

**ITALIAN COLONISATION & LIBYAN RESISTANCE  
THE AL-SANUSI OF CYRENAICA  
(1911 – 1922)**

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**Abstract**

This paper seeks to analyse Italian Colonialism in Libya from 1911-1922 against the backdrop of the anti-colonial Sanusi Order. Part A seeks to set the colonial context and ambitions of the European powers in North Africa (and the Maghrib). Part B will outline the emergence of the Sanusi resistance as well as the origins and evolution of the Order from mid-1800's to a religious-politico organisation by 1911. Part C will investigate the Turco-Italian War (1911-12) whereby Italy officially occupied Libya, it will examine the role of the Sanusi resistance during the first colonial war, subsequent conflicts and the years of the Accords (when a semblance of peace appeared to be on the horizon) and conclude briefly on the impact of the Sanusi Order.

**PART A: THE COLONIAL DAWN**

**The Maghrib**

Maghrib made up of four counties is located in the North-west of Egypt, consisting of Tripolitania (Libya), Algiers, Tunis (Tunisia), all former nominal dependencies of the Ottoman Empire, and Morocco which remained an independent kingdom (Oliver & Atmore 52). The Maghrib is a part of the wider geographical region of North Africa, which also comprises of Egypt, Western Sahara and Northern Sudan. It is not an easy task to summarise the Maghribi colonial era, as much as been published from a historiographical perspective in

the relevant countries, but more needs to be done to ensure an objective contemporary analysis of the subject (Contreras 110). Many (Western) historians find Libya as a gateway to North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa and as such they view it as a peripheral state not as worthy of study as Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco – all of which have a lengthy experience with French colonialism as against Libya's thirty-year period of Italian rule (Le Gall & Perkins 104). Libya is unique in that it underwent a sustained period of renewed Ottoman rule (between the nineteenth and early twentieth century) – the significance of which is still being weighed by Historians (Le Gall & Perkins 104).

### **History of Libya**

The usage of the term 'Libya' as applied to the North African territory is a fairly modern development, while the origin of the term is ascribed to the Egyptians as far back as the third millennium, the Greeks used it to refer to all North African and the Romans to the region of Cyrenaica – it was first officially applied on November 5<sup>th</sup> 1911 by the Italians (Golino 341). The history of the Libyan region has been characterised by a seemingly never-ending procession of foreign rulers who have attempted to subdue the restless network of tribes which have populated the hinterland, the Arab era in Libya dates back to 642 AD, when Arab troops crossed into Cyrenaica and imposed annual levies on the local Berber population, by 1050-1100 AD Libya was thoroughly Arabised linguistically, culturally and religiously under the impact of migration of two Bedouin tribes (the Bani Sulaim and Bani Hilal from Egypt and the Hejaz from the Arab Peninsula), their nomadic lifestyle signalled economic decline and although the Libyan Berbers resisted fiercely they were eventually assimilated (Collins 3). Hence prior to the nineteenth century it was not possible to identify a single people linked by patterns of

interaction with the territory of present-day Libya, the patterns of identity were based on traditional trade routes and population movements, Cyrenaica was traditionally tied by associated patterns to Egypt and Sudan and Fezzan was to Chad and Niger (Golino 341).

### **European Colonialism**

Colonialism is based on the will to make peripheral societies subservient to the metropolises (Osterhammel 15). The legitimacy of colonialism has been a longstanding concern for political and moral philosophers in the Western tradition. At least since the Crusades and the conquest of the Americas, political theorists have struggled with the difficulty of reconciling ideas about justice and natural law with the practice of European sovereignty over non-Western peoples (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). In order to triumph colonisation wanted to serve only its own interests, by its inherent inevitability and egotism, it apparently failed completely and polluted everything which it touched, it decayed the coloniser and destroyed the colonised (Haddour 10). Colonialism pulls every string shamelessly, and is only too content to set at loggerheads those Africans who were previously leagued against the settlers (Fanon 129). The European perception of racial superiority, concept of the civilising mission and the belief that Africa contained rich lands waiting to be exploited – were three of the intellectual strands that came together in the aggressive imperialistic drive of Europe (Hallet 374). Colonialism oppressed through representation, the imagination of the ‘other’ as well as systemic repression, in many ways the cultural confiscation by historical misrepresentation was as damaging as economic expropriation (Naylor 167). After 1878 Britain gave up her policy of safeguarding the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire, and by her occupation of Cyprus instigated the

bargaining with France and Italy over the colonial prizes in North Africa (Abun-Nasr 248). European imperialism in North Africa began with the French occupations of Algeria (1830), Tunisia (1881) and Morocco (1912), the British commenced occupation of Egypt (1882) and Italy invaded Libya in 1911 (Ahmida 87). At the Congress of Berlin (1884-85), Italy was unable to compete with the Great Powers and was thus left with the 'leftovers', picking up Somalia and Eritrea - Libya was one of the few countries not under European 'claim' (Collins 5). The Italian ambitions in Libya, were encouraged by the French and British (at the Congress of Berlin in 1878), from 1881 onwards the Italians in Tripolitania adopted the tone of future rulers, whilst incidents between them and Ottoman officials multiplied after 1882 (Abun-Nasr 318). Italy had to take what the other nations of Europe did not want, the territories finally acquired by Italy have been described as the least desirable of all the colonial lands, possessing few resources and a sources for raw material needed for a modern industrial state (Rudin 222). The establishment of colonial control was the outcome of a long and complex process of economic and political penetration – the conquest was derived from the opening of Ottoman lands to Western manufacturers in exchange for raw materials – in the second half of the sixteenth-century the two ascendant powers signed important trade agreements with the Ottomans which afforded them rights to establish consulates and privileges to their nationals trading in Ottoman domains – France's trade concessions in North Africa paved the way for its conquest of Algiers in 1830 (Hunter 2). From 1889 to 1929 colonialism triumphed – its only limits were those it imposed on itself in line with the ideology of 'white man's burden' and economy of expenditure and effort. Its triumph had its counterpart in the reactions of its victims: resignation or hopeless revolt (Laroui 327).

## **Italian Colonialism**

“Italy knows her duty as a colonising power, the duty of endeavouring to reconcile the supreme necessity of colonisation with the vital needs of the indigenous populations, and of limiting the use of force and coercion to absolute necessity...the Italy of today wishes to develop her African possession for the benefit not only of the home-land but also of the subject populations and of humanity as a whole” (Schanzer 448).

Italy's territorial colonialism began in 1882 in Eritrea in East Africa, through the commercial purchase of lands and expanded as Crispi (Prime Minister) campaigned for the colonisation of Eritrea and Ethiopia. It was the defeat at Adowa that led Italian policy-makers to attention to Tripolitania, the last Ottoman regency in North Africa (Ahmida 105). Italy's imperial ambitions were pursued in two directions, southwards in Africa and north and eastwards into Central Europe and the Balkans; African footholds were established on the Red Sea (Eritrea) in 1882, on the Indian Ocean in 1889 and Italy's 'fourth shore' Libya in 1911, although conquest of the last was not completed until 1931 (Watson-Seton 169). Italy's imperial ambitions were part irredentist, in part strategic – one of the larger elements being the pursuit of prestige and glory, the acquisition of colonies was considered a necessity of modern life (169). Turkish North Africa stretched far into the Sahara and the Sudanic lands, thus presented to Italy as a natural route for the penetration of Central Africa – Tripolitania (Libya) was identified by some expansionists as the gateway to all the almost unknown lands, the Italians were convinced the supposedly rich trans-Saharan trade could be revived once the desert was conquered and pacified by European arms, ensuring caravans could travel

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unmolested (Joffe 70). The primary and practical motives behind Italy's colonial aggression were characterised by a need to find an outlet for Italian emigration, the population in the South of Italy especially was becoming an issue that needed a pressing solution (Adams 27). Evidence of Italy's emigration policy in Libya, can be discerned from a film reel showing masses of Italian workers arriving at a dock in Tripolitania amidst cheers although a number of them appear to be wearing a uniform too, indicating soldiers ("Italian Immigrants Arrive in Tripoli").

