of the Bedouin tribes, those communities whose primary interest lay in cultivating the land and grazing their livestock. Bianco advocated a process of generating consensus for Italian colonial rule by gradually replacing the Sanusiyya as the local power structure through a process of replacing the benefits provided by the *zawāyā* like protection for trade and assistance for the poor with a civil structure and cultivating the strength of those tribes he recognized as stable.

Bianco's analysis of the divisions within the Sanusiyya and within the broader social context of Cyrenaica constituted both a warning of the inadequacy of negotiating only with Ahmad al-Sharif and a recommendation for taking advantage of his weaknesses to undermine Sanusi authority and replace it with a strong Italian state. Captain Bianco did not deny the potential utility of some form of an agreement with the Sanusi elite. He argued that the

¹⁷⁷ "I veri amici delle zauie erano il governo turco e i prepotenti che si appoggiavano ad esse per governare e sgovernare, i poveri che vi trovano un soccorso, i facinorosi ed i briganti che si avvantaggiano del diritto di asilo ed i cammellieri che compiono indisturbati sotto la loro salvaguardia i loro lunghi viaggi." Ibid., 18.

widespread recognition of the moral authority of Ahmad al-Sharif made the approval of the Sanusi leader valuable for securing the consensus of the individual shaykhs and the leaders of Cyrenaican tribes. However, the diffuse nature of authority among the various *zawāyā*, he claimed, meant that Sanusi adherents would not automatically follow any agreement they might establish with Ahmad al-Sharif, and he recommended that state officials negotiate simultaneously with individual Sanusi shaykhs and tribal leaders as a means of undercutting Sanusi authority in the region and protecting against what he considered the inevitability of Ahmad al-Sharif's rejection of the Italian state presence. Bianco argued that they could not predict which way Ahmad al-Sharif would decide to go in his response to Italian attempts at friendship, but he warned that even if he agreed to enter into negotiations with the Italians, the Sanusi leader would eventually recognize that a full Italian occupation could only spell doom for the regional power of his *ṭarīqa*.

He must have recognized that the Italian conquest of this land did not represent a pure and simple substitution of Turkish troops with Italian troops, rather it represents a profound political and social mutation in the regions we occupy.... In the place of a weak, inert, and incapable government, in need of the support of all of the most desperate elements of this society and especially of the Sanusiyya, so firmly organized and powerful, and therefore constrained to total favoritism, to grant all of the concessions that allowed him to immobilize and weaken the Bedouin masses, now will be replaced with a strong government, active and just, that can depend primarily on its own abilities and the spontaneous result of the good and grand works that it will know to complete to awaken all the dormant or sleeping energies.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸ “Egli non può non aver sentito che la conquista di queste terra all’Italia non rappresenta una pura e semplice sostituzione delle truppe turche con truppe italiane, ma rappresenta un profondo mutamento politico e sociale delle regioni da noi occupate.... Ad un governo debole, inerte ed incapace, bisognoso dell’appoggio di tutti gli elementi più disparati di questa società e specialmente dei Senussi, così saldamente organizzati e potenti, e costretto perciò a tutte le parzialità, a tutte le concessioni verso coloro che lo aiutavano ad immobilizzare e a rendere docili le masse beduine, si sostituisce ora un governo forte, attivo e giusto, che può contare essenzialmente su se stesso e sul risultato spontaneo delle opere buone e grandi che saprà compiere per risvegliare tutte le energie assopite o spente.” Ibid., 6.

Bianco called for the establishment of a strong state that would completely transform the Libyan territories into an Italian space and, after an initial period of economic advantages for the Sanusi *zawāyā* with the influx of Italian trade, would eventually weaken and perhaps “annihilate all of the parasitic institutions including that of the Sanusiyya.” In Bianco’s plan, the Italian army would replace the functions of the Sanusiyya as a source of aid for the poor and protection for regional trade routes.

An introductory letter accompanying the report from the general in charge of the Second Division noted the widespread approval of Bianco’s conclusions from officials within the Occupying Forces, and Bianco’s assessment echoed through a series of reports from the Political Office of the Occupying Forces as personnel on the ground began to collect data concerning tribal divisions, membership in specific *zawāyā*, and information on particular Sanusi shaykhs to identify potential sources of Sanusi division to be used for the benefit of Italian state expansion. Bianco’s report and its focus on the power of the individual Sanusi shaykhs informed a handbook that the Political Office of the Occupying Forces distributed to colonial officials to prepare them for regular contact with Muslim leaders in the Libyan colonies. The handbook emphasized the negative characterization of Sufi *ṭuruq* from the Bianco report, depicted them as preying on the submission of its adherents for their own material gain, and projected an image of the Italian nation as a civilizing force that would save the Bedouin tribes from the perils of religious fanaticism by promoting secular policies. The inherent divisions of the Sanusiyya, the handbook claimed, would prevent the Sufi elite from fulfilling the menacing threat of a pan-Islamic opposition to European colonial rule and provide the leverage the Italians needed to gain control of the region’s political situation, but not without some effort on the part of the Italian

administration to prevent anti-Italian collaboration. “We must put our hearts at rest against the fear of this pan-Islamism of which the *turuq* would be at once the foundation and the keystone. Without doubt, however, we must not lull ourselves into a false state of tranquility; cases may occur at any moment that these orders forget their dissension to take up a common cause against a common enemy. But it is the task of the secular colonial policy to know how to make this impossible, using with tact the current schisms and making an effort, as needed, to maintain and accentuate them.”¹⁷⁹

Signs of Division and Weakness within the Sanusiyya

The characterization of the Sanusiyya as weakened by internal divisions gained further credibility in September 1912, shortly before the Ottoman Empire relinquished sovereignty, when the Italian Occupying Forces published translations of documents concerning the Sanusiyya from the offices of the former Ottoman representatives in Tripoli and Benghazi. The Ottoman documents provided evidence of dissent among Ottoman officials concerning the utility of Ahmad al-Sharif as a regional ally in the year leading up to the Italian invasion of the Libyan coast. The Ottoman documents in the Italian archives present a rare glimpse into the relationship between Ottoman officials in Tripoli and Benghazi and the Sanusi elite of the Cyrenaican interior after the Young Turk revolution of 1908 and suggest a promising field of inquiry for further research in the Ottoman archives. Debates over the reliance on the Sanusiyya as regional

¹⁷⁹ “Dobbiamo mettere il cuore in pace contro il timore di questo panislamismo del quale le Tariche sarebbero ad un tempo la base e la chiave di volta. Senza dubbio dobbiamo tuttavia non addormentarci in una falsa tranquillità; dei casi possono verificarsi qualora momentaneamente questi ordini dimentichino le loro dissensioni per fare causa comune contro un nemico comune. Ma è compito della politica coloniale laica di saper rendere impossibile questo avverarsi, utilizzando con tatto gli scismi attuali e facendo sforzi, al bisogno, per mantenerli ed accentuarli.” AUSSME L8/232/5, Ufficio Politico Militare, “Le società religiose in Tripolitania,” March 1912, 62.

intermediaries in the Cyrenaican interior reveal the lack of a unified or systematic approach to dealing with regional Muslim elites during the Second Constitutional Era. The Ottoman debates echoed discussions in the Italian, French, and British archives concerning the Sanusiyya and local power structures, suggesting that, at least after 1908, the Sultan's claims to the title of Caliph yielded little additional insight to Ottoman officials concerning the inner workings of the Sufi *ṭuruq* of North Africa or their connections to the political and military tribal leaders.

In a theme that was to become a constant source of anxiety for imperial authorities concerning their relationships with the Sanusi family, the Ottoman *Vali* of Tripoli argued that the very recognition of Ahmad al-Sharif as a religious figure and the reliance on his political authority to govern the remote interior of Cyrenaica had the perverse effect of increasing his power in such a way that could undermine state control. “To grant them greater advantages, and in this precise moment make them imagine such a possibility, it would be as if we made their importance grow and multiplied their follows; something that is not permissible in any way.”¹⁸⁰

The *mutassarif* of Benghazi favored cultivating the authority of Ahmad al-Sharif as a means of gaining consensus for the establishment of an administrative center and military garrison in the oases of Kufra to defend against French incursions in the region. The Ottoman minister of the interior followed his recommendations and began paying Ahmad al-Sharif a monthly salary of 4,000 piastres¹⁸¹ and exempting the Sanusi *zawāyā* from taxes as part of an

¹⁸⁰ “L’ accordar loro vantaggi superiori, ed anch nell’ attuale momento far loro concepire una tale speranza, sarebbe come accrescere la loro importanza e moltiplicare i loro seguaci; il che non è ammissibile in alcun modo.” Ibid.

¹⁸¹ The piastre generally referred to kuruş in European texts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In 1910, 100 silver kuruş=1 gold Ottoman lire = 1.1 British pound sterling, so 4,000 piastres would have been equal to about 36 British pounds sterling. See Şevket Pamuk, “Money in the Ottoman Empire, 1326-1914,” in *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1914*, eds. Halil İnalcik and Donald Quataert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 972.

effort to win over opposition to an Ottoman plan to build a garrison in the oases of Kufra as part of a defense against French and Italian military expansion in the Northern Sahara. Local Ottoman officials in Homs and the Jebel al-Akdhar disagreed with increased reliance on the Sanusiyya, claiming that at least certain Sanusi elite were taking advantage of the resources the Ottoman state sent to the Sanusi *zawāyā* and using them to bolster their individual authority against the interests of the central state. The *Vali* of Tripoli cited the arguments of these Cyrenaican officials to support his critique of the Sanusiyya in a letter to the Ottoman Minister of the Interior: “The Sanusi living in this Vilayet not only do not lead a life in conformity with political and social norms, but they have never lent an important service to the Governor. Conversely, they have always focused on their own interests. In this era of constitutional regime, I would consider it an illegal act to give them a more exceptional position.”¹⁸² The issue posed a common predicament for state officials in central governments funding and supporting the jurisdiction of local intermediaries in overseas territories while simultaneously trying to prevent them from gaining leverage to act against state authority.

The contradictory assessments of the Sanusiyya in the Ottoman documents also reflected disagreements among the political elite of the CUP concerning the role of religious authority in the late Ottoman provinces as either a fundamental component of anti-Western ideology or a

¹⁸² “I Senussi abitanti questo Vilayet, non solamente non menano una vita conforme alle norme politiche e sociali, ma non hanno mai prestato un importante servizio al Governo. Viceversa, essi non hanno avuto di mira che i loro propri interessi. In quest’epoca di regime costituzionale, l’accordar loro una posizione eccezionale maggiore è da me considerato come un atto illegale.” Letter from the Vali of Tripoli to the Ottoman Minister of the Interior 8/4/1910: translated into Italian in AUSSME L8/154/7, “Relazioni fra Turchi e Senussi” by the Ufficio Poltico Militare of the Occupying Forces of Tripolitania, September 1912.

potential challenge to the modernizing goals of the Young Turk Revolution.¹⁸³ The Italian invasion of the Libyan territories led to a heightened challenge to CUP authority in Istanbul, the formation of an alternative party, and general elections in 1912. The CUP turned to the theme of Islamic unity familiar from the reign of Abdulhamid to maintain the party's hold on power, and there seemed to be little doubt among the political elite of the CUP of the desirability of an alliance with Ahmad al-Sharif in what became an increasingly important region on the eve of the First World War as a position bordering British, French, and Italian territories.¹⁸⁴

In the aftermath of the Ottoman renunciation of sovereignty in the Libyan territories, French officials in Equatorial Africa echoed the skepticism of Italian and Ottoman reports concerning the strength of Sanusi authority in North Africa. French diplomatic agents in Cairo and military officers in French Equatorial Africa had been actively seeking the support of Ahmad al-Sharif since early in 1911 when French forces began a campaign to push into the region of Borkou and Ennedi in northern Chad and sultanate of Dudmurrah in Wadai. Sanusi *zawāyā* in the Borkou and Wadai regions provided crucial transit points in regional trade routes, and the Sanusi *ikhwān* blocked the movement of essential goods into the region in protest against the French occupation and seizure of Sanusi properties in the region. The French diplomatic services in Cairo sent a mission to Ahmad al-Sharif in July 1911 to try to reopen trade to the region and secure his support in convincing Dudmurrah to submit to French rule. In his response to their attempt at communications, Ahmad al-Sharif accused French forces of having targeted Sanusi *zawāyā* in the region of Kanem, stealing their valuable reserves of books and arms, and

¹⁸³ For an account of the divergent viewpoints of religious and political authority within the Young Turk movement, see, M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 13-15.

¹⁸⁴ Amit Bein, "‘Ulama’ and Political Activism in the Late Ottoman Empire," 79.

chasing the Sanusi *ikhwān* into Ain Galakka where the French soon followed them. Despite these acts of brutality, Ahmad al-Sharif agreed to resume normal trade in the region if they, in turn, recognized his regional authority by refraining from dealing directly with individual local Sanusi shaykhs without first contacting him and if they established a demarcation between Sanusi and French territories. He also requested the return of the Sanusi books of around 700 volumes and arms of around 4,000 guns lost to the *zāwiyya* during the French offensive.¹⁸⁵

Ahmad al-Sharif's requests suggested that he might be losing whatever control he once had over the activities of individual Sanusi shaykhs as they increasingly came into contact with French state expansion. The French Ministry of Colonies refused the demands of Ahmad al-Sharif and French officials in the region began to question the level of authority of Ahmad al-Sharif within the Sanusi *ṭarīqa* and among the regions' tribes. For the next few years, French officials, similar to their Italian colleagues to the north, oscillated between representations of the Sanusiyya as a civilizing force that benefitted the French colonial presence, a dangerous threat, or an irrelevant religious figure. When international competition for an alliance with Ahmad al-Sharif intensified in the months leading up to the onset of hostilities associated with the First World War, the French commander of the territory of Chad, Colonel Largeau, agreed to resume negotiations with the Sanusi leader with a caveat that engaging with Ahmad al-Sharif ran the risk of exaggerating his authority to make him believe, "that the French government is disposed to

¹⁸⁵ FR CAOM AEF GGAEF 5D/20, Ahmad al-Sharif to the French mission of M. Bonnel de Mezieres, 2 November 1911.

treat him as one power to another; it could, in effect, exaggerate the importance of what is, in our view, his very relative authority.”¹⁸⁶

Ottoman-Sanusi Relations During the Italian Invasion

If divisions within the Sanusi elite had developed to threaten the regional position of the Sufi *ṭarīqa*, the Sanusi family increased its political and military clout during the course of the Italo-Turkish War as Istanbul became increasingly reliant on the Sanusiyya to organize defensive forces, and after the Ottoman Empire renounced sovereignty over the Libyan territories, international competition for an alliance with the Sanusi family intensified as a result. Italian naval superiority and pre-existing claims on Ottoman resources prevented the Sultan from sending a large army against the Italian invasion, but the Ottoman Ministry of War did assign a group of military officers from the *Teskilet-i Mahsusa*, to assist military officials already in the Libyan territories in organizing defensive strategies among local populations. The defense of the Libyan territories proved a popular cause among a cohort of elite officers in the CUP, many of whom later became important figures in Turkish nationalism including Enver Pasha (director of the *Teskilet-i Mahsusa* and later Ottoman Minister of War) and Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk). Having espoused models of modernization to seek entry to a Euro-centric world order, the Young Turk movement embraced a renewed sense of anti-European Islamic unity in response to the lack

¹⁸⁶ “que le Gouvernement français est disposé à traiter avec lui de puissance à puissance; il pourrait, en effet s’exagère l’importance que revêt, à nos yeux, son autorité très relative.” FR CAOM AEF GGAEF 5D/20, French Minister of Colonies to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, “Voyage du cheikh Ben Tekkouk chez les Senoussistes,” 18 August 1913.

of international censure against Italy for the invasion of the Libyan coast.¹⁸⁷ In Cyrenaica, the Ottoman-directed war contributed to the militarization of the Sanusi *zawāyā* as the training grounds and arms depots for a coalition of regional forces that surprised the Italian Occupying Forces with the strength of its opposition to the invasion. In battles like the one at Sharr al-Shat on October 23, 1911, the Italian forces faced large losses and proof that Ottoman alliances with regional leaders like Ahmad al-Sharif or Suleiman al-Baruni in the Gebel Nafusa could effectively prevent the extension of Italian military presence beyond a few cities along the coast.¹⁸⁸

Italian aggression in the Dodacanese Islands and the revolt of Muhammad al-Idrisi against the Ottoman government in Yemen—funded in part by Italy as a distraction—weakened the resolve of central authorities in Istanbul to continue providing military supplies and training in the Libyan territories and contributed to the decision to renounce Ottoman sovereignty over the Libyan territories in the Treaty of Lausanne in October 1912. Italian imperialists hailed the Treaty as an opportunity for Italy to finally become one of Europe’s Great Powers through the expansion of direct territorial control, but the renunciation of sovereignty did not mean the end of Ottoman influence. The strength of the Ottoman-Arab forces in fighting against the occupation and their total lack of preparation for governing in a Muslim territory convinced the Italians to

¹⁸⁷ Aydin, *Politics of Anti-Westernism*, 97; Childs, *Italo-Turkish Diplomacy*, 76. The list of Ottoman officers, some belonging to the Teskilat-i Mahsusa, who joined Enver Pasha and Mustafa Kemal in fighting against the Italian invasion of Libya. Shakib Arslan, Nuri and Halil, Ali Fethi Okyar, Kuscubasi Esref and his brother Haci Selim Sami, Suleyman Askeri and Yakup Cemil, Ali Cetinkaya, Sadik Bey, Fuat Bulca, Nuri Conker, Rauf Orbay, and Mim Kemal Oke. They all went on to take important posts in the CUP government, but for ‘Aziz ‘Ali al-Misri, already in the Libyan territories as an Ottoman officer before the Italian invasion, involvement in the war against Italy shaped his development as a dominant force in Arab nationalism, pitting him against Enver Pasha and the CUP. See: Syed Tanvir Wasti, “Amir Shakib Arslan and the CUP Triumvirate,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 6 (2008), 934.

¹⁸⁸ Childs, *Italo-Turkish Diplomacy*, 86.

accept a clause in the Treaty of Lausanne required the Italian state to recognize the continued religious authority of the Ottoman Sultan as Caliph, a position which allowed him to retain a representative in the region with the power to name qadi or judges in civil courts and direct the management of *waqf* properties.¹⁸⁹ The presence of a representative of the Ottoman Caliphate proved a constant source of anxiety for Italian colonial officials until the hostilities of the First World War provided an opportunity for them to annul the agreement and dispense of the position.

The Treaty of Lausanne led to an increase in the regional and international influence of Ahmad al-Sharif as the Ottoman Minister of War continued to channel funding from Egyptian banks, local taxes, and donations from throughout the Muslim world for anti-Italian activities under his command.¹⁹⁰ With the formal end to the Italo-Turkish war, most *Teskilet-i Mahsusa* officers, including Enver Pasha, left the region to deal with the situation in the Balkans, but a handful remained in the region under the leadership of ‘Aziz ‘Ali al-Misri, the former commander of Ottoman forces in Cyrenaica. The remaining Ottoman officers trained Bedouin troops in the Sanusi *zawāyā* with the understanding that the ultimate goal in ejecting the Italian occupation and recovering Ottoman control would be the establishment of a local semi-independent government under Ahmad al-Sharif and with the military support of the Ottoman officers under his command.¹⁹¹ The collaboration between Ahmad al-Sharif and ‘Aziz ‘Ali al-Misri derailed, however, after rumors spread in the spring of 1913 that the military commander

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 160.

¹⁹⁰ BNA PRO 30/56/43, Intelligence report from Constantinople, 22 November 1912; El-Sh’ab, 15 January 1913; Erik J. Zürcher, *Storia della Turchia* (Rome: Donzelli Editore, 2007), 130; Abdulmola S. al-Horeir, “Social and Economic Transformations in the Libyan Hinterland During the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century: The Role of Sayyid Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi.” UCLA, 1981, 169.

¹⁹¹ Anwar Bey had suggested calling the proposed administration “The Union of African states” to try to limit Sanusi influence, but Ahmad al-Sharif insisted that the theoretical state would be al-Hakuma al-Sanusiyya, or the Sanusi Government. el-Horeir, “Social and Economic Transformations,” 174.

had accepted funds from Italian officials in exchange for providing geographical information that helped them make territorial advances into the Cyrenaican interior, and ‘Aziz al-Misri left the Libyan territories for Alexandria in July 1913.¹⁹² According to the historian of the Sanusi monarchy, Muhammad Fu’ad Shukri, he took large stockpiles of Ottoman weapons and funding with him, paralyzing the Bedouin forces in the Sanusi *zawāyā*.¹⁹³

The departure of ‘Aziz ‘Ali al-Misri signaled a possible break in Ottoman-Sanusi relations and offer a new opportunity for Italian attempts to negotiate with Ahmad al-Sharif.¹⁹⁴ In the summer and fall of 1913, imperial officials throughout the region competed for Ahmad al-Sharif’s favor as French, Italian, and Ottoman officials hoped to gain a strategic advantage in Cyrenaica. Despite their attempts, a small handful of Ottoman officials remained in the region, and along with German officers, they continued to provide shipments of arms to Sanusi *zawāyā* through the Western Desert of Egypt and German submarines along the Libyan coast, nurturing the militarization of the Sufi *ṭarīqa* that they tried to use to their advantage in the North African battles of the First World War.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² FR CAOM AEF GGAEF 5D/20, DeFrance, French Minister in Cairo, to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, “Conversation avec un notable Senoussiste,” 22 April 1914.

¹⁹³ ‘Aziz al-Misri was later arrested in Istanbul, charged with treason, and sentenced to execution until Lord Kitchener persuaded the Ottoman government to release him claiming that Arab nationalist sentiment in Egypt had been roused by his trial. Elie Kedouri, *England and the Middle East: The Destruction of the Ottoman Empire, 1914-1921* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987), 47-48; Shukri, *Al-Sanusiya; Din wa dawla*, 155.

¹⁹⁴ FR CAOM AEF GGAEF 5D/20, Fouchet, French Consulate in Cairo to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, 11 November 1913.

¹⁹⁵ ASMAI II 150/1/5, Governor of Cyrenaica, Ufficio Politico-Militare, “Interrogatorio di Raschid Ben el Hag Ali,” 4 March 1914; FR CAOM AEF GGAEF 5D/20, DeFrance, French Minister in Cairo, to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, “Conversation avec un notable Senoussiste,” 22 April 1914.

The Italian Ministry of Colonies and the Politica dei Capi

After the Ottoman Empire renounced its sovereignty over the Libyan territories in October 1912, Rome marked its new status as one of Europe's colonial powers with the creation of the Ministry of Colonies in November 1912. In January of 1913, the first Minister of Colonies, Pietro Bertolini, started the new year by declaring his commitment to securing pacification of the Libyan territories through political policies instead of military aggression in a letter to General Briccola, the commander of Italian forces in Cyrenaica. Citing his opposition to a more militant approach proposed by the Minister of War, Briccola called for winning local consensus to Italian rule through peaceful means to avoid alienating potential Italian allies in the future administration. Bertolini meant his tactics to encourage economic development, a goal he considered central to Italian expansion. Though he left open the possibility of using force in situations that seemed to require it, Bertolini advocated a diplomatic cooperative approach whenever possible.¹⁹⁶

Bertolini's attempts to pacify the region through political alliances fit with a wider directive established in Royal Decrees issued in January 1913 and January 1914 that prescribed a "politics of chiefs" or *politica dei capi* built on collaboration with local notables to rule the broader population in exchange for a payment of regular stipends from colonial state coffers.¹⁹⁷ The question of how to identify the appropriate local notables to incorporate in the Italian administration led the separate administrations of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania to generate detailed

¹⁹⁶ ASMAI II 136/1/5 Minister of Colonies Bertolini to General Briccola, 2 January 1913: "Questo governo desidera di arrivare ad una pacifica occupazione del paese, sulla base della pacificazione degli animi che sola può permettere lo svolgimento del programma politico-economico coloniale."

¹⁹⁷ Baldinetti, "Italian Colonial Rule," 94.

charts tracing tribal affiliations to try to determine which tribal leaders they could pay in exchange for securing the submission of local populations. The process of identifying tribal chiefs seemed haphazard at best, and they frequently identified and paid tribal leaders based on who appeared before state officials to submit to colonial authority.¹⁹⁸ In the application of the *politica dei capi*, Italian officials attempted to accentuate traditional divisions and rivalries to prevent a concentration of power in the hands of a few individuals or families, and similar principles informed the development of new methods to approach relations with the Sanusiyya as the Italian administration applied a variety of strategies to gain an alliance with the Sanusi elite.

In the first two years after Italy gained official sovereignty over the Libyan territories, the policies of *politica dei capi* seemed to be working in Italy's favor in Tripolitania as an increasing number of notables signaled their support for the Italian occupation, but the plan to use regional rivalries to their advantage soon backfired in an attempt to establish Italian garrisons in the interior. Initially, the Italian administration relied on alliances with notables in the coastal region who had attained high positions in the Ottoman administration, including Omar Pasha Muntasir and his extended family of powerful merchants in Misurata. Having gained prominence as local functionaries during the reign of Abdulhamid III, their marginalization after the Young Turk Revolution convinced members of the Muntasir family to support the Italian occupation, and their relationship with the Italian state secured them immediate benefits against their political rivals. Omar Pasha Muntasir occupied Sirte in December 1912, taking it from the control of Enver Pasha's brother Nuri bey and expanding the Muntasir family domain in the name of the

¹⁹⁸ Payment for submission of local notables identified as chiefs of aïlet would receive in 1913 around 100 to 200 lire. ASMAI II 148/1/2, Governor of Cyrenaica, "Capi tribù. Stipendi", 6 June 1913.

Italian colonial administration.¹⁹⁹ Soon after the Muntasir family claimed control of Sirte, Italian forces defeated Suleiman al-Baruni, a staunch supporter of Ottoman control and a leading figure of the Ibadiyya of the Nafusa Mountains of western Tripolitania, in the spring of 1913.

With the coastal area largely secured, the Italian administration turned to consider the possibility of extending the occupation into the Fezzan with the ultimate goal of using the position as a base for operations into the territories of the Mogarba tribes in western Cyrenaica.²⁰⁰ The occupation of Fezzan thus promised to secure the Italian authority in the Tripolitanian interior and provide entry into the oases of the Cyrenaican interior even if attempts to negotiate with the Sanusi family failed. With the shift in objective, the Italian administration abandoned its earlier alliance with the Muntasir family to cultivate a relationship with the Saif al-Nasir clan, a rival family of notables from the Awlad Suleiman tribes in the interior region of Sirte and the Fezzan. The Saif al-Nasir family famously led an opposition to Qaramanli taxation policies in the region in the 1820s, and they later played an important role in spreading the Sanusi *ṭarīqa* into the Lake Chad region.²⁰¹ In the summer of 1913, Colonel Antonio Miani arrived with Italian troops on the coast of Misurata in the city of Sirte, and for six months, he stationed his troops in Sawkna, a stronghold of the Saif al-Nasir family as a staging ground for military operations in the Fezzan.

¹⁹⁹ Paolo Soave, *Fezzan: Il Desert Contesto (1842-1921)* (Milan: Giuffrè Editore, 2001), 266.

²⁰⁰ Angelo Del Boca, *La disfatta di Gasr bu Hādi. 1915: il colonnello Miani e il più grande disastro dell'Italia coloniale* (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori, 2004), 43. On using Sirte to pacify Cyrenaica, ASMAI II 126/1/10, General Garioni to Minister of Colonies, 16 August 1913.

²⁰¹ Dennis D. Cordell, "The Awlad Sulayman of Libya and Chad: Power and Adaptation in the Sahara and the Sahel," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 19, no. 2 (1985), 328; Ahmida, *Making of Modern Libya*, 46.

During his campaign, Miani also relied on the assistance of Abd al-Nabi Belkhir, a leading figure of the Warfalla tribe who the Italian state paid to act as a political guide and to facilitate in obtaining supplies and local troops. Though both the Saif al-Nasir family and Abd al-Nabi Belkhir helped the Italian mission in the initial occupation of the Fezzan, they later turned to use their resources and political influence against Italian state presence, Abd al Nabi Belkhir in 1915 and the Saif al-Nasir family sometime in the 1920s.²⁰² But in December 1913 and January 1914, Miani and his troops occupied a succession of oases in Fezzan with their assistance, and he declared the region pacified.²⁰³ The occupation resulted in formal acts of submission or *sottomissione* to Italian state authorities from a number of tribal leaders in the Libyan interior.

Pacification and the Act of Submission

Colonel Miani's entourage photographed their expedition in the Fezzan, and the images of the submission of tribal leaders in the Fezzan, reproduced on a limited bases in Angelo Del Boca's study of Miani's ultimately failed occupation of the region, offer a rare glimpse into what the formal act of submission entailed during the Italian occupation of the Libyan territories. Formal submission to Italian authority entailed a written statement recognizing Italian state sovereignty and accepting Italian protection and a physical ceremony presented before Italian and native officials. During the occupation of the Libyan territories, Italian military and civil officials chased after the formal submission of tribal notables and some Muslim elites like the

²⁰² Ahmida, *The Making of Modern Libya*, 51.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 53-60.

Sanusi family as evidence of advances in state control and Italian influence, but there is no indication of a standardized code for formal submission from the central authorities in Rome. It seems more likely that the practice of submission developed in a gradual process among officials with experience in colonial settings and that the associated ceremony changed accordingly. Precedents for the formal letters submission appear in the Italian colonial archives from Eritrea as early as 1890.²⁰⁴ French authorities in present-day Chad also recorded acts of *soumission* to French authority from tribal leaders near Ain Galakka.²⁰⁵

In addition to a written statement of loyalty to the Italian state, colonial officers also insisted that tribal leaders present themselves in a public act of submission. The photographs from Miani's campaign demonstrate a formal ceremony in which groups of tribal leaders encircled a table presided over by Miani and other colonial officials along with an Arab notable, perhaps a qadi lending his authority to the ceremony. The warriors passed before a photograph of King Victor Emmanuel as they stamped a document of formal submission.²⁰⁶ Submission to Italian authority usually accompanied a relinquishment of weapons, and it often gave military officials an opportunity to interrogate those who submitted to get information about the structure and location of opposition forces. Among the rash of submissions in early 1914, some made reference to positions they held previously in the Ottoman military or civil administration and requested or were offered similar positions within the Italian system. These exchanges suggest

²⁰⁴ For example, ASMAI Archivio Eritrea, Pacco 10, "Atto di sottomissione del Sceik Muhammad Musa," 25 August 1890.

