



THE LIFE AND TIMES OF KING IDRIS OF LIBYA



Idris I, King of Libya



THE LIFE AND TIMES
OF KING IDRIS
OF LIBYA

E. A. V. DE CANDOLE

Published privately
by Mohamed Ben Ghalbon in 1990

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This book was first published privately by the writer in 1988, in an edition of 250 copies. Permission to re-print it was obtained from the writer's grandson Mr. J. A. De Candole. I re-printed the book after having added relevant foot notes and several photographs and appendices, the additions and the arrangements of which were carried out with the able help of my brother Hashem.

The cost of the re-printing of the book was shared equally with two friends from prominent Libyan families. The distribution of this edition to friends, researchers and libraries was done as a tribute to Sidi Idris.

The Publisher,

Mohamed Ben Ghalbon.

May, 1990.

*Dedicated to
Sayidda Fatima Idris*
Daughter of an Illustrious Arab House
and for over fifty years the
loyal and devoted wife of
Mohammed Idris, King of Libya*

★ Sayyida fatima al' Shi'fa daughter of Sidi Ahmed al Sherif who out of her deep love and devotion for her cousin and husband, Sidi Idris, always prefers to be known as Fatima Idris.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Eric Armar Vully de Candole was born in Cornwall in 1901. He is descended from a Swiss family some of whose members settled in France and England in the early 19th Century. His great grandfather had a school in Paris and his great grandfather, after immigrating to England, became a schoolmaster and Professor of French at Clifton College. His father was a Church of England clergyman and his mother a teacher at Girton College, Cambridge.

After St. Paul's and Aldenham, Eric de Candole went to Oxford University from where he graduated with an Honours degree in modern history. In 1923 he began a career in North Africa and the Middle East that would last forty years. He was appointed to the Sudan Political Service and took up a teaching post at Gordon College, Khartoum where he organized the Boy Scout Movement in The Sudan in addition to a full teaching programme. From Education, he was transferred in 1928 to District Administration and during the next eight years was respectively District Commissioner of Berber, Northern and Khartoum Provinces. He was awarded The Order of The Nile 4th Class at this time. In 1936 he was appointed as Political Resident and Magistrate of Darfur Province in the Western Sudan and in 1944 as Deputy Governor of the Northern Province. Here he was concerned with agricultural affairs in the Nile basin adjoining the Egyptian boundary. In Darfur he was responsible for boundary relations with the French authorities in Chad.

In 1946 he was transferred to the British Military Administration of the former Italian colonies in Somalia and Cyrenaica, first as Chief Secretary, then as Chief Administrator of Cyrenaica. In 1948 he was awarded the CBE. In 1949, until his retirement from Government service in 1952, Eric de Candole



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held the post of Her Britannic Majesty's Resident, Cyrenaica. It was during this time that his friendship with Sayyid Idris, thereafter King of Libya, began. He was awarded the CMG. and The Order Of Independence by the Libyan Government in 1952.

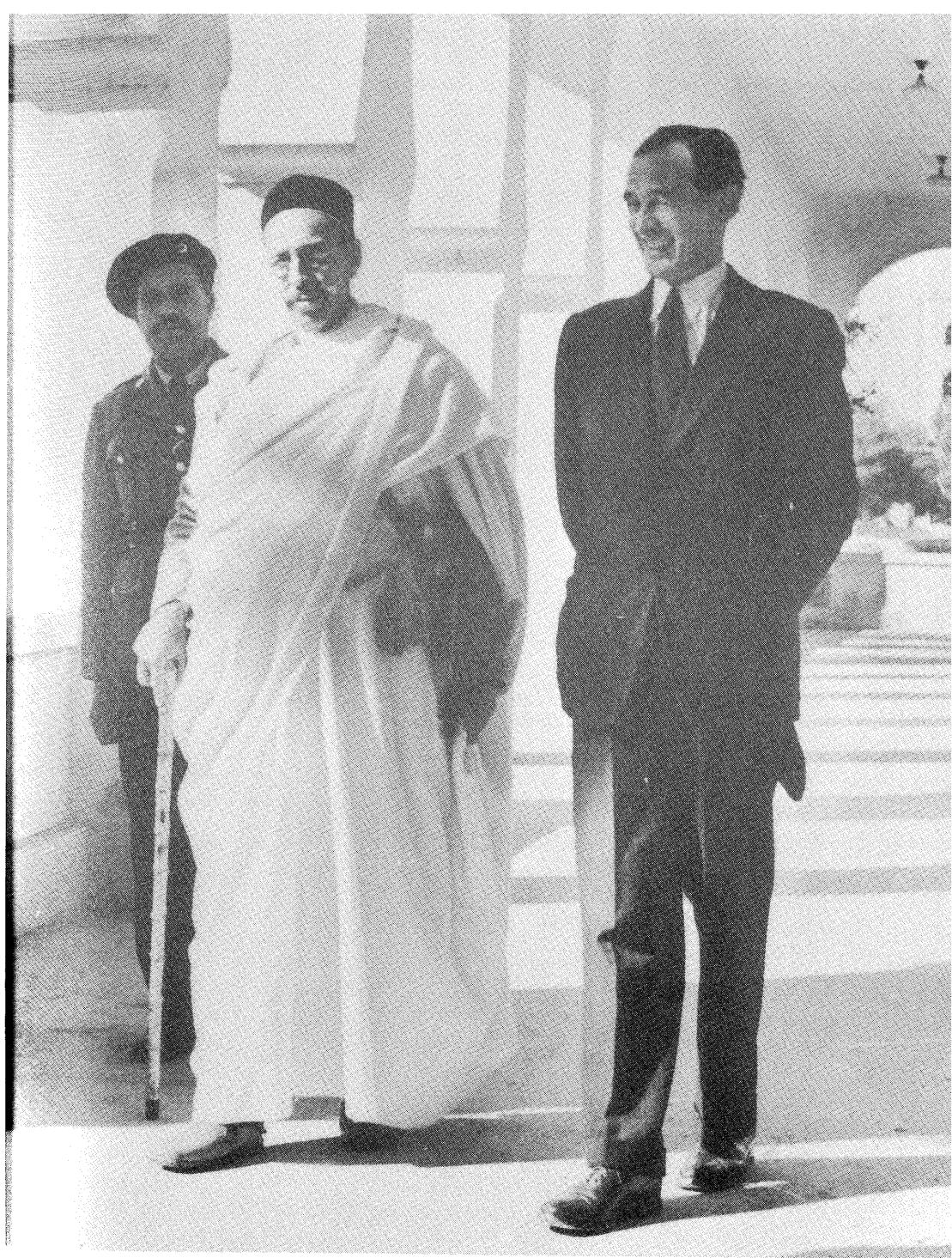
In 1952 he left the Foreign Office and joined the Kuwait Oil Company, taking care of relations with the Kuwait Government. He was involved in the Arab oil conferences in Cairo and Beirut which led to the formation of O. P. E. C.

In 1966 he retired to the New Forest where he now lives with his wife Elizabeth whom he married in 1932 and by whom he had three sons.

This book, began more than fifteen years ago and completed before Sayyid Idris died in 1983, is the harvest of a rich friendship, cut short by the enforced exile of King Idris in 1969. It reconstructs the life of Sayyid Idris in great detail and much of the text is a result of the many hours of conversation that took place between the author and Sayyid Idris during the years 1949-1969. In parts of the book, the author allows the King to give a personal account of his memories, and these, of course, are particularly precious in view of the falsification of history that followed the 1969 military takeover.

Michael de Montaigne, in his essay, 'Of Friendship', tells the story of Eudamidas the Corinthian, who, on his deathbed, bequeaths the care of his elderly mother to one friend and the provision of a dowry for his daughter to another. In burdening his friends so, Montaigne tells us, Eudamidas showed himself to be a true friend since into their hands he put the means to do him good.

In similar fashion, Sayyid Idris showed his friendship for Eric de Candole when, in the months after the *coup*, at a time of great personal disappointment with the British, he felt able to turn to him for assistance: From a request that warm clothes be sent to see him through the first cold winter in exile, to the arrangement of his son's education in Britain. Above all, the unspoken request that the author endeavour to sweep away the unjust insinuations made against Idris and write again his biography which had, so characteristically, been rewritten by the propagan-



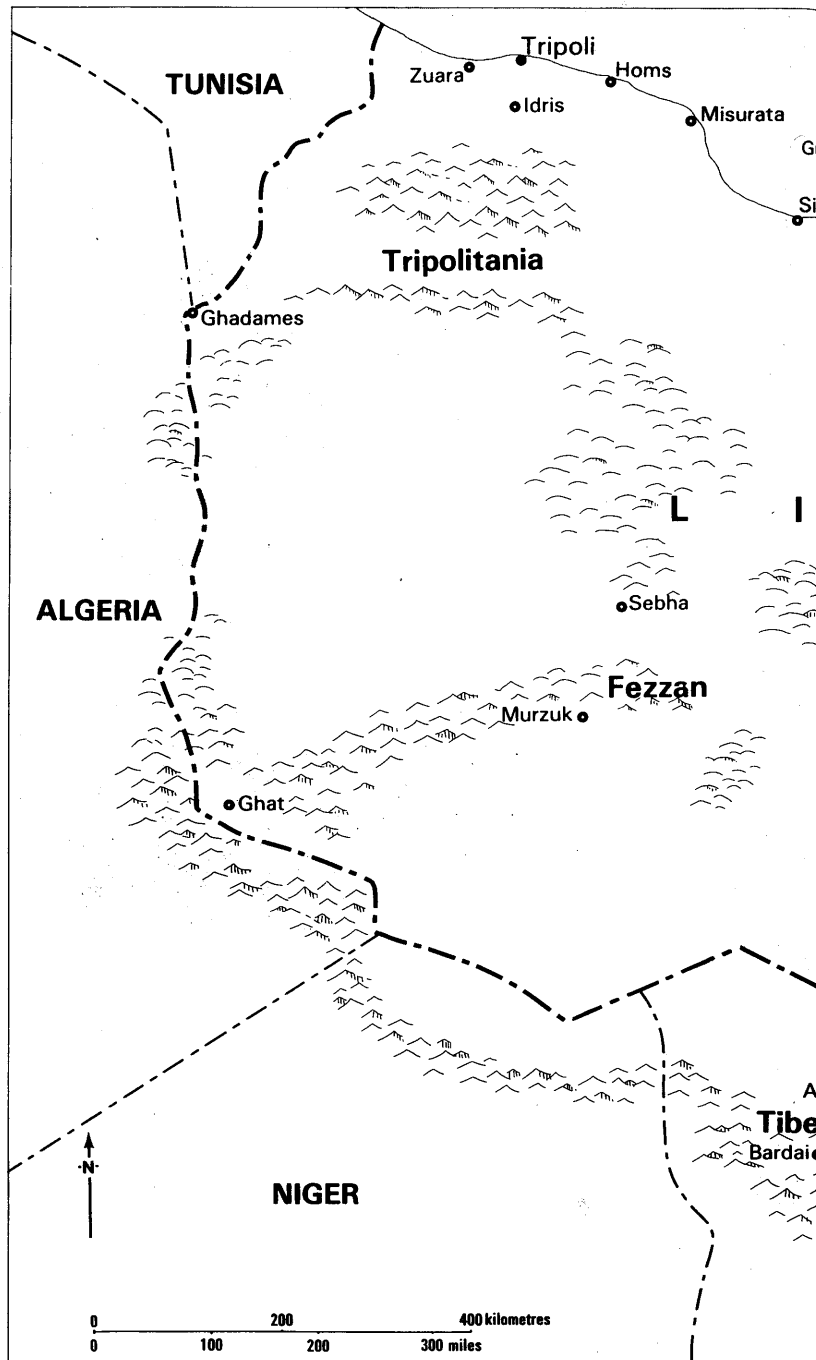
The author with Sayyid Idris, Amir of Cyrenaica, in the Manar Palace, Cyrenaica, 1949.