### **Why Libya?**

One cannot write the histories of Italy without studying the history of its colonies, especially Libya - both Italian and Libyan colonial and national historiographies are limited, if not distorted, if the nation state alone constitutes the unit of scholarly analysis (Ahmida 175). Italian domination over Libya was perhaps the most severe experienced by any Arab country in modern times (Sharabi 39). Although Italy's attempt to conquer Ethiopia ended in military disaster, within fifteen years a vigorous nationalist movement was proclaiming the need to create a virile, bellicose nation which would wipe out the shame at Adowa and force the plutocratic imperialist powers to give justice to Italy (Watson-Seton 169) - this came in the form of Libya. With Libya in their possession Italy would be able to control the chief routes between the Mediterranean and trans-Saharan trade, one route led to the heart of the Sahara (home of the great exchange market) another to the fertile districts of Niger and Lake Chad and the third most important route was an old highway running parallel to the coast of Tripoli and Egypt ("Italy's Gains in Africa" 483).

### **Italy in Libya Prior to Occupation**

Most Italians in favour of expansion wanted a Mediterranean colony, the emotion resonance of this wish was tied to a need of national identity (for the recently unified Italy), intensified by France's acquisition of Tunisia in 1881. Tunisia had the highest concentration of Italians in North Africa – but Libya was the consolation prize and the first colony to be taken through force (Fuller 124). Italy adopted a 'gradualist' policy of slow economic penetration of Libya, beginning in the late 1800's, whereby Italian businessmen were encouraged to buy the few Libyan commercial/manufacturing interests and to obtain control of Libyan shipping lines, as well as export in ivory, wool and sponges (Collins 5). In 1905 *Banco di Roma* was ordered by the government to penetrate the country economically, and in 1910 it had strategic branches in Tripolitania, Benghazi and 12 other towns – Italy hoped to 'buy' Libya for a colony and have Italian immigrants employed by the Italian-owned enterprises (5). By the late-nineteenth century, Italian states including Sardinia, Tuscany and Naples maintained their commercial interests at Tripoli, following Italy's unification (1870), these interests continue to thrive laying the groundwork for the Italian takeover in 1911 (Martin 120). Italy began to prepare for the conquest of Tripolitania in the 1890's – Italian banks (*Banco di Roma*), schools and newspapers began to flourish; powerful Jewish and Muslim merchants were contacted by Italian consuls as early as 1890. Finally in 1907 *Banco di Roma* (Bank of Rome) became the vehicle for buying land, investing in trade and employing key people to work for the Italian cause (Ahmida 105). The Italian immigration population in 1912 totalled 27,495, whereas Eritrea and Somaliland are described as "typical territories for economic exploitation", before Italian occupation Libya was considered one the most backward countries of Africa, whilst Eritrea and Somaliland were "comparatively primitive" (Schanzer 446).

## **PART B: THE EMERGENCE**

### **Italy Lobbies for Libya**

Germany, the master of the Triple Alliance was the first to weaken to Italy's appeals, during the 1887 renewal of the Triple Alliance, Germany and Italy signed a separate protocol that Germany would support Italian action in Libya, if France upset the North African status quo in Morocco (Bosworth 136). 1902 saw Britain declare that any alteration in the *status quo* of Libya would be in conformity with Italian interests. Later in June 1902 the Prinetti-Barrere (French) agreement was secretly arranged allowing Italy to have a free hand in Libya. July 1902 the Austro-Hungarian Government signalled their approval stating: 'having no special interest to safeguard in Tripoli and Cyrenaica has decided to undertake nothing which might interfere with the action of Italy'. The approval of Russia (the last Great power) was given in 1909 (137).

### **The Sanusi: Early Years**

The Sanusi Order was developed in the wake of the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt in 1798 an event which sparked awareness within the Muslim world of the innate power and threat Europe was to embody - Sayyid Muhammad bin Ali al-Sanusi was alerted to the European threat in North Africa by France's invasion of his native Algeria in 1830, the Order was this specifically designed to protect *dar al-Islam* (the Islamic world) from *dar al-harb* (the outer world) (Joffe 616). Sayyid Muhammad bin Ali al-Sanusi (later known as 'Great' or 'Grand' Sanusi) was born in Algeria (1787) to a clerical family, claiming lineage to distinguished ancestors. His family had a tradition of learning, with both men and women considered to be of the learned class ('*ulama*'), whilst he personally ascribed to philosophies of moral positivism and

hard work (Martin 100). The Grand Sanusi was greeted with hostility by the orthodox religious authorities in the Hijaz and Egypt, although he protested he was not an ‘innovator’ and with a mind to return back to his native Algeria, he left Hijaz and reached Gabes in Tunisia, where the news of the French colonisation of Algeria led him to retrace his steps back to Cyrenaica (Peters 11). The Grand Sanusi thought he could not compete with the established bureaucracy of Tripolitania (his ideas were rejected in varying degrees in Yemen, Egypt and ignored in Tunisia) thereby he settled in Cyrenaica which was remote from Ottoman central authority in Tripolitania and its tribes and merchants were virtually autonomous (Ahmida 89). By the early 1840’s al-Sanusi dispatched emissaries, missionaries and agents to every part of Barqa, to the Fazzan and every part of Libya – these dedicated men insisted the population should return to Islamic thinking defined by al-Sanusi, the proselytization of the order proved victorious (Martin 108). In 1843 the first *zawiya* (religious lodges utilised for Sanusi teaching, learning and meeting) was built at Cyrenaica, from than onwards *zawiyas* were built in quick succession (Ziadeh 99). By 1902 all the Bedouins of Cyrenaica, of the Sirtica, most of the Western desert of Egypt, areas of Senegal all followed the Order, it made some progress in Tripolitania and was the dominant power in Fezzan and the Central Sahara. Even the destruction of Islamic lodges between 1902-4 (by the French) in Central Africa (Ennedi, Chad and Waddai) did not affect the faith of the people (99). It is true its success was greater in parts where ignorance and anarchy prevailed; regardless it achieved a large part of its programme in these territories (68). His ability at dealing with the unruly desert Arabs was considerable, he made an impression of superior sanctity and gained a reputation for the possession of extraordinary spiritual powers, these powers were said to have descended in the line of the family (51). The ‘Grand Sanusi’

had been described as a peaceful individual, an opponent of warfare despite his strong political views (Martin 108). He died in 1859, his son Sayyid al-Mahdi succeeded him, he was barely sixteen years of age, but possessed a good education at Makka and had since the age of thirteen been sending emissaries, receiving delegates and teaching. He shared responsibilities with his brother Sayyid Muhammad al-Sharif (who dealt with all educational issues, a considerable share of the Order's work) (Ziadeh 50-1). He remained head of the Sanusi from 1869-1902, in which period Jaghub remained the centre and Kufra the capital of the Sanusi, under his leadership the call extended to Central Sudan, Lake Chad, Senegal, the Mediterranean and to a lesser extent Asia - the British occupation of Egypt in 1882 made Jaghub too vulnerable, hence the Order's move to Kufra, this position would allow him to better direct the trade routes via the Sahara as well as deal with the tribes in the Saharn interior. But by 1899 he re-established the seat of the Order at Qiru (Central Sudan) whence his followers increased furthermore, the French saw this a as threat to her sphere of influence in Central Africa, eventually attacked the Order (at Qiru) in 1902 (at which time al-Mahdi passed away) (51, 60).