²⁰⁵ FR CAOM AEF GGAEF 5D/20, Governor of Brazzaville to General Command, 21 March 1914.

²⁰⁶ See the photograph inset in Del Boca, *La disfatta*.

that the act of submitting to the colonial state reflected in part a demand for employment within the colonial state after the withdraw of formal Ottoman support.²⁰⁷

Whether or not the form for the ceremony of *sottomissione* was established by the central government or created on the spot by military commanders in the colonies remains unclear, but the physical act of presentation to state officials held just as much importance as the written declaration of support for colonial authority. The act of submission loomed large in popular Italian imagination as a sign of national strength. Portrayals of local populations flocking to kneel down before Italian colonial authorities decorated magazine covers and school notebooks in Italy, though more examples remain from the later occupation of Ethiopia. In the Libyan territories, however, the inability to fulfill the corresponding responsibility to protect the tribes that submitted to Italian authority presented a constant source of anxiety for colonial officials as a sign of weakness and a point of critique against the policies of the colonial state. The reliance on the political or moral authority of regional notables also detracted from the symbolic value of the act of submission to Italian colonial authority; in generating consensus for colonial rule or assisting in the expansion of official Italian territorial control, local intermediaries oversaw the act of submission in the place of Italian state officials.²⁰⁸

While Miani and his troops used their alliances with the Saif al-Nasir family and Abd al-Nabi Belkhir to move into the Fezzan, the governor of Cyrenaica, Giovanni Ameglio, initiated a more limited series of military campaigns to expand the Italian military presence in Cyrenaica.

²⁰⁷ See the records in ASMAI II 150/1/4.

²⁰⁸ For example, Omar Pasha Muntasir demanded the submission of the population of Sirte in the name of the Italian colonial state. The Governor of Tripolitania turned to Sef en-Nasser at the end of 1914 and offered to provide armed forces to the Sef en-Nasser family in exchange for trying to convince the Mogarba leaders to submit to Italian authority. AUSSME L8/232/15, Governor Cigliana to the Ministry of Colonies, Telegram No. 97, 16 November 1914.

Though Italian troops in Cyrenaica made relatively smaller territorial gains, Ameglio recorded an increasing number of acts of formal submissions to Italian rule from among tribes near Benghazi and Derna.²⁰⁹ In April 1913, a group of tribal leaders from Cyrenaica joined the growing list in a ceremony of submission in Benghazi, and by December 1913, the Italians calculated that 135,200 out of a total population of 351,600 in Cyrenaica had submitted to Italian rule. According to their calculations, centers of Mogarba dominance in the oases of Kufra, Jalo, Jaghub, and western Cyrenaica represented the largest population in the region that had not yet submitted to Italian rule. The refusal of these highly influential affiliates of the Sanusiyya to recognize Italian sovereignty suggested the development of Sanusi centers of opposition and demonstrated the imperative of either negotiating an alliance with the Sanusi family or cultivating alternative sources of political and moral authority to support the expansion of Italian state presence in the region.²¹⁰

International Competition for an Alliance with the Sanusi Elite

The diversification of colonial knowledge production concerning the Sanusiyya informed a variety of strategies Italian officials in the Ministry of Colonies and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs employed to try to win the support of the Sanusi elite in the initial years of the occupation, but the idea of establishing an alliance with the Sanusi family as intermediaries to negotiate the submission of the tribal leaders of the Cyrenaican interior remained an organizing

²⁰⁹ FR CAOM AEF GGAEF 5D/20, French Vice-Counsel in Benghazi to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, “Les Italiens en Cyrénaïque”, 23 March 1914.

²¹⁰ AUSSME L8/233/8, Political Military Office of the Occupying Forces of Benghazi, Report on population submissions in Cyrenaica, December 1913; ASMAI II 148/1/3, Ameglio, “Sottomissione dei capi, 5 April 1914.

principle in the Italian approach to colonial rule in the eastern territory. While Enrico Insabato continued to advocate direct negotiations with the Sanusi family, the military reports indicating divisions and weaknesses in Sanusi authority in the region and the overarching program set out in the *politica dei capi* inspired attempts to force Ahmad al-Sharif into an alliance by first cultivating relationships with individual shaykhs in control of the various Sanusi *zawāyā* throughout Cyrenaica.

It became increasingly clear to Italian officials receiving conflicting reports concerning the attitude of the Sanusi shaykhs and Ahmad al-Sharif towards the Italian occupation that their ambivalence stemmed in part from caution as they watched to see which way the political tides would go and that even if Ahmad al-Sharif could command the loyalties of the Sanusi shaykhs, the attitude of the Sufi *ṭarīqa* depended largely on the positions of various tribal leaders in Cyrenaica. In December 1912, newspapers in Constantinople reported that forty-two Sanusi had declared their intention to refuse a treaty “which authorizes the presence of the enemy in our country,” and had promised to continue to fight against the Italian presence both for the sake of the Ottoman Caliphate and in order to “purify our soil of the presence of the enemy.”²¹¹ However, British intelligence in Cairo informed the Italian administration in January 1913 that Ahmad al-Sharif had met with various tribal leaders in the region, but they had not yet decided whether or not to accept Italian sovereignty, suggesting an alternative route for gaining consensus by appealing directly to tribal leaders. In an effort to take advantage of these possibilities, the Italian Minister of Colonies instituted a program of payments to Sanusi shaykhs and tribal leaders in exchange for their loyalty to the Italian state.²¹²

²¹¹ ASMAI II 136/1/5, Garroni to San Giuliano, 11 December 1912.

²¹² ASMAI II 136/1/5, Minister of Foreign Affairs San Giuliano to Minister of Colonies, 22 January 1913.

The ultimate goal of direct negotiations with Sanusi shaykhs and tribal leaders, however, remained an alliance with the Sanusi family to establish a power sharing system; Italian officials hoped to use their relationships with other notables in the region to pressure Ahmad al-Sharif to enter into an agreement with the Italian state. After the increase in the number of submissions to Italian rule among Cyrenaican tribes in the spring of 1913, the Ministry of Colonies and the new governor in Cyrenaica, Giovanni Ameglio, saw an opportunity to convince the Sanusi family to align themselves with Italy to prevent a loss of influence among the populations under Italian jurisdiction. As the year progressed, they began to believe that if they won the submission of enough tribal leaders in the interior, Ahmad al-Sharif would follow their lead and thus create conditions to encourage further submissions.²¹³

The Italian administration also tried to use alliances with a number of high-profile political figures in the region to convince Ahmad al-Sharif to negotiate a position as a colonial intermediary. In January 1913, the Italians pursued negotiations through Omar Mansur al-Kekhiya, a Benghazi notable and a former representative in the Ottoman Parliament. Ahmad al-Sharif asked for autonomy in the Cyrenaican interior for all areas that the Italians had not successfully taken control of by June 1913, meaning the vast majority of the province besides a few towns along the coast.²¹⁴ The Italians refused at the time, though in October 1913, as his first act as the new Governor of Cyrenaica, Ameglio proposed recognizing Ahmad al-Sharif as an Emir in the Cyrenaican interior and granting him control over religious education in exchange

²¹³ ASMAI II 136/1/4 Governor Ameglio to Minister of Colonies, 13 November 1913.

²¹⁴ Anderson, *State and Social Transformation*, 191.

for his assistance in maintaining trade paths.²¹⁵ The deterioration of conditions for the Italian administration in the months leading up to the First World War precluded further consideration of the option of granting Ahmad al-Sharif's requests for regional autonomy, but they soon returned to the proposal of a Sanusi Emirate in negotiations with Ahmad al-Sharif's cousin in 1916.

In the year leading up to the outbreak of hostilities in the First World War, international competition for an alliance with Ahmad al-Sharif intensified as officials attached to intelligence and foreign services in Cairo watched one another for indications that rival powers could gain Sanusi support. Italian agents in Cairo developed a secret scheme to enter into negotiations with Ahmad al-Sharif through a collaborative effort of local functionaries in the Banco di Roma and the Khedive Abbas II. Italy had a history of supporting the Egyptian Khedive as a sort of protest against British and French imperialism and a general call for the principles of nationalism that had informed the *Risorgimento* in Rome. A community of Italian expatriates in Cairo included a core of political radicals who fled the peninsula in protest against the dominance of moderating forces in the Italian unification, and many in this community of political and intellectual elites formed relationships with the Khedive and other Egyptian nationalists. Their relationships inspired Khedive Isma'il to seek exile in Italy when the British forcibly removed him from office in 1879, and the Italian press hailed him as the Egyptian Garibaldi on his arrival in Rome.²¹⁶

In October 1913, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs were able to use a relationship between the local manager of the Banco di Roma in Cairo, Abdul Hamid Shedid, and the Khedive Abbas II to persuade the Khedive to visit Ahmad al-Sharif in the hopes that he could

²¹⁵ Luigi Tùccari, *I governi militari della Libia (1911-1919)* (Rome: Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito, Ufficio Storico, 1994), 148.

²¹⁶ Saho Matsumoto-Best, "British and Italian Imperial Rivalry in the Mediterranean, 1912-14: The Case of Egypt," *Dipomacy and Statecraft* 18, no. 2 (2007), 299.

persuade the Sanusi leader to negotiate with the Italian colonial state.²¹⁷ The agreement included political and commercial components that sought to increase Italian control over regional trade and infrastructure at the expense of British interests. The Khedive agreed to help block the trade in weapons across the border into Cyrenaica, to enter into discussions with Ahmad al-Sharif, and to promote Italian trade and investments in the Banco di Roma in Egypt at the expense of British trade and banking. In exchange, the Italian government promised to support the Khedive against the impending threat to his position by the British government and to promote Egyptian independence.²¹⁸ Their secret negotiations also included provisions for the construction of Italian railways between Tripoli and Benghazi that would eventually extend all the way to Alexandria to facilitate regional trade.²¹⁹

The agreement between the Khedive and the Italian government did not remain a secret for long. The Egyptian press publicized accounts of the Khedive's visit to Ahmad al-Sharif, and British intelligence agents easily uncovered the agreement between the Khedive and the Italian government. The Khedive's mission to Ahmad al-Sharif was widely reported to have been a failure, but the implications that the Khedive could claim the authority to make international agreements and that the Egyptian railways could come under Italian authority led to a series of tense exchanges between British and Italian diplomatic agents. The possibility of establishing Ahmad al-Sharif as a connected force in anti-British designs across the Egyptian border compounded the issue, especially when the British discovered that the Khedive had promised Ahmad al-Sharif control over the oases of Kufra and Jaghbub in territory of disputed control

²¹⁷ BNA WO 106/1532, Intelligence Department, War Office, Cairo, 11 October 1913.

²¹⁸ BNA PRO 30/57/45, Kitchener's despatch no. 101, 19 June 1914.

²¹⁹ Matsumoto-Best, "British and Italian Imperial Rivalry," 302.

between Egypt and Cyrenaica in his attempt to gain the Sanusi alliance. Initially, the Italian government insisted that the entire project reflected the initiative of the Banco di Roma alone, but in the throes of the downfall of Prime Minister Giolitti's administration in 1914, an Italian diplomatic agent in Cairo, Ernesto De Martino—later to serve as Governor of Cyrenaica—admitted to the involvement of the Italian Ministry of Colonies in paying the Khedive to negotiate on Italy's behalf, leading to a series of inquiries into the political affiliations of local Banco di Roma employees and a shift in personnel.²²⁰

Despite the numerous reports from French agents on the ground in North Africa that the Sanusi elite had little influence in regional politics, for example, evidence that both Rome and Istanbul sent missions to visit Kufra to try to obtain Ahmad al-Sharif's support convinced French intelligence agents and diplomatic officers in Cairo that the competition for an alliance offered proof of his considerable religious authority and influence in the region and that they would be remiss not to take part.²²¹ French agents in Cairo urged the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs to enter into the competition for Sanusi support, "in anticipation of circumstances still possible in which the support of this religious person would facilitate, in North Africa, the maintenance of our authority."²²² The push to continue negotiating with Ahmad al-Sharif reflected a sense of his importance in the region as a civilizing force and a competitive spirit bent on preventing the Sanusiyya from supporting the Italian cause instead. "Let's assume that the ambitions of our neighbors in the Alps are realized in full. Would we want to see a highly militant Muslim

²²⁰ Ibid., 303.

²²¹ "Elle tendrait à témoigner, une fois de plus, du grand crédit accordé à l'influence du Cheikh de Kufra." FR CAOM AEF GGAEF 5D/20, M. Fouchet in the French Consulate in Cairo to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, "Au sujet du Cheikh des Senoussyas," 11 November 1913.

²²² "en prévision de circonstances toujours possibles au cours desquelles l'appui de ce personnage religieux faciliterait, dans l'Afrique du Nord, le maintien de notre autorité." Ibid.

congregation beside them, who because of their relations with Wadai and Darfor could, directed against us, hamper in a certain measure the development of our possessions in Central Africa?”

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At the end of 1913, Ahmad al-Sharif’s public declaration of jihad against the presence of the Italian colonial state ended speculation on his official position towards the Italian administration and demonstrated the ultimate failure of their strategies to negotiate with a Sanusi alliance. Over the following year, hostilities against Italian garrisons and supply lines increased as a coalition of tribal and Sanusi forces acquired material and tactical support from Ottoman and German officers hoping to use their relationships with the Sanusiyya to their advantage in undermining the security of Allied territories. In assessing the failure to form an alliance with the Sanusi elite, Italian government officials and public opinion assigned primary responsibility to Enrico Insabato. Some claimed that the Italian administration never had any possibility of gaining the support of Ahmad al-Sharif and discredited any evidence Insabato had presented of his communications with Kufra. The Italian Ministry of Colonies decided that all letters and messages Insabato had produced from Ahmad al-Sharif declaring his neutrality and eventual support for the Italian administration to be fakes, and an Italian correspondent and editor of the Turin newspaper *Secolo* claimed that Insabato had passed off random merchants and caravan

²²³ “Supposons donc que les ambitions de nos voisins des Alpes se réalisent entièrement. Aurions-nous intérêt à voir auprès d’eux un congrégation musulmane très militante, qui en raison de ses relations avec le Ouadai et le Darfour pourrait, dirigée contre nous, entraver dans une certaine mesure le développement de nos possessions du Centre Africain?” FR CAOM AEF GGAEF 5D/20, French Minister of Colonies, Afrique Occidentale et Equatoriale, “Affaires musulmanes au sujet du Borkou,” 9 February 1912.

drivers from the bazaars of Cairo as Sanusi shaykhs when he paraded them through Rome in November 1912.²²⁴

Discredited and disgraced, the Italian Ministry of Colonies ordered Insabato to leave North Africa permanently. Though he was called in on occasion to consult in further negotiations with the Sanusi elite, Insabato never held an official position in the Italian administration in the Libyan territories. His arguments in favor of forming a power sharing system through a Sanusi intermediary, however, continued to influence a strain of thought among a cast of Italian colonial officials, regional experts, and agents in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who consistently returned to the plan to form an alliance with Ahmad al-Sharif as a way of expanding state control in the Libyan territories while promoting Italian relations in the wider Muslim world. If nothing else, the presence of his friend Aldobrandino Malvezzi di Medici as a high level functionary first in the Foreign Ministry then in the Ministry of Colonies helped ensure continued influence of Insabato's ideas. The two were childhood classmates and worked together in Cairo when the Foreign Ministry sent Malvezzi to Cairo as an official representative to prepare for the occupation of Libya by contacting the heads of the Sufi *turuq* in the region alongside Insabato.²²⁵ Malvezzi shared in Insabato's opinions concerning the necessity of negotiations with the Sanusiyya for a successful Italian administration, and he remained in an official position as a high level functionary in the Ministry of Colonies during the rest of the liberal colonial occupation with the capacity to influence policy decisions.

²²⁴ FR CAOM AEF GGAEF 5D/20, M. Defrance, French Consulate General in Cairo to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 6/5/1913; FR CAOM AEF GGAEF 5D/20, French Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Minister of Colonies, "Présence à Rome d'envoyée du Grand Senoussi," 11/16/1912.

²²⁵ Baldinetti, *Orientalismo e colonialismo*, 45-46.

In support of the efforts to negotiate with the Sanusi elite, Malvezzi published a book in 1913 entitled *L'Italia e l'Islam in Libia* in which he depicted the Bedouin population as inherently violent and driven towards independence. He argued that the Italians should accommodate the interests of the Sanusiyya as a religious organization in order to supplant Ottoman religious and political authority with that of a religious group that would, as a result of their assistance, be more amenable to working with the Italians. “We suggest for our native policy not only to make use of the natural tendencies for autonomy of the Libyan populations, but above all gain all the advantages that we can from supporting the aspirations for dominance of the religious congregations”²²⁶ Promoting the interests of the Sanusiyya, he argued, could also improve Italian standing in the Muslim world and mark them as distinctive from other European powers with Muslim subjects. “Not to mention that the day in which Italy assumes the position of protector of the independent Senusso in Islam, we would gain great respect and power, not only in Libya and Yemen, but in most of the Muslim world.”²²⁷

Another call for indirect rule under the Sanusiyya came from Carlo Alfonso Nallino, a specialist in Arabic language and society and active participant in forming colonial policy decisions. Nallino established his credentials as a regional expert in 1902 when he published a book entitled *Le odierne tendenze dell'islamismo* in which he argued against popular perceptions of a decline in Islam and warned of the potential growth of a pan-Islamic movement to inspire “a

²²⁶ “Proponiamo dunque alla nostra politica indigena, non solo il fine di giovare delle spontanee tendenze all'autonomia delle popolazioni libiche, ma soprattutto quello di trarre tutti i vantaggi che possono derivarci dall'assecondare le aspirazioni di preponderanza delle congregazioni religiose.” Aldobrandino Malvezzi De Medici, *L'Italia e l'Islam in Libia* (Florence: Fratelli Treves, 1913), 231.

²²⁷ “Senza contare poi che il giorno in cui l'Italia si atteggiasse a protettrice del Senusso indipendente nell'Islam acquisterebbe considerazione e potenze grandissime, non solo in Libia e nello Yemen, ma in gran parte del mondo musulmano.” *Ibid.*, 245.

wave of fanaticism against Europe.”²²⁸ Though Nallino attributed the spread of pan-Islamic sentiment in Africa to the popularity of mystical Sufi orders, he also recognized a civilizing function in the Sufi *zawāyā* in promoting education and property ownership.²²⁹ The depiction of Sufism as an intermediary stage of civilization between African barbarity and European modernity became a constant in Nallino’s work and a foundation in his arguments in favor of a Muslim intermediary government under the control of Sanusi leaders.

Conclusion

By the summer of 1914, Sanusi *zawāyā* throughout Cyrenaica had become centers of anti-Italian activity, and hostilities against Italian garrisons and supply lines increased throughout the region. In December 1914, the Italians decided to pull out of the interior, and the prospect of regaining control became dramatically less likely as authorities in Rome diverted Italian military resources to the hostilities of the First World War. That Ottoman and German officers had won the support of Ahmad al-Sharif and the use of the military and tactical resources of the Sanusi forces and their affiliated tribes became clear when Ahmad al-Sharif led a series of attacks on Egypt’s western border and against French positions in the Northern Sahara in 1915-1916.

The focus on establishing an alliance with the Sanusiyya persisted as the Ministry of Colonies looked to regional experts to determine the best method of preserving Italian sovereignty at a minimum cost to the central state, but Italian intelligence reports describing the Sanusiyya as highly divided both internally and in terms of the *ṭarīqa*’s regional affiliations

²²⁸ Carlo Alfonso Nallino, *Le odierne tendenze dell’islamismo* (Florence: Biblioteca Scientifico-Religiosa, 1902), 11.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 14-15

informed the development of a new plan to cultivate an alternative Sanusi intermediary with Ahmad al-Sharif's younger cousin Idris al-Sanusi during the First World War. Italian agents first began to consider him as a possible ally when Idris al-Sanusi signaled his willingness to consider becoming involved in the development schemes the Banco di Roma and the Egyptian Khedive proposed to Ahmad al-Sharif in 1913. In the years that followed, the Italian Minister of Colonies—with substantial British assistance—established a series of treaties with Idris al-Sanusi to use his moral authority and political influence in the region to generate consensus for Italian colonial rule and the expansion of Italian infrastructure into the Cyrenaican interior. After the end of the First World War, Italian colonial officials credited the Sanusi administration of the Cyrenaican interior with having maintained relative order in the eastern region compared to a chaotic situation in the west as Tripolitania dissolved into civil wars. But suspicions that the process of negotiating an alliance with Idris al-Sanusi risked exaggerating his political authority or making the Italian state overly dependent on the waning influence of a secondary religious figure continuously troubled Italian officials in the Libyan territories. Ultimately, the alliance between Idris al-Sanusi and the Italian colonial state collapsed under the weight of Italian ambitions for direct territorial control and evidence of Idris al-Sanusi's inability to gain the approval of key tribal figures for Italian development schemes.

Ch. 4: WWI and the Period of Accords

The beginning of hostilities between Britain and the Ottoman Empire in November 1914 altered the dynamics in the Libyan territories. The shaky network of alliances that assisted Miani's military operations in the Fezzan and Ameglio's more modest incursions into the interior of Cyrenaica fell apart as regional elites, favoring a return to Ottoman influence in the region, aligned themselves with Ottoman and German interests in exchange for an influx of military supplies. In the second half of 1914, Italian Occupying Forces in Tripolitania met a series of military defeats that eventually pushed them back to a few coastal holdings by the end of 1915. Ahmad al-Sharif echoed the Ottoman call to jihad in all territories under Allied control at the end of 1914, and Italy's decision to join the war on the side of the Allies a few months later crystalized the opposition between the Sanusi leader and Italian state presence in Cyrenaica. Rumors that Ottoman and German agents were using the Sanusi *zawāyā* as training grounds for a Bedouin army stoked British and French concerns about their North African territories. When Ahmad al-Sharif led Sanusi forces in attacks on the western border of Egypt in 1915 and lent logistical support and moral encouragement to anti-French rebellions in the Northern Sahara soon after, Italian officials grew anxious over their loss in credibility as an imperial power and a regional ally.

The demands on resources for the war in Europe limited Italy's capacity to respond to the loss of control in the Libyan interior with military force, making the idea of a Sanusi intermediary in Cyrenaica even more compelling. With considerable pressure from British officials in Egypt, the Italian colonial administration expanded on previous contacts with Ahmad

al-Sharif's more willing younger cousin Idris al-Sanusi to negotiate a series of accords limiting Italian state presence to the coastal region and cultivating Idris al-Sanusi as the leader of the Sanusi *ṭarīqa* and an intermediary between the Italian state and tribal leaders of the Cyrenaican interior. During the First World War and in the first few years after, Italian colonial officials attributed a relatively peaceful situation in Cyrenaica to the influence of Idris al-Sanusi and his acceptance of a power-sharing system. The apparent success of their initial treaties lent weight to Italian regional experts who promoted the Sanusiyya as a civilizing force in the Libyan territories and a potential ally in expanding Italian influence throughout the Muslim world. The defeat of the Ottoman Empire suggested an opportunity to create new alliances with Muslim elites like the Sanusiyya in an emerging international order, and it allowed for the Italian colonial state to expand its influence in the legal order of the Libyan territories after renouncing the agreement in the Treaty of Lausanne that preserved the Sultan's status as Caliph in the Libyan territories with the right to name qadi in the region's civil courts.

The motivations behind Idris al-Sanusi's decision to negotiate a power-sharing system with the Italian colonial state prove more difficult to determine from the colonial documents. According to Italian accounts, indications that some tribes in the coastal region of Cyrenaica intended to declare their formal submission directly to the Italian state inspired Idris al-Sanusi to agree to act as an intermediary so that tribal leaders would have to negotiate with a Sanusi administration. Idris stood to gain financially from the negotiations; the Italian state provided him with a stipend in exchange for his position as an intermediary, and he increased his property when Ahmad al-Sharif left for exile in 1918. Allies of the Sanusi family and prominent members of the Sanusi *ṭarīqa* also benefitted from the negotiations. The Italian administration employed

the services of Omar Mansur al-Kekhiya, a notable from Benghazi and former functionary in the Ottoman administration, to communicate with Idris, and merchants in the coastal stood to profit from the promise of continued access to trade routes in the case of an Allied victory in the world war.

Italian and British agents involved in the negotiations with Idris al-Sanusi, however, recognized that the process of establishing Idris al-Sanusi as an intermediary for a European colonial state risked undermining his already dubious claims to moral and political authority in an era defined by the rhetoric of self-determination and a rising sense of Arab nationalism. Recognizing this risk, British agents involved in their negotiations warned the Italians to limit their demands on Idris concerning the extent of his concessions to Italian sovereignty in the region, and between 1916 and 1920, the Italian colonial state provided Idris with financial and military support to bolster his position. The process of negotiations and the provision of military forces and for his protection solidified Idris al-Sanusi's role as a major figure in regional and international politics. For some Italian imperialists, the concession of a political and administrative position to Idris al-Sanusi represented an embarrassing loss of authority to a religious figure, but they reasoned that the arrangement would be temporary and that their collusion would lead to a decline in Sanusi influence in the region that would allow for a gradual transfer of power to an Italian civil administration.

The limitations of their arrangement became clear when the Italians tried to expand the state presence and Italian infrastructure projects through the creation of a Sanusi Emirate in the Regima Accord of 1920. The reaction against the Regima Accords indicated that the consensus generated under Idris al-Sanusi had been based primarily on the corresponding limitations to

Italian state and private expansion beyond a few urban centers along the coast. In this chapter, I will trace the process of negotiations between Italian authorities and Idris al-Sanusi before turning to look at the disintegration of their relationship and the subsequent military operations of the fascist administration.

The Failures of the Politica dei Capi

The extension into Cyrenaica beyond the immediate surroundings of Benghazi halted as armed Sanusi forces attacked Italian supply lines in the Mogarba region between al-Ajedabiya and al-Zuwaytina in September 1914.²³⁰ Assaults against Italian garrisons and supply lines escalated and spread into Tripolitania in April 1915 when Sanusi forces led by Ahmad al-Sharif's brother Saf al-Din joined the armed tribes of the Sirte region to defeat the Italian Occupying Forces under Colonel Miani in the Battle of Qasr Bu Hadi or al-Qadarbiya, Italy's most dramatic military disaster in the colonies since the Battle of Adwa in 1896.²³¹ From that point, the colonial state presence remained confined to urban centers on the coast until the fascist administration initiated what they labeled as the "reoccupation" of the interior at the end of the 1920s.

Shifting alliances in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica contributed to Italy's loss of the modest territorial gains they had made in the interior as the shaky network of alliances with regional

²³⁰ The Mogarba region refers to the area east of the Sirte Desert. Al-Ashab, *Barqa al- 'Arabiya*, 281; el-Horeir, "Social and Economic Transformations," 247. With the Italian retreat from the Fezzan and the Sirte Desert, they lost the submission of the Mogarba populations that they had acquired through the mediation of the Saif el-Nasser family.

²³¹ WO 106/672, British Ambassador to Rome to the British War Office, 3 May 1915.

elites Italian agents had formed through a combination of intimidation and promises of political influence in the colonial state fell apart. Two influential notables from Tripolitania in particular—Abd al-Nabi Belkhir and Ramadan al-Suwayhli—changed their positions towards the Italian military presence during the initial attempts to occupy the Fezzan, first contributing troops and helping them establish garrisons in the region, then joining with Sanusi forces to rout the Italian troops and expel them to the Libyan coast. Ramadan al-Suwayhli came from a notable merchant family in Misurata that benefited financially and politically from close relationships to Ottoman officials. After Italian officials held him under arrest briefly in 1914 and threatened him with exile, Ramadan al-Suwayhli agreed to cooperate with the Italian administration and assist in Miani’s expedition into the Fezzan in exchange for a regular salary.²³² Abd al-Nabi Belkhir had been a tax collector in the Ottoman administration, and he had used his position to build support among tribal leaders until he became the recognized representative of the Warfalla tribes of eastern Tripolitania.²³³ Both individuals gained greater control over the territory and its resources with the defeat of the Italian Occupying Forces.

The involvement of Sanusi forces in the attacks on Italian troops in Cyrenaica and Tripolitania seemed to indicate an attempt by the Sanusiyya to expand their influence and possibly unify the two territories against the Italian state. The prospect of facing the combined forces of Sef al-Din and Ramadan al-Suwayhli with the increased military capacity from the weapons and ammunition they acquired with the Italian military retreat convinced the Governor of Cyrenaica of the necessity of negotiating a peace with Idris al-Sanusi to avoid the loss of

²³² Anderson, “Ramadan al-Suwayhli,” 117.

²³³ Ahmida, *Making of Modern Libya*, 114.

Italian control over Ajedabiya, a port town with ties to Sanusi trade routes.²³⁴ However, after the defeat of Miani's troops, Ramadan al-Suwayhli proved eager to increase his regional power and prevent the extension of Sanusi influence into Sirte or the Fezzan. He took possession of all of the weapons and supplies the Italian military lost during their retreat, and he pushed out Sef al-Din and his Sanusi forces to prevent an attempt by the Sanusiyya to collect taxes in the region. As a sign of his commitment to limiting the influence of the Sanusi family and their allies in Tripolitania, he had three Sanusi shiekhs who were also members of the Muntasir clan arrested and executed in Misurata in 1916. After gaining control of Misurata, al-Suwayhli turned to the territory of the Warfalla under Abd al-Nabi Belkhir to the south in 1920 sparking a widespread struggle that Libyan historians recognize as a civil war. Fueled by Italian supplies to the Muntasir family and to Abd al-Nabi Belkhir, the conflict lasted until Ramadan al-Suwayhli's death in November 1920.²³⁵

The expulsion of the Italian forces in 1914-1915 reflected in part a return of Ottoman influence in the region. As tensions mounted leading up to the First World War, Ottoman and German military officers increased their supply of military resources into the Libyan territories in a bid to gain the support of local notables and tribal forces as part of a wider strategy to damage British interests in Egypt and, to a lesser extent, the French in the Northern Sahara. Regional notables like Ramadan al-Suwayhli and Abd al-Nabi Belkhir had provided support to the Italian occupation in part to maintain their administrative positions in a new political order, but the Tripolitanian notables favored the possibility of a return to Ottoman rule. After defeating

²³⁴ ASMAI II 150/1/7, Governor Ameglio to the Italian Minister of Colonies, 19 August 1916.

²³⁵ Baldinetti, *Origins of the Libyan Nation*, 80; Ahmida, *Making of Modern Libya*, 129-131; Anderson, "Ramadan al-Suwayhli," 126.