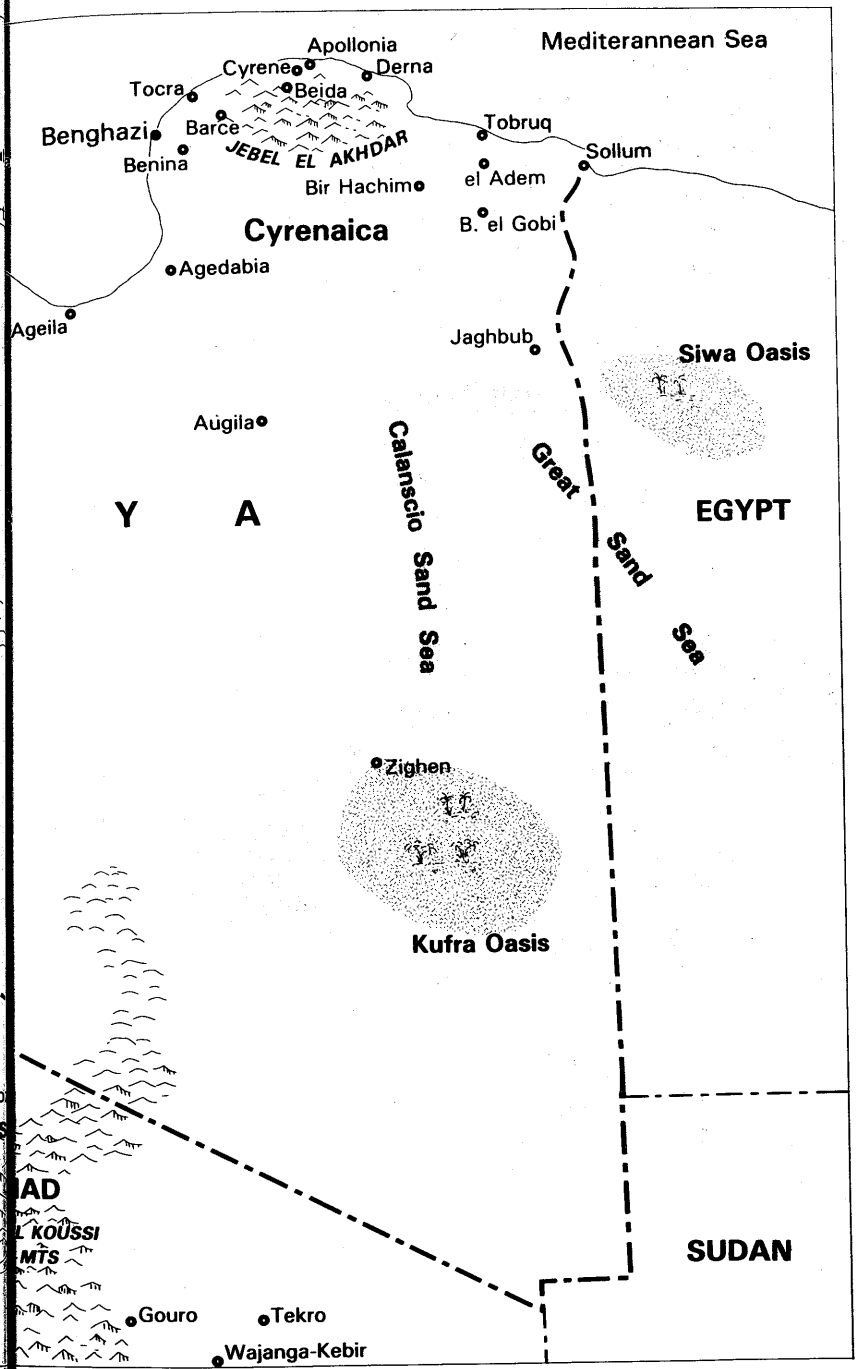
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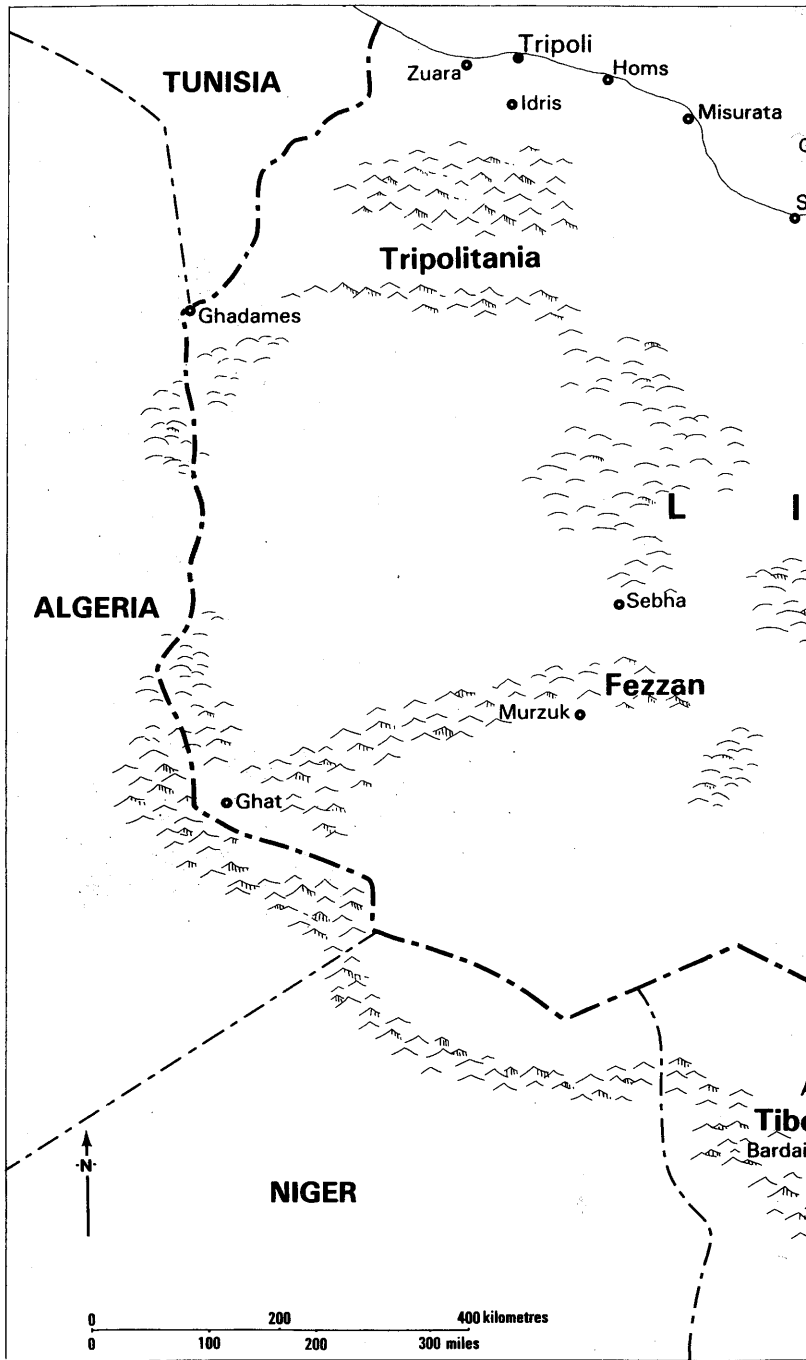
BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

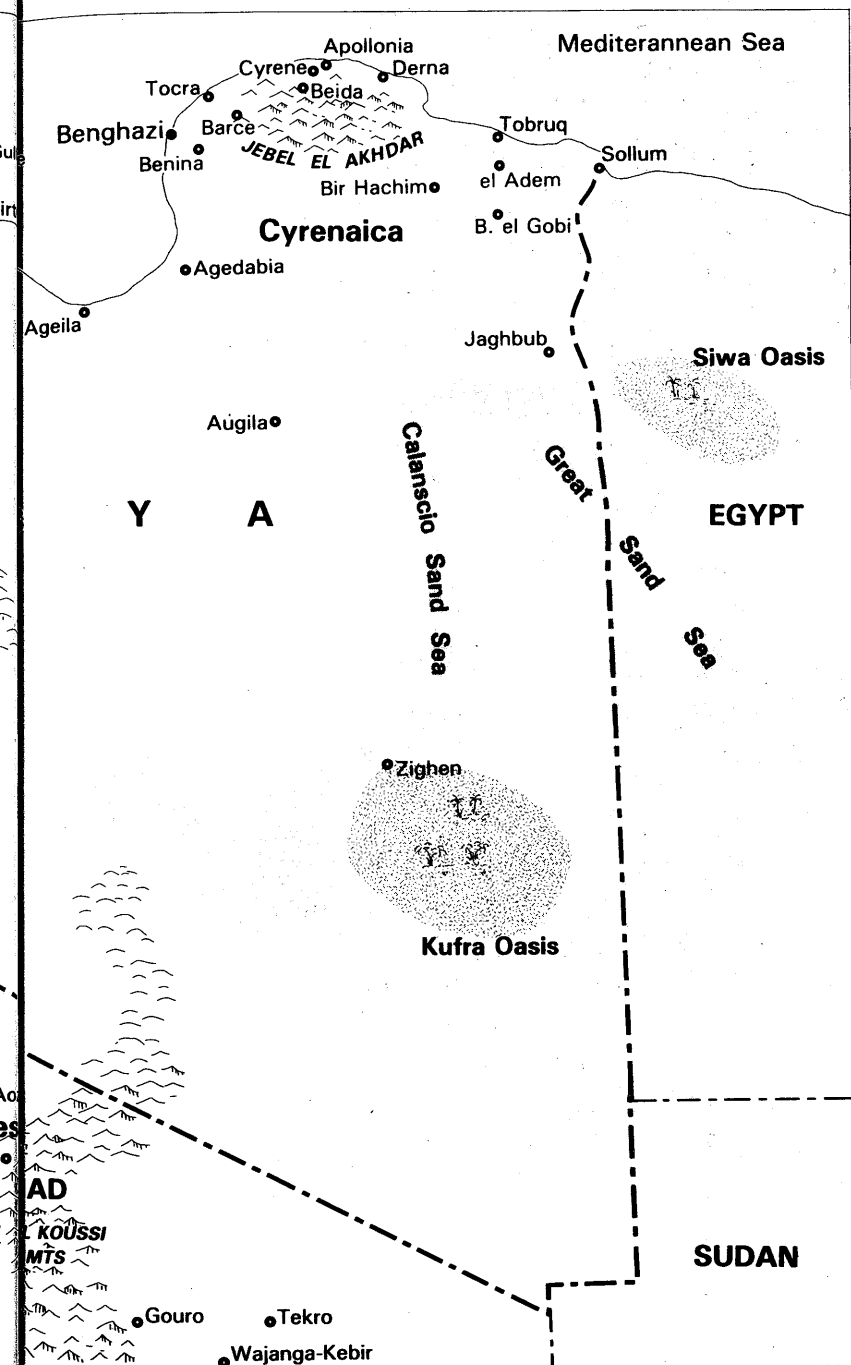
dists of a 'revolution'. This book bears witness to a man whose humility, moderation, and steadfastness contrasted so markedly with the intemperate excesses of the present regime.

J.A. de C. March, 1988









1

THE SENUSSI ORDER

Sayyid Muhammad Idris al Mahdi al Senussi, the hero of our story, was a descendant of a distinguished Arab family long settled in North Africa who trace their descent from the Prophet Muhammad through the Prophet's daughter Fatima and her husband Ali ibn Abi Talib,[★] the fourth Caliph of Islam. Towards the end of the 8th Century A.D. a great grandson of Fatima and Ali named Idris ibn Abdalla fled to North Africa from Mecca after an unsuccessful revolt against the Abbasid Caliph and founded the Idrisid State with its capital at Fax (Fez). According to the Senussi genealogical tree, Muhammad Idris was descended from this eponymous ancestor through a succession of kings and emirs in Morocco but his forebears in modern times lived in Algeria where the family was named Senussi after a religious Shaikh who lived at Tlemcen in the 13th Century.

★ Muhammad Idris ibn Muhammad al mahdi ibn Muhammad ibn Ali ibn al Senussi ibn al Arabi al Atrash ibn Muhammed ibn Abdelqadir ibn Ahmad Shuhda ibn Muhammad Sha'ib al De'raa ibn Yusef abu Da'hyba ibn Abdalla ibn Ka'ttab ibn Ali Abu al Assal ibn Yahya ibn Ra'shid ibn Ahmad al Murabit ibn Mindas ibn AbdelKawwi: ibn AbdelRahman ibn Yusef ibn Zayyan ibn Zyenal Abideen ibn Yusef ibn al hassan ibn Idris ibn Abdalla ibn Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Abdalla ibn Hamza ibn Saeid ibn Yacoub ibn Da'wood ibn Hamza ibn Ali ibn Umran ibn Mawlana Idris al Azhar (Junior), founder of the city of Fez, ibn Immam Idris al Akbar, the first King of the Adarassa, ibn Abdalla al Ka'mil ibn al Hasan al Muthana ibn Immam al Hasan al Sabt ibn Sayyidina al Immam Ali ibn Abi talib and Fatima al Zah'ra, daughter of prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him.