### **Dynamics of the Order**

The Order successfully developed mutually beneficial political and economic relationships with the surrounding tribes, who lacked defined leadership structures (such as the primary *Saadian* and *Marabtin* tribes in the area (Joffe 617). As a religious order the Sanusi was easily assimilated into the tribal traditions of North Africa, it had the prestige to gain respect and over time it developed political power as both an arbiter and controller of regional affairs (617-8). The Sanusi developed in to a political order largely because they identified with the tribal system of the Bedouin, they showed a marked

tolerance towards other Orders, given that there were no doctrinal differences and often they worshipped together (Evans-Pritchard 84-6). The strategic locations of lodges (*zawiya's*) on key trade routes and at the interface of areas under tribal control allowing them control the key economic variable in the region, all served to augment their position (Joffe 617). As the nineteenth century (1899) drew to a close the Sanusi brotherhood stood at the height of their spiritual and temporal power, in 1899 Sayyid M. al-Mahdi, the son of the eminent founder of the order, moved the headquarters of the organisation from Libya to the rocky oasis of Gourou near the eastern edge of the highlands of Northern Chad (Spaulding & Kaptejins 4). Hereby the Sanusi ensured a monopolistic economic control over the Eastern Sahara and associated that with control over the internal power structures of tribal society – this was achieved by process of being apart and yet apart from tribal society and imposing its local leaders (heads of the *zawiyas*) as arbitrators in that society, the Order's representatives has to be seen as peaceful and not competitors for power with the tribal power structures themselves (Joffe 34). The Order came to fill a political vacuum and becoming a state or empire was only a natural development (Ziadeh 116). The longevity of the Sanusi can be attributed to its extensive corporatism and partly due to an unwillingness to imagine a better alternative (Vandewalle 58).

### **The Ottoman Position**

Following the defeat of some half-hearted Crusader attempts to hold the coastal areas in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, much of North Africa was organised by the Ottoman Turks into three regencies, Algeria, Tunisia and Tripoli (including Cyrenaica and Fezzan). The populations were left un-administered. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman rule was nominal, with real power in the hands of the local rulers, primarily from Turkey, such as the Karamanli

dynasty that ruled from 1711-1836 (Collins 6). Throughout the 1800's Western powers had subtly began to divert trans-Saharan trade westwards and southward to the European ports of West Africa, denying the Libyan much trade – coinciding with expansion of British power in Egypt and the fall of Algiers, the Ottoman Sultan decided to re-establish direct Ottoman rule of Libya in 1835 to prevent further erosion of its position in the Mediterranean (Collins 5). During the last thirty years in Libya, the Turks were hard pressed to protect the province from neighbouring expansionist powers, the Anglo-Egyptians to the east, the French to the west and south and pacific penetration of the Italians to the north (Wright 20). By the critical standards European standards of the time, the Ottoman administration in Libya in the nineteenth and early twentieth century may have been negligent or incompetent, but it was needlessly harsh or overbearing; if it gave little to country, it demanded little in return (Wright 20). Many visitors to the region found critical signs of Ottoman maladministration, economic decline and lack of social services in Turkish North Africa, but this did not necessarily upset the inhabitants, whose ties of religion were strong (20). Ottoman policy towards the Sanusi was suspicious in the nineteenth century, a major concern was an armed rebellion, however many praised the Sanusi's religious piety and his pedagogic role among the 'ignorant' tribesman (Ahmida 89). The existence of disparate possibilities was especially confusing in dealing with the Sanusi because of the relative obscurity that surrounded the order, the Ottoman government remained uncertain, at least in the 1880s, about the political intentions and the military capabilities of the tariqa (Le Gall 93). Reports, which drew on the wild exaggerations of French sources, informed the Ottoman Sultan that the Sanusi had four hundred lodges and that the oasis of Jaghubub (the headquarters of the tariqa in the province of Benghazi) contained arms

work-shops manned by two thousand slaves (93). Until the mid-1880s, contacts between Istanbul and Sanusi leaders were few. Only after the full impact of the British occupation of Egypt had penetrated his thinking, did the Sultan begin to show concern for the province of Benghazi and the Sanusiyya. Between 1886 and 1895, there were five high-level exchanges between Sanusi and Ottoman officials (91-3).

### **Emerging as a Resistance Order**

Al-Mahdi (Grand Sanusi's son) resisted Turkish demands for assistance in their war against the Russians (1876-8), he refused to aid the Egyptian Arabi Pasha (1882) and the Sudanese Mahdi (1883), likewise rejecting diplomatic overtures by the Italians and Germans. But when the French invaded the Saharan territories in 1902 and destroyed the religious houses and when the Italians without provocation did the same in Cyrenaica, the Order had no choice but to mount a resistance (Pritchard-Evans 68). At the death of Sayyid al-Mahdi in 1902, his elder son Sayyid Idris was too young to be shouldered with the responsibilities of this large Order, in light of the Sanusi battle with the French, demanded a warrior leader and thereby Idris's cousin Sayyid Ahmad al-Sharif (Born 1873 at Jaghbub, where he received his early education. And hereby known as al-Sharif) succeeded to the leadership of the Order (Ziadeh 65). It is al-Sharif who is the predominant Sanusi for the purposes of this paper and the discussion below. The story of Italian conquest of Libya, which lasted in intermissions between 1911-1931 is certainly interesting and instructive on account of the brave resistance which the people under the Sanusi leadership put in the face of more powerful and better equipped larger armies (Evans-Pritchard 68). The one teaching of the Sanusi which distinguished it from other Orders in North Africa, was its belief that Muslims ought not live under non-Muslim rule - Sanusi, the youngest and in

Africa the most powerful confraternities of their time, stood apart by reason of the character of their rulers, and the policies they followed (Andrews 125). During the late 1900's the Sanusi extended their control throughout Cyrenaica, southwards to Kufra and Borku and to a lesser degree in eastern Algeria and Tunisia. The movement was not a great success in Tripolitania, due to its differing political structure, however it was suitably dominant in Libya as a whole for it to claim natural leadership of the resistance against the Italian occupation after 1911 (Joffe 618). It appears that the level of Sanusi political initiative against the French in Chad and the Sahara became more active only after the accession of Ahmad al-Sharif (1902), who was more militarily minded than his predecessor and more pragmatic in dealing with the Ottoman government (Le Gall 101). Whereas Knut Vikor suggests the origins of the Order were not political in nature, from 1912 the call of Jihad against the enemy had begun, the Sanusi thus transformed from mainly a religious and familial entity to a political and military one (Baldinetti 10). This call was intended to encourage the rise of a new form of popular mobilisation – this became necessary as tribes fought a common fight against an external enemy which had no precedent (14). The Sanusi order was clearly distinguishable from the preceding orders in being a congregation state with political, military and religious aims (Hitti 437). In Weberian terms the Sanusi enjoyed the monopoly of the legitimate use of violence (according to Islamic precepts as a response to foreign rule, see Joffe 128 for a detailed explanation of Sha'ria Law on the Islamic State) over the territory in which it operated and in Hegelian terms the Order was the 'actuality of the ethical idea' of the state. Secondly the Order was the sole agent within the region in which it operated with the duty to preserve society in a condition appropriate for the proper observance of Islam and was recognised by the population as

such (Joffe 28). But the late 1800's colonial pressures in the area were near impossible to ignore, al-Mahdi and al-Sharif continued to organise resistance and the fighting outlived them (Morsy 282).