Miani's forces, Ramadan al-Suwayhli opened up Misurata for use as a German navel base, and Ottoman and German officers encouraged Suleiman al-Baruni to increase anti-Italian military activities from the Jebel Nafusa region in western Tripolitania.²³⁶ The influx of Ottoman and German financial and military aid gave a number of notables in Tripolitania like Suleiman al-Baruni and Ramadan al-Suwayhli, among others, the resources to establish spheres of individual influence throughout the region. When the Ottomans and Germans withdrew from the region in 1918, the multiplicity of regional strongmen contributed to the outbreak of civil war in 1920 after a brief attempt at regional unity under the Tripolitanian Republic.²³⁷

The Sanusiyya factored as a centerpiece in the German and Ottoman plans for an attack on British positions in Egypt and in a broader initiative of the Emperor Wilhelm to position Germany as a “protector of Islam” to undermine British influence around the world.²³⁸ The Ottoman call for jihad against Entente powers in November 1914 signaled an attempt to use the history of alliances between central powers and Muslim elites in the Ottoman provinces in the broader international conflicts, and given the recent history of training from officers of the *Teskilat-i Mahsusa*, the Sanusi troops centered in Kufra seemed natural allies. With Italy maintaining a position of neutrality until May 1915, German and Ottoman officials tried to persuade the Sanusi elite to suspend their attacks on Italian troops to turn their forces instead against British and French interests in North Africa. Ottoman-German strategy was to be an assault on Britain in Egypt from three points: “from the east by the Turks in Palestine; from the

²³⁶ Soave, *Fezzan*, 454.

²³⁷ Ahmida, *Making Modern Libya*, 107.

²³⁸ Simon, *Libya Between Ottomanism and Nationalism*, 106.

south by Ali Dinar, Sultan of Darfur; and from the west by the Sanusi of Cyrenaica.”²³⁹ They established this plan in late 1914, but it took on new importance after the failed attempt to take the Suez Canal from the Sinai desert in January 1915.²⁴⁰

The alliance with the Sanusi elite fit into broader German foreign policy goals as delineated in an eight-point plan to incite violence against the Entente powers in regions stretching from Afghanistan and the Caucuses to Sudan and India. With assistance from Istanbul, the plan called for “influencing of the Senussi tribes living in the frontier district between Egypt and Tripolitania against England.”²⁴¹ The head of German intelligence in North Africa, Otto Mannesman, proposed an agreement with Ahmad al-Sharif in which the German Government would act as his patron to secure for him religious freedom throughout North Africa and an “independent principality” in the Cyrenaican interior, a region Mannesman defined as the area between Tripolitania, Egypt, and Lake Chad. German and Ottoman officers including Nuri Bey and Mannesman met with Ahmad al-Sharif in December 1914 to back up the offer with financial support of 15,000 Turkish pounds. In exchange, the German intelligence officers asked Ahmad al-Sharif to suspend hostilities against Italy—reflecting in part the yet undefined position of Italy in the international alliances dividing Europe—and they requested that he focus his forces instead against the British in Egypt and Sudan and the French in Equatorial Africa.²⁴²

²³⁹ John Wright, *The Emergence of Libya* (London: The Society for Libyan Studies, 2008), 270.

²⁴⁰ Zürcher, *Storia della Turchia*, 145.

²⁴¹ Reproduced in Lothar Rathmann, “Archival Material on the Modern History of Libya,” in *African Studies - Afrika-Studien: Dedicated to the IIIrd International Congress of Africanists in Addis Abeba*, ed. Thea Büthner and Gerhard Brehme (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1973), 66. According to Rothmann, the document came from the files of the Political Department of the Foreign Office of the German Reich which can also be found in the British National Archives in London.

²⁴² Rothmann, “Archival Material,” 66; el-Horeir, “Social and Economic Transformations,” 182-183.

Arms Distribution and Military Training in the First World War

A heightened flow of arms and military resources into the region to Sanusi forces and their allies pointed to Ahmad al-Sharif's acceptance of the German proposal, though a subsequent increase in the frequency and severity of attacks on Italian military posts in November and December 1914 suggested a possible reluctance of the Sanusiyya to divert their attentions from the anti-Italian activities. The expulsion of Italian troops from the Libyan interior facilitated the movement of military supplies from the Cyrenaican coast and Egypt's Western Desert into the Libyan interior. As I have mentioned in an earlier chapter, the Sanusiyya and their associated trade networks had long been associated with facilitating an illicit market in weapons and ammunition in the region. French and British agents in North Africa began to track the arms trade in the Libyan territories before the Italian occupation when weapons from conflicts around the world, including guns from Japan from the Russo-Japanese war, began to reach the Sanusi *zawāyā* in Cyrenaica and Egypt's Western Desert and from there made their way into the hands of anti-French troops in Wadai, Dar Fur, and the Central Sahara.²⁴³ Despite international agreements to classify the arms trade in the Ottoman Empire's North African territories as contraband, it began to supplant the disappearing slave trade as a driving force in

²⁴³ FR CAOM FM SG AFRIQUE/VI/191, French Vice Counsel in Benghazi to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, 4 February 1911. Also see Spaulding and Kapteijns, *An Islamic Alliance*.

the region's economy.²⁴⁴ Gun smugglers and merchants identified the influence of the Sanusi elite as preventing Ottoman officials from policing the illicit trade.²⁴⁵

French officials in the Northern Sahara, after years of complaining about a lack of control over the movement of arms from the Mediterranean and the Egyptian border into the desert, hoped that the Italian occupation of the Libyan territories would finally “reduce the fanatics of Jalo, Jaghbub, and Kufra to a state of impotence” and curtail the armament of Ain Galakka where a Sanusi stockpile helped reinforce local forces fighting against French-Senegalese troops in their occupation of the Borkou region in the central Sudan.²⁴⁶ If anything, the Italian invasion of the Libyan coast increased the availability of weapons in the Cyrenaican interior, though it did cause the Sanusiyya to divert their arms trade away from French enemies in the Borkou, Ennedi, and Wadai as they became increasingly engaged in fighting against the Italian occupation in the Libyan interior, especially during the Miani campaigns in 1913 and early 1914.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁴ FR CAOM FM SG AFRIQUE/VI/191, French Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Minister of Colonies, 31 January 1911.

²⁴⁵ “Il est si difficile dans ce pays de ne pas être inféodé aux Khouans!” *Ikwāns*, or brothers, was a generic term used to refer to adherents to Sufi brotherhoods, in this case the Sanusiyya. FR CAOM AEF GGAEF 5D/20, French Vice-Consul in Benghazi to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, “Situation actuelle des Senussis,” 6 March 1911.

²⁴⁶ FR CAOM AEF GGAEF 5D/20, General Gargeau, Commander of the Military Territory of Chad to the central command of Afrique Équatoriale Française, 7 February 1912.

²⁴⁷ FR CAOM AEF GGAEF 5D/20, DeFrance, the French Plenipotentiary Minister in Cairo to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, 22 April 1914. Ahmad al-Sharif contacted the French government in early 1914 to signal that he and his allies were committed to using their arms against Italian troops instead of French presence in the region. Also, see Spaulding and Kapteijns, *An Islamic Alliance*, 46. As I noted in an earlier chapter, ‘Ali Dinar, the Sultan of Dar Fur, complained in early 1914 that a shipment of arms he was supposed to have received from Sanusi sources never arrived because Muhammad Abd al-Sanusi had sent them to Fezzan instead.

Estimates for the number of arms in circulation in the Cyrenaican interior after the Italian invasion varied widely from around 40,000 up to 150,000,²⁴⁸ but the First World War doubtlessly contributed to the armament and militarization of the Sanusi *zawāyā* throughout the region when the Ottoman and German militaries began to send shipments of weapons and supplies on a regular basis. German and Turkish military instructors accompanied the shipments of arms to Cyrenaica, and they began using the Sanusi *zawāyā* to train Bedouin forces in techniques of fighting from horseback and on how to use the weapons. French intelligence reported the presence of five or six German officers near Kufra at the beginning of 1914 to train Sanusi troops, and there was some indication of a remaining force of around 1000 Ottoman troops.²⁴⁹

British agents in Egypt watched the movements of Ottoman officers and military supplies through Egypt's Western Desert into Cyrenaica carefully from the beginning of the Italo-Turkish War, but they felt little concern that the formation of Sanusi troops posed a significant threat to British interests along the Egyptian border. Anglo-Egyptian border officials hoped to cultivate a positive but distant relationship with Sanusi elites in the Cyrenaican interior, optimistic that the presence of a friendly Islamic authority near the western border of Egypt would contribute to a lasting peace among tribal factions whose conflicts as recently as 1910 had stymied trade through the region, but wary that attributing too much political authority to a Sufi figure would set a dangerous precedent for claims to autonomy among religious notables throughout North

²⁴⁸ ASMAI II 147/1/3, Italian Occupying Forces, Command of the Second Division, "Tribù della Cirenaica," March 1914.

²⁴⁹ FR CAOM AEF GGAEF 5D/20, French Minister in Cairo to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, "Conversation avec un notable Senoussiste," 4/22/1914; Francesco Correale, "Weapons and "smugglers" throughout Western Sahara: From the Anti-Colonial Resistance to the First World War," in *Bridges Across the Sahara*, edited by Ali Abdullatif Ahmida (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2009), 136.

Africa.²⁵⁰ Border authorities had long been reluctant to enforce the international agreements banning arms trade into the region because they feared it would create problems with Bedouin tribes in Egypt's Western Desert and Sudan, many of whom claimed adherence to the Sanusi *ṭarīqa*. The border town of Solum was known as a transit point for arms and supplies from Alexandria headed for the Sanusi *zawāyā* of Cyrenaica including uniforms for Sanusi forces with an insignia in Arabic for the "Senussi Government" after the Ottoman renunciation of sovereignty in 1912.²⁵¹ Leading up to the First World War, they had reason to believe that their tactics had secured the good will of Ahmad al-Sharif; officials in Egypt noted a marked preference among their Libyan contacts for the possibility of extending a British protectorate over the region as an alternative to Italian state expansion.²⁵² Indications that Ahmad al-Sharif and the Sanusi elite in Cyrenaica favored the British over other European colonial powers in the region convinced some officials in Cairo to ignore warnings that the Ottoman and German officers in the region intended the Sanusi troops to instigate an attack on the Egyptian border.

When Sanusi forces drove Italian troops out of Ajedabiya, al-Marj and other positions in the interior of Cyrenaica in March 1915, the Italian ambassador in Cairo issued a proposal for a joint Italian-British accord with the Sanusiyya based on the argument that the British would benefit from neutralizing the potential threat of a Sanusi attack on Egypt's western border.²⁵³ Citing past examples when the Sanusi elite reached out to British officials in Egypt for protection

²⁵⁰ BNA FO 881/9909, British Consulate in Benghazi to British Secretary of Foreign Affairs, 23 February 1910.

²⁵¹ BNA FO 141/653, MacMahon, High Commissioner in Egypt to the British Secretary of Foreign Affairs, 12 May 1915; BNA FO 141/653, Vassallo, *Journeaux d'Italie*, 18 April 1915.

²⁵² BNA FO 101/94, British Consulate in Benghazi to the British Secretary of Foreign Affairs, 20 August 1902.

²⁵³ BNA FO 141/653, Intelligence News, Cairo, 4 April 1915.

against the Italians as evidence of Ahmad al-Sharif's continued good will, the British initially refused to engage in joint negotiations; they were nervous that cooperating with the Italians in the Libyan territories would turn Sanusi adherents among the Bedouin tribes of Western Egypt against them and could set a dangerous precedent for other religious figures in Egypt and Sudan to claim positions of political authority within the colonial system.²⁵⁴ British intelligence agents generally defended the Sanusiyya against Italian accusations of violent attacks and characterized the Sanusi *ṭarīqa* as a mostly peaceful religious order defending against Italian aggression. But the Italian entry into the European war on the side of the Entente powers in May 1915 placed the British in a delicate position from which the negotiation of some sort of peace between Italian colonial officials and Ahmad al-Sharif appeared to offer the means to avoid accusations of abandoning either.²⁵⁵

For the year between the Ottoman call to jihad and the eventual Sanusi attack on Egypt's western border in November 1915, Ahmad al-Sharif stalled in fulfilling his agreement with the Ottoman and German officers due to a shortfall of resources and fear that aggression against British posts would cause the Sanusi tribes to lose access to food and military supplies that arrived in the region through the Egyptian border.²⁵⁶ In the meantime, British officials in Egypt engaged the services of Muhammad Idrisi, a notable from Luxor whose family had acted as intermediaries between the Idrisi of Asir and the Government of Aden in the Arab revolt of 1916,

²⁵⁴ BNA FO 141/653, British Agent in Cairo to the Foreign Office, 26 February 1915.

²⁵⁵ ASMAI II 136/1/3, Admiralty War Staff Intelligence Division, "The Senussi," 26 May 1915. Found and translated by Italian intelligence.

²⁵⁶ BNA WO 106/672, "The Situation in Cirenaca from the "Tribuna", 24 December 1914. Some indication that the ultimate failure of the attack on the Egyptian border reflected the failure to adequately supply the Sanusi troops: Martin S. Kramer, *Islam Assembled: The Advent of the Muslim Congresses* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 56.

to initiate negotiations with Ahmad al-Sharif. Muhammad Idrisi met with Ahmad al-Sharif as late as July 1915 with an offer of British and Italian recognition of his position of religious authority and the payment of a small subsidy in exchange for his relinquishment of Sanusi prisoners in Kufra.²⁵⁷ References in the negotiations to a Sanusi government (*al-hukuma al-Sanusiyya*) concerned British Foreign Office representatives, and after meeting with other regional notables in Kufra at the end of the month, indications that Ahmad al-Sharif fully accepted the presence of German and Ottoman officers in Sanusi *zawāyā* convinced British agents to end communications.²⁵⁸

After the Italian retreat from the interior, British officials in Egypt became increasingly nervous concerning the marked increase in Ottoman and German supplies reaching the Sanusiyya through the poorly guarded coastline in eastern Cyrenaica.²⁵⁹ Weapons supplies from a German ammunitions factory near Sollum and an increase in Ottoman and German financial and military supplies to the Sanusi elite mitigated their previous reliance on trade routes through Egypt's Western Desert, and by July 1915, it was well known that Sanusi troops planned to attack British posts on the Egyptian border under the leadership of Omar al-Mukhtar, a Sanusi shaykh known for his anti-European militancy and enthusiasm for continued armed resistance against the Italian occupation after the Treaty of Lausanne.²⁶⁰ Ahmad al-Sharif and the Sanusi forces initiated a series of assaults on Egyptian forces in November and December 1915. The

²⁵⁷ BNA FO 141/653, British agent in Ramleh to Foreign Office, 3 June 1915; BNA FO 141/653, Adviser of the Interior to the High Commissioner of Egypt, 14 July 1915.

²⁵⁸ BNA FO 141/653, Italian agent in Cairo to *Il Secolo* newspaper in Milan, 24 July 1915.

²⁵⁹ BNA WO 106/672, From Lieutenant General Sir John Maxwell to Earl Kichener, 23 May 1915.

²⁶⁰ BNA WO 106/672, "Senussi," unsigned note, 1915; ACS Carte Ameglio, b.2, Moccagatta to Ameglio, 27 July 1915.

Sanusi troops took control of the port of Sollum, in essence reclaiming it from the British who had used the instability of the Italo-Turkish War as an excuse to push out an Ottoman garrison and claim the port as part of Egypt.²⁶¹ But despite the influx of Ottoman and German supplies, the Sanusi troops of around 20,000 against an Egyptian force numbering around 60,000 had little hope of holding their ground. The Egyptian Army regained control of Sollum in March 1916 and drove the Sanusi forces out of Egypt.²⁶² Ottoman and German officers subsequently redirected a greater portion of their shipments to Misurata to solidify their alliance with Tripolitanian notables like Suleiman al-Baruni and Ramadan al-Suwayhli.²⁶³

After the Egyptian Army pushed them out of the Western Desert, the Sanusi forces turned to French territories in the Northern Sahara where they provided arms and military aid to Tuareg and Tibu (Teda) groups who had been displaced and financially damaged by the French occupation of the Tibesti mountains in Northwestern Chad along the border of modern-day Niger. The combined effect of Sanusi military resources and the general abandonment of the region by French troops facing a restriction in resources due to the growing crisis in Europe allowed Sanusi and Tuareg forces in 1916-1917 to claim territories in the Djado Plateau, the Tibesti Mountains, Southern Fezzan, and the Tassili n'Ajjer mountains in Southwestern Algeria that had been occupied by the French.²⁶⁴ The Sanusi-directed attacks on British and French

²⁶¹ Matsumoto-Best, "British and Italian Imperial Rivalry," 301.

²⁶² Ahmida, *Making of Modern Libya*, 122.

²⁶³ Simon, *Libya Between Ottomanism and Nationalism*, 130-131. The influx of German and Ottoman supplies during the First World War led to increased tensions between Sanusi elite like Muhammad al-Abed who used the opportunity to attempt an expansion of his military presence in Sirte and the forces of Ramadan al-Suwayhli and other tribal leaders and prominent Ottoman functionaries. See Luigi Goglia and Fabio Grassi, eds., *Colonialismo italiano da Adua all'impero* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1993), 184.

²⁶⁴ Finn Fuglestad, "Les révoltes des Touareg du Niger (1916-17)," *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 13, no. 49 (1973), 88-89.

territories in North Africa lent new urgency to a movement among European officials in the region to neutralize the military threat through a political agreement with favorable Sanusi elites, and the continued access to Ottoman and German military supplies among forces in Tripolitania and Fezzan made the Italian colonial administration particularly anxious to find an ally in the region to prevent a total loss of control throughout the Libyan territories. After Ahmad al-Sharif's attacks on British and French territories, the European powers turned to his cousin, Idris al-Sanusi. The process of negotiations between Idris al-Sanusi and British, Italian, and at times French authorities led to the establishment of a Sanusi Emirate in the Cyrenaican interior and laid the groundwork for the creation of the Kingdom of Libya after independence.

Identification of Idris al-Sanusi as an Alternative Intermediary

Italian officials in the Foreign Ministry identified Idris al-Sanusi as a potential replacement for Ahmad al-Sharif as a more compliant Sanusi leader as early as 1914. The idea took root after the misguided plan of Italian agents in Cairo, including the later Governor of Cyrenaica, Ernesto De Martino, to have the Khedive of Egypt convince Ahmad al-Sharif to end hostilities against Italian expansion in the Cyrenaican interior in exchange for Italian protection of the Khedive's position in Egypt failed. While Ahmad al-Sharif refused to entertain the possibility of dealing with the Egyptian Khedive on Italy's behalf, Idris al-Sanusi was known to stay as a guest in the Khedive's residence in Egypt while the Khedive communicated with Italian representatives on his behalf. Italian agents offered to recognize Idris al-Sanusi instead of his cousin as the rightful leader at the head of the Sanusi *ṭarīqa*—the position they referred to as the

“Grand Senusso.”²⁶⁵ If the negotiations had gone through, Idris intended to travel to Istanbul to have the Sultan recognize him as his official religious representative in the Libyan territories in accordance with the stipulation in the Treaty of Lausanne calling for religious representation of the Sultan-Caliph. The British Military Attaché in Rome likened the potential arrangement between Idris and the Italian colonial state to that, “obtaining between the Sudan and Dar Fur, whose Sultan pays tribute but enjoys autonomy in internal affairs.”²⁶⁶

Based on this idea that some factions of the Sanusi family could be more easily persuaded to form an alliance with the Italian colonial state, officials began to expand on charts the Occupying Forces had previously made of tribal alliances in the region, marking divisions within the Sanusi *ikhwān* and tying them to particular tribal factions in the Libyan interior. It was known that the various members of the Sanusi family collected the revenue from particular *zawāyā*.²⁶⁷ Assuming a corresponding division in the loyalties of Sanusi adherents, the Political Office of the Italian governor of Cyrenaica identified a division after the death of Muhammad al-Mahdi in 1902 between those *zawāyā* that followed Ahmad al-Sharif and his brothers and those that followed Idris al-Sanusi and his brother, Muhammad al-Reda. Out of a total of forty-four Sanusi *zawāyā* in Cyrenaica, the Italian administration calculated nineteen belonging to Ahmad al-Sharif and his brothers and nineteen belonging to Idris al-Sanusi and Muhammad al-Reda; the remaining six fell within the territories under Italian control and therefore posed little interest in terms of gauging Sanusi influence in the region.

²⁶⁵ BNA PRO 30/57/45, Kitchener to the Foreign Office, 11 June 1914.

²⁶⁶ BNA PRO 30/56/45, British Military Attaché in Rome, C.G. Hobkirk, to Sir Rodd, British Ambassador to Rome, 22 June 1914.

²⁶⁷ Anderson, “Nineteenth-Century Reform,” 337.

Agents in the Governor's office in Benghazi found evidence in their analysis of the divisions within the Sanusi family to support theories of a decline in influence of Ahmad al-Sharif as a religious and political figure in the region. In the summer of 1915, Italian officials began to note indications of discontent among some populations in Cyrenaica concerning Ahmad al-Sharif's arrangement to assist in the Ottoman and German assaults against British and French interests due to the increased demand the military project placed on local resources, taxation, and access to regional trade.²⁶⁸ Some Europeans cited their own doubts over the proper path of succession for an inherited title in Islam as evidence of a possible replacement of Ahmad al-Sharif. Furthermore, since the properties going to Ahmad al-Sharif's branch of the family had to be divided among more members than that of al-Mahdi's branch of the family, Italian informants concluded, the sons of al-Mahdi had more wealth at their disposal than Ahmad al-Sharif and his family, "which seems to be not a small preoccupation for the actual 'Senusso' [Ahmad al-Sharif] because wealth is an element of greater influence, and the aspiration seems not entirely dormant in Said Idris of having the title and the position that passed, perhaps without absolute legitimacy, to Ahmad al-Sharif."²⁶⁹

After the Sanusi attacks across Egypt's borders, British officials produced similar reports suggesting that a large portion of adherents of the Sanusiyya did not consider Ahmad al-Sharif to be the true leader of the Sufi *ṭarīqa*, and that many of them, including Idris, would prefer a

²⁶⁸ ACS Carte Ameglio, b. 2, Ameglio to Minister of Colonies, 14 August 1915.

²⁶⁹ "e ciò sembra essere una non piccola preoccupazione per l'attuale Senusso poichè la ricchezza è anche elemento di maggiore influenza e sembra sia non del tutto sopita in Sayed Idriss l'aspirazione ad avere il titolo e la carica, passata, forse con non assoluta legittimità, a S. Ahmad Scerif." ASMAI II 147/1/4, Governor of Cyrenaica, Political Military Office, "Zauie senussite della Cirenaica," February 1916.

transfer in control of the Sanusiyya's political activities.²⁷⁰ Idris al-Sanusi confirmed the idea when he contacted British and Italian officials in Cairo concerning the possibility of resuming the discussions he had begun with the Italian administration through the mediation of the Egyptian Khedive in 1914, this time without the additional requirement of obtaining the approval of the Ottoman Sultan as Caliph since the Italians had renounced the Treaty of Lausanne when declaring war on the Ottoman Empire in 1915.²⁷¹

The Acroma Accords

In the summer of 1916, British and Italian officials began meeting with representatives of Idris al-Sanusi. For months, they danced around the issues of formal submission to Italian sovereignty and plans for disarmament of the tribal populations in the interior until they finally agreed on a temporary treaty to end immediate hostilities in the spring of 1917 in Acroma, a desert town about twenty miles from Tobruk. After years of warfare in the region, Idris al-Sanusi's top priorities in the *modus vivendi* centered on stabilizing trade routes, improving access to basic goods in the Cyrenaican interior, and the restitution of Sanusi properties occupied during the war. Idris also hoped to maintain, if not increase, Sanusi influence among the tribes of Cyrenaica in the process. The possibility that factions of the Abeidat tribes in the coastal region of Cyrenaica would negotiate directly with the Italian state prompted Idris al-Sanusi's decision to enter into a power-sharing relationship with the colonial state. The Acroma Accords assigned Idris the task of negotiating the submission of the tribes of the Cyrenaican interior, giving him

²⁷⁰ ASMAI II 147/1/4, "Zauié senussite della Cirenaica", by the Political Military Office of the Governor of Cyrenaica, February 1916.

²⁷¹ BNA CAB 44/14, Historical Section of the Foreign Office, Committee of Imperial Defence, "Relations between Great Britain, Italy and the Senussi 1912-1924," 1927.

the responsibility for security in the interior and the power of enforcement.²⁷² The arrangement limited Idris al-Sanusi's functions as an intermediary and an administrator to the regions the Italians had not occupied in Cyrenaica; with some apprehension over Idris al-Sanusi's possible reactions, colonial officials continued to negotiate directly with tribal leaders who had already declared formal submission in the coastal regions.²⁷³ However, the settlement did not entail any further restrictions on a possible expansion of Sanusi authority in the vast regions of Cyrenaica without an Italian presence, and it granted Idris the right to adopt symbols of his administrative powers, including the ability to fly his own flag.

In their initial discussions for the *modus vivendi*, Idris al-Sanusi called for a position of almost total independence in which the Italian state would provide him with the resources to centralize his control over a Sanusi administration and expand his trade network through Italian-funded infrastructure. Citing the former Egyptian Khedive Muhammad Ali as a model for his ideal position as an independent ruler of the Cyrenaican interior, Idris asked that the Italian state provide him with arms, money, and officers for military training to assert his authority over potential opponents in the region. The Italian officials in the negotiations, on the other hand, asked for the formal submission of Idris al-Sanusi to the Italian colonial state and the total disarmament of the Sanusi *zawāyā* and affiliated tribal forces in Cyrenaica.²⁷⁴

The British involvement in the negotiations compelled compromise on both sides, but the final agreement corresponded more closely to Idris al-Sanusi's stipulations. The British pushed

²⁷² Attilio Teruzzi, *Cirenaica verde*, (Rome: Mondadori, 1931), 32-33.

²⁷³ ACS Carte Luigi Pintor, Busta 1, Fasc. 1, Governor Ameglio to Pintor, 3/20/1917; ACS Carte Luigi Pintor, Busta 1, Fasc. 1, Governor Ameglio to Pintor, 16 May 1917.

²⁷⁴ BNA FO 141/651, Talbot, "Report on the Negotiations of the Anglo-Italian Mission with Muhammad Idris el Mahdi el Senussi," July-September 1916.

Idris al-Sanusi to conclude an agreement with the Italian state by threatening to confiscate Sanusi properties in Egypt's Western Desert after Ahmad al-Sharif's failed attacks and setting the conclusion of a treaty between the Italian colonial state and the Sanusi notable as a prerequisite for the application of a separate British-Sanusi agreement. British involvement in the negotiations also pushed the Italians to attenuate some of their demands. As a young member of the Sanusi family²⁷⁵ with relatively weak claims to moral or political authority within the Sanusi *ṭarīqa* or among the tribes of the Cyrenaican interior, the British delegate to the negotiations, Colonel Talbot, warned the Italians against asking Idris to submit to Italian rule or attempt full disarmament as measures that would damage his prestige and negate any potential benefits they hoped to gain from their relationship with a Sanusi family member. Throughout the process of negotiations, the British officials went further and pressured the Italian authorities to provide Idris al-Sanusi with the material and military resources to create a friendly and strong Sanusi authority on Egypt's western border. The British arguments to the Italian government in favor of supplying Idris with arms and supplies cited his negotiations with European imperial powers as a source of weakness that damaged his religious prestige insofar as he required assistance to maintain his position as an authority figure in the region.²⁷⁶ Though opening markets and increasing trade helped augment his popularity and prestige, Idris al-Sanusi's divergence from Ahmad al-Sharif and Ramadan al-Suwayhli in their support of the Ottoman objectives in the First World War threatened to undermine his position both within the Sanusi *ṭarīqa* and among the tribes of the Cyrenaican interior.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁵ When the negotiations began, Idris was under thirty years old.

²⁷⁶ BNA FO 141/652, Cairo to the Foreign Office, 3 December 1917.

²⁷⁷ BNA FO 141/651, Talbot to the Residency in Cairo, 22 March 1917.

Idris al-Sanusi recognized the British government as more favorable to his requests and more dependent on his protection from further attacks on Egypt's western border. He appealed to his British contacts when the Italian government failed to give him adequate supplies or funding to counter the activities of supporters of Ahmad al-Sharif or rebellious Tripolitanian notables from joining in anti-European assaults. The close relationship between Idris and British agents grew increasingly embarrassing for the European parties as it risked marginalizing the Italian administration, but the threat that Idris might abandon his position and allow anti-British attacks on the Egyptian border to resume prompted the British government to pressure the Italians to provide Idris with arms as a solution to gaining security in the desert at a minimal cost.²⁷⁸ The British Government offered to provide military supplies but insisted on channeling them through the Italian colonial administration to encourage Idris to communicate directly with the government in Benghazi and rid themselves of a difficult political situation with an Islamic leader whose followers stretched across the indistinct border between Cyrenaica and Egypt.²⁷⁹

The British and Italian officials involved in the process of negotiations hoped to limit their recognition of Idris al-Sanusi as a religious figure with no reference to political power or regional autonomy, but they recognized that the process of negotiations and the subsequent attempts to bolster Idris al-Sanusi's position as a regional intermediary necessarily entailed a recognition of his status as a political figure.²⁸⁰ British authorities in Egypt feared the possible implications for claims to political authority among Muslim elites in other British territories, and

²⁷⁸ BNA FO 141/652, British Ambassador in Rome to Colonel Syms, 24 September 1917; BNA FO 141/652, British Ambassador in Rome to Balfour, 23 October 1917.

²⁷⁹ BNA FO 141/652, Cairo to the Foreign Office, 23 November 1917.