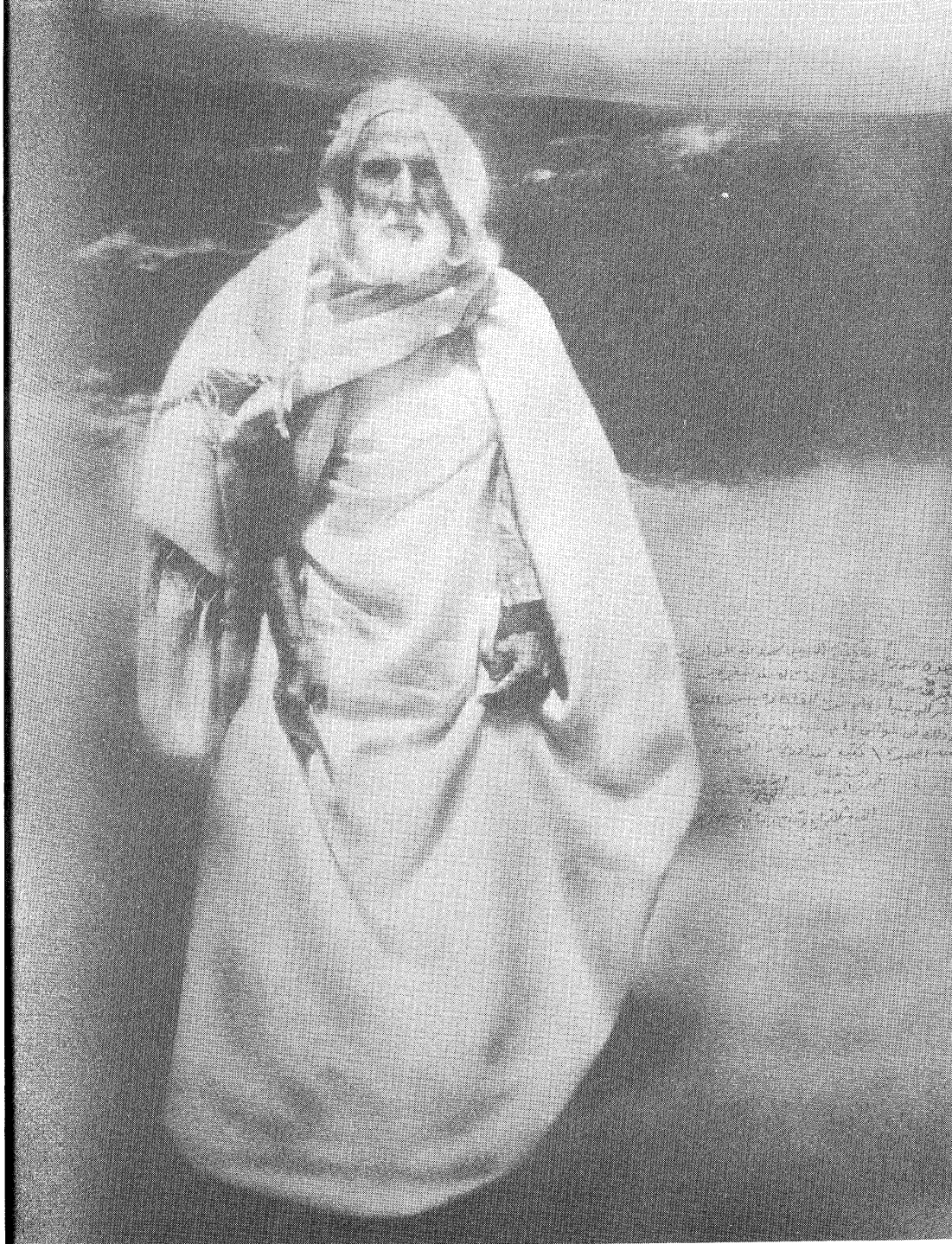
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Sayyid Muhammad Idris derived much of his prestige from his position as the head of the Senussi Order, in direct succession from his father and grandfather, and so let us begin with a brief description of his predecessors and the movement they founded and directed. It should be understood that until recent times, religious Orders played a large and influential part in the life of the inhabitants of the Islamic world.

The Senussi Order was founded by Sayyid Muhammad Ali al Senussi, the grandfather of Sayyid Muhammad Idris, about the year 1837, commencing as a revival of the pure faith and vitality of early Islam and developing into a missionary movement to teach the practice of Islam to the backward inhabitants of the Saharan and trans-Saharan territories. The founder of the Senussi Order was born in Mustaghanim in Algeria in the latter half of the 18th Century. A young man of exceptional intelligence, he was educated at the famous Qarawiyin Mosque-University at Fez where he gained an outstanding reputation as an Islamic scholar. Leaving his native Maghreb in pursuit of further knowledge and experience, he travelled slowly across North Africa to Mecca, visiting many places and making many friends on the way through his eloquence and religious zeal. After further study at Mecca he taught for several years in Asir and on returning to Hejaz founded his own Order known as the Senussiya.

The rules of the Order were clear and inspiring: To revive the pure faith and practice of Islam according to the Prophet Muhammad's teaching, freed from the dogmas which had weakened it: To restore the unity and strength of Islam by uniting the tariqas (of which there were many) into one universal Order based on the simple tenets of the Quran: To teach Islam to the backward people on the fringes of the Arab world. This simple teaching was well set out in a letter to the inhabitants of Wajanga in Wadai, Chad:

We ask you to obey what God and his Prophet have ordered; making the five prayers: keeping the month of Ramadan: giving tithes: making the pilgrimage to the sacred house of God and avoiding what God has forbidden of telling lies, abusing people behind their



Sayyid Mohammad ibn Ali Assanusi, founder of the Senussiyya.



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backs, taking unlawfully other people's money, drinking wine, killing people unlawfully, giving false evidence and the other things which God has forbidden.

The Senussi Order demanded austerity and strict self-discipline. The use of alcohol and tobacco and the wearing of rich clothing and jewels by men was forbidden. Music, drums, dancing, processions and gyrations practised by the dervish Orders were also excluded. It was to the development of this Order that Senussi dedicated his life.

It seems to have been to chance rather than design that the Grand Senussi selected Libya as the main field for the operations of his Order in its formative years. Leaving Mecca with a party of pilgrims returning to North Africa, his journey was interrupted for several months by illness at Siwa. When he eventually reached the Tunisian borders his further progress was hindered by the French occupation of Algeria and he turned back into Libya and settled in the Jebel al Akhbar of Cyrenaica. Here he founded a lodge or *zawia* to serve as a centre for his teaching. He named it Zawia al Baida, after the famous Muslim saint and companion of the Prophet Sidi Rafa. From this small beginning in the year 1841 the Senussi brotherhood grew and flourished until its inspiring influence spread all over North-East Africa creating a great Islamic revival among the ignorant Bedouin tribes inhabiting the Mediterranean coastline and the deserts of the Interior.

It must be remembered that although North Africa was divided by political boundaries imposed by foreign colonial occupations – Turkish, French and later British and Italian – there were no national states in the modern sense in the Arab world. The inhabitants of the whole region from the Atlantic Ocean to the Persian Gulf, whether independent or tributary to the Ottoman Sultans, were knit by a common Arab kinship, language and tradition and followed predominantly the religion of Islam irrespective of Tribal or ethnic origins. Political divisions imposed by foreign invaders were transient factors weakening and disturbing but never completely destroying the Arabism which linked these people. To the Grand Senussi, Islam was the principal binding force of the Arabs and he and his successors sternly



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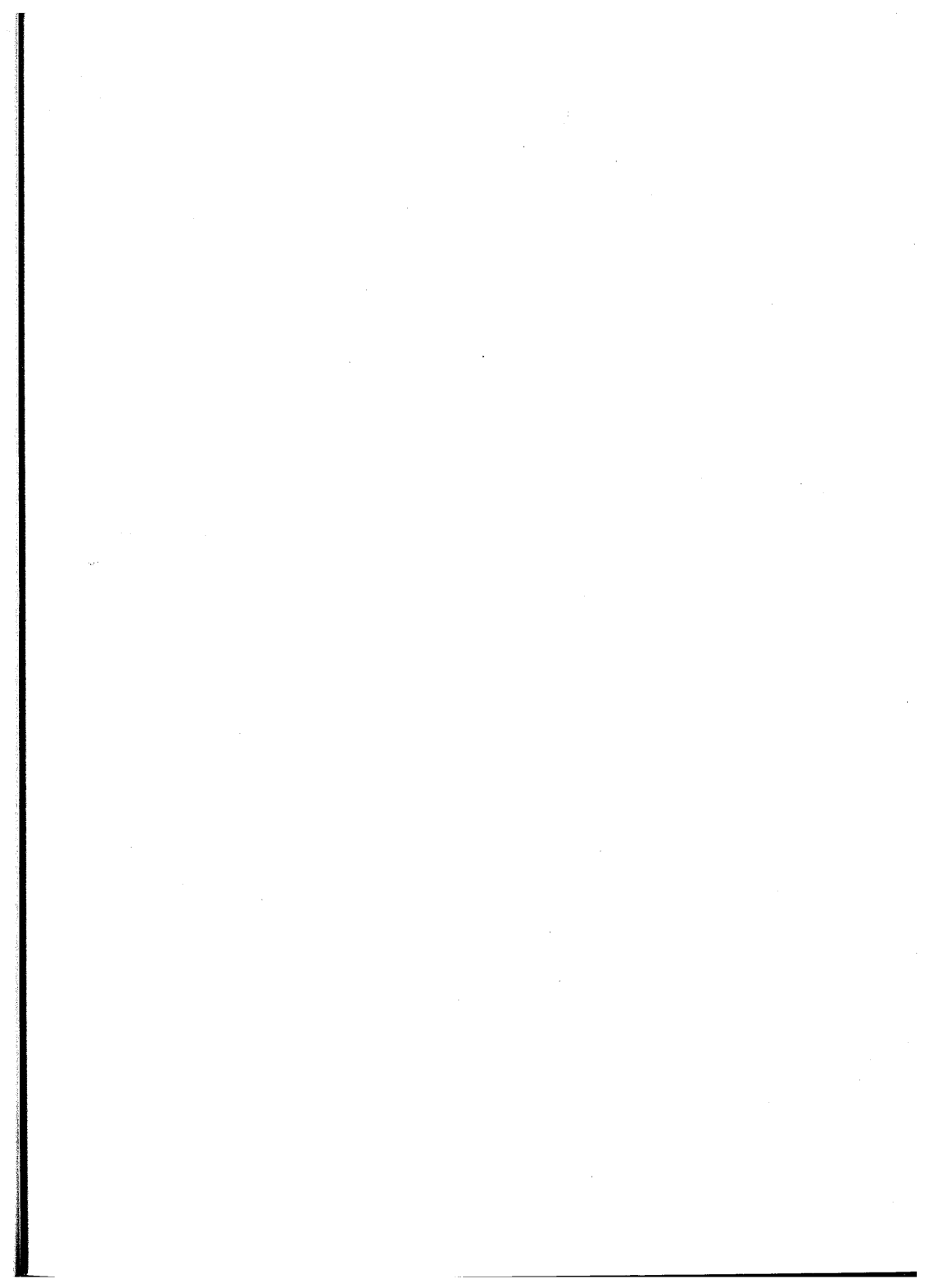
opposed the colonial invasions which threatened to destroy the Prophet's heritage and force the Arabs into foreign moulds and systems.