## **PART C – THE RESISTANCE**

It is impossible to understand the (North) African past without the re-establishment of the truth of resistance, in the course of the struggle against the imposition of colonial rule each people founded positions from which they waged a struggle for complete liberation (Oliver 60). The history of nineteenth-century Maghrib was fashioned by a succession of encounters between the Muslim populations on one hand and the twin forces of European imperialism and larger world economy on the other (Clancy-Smith 1-2). These multiple confrontations, inconclusive skirmishes, implicit pacts and prudent retreats were as important to historical process as violent clashes or heroic stands (2).

### **Muslim Orders & Nationalism**

The primary concern of many Islamic brotherhoods was the socio-moral reconstruction and reform of society; they had not come into existence to rectify beliefs but to reform failures of the Muslim communities, through which this society had become petrified (Cambridge History of Islam, p.640). All these movements without exceptions emphasised a return to pristine Islam and in some cases what revivalism means remained unclear to the revivalist himself (641). Discontent with the status quo and exposure to Western influences have been principal causes of the birth and development of various reformist and revolutionary groups in the traditional state (Lenczowski 673). By the late 1800's there existed over hundred religious confraternities in French North Africa alone,

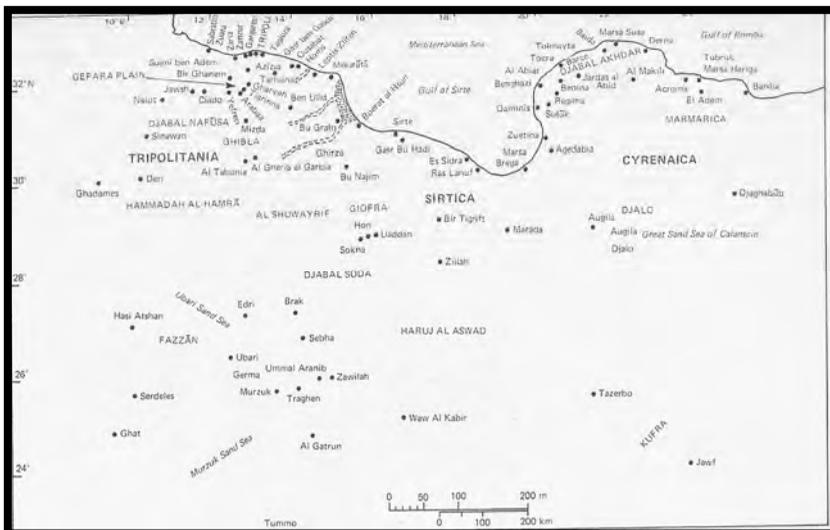
it was estimated (conservatively) that one-eighth of the Algerian male population belonged to such organisations (Andrews 120). *Nationalism* is primarily a cultural phenomenon although it often takes political form; it has often had great humanity and civilising influences, paving the way for legitimate sweeping social change (Parthajee 1, 7). Nationalism has been a dominant ideology in North Africa, providing hope during the long colonial night, leading to the building of modern States in the region – the notion of territorial nationalism has prevailed over all competition whereby liberalism and socialism always remained marginal (Baraket 157). Islamic nationalism (not Arab) attracted committed adherents who abhorred Western materialism and imperialist social theories, who rejected the capitalist international system predicated on the supremacy of Western empires – it was such dimensions that preoccupied imperial authorities because it suggested that whatever the relative local weaknesses of pan-Islamist anti-colonial groups, their real strength lay in their appeal to colonial subjects to unite across imperial frontiers in opposition to European control (Thomas 73). In the Sahara alone a list of brotherhoods included the Qadiriyya, Mukhtariyya, Aynayniyya, Fadiliyya, Tijaniyya and the Sanusiyya with members into their tens of thousands, with memberships in Morocco as high as quarter of a million – these Orders represented socio-political networks, their organisation structures ranged from highly centralised to loose associations, they appealed to the learned and the unlettered and their influence was as much a function of the status of their leader as it was their members (Roberst 212). As Lisa Anderson asserts until the 1920's the dominant idioms of political identity in Libya were those of Islam and the Ottoman Empire, the idea of nationalism, of a nation based on Arabism, did not exist (Baldanetti). Under particularly historically determined conditions of stress, social or cultural faultlines

that previously lay dormant may become active, these can produce social earthquakes of sufficient magnitude to bring down not only regimes and classes but worldviews (Burke III 17). In North Africa this resulted in the myriad of politico-religious brotherhoods that took up the call to resistance as a response to European colonialism.

### **Sanusi as a Politico-Religious Order**

The fundamental psychological and ideological mechanism of colonial rule, one way in which Europe not only produced imperialism, but also contrived to live with it in good conscience, was on the conviction of its 'greater good' coupled with the externalisation of imperialism's own violence onto its victim (McDougall 120) - as Italy inevitably did Libya (see below). Political action is broadly defined as including not only participation in jihads or (Sanusi) movements but also such things as moral persuasion, propaganda, emigration, evasion, withdrawal and accommodation with the colonial regime (Clancy-Smith 4). By the dawn of the First World War the Sanusi had already been involved in years of hard fighting with the French Colonial Army and Italian invaders. Since 1902 and the French invasions the Sanusi had began gravitating towards becoming more political, with the dawn of the Turco-Italo War (1911) this became a reality.

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Map of Libya from: Boahan, A. A. UNESCO General History of Africa: Vol. VII, 1880-1935. California: University of California Press, 1985.