²⁸⁰ BNA FO 141/651, Commander in Chief to the High Commissioner, 25 August 1916.

the Italian colonial administration acknowledged that assigning a political role to Idris further curtailed Italy's weak claims to sovereignty beyond the urban centers along the coast. The issue of temporal versus religious authority caused some confusion in the British approach to dealing with the Sanusi properties in Egypt. Eager to promote their relationship with Idris, they tried to distinguish between the *zawāyā* Idris could claim as personal property—which they agreed to retribute to him and his family—from those that belonged to the Sanusi *ṭarīqa* more broadly. British officials in Cairo and the Frontier Districts Administration decided to destroy the Sanusi *zawāyā* in the Western Desert that did not belong directly to Idris al-Sanusi as “the outward symbols of the Senussist temporal power,” though they promised not to damage the mosques connected to the Sanusi territories as proof of their respect for Islam and for the religious authority of the Sanusi family.²⁸¹

Luigi Pintor, the Italian mediator in the negotiations for the Acroma Accords, cited the risk of acknowledging the temporal authority of the Sanusiyya as further justification for postponement of the disarmament of the Sanusi *zawāyā* and the tribes of the Cyrenaican interior, a deferment they agreed to in part because they recognized the advantage of having their ally maintain arms to defend against possible attacks from German-Ottoman supporters or from those within the region who challenged his authority. Fundamentally, Pintor doubted the ability of Idris al-Sanusi to convince the tribal forces to disarm, but he also argued against disarmament as a process that would confirm and solidify a political position for Idris, a position the Italian and British governments had implicitly recognized when they first contacted him to negotiate the settlement of the Acroma Accords.

²⁸¹ BNA FO 141/651, High Commissioner of Egypt to Talbot, 4 April 1917

But having reached our goal which is temporary and not definitive, there is no reason to renew this recognition or to do acts that in any case imply it. Now, asking for and—in the best hypothesis—obtaining the disarmament of the tribes by means of Said [Idris] belongs precisely to this category of acts. It would have the advantage of securing for us the—always quite relatively—better guarantees of tranquility in the country; but this we will already obtain with the principle obligation of Idris to maintain the peace. And on the other hand, it would have the great disadvantage, which I have already hinted at, of confirming and perhaps increasing his power over the populations.²⁸²

This anxiety over the potential for their agreements to empower Idris beyond his position as a religious figure and the tension between needing him to control the Cyrenaican tribes while wanting to make him dependent on the colonial state suffused the entire process of negotiations between Idris and the European state officials. Officials in the fascist administration criticized the colonial state of their liberal predecessors for conferring a disproportionate level of political authority to a religious figure and accused them of creating a local state where one did not belong with the capacity to challenge Italian sovereignty.

Tripolitania and the Continued Influence of Ottoman Officers

The conclusion of the Acroma Accords produced immediate benefits for the Italian and British colonial administrations in Cyrenaica and Egypt that outweighed concerns over the recognition of Idris al-Sanusi as a political authority. The Acroma Accords contributed to an

²⁸² “Ma raggiunto il nostro scopo che è transitorio e non definitivo, non vi è alcun motivo di rinnovare questo riconoscimento o di fare atti che comunque lo implicino. Ora, il chiedere e—nella migliore ipotesi—l’ottenere il disarmo della tribù per mezzo del Saied appartiene, appunto, a questa categoria di atti. Avrebbe bensì il vantaggio di assicurarci—sempre molto, molto relativamente—maggiori garanzie di tranquillità nel paese; ma questo già l’otteniamo ora con l’obbligo principale di Idris di mantenere la pace. E d’altro canto ha lo svantaggio grande, cui accennavo dianzi, di confermare, forse accrescere il suo potere sulle popolazioni.” ACS Carte Luigi Pintor, “La sistemazione dei nostri rapporti con la Senussia,” 1 April 1919.

intensified threat of anti-Italian activities in Tripolitania that reinforced European reliance on Idris al-Sanusi to prevent similar disorder in Cyrenaica and to buffer against further attacks on British posts in Egypt from the west. The Acroma Accords stipulated that Idris al-Sanusi expel Ottoman and Turkish officers from Cyrenaica, and the European officials emphasized their determination to get rid of Nuri Pasha, Enver Pasha's brother and a prominent Ottoman officer in the Tashkilat-i Makhsusah who had gone into the Cyrenaican interior to train Bedouin forces in the Sanusi *zawāyā* and persuaded Ahmad al-Sharif to lead the attacks on the Egyptian border.²⁸³ In 1917, Nuri Pasha left Cyrenaica and turned to solidify ties between the Ottoman state and notables in Tripolitania against the influence of the Sanusiyya in the wake of the Acroma Accords. Nuri Pasha redirected Ottoman resources from Cyrenaica to Tripolitanian notables, and he appointed Ramadan al-Suwayhli as a local governor in the Fezzan and Sirte, displacing the Warfalla notable Abd al-Nabi Belkhir.²⁸⁴

For British and Italian interests, the agreements with Idris al-Sanusi provided a defense against the threat that the coalition of Ottoman officers and local notables in Tripolitania could extend their territorial control into Cyrenaica to use it as a staging ground for further attacks on Italian garrisons along the coast and British posts in Egypt's Western Desert. After the conclusion of the Acroma Accords, Nuri Pasha and Ramadan al-Suwayhli targeted Sanusi shaykhs and their supporters in Tripolitania in protest against the political influence of Idris al-Sanusi and his negotiations, but at the same time, they reached out to Ahmad al-Sharif and other members of the Sanusi family in search of a further alliance in favor of Ottoman influence.²⁸⁵

²⁸³ Al-Horeir, "Social and Economic Transformations," 160.

²⁸⁴ Anderson, "Ramadan al-Suwayhli", 122; Ahmida, *Making Modern Libya*, 125.

²⁸⁵ Soave, *Fezzan*, 455.

When Idris al-Sanusi effectively blocked a plan for Ahmad al-Sharif to combine his Sanusi forces with those of Ramadan al-Suwayhli in assaults on the British border in March 1917, his willingness to block his cousin reconfirmed the utility of Idris al-Sanusi as an alternative leader of the Sanusi family and the Sanusi *ṭarīqa* and encouraged the European powers to increase their provisions to the Sanusi forces in Cyrenaica.²⁸⁶

Despite this evidence of Idris al-Sanusi's dedication to upholding the Acroma Accords, European agents in the region continued to express reservations concerning the nature of his relationship with Ahmad al-Sharif. Some suspected the Sanusi cousins of trying to hedge their bets in the uncertain international order of the First World War with Ahmad al-Sharif collaborating with pro-Ottoman forces while Idris negotiated a settlement with British and Italian authorities. At times, Idris presented his relationship with Ahmad al-Sharif as cordial and defined primarily through their distinctive positions within the Sanusi *ṭarīqa*; he claimed that Ahmad al-Sharif had given him administrative duties in Cyrenaica among the Sanusi adherents during the attacks on the Egyptian border with the idea that Ahmad al-Sharif would retain spiritual leadership as a militant religious figure.²⁸⁷ In other instances, Idris portrayed the negotiations as an act of defiance against Ahmad al-Sharif and his followers within the Sanusi *ṭarīqa* such that Idris required the material and military assistance of the Italian and British states to defend his position against possible recriminations. Idris used the fear of Ahmad al-Sharif's influence and the possibility of his alliance with Tripolitanian notables to leverage further concessions and material assistance from state authorities. Idris pressured British and Italian

²⁸⁶ BNA FO 141/651, High Commissioner in Egypt to Talbot in Tobruk, 1 March 1917; De Cadole, *Life and Times*, 38.

²⁸⁷ BNA FO 270/987, British Ambassador in Rome to the Foreign Office, 23 May 1916.

officials to expedite a resumption of regional trade to provide basic supplies to a region where years of war and drought had produced chronic shortages. The renewal of trade promised to affirm Idris al-Sanusi's position and the legitimacy of his agreements with the colonial state among merchant tribes and Sanusi elites who stood to benefit from the influx of revenue to Cyrenaican *zawāyā*.²⁸⁸ The European powers also increased their supply of arms and military expertise as a counterweight to the possible influence of Ahmad al-Sharif and the Tripolitanian notables among the tribes of Cyrenaica. The central government in Rome issued a Royal Decree in the spring of 1918 to establish armed garrisons with government funding to bolster Idris al-Sanusi's nascent authority both within Cyrenaica and against possible incursions from Tripolitanian-Ottoman forces. The directive called for two distinct categories of armed garrisons. The "gruppi Idrissiti" were intended to defend against possible attacks from Tripolitania and consisted of two garrisons of about one thousand men each. The "Campi armati senussiti" were meant to support Idris al-Sanusi's hold on regional authority and security of trade routes and consisted of a force of over two thousand men.²⁸⁹

Ahmad al-Sharif went into exile in 1918 and was never to return to Cyrenaica. Intelligence reports documented a continued favorable relationships between Idris and Ahmad al-Sharif, adding weight to the idea that Ahmad al-Sharif preserved his position as the religious leader of the Sanusi *ṭarīqa*.²⁹⁰ The possible return of Ahmad al-Sharif to Cyrenaica appeared as a constant source of anxiety among Italian colonial officials in the following years as an

²⁸⁸ ACS Carte Luigi Pintor, Busta 1, Fasc. 1, De Vita and Pintor to Moccagatta, 14 March 1917; BNA FO 141/651, Wingate to Talbot, 27 March 1917.

²⁸⁹ ASMAI II 150/2/16, Decree from Vittorio Emanuele III, 1 April 1918; ASMAI II 150/2/16, Definition of the Gruppi Idrissi and the Campi Senussiti, No author, 27 May 1920.

²⁹⁰ BNA FO 170/1147, Major M.S. MacDonnell and Captain L.V.A. Royle, August 1918.

embodiment of opposition to the Italian colonial state. At times, Ahmad al-Sharif's subsequent affiliation with international movements of Islamic and Arab nationalism seemed to represent an opportunity for the Italian Foreign Ministry after the First World War to promote Italy as a friendly nation to Islamic nationalist movements as an effort to damage British and French interests, but one that posed a threat to their power-sharing arrangement with Idris al-Sanusi.²⁹¹

Ahmad al-Sharif's departure and the Ottoman defeat in the First World War sparked a crisis of leadership in Tripolitania among tribal leaders and coastal elites.²⁹² Initially, Ottoman officers continued to organize armed forces in Tripolitania after the armistice ending the First World War, and a coalition of Tripolitanian notables declared independence and created the Tripolitanian Republic in November 1918.²⁹³ However, competition for Ottoman resources and for political influence in the region led to a series of power struggles some Libyan historians have characterized as a civil war. The Italian colonial state contributed to the disorder by providing arms and supplies to provoke armed conflicts between Ramadan al-Suwayhli on the one hand and an alliance of the Muntasir family and the Warfalla leader Abd al-Nabi Belkhir on the other. Their violent struggles only ended with the death of Ramadan al-Suwayhli in 1920.²⁹⁴

²⁹¹ Juliette Bessis, *La Méditerranée fasciste: L'Italie mussolinienne et la Tunisie* (Paris: Editions Karthala, 1980), 85.

²⁹² Lisa Anderson, "Ramadan al-Suwayhli", 124.

²⁹³ BNA FO 608/209, British Ambassador to Rome, Sir R. Rodd to the Foreign Office, 13 January 1919.

²⁹⁴ Ahmida, *Making of Modern Libya*, 131.

Religious Authority in the Era of Negotiations

Italy's declaration of war against the Ottoman Empire in 1915 contributed to the loss in territory and the political and military chaos in the Libyan interior for the following years as Ottoman and German officers funded anti-Italian forces in the region, but it also held the promise for the Italian Ministry of Colonies to initiate a reconfiguration of the Islamic justice system. Soon after they entered the war, the Italian government repealed the Treaty of Lausanne, thus removing the required recognition of the Sultan's position as Caliphate. Italian officials recognized the shift as an opportunity to gain more direct control over the appointment of qadi, or Islamic judges to the civil courts in the Italian-controlled territories, but the end of the recognition of the Ottoman Caliphate also suggested a possible increase in the influence of the Sanusi *ṭarīqa* in religious matters. The Minister of Colonies, Ferdinando Martini, advocated direct state involvement in collaboration with a commission of local notables to name the functionaries in the Islamic and civil courts in the Italian-controlled territories as check on Sanusi influence in religious matters.²⁹⁵

With the guidance of a commission of local notables originally created in 1913, Italian state officials in Tripolitania established a new order of functionaries and religious elites in 1916. For the most part, Italian officials and their local informants culled from the ranks of notables and religious scholars who had gained prominence during the Ottoman administration. The new order compounded the confusion among Italian state officials, especially in Tripolitania where colonial officials lacked a singular intermediary like Idris al-Sanusi to manage the plurality of tribal chiefs and Muslim elites. In an attempt to clarify the official hierarchy, avoid giving

²⁹⁵ ASMAI II 173/2/3, Minister of Colonies, "Progetto di decreto per la Libia." The document does not have a date, but since it was focused on proposing a plan in the case of what he considered the probable declaration of war, it seems most likely from early 1915.

offense, and provide a “tangible sign of the consideration for their function, their office, and their social status, the Governor established a system of identification based on color-coded cards issued to recognized notables, functionaries, and ulema.²⁹⁶

The end of Ottoman influence in local judicial system spurred the production of a number of studies concerning the Caliphate and Islamic law with recommendations for an approach to nominating functionaries that focused primarily on balancing the regional authority of the Sanusiyya. When Martini had taken over the Ministry of Colonies from Bertolini in December 1914, he formed an advisory panel of scholars and experts on Islamic issues in North Africa to correct what he considered his predecessor’s deplorable lack of knowledge about the concerns of local populations, and he deployed the panel to formulate strategies for a new religious and juridical order in anticipation of a post-Ottoman era. The panel included C.A. Nallino, Italy’s most famous scholar of Arabic language and culture, and Davide Santillana, a Tunisian-born Italian citizen who had experience working as a consultant for the French administration and as a representative promoting Italian interest in Tunisia before the occupation of the Libyan territories. Martini intended the commission of Islamic experts to help the administration identify potential qadi whose position in shari’a courts would fit in with Italian strategic interests while avoiding any offense of the “religious sense of the populations.”²⁹⁷ Martini also instructed the panel to determine the best plan of action for dealing with the *waqf* properties in the colonies to increase Italian state control over property ownership through the increased influence over local qadi.

²⁹⁶ ASMAI II 126/1/14, Ameglio, “Circolare sul tessere per funzionari e notabili indigeni,” 1918; Baldinetti, “Italian Colonial Rule and Muslim Elites,” 101-102.

²⁹⁷ ASMAI II 109/1/3, Italian Minister of Colonies, “Costituzione di un commissione per lo studio di questioni islamiche d’interesse coloniale”, December 1914.

As part of the activities of this panel of experts, the Ministry of Colonies published a study by Nallino in 1919 discrediting the Ottoman Caliphate. Nallino argued that the Italian administration and Europeans in general had mistakenly separated the role of the Sultan from his position of Caliph so they thought he could have religious authority in the Libyan territories without having political authority in a role he likened to that of the pope in his position outside the state. The Treaty of Lausanne had formalized these mistaken ideas to give the Caliph absolute authority over the religious hierarchy in the Libyan territories and assigning the qadi the position of a local religious authority instead of understanding that the qadi served as a judicial magistrate which, he argued, the Italian state should appoint to preserve its claims to sovereignty.²⁹⁸ Though not part of the advisory commission on Islamic issues, Enrico Insabato produced a study intended for an international audience in 1920 in which he echoed Nallino's criticism against the Ottoman Caliphate as a political artifice. True to form, Insabato presented the Sanusiyya as a civilizing force that would work to the advantage of colonial state authority. He argued that colonial powers could easily prevent pan-Islamic movements from forming by cultivating relationships with Sufi orders who counteract the risk that the traditional Islamic elite—ulema and qadi mostly in urban areas—might perpetuate the influence of the Ottoman Sultan or introduce pan-Islamic schemes to local religious, civil, and political affairs. “The Sanusiyya is not a heresy, but it contains, in a latent state, the possibility of hostile attitudes, whether against the Caliph or against the orthodox ulema; this is why it is of paramount interest to know their

²⁹⁸ Nallino, *Notes sur la nature du <<Califat>>*, 13-14, 21-22.

potential thoroughly to use them when needed.”²⁹⁹ Davide Santillana addressed the issue of property rights, especially in relation to an article in the Acroma Accords that required the Italian state to restitute all Sanusi properties. Santillana recommended using the expected increase in state influence over local qadi after the First World War to have them generate detailed explanations for the terms of *waqf* ownership in the Libyan territories, suggesting that in certain cases, the state could retain ownership rights over Sanusi *zawāyā* and their related properties that had been abandoned during the war.³⁰⁰

The attempt to balance the authority of Idris al-Sanusi through state control over the judicial system fit into the broader pattern that was a defining feature of Italian colonial rule of trying to play competing factions against one another in the regional competition for control over resources.³⁰¹ As part of the colonial state’s efforts to distinguish between military and civil territories in the Libyan colonies, the attempt to reformulate the civil judicial system during a period of state retraction to the coast merits further attention.³⁰² The formal cataloguing of functionaries, notables, and ulema embodied the endeavors of the Italian colonial state to increase their control over power structures in a shrinking territorial space while projecting an image of the Italian government as amenable to the interests of Muslim elites.

²⁹⁹ “Le senoussisme n’est pas une hérésie, mais il renferme, à l’état latent, la possibilité d’attitudes hostiles, soit contre le Khalife, soit contre les oulémas orthodoxes; c’est pourquoi il est d’intérêt primordial de connaître à fond ces possibilités pour s’en servir en cas de besoin.” Insabato, *L’Islam et la politique des alliés* (Nancy-Paris-Strasbourg: Berger-Levrault, 1920), 60.

³⁰⁰ Baldinetti, *David Santillana*, 68.

³⁰¹ Anna Maria Medici, “Waqfs of Cyrenaica and Italian Colonialism in Libya (1911-1941), *Held in Trust: Waqf in the Islamic World*, Pascale Ghazaleh, ed. (Cairo: American University in Cairo, 2011), 3.

³⁰² For a brief introduction to the issues involved, see: Francesco Castro, “Diritto coloniale e diritto musulmano,” *Un Colonialismo, due sponde del Mediterraneo. Atti del seminario di studi storici italo-libici* (Pistoia: Editrice C.R.T., 2000).

Religious Policies in the Post-War Era and the Catholic Mission

The attempt to foster deeper ties between the Italian colonial state and the Muslim elite precipitated an intensification in the longstanding discord between Governor Ameglio and the Bishop of the Libyan territories, Ludovico Antomelli. Repeated professions of religious tolerance and attempts to trace cultural affinities between Italy and the Muslim world confirmed Antomelli's long-standing suspicions that officials in the Italian colonial state—Ameglio in particular—harbored anti-Church and pro-Masonry sentiments. The tensions between Antomelli and Ameglio came to a head when the Qadi of Tripoli—a judge appointed to the civil and religious courts by the Italian administration in consultation with the native commission—wrote an open letter to encourage local populations to accept Italian rule stemming from parallels he traced between Islam and Christianity. The author, Abd al-Rahman al-Busairi, equated the piety of Christians to that of Muslims and urged greater cooperation in the Libyan territories rooted in a shared sense of religiosity. Attacking the article as blasphemous, Antomelli portrayed its publication as part of a larger pattern of pro-Islamic anti-Christian tendencies in the Libyan colonies. Antomelli demanded an official denunciation of the article and greater protection of Christian values as part of Italy's heritage and legal framework. "I demand that in the same manner that requires the respect of the Muslim beliefs, so at least you respect our holy religion and the divine Person of Jesus. And in asking for this, I ask that which justice and fairness require: both because the Catholic religion is the religious of our Italian statutes, and for that

feeling that in any place, but especially in the colonies, must be used by everyone to avoid exasperating others and generating discord.”³⁰³

Voices in the Italian administration accused Antomelli of disloyalty in creating difficulties for the colonial state, and the hostility between the Bishop and the colonial state escalated.³⁰⁴ When Antomelli wrote a pastoral letter in 1917 that aired his criticism of the colonial state practices, Ameglio and his administration accused the Bishop of spreading unpatriotic messages that threatened to demoralize Italian troops for the colonial enterprise. The nub of their disputes concerned the persistent issue of state versus Church control of education, an issue of particular importance as Italian state officials anticipated the demand for state education to train local functionaries. In his letter, Antomelli accused the state schools in the Libyan territories of employing atheists as teachers, an accusation the director of the Technical School in Tripoli denied.³⁰⁵ Ameglio attributed a broader anti-Italian sentiment to the Bishop. “It is enough to read from beginning to end the pastoral letter to be convinced that under the mantle of religion, in the name of the heart of Jesus, he attempts a full attack, even as he pretends not to, against the

³⁰³ “domando che in quella guisa che si esige il rispetto alle credenze mussulmane, così almeno si rispetti la nostra santa religione e la Persona divina di Gesù. E domandando questo, domando ciò che giustizia ed equanimità esigono: sia perchè la religione cattolica è la religione dello statuto nostro italiano; e sia per quel tatto che dovunque, ma specialmente qui in colonia si deve ad ognuno usare, onde evitare ciò che può esasperare gli animi altrui, e divenire incentivo di discordie intestine.” Called on him to enforce respect for the Christian religion that was “maestra di civiltà la diletta nostra Patria.” ASMAI II 121/1/3, Antomelli to Ameglio, 21 January 1916.

³⁰⁴ ASMAI II 121/1/3, Ameglio to Minister of Colonies, 5 December 1916.

³⁰⁵ ASMAI II 121/1/3, Director of the Technical School of Tripoli to the Superintendent of Schools, 5 March 1917.

national war, the Government of the King, the authority, the institutions, and the customs of this Colony.”³⁰⁶

The missionaries painted the antagonism of Ameglio against Antomelli as a part of a larger pattern of anti-Church behavior and the influence of Freemasonry among Italian military officials and political elite. There might have been some substance to those accusations. A number of high-ranking military officers supported Freemasonry and opposed Church influence in Italian politics at home and abroad. More immediately, however, the tensions between Antomelli and Ameglio reflected the relative unimportance of the idea of spreading *italianità* for Ameglio and the officials in his administration. In an era of chaotic civil war in the Tripolitanian interior and the establishment of a Sanusi-Italian coalition in Cyrenaica, colonization schemes and the promotion of Italian civilization in the Libyan territories—including the Catholic Church—took a back seat to the more immediate demand of stability.³⁰⁷ In an era of decreased state spending on colonial enterprises and the rising popularity of an international rhetoric calling for self-determination, Italian officials prioritized the incorporation of Muslim elites in power-sharing systems as a stopgap to prevent total loss of their claims to sovereignty in the Libyan territories.

³⁰⁶ “Basta leggere da capo a fondo la lettera pastorale per convincersi che sotto il manto della religione, nel nome del cuore di Gesu, essa tenta una carica a fondo, pur dandosi l’aria di non farlo, contro la guerra nazionale, il Governo del Re, le autorità, le istituzioni e le costumanze di questa Colonia.” ASMAI II 121/1/3, Ameglio to Minister of Colonies, 27 February 1917.

³⁰⁷ Ianari, *Chiesa, Coloni e Islam*, 109.

Economic Development and the Italian-Arabic Union

The devastation of the First World War and the loss of territorial control in the Libyan colonies distracted national attention away from popular projects for economic development and mass colonization among Italian nationalists, and the prolonged conflicts among competing forces in Tripolitania precluded an extension of private or public development projects in the western region. Both Idris al-Sanusi and the Italian colonial officials, however, saw the Acroma Accords as laying the groundwork for future economic and infrastructure developments in Cyrenaica. Idris encouraged Italian state and private investments in projects to develop regional communications and transportation infrastructure to encourage trade and agricultural production, but he also took measures to ensure that he and his allies would benefit financially from the developments and retain or expand their control over regional trade. In the original list of demands Idris al-Sanusi issued prior to negotiating the terms of the Acroma Accords, he requested that the Italians construct railways into the interior from the coast with the stipulation that half of the revenue from the railways would belong to him immediately and that the entire railway system would become his after ten years.³⁰⁸ In the subsequent process of negotiations, Idris dropped the issue of the rail construction. Neither the British nor the Italian documents indicate why the idea of extending the small stretch of Italian railways along the coast into the interior of the region—a development from which both Italian imperial interests and the Sanusi participants in the negotiations clearly stood to benefit—failed to make it into the final agreements in Acroma.

³⁰⁸ BNA FO 141/651, Talbot, “Report on the Negotiations of the Anglo-Italian Mission with Muhammad Idris el Mahdi el Senussi,” July-September 1916.

The plan to extend the railways into the Cyrenaican interior would come back in the negotiations for the Regima Accords in 1920 as part of a plan to expand state control, but it proved a highly contentious issue among the Mogarba tribes of western Cyrenaica who saw the railways as a threat to their control over access to camels, caravan guides, and scarce water through a network of wells in the interior oases. The inclusion of a program of railway construction would ultimately contribute to the failure of the Regima Accords and the subsequent resumption of armed conflicts in Cyrenaica between the Italian military and Sanusi forces with their allied tribes. Most likely, the disappearance of the railway development from the negotiations in the Acroma Accords reflected the urgency of establishing stability that took priority over unpopular projects for state-organized infrastructural development, projects that likely would have faced opposition in Italy as well in a time of heightened economic strain. The final agreements in Acroma did include provisions for the Italian state to provide telephone and telegraph wires between the coastal region and Sanusi *zawāyā* in the Cyrenaican interior as a way to improve communications between Italian state officials and their Sanusi ally, but all other development projects were deferred.³⁰⁹

A little over a year after the negotiation of the Acroma Accords, the relative peace in Cyrenaica and the end of hostilities in the First World War encouraged renewed interest in agricultural and economic development projects among Italian state officials and private speculators. In October 1918, a group of Cyrenaican elites signed an agreement with Italian financiers to create an Italian-Arab Union for Agriculture and Commerce (*Unione Italo-Araba per l'agricoltura e il commercio*). The charter for the Union established two associations: one of

³⁰⁹ ACS Carte Luigi Pintor, b. 1, f. 2, Luigi Pintor, "Seconda missione italiana presso il Said Muhammad Idris ben Muhammad el Madhi es Senussi," 5 May 1917.

regional notables centered in Ajedabiya and the other of financiers centered in Benghazi. The organization promised a mutually beneficial exchange of capital investments for the political influence of the Cyrenaican elite. The association of local notables in Ajedabiya included Idris al-Sanusi, a handful of influential Sanusi *ikhwān*, and leading figures from the Mogarba and Awaghir tribes of western Cyrenaica. The Cyrenaican elites agreed to negotiate terms with tribal leaders of the Cyrenaican interior to secure land, native labor, and livestock necessary for agricultural development. In exchange, the financiers provided capital to pay for labor, seeds, and machinery, and they agreed to an even division of the revenue generated from subsequent exportation of Cyrenaican crops. Through their collaboration, they hoped to become the “principle means of penetration among the populations of the interior.”³¹⁰

The Italo-Arab Union marked the realization of a perpetual goal among liberal colonial officials for a full incorporation of a Sanusi authority in the expansion of Italian influence into the Cyrenaican interior. The Union kept its agreements and activities secret to prevent the unpopularity of the Italian state occupation among tribal leaders of the interior from undermining the political influence of the Cyrenaican association in Ajedabiya, but the Italian Governor of Cyrenaica considered the covert involvement of Idris al-Sanusi in the association crucial to the success of Italian economic penetration of the interior and evidence of the successful results of the Acroma Accords. “The concept is to give a joint interest to the natives in works of economic

³¹⁰ ASMAI II 150/2/3, “Unione Italo-Araba per l’agricoltura ed il commercio,” 19 August 1918.

penetration such that on one hand they act as its guardians while on the other, the government affirms and makes progress in such a way that it appears to be based on independent actions.”³¹¹

However, the Italian-Arab Union also underscored the importance of the tribes centered on Ajedabiya and the area stretching to the west into Sirte in Idris al-Sanusi’s attempts to consolidate his authority in a centralized administration and systemize relations between the coastal areas and the tribes of the Cyrenaican interior. The Regima Accords represented a formalization and extension of the incorporation of Idris al-Sanusi into Italian state and private plans for economic penetration into the interior, but the proposed system threatened a decisive shift in economic and political power away from Ajedabiya to the financial center of Benghazi. The related failure to gain consensus among the Mogarba and Awaghir tribes of western Cyrenaica ultimately contributed to the collapse of the agreements between Idris and the Italian state.

Conclusion

Though the Italian colonial state still officially considered Cyrenaica to be in a state of war during the secret negotiations for the Italian-Arab Union, the cooperation of local elites in Italian development schemes seemed to promise the possibility of future expansion of Italian state presence to reinforce Italy’s status as an imperial power and eventual financial returns for the financiers and state agencies who had funded the colonial enterprise. With the establishment

³¹¹ “Il concetto di cointeressare gli indigeni in opere di penetrazione economica per ottenere che da una parte essi ne siano i tutori e, dall’altra, il Governo affermi e faccia progredire in modo che sembri trattarsi di azioni indipendenti.” ASMAI II 150/2/13, Governor of Cyrenaica to Governor of Tripolitania, “Trattative segrete con il Saied Idris,” 1 October 1916.

of a relatively stable administration in Cyrenaica and the mobilization of funding for infrastructure development, schemes to encourage mass colonization of Italian emigrants into the Libyan territories returned to the forefront of discussions among Italian nationalists and imperial interests. When a group of Tripolitanian notables signed an agreement with Italian officials in April 1919 to establish the Libyan Statutes, the Italian government intended the Statutes to formalize the extension of Italian citizenship and the creation of an Italian-backed regional administration in Tripolitania. Italian nationalists heralded the Libyan Statutes an opportunity to prove Italy's strength as an imperial nation through an expansion of state control and a transfer of Italian emigrants into a fully Italian territory while seeming to comply with Wilsonian ideals of self-determination.

The rapid disintegration of Tripolitania into further regional conflicts revealed the shortcomings of the Italians' understanding of regional politics and the deep unpopularity of the Italian state, but the relative peace in Cyrenaica inspired Italian officials to negotiate a new agreement with Idris al-Sanusi. The resulting Treaty of Regima³¹² represented an attempt to increase the scope of the Sanusi administration through the establishment of a Sanusi Emirate under Idris with the mission of applying the Libyan Statutes in Cyrenaica. Italian officials in Benghazi and Idris saw the Regima Treaty as an opportunity to realize development projects—especially the construction of railways—that would lead to a higher centralization of state control over the tribes of the interior and associated trade routes in the region. Though the new accord affirmed Italian dependence on Idris al-Sanusi for control over the colonial territory, colonial officials wrote about the Regima Treaty and the Sanusi Emirate as a temporary

³¹² The treaty was named after the town al-Rajma in the outskirts of Benghazi. I have kept the standard Italian spelling to avoid confusion.

institution that would inevitably self-destruct due to the inherent weakness of Idris al-Sanusi and the proportionate increase in authority of the Italian colonial state.