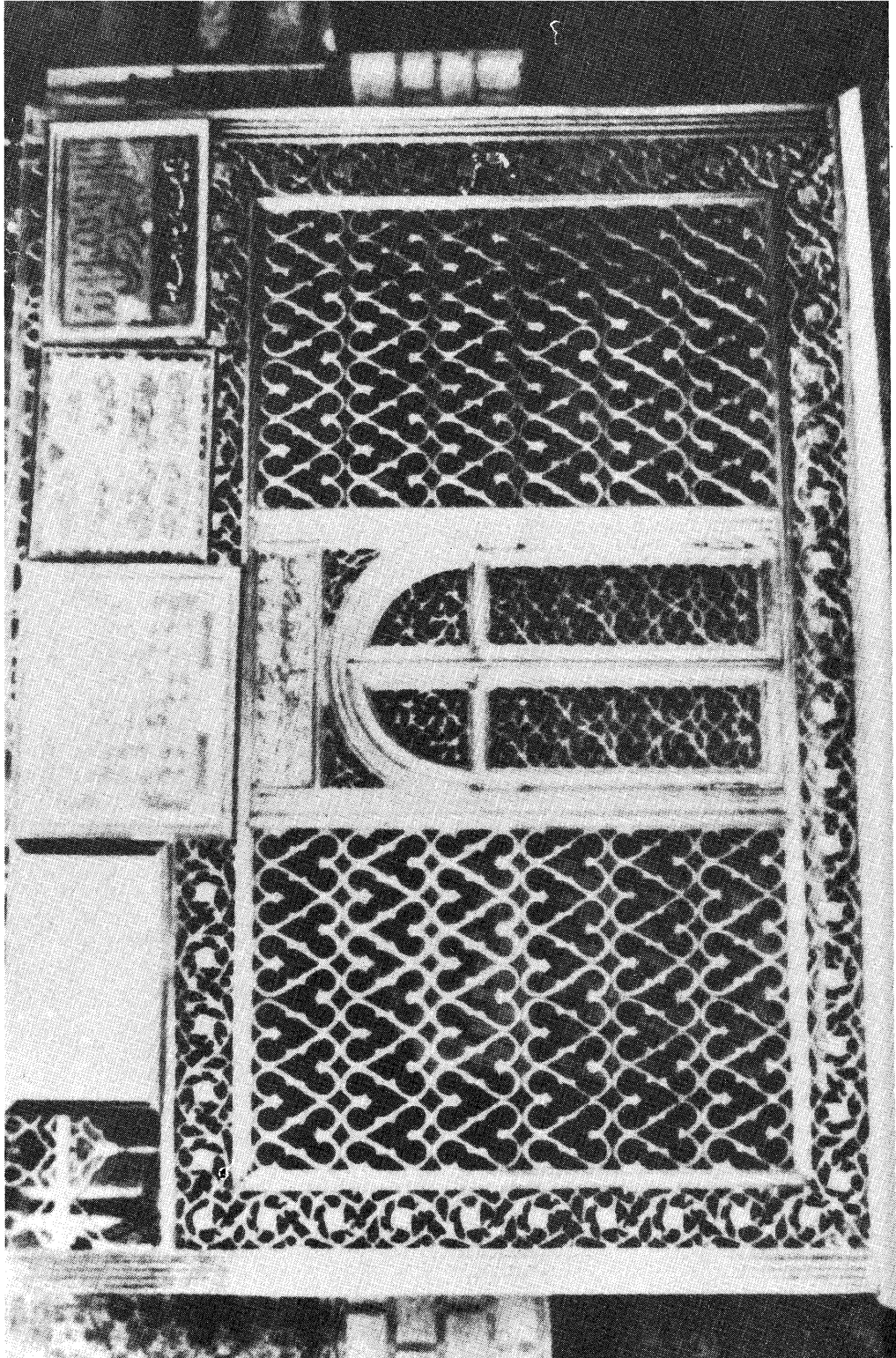
Towards the end of his life the Grand Senussi moved his headquarters into a desert place called Jaghub to escape from the interference of the foreign invaders. There is an interesting account of the Senussi establishment of Jaghub by a contemporary French writer.

Meanwhile Senussi, sensing the approach of death and finding the Green Mountains too close to the Turks at Benghazi and the foreign consuls who resided there, ordered the creation of a new zawia at Jaghub in the desert a little north of the route from Siwa to Jalo Oasis. At Jaghub there was only a solitary brackish water well in an arid depression in the middle of emptiness. New wells were dug and the zawia sprang up as though by enchantment.

The Grand Senussi did not long survive the move to Jaghub but under his eldest son and successor, Sayyid al Mahdi, this unpromising place was to be, for nearly half a century, not only the headquarters of the most constructive and successful Islamic Order of its time but the seat of a Muslim college ranking in reputation to that of Al Azhar in Cairo. Jaghub is to-day the only impressive historical Arab monument in Libya. [Since the time of writing, the College and the Jaghub Mosque have been closed by the regime which deposed King Idris in 1969: Ed]

The white-domed Mosque stands just as it was built by the Senussi brothers, of stone locally quarried, cut and carried by their own hands under the direction of the Grand Senussi, over a hundred years ago. To come upon this hallowed place of religion and learning set in the severest natural surroundings is an inspiring experience. One enters a spacious arcaded courtyard in the centre of which is a square stone water tank for ablutions, and on the far side is a fine carved ebony door leading into the Mosque, a cool cloistered building with walls of massive stone blocks. From the Mosque, a door leads to an inner chamber crowned by a vaulted dome painted in green, red and gold. On the floor under the dome is a finely wrought bronze grill with arched doors in the centre, which was worked in Java. Fixed to





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the front of the grill are two panels on one of which is inscribed the Senussi family tree and on the other a complete transcript of the Quran in microscopic characters. Inside is the tomb* of the Grand Senussi. The whole effect is one of austere dignity, ordered care and sound craftsmanship. It has been faithfully preserved exactly as it was in the days of the founder of the Senussi Order. It is a fitting testimony to that great Arab leader who sought for his people a pure form of Islam undefiled by contact with the material world and who brought new hope and spirit to the backward inhabitants of the Libyan deserts and beyond.

Less impressive but equally interesting is the College which adjoins the Mosque. One must remember that in the Grand Senussi's time there were virtually no schools in Libya and one of the Order's main achievements was to provide schools, where the boys could have a simple education in religion, and reading and writing. The Jaghub College consists of a quadrangle, at one end of which is the long schoolroom with flat roof and arched windows and recesses for the students' books along the walls. Down the sides of the quadrangle are little arched doorways next to which are the ovens where the students cooked their food. From the doorways winding stone staircases lead up to the students' lodgings above. In an adjoining courtyard is the great library which housed eight thousand priceless Arab books and manuscripts. It was ransacked and destroyed by the Fascist invaders in the nineteen-thirties.

The educational work at Jaghub was of great importance in expanding the Senussi Order. The teachers were learned brothers of the Order such as Ahmad al Rifi, Sayyid al Mahdi's Moroccan teacher and Imam ibn Baraka, brother in law and

* In 1984, acting on the orders of Mu'amar Gaddafi, his cosin Hassan Ishkal supervised the demolition of the tomb. The desecration of the tomb took place during a huge celebration laid by members of the revolutionary committees. Ishkal's party also exhumed the graves of the Sayyid's and their followers (Ikhwan), as well as those of the wives of sayyid Muhammad ibn Ali al Senussi which were all located in the graveyard adjoining the mosque. The fact that they discovered that the bodies of Sidi ibn al Senni, that of his son Sayyid Muhammad al Sherif and that of his follower and in-law Sidi Umran bin Baraka had not, after all these years undergone decomposition, did nothing to halt the process of desecration. They dumped the three holy bodies unceremoniously in the desert and buried the bodies found in the other graves in a hole in the ground in an unknown location.

The graveyard adjoining the tomb of Sidi Rafa al Ansari in Beida met a similar fate. The graves of all the Sayyid's and their followers (Ikhwan) were exhumed and their remains were collectively dumped in a hole in the ground and buried once again in an unknown location after having been left in the open air by the tomb for a very long time.



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former chief counsellor of the Grand Senussi. The curriculum included study of the Quran and the Hadith, Arabic language and syntax, history and geography and the sciences of logic and arithmetic. In the summer classes were held in the coolness of the Mosque and in winter in the long schoolroom. More practical skills also played an important part; instruction was given in building, carpentry, metal work, cotton spinning and weaving, dyeing, book binding, mat making and bakery. On Fridays after prayers in the Mosque there was physical training including riding and archery. Life at Jaghbub was tough and food spare: Students received a daily ration of a loaf of bread, dates and Yoghurt for breakfast, lentil or bean soup with bread for lunch and supper. On Fridays they had meat. Each student received clothing consisting of two shirts, two caps, two loose cotton trousers and one jerd (woollen robe) each half year. Cleanliness was demanded and the students washed their clothes every week. Students entered the College at the age of fifteen, coming from near and distant parts of North Africa. After their five year course they went back to their own areas to give the same kind of teaching in local schools. Some became brothers of the Order – dedicated missionaries who were the backbone of the Order. The Jaghbub College flourished for over seventy years and was only closed during the Italian occupation. It is now little used since modern schools and a Senussi university at Baida have taken its place. In due course Sayyid Mohammed Sherif, the brother of Sayyid al Mahdi, became head of the University, thus freeing al Mahdi for the administration of the Order and its expansion into distant parts of Africa. When al Mahdi took over the Order the number of zawias was between fifty and sixty, mainly in Cyrenaica, Tripolitania and the Hejaz. Under his direction the number increased to about one hundred and fifty, of which thirty were in Egypt, sixteen in the Hejaz, eighty-eight in Libya and about sixteen in the central Sudan and southern Sahara. The majority of these were destroyed by the Italian colonists who considered them dangerous centres of hostile feeling.

The zawias were built on much the same simple lines as Jaghbub, but on a smaller scale, including a mosque, school-

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room, guest room, houses for the Shaikh and teachers, a dormitory and storeroom. The buildings were of mud or stone flints, with mud roofs supported by wooden beams.

The settlement was usually surrounded by a wall and in fertile places there was a garden where vegetables were watered from near-by wells. The zawia served many purposes; it was not only a place of prayer and education, but also a court of justice, commercial emporium and caravanserai, and an agricultural centre for the surrounding desert. The Shaikh was the prayer leader, schoolmaster, arbitrator for tribal disputes and Qadi (judge) who administered the Islamic law or Sharia, which included both civil and criminal justice. Thus the Senussi Order carried out most of the functions of a civil administration as well as those of religion and education. In time the zawias grew and flourished. An example of their prosperity was that at the zenith of the Senussi Order (1880-1900) fourteen zawias in Cyrenaica possessed no less than 125,000 acres and one-third of the date trees and gardens in the Kufra Oases. These endowments stemmed from voluntary endowment by the local tribes who also paid the tithes required by Islamic obligation.

In order to spread the Order into distant regions it was necessary to establish an efficient system of communications for the supply and supervision of the zawias. Another great achievement of Sayyid al Mahdi was the opening of caravan routes connecting Jaghbub with outlying zawias. These routes were used not only by the couriers, who kept the head of the Order in touch with the zawias, but also by trade caravans and pilgrims passing to and from Mecca. Zawias were usually built at well centres in the oases on these routes, and provided rest houses where travellers could obtain three days free board and lodging according to Muslim customs. In the course of time, as trade developed between the central Sudan and the Mediterranean, the caravan routes became increasingly frequented and the zawias situated along them became prosperous trade and refreshment centres, where the travellers could replenish their supplies of food and water and trade with the local inhabitants.

The most important caravan route developed by al Mahdi was that which connected Benghazi on the Libyan coast with Abeshr,



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the capital of Wadai in the Central Sudan. This originated from the friendship between the Grand Senussi and Muhammad Sherif, Sultan of Wadai, formed in Mecca in the eighteen thirties. Through their great influence over the tribes of the Libyan desert and beyond the Senussi made this route the safest and most flourishing in North Africa. Senussi brothers used to travel with the caravans to administer the paid protection whereby a merchant wishing to cross safely a tribe's territory addressed himself to the representative of the Grand Senussi who would accord him the necessary protection in return for a fee. This protection was agreed by contract with the tribes which supplied the necessary escort. Under the Senussi regime it was said that a woman could travel alone and unharmed over the thirteen hundred miles of mountain and desert between the central Sudan and the Mediterranean. Through the energy and foresight of Sayyid al Mahdi this route carried a regular flow of caravans bearing clarified butter, senna, sesame, ivory, ostrich feathers and gold from the centre of Africa to the markets of Libya and Egypt and returning with cloth, sugar, tea, coffee, salt, dates and manufactured goods. It is recorded that between 1890 and 1900 an average of 200 and 300 camels in caravans entered Jalo from Kufra each week. The most prosperous days of Kufra were from 1860 to 1905 when the ten camel caravan routes radiating from the Kufra Oasis were in their fullest activity. It was along these caravan routes that the Senussi influence was carried by the brothers and by the graduates of the Jaghbub College returning to distant parts of Africa – to Darfur in the Egyptian Sudan, to Tibesti, Borku, Wadai, Kanem, Bornu and Baghirmi in Chad and to Kano and Zinder in Nigeria. The fame of the Senussi even reached Senegal on the Atlantic coast whence a party of pilgrims travelled three thousand miles across Africa in 1879 to visit Sayyid al Mahdi at Jaghbub. So stimulated were they by their experience that they returned home without troubling to continue the journey to Mecca.

Busy with their peaceful and constructive labours the life of the Senussi community went on happily at Jaghbub during the thirty-five years of Sayyid al Mahdi's rule. During this period

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two sons were born to him; Muhammad Idris (the hero of this book) of his wife Aisha, a lady of the Bu Saifi family of Syrte, in Libya in 1890, and the younger Muhammad al Rida of his wife Fatima of the Umran family of Jebel al Akhdar a year or two later. Three daughters Safia, Nafisa and Husnia were also born to him. The choice of Jaghbub had been an auspicious one and no misfortune overtook the Senussi during their long sojourn in this quiet and secluded place.

THE SENUSSI MOVE TO KUFRA AND THE SUDAN

In the year 1895 Sayyid al Mahdi moved his headquarters from Jaghub to Kufra, an oasis in the heart of the Libyan desert. The main reason for the move was the need to find a centre where he could direct his movement independently of Turkish interference. For many years Kufra had been a loyal Senussi outpost and separated from the Turkish coastal authorities by seven hundred miles of almost waterless desert it was about as safe a place as could be found. Although it had always been the Senussi policy to maintain good relations with the Turkish authorities who, in turn, had allowed the Senussi considerable freedom of action, this position began to change about the year 1889 when Sultan Abdul Hamid II had noticed with alarm that the Senussi influence in Cyrenaica was fast exceeding that of the Ottoman Governors. In 1889 Rashid Pasha, the Governor of Benghazi, visited Jaghub at the head of an armed force to extend an invitation to Sayyid al Mahdi to visit Istanbul. This visit was followed by other emissaries with gifts from the Sultan and more pressing invitations and it became clear to Sayyid al Mahdi that in accordance with Ottoman practice towards Arab leaders whose influence threatened their imperial authority, he and his family were going to be exiled to Istanbul.