### The Turco-Italo War (1911)

The Cyrenaican fighters have been described as being more formidable antagonists than the Tripolitarians – the British were of the view that Italian prestige was yet to win in Cyrenaica, and the price would be blood (“Italian Occupation of Libya”)

From 1907 onwards the *Banco di Roma*'s strategy of ‘peaceful penetration’ was underway by investing in local agriculture, light industry, mining and shipping. Trade and communications were expanded but were hampered by growing local hostility to all Italian activity (i.e. the Sanusi). Italy eventually used this hostility as a *casus belli*, (the summer of 1911 the Moroccan crisis, preparing for further French expansion) compelled Italy to act to restore the balance of

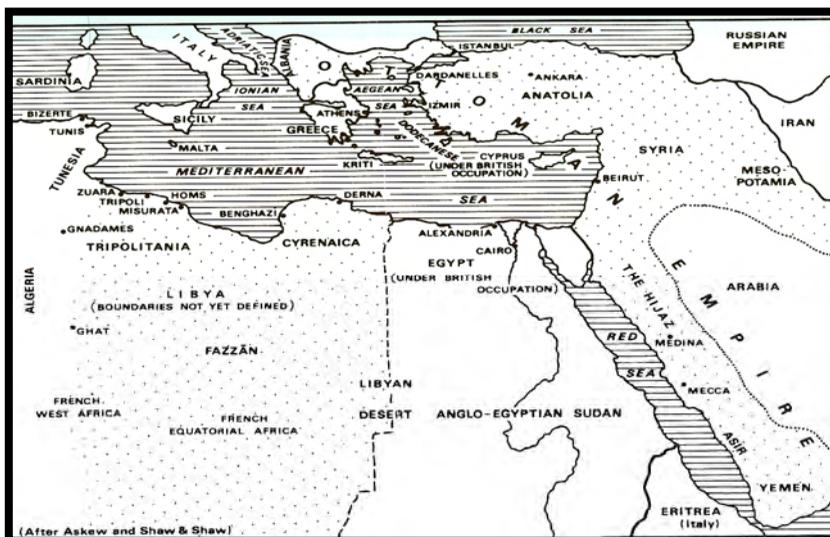
power in the Mediterranean (Wright 26). There were many in Italy who became perturbed by Italy's imperial determination and the desire to conquer and dominate other races viewing it as a betrayal of the liberal ideals of the *Risorgimento* and Italy's own unity and independence from alien domination, these socialists opposed a war with Tripoli (1911) proposing it was unrelated to the needs of Italy, arguing resources ought to be devoted to 'internal colonialism' (particularly the development of the South) (Joffe 71). On the plea that Turkey barred Italian economic activity in Italy, the Italian government began the declaration for war upon the Ottoman Turks (MacCartney 279). On September 26 1911, Italy sent an ultimatum to the Sublime Porte announcing its intention to occupy Libya and demanding that within twenty-four hours the Ottoman government ought to give orders so the invasion force may meet with no opposition. The Ottomans refused (Anderson 229), thus began the Turco-Italo War of 1911 also known as the Italo-Sanusi War (Evans-Pritchard 107). The direct confrontation with a foreign power was not the sole reason for protracted resistance, colonialism alone cannot explain why a *jihād* was launched, as al-Sharif was not inherently anti-Christian, it was to eloquently rally support for the political, religious and economic status quo of the Ottoman Empire and obligations of Islamic governance (Gazzini 22).

### **The War: Sanusi-Ottoman v. Italy**

By 1911 the Sanusi had telegraphed assurance of loyalty to the Sultan and showed their readiness to join in the defence of Libya against foreign attack ("*Italy & Tripoli*"). Between the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 and the First World War many abandoned ideals of Ottomanist and pan-Islamic sentiments in favour of Turkish, Arab or regional loyalties. However, the Sanusi remained loyal to pan-Islamic aspirations associated with the Ottoman Empire and did not turn to Arab

nationalism; this stance reflected the specific historical circumstances (Khalidi 225). The Sanusi Chief al-Sharif (grandson of the Founder) against the advice of his councillors made the decision to throw the Order into the struggle and in essence transform the trade-orientated organisation into a guerrilla force. The Order set up training camps with the Ottoman-Turks instructors, were armed by them (and later by the Germans) (Tsugitaka 15). This unexpected Arab (Libyan/Sanusi) rising against the invaders was the iceberg on which the Italians suffered a shipwreck (McCullough 320-1). It was unthinkable for the Libyans to side with the Italians against the Ottomans. The Italians initially captured several port cities and in 1911 declared Tripolitania and Cyrenaica to be annexed to Italy, in the face of the Italian invasion (with 34,000 troops, 145 warships and 114 other vessels used for shelling) the Libyan tribesman rallied by the Sanusi assembled at Turkish-organised camps outside the occupied cities (Collins 8). The Italians found resistance to get progressively stronger as they left the coast, one year following invasion the Italians were no more than 10 miles west of Tripoli (8). Hope that Turkish North Africa would simply become Italian through diplomacy and force was illusory, there were no capitulations from the Libyans (Wright 27). The Turks fought alongside the Libyans (many Sanusi) as Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Sultan. Italy employed the newest weapons (aeroplanes and airships made their battle début in Libya 1911-12), however, there is evidence to suggest the troops poorly trained and unstable (27). Throughout 1911-12 Turkish officers continued to support the resistance to Italy, but the majority of the fighting fell to the local Arabs (and the Sanusiyya), the unity within the Ottoman Empire being not so much political as religious – Italy was struck with a conundrum as to how it would deal with the allegiances of the Muslims of Libya without resorting to a holy war. During the

Turco-Italo War there were reports of Italian troops killing all males above the ages of fourteen in an oasis, they were killed or exiled because they were suspected of having fired on the Italian rear or capable of doing so in the future (McCullough 249). A Times correspondent had said the “severity with which the Italian army has exacted retribution upon the suburban Arabs might justly be described as indiscriminate slaughter...it has been a miserable business...the Italians having set themselves to cow the Arabs, the floodgates of bloodlust were opened...the innocent suffered with the guilty” (252). Fellow Europeans expressed shock, denouncing Italy’s conduct as barbarous and uncivilised even by imperialist standards, for instance in December 1911 the Italians occupied Ain Zara, a fortnight later Zanzur and two days later Bir Tobras, it was widely believed impending action by the Sanusi was severely exaggerated (“*Senussi & Italy*”). The Italians completely destroyed a Sanusi camp at Ettangi, with losses being very heavy, the Italians also burnt their camps at Bu Crat, in the hope that this may break the back of the resistance (“*Italian Success in Tripoli*”). The Italians published stories of atrocities committed by the Ottoman against the Italian soldiers and civilians of Tripoli, yet even this could not mask the majority of the massacres were the sole responsibility of Italian troops (Section of Libyan Arabs People’s Bureau). A rather morbid reel of film shows the hanging of fourteen Muslim men (unable to discern whether they are Turks or Libyans/Sanusi), by the Italian forces during the Turco-Italo war, a testament to the cruelty Italy showed during the conflict (“*Public Hangings of 14 Turks*”)



The Ottoman Empire 1911-12 (Dotted Area)

From: Childs, T. Italo-Turkish Diplomacy and the War over Libya 1911-1912. E.J. Brill. 1990:.xiv