Three years after the conclusion of the Regima Treaty, the Italian Minister of Colonies revoked the treaties with Idris al-Sanusi, but only after he fled Cyrenaica for self-imposed exile in Egypt. A variety of factors precipitated the disintegration of the agreements between Idris al-Sanusi and the colonial state. As we have seen, Idris al-Sanusi signaled his support for Italian railway construction in his original demands prior to the negotiations for the Acroma Accords in 1916-1917. The Regima Treaty reintroduced the primacy of railway construction as an instrument of an expansion of the Italian-Sanusi state, and Cyrenaican tribes who had previously favored the Acroma Accords opposed the new measures as a threat to their dominance over access to resources associated with traditional methods of caravan trade. The emergence of a new political order in Rome contributed to the collapse of the Sanusi-Italian efforts at collaboration as Italian nationalists took the reins of the Italian Ministry of Colonies and instituted a campaign for direct military control over the Libyan interior. Characterizing Idris al-Sanusi as simultaneously ineffective and posing a threat to Italian sovereignty, the fascist administration turned away from alliances with Muslim notables and initiated a series of military campaigns into the Libyan interior with the end goal of filling the colonial territory with Italian emigrants and Italian culture.

Ch. 5: The End of the Accords and the Fascist ‘Reconquest’ of the Interior

The Italian Ministry of Colonies officially declared an end to the state of war in Cyrenaica in March 1921, just a few months after the conclusion of the Regima Accords. As a measure of central importance to the Regima Accords and the application of the Libyan Statutes in Cyrenaica, Idris al-Sanusi agreed to assume responsibility for disarming tribal forces in the Cyrenaican interior within eight months of their signing of the treaty. Governor De Martino in Cyrenaica heralded the promised disarmament as establishing a new phase in Italian state expansion that would support increased private investments in Cyrenaican infrastructure and the eventual immigration of Italian agricultural workers, all while improving Italy’s international image as a friendly colonial power in a Muslim society. But the declaration ending the state of war proved premature; notables from Mogarba and Awaghir tribes in western Cyrenaica rejected the Regima Accords as an aggressive extension of Italian state presence that threatened to upset regional trading patterns by shifting the Cyrenaican administrative center to Benghazi and replacing camel-based trade with rail and automobile transportation.

For two years, Italian officials watched from the sidelines as Sanusi elites and shifting alliances of tribal leaders debated whether or not to accept the application of the Libyan Statutes and the Sanusi Emirate. The Regima Accords revealed divisions within the Sanusi family and allied tribal leaders and sparked a struggle for control over the Sanusi coalition between Idris al-Sanusi and Saf al-Din, the younger brother of Ahmad al-Sharif. Unsure of who to trust, officials in the Italian administration complained of being trapped in a web of their own design, stuck defending the uncertain authority of Idris al-Sanusi for the expansion of Italian state control into

the Cyrenaican interior. Given the unpopularity of the Libyan Statutes and the Regima Accords, Italian officials agreed to postpone the issue of disarmament to prevent a widespread backlash against the Sanusi Emirate. Increasingly nervous about the possibility of losing control over the narrow coastal territories, Italian officers reinforced the Sanusi garrisons established by Royal Decree in 1918 and placed them under joint Sanusi-Italian control as an attempt to remind Idris of his dependence on the Italian state.

In the year following the signing of the Regima Accords, attempts to gain the consensus of the Mogarba and Awaghir notables of western Cyrenaica faltered, and the Mogarba notable, Saleh al-Ateusc, developed a plan to unify Cyrenaica and Tripolitania under a Sanusi Emirate in collaboration with nationalist activists in Tripolitania as a way of preventing an expanded Italian presence. Alarmed at the prospect of a Sanusi state beyond Italian control, Italian agents in Cyrenaica began to advocate for an end to the collaborative approach with the Sanusi family and a stronger military presence at the beginning of 1922. Initially, officials in Rome defended Idris against the accusations of Italian agents in Cyrenaica and held on to the belief that a Sanusi intermediary offered the best solution for generating consensus among tribal leaders and preventing the political influence of pan-Islamism or Arab nationalism from generating widespread opposition in Cyrenaica to the Italian colonial state. The shifting political landscape after the fascist March on Rome in October 1922 brought a new cadre of officials to power in Rome who supported the move away from negotiations in favor of direct state control, and in the spring of 1923 the new Minister of Colonies, Luigi Federzoni, officially renounced the Regima Accords. His subsequent replacement of civil functionaries in the colonies with military officers

signaled a distinct transition in the Italian administration and a new readiness to engage in military operations.

Scholarship on the Italian occupation of the Libyan territories has focused either on the rise of fascism and the subsequent change in political leadership in Rome or on fear of Idris al-Sanusi's potential to unify Cyrenaica and Tripolitania as the causal factors for the disintegration of the negotiations. But while the changes in Rome led to an undeniable shift in the willingness of colonial officials to resort to force and the signs of a developing agreement between Tripolitanian and Cyrenaican notables to extend the Sanusi Emirate to the west in the Garian Conference indicated the possibility of a Sanusi authority out of control with ties to nationalist elements throughout the Arab world, the order of events also suggests that the inability of Idris and the Italian administration to gain the consent of tribal leaders in western Cyrenaica for the Regima Accords had signaled the ultimate failure of British and Italian officials to establish Idris al-Sanusi as a viable local intermediary, a failure punctuated by Idris al-Sanusi's departure from Cyrenaica in January 1923 into a self-imposed exile in Egypt. The idea that opposition to Idris al-Sanusi's involvement in Italian development schemes in the Regima Accords precipitated the downfall of the Sanusi-Italian negotiations is one that has not garnered attention in the historiography of colonial Libya, but it offers an explanation for the redefinition of the Sanusi *ṭarīqa* as a force of anti-Italian opposition among a loose and uneasy coalition of tribal leaders and Sanusi military commanders in the interior of Cyrenaica. As we will see, continuities in the personnel of the colonial administration and continued attempts to reopen negotiations with Idris al-Sanusi after 1922 support the focus on the loss of support from local power brokers in the failure of negotiations instead of a simple shift in approach from Rome.

In the years after the departure of Idris al-Sanusi and the annulment of the Regima Accords, Sanusi shaykhs redefined the Sanusi *tarīqa* as an organized movement of anti-colonial armed resistance as the Italian colonial administration initiated a period of increased use of force to extend state presence into the Libyan interior. Initially, the Italian administration focused on military operations in Tripolitania where General Rodolfo Graziani led a series of maneuvers against Warfalla and Awlad Suleiman forces to occupy the oasis of Ghadames and Beni Ulid in the Nafusa Mountains. In the first few years of the fascist administration, the situation in Cyrenaica saw relatively little change apart from an initial occupation of the former seat of Idris al-Sanusi's administration in Ajedabiya, but the Mogarba leader Saleh al-Ateusc, the Awaghir militant Abdullah ben Kheja, and the Sanusi shaykh Omar al-Mukhtar began to organize a broad coalition of "Sanusi" forces in collaboration with Saf al-Din, Ahmad al-Sharif's brother and the military commander of the Italian-supported Sanusi garrisons.

During his second term as Minister of Colonies, Luigi Federzoni and his new Governor of Cyrenaica initiated aggressive military operations in 1926. Calling on an extension of Italian state presence into the Cyrenaican interior, Federzoni set forth a goal of establishing complete military control up to the 29th parallel, a line that reached the oases of Jalo, Awajil, and Marada—oases with primarily Mogarba populations that the Regima Accords had established as Sanusi territory. Federzoni meant the series of occupations as a final solution to the problem posed by Mogarba dominance in Sirtica by cutting off supply lines leading into Egypt and the Cyrenaican coast. The dissolution of the Sanusi administration fed the Italian nationalist fantasy of mass colonization in the Libyan territories, and Federzoni proved an eager advocate of projects designed to transform the region into a fully Italian space. The full force of the Italian

“reconquest” of the Cyrenaican interior did not begin until 1928 when Mussolini sent General Graziani to pacify the eastern territory with the same notoriously repressive methods he had used in Tripolitania, but Federzoni’s administration had set the tone and the expectations for a full territorial conquest. As a vocal and public advocate of reconciliation between the Vatican and the Italian state, Federzoni’s vision for Italian expansion in the Libyan territories included a central role for the Catholic missionaries as partners in the effort to spread Italian culture and the Italian people across the Mediterranean; the end of the negotiations with the Sanusiyya seemed to present an opportunity for him to realize a program of Italian colonization that would reflect his particular vision of Italian nationalism.

Railroads and Camels: Trade and Resistance to the Regima Accords

The Regima Accords did not have the effect Governor De Martino and the Italian Ministry of Colonies had envisioned of incorporating Cyrenaican tribes into the Italian colonial state system. Notables from the Mogarba tribes and dissident Awaghir tribes in western Cyrenaica in particular opposed the application of the Regima Accords and the Libyan Statutes, and their refusal to hand over arms or recognize Italian state authority weakened the position of Idris al-Sanusi as a figurehead for the Sanusi *ṭarīqa* and an intermediary with the Italian state. The Mogarba and Awaghir notables saw the Regima Accords as an insidious vehicle of state expansion at the expense of their local autonomy, and they objected to Italian plans for infrastructural development that threatened to replace caravan trade with rail and automobile travel to devalue their dominant access to water sources and camels.

From the beginning of their occupation, access to safe travel routes for supply lines proved a constant worry for Italian officials in the Libyan colonies, but during the 1910s, the combination of a lack of state funds, the disapproval of local populations, legal restrictions on land ownership, and technical difficulties with the Jebel al-Akhdar plateau near Benghazi restricted the construction of railroads in Cyrenaica.³¹³ Governor De Martino considered the conclusion of the Regima Accords and the extension of the Libyan Statutes in Cyrenaica to represent an opportunity to initiate a new era of economic and state development in the region. Every colonial context, De Martino claimed, passed through two phases. In the first phase, the state limited its functions to political and military operation, and in the second, a heightened level of security allowed for greater private enterprise and a limitation of state functions to “guiding and collaborating” with private projects. “Following the accords with the Sanusiyya and the application of the liberal Statutes, Cyrenaica has doubtlessly entered into the second period: it follows that development will follow from private initiative, strongly supported by the State.”³¹⁴ De Martino had long been an advocate of combined state and private activities in Italian colonial expansion, including his involvement in schemes with the former Egyptian Khedive and the Banco di Roma in Egypt in 1913 to extend railway networks from Tripoli and

³¹³ Stefano Maggi, “The Railways of Italian Africa: Economic, Social and Strategic Features,” *Journal of Transport History* 3, 18 (1997), 58.

³¹⁴ “In seguito agli accordi colla Senussia e alla applicazione degli Statuti liberali, la Cirenaica è entrata indubbiamente nel secondo periodo: conviene dunque che l’azione di valorizzazione muova dall’iniziativa privata, fortemente sostenuta dallo Stato.” ASMAI II 150/2/19, Untitled report on economic development in Cyrenaica. The report does not have an author, but it is most likely by De Martino due to his references to similar development he initiated as Governor of Italian Somaliland in 1910-1916.

Benghazi to Alexandria.³¹⁵ With a promised end to anti-Italian hostilities, De Martino identified the construction of roads and railroads as a first step in the agricultural development of Cyrenaica and its eventual colonization by Italian immigrants, a step that would, he claimed, help transform the region into its proper state as “a piece of Sicily nestled in the African continent.”³¹⁶

The push for the development of infrastructure in Cyrenaica represented the combined interests of political elites and capitalist enterprises in Italy who, like De Martino, expected immediate financial benefits in the Libyan territories with the more distant promise of its future transformation into an Italian space for emigrant workers. The prospect of infrastructure development into the interior inspired a renewed interest in agricultural development schemes among colonial institutions in Italy and encouraged Italian agents in their negotiations with Idris al-Sanusi. In October 1920, a commission from the *Sindacato di studi per la valorizzazione della Cirenaica*, an organization founded in Milan by a senator Angelo Valvassori-Peroni, arrived in Benghazi just a few days before the conclusion of the Regima Accords. The commission supported the plan for joint sovereignty under Italian and Sanusi authority because they argued that it would allow for the development of roads and railways in the region between Benghazi and Derna, the area with the best agricultural land in Cyrenaica.³¹⁷ Following the commission’s

³¹⁵ The scheme was related to the attempt to have the Egyptian Khedive negotiate on behalf of the Italian state with Ahmad al-Sharif. See Matsumoto-Best, “British and Italian Imperial Rivalry,” 302. A railroad track from Sollum along the Cyrenaican-Egyptian border and Alexandria was completed in the 1920s as part of a general development of railroad lines throughout North Africa in the interwar era. See Soraya Altorki and Donald P. Cole, “Land and Identity among Awlad ‘Ali Beduoin: Egypt’s Northwest Coast,” in *Nomadic Societies in the Middle East and North Africa Entering the 21st Century*, ed. Dawn Chatty (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 636.

³¹⁶ “un pezzo di Sicilia innestato nel continente africano,” Ibid.

³¹⁷ Cresti, *Non desiderare la terra*, 62-69.

recommendations and the conclusion of the Regima Accords, the colonial technical services decided to focus the development of roads and rail in the area between Derna and al-Marj, a development that contributed to the transformation of al-Marj from a small village into a major town during the 1920s.³¹⁸

Anticipating negative reactions against road and rail construction, the Regima Accords charged Idris al-Sanusi with the specific task of using his influence to prevent tribal leaders in Cyrenaica from opposing Italian plans for infrastructural development in the region. Article Nineteen of the Regima Accords noted the importance of Idris al-Sanusi's willingness and ability to assure the application of the Libyan Statutes in Cyrenaica as a precondition for his continued good standing within the Italian state system and the corresponding financial and political benefits he stood to gain from his position. In a stipulation that has received little attention in scholarship on the negotiations between Idris and Italian officials, this final article of the Regima Accords gave particular weight to the intended effect of the Libyan Statutes to promote private industry and the development of communications and transportation infrastructure. "The Emir for his part will undertake a project of persuasion by means of his high influence so that there should be no obstacle on the part of those who oppose the creation of roads and railroads, of postal, bus, telegraph and telephone lines, all works required for the progress of the country and

³¹⁸ BNA FO 141/757, Frontier Districts Administration to the Residency at Ramleh, 9 August 1921; On the transformation to al-Marj, see Maggi, "Railways of Italian Africa," 63. The Italians changed the name of al-Marj to Barce, a reference to a name for the region in imperial Rome. By 1927, al-Marj became the center of activity of Italian colonials and industrialists due to the train services. According to Luigi Federzoni, the fascist Minister of Colonies, the colonial population of the town grew from 30 Italians in 1922 to 900 by 1927. See Luigi Federzoni, *La politica coloniale del fascismo: Discorso pronunciato alla Camera dei Deputati nella tornata del 18 marzo 1927* (Rome: Tipografia della Camera dei Deputati, 1927), 27.

the interest and prosperity of commerce.”³¹⁹ As the final clause of the Regima Accords, Article Nineteen betrays the true thrust of the treaty for the Italian officials and their regional allies involved in the negotiations. They intended the disarmament of tribal forces, formation of the Cyrenaican parliament, and the establishment of an Emirate under Idris al-Sanusi to promote conditions favorable to Italian private and public investment in Libyan infrastructure.

As a sign of the importance of the tribal leaders of western Cyrenaica in realizing the objectives of the Regima Accords, the Italian Ministry of Colonies wrote to leading members of the Awaghir and Mogarba tribes in Ajedabiya and the Jebel al-Akhdar regions to reassure them that the new system would not diminish their status or their local autonomy. Italian authorities informed them that the state would keep out of tribal politics and leave them to choose their own leaders and potential representatives to a future Cyrenaican Parliament they intended to establish in Benghazi. Hoping to forestall any possible violent opposition to the new measures, the Italian authorities told the Mogarba and Awaghir notables that they could even choose to abstain from engaging in the Italian state system entirely if they wished. “Those Tribes who do not wish to accept the Law will remain in peace in their country, but they will not be represented either in the House of Deputies (Mabo’san) or in the Council of Administration, nor will their Shaykhs be granted any privileges by the Government.”³²⁰ However, the Italian authorities failed to address what proved to be the central issue for tribal leaders in the expansion of infrastructure.

³¹⁹ “L’Emiro per sua parte, s’impegna a svolgere opera di persuasione mediante la sua alta influenza, affinché nessuno ostacolo sia opposto da parte di chi ? alla creazione di strade ordinarie e ferrate, di linee postali, automobilistiche, telegrafiche e telefoniche, lavori tutti richiesti dal progresso del paese e dall’interesse e prosperità del commercio.” There are a few copies of the Regima Accords in the Italian colonial archives. See for example ACS FG 1/2/2, Copy of the Regima Accords with agreements on salaries for Sanusi notables, 25 October 1920.

³²⁰ BNA FO 141/652, translation of a letter from Italian authorities to the Shaykhs of Barka, Military Administrator of the Frontier Districts Administration to the British High Commissioner in Egypt, 15 December 1920. The letter was dated 23 Gamad I, 338 = 23 Jumada al-Awwal 1338 (14 February 1920).

The tribal leaders of Cyrenaica responded to the Italian authorities with a refusal to recognize the validity of any negotiations Idris al-Sanusi concluded with the Italian government that went beyond the boundaries established in the Acroma Accords from 1917. Their opposition to the Regima Accords reflected a common concern with the potential centralization of authority in the Italian state center of Benghazi as a threat to their regional autonomy, but they focused on the threat Italian plans to extend the railroad and roads into their territory posed to existing trade patterns. “As regards the election of the Council, we, the nomad Arabs, will have our Council in Agdabia [Ajedabiya], and will not agree to its being at Benghazi. We do not consent to having any railways in our country, as this would cause a loss to us in the trade of hiring camels.”³²¹ De Martino’s proposed railway construction and the establishment of the state center in Benghazi threatened to shift political power away from the town of Ajedabiya and the nearby region of Sirtica where Idris al-Sanusi claimed the support of Mogarba notables. Mogarba notables dominated trading patterns in their region based on their access to camels and their ties to merchants in the interior oases, many of whom came from Mogarba client tribes like the Zuwaya. Besides detracting from camel-based trade, the construction of railway lines required digging new wells to supply workers, thus diminishing the value of the Mogarba tribes’ control of wells in a network from Sirte to the oases of Kufra.³²² The Mogarba and Awaghir shaykhs did not object to Italian involvement in regional commercial activities; on the contrary, they noted their approval of the Acroma Accords because they understood it to limit Italian presence in

³²¹ Ibid. Reply from the *shaykhs* dated 29 Gamad Awal 1338 (20 February 1920).

³²² Triaud, *Légende noire*, 498. Triaud quoted a report from the French military commander in Chad, Col. Largeau from a report noting that the Mogarba gave the French command permission to construct a well in Kufra for their own supply. “L’eau est tirée al’aide d’une poulie et d’un cable et chanvre que les chefs de caravanes renouvellent au fur et à mesure de son usure; ce sont des chameaux qui font monter les puisettes plein.” CAOM Afrique, IV 37bis., Colonel Largeau, 7 February 1912.

Cyrenaica to commerce and not government. They understood the Regima Accords as the first attempt of the Italian state to assert its control over trade through the development of infrastructure. “We accept in our country only the commercial purposes of the Italians (with the exception of railways).”³²³

The refusal of the Mogarba and Awaghir shaykhs to accept the validity of the Regima Accords undermined both the authority of the Italian colonial state and the position of Idris al-Sanusi as the figurehead of the Sanusi *ṭarīqa* and a colonial intermediary. The shaykhs made it clear in their response that they recognized the validity of the Sanusi government, but they refused the right of Idris al-Sanusi to negotiate on their behalf, rejecting the Italian and British project to cultivate Idris as an authoritative representative of the Sanusi *ṭarīqa*. The Cyrenaican shaykhs referred to “our Senussi Black Flag, the flag of our Prophet” as a symbol of their freedom from Italian state control, and recognizing the Libyan Statutes as an initial move towards state involvement in the region through the development of laws and infrastructure, they declared that, “if the aim of the Italian Government is to spread its flag and to publish laws, we fully disapprove of this, and any peace made between the Italian Government and Sayed Idris without our consent will be valueless.”³²⁴ The objection of the Cyrenaican tribal leaders revealed the symbolic value of the Sanusi *ṭarīqa* as a political movement for anti-colonial independence that could be entirely divorced from the figure of Idris al-Sanusi and, increasingly, from the entire Sanusi family as an uneasy coalition of Sanusi notables—military leaders and tribal elite with prominent positions in the Sanusi *ṭarīqa*—took up the Sanusi flag against the extension of Italian development projects into the interior.

³²³ BNA FO 141/652, Reply from the *shaykhs* dated 29 Gamad Awal 1338 (20 February 1920).

³²⁴ *Ibid.*

In protest against the Regima Accords, Sanusi forces began attacking Italian road and rail construction projects in the region of Cyrene in May 1921.³²⁵ To pursue his interest in promoting railway construction in the region, Idris al-Sanusi organized meetings with shaykhs from Mogarba and Awaghir tribes twice between February and the end of October 1921 to try to bring them to agree to disarmament and the extension of the Italian administration in the Regima Accords, an extension that would limit the Sanusi administration to the oases of Awjila, Jalo, and Kufra to permit Italian state authority and development throughout the coastal regions and the plateau of Jebel al-Akhdar.³²⁶ The proposed construction of the railroad between al-Marj and Derna proved too unpopular among the Mogarba and Awaghir tribes, and the first meeting in al-Abiar ended with the Cyrenaican shaykhs declaring their intention to oppose the application of the Regima Accords with force if necessary.³²⁷ After a meeting in October in Ajedabiya, Idris managed to gain the Mogarba shaykhs' provisional acceptance of the Italian project to build railways and a temporary halt in attacks on infrastructure projects with the stipulation that they be allowed to keep their armed *adwar*.³²⁸

Governor De Martino, focused on the immediate promise of security for Italian development projects, pushed for a temporary solution to postpone the issue of disarmament by placing the armed groups the Italian government established and funded in 1918 to protect Italian

³²⁵ ACS Carte Luigi Pintor, b. 5, f. 21, Commissary of Cirene to Pintor, 6 June 1922. The Italians adopted the Roman name of Cirene for the city now known as Susa.

³²⁶ BNA FO 141/652, Frontier Districts Administration to the Chancery, the Residency in Cairo, 29 October 1921.

³²⁷ BNA FO 141/757, Military Administrator of the Frontier Districts Administration to the British Resident in Ramleh, 6 July 1921; ACS Carte Luigi Pintor, b. 3, f. 14 Governor De Martino to Minister of Colonies, 14 October 1921.

³²⁸ ACS Carte Luigi Pintor, b. 3, f. 14, Captain De Angelis to Governor De Martino, 18 October 1921.

and Sanusi interests under joint command of Italian and Sanusi leadership.³²⁹ The measure provoked objections from officials within the colonial administration and nationalists in Rome who saw it as a loss of control and prestige for the Italian state. The Minister of Colonies at the time, Giuseppe Giardini, voiced concern that armed camps in Cyrenaica under joint Italian and Sanusi control would strengthen the Sanusi authority among local populations and would breed confusion about whether the Italians or the Sanusi family had true control.³³⁰ But the fear that forced disarmament would lead to political and military catastrophe and Idris al-Sanusi's refusal to take responsibility for the potential chaos convinced the Minister of Colonies to accept De Martino's plan for joint control of the armed camps.³³¹ In November 1921, the Italian agent primarily responsible for negotiating with the Sanusiyya, Luigi Pintor, met with the Sanusi intermediary in the negotiations, Omar Mansur al-Kekhiya in Bu Mariam, and they agreed to maintain four of the eleven garrisons the Italian administration had funded for Idris in their previous treaties. In order to maintain an image of Italian control in the region, they agreed to a ratio of ten Italian soldiers to every eight Sanusi men within the armed groups.³³²

Giacomo De Martino died in Benghazi the same month as the conclusion of the Bu Mariam agreements, and Luigi Pintor was named Regent Governor to maintain a sense of continuity in the discussions with the Sanusi family and the Mogarba tribes. When Mogarba notables began to collaborate with nationalist activists in Tripolitania at the beginning of 1922

³²⁹ On the purpose of these armed camps known as "Gruppi Idrissiti" and "Campi Senussiti": ASMAI II 150/2/16, Definition of the Gruppi Idrissiti and the Campi Senussiti, no author, 27 May 1920.

³³⁰ ACS Carte Luigi Pintor, b. 3, f. 14, Minister of Colonies to Governor De Martino, 16 October 1921.

³³¹ ACS Carte Luigi Pintor, b. 3, f. 14, Governor De Martino to Minister of Colonies, 20 October 1921.

³³² ACS Carte Luigi Pintor, b. 3, f. 14, Idris to De Martino, 10/28/1921; BNA FO 141/652, British Ambassador in Rome to Field Marshal Viscount Allenby, 26 January 1922.

for the establishment of a unified Libyan Emirate under Sanusi authority, Pintor became an outspoken critic of the very treaties he had negotiated with Idris al-Sanusi and Omar Mansur al-Kekhiya. Unsure if Idris al-Sanusi's failure to gain compliance for the Regima Accords reflected his lack of authority among the Sanusi *ikhwān* and their affiliated tribes or a plot by Idris and Omar Mansur to undermine the Italian colonial project, Pintor joined a growing chorus of voices among Italian imperialists and nationalists who saw their reliance on a Sanusi intermediary as a needless concession to pressures from international pan-Islamist networks and a symbol of Italian weakness.

Luigi Pintor exemplified a strain of continuity between the liberal and fascist administrations. In Federzoni's Ministry of Colonies, Pintor would gain a prominent voice as an official with extensive experience negotiating with the Sanusi elite. His inclusion in the fascist administration indicated the continued importance ascribed to the Sanusiyya among Italian officials after 1922, but his growing criticism of the process of negotiations with Idris after the failed application of the Regima Accords points to the importance of the opposition of the tribal leaders of western Cyrenaica in turning the tide of opinion in the Italian administration against the Sanusi Emirate as a useful intermediary to promote Italian infrastructure and claims to state control into the interior.

Pan-Islamic Networks and the Possible Return of Ahmad al-Sharif

As Italian colonial agents and Omar Mansur al-Kekhiya negotiated the Regima Accords and Idris tried to gain the support of notables among the Mogarba and Awaghir tribes in Cyrenaica for disarmament and the construction of infrastructure in 1920-1921, the possibility of

establishing an agreement with Ahmad al-Sharif, Idris' notoriously militant cousin, reemerged in the foreground of discussions among officials in the Italian Ministries of Colonies and Foreign Affairs. While an alliance with Idris al-Sanusi seemed to provide stability in Cyrenaica, the possibility of a relationship with Ahmad al-Sharif offered an advantage on the international stage. However, Ahmad al-Sharif's prominence as a religious and political figure in the Arab world suggested the need for a delicate balance between preventing a rise in nationalist opposition in Cyrenaica that his return could inspire and the potential benefits of negotiating an agreement with him both as a signal of Italy's power in the Arab-Muslim world and a way of precluding rival imperial powers from gaining his support.

Ahmad al-Sharif's value as a symbol of Islamic resistance against European imperialism only grew after he left Cyrenaica when he became an active supporter and public promotor for the creation of a parallel government in Ankara under Mustafa Kemal, the Turkish nationalist later known as Atatürk who had participated in the Italo-Turkish War in 1911-1912.³³³ The involvement of Islamic leaders like Ahmad al-Sharif in the Kemalist government against the religious condemnation of the pro-British Sultan-Caliph allowed the Turkish nationalist movement to broaden its appeal and sources of funding by calling on anti-European Islamic unity. The possibility that the Kemalist government might recognize Ahmad al-Sharif as an alternative Caliph to the Sultan gave renewed urgency to the idea of establishing an alliance with the Sanusi leader among the European colonial powers who feared his potential influence on Islamic anti-colonial movements in Arabia, Egypt, Sudan, and Libya.³³⁴ Rumors that he might

³³³ Zürcher, *Storia della Turchia*, 185.

³³⁴ Aydın, *Politics of Anti-Westernism*, 135; ASMAI II 136/1/11, Italian Delegate to the Ottoman Police to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, 2 July 1921.

be given a position as Emir of Hejaz and Mesopotamia reached Italian officials as an indication of the level of popular and elite support he had acquired in the process of fighting against European powers during the First World War. For the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, the news indicated that, “the faces of the most intransigent representatives of Ottoman-Muslim nationalism had turned with intense attention on Sidi Ahmad as a possible valid contrast to figures, especially British creatures, in Eastern Anatolia and Arabia.”³³⁵

A temporary alignment of interests between Soviet Bolsheviks and pan-Islamic/Turkish nationalist movements in 1920-1921 based on their shared anti-Western rhetoric added to the threat of Ahmad al-Sharif as a public figure with the potential to destabilize colonial territories of Western European powers.³³⁶ Ahmad al-Sharif’s position in pan-Islamic networks integrated Italy’s problems of colonial rule within a larger international framework that inspired a collaborative approach between the Ministry of Colonies and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Minister of Colonies, Giuseppe Giardini, underlined the confluence of international and colonial issues in a memo to the Minister of Foreign Affairs as they debated the best approach to dealing with the possibility of Ahmad al-Sharif’s return to Cyrenaica. “The vision that this Minister has always had of the situation in Libya that becomes clearer every day is that the events in Libya are not for the most part anything but the local manifestations of factors and actions that are prepared or matured in other places. Thus it is not possible to conceive of a

³³⁵ “gli sguardi dei più intransigenti rappresentanti del nazionalismo ottomano-musulmano abbiano potuto rivolgersi con intensa attenzione alla persona di Sidi Ahmad come ad un possibile valido contrapposto a creature, specialmente britanniche, nell’oriente anatolico ed in Arabia.” ASMAI II 136/1/9, Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Minister of Colonies, 13 October 1921.

³³⁶ Aydin, *Politics of Anti-Westernism*, 146; Kramer, *Islam Assembled*, 69; Jacob M. Landau, *The Politics of Pan-Islam* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 167-168.