In early 1895 preparations were complete and Sayyid al Mahdi

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with his family and principal followers left Jaghbug on the forty days trek across the desert via Jalo to the village of Al Jof which was to be their new home. It seems that the Turks were quite happy to see the Senussi depart and sent a large number of officials to Jalo to wish them God-Speed. They arrived at Jof and Sayyid al Mahdi, with characteristic energy, set about building a mosque, a school and houses on a ridge some 400 feet above the wadi among whose date palms the villagers lived. This place was called al Taj and continued to be the principal Senussi centre until the Italians occupied it in 1936. Apart from its remoteness from the Turkish interference, al Jof had the advantages of being an important staging post on the caravan route from Wadai to the Mediterranean and a convenient centre for the Senussi missionary expansion in the trans-Saharan regions.

Sayyid al Mahdi only lived for five years at Kufra but during this time he did much to convert the place into a civilised and thriving centre. Flower and vegetable seeds and fruit cuttings were brought from Egypt and irrigated from numerous wells which were dug among the palm trees in the long narrow valley. Surrounded by completely arid desert, scorchingly hot in summer, it is remarkable to find such a well watered place in such an inhospitable area. Sayyid al Mahdi introduced the method of irrigation known as shadoof used on the Nile whereby water is raised from the wells in leather buckets suspended from a wooden lever and poured into narrow channels flowing on to small fields. Vegetables grown included tomatoes, ladies fingers, onions, courgettes, beans and radishes. The varieties of fruit in addition to the ubiquitous dates included grapes, figs, olives, almonds, bananas, melons and limes. Wheat, barley and millet were grown for flour, lucerne for fodder, and roses, henna and mint to provide flavour for tea and rose water used so extensively in Arab society. He also imported horses and donkeys for riding and goats for milk and chickens to supplement the meagre meat supply. To preserve their independence and resist penetration by colonial influences, strict orders were given to prevent the visits of inquisitive foreign explorers for whom a journey to the mysterious desert stronghold offered an irresistible challenge. Stories were spread of Senussi fanaticism whose purpose it was to deter



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such people by exaggerating the dangers they would have to face. The Senussi, however, never waylaid or murdered peaceful travellers, and indeed such behaviour would have been contrary to the principles of peace in which they believed so strongly.

In Sayyid al Mahdi's day Kufra was a forty days journey by camel caravan from Benghazi. To-day there is a bi-weekly air service taking a couple of hours. Kufra is a timeless place, its remote solitude undisturbed by the commotions which agitate the outside world. Within its secluded groves lie wide salty lakes fringed with countless palm trees bearing the sweetest dates I have ever tasted. Kufra is a perfect sanatorium – providing peace and calm and settled weather, a great restorative for jangled nerves and a curative power for rheumatic and respiratory disorders. With its hot sunshine, cloudless skies and cool nights, warm saline pools and pure drinking water, it is difficult to envisage a more salubrious place.

In the year 1900 Sayyid al Mahdi decided to move from Kufra in search of another centre in the more spacious and populated country to the South of the Libyan desert. It seems he believed that the most promising field for the missionary work of the Senussi Order lay among the semi-heathen inhabitants of the Sudan. His first idea was to settle in the Marra mountains of Darfur in the Western Sudan, a vast and undeveloped region with a large population and plenty of land suitable for cultivation and the rearing of livestock. Although the Senussi had good relations with Ali Dinar, the Sultan of Darfur, the latter rejected this proposal, no doubt fearing the establishment in the heart of his territory of a potential rival to his own authority. Sayyid al Mahdi found a more cordial welcome from the Sultan of Wadai who allotted him the district of Quru on the north-east side of the great Tibesti massif.

The journey to Quru was described to me by Sayyid Muhammad Idris, then a boy of 10, who accompanied his father on this ill-fated expedition:

In the month of Rejab 1317 AH (corresponding to October 1899) we left Kufra for Quru where a zawia had been built and houses prepared for our occupation. This was a smaller expedition than the

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journey to Kufra headed by my father and including my younger brother and my cousins, the sons of Muhammad Sherif and some two hundred followers. No women accompanied the party.

We followed the Kufra-Abeshr route southwards to Bushra where my grandfather had opened a well some fifty metres deep many years before. Thence we continued through Sarra to Tekro where the wells were dry at the time of our journey. Up to Tekro the route crosses hard open desert and the going is good but there is no water. After Tekro the landscape changes to steppe country with rocky ridges and wadis where acacia trees and dom palms grow and water is found in shallow wells. The first village of Wadai we reached was Wajanga (later called Ounianga) where there was a zawia founded by my grandfather. Here is a large lake fringed with reeds and date palms teeming with fish and frequented by teal and wild geese. From Wajanga we turned towards the Tibesti mountains and reached Quru in three days.

Quru was a lonely spot in a wadi leading from the great mountain of Emi Koussi. The inhabitants are dark-skinned people, known as tibu, who welcomed our arrival and provided us with accommodation and food. Life at Quru was hard and primitive as little food is produced locally. My father arranged for flour to be brought from the south and dates and a few small luxuries from Kufra. The Senussi did not acclimatise well to the wild mountainous country and uncertain climate with its sudden storms and clouds so different from the dry desert.

My father fell ill and died suddenly of fever in the early summer of 1320 AH (corresponding to 1st June 1902). This was a great blow and the elders of the settlement decided to return to Kufra carrying my father's body with us.

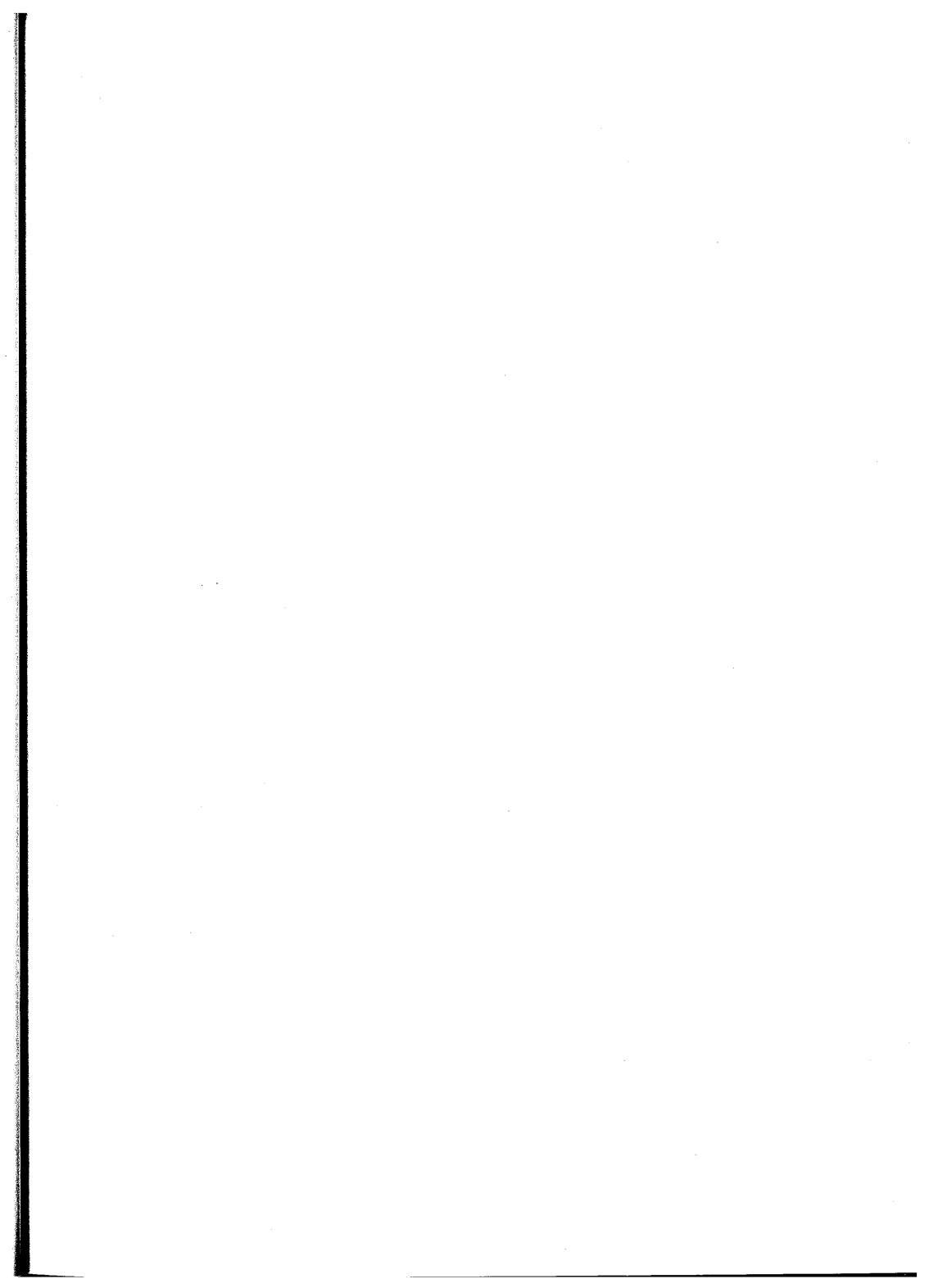
Sayyid al Mahdi achieved great fame from his successful expansion of the Senussi movement which reached its zenith during his lifetime. He brought peace and order to a previously lawless area and taught the inhabitants self-respect and the proper observance of Islam in their daily lives. Indeed, it is not too much to say that the Senussi movement gave Libya and its vast hinterland a measure of tranquillity and moral and economic improvement that it had never known before. It also created a unity and brotherhood based on the Islamic religion that it has never known since.

Sayyid al Mahdi's premature death came as a great shock to his



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followers and was a great disaster to the Senussi movement. The news spreading far and wide across the desert was too bitter and unforeseen to be believed and many refused to accept that he was really dead. The legend grew and gained in the telling that he had gone into the desert on a secret journey and would one day come back to lead Islam to its former greatness.





Sayyid Ahmad Al Sharif Assanusi.

THE SENUSSI UNDER ATTACK

Sayyid al Mahdi's death occurred too prematurely for his successor to have been named. His eldest son Muhammed Idris being a boy of only twelve years, the brothers of the Order decided that his cousin, Sayyid Ahmad Sherif, should take charge until he came of age. Meanwhile, back at Kufra, Muhammed Idris continued his education in the school at the Taj, spending his time studying the Quran, Hadith (traditions of the Prophet), Tafsir (Quranic interpretation), Sharia (Islamic law), Fikh (jurisprudence), Tarikh (history) and Hisab (arithmetic).

At this time a great danger to the Senussi movement had appeared in the far south-west: The French invasion of Chad had begun in the year 1900. Under a secret Anglo-French convention, signed in March 1899 and so characteristic of contemporary European conspiracies to acquire African possessions, France was allocated the central Sudan from Lake Chad in the west to the Darfur boundary in the east, an area which from time immemorial had been ruled by independent Sultans. In return, she would recognize British interests in the Egyptian Sudan. This was followed in December 1900 by a secret agreement between Italy and France under which Italy was given a free hand in the Ottoman provinces of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica in return for recognition of French interests in the independent Sultanate of Morocco.



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These arrangements for the partition of Africa among the European powers were typical of the cynical horse-trading which went on at this time. They completely ignored the rights of the inhabitants to live under their own self chosen governments. In the case of the central Sudan the French considered the Senussi movement as their main obstacle on the grounds that it was fanatically hostile to Christian influence. This false belief, based on a few travellers' exaggerated stories, completely ignored the peaceful and civilising influence of the Senussi and instead credited them with a military organisation and designs which they neither desired nor possessed. Hastening to reach the limits of the sphere allotted to them by the agreement with the British of 1899, French columns began to move eastward from their bases in Southern Algeria and Niger about the time of Sayyid al Mahdi's move to Quru. The capture of the zawia at Bir Alali*, the Senussi headquarters in Kanem, in 1902 and the killing of its chief, Sidi Muhammed at Barrani, was a great blow to the Senussi cause. The French conquerors then set about the systematic destruction of the Senussi Order in the immense Chad territory and beyond. In a brief ten years the Senussi Order in this area was virtually exterminated. It was the realisation of the French threat created by the capture of the caravan routes leading from Baghirmi, Niger, Kanem and Wadai towards Libya that finally caused the Senussi to sink their previous differences with the Turks and come together to face this common danger.