### **End to the Turco-Italo War: Treaty of Lausanne (1912)**

The European powers leapt into diplomatic action following the Turco-Italo War to contain the damage, fearing the Italians might set off a war in the volatile Balkans (indeed the Italians had been fanning the flames of Albanian nationalist movements against the Ottomans) (Rogan 136). Italy was willing to allow the European conference system to settle the Libyan question; its troops had met with stern resistance from the small Turkish garrisons and the Libyan local population and were unable to extend their control from the coastline to the inland regions (136). But on October 4<sup>th</sup> Turkey finally relented and expressed its willingness to come to a settlement with Italy over Libya. The Balkan situation worsened with Montenegro formally declaring war on Turkey (October 8<sup>th</sup>), a

war with Europe and Italy was a daunting prospect – negotiating the end to the Libyan War was perceived as “the punishment of Tantalus” (derived from the Greek Myth of Tantalus). Italians seizing the opportunity to have the upper hand, reiterated their non-negotiating stance and drew up a memorandum of grievances against Turkey should the need for military recourse arise (Bosworth 193). The Italians were concerned “the Turks apparently proposed to take all the meat and leave Italy with the bones” (“*Turco-Italian Peace Negotiations*”). Despite the Italian stalemate the Ottoman Sultan beset by political machinations in the Balkans signed a peace treaty with Italy (October 1912) which granted Cyrenaica and Tripolitania ‘independence’ under Italian ‘sovereignty’ (Collins 8). The Great Powers of Europe were dismayed by events in the Mediterranean, Germany and Austria (October 14<sup>th</sup>) agreed to counsel Turkey to accept Italy’s peace terms, followed by Britain (October 15<sup>th</sup>) where a preliminary accord was initialled (Ouchy). Three days later the Treaty of Lausanne was formally signed, the Great Powers hastened to recognise Italy’s ownership of Libya (Bosworth 193). The Lausanne decree “grants full amnesty to all who have taken part in the hostilities...assures liberty of faith...the rights of the religious foundations will be respected” (“*Turco-Italian Peace Agreement*”). The door to peace had not been opened by Italian arms but by the military action of small Balkan states (Bosworth 194) By 1912 Italy had won sovereignty over Libya, as well as retaining islands of Rhodes and the Dodecanese group in the southern Aegean Sea as a pledge for the execution by Turkey of the peace settlement (Treaty of Lausanne 1912) (Macartney 279).

### **Sanusi Response**

The articles of the Lausanne Treaty included: the immediate cessation of hostilities, recall all Ottoman troops, exchange war

prisoners and Italy was required to pay an annual sum to the Turkish administration no less than 2,000,000 Lira (Al-Barbar 168). The Ottoman government decided to withdraw from Libya, but to abandon its Muslim subjects was embarrassing, especially since the Italian conquest became a major Islamic issue – aid and volunteers from India, Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia and Chad arrived in Libya, whilst Islamic and Arabic newspapers started to mobilise Muslims against the Italian crusade in Libya (Ahmida 118). The peace treaty was ambiguous; Ottomans agreed to withdraw from Libya but simultaneously granted Tripolitania and Cyrenaica ‘independence’ in a different declaration (118). Despite signing the peace treaty the Ottomans did not cede sovereignty over Libya, rather the Sultan issued a declaration to his subjects granting them “full and complete autonomy” and reserved the right to appoint an agent charged with protecting Ottoman interests in Libya (Anderson 130). Al-Sharif met with Enver Bey (Ottoman official and Army Leader) who supplied him with arms and supplies before departing, and then declared *jihad* against the Italians in 1913 – he could afford to do this as the Sanusi possessed integrated social, economic and religious institutions, the situation in Tripolitania was different (Anderson 118). The fighters (Sanusi included) made it clear they did not recognise Italian sovereignty and would oppose anything short of complete Italian withdrawal from Libya (Al-Barbar 169) thus leading a period of wars.

### **Period of Wars**

Following Turkish withdrawal from Libya, the Sanusi order assumed full responsibility and leadership for liberation with proclamations for the direction of resistance issued in the name ‘al-Hakuma al-Sanusiyya’ (the Sanusi Government). The Sanusi fighters and members of their order came to be recognised in Islamic States as not only liberators of Libya but

as ‘fighters of the faith’ (Booth 523). The religious predominance (Italo-Turco war) and their leadership placed the Sanusi into a position of temporal rulers, a position they had no intention of resigning (“Appreciation of Character and Position of Idris el-Senusi”). It was widely believed in Europe the Sanusi “have intense dislike and distrust and little fear of the Italians” (“Telegram, Aug. 20<sup>th</sup> 1916”).

### **Battle of Sirte (1912)**

During the Battle of Sirte the Italians lost five-hundred men, over five thousand rifles and several million rounds of ammunition, a variety of machine guns, artillery, cash and food supplies. This caused Italy to withdraw to the coastal cities, limiting its rule to Tripoli city, Khums, Benghazi and few coastal towns in Cyrenaica (Anderson 192). By 1913 the campaign had broken into a series of guerrilla fights and skirmishes, making it difficult to describe its development (Evans-Pritchard 118) in further detail than outline below.

### **Sidi Qurba (May 16, 1913)**

This battle represented the first full involvement of the Sanusi. In Barqa the Sanusi proffered to the resistance movement what the Ottoman presence had achieved for the entire province - in Tripolitania tribal forces disunited following the withdrawal of Ottoman forces, the Sanusi however ensured their tribal units remained unified allowing them to mount a suitable resistance (Al-Barbar 184). The Italian defeat at Sidi Qurba cast al-Sharif to prominence as the head of the resistance in Libya (184).

### **Cyrenaica (1913)**

In summer 1913 the Italians attacked in Cyrenaica, thus beginning the systematic occupation of the country between Benghazi and Derna – the Sanusi unable to offer effective formal resistance, took to guerrilla warfare, although Italy held

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the Cyrenaican coastlands and towns in the Northern arc of the territory much of country in between was under Sanusi control (Wright 29).

### **Derna (1913)**

On October 15<sup>th</sup> the Italians demanded the surrender of Derna, upon refusal they bombarded the city with 800 men landing; they faced an unexpected attack from Ottoman-Sanusi forces. The Italians sustained many losses, escaping back to their ships but returning subsequently to continue fighting door-to-door, still failing to subdue the town (Al-Barbar 150-8). As the war continued in 1913, the Sanusi numbered at 16,000 and the Tripolitarians at 15,000, the anti-colonial resistance numbered 31,000 fighters, the social base of the resistance was the tribe, which provided food and supplies (Ahmida 119). The Sanusi with their well-integrated socio-political system managed to mobilise and keep the Italian armies inside the coastal towns of Cyrenaica (in comparison the Tripolitarians resisted the army only until 1913, plagued by a lack of armies and supplies, resulting in the occupation of Jabal and the exile of key leaders in the resistance along with 3,000 fighters escaping to Tunisia) (119-20).

### **Qasr Bu Hadi (1914)**

Italian strength too was waning, in 1914 a garrison at Sabhah was sacked and destroyed by Libyan forces and in 1915 Italian 'friendly' Ramadan al-Suwayhli joined the forces attacking the Italians. This battle (Gardabiyya or Qasr Bu Hadi) marked the end of any semblance of Italian control in the hinterland. For the duration of the First World War, Italian occupation was limited to a few coastal cities (Anderson 233).

### **Consequences**

By late 1915 the Sanusi were in trouble, the commander of Cyrenaica Aziz Bey al-Misri allegedly deserted the cause after a battle with Umar al-Mukhtar and fled to Egypt with the money and artillery destined for the resistance and during the summer of 1913 Italian columns reached Fezzan, with two years of failing crops, the resistance was weakening (232).

In addition between September and October 1912, at the Battles of Shari al Shat, al Hani and Ain Zara, 5,000 lives were lost (many Sanusi) and many civilian victims of air warfare and mass executions. During the first year of the war 6,000 people were arrested and exiled to Italian islands, many did not return, believed to have been killed (Al-Barbar 236). The situation could not be sustained.