Libya policy in itself. Instead, it is necessary to consider it as a function of domestic, intercolonial, and international factors that contribute to its formation.”³³⁷

Ahmad al-Sharif actually made the first moves to re-establish contact with Italian officials several times after his departure to determine the possibility of returning to Cyrenaica and claiming his properties in the Libyan territories, but colonial officials in the process of cultivating Idris al-Sanusi as an alternative authority within the Sanusi *ṭarīqa* found the idea of negotiating with Ahmad al-Sharif too risky at the same time. It was only with his involvement in the Kemalist government that the possibility of a relationship with Ahmad al-Sharif resurfaced to the foreground of discussions within the Ministry of Colonies.³³⁸ Worried that the British would help him return to Cyrenaica if only to remove him as a threat in Anatolia, Italian officials renewed their attempts to communicate with Ahmad al-Sharif to try to assure that if he returned, he might do so with a more favorable relationship to the Italian state.³³⁹ Luigi Pintor, the Italian agent acting as primary contact with Sanusi representatives in the negotiations with Idris al-Sanusi, began to argue in favor of establishing a relationship with Ahmad al-Sharif as a way to

³³⁷ “La visione, che questo Ministero ha sempre avuto della situazione libica va risultando di giorno in giorno più chiara, che cioè gli avvenimenti libici non sono per la massima parte che la manifestazione in loco di fattori o di azioni che si preparano o si maturano altrove. Non è quindi possibile concepire una politica libica a sè stante. È necessario invece considerarla in funzione dei fattori interni della metropoli, intercoloniali ed internazionali che concorrono a formarla.” ASMAI II 136/1/9, Minister of Colonies to Minister of Foreign Affairs, 11 November 1921. There was some ambivalence within the Italian administration concerning how to respond to the possible return of Ahmad al-Sharif which Claudia Gazzini has argued reflected divergent aims between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Colonies. However, after initial reluctance of the Minister of Colonies, Giuseppe Giardini, the Ministry of Colonies and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs collaborated closely in the issue of a possible return of Ahmad al-Sharif. More than an inter-ministerial conflict over objectives, the ambiguity reflected an attempt to balance among various forces as they tried to determine which posed a greater threat to Italy’s claims to sovereignty and prestige: the return of Ahmad al-Sharif to Cyrenaica or his possible involvement with other colonial authorities.

³³⁸ ASMAI II 136/1/11, Notes for the Minister of Colonies, July 1921.

³³⁹ ASMAI II 136/1/11, Minister of Colonies to Minister of Foreign Affairs, “Libia: Ex Senusso Saied Ahmad El Scerif”, 6 August 1921.

control the ramifications of his possible return, “with pacts and guarantees through our means rather than endure it unprepared, and without restrictions on his part and even with the fraudulent help of others.”³⁴⁰

Increasingly distrustful of British intentions, the potential to negotiate directly with Ahmad al-Sharif represented a possible way to inflict damage on Britain’s reputation within the Muslim world, and it fit into a movement among nationalists within Italy’s political elite that recognized an alignment of interests with the Kemalist government in Ankara in its opposition to British foreign policy after the shortfalls in Italian territorial gains after the First World War.³⁴¹ Some Italian nationalists conflated the Kemalist government with pan-Islamism or Arab nationalism. The nationalist poet and general Gabriele D’Annunzio, for example, developed relationships with influential Egyptian nationalists and helped establish pan-Islamic associations in Rome as a way to undermine British foreign policy.³⁴² Cosmopolitan Italians with ties in North Africa had long fostered ties with Egyptian nationalists as allies in extending Italian influence abroad at the expense of the British, but after the First World War, Ahmad al-Sharif’s position within the Kemalist government as a spokesperson for anti-British movements throughout the Muslim world spoke to the frustrations of Italian nationalists and seemed to offer the possibility for a new order of negotiations between the Italian colonial administration and the Sanusi elite.

³⁴⁰ “con patti e garanzie per nostro tramite, piuttosto che subirlo inatteso e senza vincoli per sua parte con lo aiuto sia pure fraudulento di altri....” ASMAI II 136/1/9, Pintor to the Minister of Colonies, 22 November 1921.

³⁴¹ Fabio Grassi, *L’Italia e la questione turca (1917-1923: Opinione pubblica e politica estera)* (Turin: Silvio Zamorani, 1996), 212.

³⁴² Malek Badrawi, *Political Violence in Egypt, 1910-1924: Secret Societies, Plots and Assassinations* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000), 185.

Ahmad al-Sharif's influence in the Kemalist government added to his popularity in the Libyan territories—even in Tripolitania where political figures had long been wary of the Sanusiyya. Tripolitanian notables began calling for a return of Ahmad al-Sharif to the Libyan territories because they hoped he could restore stability to a region devastated by a chaotic civil war between Ramadan al-Suwayhli on the one hand and an alliance of the Muntasir family and Abd al-Nabi Belkhir, a leading figure in the Warfalla tribes, on the other. After Ramadan al-Suwayhli died in August 1920 during an attack on Warfalla forces, a group of Tripolitanian notables met in Garian in November 1920 to try to establish a consensus for unified political action. Led by the Egyptian nationalist Abd al-Rahman Azzam and Ahmad al-Mraied, a former functionary for the Italian government in Tarhuna, they hoped to develop a system that would allow for relative autonomy from the Italian colonial state while promoting much-needed stability in the region.³⁴³ Given his influence in Ankara, Ahmad al-Sharif offered the possibility of integrating the interests of Tripolitanian populations into wider pan-Islamic networks, and the previous negotiations between the Italian state and the Sanusi family suggested that the establishment of a Sanusi Emirate under his leadership in Tripolitania could prevent significant opposition from the Italian authorities.³⁴⁴

The possibility of a Sanusi Emirate in Tripolitania alarmed the Ministry of Colonies as a sign of ambitions among regional elite to unify resources of the two regions in opposition to the Italian colonial state and as a possible source of international influence that could undermine Italian authority in the region. For most of the Italian occupation, rivalries between Tripolitanian notables—especially Ramadan al-Suwayhli—and Sanusi elite had reassured Italian officials who

³⁴³ Ahmida, *Making of Modern Libya*, 129-132; Anderson, "Ramadan al-Suwayhli," 126.

³⁴⁴ ASMAI II 136/1/11, Notes for the Minister of Colonies, July 1921.

hoped to keep a strict division between the territories as a way to prevent any one regional figure from gaining widespread authority. In the summer of 1921, a coalition of notables in Tripolitania led by the Egyptian nationalist Abd al-Rahman Azzam showed interest in establishing an emirate under Ahmad al-Sharif as a plan to limit Italian authority in the region.³⁴⁵ In January 1922, the notables of Tripolitania met for a second time in Sirte, and as a signal of their intentions to develop cross-regional ties, they invited Saleh al-Ateusc, the Mogarba notable from Ajedabiya who presented one of the primary opponents to the realization of the Regima Accords, as a representative of Cyrenaican interests.³⁴⁶ In April 1922, the Tripolitanian notables issued a proposal to the Italian Ministry of Colonies for an Emirate under the leadership of Ahmad al-Sharif in Tripolitania that would answer to Idris al-Sanusi. Not all of the Tripolitanian notables approved of a Sanusi Emirate, but the proposal reflected their attempt to appease Saleh al-Ateusc and gain access to the considerable forces of the Mogarba tribes in Sirtica.³⁴⁷

For Italian administrators in Cyrenaica, the collaboration threatened to spread the unrest that had dominated Tripolitania after the First World War into Cyrenaica and further exacerbate the attempts to induce the Mogarba tribes to accept the application of the Libyan Statutes.³⁴⁸ The centrality of Saleh al-Ateusc in the plan for an extension of the Sanusi emirate into Tripolitania offers further evidence that the failure of Idris al-Sanusi to gain the support of the tribal leaders

³⁴⁵ ASMAI II 136/1/9, Minister of Colonies to Governor of Cyrenaica, “Intenzioni di Ahmad El Scerif,” 12 August 1921.

³⁴⁶ ACS Carte Luigi Pintor, b. 4, f. 18, Pintor to Minister of Colonies, 3 January 1922. The Tripolitanian notables included Muhammad Mraied (the *kaymakam* of Tarhuna), Ahmad al-Suwayhli (the son of Ramadan al-Suwayhli), Abd al-Rahman Azzam, the *kaymakam* of Homs, and a representative of the Warfella tribes.

³⁴⁷ ACS Carte Luigi Pintor, b. 4, f. 18, Pintor to Minister of Colonies, 3 January 1922; ACS Carte Luigi Pintor, b. 4, f. 18, Pintor to Minister of Colonies, 13 March 1922.

³⁴⁸ ACS Carte Luigi Pintor, b. 4, f. 18, Pintor to Minister of Colonies, 26 April 1922.

of western Cyrenaica precipitated his departure and the Italian renunciation of negotiations. Italian state officials did not necessarily object to the extension of Idris al-Sanusi's authority; the potential agreement between Saleh al-Ateusc and the Tripolitanian notables instead indicated the potential for anti-Italian forces with considerable control over resources in the region to hijack the Sanusi administration.

Local Officials in Revolt against Rome: Volpi and Pintor vs. Amendola

By focusing on the opposition of the tribal leaders of western Cyrenaica to the application of the Regima Accords, I have tried to turn our attention to the little-understood aspects of Idris al-Sanusi's reliance on the support of regional power brokers for his position as a colonial intermediary. This is not to diminish, however, the importance of a rising impatience among a cadre of political and military figures with increased influence in Rome and in the Libyan territories calling for aggressive measures and increased resources to secure the entire region conclusively for Italian state development and settlement schemes. In the year leading up to Mussolini's March on Rome, the push for direct territorial control emerged among Italian officials in the colonial governments of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, leading to a distinct split with central authorities in Rome who remained focused on the potential benefits of indirect forms of colonial rule through a Sanusi intermediary. The first division in the methods of the local and central governments occurred soon after the announcement of a proposal for a unified emirate under Idris al-Sanusi when the Italian Governor of Tripolitania, Giuseppe Volpi, ordered the occupation of the city of Misurata to prevent Abd al-Rahman Azzam from establishing an independent administration in the coastal city with ties to Arab nationalist and pan-Islamic

networks in Egypt and Anatolia.³⁴⁹ An entrepreneur long interested in colonization schemes for the Libyan territories, Volpi saw his occupation of Misurata as an act of defiance against political actors in Rome who hoped to project an image of Italy as friendly to pan-Islamic networks in alliance with Abd al-Rahman Azzam and Egyptian nationalists as part of an effort to diminish British and French influence in the Muslim world.³⁵⁰

The occupation of Misurata generated a public debate in Rome and energized a movement for greater direct territorial control, but officials in the Ministry of Colonies initially opposed an extension of Volpi's aggressive tactics into Cyrenaica, prompting a rising dissatisfaction in the Cyrenaican administration over a subsequent shortage of resources. Volpi initiated the occupation without the permission or knowledge of the central government in Rome, but when he announced the success of his mission in February 1922, he gained the approval and support of the newly appointed Minister of Colonies, Giovanni Amendola. Amendola tried to strike a moderate tone; following Volpi's lead, Amendola shifted away from his predecessor's willingness to negotiate with the Tripolitanian notables or consider the possibility of extending the Sanusi Emirate to Tripolitania as a concession to international pressure from Islamic networks that threatened to weaken Italian authority. In a speech before the Italian House of Deputies, Amendola signaled his discontent with directives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who, along with certain nationalist circles in Rome, promoted the possibility of engaging pan-Islamic networks to achieve Italian anti-British foreign policy objectives. "It is recommended to

³⁴⁹ Enrico De Leone, *Riformatori musulmani del XIX secolo nell'Africa e nell'Asia mediterranee* (Milan: Giuffrè Editore, 1973), 35.

³⁵⁰ See Volpi's introduction to a volume on colonial policies presented to Mussolini during his 1926 visit to the colonies: Angelo Piccioli, ed. *La rinascita della Tripolitania. Memorie e studi sui quattro anni di governo del Conte Giuseppe Volpi di Misurata* (Milan: Mondadori, 1926).

the government to meet the views and objectives of the pan-Islamic movement. But what good would it do for Italy? In that case, we would have to allow for the constitution in Libya of an Arab national state, an advanced sentinel of Islamic revolt against European occupation in North Africa for which we would be granted the honor of paying the expenses; we would have to cover with our flag the reaffirmation in the Mediterranean of a principle of anti-Western and anti-Christian conquest.”³⁵¹ Amendola argued that seeking alliances among pan-Islamic or anti-Western activists in the Muslim world would damage Italy’s status within the colonies and on the international stage by tying the future of the nation to the Mediterranean and excluding it from the ranks of the European powers.

However, Amendola remained a staunch supporter of negotiating with local notables in the Libyan territories against the rising voices of those who saw Volpi’s success as initiating a dramatic shift in regional power dynamics. Calling for a “policy of absolute sincerity and loyalty,” Amendola defended Idris al-Sanusi as an ally against pan-Islamic or nationalist influences against mounting criticism from Luigi Pintor, the Italian functionary who had served as the primary Italian representative throughout the process of negotiations with Idris and was named Regent Governor after the death of Giacomo De Martino in November 1921.³⁵² After years of negotiating with Idris al-Sanusi through the Benghazi notable Omar Mansur al-Kekhiya and pursuing measures designed to promote Sanusi political authority as an extension of the

³⁵¹ “Si consiglia, al Governo, di andare incontro alle vedute e alle finalità del movimento panislamico. Ma quale vantaggio ne verrebbe all’Italia? Dovremmo, in tal caso, consentire alla costituzione, in Libia, di uno Stato nazionale arabo, sentinella avanzata della rivolta islamica contro le occupazioni europee nell’Africa settentrionale, e del quale ci sarebbe concesso l’onore di pagare le spese; dovremmo coprire con la nostra bandiera, la riaffermazione nel Mediterraneo di un principio di conquista antioccidentale ed anticristiana.” From a speech before the House of Deputies 22 June 1922 on spending in the colonies. Giovanni Amendola, *Discorso Politici (1919-1925)*, ed. Sabato Visco (Rome: Carlo Colombo, 1968), 128.

³⁵² ACS Carte Luigi Pintor, b. 5, f. 21, Information from Senussi Gazzali, Benghazi July 1922.

Italian colonial state, Pintor grew suspicious of the Sanusi intermediaries in the spring and summer of 1922, and his communications with the Minister of Colonies took on an alarmed quality as he reported a growing frequency of attacks on Italian supply lines and *sottomessi* tribes in the coastal regions.

Simultaneously concerned that Idris al-Sanusi had either lost control of the Sanusi *ṭarīqa* and its allied tribes or that he intended to coordinate with Saleh al-Ateusc and nationalist leaders in Tripolitania to expand Sanusi influence, Pintor's suspicions increased with the news that Idris invited tribal leaders throughout Cyrenaica, including leaders from the *sottomessi* tribes who recognized Italian authority, to a conference in Ajedabiya for the first week in June 1922. Pintor argued that in bringing together all of the Cyrenaican tribal leaders, Idris either wanted to get their approval for the idea of a unified Emirate with Tripolitania or he was pushing for donations of money or arms. Evidence that Omar al-Mukhtar and other known militant Sanusi shaykhs had employed the Sudanese bodyguards of Idris to intimidate *sottomessi* tribal leaders into attending the meeting in Ajedabiya, Pintor claimed, revealed the true weakness of Idris al-Sanusi in the face of objections to the Regima Accords and suggested that Idris either lacked the authority or the desire to disarm the tribal forces in Cyrenaica.³⁵³

Pintor's communications to the Ministry of Colonies in Rome grew increasingly insistent on the perils of relying on their agreements with the Sanusiyya and increasingly critical of the central authorities in the spring of 1922. At the beginning of the year, Pintor seemed to feel a sense of competition with the Governor of Tripolitania over resources and troops diverted from

³⁵³ "Oggi la Senussia est costretta a scoprirsi, ed agire direttamente coi mercenarii suoi maggiori achuan, et persino coi sudanesi, fidata guardia del corpo dello Emiro." ACS Carte Luigi Pintor, b. 4, f. 18 Pintor to Minister of Colonies, 27 May 1922.

Cyrenaica to Tripolitania for the occupation of Misurata.³⁵⁴ As the months went on, Pintor increasingly aligned himself with Volpi against the Ministry of Colonies, and they both called for a more forceful state presence that would lessen their dependence on local notables.³⁵⁵ After complaints against a number of Italian functionaries in the Cyrenaican administration by the Sanusi intermediary, Omar Mansur al-Kekhiya, induced Amendola to dismiss the offending parties, Pintor expressed a sense of embattled isolation against the central office, and he grew increasingly vocal in his criticism of the process of negotiations with Idris al-Sanusi.

The dispute between Pintor and Amendola escalated when Italian agents received confirmation that Idris al-Sanusi intended to accept the proposal of Saleh al-Ateusc and the Tripolitanian notables for a united Sanusi emirate in May 1922. After years of negotiating with Omar Mansur al-Kekhiya and Idris, Pintor argued that the reliance of the Italian state on the Sanusi intermediary had backfired, and he called for a dramatic change in the approach to colonial rule. Pintor placed primary responsibility for the failures of the negotiations with the contradictory goals of the Italian Ministry of Colonies which wanted the treaties with Idris to simultaneously cultivate the political authority of the Sanusiyya and undermine it to prevent it from becoming too powerful. He characterized the entire process of negotiations as a ruse on both sides, a relationship in which the Italians constantly sought to convince the Sanusi elite of their peaceful intentions and support for Sanusi authority. “But such veils and treatments and fatally insincere artifices could not hide the substance of a continuous attack against the Sanusi political structure, avoidance of which would require us not to follow Regima or Bu Mariam,

³⁵⁴ ACS Carte Luigi Pintor, b. 5, f. 29, Pintor to Minister of Colonies, 3/29/1922; Pintor to Volpi, 3 April 1922.

³⁵⁵ ACS Carte Luigi Pintor, b. 4, f. 18, Pintor to Governor of Tripolitania, 25 June 1922.

which are in fact essentially directed at dismantling the political structure of the confraternity, by now inextricably linked ... to its organization as a *ṭarīqa*.”³⁵⁶ The Italian state, Pintor argued, had tied its fate to the diminishing power of the Sanusiyya which looked to establishing ties with notables in Tripolitania and British officials in Egypt to escape their reliance on the Italian state.

Pintor recommended taking a similar move to develop relationships with alternative Sanusi family members and tribal leaders. Apparent divisions in the responses to the Regima Accords and the Bu Mariam agreements suggested a possible opportunity for the Italian administration to circumvent Idris as a local intermediary and enter into direct discussions with the intransigent Mogarba of western Cyrenaica. A meeting between the Mogarba leader Saleh al-Ateusc and an Italian agent in Zuwaytina in April 1922, for example, gave the impression that the Italian government could induce him to agree to support the state directly without the mediation of Idris in exchange for payment.³⁵⁷

Amendola rejected Pintor’s recommendation to undermine the authority of Idris al-Sanusi as typical of what he called the “indisciplined spirit unfortunately not infrequent in the colonial administration” that prevented the full realization of Italian projects in the Libyan territories.³⁵⁸

Over the next few months, Pintor persisted in his condemnation of the accords, and both Idris

³⁵⁶ “Ma siffatti veli e cure e artifici fatalmente insinceri non potevano coprire la sostanza di continuo attentato alla compagine politica senussita, per evitar la quale bisognava non eseguire Regima, non eseguire Bu Mariam, che sono appunto essenzialmente diretti a disgregare compagine politica della confratnerita, connessa ormai indissolubilmente ... alla sua organizzazione di tarica.” ACS Carte Luigi Pintor, b. 4, f. 18, Pintor to Amendola, 9-10 May 1922. The only biographical study of Luigi Pintor I have seen ignored this moment in Pintor’s career to focus on his involvement in pro-Sanusi accords. Despite his involvement in the negotiations with Idris al-Sanusi, Pintor transitioned into the fascist administration after a short vetting process as Director General for the Colonies of North Africa until his death in 1925. See Giovanni Tosatti, “Le carte di un funzionario del Ministero delle Colonie: Luigi Pintor,” in *Fonti e problemi della politica coloniale italiana*, Edited by Carla Ghezzi (Taormina-Messina: Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, 1989).

³⁵⁷ ACS Carte Luigi Pintor, b. 5, f. 28, De Angelis to Pintor, 26 April 1922.

³⁵⁸ ACS Carte Luigi Pintor, b. 4, f. 18, Amendola to Pintor, 13 May 1922.

and Omar Mansur al-Kekhiya complained to central authorities of the difficulty in dealing with him. After months of disagreements between Pintor and the Sanusi intermediaries, Omar Mansur al-Kekhiya traveled to Rome and threatened to relinquish his position as an intermediary between state officials and Idris al-Sanusi—a position for which he had been paid 600,000 Lire.³⁵⁹ Pintor asked to be replaced as Governor, and Amendola sent Edoardo Baccari, the former director of political affairs in the Ministry of Colonies, in his place. Known for having established a friendly relationship with Omar Mansur al-Kekhiya, Amendola hoped the appointment of Baccari would improve relations with the Sanusi elite.³⁶⁰

The Fascist Administration and the End of Accords

Edoardo Baccari stayed in Cyrenaica only two months before the government formed under Benito Mussolini following the fascist march on Rome in October 1922 came into power and instituted sweeping changes in the personnel of the Italian colonial administration in Libya. The new order did not reject the possibility of establishing agreements with various members of the Sanusi family as intermediaries in the Cyrenaican interior, but with a new premium on gaining direct territorial control, fascist administrators proved more willing than their liberal predecessors to engage military force and less willing to make concessions to Sanusi elites in negotiations.

³⁵⁹ ACS Carte Luigi Pintor, b. 5, f. 26, Dr. Alaimo to Pintor, 9/8/1921; However, Pintor suggested the Italian government only paid Omar Mansur al-Kekhiya 80,000 Lire, ACS Carte Luigi Pintor, b. 5, f. 20 Pintor to Governor of Cyreniaca, 17 February 1921.

³⁶⁰ ASMAI II 134/26/196, Orlando Pascalis, “Le responsabilità coloniali dell’on. Amendola” in *Il Popolo d’Italia*, 28 January 1925.

Mussolini appointed Luigi Federzoni as his first Ministry of Colonies, a position he filled first in 1922-24 and again in 1926-28. After the shift in administration at the end of 1922, Federzoni directed investigations into the process of negotiations with Idris al-Sanusi in an attempt to assign blame for the failure to fulfill the full terms of the Regima Accords. Well before the march on Rome, Federzoni had voiced opposition to the negotiations with the Sanusi elite and what he saw as a linked approach to foreign policy that promoted an alignment in Italian interests with pan-Islamic networks when he served on a parliamentary commission on foreign and colonial policies in 1920-21. Federzoni saw the Sanusi Emirate of the Regima Accords as a relinquishment of Italian state sovereignty, and he cited a fundamental connection between religious and political-military authority in Islam as precluding the possibility of establishing a neutral colonial intermediary under Sanusi leadership. His opposition to the negotiations with the Sanusi family pitted Federzoni against moderate socialists who opposed military action in the expansion of the Italian colonies and likened Arab nationalists to heroes of Italian unification, and his interest in colonial expansion made him an obvious choice to establish a new direction as Minister of Colonies in line with the rising popularity of nationalist politics.³⁶¹

In the course of investigating the process of negotiations with the Sanusiyya, Luigi Pintor gained a voice within the fascist administration for having criticized the Regima and Bu Mariam accords under the Amendola Ministry. Despite his direct involvement in the process of negotiations, Federzoni appointed Pintor to the position of Vice Director General in the Ministry

³⁶¹ ACS Carte Luigi Pintor, b. 2, f. 10 “Ragione per tenere la Libia”, no date, but it is likely from 1920; ACS Carte Luigi Pintor, b. 2, f. 10 “Dichiarazioni alla commissione per gli esteri e per le colonie”, September 1920; Carte Luigi Pintor, b. 3, f. 15, “Appunti schematici sopra alcuni questioni posti a S.E. il Ministro delle Colonie da membri della commissione parlamentare per gli affari esteri e per le colonie,” 3 February 1921. See also Bessis, *Méditerranée fasciste*, 87.

of Colonies and recognized him as an expert on native affairs in Cyrenaica.³⁶² In the public condemnation of the Regima Accords, Pintor placed the blame squarely on Omar Mansur al-Kekhiya for the failure of the agreements to lead to the disarmament of tribal forces or an increase in Italian influence in the region. Pintor accused Omar Mansur al-Kekhiya of having pressured Idris to prevent the dissolution of the armed camps under mixed Italian-Sanusi authority and of generating the idea of the Bu Mariam agreement as a ploy to increase his personal influence over the territory of the Abeidat in the region of Derna.³⁶³ Based on Pintor's testimony, Italian authorities arrested Omar Mansur al-Kekhiya in January 1923 and condemned him to twelve years in prison. The sentence was overturned on appeal in the Italian courts, but state officials forced him to spend the majority of the remaining years of Italian occupation in exile.³⁶⁴

The fascist administration condemned the Regima Accords as a symbol of Italian weakness and the failed colonial policies of their liberal predecessors. As the primary proponent of the Regima Accords, the fascist press accused the now deceased former Governor of Cyrenaica, Giacomo De Martino, of instituting "policies of humiliation and degradation" and for valuing Arabic intermediaries above Italian officials by paying Omar Mansur al-Kekhiya a salary well above the stipends of Italian functionaries.³⁶⁵ Giovanni Amendola also faced incrimination

³⁶² Peter Woodward, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print. Part II, From the First to the Second World War. Series G, Africa, 1914-1939*, eds. Kenneth Bourne and Cameron D. Watt, Vol. 6, *Egypt and the Sudan, November 1923-November 1924* (University Publications of America, 1995), 70.

³⁶³ ACS Carte Luigi Pintor, b. 6, f. 6, Luigi Pintor, Vice Director General in the Ministry of Colonies, internal report on Omar Mansur al-Kekhiya, 22 March 1923.

³⁶⁴ BNA FO 1015/2, Request from Omar Mansour for reparations from the British Government, 25 September 1946.

³⁶⁵ ASMAI II 134/26/196, Orlando Pascalis, "La responsabilità coloniale dell'on. Amendola" from *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 28 January 1925.

for continuing to focus on negotiations after De Martino's death and even after the failure of Idris al-Sanusi to fulfill the terms of the Regima Agreement. Amendola defended his approach as the Minister of Colonies in the Chamber of Deputies in June 1923, and he argued that though the terms of the negotiations with the Sanusiyya had reached only partial fulfillment, they had "benefitted Italy much more than the Sanusiyya, since for the former they assured the secure and irresistible peaceful penetration in Cyrenaica, while for the latter they eliminated the most effective means of resistance, including the great prestige that came to the Sanusi Confraternity due to the lack of all contact with the hated infidel."³⁶⁶

Despite the swift condemnation of the Regima Accords and Omar Mansur al-Kekhiya, fascist officials did not reject the possibility of continuing agreements with Idris al-Sanusi for an indirect form of rule in the Cyrenaican interior; during his first term as Minister of Colonies, Federzoni objected to the provisions allowing for Sanusi military control, not to the concept of a Sanusi intermediary. In the first year of the fascist administration, the new military Governor, Luigi Bongiovanni, dissolved the mixed Sanusi-Italian armed garrisons by force and occupied Ajedabiya, the center of the Sanusi administration to signal the end of Italian support for Sanusi military forces. But while he initiated the preparations for the military operations, Bongiovanni reached out to Idris al-Sanusi and offered to reinstate the Regima Accords if he could gain control of the Mogarba tribes near Ajedabiya and the militant shaykhs of the Sanusiyya. Having already left the region for self-imposed exile in Egypt in January 1923, Idris refused to return to his position as an Italian intermediary, and Bongiovanni declared an official end to the accords

³⁶⁶ "Hanno giovato assai più all'Italia che alla Senussia, giacchè alla prima hanno assicurato la sicura ed irresistibile penetrazione pacifica in Cirenaica, mentre alla secondo hanno tolto i mezzi più efficaci di resistenza, incluso il prestigio grande che veniva alla Confraternita Senussita della mancanza di ogni contatto con l'odiato infedele." Luigi Federzoni, *Venti mesi di azione coloniale* (Milan: Mondadori, 1926), 87.

with the Sanusiyya in May 1923.³⁶⁷ Officials in the fascist administration reached out repeatedly to Idris and even Ahmad al-Sharif during their military operations in Cyrenaica. They even called on Enrico Insabato to resume negotiations at one point, but both remained in exile.³⁶⁸

The issue of why Idris al-Sanusi chose to leave Cyrenaica has been a matter of debate among historians as a key moment in his political history as a colonial intermediary and potential nationalist symbol. Official British historians attributed Idris' decision to leave Cyrenaica at the end of 1922 as recognition that the political transition in Rome spelled an inevitable end to his relationship with the colonial administration.³⁶⁹ Some within the Italian administration suspected that Idris al-Sanusi left for Egypt in order to break the accords and allow militant elements within the Sanusi family and their Mogarba allies to take control of the situation without losing the possibility of negotiating with European powers again at some future point. In his own accounts after independence, Idris al-Sanusi gave weight to both possibilities. He cited the replacement of Giacomo De Martino with “a much less liberal governor”—meaning Luigi Pintor—and the preservation of his reputation as a religious authority that remained extraneous to actual guerilla warfare as his motivations for leaving.³⁷⁰

The fact that Idris began to request permission to leave for Egypt as early as March 1921 for medical care suggests the possibility of a third explanation: that he recognized his limitations as a political authority within the Sanusi *ṭarīqa* and among its regional allies. Perhaps physically

³⁶⁷ Fabrizio Serra, *Italia e Senussia: Vent'anni di azione coloniale in Cirenaica* (Milan: Fratelli Treves, 1933), 131.

³⁶⁸ Del Boca, *Italiani in Libia*, vol. 2, 73.

³⁶⁹ BNA CAB 44/14, “Relations between Great Britain, Italy and the Senussi 1912-1924,” Prepared by the Foreign Office for the Historical Section, Committee of Imperial Defence in 1927; FO 141/585, British Secretary of State to British High Commissioner in Egypt, Lord Allenby, 26 January 1923.

³⁷⁰ E.A.V. De Candole, *The Life and Times of King Idris of Libya* (Published by author: 1988), 42-44.

weakened by a chronic health condition, Idris al-Sanusi repeatedly signaled a desire to relinquish his position within the Italian colonial state and hand over the negotiations to Saf al-Din and Muhammad Reda. Italian officials rejected Idris al-Sanusi's requests to leave Cyrenaica, claiming that he was needed to maintain order among unruly Sanusi shaykhs and militant tribes.³⁷¹ Idris al-Sanusi seized an opportunity in the confusion of administrative transition at the end of 1922 to leave without going through official channels. Of course, as Anna Baldinetti has pointed out, Idris was just one of a number of elites who left the Libyan territories in the wake of the Libyan Statutes. Disappointed with the unfulfilled promises of autonomy, Libyan notables found greater freedom to organize resources and gain international support for a burgeoning nationalist movement.³⁷²

Dividing Allies from Enemies: Forced Resettlement of the Coastal Tribes

Idris al-Sanusi's departure for Egypt in January 1923 and the Italian occupation of Ajedabiya precipitated a change in the power dynamics among the Sanusi elite and their regional allies. Italian military commanders attributed a unified Sanusi command to armed forces in the Cyrenaican interior throughout the 1920s, but the direction of the Sanusiyya, access to Sanusi resources in the interior oases, and alliances between Sanusi elite and regional tribal leaders shifted at various points throughout the decade. With Idris al-Sanusi and Ahmad al-Sharif in exile, other Sanusi family members—Saf al-Din, Muhammad al-Reda, and Muhammad Abed in Kufra—gained status in the region as power-brokers and potential intermediaries with state forces. But two Sanusi shaykhs, Gheggia ben Abdullah and Omar al-Mukhtar, overshadowed

³⁷¹ BNA FO 141/585 British High Commissioner in Egypt, 29 November 1921.