Loth to surrender their cherished independence, the Senussi had hitherto refused to receive Turkish representatives in Kufra. Now in 1908, they welcomed the raising of the Turkish flag to proclaim Turkish sovereignty for their protection. Preoccupied with troubles at home, the Turks could provide little force to protect such distant boundaries and Sayyid Ahmad Sherif was forced to turn elsewhere for salvation. With the whole of Bornu and Tibesti, including Quru and Wajanga, in French hands,

* The number of martyrs who fell defending Zawia Alali exceeded one hundred men, sixty of whom were from the Zwayya tribe and included Shaikh abu Bakir Qwaytin. Other martyrs of that incident include the Chief of the Zawia, Sidi Muhammad al Barrani al Sa'edi, Shaikh Younis Badr, Shaikh Musbah al Hawli, Shaikh al Senussi Kherallah al Abid, and his brother Abdallah Kherallah al Abid, and Shaikh Gaith Saif al nasir. Shaikh Muhammad ibn Agila, the Shaikh of the Zawia of "Quru" who arrived later leading a group of Mujahidin in an attempt to rescue Zawia Alali, also died as a martyr.

(Extracts from "Barqa al Arabiya" by Ta'ib al Ashhab.)

THE *SENUSSI UNDER ATTACK*

Sayyid Ahmad sent an appeal for help to Lord Kitchener in Cairo.* The British Government, taking the view that Kufra belonged to the Ottoman dominions, intervened to prevent the French from occupying it but only just in time; a French column had reached Sarra only 200 miles south of Kufra. In 1910, they withdrew to Tekro which was recognised as the boundary between Libya and Chad.

Saved from the danger in the south, the Senussi were now beset by a new and more pressing danger in the north. In pursuit of her claims to a sphere of influence in Libya and to secure a position on the southern Mediterranean shores – much of which had already fallen into the hands of Britain and France – Italy suddenly declared war on Turkey in September 1911 and rapidly made landings at Tripoli, Homs, Benghazi, Derna and Tobruk. This was a patent aggression which aroused the indignation of the Muslim world but provoked little adverse reaction in Europe – the great European powers were busily engaged in similar aggressions in other parts of Africa. The Turks, preoccupied by the Balkan war, were in no state to put up an effective defence and such resistance as occurred was organised by local Libyan leaders. It lacked, however, any co-ordination or efficient direction.

Meanwhile Sayyid Ahmad Sharif sent orders from Kufra for his followers to rally to the support of the Turkish garrisons in the Benghazi and Derna areas. Thus two separate and uncoordinated resistances were organised by local tribesmen – in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica – and this was to be the pattern throughout the Libyan struggle against the Italians. Although the Turkish government was unable to send reinforcements owing to the Italian blockade of the coast, many Turkish and Egyptian officers made their way by devious routes to join the Turco-Libyan forces. Among those who reached Tripolitania were Fethi Bey – the Turkish military attaché in Paris, Hafiz Afif – a doctor who later became Egyptian ambassador in London, and Abdul Rahman Azzam – afterwards Secretary-General of the Arab League. With the cooperation of the Egyptians, who did all possible to

* It is at this stage that relationships between Britain and the Senussi movement began to take effect, which is contrary to what was assumed and circulated, that they were established during Sidi Idris's exile in Egypt in the 40's.



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support the Libyan resistance, those who reached Cyrenaica included Enver Bay – afterwards Turkish Minister of War, Mustafa Kemal – afterwards, of course, first President of the Turkish republic, and Abdulla al Masiri. All belonged to the Young Turk Movement.

Friendly and persuasive, Enver Bay was very successful in securing the support of the Cyrenaican tribes, who, by persistent attacks, were able to confine the Italian invaders to their coastal strongholds. In the summer of 1912, Sayyid Ahmad Sherif was persuaded to move to Jaghbug where he was visited by Enver, who informed him that the Sultan had granted the Libyans their independence and urged him to continue the war alone and to accept no terms of peace as long as the Italians remained in Libya. Enver himself then left for Turkey where Mustafa Kemal had already preceded him. Soon after, the Turks came to terms with the Italians by the Treaty of Lausanne. Under this equivocal agreement, the Turks had to withdraw their forces from Libya and grant the country full autonomy. The Sultan was allowed to nominate a personal representative and retain his religious authority. The representative he appointed was Sayyid Ahmad Sherif who was thus forced by circumstances to become a head of government and a military commander. Considering the superiority of the Italian forces which confronted him and his military inexperience, the success with which he carried out this role was remarkable.

★ Enver Pasha was the bearer of that Sultanic decree to Sidi Ahmad al Sherif which stated that he become the Caliph's representative in Africa and which vested him with the same plenary authority as that of the Caliph, both on the civil and military side. Such a position also entitled him to the bestowal of ranks and medals of honour, the granting of clemency and appointments and dismissals without consulting the caliph's court.

Prior to his departure from Cyrenaica in 1918 Sidi Ahmad al Sherif appointed Sidi Idris to his place and vested in him all the above mentioned authorities. A large number of medals of honour were delivered by Enver Pasha to Sidi Ahmad al Sherif which he was to grant to whom ever he chose from his followers. The Sultan conferred upon Sidi Ahmad the rank of Pashawiya of the highest grade as well as a number of eminent medals including the First Othmani medal. He also conferred upon Sidi Idris al Senussi the same medal and the same rank of Pashawiya of the highest grade. Additionally, he bestowed the rank of Pashawiya and a number of eminent medals to Sayyid Muhammad Abed al Senussi, Sayyid Rida, Sayyid Ali al Karabi, Sayyid Hilal and Sayyid Safi al Din.

In his capacity as the representative of the Othman Caliph, Sidi Ahmad pursued his absolute authority and granted both ranks and medals to his followers of whom we mention the following:

the rank of Pashawia and the Othmani medal to Hussyn Bsykri, Sayyid Ahmad ben Idris, Sayyid Ahmad al Issawi, Sayyid Muhammad Ali AbdelMawla, Sayyid al Murtadi Farkash, Sayyid Muhammad al Dardafi, Sayyid Muhammad ben Ammour and Sayyid Umran al Sukkari. he also granted Sayyid Muhammad al As'ma, Sayyid Abdalla ben Amer, Sayyid AbdelSalam bu Kashata, Sayyid Mustafa Mniena and Sayyid Wasfi al Khazmi other ranks and medals.

Prior to his nomination as the Caliph's representative Sidi Ahmad was a Field Marshal in the Othmani army. He was also the owner of the first Majidi medal, the 4th and 2nd Othmani medals and the sash and encrusted medal. At a later date, he acquired one of the most eminent German military medals. (Extracts from "Barqa al Arabiya" by Ta'ib al Ashhab).

THE SENUSSI UNDER ATTACK

After the Turks withdrew their forces from Tripolitania, resistance petered out there. In Cyrenaica however, some Turkish troops remained and with the wholehearted support of the Beduin tribes inflicted several sharp defeats on the Italians. Sayyid Ahmad Sherif formed his own government with headquarters at Jaghbug and all documents issued were stamped 'al Hakuma al Senussiya' – the Senussi Government. He was fortified by the moral backing of the whole Arab and Muslim world, committees being formed to raise funds for the war in Egypt, Syria and the Hejaz. Supplies of food and ammunition came through the port of Sollum in Egypt who, herself unable to send forces owing to British control, formed a Red Crescent society to look after the Libyan sick and wounded.

In the summer of 1913 things began to go badly for the Senussi who suffered heavy losses and were obliged to withdraw from the vicinity of Benghazi and Derna and part of the Jebel al Akhdar. They were further weakened by disagreement between Sherif and his advisor, Abdul Aziz al Masiri, over the conduct of the campaign. As a result, the latter withdrew across the Egyptian boundary, taking most of the remaining Turkish artillery with him. Sherif complained to Enver Bey and Masiri was court-martialled and condemned to death on a charge of surrendering Cyrenaica to the Italians. Since Sherif was a proud and headstrong man with little knowledge of warfare, there may have been good reason in Masiri's actions but to the Cyrenaicans it seemed a gross betrayal. Masiri had many friends in Egypt and as a result of their influence and the intervention of "The Times" correspondent in Istanbul, he was released and allowed to go to Egypt. He subsequently took part in the Arab revolt in the Hejaz and later, adopting Egyptian nationality, occupied important posts in Egypt including that of Inspector General to the Egyptian army. He died in 1965 at the age of 85. After Masiri's departure, organized resistance under Turkish officers ceased in Cyrenaica but war continued in a guerilla form with the Arabs harassing Italian ports and supply columns, and preventing them from extending their control beyond the coastal belt.

In Tripolitania the Arabs were divided as to whether to continue the war or enter into negotiations with the Italians on the



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basis of the autonomy accorded by the Treaty of Lausanne. The war party, under Suliman al Baruni, prevailed for a time but Baruni was unable to unite the people behind him. The withdrawal of Turkish forces early in 1913 left the Tripolitarians leaderless and unarmed. The Italians were able to occupy most of the territory without serious opposition as a result. Baruni left for Istanbul in March, 1913, and only returned in 1915 when the preoccupation of the Italians in Europe permitted the renewal of pro-Turkish operations in Tripolitania.

4

SAYYID IDRIS GOES ON PILGRIMAGE

Let us now return to Kufra and the fortunes of young Muhammad Idris. The following is an account by Idris himself of a pilgrimage undertaken in the period 1913-1914:

'In the year 1330 AH [corresponding to 1912] I came of age at Kufra and some of the Senussi Ikhwan acting both for themselves and on behalf of others asked me to take over the responsibilities of my late father from Sayyid Ahmad al Sharif who was then preparing, on the request of Anwar Pasha [Enver], to leave for Jaghub so as to be close to the warriors. My reply to this request was that Sayyid Ahmad al Sharif was then preparing for this journey and that we were on the brink of a war with Italy and so I did not think it appropriate to take over from him at that time; that I valued his oft-proved skill in managing the affairs of the Order; that as soon as conditions became stable their wishes would be met and that Sayyid Ahmad would undoubtedly agree to such a course.

Sayyid Ahmad left for Jaghub and I remained behind at al-Kufra for a whole year, during which I was trained in the management of the affairs connected with my forcoming responsibilities. During this period Turkey ceded the country to Italy [The Treaty of Lausanne, 1912]. As Sayyid Ahmad was fighting the Italians, I decided to go to Mecca to perform the pilgrimage and then return to assist him.

On the 4th Shawwal [corresponding to August 1913] I left Kufra



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by horse, accompanied by three Ikhwan – Haj Mohammed Tawati [son of a Grand Senussi councillor], Haj Faraj and Haj Ali al Abidiyya [a famous Senussi leader born in 1870] – a Zuwayi Shaikh, three servants including one Sudani and the camel drivers. I rode my mare and camels carried our baggage. We travelled by the main caravan route – Tullab – Ribiana – Buzaima – Zieghen – Abu Ishka – Buttafal to Jalo. This took twenty-one days of which sixteen were actual travelling. We travelled by night and rested by day according to custom in the summer. We spent nine days at Jalo which was an important commercial centre but then declining in prosperity owing to the closing of the caravan route from the coast to Wadai. We then proceeded to Jaghub by way of Khirba, Qutmur, Terfawi and Abud Salam. The journey took sixteen days of which thirteen were actual travelling.