### **British-Sanusi War (1915)**

In 1914 Italy entered the war on the side of the Entente, the Ottoman Empire and its German allies saw the Ottoman troops in Libya to spark a revolt against the British, French and Italian, thereby the Ottoman officer Nuri Bey returned to Libya charged with winning al-Sharif's agreement to an attack on British positions in Egypt (autumn 1915) (Khalidi 233). This they did with some difficulty but supplied with German arms the Ottoman-Sanusi forces took the British garrison at al-Sallum - but by early 1916 the British had regained their positions, routing the Sanusi forces (233). By early 1917, the British press was reporting operations against the Sanusi in the western desert had been brought to a conclusion, easily able to capture a convoy of the Sanusi forcing the main body to retire into the desert with casualties reaching 200 men, the British managed to capture rifles, store, ammunition and camels ("The Senussi Main Force defeated"). The British forces continued to afflict heavy losses life to the Sanusi resistance, in early 1916,

some 1,300 fighters were driven back and 500 killed, causing many of the fighter to flee thereafter (“Senussi dispersed”). In addition the British utilised motor-cars in their battles with the Sanusi, in 1916, with only eight officers they were able to take 90 prisoners and 50 deaths (“Pursuing the Senussi”). Al-Sharif had been reluctant to attack the British, knowing most of his supplies came from Egypt, pressured by the Ottoman elite, he attacked, his 20,000 man army was defeated by the 60,000 strong British army, in the process the Sanusi was forced out of Egypt and almost starved in Sirtica (Ahmida 122).

### **Aftermath**

By 1916 the Sanusi led Ottoman forces were devastated by the war and defeated on most fronts, the new British imposed blockade of the coast (due to the 1915 conflict) and closed trade with Egypt meant Cyrenaica was cut off both by land and sea (Gazzini 28). The war with the British effectively ended the reign of al-Sharif and bought his cousin Muhammad Idris onto the scene. When a faction led by Muhammad Idris, opened negotiations with the British and Italians, al-Sharif retreated to Jaghub subsequently giving up his political leadership but retaining his religious primacy – he had allegedly voluntarily given up his position to open talks with the British but not with the Italian whom he viewed as illegitimate occupiers. Al-Sharif himself refused to sign an agreement with the foreign powers as it compromised his religious principles (29).

### **British-Sanusi Collaboration**

Idris took no part in the resistance movement until 1916; but he opposed al-Sharif and Ottoman attempts to attack the British and voiced his sentiments to other members of the al-Sanusi family (Al-Barbar 201). The differences between the cousins were marked: Idris preferred diplomacy over military

means, he thought in terms of local needs rather than an Islamic world scale, he spoke harshly of the Turks whereas al-Sharif chose to collaborate with them (202). Idris could not prevent al-Sharif's attack in Egypt but reacted by remaining in constant contact with the and rallying support of the crucial al-Sanusi family consolidating his authority over the Order and enter peace negotiations with the British (202-3). In 1919 *The Times* acknowledged the "Senussi sect...is still one of the most powerful Moslem brotherhoods" ("*The Senussi Chief in Exile*").

### **The Years of the Accords (1915-22)**

Between 1916 and 1922, the Italian policy unable to crush the resistance, shifted its direction to making peace with the Sanusi. Italian colonial policy makers defeated by a highly motivated and well-equipped resistance and burdened economically due to the World War, made concessions to the resistance such as recognising the autonomy of the Sanusi Order via treaties signed in 1916, 1917 and 1920. These gave the Sanusi leader Idris the title of prince and granted Cyrenaica a parliament in 1920 (Ahmida 106). By 1916 "we are ready to arrange for the cessation of hostilities... all laws with regard to marriage, divorce, property and inheritance should be according to Mohammedan Law and administered by religious judges" (Appendix D.2, 27<sup>th</sup> July 1916 FO 141/651). Idris demanded that "Italy must provide me with arms and money and the complete independence of the interior" (Appendix D.1. FO 141/651). "Italy should introduce factories...and all the men working in those factories should be natives" (Clause 10 Appendix D.1. FO 141/651). The British believed it unnecessary for Idris to inform the population of Italy's sovereignty, as the Europeans had already recognised this ("Italian Negotiations for General Settlement"). They were convinced Idris desired peace and acknowledged the Order had

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now evolved into a temporal power (Telegram, Aug. 20<sup>th</sup> 1916, No. 340/323, FO 141/651). Italy had been promised sovereignty over Libya at the 1915 Pact of London. But the country faced grave economic and political difficulties at home and proved reluctant to use military force to extend its power in Libya (Vandewalle 28). As a result the Italians temporarily acquiesced to the British patronage of the Sanusi and the relative autonomy of the Order in Cyrenaica (Ahmida 106). Al-Sharif was blamed by Idris for the disastrous war with the British (1915), during the 1916 peace talks the British insisted Idris oust al-Sharif and all Ottoman officers in Cyrenaica. Idris had since 1913 been willing to ally the Order with the British; he believed this would serve to preserve the Order's lost prestige (Ahmida 122). Thereby arranged for the truce with the Italians at the Sanusi-Italian treaties of:

- al-Zuwaytina (1916)
- al-Akramah (1917)
- al-Rajma (1920)

### **Accord al-Zuwaytina (1916)**

Agreement of al-Zuwaytina, ratified in 1917 by al-Akrama: these two documents stipulated the suspension of hostilities, recognise Italian sovereignty along the coast and Sanusi sovereignty over the hinterland, to allow free trade, to remove 'troublemakers' such as al-Sharif and Ottomans, to exempt Sanusi land from tax, and to grant the Sanusi family a monthly salary in exchange for disarmament and disbanding of the Sanusi tribes (Ahmida 122).

### **Accord of al-Akramah (1917)**

Was more a truce than a treaty, it military questions to a close but left political questions for a future settlement – Italy did not renounce her claim to sovereignty and the Sanusi did not conceded it to her or renounce (Evans-Pritchard 145). The

authority of the Italians was limited to the coastal towns and the rest of Libya came under Sanusi administration (145). The Akrama greatly benefited the Italians, giving their forces an opportunity regroup, additionally the agreement was negotiated by half of the province widening the breach between the people of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania. Idris played into the hands of the Italians, who had aimed at breaking the resistance into small units to defeat (Al-Barbar 205). Following the conclusion of Akrama, Italy concentrated its efforts in creating dissent amongst the warring leaders of Tripolitania.

### **Accord of al-Rajma (1920)**

This granted Idris, a ceremonial title of Emir – under this agreement Idris was paired a monthly stipend of 63,000 lire every month, the Italians agreed to pay for the policing and administration of the regions under Sanusi control, as well as 300,000 lire in gold (Anderson 208). The Italians were effectively bribing the whole country to keep quiet (Evans-Pritchard 208). Dissatisfaction with the Akramah Agreement (1917) led to renewed discussions between the Italians and Sanusi in 1920, by October a the Accord of al-Rajma was concluded, whereby Idris was accorded (what Italians viewed as ceremonial) title of Emir of Cyrenaica and was permitted to organise the administration there (Khalidi 237). In return Idris agreed to cooperate with the Italian application of the *Legge Fondamentale* to disband his Sanusi military units and to levy no taxes above the Sanusi religious tithe – Idris did not disband his units (Vandewalle 28). By 1921 relations between the two powers deteriorated beyond repair.