³⁷² Baldinetti, *Origins of the Libyan Nation*, 63.

them as military leaders who led Sanusi forces against the attempts of Italian state extension into the interior.³⁷³ The Mogarba and Awaghir tribes near Ajedabiya and in the region of Sirte continued their opposition to the expansion of Italian infrastructure and development as proposed in the Regima Accords, but not always as a cohesive unit and not always in collaboration with the Sanusi shaykhs.

When Italian troops occupied Ajedabiya in April 1923, they displaced the Sanusi forces under Gheggia ben Abdullah, a Sanusi shaykh usually described as being of Sudanese origin and probably part of the Sanusi family's private forces that Idris al-Sanusi used to protect his administration during the years of his treaties with the Italian administration.³⁷⁴ At the time of their displacement, the Mogarba tribes under the leadership of Saleh al-Ateusc, along with Awaghir forces under the command of Abdulsalam al-Khezza, joined Gheggia ben Abdullah to repel the Italian advance, but the continued presence of the Sanusi shaykh in the region unsettled Saleh al-Ateusc who objected to his attempts to incorporate Mogarba resources into the Sanusi troops under his command. During the development of the Acroma and Regima Accords, Saleh al-Ateusc and other Mogarba notables only communicated with Italian authorities through the mediation of the Sanusi family, and as I demonstrated above, they insisted on the continued

³⁷³ Ali Abdullatif Ahmida referred to the rising influence of these Sanusi military commanders as a "social revolution" in Cyrenaica. "The ordinary tribal commanders rebelled against the compromising Sanusi elite." *Making Modern Libya* (137).

³⁷⁴ Italian documents refer to him as "Gheggia ben Abdallah," British reports called him Cheja ben Abdullah. See Peter Woodward, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, 70. Colonial officials referred to Gheggia ben Abdallah as a Sudanese Sanusi shaykh, and he was probably connected to Idris al-Sanusi's tendency to use Sudanese bodyguards to protect his administration during the years of his treaties with the Italian administration. Perhaps his position as a military commander of Sanusi troops reflected the practice of the Sanusi family to train Sudanese boys as soldiers which Rosita Forbes noted in her account of her trip into the Kufra oases in 1916. Forbes also noted a racial element to the practice of employing Sudanese soldiers to defend against possible attacks by Beduoin tribes. "It is curious the fear with which the Beduins regard the black slaves who are sent from the Sudan as boys of eight or ten and who are trained as soldiers by the Sanusi family." Rosita Forbes, *The Secret of the Sahara: Kufara* (New York: George H. Doban Company, 1921), 81.

presence of a Sanusi administration even while they objected to the Regima Accords. In the aftermath of Idris al-Sanusi's departure, however, Saleh al-Ateusc proved wary of attempts by the Sanusi shaykhs to gain further control of Mogarba resources, and his struggles with Gheggia ben Abdullah over the command of Mogarba forces led to a crucial split in anti-Italian alliances that eventually allowed Italian officials to gain the support of the Mogarba tribes against the Sanusi-led forces.³⁷⁵

As they looked to expand their military presence and the potential for infrastructural development into the Cyrenaican interior, Italian officials developed a two-step plan in 1925-26. First, they planned to take control of the mountainous region of the Jebel al-Akhdar where Omar al-Mukhtar collected the remaining Sanusi forces, and then they would use that position to move west to gain control over the Mogarba territory and eventually reach Sirte to join together the two Libyan regions. Hoping to weaken the Sanusi forces and the allied Mogarba-Awaghir tribes, the Italian command attempted to cut off their access to arms and basic supplies by constructing additional garrisons along the border of Egypt and occupying the oasis of Jaghbub, a major transit point along the Egyptian border where Italians believed the majority of arms entered into the region.³⁷⁶

Italian military command also attempted to isolate the anti-Italian forces of the interior from contact with tribes in the territory under Italian control by moving communities in the coastal region into settlements where Italian troops could more easily supervise their movements and prevent them from trading supplies. The departure of Idris had called into doubt the relationships of the coastal tribes, many of whom had submitted to Italian rule through the

³⁷⁵ ASMAI II 134/26/198, Governor of Cyrenaica, Monthly Report, 1 April 1925.

³⁷⁶ ACS FG 6/7/10, Italian Command in South Tripolitania, 30 October 1925.

mediation of the Sanusi accords, with the Italian colonial states. Italian authorities felt confident that they could depend on some of the coastal tribes to support state expansion. Tribes like the Abeidat had attached themselves to the Italian state early in the occupation as a way of limiting Sanusi authority, and they stood to gain from the labor and trade that came with state development in the region.³⁷⁷ As they stepped up military incursions into the Jebel al-Akhdar, establishing a clear division between the tribal communities under Italian control and the anti-Italian rebellion provided a powerful tool to target the populations of the interior and block their access to supplies from the coast.

To further try to isolate armed forces in the Cyrenaican interior, the Governor of Cyrenaica developed a resettlement program in May 1925 to move populations in the territories under direct Italian control into areas north of Italian garrisons where Italian troops could supervise their movements and prevent collusion with armed rebels. Over the following year, the Governor of Cyrenaica ordered the resettlement of all *sottomessi* populations in Italian controlled territory. In the area of Cyrene alone, the Italian commissary reported transferring over 15,000 people.³⁷⁸ The forced resettlement and concentration of *sottomessi* populations cleared space for the construction of a truck route to aid military operations against Omar al-Mukhtar in the mountainous region of Jebel al-akhdar and allowed for a clear spatial separation to distinguish between *sottomessi* and dissident populations. But in the process, the region between the mountains and the settled communities transformed into a dangerous empty space where armed bands staged frequent attacks on supply lines and *sottomessi* camps. The forced

³⁷⁷ Teruzzi, *Cirenaica Verde*, 34.

³⁷⁸ The Italians adopted the Roman name of Cirene for the city now known as Susa. The administrative region of Cirene included Beda, Faidia, Slonta, Maraua, and Hania. ASAMI II 134/27/204, Commissariate of Cirene to Governor of Cyrenaica, 31 July 1926.

settlements also earned the Italian administration a reputation for harsh treatment of colonial subjects, and international media coverage of the resettlement program condemned the Italian surveillance practices while *sottomessi* populations complained of the imposition of curfews and restrictions on grazing territories for their livestock.³⁷⁹

Some Italian officials recognized the resettlement project as severe and detrimental to their capacity to rely on the goodwill of tribal leaders in the coastal regions, many of whom had formerly worked for the Italian state, but the renunciation of the negotiations with the Sanusi family had ushered in an era of marked distrust when Italian officials were reluctant to risk a reliance on local alliances. A shortage of Italian troops contributed to the problems of the resettlement program as the Italian colonial state lacked the resources to either fully control or protect the tribes in their territories. Complaining of raids on their herds from the isolated communities of the interior, Haasa and Abeidat communities asked the Italian administration to provide them with arms to allow them to make up for the deficiencies of the military, but the risk of collusion with the anti-Italian rebels was considered too great to consider the proposal. “Are the *sottomessi* trying to effectively distance themselves from the dissidents or rather attempting to reclaim the arms that we took from them to then use them, in certain circumstances, against us as well?”³⁸⁰

During the remaining years of the occupation as the fascist administration initiated what they called the “reconquest” of the Libyan interior, the Italian state repeatedly used forced

³⁷⁹ ASMAI II 134/27/204, Regent Governor Anceschi to Minister of Colonies, 6 July 1926; ASMAI II 134/27/204, Regent Governor Anceschi to Minister of Colonies, 2 July 1926.

³⁸⁰ “ Il desiderio che manifestano i sottomessi ha lo scopo di volere effettivamente staccarsi dai dissidenti o piuttosto si tende a riavere le armi che abbiamo ritirate per impiegarle poi, secondo le circostanze, anche contro di noi?” ASMAI II 134/27/204, Commissariate of Cirene to Governor of Cyrenaica, 31 July 1926.

resettlement as a method of securing submission and a clear geographical demarcation between rebels and subjects, though as we will see below, the lack of adequate troops prompted a more conciliatory approach to gain the submission of Mogarba populations in western Cyrenaica in 1927. In the two years before they announced the pacification of Cyrenaica with the capture and hanging of Omar al-Mukhtar in 1931, over 100,000 people lived in forced settlements in notoriously harsh conditions. The Italian state did not record many statistics concerning the camps, but some estimate that around 35,000 people died in the camps in the last two years of the Italian occupation alone.³⁸¹

The military Governor General Ernesto Mombelli initiated the resettlement of the Cyrenaican tribes in 1925 to aid military operations under his command to destroy the armed forces of Omar al-Mukhtar in the Jebel al-Akhdar region. Mombelli deployed small armed groups meant to mimic the mobility and flexibility of the Sanusi *adwar* with the support of aviation, and Mombelli's operations reached the oasis of Jalo where Omar al-Mukhtar and Muhammad Reda had established a base camp. Despite a series of heavy bombardments on the forces of Omar al-Mukhtar and Gheggia ben Abdullah, the combined military campaigns and isolation tactics failed to win significant gains for Italian territorial control.³⁸² Except for the occupation of Jaghub on the Egyptian coast and the occupation of Ghadames in Tripolitania, the map of Italian control in Cyrenaica did not change much from 1923 until 1926.³⁸³ Furthermore, evidence of a new influx of arms and supplies through Egypt's Western Desert pointed to the

³⁸¹ Atkinson, "Nomadic Strategies and Colonial Governance: Domination and Resistance in Cyrenaica, 1923-1932," in *Entanglements of Power: Geographies of Domination/Resistance*, Joanne P. Sharp, Paul Routledge, Chris Philo, and Ronan Paddison, ed. (London: Routledge, 2000), 94, 112.

³⁸² Del Boca, *Italiani in Libia*, vol. 2, 70-71.

³⁸³ For a map showing Italian territorial gains 1922-1926, see ACS SPD CR 23/224.

failure of Italian attempts to cut off supply lines, and rumors of a new Sanusi offensive against Italian garrisons fueled calls in Rome for a stronger military push into the interior.³⁸⁴

Luigi Federzoni and the Italian 'Reconquest' of Libya

In 1926, Mussolini looked to the issue of colonial expansion in the Libyan territories as a popular distraction from domestic unrest following the murder of socialist deputy Giacomo Matteotti by fascist agents in 1924. He paid his first visit to the region to mark his new interest in colonial issues, and he returned Federzoni to the position of Minister of Colonies after two years as the Minister of the Interior. During his career as a public figure and politician, Federzoni developed a reputation for his support of the Church, the monarchy, and the political involvement of traditional elites in Rome. Considered a moderate influence in the Fascist party, Mussolini appointed Federzoni as Minister of the Interior as an attempt to counterbalance more radical strains within the Fascist party calling for increased squad violence. After failing to stem a wave of anti-Church and anti-Freemason violence in 1925, Federzoni returned to the Ministry of Colonies with a vigorous program centered on expanding state authority and promoting his particular vision of Italian nationalism in the colonies.³⁸⁵

On his return to the Ministry of Colonies, Federzoni established a military agenda to expand the Italian presence into the interior to the 29th parallel, a line that would bring the oases of Jalo, Awjila, and Marada under Italian control. As a caravan route from Egypt's western

³⁸⁴ ASMAI II 134/26/197, Italian Legate in Egypt to the Governor of Cyrenaica, 10 March 1926; ASMAI II 134/27/204, Governor of Cyrenaica to Minister of Colonies, 28 July 1926.

³⁸⁵ Michael R. Ebner, *Ordinary Violence in Mussolini's Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 43; Frederick W. Deakin, "Il colonialismo fascista nel giudizio degli inglesi," in *Le guerre coloniali del fascismo*, Angelo Del Boca, ed. (Rome: Laterza, 1991), 349; Macchi, *Luigi Federzoni*, 8.

border into eastern Tripolitania and the Fezzan, the plan to occupy these oases aimed at debilitating the armed forces of the Sanusiyya and the Mogarba-Awaghir tribes and pushing any remaining opposition to Italian state expansion into the Saharan oases of Kufra. To take charge of the operations as the new Governor of Cyrenaica, Federzoni chose Attilio Teruzzi, a fascist strongman who had fought in the initial occupation of the Libyan territories. Both Teruzzi and Federzoni identified the hostility of the Mogarba tribes of western Cyrenaica as the primary impediment to Italian expansion into the interior, the objective being “total conquest and the definitive occupation of the entire Libyan territory up to its most remote Saharan borders.”³⁸⁶

Facing a constant shortage of funds and troops, Federzoni called for a possible political approach to winning the support of the Mogarba population of western Cyrenaica, but he considered military operations to be a prerequisite for possible negotiations.³⁸⁷ Without the resources to separate *sottomessi* populations from dissidents in the Mogarba territory in settlement camps like they did in the Benghazi-Derna region, Federzoni recommended a more conciliatory approach, separating them from the Sanusiyya, and opening markets.³⁸⁸ An earlier split in the Mogarba tribes, precipitated by disagreements between Saleh al-Ateusc and the Sanusi shaykhs, facilitated the Italian negotiations for the submission of the Cyrenaican Mogarba tribes to Italian authority. By the end of June 1925, the attempt of Gheggia ben Abdullah to take command of the Mogarba tribes in the name of the Sanusiyya led to a division in the Mogarba forces between those opposed to Gheggia ben Abdullah’s command who followed Saleh al-Ateusc into Sirte and those who remained in western Cyrenaica and accepted Sanusi

³⁸⁶ ACS SPD CR 23/224R, Federzoni to Mussolini, 24 November 1926.

³⁸⁷ ACS SPD CR 23/224R, Federzoni to the Minister of Finance, 6 August 1927.

³⁸⁸ ASMAI II 134/27/205, Minister of Colonies to Governor of Cyreniaca, 1 December 1926.

leadership.³⁸⁹ By the end of September 1927, Teruzzi and his agents used a combination of negotiations and the threat of force, including taking hostages from among family members of Mogarba and Awaghir notables, to induce the submission of the portion of the Mogarba populations who remained in western Cyrenaica to Italian authority.³⁹⁰ Their agreement allowed Italian troops to occupy the entire territory of Sirtica as a base for occupying the southern oases along the 29th parallel.³⁹¹

Throughout the process of negotiating the submission of the Mogarba population, Federzoni rejected any potential role of Sanusi intermediaries as an absolute detriment to Italian national prestige. Federzoni's injunction against negotiating with the Sanusi family placed Italian agents in Cyrenaica in a delicate position at times. The Mogarba in Cyrenaica, unlike Saleh al-Ateusc, maintained ties with Muhammad Reda, and they requested that the Italian government provide him with an official position in the local political structures.³⁹² In response, Federzoni ordered the removal of Reda to the Italian island of Ustica where Italy kept many of the political prisoners from the Libyan territories.³⁹³ Teruzzi celebrated the refusal to negotiate with Sanusi family members as an effort to replace their authority with that of the Italian state, to "detach, bit by bit, the populations from their Sanusi patrons."³⁹⁴

³⁸⁹ ASMAI II 134/26/199, Governor of Cyrenaica, Monthly Report, 1 July 1925.

³⁹⁰ Teruzzi, *Cirenaica verde*, 183.

³⁹¹ ACS FG 4/6/7, "Operation Mogarba", 18 January 1928; ACS FG 4/6/8, Teruzzi to Governor of Tripolitania, 28 January 1928.

³⁹² BNA CAB 44/14, "Relations between Great Britain, Italy, and the Senussi 1912-1924", 1927.

³⁹³ Santarelli et. al, *Omar al-Mukhtar*, 73.

³⁹⁴ Teruzzi, *Cirenaica verde*, 178.

Besides a movement for greater Italian state authority in the colonies, the rejection of possible negotiations with Sanusi intermediaries also reflected a debate among colonial experts over the capacity of the Sanusi family to act as state agents that centered on the nature of the Sanusi *ṭarīqa* as a religious or political organization. Two consecutive issues of the *Rassegna italiana* in 1928 published a debate between Bruno Ducati, a former student of Carlo Alfonso Nallino³⁹⁵ and a prominent scholar on Islamic law, and Filippo Lo Bello, a frequent author on colonial subjects. Following in the spirit of Nallino, a constant advocate for indirect systems of rule in the Libyan territories, Ducati defended the negotiations with Idris al-Sanusi as a colonial system that took advantage of the competition between Idris and Ahmad al-Sharif to promote a friendly Islamic power with state-like authority. “This brotherhood, in addition to its importance, has a special characteristic that differentiates it from all others; i.e., besides its religious program, it also has a political program, and it has entered into politics not as a simple force conforming to or subordinate to parties or trends, but acting as an independent unit, such that it is situated in Islam almost as a state within another State.”³⁹⁶

The rebuttal by Filippo Lo Bello in the following issue of the *Rassegna Italiana*, reflected the official view of the Federzoni ministry as a rejection of the Sanusiyya as effective colonial intermediaries. Lo Bello disputed the characterization of the Sanusiyya as an independent political authority and argued that the process of negotiations had essentially created a political

³⁹⁵ C.A. Nallino, often cited as Italy’s most famous Orientalist, frequently criticized the fascist government for failing to consult with experts on Islamic issues. See Federico Cresti, “Il professore e il generale. La polemica tra Carlo Alfonso Nallino e Rodolfo Graziani sulla Senussia e su altre questioni libiche,” *Studi Storici* 45, no. 4 (2004), 1123.

³⁹⁶ “Questa confraternita, oltre alla sua importanza, possiede una caratteristica speciale che la differenzia da tutte le altre; ossia essa, oltre al suo programma religioso, ne ha anche uno politico e nella politica è entrata non come sola forza confomitante o suborinata a partiti o a tendenze, ma in veste di unità indipendente, in modo da trovarsi nell’Islam quasi come uno stato dentro un altro Stato.” Bruno Ducati, “Lo Stato Senussita,” *Rassegna italiana*, vol. XXI (1928), 178.

authority where one did not exist. Lo Bello pointed to a fundamental misunderstanding of the relationship between the Ottoman central authorities and Sanusi notables as constituting a “state within a state,” and he argued that the Ottoman authorities only dealt with the Sanusiyya to control them and prevent them from becoming overly powerful in regional politics. According to Lo Bello, the Sanusi family represented a spiritual authority that imperial powers had mistakenly endowed with state functions, and after years of negotiations with centralized authorities, Sanusi elite had even lost their legitimacy as religious leaders, “after many lies and due to the ruin and loss of human lives for a cause of which the majority, though ignorant, understand its exact scope, the Sanusiyya are blamed and condemned.”³⁹⁷

Federzoni signaled his commitment to avoiding further mediation from the Sanusi family in discussions in the Italian Chamber of Deputies concerning the development of a new legal order to replace the 1919 Libyan Statutes. After years of propping up Sanusi authority, Federzoni argued that they had to refuse the possibility of negotiating power-sharing structures with any local notables because of the risk that it would feed expectations among local populations that the Italian state would establish another intermediary administration under the Sanusi family. Federzoni advocated an alternative approach to eliminating anti-Italian unrest in the Libyan territories by overwhelming local populations with mass colonization from the Italian peninsula. He called for the settlement of at least 300,000 Italians within a quarter century to balance out the demographics.³⁹⁸ Voicing popular conceptions of the Italian colonial project as an outlet to benefit Italian agricultural emigrants, Federzoni urged Mussolini to embrace a

³⁹⁷ “dopo tante menzogne ed a causa della rovina e della perdita di tante vite umane per una causa della quale ormai i più, sebbene ignoranti, comprendono la loro esatta portata, i Senussi sono biasmati e condannati.” Filippo Lo Bello, “La confraternita dei Senussi,” *Rassegna italiana*, vol. XXII (1928), 656.

³⁹⁸ Federzoni, *La politica coloniale del fascismo*, 21.

program of state-directed land concessions to bring massive numbers of Italian settlers into the colonies. Not just a measure for the economic development of the region, Federzoni saw the mass colonization as a political necessity that would bring in Italian nationals, “who would make a part of the Mediterranean coast of Africa Italian in fact and not just in law.”³⁹⁹

Fascism and the Catholic Church in the Libyan Territories

Within the nationalist movement and the PNF, Federzoni promoted a campaign in favor of the Catholic Church and against the influence of Freemasons in national politics, and he infused those agendas in his colonial administration and his vision for the nationalization of the Libyan territories through Italian settlements.⁴⁰⁰ In Federzoni’s colonial administration, the influence of Freemasons came to be equated with an excessive tolerance for Muslim traditions and the native population as a limitation of Italian state authority. In their condemnation of De Martino, Amendola, and the Regima Accords, Federzoni and Luigi Pintor declared a political battle against what they cast as a Freemason plot to work against the government and support the Sanusi elite.⁴⁰¹ Condemnations against the influence of Freemasons became widely diffuse during the course of the Italian military expansion into the interior among military personnel who blamed the influence of Freemasons for the punishing violence against the native population.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁹ ACS SPD CR 23/224R, Federzoni to Mussolini, 22 April 1927.

⁴⁰⁰ Macchi, 1927, 7; Adrian Lyttelton, *The Seizure of Power: Fascism in Italy 1919-1929* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), 119.

⁴⁰¹ ACS Carte Luigi Pintor, b. 6, f. 6, Pintor to Minister of Colonies, October 1923.

⁴⁰² ASMAI II 134/27/204, Anonymous soldier from the 2nd Libyan Legion to Minister of Colonies, 3 July 1926.

Federzoni aimed his campaign in part against anti-clerical elements among both liberals and fascists as part of his promotion for increased Catholic influence in Italian national politics. Throughout his political career, Federzoni developed a reputation as a pro-Catholic nationalist, and he considered the occupation of the Libyan territories as a key moment in superseding the ‘Roman Question’ and incorporating the Catholic Church into the Italian nation.⁴⁰³ Federzoni’s support of the Catholic Church in national politics translated into increased financial support for missionary work in the Libyan territories during his time as Minister of Colonies as part of a wider project to expand *italianità* as a precursor for mass Italian immigration into the Libyan territories and a further step in his anti-Freemason campaign.

When Mussolini named Federzoni as his Minister of Colonies, the relationship between the Catholic mission in Libya and the colonial administration was already much improved from the bitter disputes between Ameglio and the Franciscan Bishop Antomelli during the early years of the Italian occupation. The Roman Curia replaced Antomelli in 1919 with Giacinto Tonizza, a bishop with experience working in Muslim societies who promised to refrain from commenting on Italian policies.⁴⁰⁴ The change in missionary leadership corresponded to a wider shift in the Vatican’s approach to missionary work that sought to distance the missions from the political issues and financing of colonial administrations, a move that eliminated much of the fuel for disagreements between missions and colonial state officials.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰³ Cordova, *Agli ordini del serpente verde*, 56.

⁴⁰⁴ Filberto Sabbadin, *I frati minori lombardi in Libia: la missione di Tripoli (1908-1991)* (Milan: Edizioni Biblioteca Francescana, 1991), 38.

⁴⁰⁵ Peter C. Kent, *The Pope and the Duce* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1981), 38; Alba Rosa Leone, “La politica missionaria del Vaticano tra le due guerre,” *Studi Storici* 21, no. 1 (1980), 124.

Federzoni furthered the improved relations by increasing state funding for missionary construction projects as part of his wider development plans to improve colonial infrastructure. In 1923, the mission used the state funds to initiate construction of a long-anticipated Cathedral in Tripoli.⁴⁰⁶ In a report to Mussolini explaining an extraordinary budget increase for the mission, Federzoni emphasized the necessity of expanding the Catholic Church's presence in Libya in support of Italy's imperial ambitions and confirmation of Italian racial superiority. "The construction of buildings for the Catholic cult is indispensable to assure the spiritual assistance to our colonists and it further constitutes a necessary moral affirmation of the dominant race which, in North Africa, resumes the tradition of the church of St. Augustine."⁴⁰⁷ Mussolini declared his support of the Franciscan missions during his visit to the Libyan colonies in April 1926, and he wrote soon after to Emilio De Bono (then Minister of Colonies) to insist on granting increased funds to assist the mission in its construction projects.⁴⁰⁸ In 1928, as part of an extraordinary budget of 800 million Lire for public works in the Italian colonies, Federzoni reserved 6.5 million Lire for the construction of a new cathedral in Benghazi and churches in Merj, Apollonia, and Tobruk, a plan that constituted a drastic expansion of the Franciscans' field of action to correspond to the military occupation of the interior.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁶ Cesare Marongiu Buonaiuti, *Politica e religioni nel colonialismo italiano (1882-1941)* (Varese: Giuffrè Editore, 1982), 157.

⁴⁰⁷ "La costruzione di edifici destinati al culto cattolico è indispensabile per assicurare l'assistenza spirituale ai nostri coloni, e costituisce d'altra parte una necessaria affermazione morale della razza dominante, che si riannoda, nel nord Africa, alla tradizione della chiesa di S. Agostino." ACS SPD CR 23/224R, Federzoni to Mussolini, 6 February 1928. On the extraordinary allotment for public funds in 1928, see ACS SPD CR 23/224R, Federzoni to Volpi, 4 February 1928.

⁴⁰⁸ Ianari, *Chiesa, Coloni e Islam*, 116. ASMAI 150/31/140, Mussolini to De Bono, 1929.

⁴⁰⁹ ACS SPD CR 23/224R, Federzoni to Mussolini, January 1928.

Over the course of the 1920s, the relationship between the Church and the Italian state gradually warmed at home and in the Libyan colonies with the direct influence of Federzoni, culminating in the stabilization of relations between the Italian state and the Vatican in the Lateran Accords in February 1929.⁴¹⁰ Pope Pius XI's quiet support for nationalist projects and focus on missionary work after 1925 folded neatly with Rome's emphasis on colonial expansion after the Matteotti crisis.⁴¹¹ The Fascist government's generosity towards the Catholic mission also fit into a broader strategy in Mussolini's foreign policy that sought to augment Italian cultural, economic, and political presence in the Mediterranean to counter British and French influence. Mussolini hoped that the improved relationship with the Holy See in the 1920s would work to Italy's advantage in the Mediterranean by using its missionary networks to extend Italian influence in the Arab world.⁴¹²

Shortly before Mussolini replaced Federzoni as the Minister of Colonies in 1928, the Franciscan mission completed construction of the Cathedral in Tripoli.⁴¹³ At the official consecration, Emilio De Bono, newly appointed Governor of the united Libyan territories, gave a speech marking the occasion in which he affirmed an abiding connection between Italian colonial expansion and the Catholic mission: "Every new attestation of our faith *in partibus*

⁴¹⁰ On Mussolini's adoption of Catholicism as a symbol of the nation at home and abroad, see Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy*, translated by Keith Botsford (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1996), 111.

⁴¹¹ Danilo Veneruso, "Il pontificato di Pio XI," in *Storia della chiesa, Vol. XXIII: I Cattolici nel mondo contemporaneo (1922-1958)* (Milan: Edizioni Paoline, 1991), 34.

⁴¹² Kent, *Pope and the Duce*, 37.

⁴¹³ In 1924, the mission finished construction on the church in Homs with money from the colonial government 200,000 Lire. The church in Misurata was constructed entirely with state funding in 1925 and it cost 270,000. The building plans also included a project to create a new entrance for the original Maltese church in Tripoli, Santa Maria degli Angeli, which was built in compliance with Ottoman laws prohibiting a Christian church from constructing open entrances along the street. Sabbadin, *Fratelli minori*, 41.

infidelium is an affirmation of possession, and a pledge of civilization.”⁴¹⁴ After years of tensions between the Italian colonial state and missionary leaders in the Libyan territories as Italian officials tried to negotiate a position as a pro-Islamic colonial power, the consecration of the Cathedral served as a symbol of a new commitment to a collaborative approach between the Church and state in spreading *italianità* across the Mediterranean.

Conclusion

Dissatisfied with the slow pace of military operations in the Libyan territories, Mussolini took over the position of Minister of Colonies from Federzoni in December 1928. He named Badoglio as the Governor of both Tripolitania and Cyrenaica who, along with General Rodolfo Graziani, oversaw the conclusion of Federzoni’s plan for the “reconquest” of the Libyan interior. Initially, Badoglio deployed Graziani to Tripolitania to occupy the Fezzan and Sirte regions where Saleh al-Ateusc led Mogarba forces in collaboration with powerful members of the Sef en-Nasser family and Awlad Suleiman tribes. Italian troops chased the Mogarba and Awlad Suleiman troops into the area around Waw al-Kabir east of Murzuk, and Graziani had families of the Mogarba taken hostage and moved northward towards the coast. His tactics led to the submission of over 2,000 Mogarba troops, but Saleh al-Ateusc fled with members of the Sef en-Nasser family and a core group of armed forces first to Kufra and then into Egypt while Graziani and his troops, assisted with heavy aerial bombardments, chased them through the desert.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹⁴ “ogni nuova attestazione della nostra fede *in partibus infidelium* è una affermazione di possesso, e arra di civiltà.” Sabbadin, *Frati minori*, 40.

⁴¹⁵ AUSSME L8/158/13, Military Command of Tripoli, “L’occupazione del Fezzan,” June 1930.