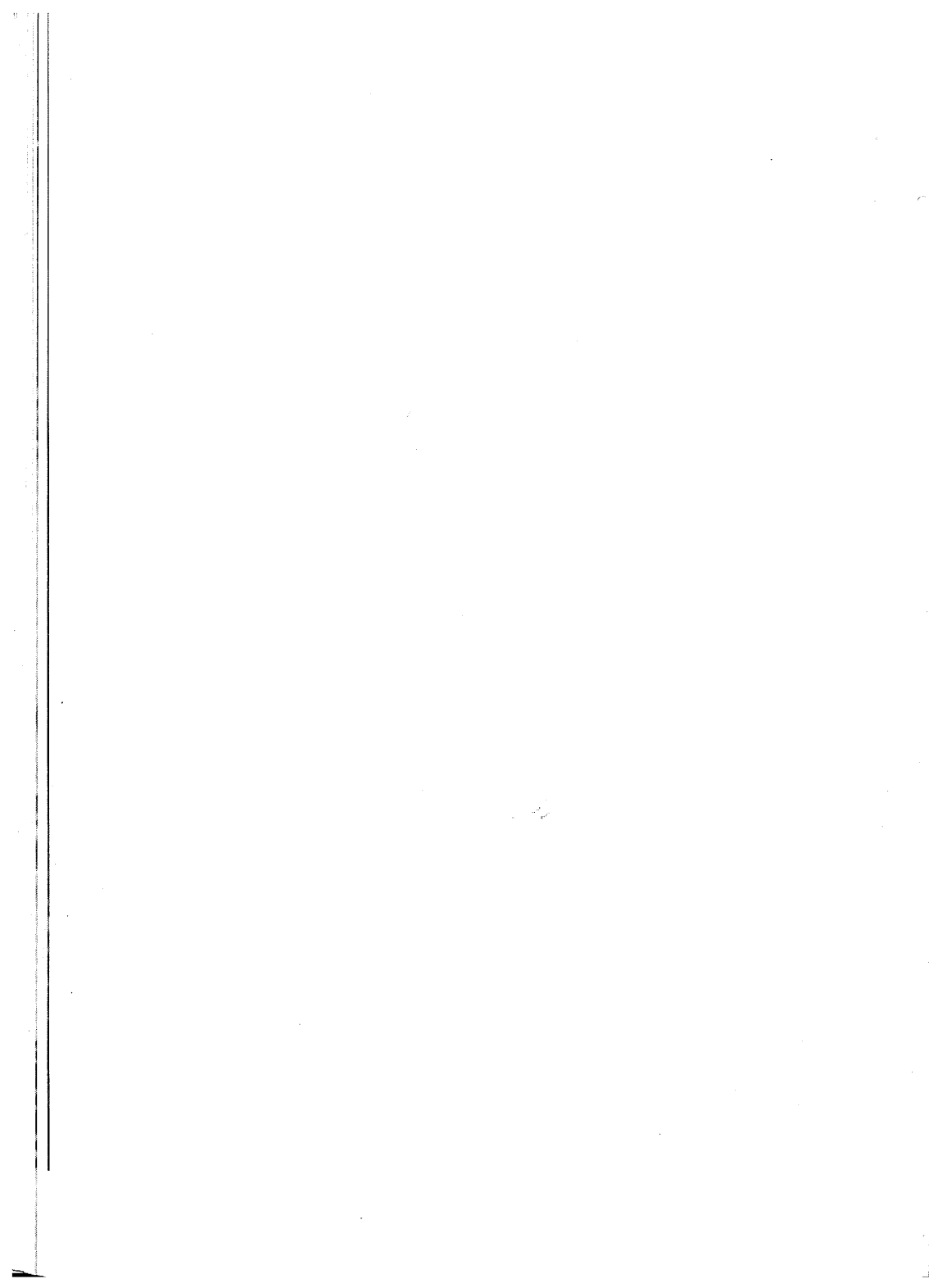
I stayed at Jaghub for seven months in the house of my father. The college founded by my grandfather was still flourishing. In the month of Jumada tani [corresponding to April 1914] I left Jaghub for Egypt with the same party including Haj Yunis al Abidia who joined us at Jaghub. We reached the coast at Buq Buq [close to Sollum] after seven days travelling: There I saw the sea for the first time. We proceeded to Dabaa [then the western terminus of the Egyptian State Railways] via Mersa Matruh where I was welcomed by the Egyptian authorities. We visited the Senussi zawias at Sidi Barrani, Shammas, Najaila, Umm al Rakham and Abu Harun on the way. At Dabaa we were met by Saleh al Harb, an Egyptian officer representing the Khedive Abbas [Abbas II, Khedive of Egypt 1892-1914] and travelled by special train to Alexandria where I stayed as the guest of the Khedive at Ras al Tin Palace. I received a warm welcome from the Egyptians, who although officially neutral in the war with Italy, supported their fellow Muslims and did all they could to help the Senussi with supplies of arms and medical equipment. At that time Lord Kitchener was the British representative in Egypt.

We stayed at Alexandria for nine days, waiting for the Khedive Mail steamer to Haifa. Then we heard that the steamer would call at Port Said, so we left by special train, again courteously provided by the Khedive. We embarked on the Khedivial Mail and left Port Said at noon and had a comfortable journey to Haifa where I arrived on 24 Rajab and was ceremoniously received by the Turkish Wali. We left immediately by train on the Hejaz railway, the royal saloon being placed at my disposal. The train to Medina ran three times weekly and the journey took three days. The main stations were Deraa, Amman, Tabouk and Medain Salih. The journey although slow was



Sayyid Idris in Egypt, wearing his Othmani medals on the official Egyptian court suit.

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SAYYID IDRIS GOES ON PILGRIMAGE

comfortable and there were wagon-lits and a dining car on the train. There was a horse box for my mare.

I stayed for fifteen days at Medina where it was very hot and I fell ill with fever. I was advised to go to Mecca where the climate was better, although the time for the pilgrimage had not yet arrived. The journey of 200 miles from Medina to Mecca was made by horse, taking eleven days travelling slowly by night and resting by day in tents. After three days at Mecca I was advised to go to Taif in the hills south of Mecca, where Sharif Hussain [Amir of Mecca, afterwards King of the Hejaz 1916-1924] and his sons, Abdalla and Faisal, spent the summer. I spent 75 days at Taif (including Ramadan and Shawwal [June 1914] where the climate was pleasant and I was completely restored to health. During this period the Austrian Archduke was assassinated at Sarajevo and the first World War broke out [4th August 1914]. We then proceeded to Mecca for the pilgrimage [October 1914]. I stayed at the Senussi zawia at Abu Qubais. Then we proceeded to Medina where we had to stay for two months owing to the interruption of communications by the war. We had been joined at Mecca by two well-known Cyrenaicans – Rashid al Kekhia and Ali al Abeidi.

While we were waiting at Medina in November war broke out between Great Britain and Turkey. The Turks, who were in control of the Hejaz, tried to get the Arabs to support them, and the British made similar approaches. Sherif Hussain maintained a neutral attitude and avoided a direct response to the Turkish call for Holy War. In December, when normal traffic was resumed on the railway, we proceeded to Haifa where the Turkish Governor, Abu Shahin, gave us hospitality. We found communication with Egypt practically cut off since the British and Turks were fighting near the Suez Canal. The British had declared a protectorate over Egypt and the Khedive Abbas II had been deposed and replaced by Hussain Kamel (his uncle) with the title of Sultan.

As an Italian steamer was running between Haifa and Naples calling at Port Said we sent one of our party by this route to see if it was practicable. Receiving a favourable report we booked passages on this ship, but the Captain would not guarantee that we would be allowed to disembark at Port Said, since the Senussi were allies of the Turks, and we were technically enemy subjects. Relations between the Senussi and the Italians had however improved and the latter were trying to come to terms with Sayyid Ahmad. It was therefore agreed that we should pay a deposit to the captain of the steamer, who would take us on to Naples if the British would not allow us to



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land at Port Said. From Naples the Italians would arrange for us to travel to Cyrenaica when an opportunity offered.

We left Haifa in February 1915. Unfortunately I had to leave my mare at Haifa as the captain could not accommodate her on the steamer. She was a Cyrenaican country-bred from Jebel al Akhdar given me by Khalil Benani. She had carried me all the way from Kufra to Mecca and back and I was very sorry to leave her at Haifa where she died soon after.

On arrival at Port Said we sent Ali al Abeidi ashore and as he had no trouble we all followed, mingling with the disembarking pilgrims, and passing as Egyptians. Once ashore we sent telegrams to Sultan Hussain and General MacMahon who had succeeded Lord Kitchener as British High Commissioner in Egypt. Receiving friendly replies we proceeded to Cairo where we were the guests of Sultan Hussain. During this period we called on General Maxwell, the commander of the British forces in Egypt and Colonel Clayton, the Sudan Agent in Cairo and discussed with them the situation of the Senussi relations with the Turks, the Italians and the British. They were anxious for us to break off relations with the Turks and support the British in the war, or at any rate to be neutral.

This was my first encounter with the British and I was favourably impressed by their friendly attitude and military strength. It was not possible for me to make any commitment on behalf of the Senussi without consulting Ahmad Sherif. I agreed to keep contact through our Idrisi connections in Egypt. The British agreed to facilitate my return to Cyrenaica.

After a short stay in Cairo we caught the morning train to Alexandria and embarked the same day on a coastguard steamer placed at our disposal by the British. We disembarked at Sollum and proceeded to Musai to join Ahmad Sherif who was living in two tents. I had been absent from Cyrenaica for nearly a year.'

HOLY WAR IN THE DESERT

The events which followed formed an unhappy chapter in Senussi history. In 1915 the fighting in Libya was at a standstill. The Italian forces maintained a precarious hold over Tripolitania and the Cyrenaican coast from Benghazi to Tobruk and the Jebel al Akhdar. The Senussi position was confined to the short stretch of coast east of Tobruq as far as the Egyptian boundary and the chain of armed camps stretching far inland across the southern edge of Jebel al Akhdar from Musaid to Ajedabia. These camps had the role of containing the Italians in the coastal area and were not available for other operations. The force under Sayyid Ahmad's command at Musaid was a small one and had as its role the protection of the limited coastline near Bardia still free from Italian occupation.

On the outbreak of war with Britain the Turks immediately turned their attention to hostile preparations against the British positions in Egypt, which they hoped to destroy by combined attack from both eastern and western flanks. To organise the latter they sent Nuri Bey (the brother of Enver) assisted by Jaafar al Askari, (an able young Iraqui officer who later changed sides and joined the Arab Revolt. Subsequently he became Prime Minister of Iraq and was killed in a coup d'état in 1963), to



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Musaid in February 1915. Their reception was at first cool, since Sayyid Ahmad did not wish to embroil himself with the British and he was reinforced in this attitude by the advice of Sayyid Idris, who had formed friendly relations with the British during his recent passage through Egypt, and advocated Senussi neutrality in the war between England and Turkey. Sayyid Ahmad was, however, a headstrong and warlike man, and a stern protagonist of the Islamic duty to engage in holy war against infidels. He also did not like to let down his old friend Enver Pasha.

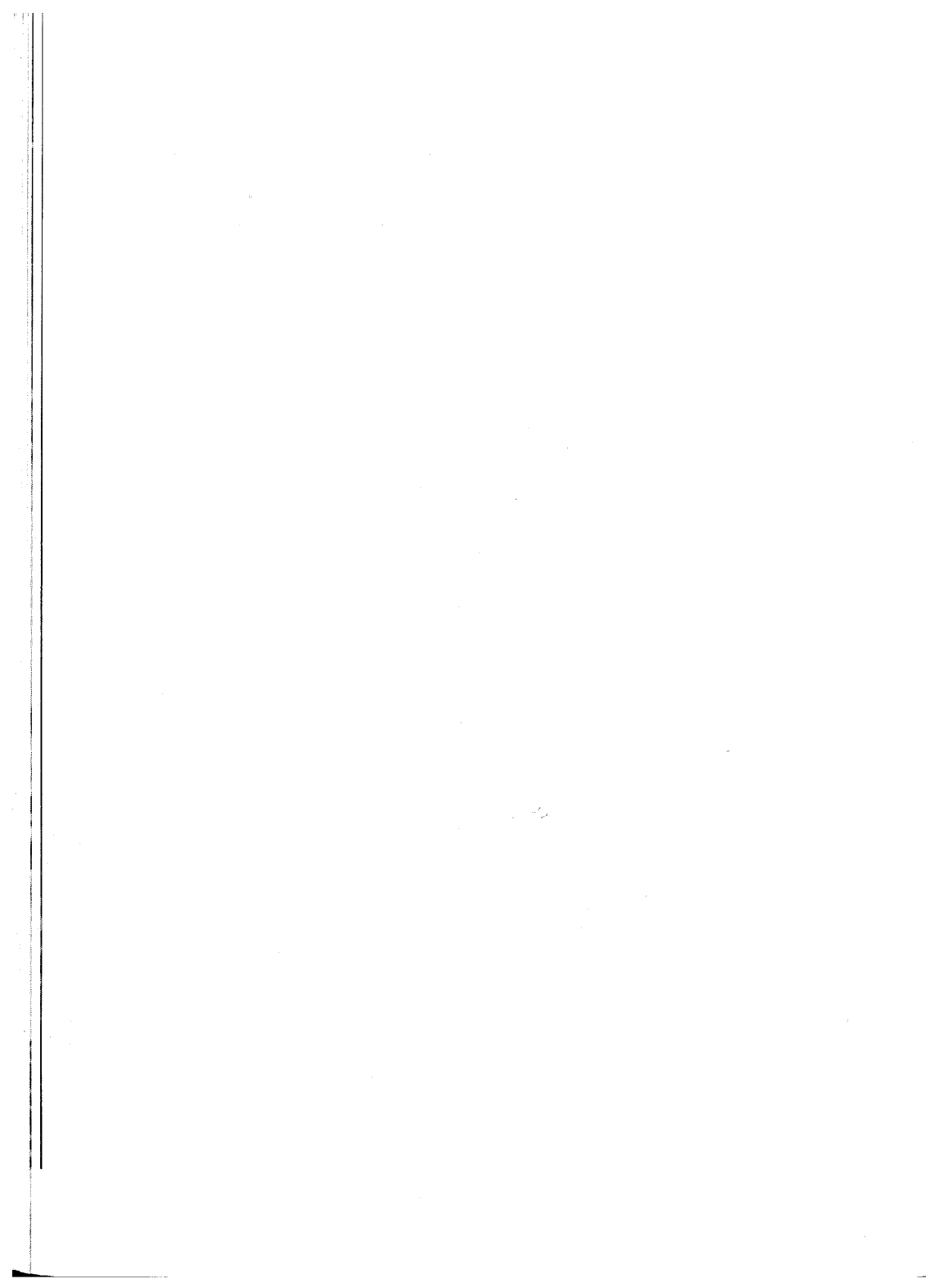
When the call went out from the Ottoman Sultan for the Arabs to join in holy war against the enemies of Turkey, he was persuaded to respond to it against the British in the same way that he had previously supported the Turks against the Italian invasion. The difference this time was that the British were not threatening any invasion of Libya, and their policy towards the Senussi was friendly and conciliatory. Unsure of himself, Ahmad al Sharif's attitude was, therefore, vacillatory. Through the spring and summer of 1915 he did nothing to compromise himself with the British, and even countenanced attempts by Sayyid Idris, through the Idrissi family in Egypt, to come to terms with the them: This was to include financial assistance in return for neutrality in the war. At the same time, however, out of loyalty to the Turks, he connived at the preparations being made by Nuri Bey to raise and train a force for action against the British. When no financial help was forthcoming from them, he willingly accepted the money and supplies which the Turks provided with German assistance. In his tacit support of the Turkish preparations he was encouraged by his appointment as the Sultan's vizier in Libya and his inflexible belief in his duty to fight for Islam, against infidels of whatever nationality they might be. Meanwhile he sat uneasily on the fence.