### **Years of Discord: 1921-23**

By 1921 an Italian governor in Tripolitania had lost patience with the Libyans and made this known by attacking the town,

Tripolitanian delegates returned to see the town in flames. In March 1922 renewed negotiations with the Italians broke down after the national Reform Association refused to discuss Tripolitania separately from Cyrenaica, by 1922 it was apparent conflict with the Italians was inevitable, the Sanusi would lose their special prerogative (Khalidi 239-40).

In the early 1920's Muhammad Idris was asked (by Tripolitania) to accept the title of Emir of Libya and perhaps unify the two major areas of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica - after much hesitation of his part and consultation with the Cyrenaican Bedouin tribes, he accepted the request, but the appointment put the Emir (Idris) in a precarious position, the Italians had informed him that any such action would be considered a breach of al-Rajma that had delivered autonomy to Cyrenaica (Vandewalle 29). The Italians understood an alliance between Tripolitania and Cyrenaica would be disastrous (29-30). The Italians used Idris' acceptance as a reason to abrogate all accords, but by this time Libyan unity was more a hope than reality, the military campaigns (by the Italians) that followed ensured the provinces were pacified confirming it was now a State in which Libyans had no place (Anderson 204). By spring 1923 the Fascists in Italy had consolidated their power and abrogated all accords and agreements with the Libyans, and began what they called the *riconquista* (re-conquest) (Khalidi 240) and all previous agreements voided. When Muhammad Idris fled the country in 1922 (December) to Egypt, the resistance continued under the leadership of Umar al-Mukhtar (born a client tribesman in the Abaidat Tribe in Eastern Cyrenaica), with his capture and subsequent public hanging on 16th September 1931, almost twenty years after the first Italian attack, resistance collapsed (Peters & Goody 19-20) - After Italy entered the Second World War, the tribal Shaikhs of Cyrenaica met with Sayyid Idris in Cairo (1940) and formed the Libyan Arab Force, he

returned in 1943, was proclaimed Emir in 1949, and in 1951 was confirmed as the King-designate of Libya (incorporating Cyrenaica, Tripolitania and Fezzan into a federal state).

### **Impact of the Sanusi Order**

Although two thirds of Arabs live in Northern Africa, Magribi's have long been regarded as 'not quite Arabs', spoiled by colonisation and the *mission civilisatrice*, condemning historical studies of the region to a marginal status (Burke III 17). North Africa's colonial legacy is etched in fire and blood in the collective memories of its inhabitants, perhaps as many as 3 million Algerians and as many as 1 million Libyans perished due to colonial conquest (Peters & Goody 21). The Grand Sanusi had aimed at unifying the heterogeneous groups into one large spiritual and possibly political entity (Ziadeh 126). Cyrenaica became a laboratory for experimenting and a crucible for producing prototypes of Muslims that would become the standard for a new reformed society, the Sanusi Order achieved a great deal of its original purpose in the African theatre, as well it came to have a valuable content, it created a unity based in religious ties which eventually expressed itself in political, military and nationalistic aspects (126-7). As the wealthiest and most powerful social groups in Libya, Sanusi leaders were faced with the issues of defining their attitudes to various Islamic government and movements. The Sanusi's had made the Prophet's rule "to reform Islam through peaceful means and not through bloodshed" as their mantra, but in an environment fraught with tension, the late 1800's saw them make difficult decisions (Morsy 280). Almost every home in Libya did its duty and shared in the sacrifices, in men or money - due to the wars with France (1900-6) and Italy (1911-1931) brought a change in viewpoint in Sanusi, it became more a state than it hitherto been, irrespective of whether such a change had been

anticipated (Evans-Pritchard 68). The Sanusi Order was politically significant in that they were a religious movement that formed the backbone of resistance to Western imperialism, and the Order actually had the longest record of such resistance in Africa (Folyan 56). Even Italian authors have to admit that the Sanusi did much for the people of Cyrenaica, the Bedouins remembered this with gratitude especially lauding the moral and cultural benefits (Evans-Pritchard 64). It was during the course of colonial resistance that (North African) tribes who lived isolation began to comprehend the identity of their interests, nationalities and large ethnic units formed more rapidly; features of national self-consciousness were crystallising; tribal unions were created; rudiments of State organisation came into being (Oliver 50). Following the First World War, Libya and the Maghrib witnessed a duo of political activities – first was the continuation of the resistance to imperialism’s last territorial push in Africa by some North Africans with the principle objectives of maintaining their sovereign existence, second was the genuine nationalist activity aimed at either overthrowing or the colonial system or its reform, which became especially militant immediately after the war. Nationalism in the Maghrib was more religious and cultural (rather than secular as seen in Egypt and southern Sudan) (Peil & Oyeneye 260). The common folk in the Maghrib too, played a not insignificant role as clients and disciples of privileged saintly lineages and sufi masters; on more than one occasion, ordinary people worked as pressure groups for or against certain political actions, they contributed to politics as bearers of news, information and rumours (Clancy-Smith 3). These rumours possessed an ideological dimension constituting a form of political discourse in a society with limited literacy (3).

The resistance leaders across Muslim North Africa were not drawn into the political field on an ideological tenet that in order to serve God they must fight other faiths – but it was the dynamic of European colonisation which led them to change leadership roles (initially many of the leaders were scholars who wrote religious books of depth and erudition) - they took military positions to protect their societies from foreign rulers (albeit of different faith) and agendas (Tsugitaka 23). The varied strategies covered a similarity of aims. But the history of European colonialism in Africa and Asia makes it clear that Islam did *not* always answer effectively to the need for militant ideology and organisation (Dunn 347). The Herodian principles states the dormant civilisation must imitate and follow the dominant civilisation, yet the responses by the dormant civilisation to the challenge of the dominant one cannot represent a revival of such civilisations, but instead provoke reactions, in psychological terms’ as being equated with ‘negativism’ and ‘identification with the aggressor’ (*per* A. J. Toynbee) – the Sanusi-Italian dichotomy is a testament to this (Shaalán 813). The colonial occupation of Libya had been more a matter of Italian national pride rather than of economic interest and thereby left no room for Libyans within its bureaucracy or within the administrations they foisted upon the region - Libya’s encounter with the Italians had been informally deleterious, unattractive and uninspiring – a collective memory that made them suspicious of modern statehood, a sentiment that continued into the 1950 and years of decolonisation (Vandewalle 43-5). Whatever manner the history of the religious Order is to be interpreted, there is no gainsaying that its success was astonishing, and its marvellous simplicity to bound provoked wonder (Peters & Goody 17). In the case of Libya the call for *jihad* was not an expression of an anti-Western belief, but a defensive response to the inviolability of Islamic rule - the Sanusi brotherhood was

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created for the purposes of reviving Islamic learning and to unite the Islamic world further consolidated via a Muslim ruler, this political philosophy is what spurred them onto resistance (Gazzini 23). The Italian conquest began in 1911; and it was not until 1932 that the Italian armies succeeded in controlling the whole country (Ahmida 105). The Sanusi movement could have resulted in a spiritual renaissance throughout the Arab world (Jameelah). But ultimately the religious Order that helped give birth to Libyan nationalism, also paradoxically brought about the Order's overthrow and disappearance in 1969 (Martin 99). Yet the significance of the al-Sanusi in the period of Italian colonisation cannot be overstated.

In the end as many troops were needed to hold North Africa as to conquer it, the conquest of men's hearts and minds never took place (Boahan 112-3).

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