Graziani declared the threat of the Mogarba neutralized, and he used his position in the Waw al-Kabir area to occupy Murzuk, the main center of the Fezzan. Badoglio sent Graziani to Cyrenaica in July 1930 to oversee military operations in the last territories where anti-Italian forces congregated: the oases of Kufra and the Jebel al-Akhdar region. After bombing Kufra and chasing the last remaining anti-Italian forces there into Egypt, Graziani focused his attentions on isolating Omar al-Mukhtar and the Sanusi troops in the Jebel al-Akhdar region. The occupation of the Fezzan had already cut off potential supply lines from the west, so the only potential sources of arms and food for the Sanusi forces would come either from the Egyptian border to the east or from populations living in Italian-controlled areas who had declared their official submission to Italian authority. Citing evidence that *sottomessi* populations had provided Omar al-Mukhtar with information concerning Italian troop movements and supplies, at times under threat, Graziani initiated an aggressive resettlement program that expanded on the forced resettlements along the coast that began under Governor Mombelli in 1925-26. Over the course of the following year, the Italian military forced around 90-100,000 in heavily controlled camps in the coastal regions.⁴¹⁶ By some accounts, the internments affected around half of the total population of Cyrenaica by the end of the military operations, and it left the forces of Omar al-Mukhtar almost completely isolated.⁴¹⁷

During the operations to move populations of the interior into internment camps, the Minister of Colonies ordered Graziani to apply a further measure targeted directly at the

⁴¹⁶ ACS FG 9/13/5, Graziani, "Le Popolazioni," 1931; Atkinson, "Nomadic Strategies and Colonial Governance," 112.

⁴¹⁷ Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Libia*, 182. Conditions in the internment camps were notoriously bad. There are no exact figures on how many people died during the internment, but most historians estimate that at least 40,000 died from a variety of causes. Some put the number higher at 50-70,000. Ahmida, *Forgotten Voices*, 44.

Sanusiyya to seize all Sanusi property. On May 29, 1930, Italian military police organized a simultaneous attack on all Sanusi *zawāyā* in Cyrenaica except Jaghbub along the Egyptian border. The Italian government then deported all of the religious heads of the *zawāyā* to the Italian island of Ustica which already held thousands of Libyan political prisoners.⁴¹⁸ Graziani favored the seizure of the Sanusi *zawāyā* for eliminating another potential source of supplies and money to the Sanusi forces under Omar al-Mukhtar's command, but he also claimed that the state seizure in effect reclaimed the possessions for members of the Sanusi family like Muhammad al-Reda who did not approve of the anti-Italian rebellion and allowed for the local populations to free themselves from the demands of the Sanusi *zawāyā* for religious contributions.⁴¹⁹

The Minister of Colonies, however, recognized the new operations as differing from previous activities of the colonial administration of Cyrenaica in its "strictly anti-Sanusi character, in that the Sanusiyya are recognized as primarily if not uniquely responsible for the rebellion."⁴²⁰ After the military operations culminated in the occupation of Kufra and the hanging and capture of Omar al-Mukhtar, Graziani underscored his conviction, shared by the colonial governor, that the Sanusi elite should never reclaim positions of authority in what he considered finally a fully Italian territory on the occasion of his departure from the colonies in 1934.⁴²¹

⁴¹⁸ Del Boca, *Gli Italiani in Libia*, 175.

⁴¹⁹ ACS FG 9/13/4, Graziani, "Le Prime direttive," 1931.

⁴²⁰ ACS FG 11/16/2, Minister of Foreign Affairs to Italian Legate in Cairo, 29 July 1930.

⁴²¹ ACS FG 11/14/9, Graziani to the Minister of Colonies and Governor Badoglio, 18 April 1934.

Conclusions

The end of an Italian military offensive in 1931 allowed for a dramatic increase in state-organized settlement in Cyrenaica. The prospect of freeing the land for Italian settlement lay at the center of the Italian military operations. Starting with Federzoni's refusal to continue negotiations with Sanusi family members after 1923, voices calling for an end to liberal policies of colonial rule through local intermediaries and an increase in Italian presence in the region became dominant in the Italian colonial administration, and at the beginning of the "reconquest" in 1926, the central government created a permanent Commission for Internal Migration and Colonization to organize Italian emigration. With the economic depression of the 1930s, the project of colonizing the Libyan territories with Italian agricultural workers seemed to offer the double benefit of consolidating Italian state power over the interior and promoting a program of economic autarky by increasing the agricultural capacity of the land in order to decrease Italian reliance on imports from regions under the control of other European powers. Italian officials also hoped that the introduction of European settlements would promote stability and allow for an increase in centralized state control without the trouble of dealing with local intermediaries. The designation of the Libyan colonies as an official administrative district in 1939, making up Italy's 'fourth shore' across the Mediterranean, signaled Mussolini's intentions to take advantage of increased Italian settlement to integrate the region in the Italian state system in a model reminiscent of French rule in Algeria. While Mussolini continued to extoll the ideas of religious tolerance for Muslim citizens, even going as far as to declare himself the 'protector of Islam' in a carefully staged ceremony during his visit to the colonies in 1937, Italian state agencies intended

the programs of mass colonization to decrease the relative influence of the Muslim populations and Muslim elites in the Libyan territories as they increased the numbers of Italian settlers. Immediately after declaring the region pacified, the Italian military command delayed releasing the Cyrenaican Bedouin tribes. General Graziani justified the continued internment as a humanitarian move to prevent an outbreak of civil war and to preserve the region's best grazing territories for nomadic populations, but the official explanation thinly veiled state interest in securing land for Italian settlement in some of the areas Italian agricultural experts considered best for cultivation.⁴²²

Though the state-run settlement programs of the 1930s led to a dramatic increase in the Italian population in the region reaching near 110,000 in 1940, the declaration of pacification in the Libyan territories did little to stem the flow of Italian emigration to non-Italian lands as many Italian advocates of territorial expansion had hoped. The number of settlers in the Libyan territories never exceeded the population of Italians in Tunisia, and the Americas remained a more popular destination for Italian emigrants. The settlement programs also did little to advance the fascist program of economic autarky. The Libyan territories failed to develop as a significant source for raw materials for Italian industry, and settler communities continued to depend heavily on imports and assistance from Rome until the outbreak of World War II destroyed many of the Italian settlements and cut short any future plans for colonization or infrastructure development.⁴²³

⁴²² ACS FG 11/14/9, Graziani to Minister of Colonies, 18 April 1934.

⁴²³ For accounts of Italy's planned settlement programs, see: Federico Cresti, *Oasi di italianità: La Libia della colonizzazione agraria tra fascismo, guerra e indipendenza (1935-1956)* (Turin: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1996); Martin Moore, *Fourth Shore: Italy's Mass Colonization of Libya* (London: Routledge, 1940); Claudio G. Segré, *The Fourth Shore: The Italian Colonization of Libya* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); Also see the relevant sections of Mark I. Choate, *Emigrant Nation*.

In the short term, however, Rome was able to sell the military operations as a resounding success and a fulfillment of the promise of territorial expansion that had long been at the center of a nationalist movement in favor of the colonial enterprise. On an international level, Graziani's brutal tactics in the Libyan territories invoked a storm of criticism against the Italian government and made Omar al-Mukhtar a hero and a symbol of resistance against imperial aggression throughout the Arab world. In the following years, Mussolini took measures to improve Italy's image by expanding on propaganda that began after the First World War depicting Italy as a bridge between the Muslim Mediterranean and Europe. He achieved some success among Arab nationalists who saw the fascist regime as a potential ally against British foreign policies and aggression in Palestine, but for the most part, publicity on the repressive tactics of the Italian occupation of the Libyan interior shaped an overwhelmingly negative public image of Italy in the Muslim Mediterranean and helped solidify Omar al-Mukhtar's credentials as a hero of anti-colonial movements.⁴²⁴

The shifts in Italian domestic politics in the 1920s and the rising influence of nationalist politics focused on territorial aggrandizement does not provide an adequate explanation for the end of the negotiations between Idris al-Sanusi and the Italian colonial administration in 1923. In this dissertation, I have focused on the continuities in Italian approaches to colonial administration and the consistent tension between an approach based on local intermediaries and an interest in centralized state control to turn the attention to the inability of Idris al-Sanusi to generate consensus for Italian state presence among tribal leaders affiliated with the Sanusi *tarīqa*. I argue that the series of negotiations between Idris al-Sanusi and Italian state officials

⁴²⁴ De Felice, *Il fascismo e l'Oriente*, 33.

represented a failed attempt to create a regional hierarchy and a political entity based on Sanusi religious authority and on a history of similar relationships between Sanusi family members and state authorities in Istanbul. In their negotiations, Idris al-Sanusi saw himself as a mediating element who could use Italian state resources for a modernizing project in regional infrastructure development and limit Italian political control in the Cyrenaican interior. Tribal leaders in the region, however, reacted against the rising influence of Idris al-Sanusi and the threat his development plans posed to their traditional roles in regional trade routes. Regional power brokers in western Cyrenaica rejected Idris al-Sanusi as a colonial intermediary well before Mussolini's rise to power or the shift in Italian domestic politics that precipitated the military operations of the 1920s. In the aftermath of Idris al-Sanusi's self-imposed exile in 1923 and Luigi Federzoni's subsequent declaration of an end to state negotiations with the Sanusi family, the Mogarba and Awaghir tribes along with Sanusi military commanders in the region redefined the Sufi *ṭarīqa* as an anti-colonial movement that took on international proportions after the hanging of Omar al-Mukhtar in 1931. The position of the Sanusiyya in broader regional political and socio-economic contexts has remained a shifting target in the decades since the Italian occupation and independence as a reflection of attempts to define political legitimacy in relation to claims of anti-colonial stature linked to a common religious tradition.

Strategies of the Sanusiyya

The Sanusi family did not adopt a monolithic approach in their reactions to the Italian invasion and subsequent attempts to impose Italian control over the Libyan interior. The links between the Sanusi elite and tribal factions in the region formed a crucial backdrop to the various

tactics of factions of the Sanusi family during the colonial period, but little is known about the details of the Sufi *ṭarīqa*'s tribal affiliations. The future of research into Libya's modern history, assuming the new government provides more open access to historians than Qaddafi did, should lie in uncovering possible Ottoman or Sanusi documents from former Sanusi *zawāyā* throughout the Libyan interior that could provide a clearer idea of how tribal interests influenced the strategies of the Sanusi elite during the colonial period. What little evidence we do have indicates that the spread of the Sanusiyya in Cyrenaica and the Northern Sahara was tied to the allegiance of tribes in control of trans-Saharan trade routes, especially the tribes of the Zuwaya in Kufra and the Majarba in Jalo. Both of these tribes established their control over discrete areas of the Wadai-Benghazi trade route as guides with extensive knowledge of the rough terrain. Though we do not have documents that provide a detailed picture of the exact relationship between Sanusi elites and the Zuwaya or Majarba, the pattern of Sufi/tribal relations from other *ṭuruq* in North Africa suggest that the expansion of the Sanusi *zawāyā* corresponded to the economic success of its followers in the Zuwaya and Majarba tribes. After an initial period of ambivalence, some factions of the Sanusi family adopted an unequivocally militant attitude, first under the leadership of Ahmed al-Sherif then later under the guidance of Omar al-Mukhtar and his warriors from the region of the Jebel al-Akhdar. The more conciliatory approach of Idris al-Sanusi represented the interests of the tribes in the southern Libyan oases along nineteenth-century trade routes that favored a re-opening of trade to the region, especially after years of famine and scarcity of the First World War.

Interpretations of the Sanusi elite as nationalist leaders during the Italian colonial administration formed the basis for the United Nation's establishment of a monarchy in the

newly independent Libya in 1951, and continued reinterpretations of Idris al-Sanusi and his position relative to the Italian state. The Italian administration, pushed to the very edges of the Libyan littoral by the end of the 1910s, proved eager to comply with the requests of Idris to grant his territory some measure of autonomy in exchange for relative stability. In the politically fraught issues of reading collaboration and resistance into the activities of elites in a colonial context, it is important to understand the variety of strategies the Sanusiyya used in relation to the Italian administration as determined in part by their historical role as mediators among the tribes of the Libyan interior. Like Julia Clancy-Smith did in her seminal work on the political strategies of Muslim elites in colonial Tunisia and Algeria, I have tried to avoid nationalist-driven debates that pit true patriots against those who collaborated with colonial authorities. According to Clancy-Smith, social norms based on pre-colonial power structures circumscribed the types of political actions available to particular religious leaders like Idris al-Sanusi.⁴²⁵ In the context of the pre-colonial power structure, Sanusi elites fulfilled the function of peacekeepers and mediators of disputes while maintaining at least the appearance of neutrality. In the disrupted world of colonial hegemony, the proper role of religious authorities was far from clear. The division in tactics among members of the Sanusi family presented one available option; they used a variety of methods to deal with the presence of Italian troops and administrators to correspond with the desires of their various supporters. Idris al-Sanusi seemed to play a balancing act between serving as an Italian agent and as a symbol of Libyan identity. His status as a spiritual guide allowed him to procure valuable resources for the tribes supporting him,

⁴²⁵ Julia Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint: Muslim Notables, Populist Protest, Colonial Encounters (Algeria and Tunisia, 1800-1904)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

including vast numbers of weapons, from the Italians, the British, and the French, as he navigated the rocky waters of regional and international competition.

Italian Territorial Control and Idris al-Sanusi Abroad

During the period of planned colonization in the 1930s, Idris al-Sanusi and the Sanusiyya disappeared from the Italian colonial documents as the officials involved in governing the colonies pursued policies of direct territorial control. Following the capture and hanging of Omar al-Mukhtar, the Italian administration declared the Sanusiyya defeated and irrelevant to the future of their colonies. Idris al-Sanusi continued to influence Libyan nationalist programs among elite Libyans abroad, but he faced continued competition from Libyans from other regional and tribal affiliations. Among notables from Tripolitania and Cyrenaica in exile abroad, the Second World War created an atmosphere of heightened tension and reinforced regional divisions that were to plague the postcolonial state as they vied to gain an edge in the political future of Libya. In 1940, a group of Libyan notables in exile met in Cairo and agreed to provide troops to fight on the side of the British in North Africa with the understanding that the British would champion Libyan independence from Italy at the end of the war. Armed and trained in Egypt, the “Libyan Arab Force” fought under British command but flew a Sanusi flag, and British officials later credited the extra manpower with providing the necessary force for Allied success in North Africa. At the same meeting in Cairo, the Libyan exiles also agreed to the formation of a provisional government under Sanusi leadership with an advisory council that included representatives from both Tripolitania and Cyrenaica.

In a move that seemed designed to demonstrate his favored status among the British to competing Libyan elites abroad, Idris threatened to withdraw his support for the war in 1942. In response, the British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, won back his support by specifying that British efforts for Libyan independence would promote a Sanusi leadership in the postcolonial state or at the very least that they would secure independence from Italy for the region of Cyrenaica even if the remainder of the Libyan territories remained under Italian sovereignty. To that end, Eden declared in the House of Commons: “His Majesty’s government is determined that at the end of the war the Sanussi of Cyrenaica will in no circumstances again fall under Italian domination,”⁴²⁶ and Idris continued to lean his weight behind the Libyan forces. Notables from the western region criticized Idris for agreeing to comply with the British before gaining assurances of the future independence of the entire nation and raised suspicions that the British had preemptively determined that the Sanusiyya would govern the entire region on independence.⁴²⁷ His involvement in the World War II secured Idris al-Sanusi the status of a regional political intermediary in a British-dominated international order.

The Sanusi Monarchy and the Imperfect Union

The roots behind Qaddafi’s revolution or even the regional divisions revealed in the overthrow of Qaddafi’s regime can be traced back to these moments of Libyan state formation in the Second World War and its aftermath when historic animosities among Libyan elites in exile and the strategic interests of international powers conspired to create the framework of a new

⁴²⁶ Baldinetti, *The Origins of the Libyan Nation*, 107-108; John Wright, *Libya: A Modern History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 47; Francesco Saverio Caroselli, “Gli Accordi Anglo-Libici,” *Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali* XX, no. 3 (1953).

⁴²⁷ Wright, *Libya: A Modern History*, 47.

state in a region with a past of predominantly negative experiences with modern states and little shared history that could serve as a foundation for a cohesive national identity. When the United Nations initiated discussions concerning the future of Italy's Libyan territories after the Second World War, the idea of establishing a united kingdom under Sanusi leadership was far from evident, but the British interests in fulfilling their wartime promises and gaining a loyal ally in a strategic area pushed the international community in that direction. Though the Ottoman Empire had administered Cyrenaica as a subdistrict of Tripolitania for a brief period of time, the two regions had little history of working together, and even within those two regions, there was little alignment between the interests of the urban centers and populations in the rural interior. In an attempt to establish stability in the region after decades of devastating warfare, the United Nations organized a commission under the direction of the former Assistant Secretary-General for Conference and General Services at the UN, Adrian Pelt, to determine the will of the people concerning the future state. The Pelt Commission divided responsibility for surveying the Libyan territories among delegates from Egypt, France, Italy, Pakistan, the United Kingdom, and the United States joined the Pelt Commission to formulate recommendations for the future of the region.⁴²⁸

The Pelt Commission spent two years in discussions over the future of the region, but they came to the decision to establish a Sanusi monarchy in a united Libyan kingdom just one week before the deadline on 24 December 1951. The decision pushed aside an alternative plan co-authored by the British Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, and the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Carlo Sforza in May 1949. The Bevin-Sforza plan called for a gradual process of state

⁴²⁸ Ismail R. Khalidi, "The Constitution of the United Kingdom of Libya: Background and Summary," *The Middle East Journal* 6, no. 2 (1952): 221.

formation in which Cyrenaica would remain under British protection, Italy would maintain control over Tripolitania, and Fezzan would go to France in continuation with the temporary administration established immediately at the war's end. Bevin and Sforza planned for the regions to unify and gain independence after ten years subject to UN approval. The Bevin-Sforza plan gained wide support in the United Nations, but citing disapproval among Arab leaders, as established primarily through the reports of the Pelt Commission, the plan quickly fell to the side.⁴²⁹

The decision to reject the Bevin-Sforza plan in favor of a Sanusi monarchy clearly fit into British and American interests in acting quickly to establish a friendly independent state in the region to create a strategic partnership in the looming Cold War. The long history of a beneficial relationship between Idris and British officials in Egypt that had intensified during the Second World War seemed to promise the compliance of the Sanusi monarch with the interests of the Western allies, but it exacerbated regional tensions between Cyrenaican and Tripolitanian notables as they debated the possible future of a unified Libyan nation.

Observers at the time saw the failure of the Pelt Commission to develop a clear plan for the Libyan state as a reflection of pervasive regional and tribal divisions throughout the territories. Lisa Anderson has argued that the inconclusive results of the Pelt Commission was just as much a result of the international nature of the commission's delegations, "as each delegation pursued lines of inquiry that coincided with the positions of their governments rather than eliciting Libyan views."⁴³⁰ Ultimately the Pelt commission supported British (and to a

⁴²⁹ John Wright, *Libya: A Modern History*, 54.

⁴³⁰ Lisa Anderson, "'A Last Resort, an Expedient and an Experiment': Statehood and Sovereignty in Libya," *The Journal of Libyan Studies* 2, no. 2 (2001): 17.

lesser extent) American interests in establishing a unified and independent Libyan state under a monarch who could and would enter into military agreements in the ensuing Cold War. Idris confirmed the suspicion that he felt little interest in the fate of Tripolitania when he admitted to the American ambassador that he preferred an emirate over Cyrenaica instead of a monarchy in the entire country.⁴³¹ Early assessments of the postwar situation from the British official assigned to Cyrenaica in 1942, Duncan C. Cummings, admitted that the leadership of Idris al-Sanusi could prove divisive, but argued that Britain's reputation in the Muslim world depended on their willingness to honor the promise Eden made to Idris for independence.⁴³²

During the discussions over the future state of Libya, individuals who tended to support the idea of a Sanusi leadership in a united kingdom came to prominence in Tripolitania and Fezzan. In Tripolitania, the Pelt Commission identified Bashir Bey Sadawi as the most capable and important political leader in the region. Bashir Bey Sadawi had been involved in forming the Tripolitanian Republic after the First World War and later became an active organizer among Libyans in exile. He established the National Council for the Liberation in Cairo with the backing of the Arab League with the goal of promoting greater cooperation and unity between Cyrenaica and Tripolitania. On the eve of independence, he formed the National Congress Party along with his Egyptian advisor (and later historian of the Idris monarchy) Fuad Shukri. The Party called for Libyan unity under a Sanusi monarchy, though with Tripolitania playing a dominant economic role in the state. Their conversations with Bashir Bey Sadawi and his

⁴³¹ Dirk Vandewall, "Libya's Revolution Revisited," *MERIP Middle East Report* 143 (1986): 31.

⁴³² Scott L. Bills, *The Libyan Arena: The United States, Britain, and the Council of Foreign Ministers, 1945-1948* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1995), 20.

supporters convinced British and UN observers of the viability of the Sanusi monarchy for creating a sense of national unity.⁴³³

The extreme poverty of the region after the Second World War contributed to the difficulties in formulating a plan for the postcolonial state. On the eve of independence, the World Bank ranked Libya as one of the poorest countries in the world with an income per capita at about \$30 per year and a population of just one million people after decades of warfare, drought, and shortages in trade. The brutality of the Italian colonial occupation, especially during the military campaigns of the 1920s, effectively destroyed all of the (relatively few) institutional structures from the Ottoman period, and the failure of the Italian administration to create an education system, especially in rural areas, left the populations of the Libyan interior with weak ties to civic systems and a pervasive distrust in the mechanisms of the modern state. Not having a greater civic spirit or institutional histories, traditional client-patron relationships, informed by tribal alliances, continued to occupy a central role in the formation of the postcolonial state.⁴³⁴

Initially, the British hoped that their relationship with Idris would prove beneficial to their standing throughout the Arab world. Recognizing the alliance with Idris as a crucial component to the ability of British troops to hold their own in the desert wars of World War II, the British chief civil affairs officer in the Middle East R.D.H. Arundell considered maintaining close ties with Cyrenaica crucial for British foreign policy. “The Power which controls this territory sits astride the sea lanes of the Eastern Mediterranean, and can threaten the Nile Valley by land and

⁴³³ Adrian Pelt, *Libyan Independence and the United Nations: A Case of Planned Decolonization* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970), 180; John Wright, *Libya: A Modern History*, 51.

⁴³⁴ Dirk Vandewall, *Libya Since Independence: Oil and State-Building* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), 44.

air.”⁴³⁵ During the 1950s, Libya’s diminished prestige led the British and the Americans to consider Libya as little more than a convenient location for an air force base and training grounds.

King Idris and the Sanusi ṭarīqa

Scholars have focused their inquiries on the influence of regional divisions and international interests in Libyan state formation during the Sanusi monarchy, but little work has been done on the Islamic nature of the Sanusi state. Did the establishment of the Sanusi monarchy represent a final transition of the Sufi *ṭarīqa* from a religious order to a purely political state structure? Did claims to legitimacy of the Sanusi monarchy rest on Idris’ capacity to spread *baraka*? Or did opposition to the Sanusi monarchy center on issues of religious identity?

British agents noted his status as a spiritual leader and his symbolic value as a the leader of the anti-colonial nationalist Sanusiyya as justification for the essentially British decision to establish a unified Libyan nation under the leadership of Idris al-Sanusi. The British chief civil affairs officer for the Middle East, Duncan Cummings, argued that the Sanusi figurehead had lost prestige during his period of exile since it separated him from direct contact with the anti-Italian rebellion, but Cummings still believed that he continued to have influence over the majority of Cyrenaicans if not Tripolitarians. “To the feckless Arab he bears the essence of sanctity; to the politically minded townsman or exile, he is a convenient peg on which to hang vague ideas of Cyrenaican independence.”⁴³⁶ According to foreign observers, if a shared regional identity was to

⁴³⁵ Quoted in Bills, *The Libyan Arena*, 22.

⁴³⁶ Scott Bills, *The Libyan Arena*, 21.

develop, especially among the rural population of Cyrenaica, it would do so based on a shared religion instead of a shared ethnicity.⁴³⁷

The status of Idris al-Sanusi as a Muslim notable clearly informed and served as justification for the United Nations decision to establish a united Kingdom of Libya under Sanusi leadership, but when he first became king, Idris al-Sanusi distanced himself from the Sanusi *zawāyā* and his previous role as head of the Sanusi *ṭarīqa*. Despite his traditional foundation for authority in his position as a spiritual leader of the Sanusi *ṭarīqa*, Idris instituted a legal system that followed the model of secular western states instead of placing *sharia'a* in a privileged position in a pattern similar to many postcolonial leaders of Arab states in the 1950s and 60s. Idris did not reconstitute the Sanusi *zawāyā* until 1963. When he did reopen the *zuwaya*, he restricted their involvement in the development of political parties or the debates over the state development.⁴³⁸ Idris' concern with limiting the involvement of Sanusi shaykhs and *zawāyā* in the Libyan kingdom was part of a larger plan to prevent the development of opposition groups that could pose a substantial threat to his hold on power.

Idris' move to separate his position as the Libyan King from his status as spiritual guide of the Sanusi *ṭarīqa* also reflected rivalries within the Sanusi family concerning succession within the Libyan Kingdom. When he was placed on the throne, Idris was married to Fatima, a daughter of Ahmed al-Sherif, but the couple was childless thus leaving open the issue of

⁴³⁷ Consider, for example, the note of caution from E.E. Stafford in 1949. Stafford agreed that Sanusi leadership presented the best option for the Cyrenaican region, but he cautioned that regional loyalties would not prove strong enough for the postcolonial state to function without significant British assistance. "It is not incorrect to regard the word 'Cyrenaican' as being synonymous with 'Senussi,' but the tie is one of faith, not one of blood." F.E. Stafford, "The Ex-Italian Colonies," *International Affairs* 25, no. 1 (1949): 54.

⁴³⁸ Baldinetti, *The Origins of the Libyan Nation*, 130; Dennis Sammut, "Libya and the Islamic Challenge," *The World Today* 50, no. 10 (1994): 198.

succession to the throne. The Libyan constitution set the laws of succession of the King in Chapter V, Article 46: “In the event of the King’s death and the Throne remaining vacant owing to the lack of a successor to the King or to no successor having been appointed, the Senate and the House of Representatives shall at once hold a joint meeting without convocation to appoint a successor within ten days.”⁴³⁹ Among members of the committee writing the constitution, however, the question arose of whether or not succession to the throne would extend to the entire line of descendants from Muhammad bin ‘Ali al-Sanusi, the recognized founder of the Sanusi *ṭarīqa*. In other words, would political leadership of the Libyan Kingdom become intrinsically linked to the spiritual guidance of the Sufi community following the Sanusi path?

The committee writing the Libyan constitution decided to leave the decision concerning royal succession to Idris, and he confirmed a strict division between his role as leader of the Sanusiyya and his role as monarch of the Kingdom of Libya by asserting that though any eligible male member of the Sanusi family could become head of the *ṭarīqa*, only descendants in his branch of the family could take the throne. This decision meant that the next in line to the throne after himself would be his younger brother and loyal friend, Muhammad al-Rida.⁴⁴⁰ Angry with the decree of succession, the descendants of Ahmed al-Sherif blamed Ibrahim al-Shalhi, a long-time servant and adviser of Idris, for persuading the king to block their access to political power in the Sanusi monarchy. In 1954, one of Ahmed al-Sherif’s sons killed al-Shalhi in Benghazi, and after deciding that a family conspiracy lay behind the murder, Idris had the entire Sanusi family placed under house arrest and later sent seven of the young men from Ahmed al-Sherif’s line into exile. In reaction to the family’s betrayal, Idris took his division between the Sanusi

⁴³⁹ Pelt, *Libyan Independence and the United Nations*, 553.

⁴⁴⁰ Wright, *Libya: A Modern History*, 81.

ṭarīqa and the Libyan state a step further by inserting a clause in the Libyan Constitution establishing that except for those individuals in the direct line of descent to the throne (i.e. Muhammad al-Rida), no members of the Sanusi family could become Minister. Adrian Pelt applauded Idris' decision as "one more indication of [King Idris'] policy of not claiming more power than a correctly conceived and functioning constitutional monarchy should allow."⁴⁴¹

In other ways, a history of adherence to the Sanusi *ṭarīqa* gave certain groups and individuals greater access to channels of power in the Libyan Kingdom. In particular, the tribes with long-standing ties to the trade routes going through Kufra—the Zuwaya and the Tibbu—maintained a distinct advantage in the Libyan Kingdom. Idris kept a personal staff and a legion of guards made up of his traditional supporters among the Tibbu suggesting that some members of this historically servant tribe rose to prominence in the central state structure.⁴⁴² In the southern oases of Cyrenaica, the powerful Zuwaya continued to dominate financial activity and local politics and they perpetuated nineteenth-century perception of the dark-skinned Tibbu as a servant class. Oral accounts from after the war suggest that the Zuwaya had grown in numbers during the Italian occupation. As the last part of Cyrenaica the Italians occupied, Kufra remained a place of refuge from various Cyrenaican tribes driven out of their homes by the colonial troops, and the Zuwaya "proved flexible in matters of genealogy, and acquired large numbers of 'members by writing' (*mukatibin* as contrasted with members by birth), granting land to them and to others who sought freedom from Christian colonial control."⁴⁴³

⁴⁴¹ Pelt, *Libyan Independence and the United Nations*, 560.

⁴⁴² Wright, *Libya: A Modern History*, 80.

⁴⁴³ John Davis, *Libyan Politics: Tribe and Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 63.

During the 1950s and 60s, the Sanusi monarchy came to represent an ineffectual holdover from the colonial past, beholden to British geopolitical interests and lacking in claims to national unity. Even Idris criticized the effort to establish a unified Libyan nation when he told the American ambassador that he would prefer to keep his emirate over the independent and separate region of Cyrenaica. Idris banned political parties and tried to prevent “corporate interests,” even among his strongest supporters. “Keenly aware of the resentment his role as head of a secular government caused among some of his tribal supporters, Idris reestablished the Sanusi lodges that had been closed by the Italians but did not allow them to reemerge as the autonomous institutions they had once been. The local shaykhs were now appointed as government employees and were supervised by a general director who reported directly to the chief of the royal *diwan*.”⁴⁴⁴ The 1967 Arab-Israeli War exacerbated widespread discontent with the Idris monarchy among a generation of Libyans educated with Egyptian teachers and textbooks that promoted ideals of Arab nationalism.⁴⁴⁵ The revolution of 1969 that brought Qaddafi to power represented a final rejection of attempts to create a political authority out of the figure of Idris al-Sanusi and led to a campaign to discredit the Sanusi family and the Sanusi *ṭarīqa* as political leaders and heroes of anti-Italian resistance. We are just beginning to understand the lingering influence of the Sanusiyya in the twentieth century at the end of the Qaddafi regime.

⁴⁴⁴ Dirk Vandewalle, *Libya Since Independence: Oil and State-Building* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), 57; this is from a dissertation by Salaheddin Salem Hasan in 1973 “The Genesis of Political Leadership in Libya, 1952-1969.”

⁴⁴⁵ Ronald Bruce St. John, *Libya and the United States: Two Centuries of Strife* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 85.

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