Throughout 1915 Nuri and Askari were busily engaged in recruiting and training the local tribesmen, who were mostly Cyrenaicans with some Aulad Ali tribesmen from the Egyptian western desert, where Senussi influence was strong. The Turco-Senussi force was armed with German weapons which arrived by sea from Turkey. During this period Nuri organised various ventures against the British garrison at Sollum and in spite of



Sayyid Ahmad Al Sharif Assansi.

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HOLY WAR IN THE DESERT

Sayyid Ahmad's equivocal attitude, including the maintenance of friendly relations with the British frontier officers, it became increasingly obvious that an attack on Egypt was impending. Jafar Pasha al Askari, when later in London as Iraqi Ambassador, commented that Sayyid Ahmad was not really anxious to fight against the British, knowing that he had to deal with the Italians in Tripoli and the French in the South. German money, German agents and the Enver's influence strongly exerted from Constantinople dragged him into the war.

The spark which set off the conflict was the affair of H.M.S. 'Tara', a British armed steamer which was torpedoed by a German submarine in Sollum Bay at the beginning of November 1915. The Germans landed the Tara's crew at Barida and handed them over to the Turks who sent them as prisoners to Bir Hakim, a lonely spot in the desert, under Senussi guards. It was impossible to ignore this overt collusion with the Germans. Furthermore serious unrest was manifesting itself in Alexandria, aroused by reports of an impending Turco-Senussi invasion, supported by German submarines operating along the coast. The strength of the forces at the Turkish disposal was greatly exaggerated by British intelligence reports, and there were alarming rumours that the whole desert might rise at the Senussi call to join in a holy war on the Turkish side. In fact, the Turkish forces on the coast never exceeded some two to three thousand men, while the main Senussi force was firmly tied up in the armed camps facing the Italians in Cyrenaica. But the unknown is always dangerous, and the Senussi had the reputation of being formidable and fanatical warriors. There was clearly a possibility that the Senussi influence might stir up an unknown number of Beduin to invade the Nile valley, driving the hardy desert tribesmen, in a fervour compounded of fanaticism and hope of spoils, to fall upon lax wealthy Egypt. It was less probable, but not impossible, that Senussi might raise a wave of religious sentiment which would carry along even the peaceful Egyptian peasants as soldiers of the Crescent. There were also reports that Sultan Ali Dinar of Darfur (who received arms from the Turks via the Senussi. He was defeated and killed by a British column operating from The Sudan in November 1916) might join in. All



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these fears, compounded by faulty intelligence, meant that a British army of 30,000 was deployed in the defence of Egypt at a most critical stage in the war.

The immediate British concern was to take measures to avert the dangers which threatened Egypt's frontier. The small Egyptian coastguard detachments at Sollum and Sidi Barrani were withdrawn to Mersa Matruh where, in the course of November, the Western Frontier force under General Wallace was hastily assembled. It consisted of a composite yeomanry brigade, a composite infantry brigade, an Egyptian Army engineer detachment and the divisional train of the 1st Australian Division. The Turkish-led force meanwhile moved forward and after occupying Sidi Barrani, advanced on Mersa Matruh. The force numbered about 2500 of whom 250 were Turkish regulars and the remainder Senussi tribesmen trained by Nuri Pasha and Jaafar al Askari and armed with German rifles, 8 mountain guns and 10 machine guns. The British force facing them at Mersa Matruh was about 2500 strong of whom 500 were cavalry.

The campaign was fought as a series of skirmishes among the sand dunes near the coast. The British casualties were light. The first engagement at Wadi Senab, four miles west of Mersa Matruh, was indecisive. Further actions at Wadi Majid and Halazin in December 1915 and January 1916 were defeats for the Arabs, who were forced to retire. They fought steadily in these actions, advancing in open formation, firing from behind cover as they moved and certainly doing credit to Jaafar al Askari's training. The decisive action of the campaign took place at Agagiya, 15 miles south-east of Sidi Barrani, on 26th February 1916. The Turco-Senussi force numbering 1600 men with three mountain-guns and five machine guns was entrenched in a good defensive position among the sand hills. Attacked from both flanks and outnumbered, they were forced to retire and finally routed by a cavalry charge of the Dorset Yeomanry. Douglas Newbold (afterwards Sir Douglas Newbold, Civil Secretary, Sudan Government: d.1946), who took part in it described how

“...the 170 sabres accompanied by shovel pack, cook and farrier waving his rasp went clean through the Senussi rearguard suffering 60 casualties mostly shot from behind by Arabs who shammed dead.”

HOLY WAR IN THE DESERT

Jaafar al Askari was captured but Nuri escaped with the Turkish survivors and took a ship from Bardiya to Turkey. The Arabs were pursued far into the desert, considerable numbers being put to the sword. Their losses were estimated to be five hundred killed and 40,000 rounds of ammunition and 60 camels loaded with dates captured.

This action marked the end of the coastal campaign. Sollum was reoccupied by the British in March 1916 and the prisoners of H.M.S. 'Tara' (who had been living mainly on snails!) were rescued by a small armoured car column commanded by the Duke of Westminster. He made an epic dash of 120 miles across the desert to Bir Hakim, a lonely outpost consisting of two Roman wells, a shaikh's tomb and a dilapidated Turkish blockhouse. The Senussi tribesmen who had joined Nuri's force came in and surrendered to the British in large numbers. By now they were feeling the pinch of hunger. The British force returned to Alexandria by sea, leaving a garrison of two battalions, a camel corps company and some light armoured cars and aircraft at Sollum.

Meanwhile Sayyid Ahmad, after delays and vacillation, had at last set out to fulfil the role assigned to him by the Turkish High Command. This was to occupy the Egyptian oases to the west of the Nile and strike at the undefended Nile valley south of Cairo. The expedition, led by Sayyid Ahmad in the uniform of a Turkish General, consisted of about 500 Senussi tribesmen and a large quantity of baggage including a double bed carried on camels. Moving by slow stages from Jaghbug to Siwa and thence across the desert through Farafra and Bahariya Sayyid Ahmad reached Dakhla Oasis about 170 miles west of the Nile where he spent the summer of 1916. Although this expedition had turned out a fiasco it was a success from the point of view of the Turkish strategy which had sought to tie up a large enemy force on the Nile, thereby relieving the pressure on the Turkish forces in the Suez Canal area.

We must now leave Sayyid Ahmad's adventures to follow the fortunes of Sayyid Idris whom we left at Musaid, on the Cyrenaican boundary, on his return from pilgrimage in March 1915.



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Far better informed on outside affairs and more farsighted and subtle than Sayyid Ahmad, Sayyid Idris had always privately opposed Senussi involvement in the Turkish war against the British with whom he endeavoured to maintain friendly relations. Aware of the preparations for an Arab revolt in the Hejaz, he considered that the Turkish Empire was on the verge of collapse and the interests of his people would be better served by co-operation with the British than by supporting the Turks. Himself a man of peace, like his father, he had no wish to take part in the war but in loyalty to Sayyid Ahmad he would do nothing to damage the latter's cooperation with the Turks. His position as commander of the armed camps facing the Italians in the Cyrenaican hinterland enabled him to dissociate himself from the Turco-Senussi campaigns in Egypt and concentrate on opposing Italian conquest and colonisation of Libya. This he explains in the account that follows in the next chapter.

6

SAYYID IDRIS MAKES PEACE

'On my return from pilgrimage I stayed with Sayyid Ahmad in camp at Musai for about nine months. During this period Sayyid Ahmad received instructions from the Turkish Sultan to declare war against the British. Sayyid Ahmad considered himself bound to obey the instructions of the Sultan and acting as always in good faith, declared war. Two Senussi forces were formed, in support of the Turks, mainly of Cyrenaicans with some Aulad Ali tribesmen from Egypt who belonged to the Senussi Order. The main force under Nuri Pasha and Jaafar al Askari operated along the coast towards Mersa Matruh. The other force under Sayyid Ahmad left for Dakhla to attack the Nile Valley in Upper Egypt. Before leaving Sayyid Ahmad handed over the command of the Senussi army remaining in Cyrenaica to me. I left Musaid towards the end of 1915 for a tour of inspection of the armed camps in Cyrenaica and in the course of this journey I received news of the defeat of the Senussi army under Nuri Pasha by the British in battles at Magreb, Bir Tunis and Agagir.

The situation in Cyrenaica was getting desperate because of the prolonged war against the Italians followed by our defeat by the British. The blockade of the coast had cut off supplies by sea and the shortage of food had been aggravated by a succession of droughts – a situation which caused the tribes to surrender one by one to the Italians in order to avoid starvation. As a result of the war between Sayyid Ahmad and the British the Egyptian markets were closed to the Cyrenaicans who begged me to save them from the hardships



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which they were undergoing. It was all the same to them whether this be achieved in collaboration with the Italians or with the British provided they could be saved from starvation.

In the summer of 1916 I determined to approach the British and Italian authorities in order to put a stop to the war as soon as possible. I wrote to Sayyid Ahmad, who was then at Dakhla in Egypt, to inform him of this and he replied agreeing to come to terms with the British but not with the Italians.* I was then at Ajedabia. I wrote to the representative of H.M. King George V in Egypt, who was then General MacMahon (Sir Henry MacMahon, High Commissioner in Egypt 1914-1916), proposing that peace negotiations should be held. He replied agreeing in principle to negotiations on condition that the Italians should also participate in them. Out of necessity, I agreed to this condition and asked MacMahon to inform the Italians in order that negotiations might be commenced. In response to my request, an Anglo-Italian delegation arrived at Zuetina (an Italian fort on the coast, 90 miles south of Benghazi) where the negotiations were to take place. The British representative was Colonel Talbot and the Italian representative was Brigatani, a diplomat from Rome. The delegation was quartered in the Italian fort. The Italian governor at Benghazi at that time was General Emilio.

The main difficulty in reaching agreement was a British undertaking, previously made in Rome, not to come to terms with the Senussi without the concurrence of the Italians. Our main demand was for the ports of Sollum, Benghazi and Derna to be opened for trade without which we faced starvation. In return, we were prepared to hand over the Italian prisoners in our hands and expel the Turkish officers in Cyrenaica. I found no difficulty in reaching agreement with the British: Colonel Talbot, who had served in the Sudan, was a very understanding man. Brigatani was much more difficult and

*From my research on that period I realized that Sidi Ahmad al Sherif had recognised beyond doubt the impossibility of the achievement of military victory. He had also recognized that the cessation of fighting and the entrance into peace negotiations with the enemy in order to save the people from the famine which hit the country at that time had become a persistent necessity. However, negotiation was one of the most difficult tasks to Sidi Ahmad who always proudly stated that he never extended his hand to the enemy of his country unless it was carrying a sword. He therefore charged Sidi Idris with the implementation of that role in order that he (Sidi Ahmad) may preserve the integrity of his principles and pride. Sidi Idris willingly accepted since he was convinced of the necessity of peace. It was also important to him that Sidi Ahmad, to whom he carried the sincerest devotion and the greatest admiration, should emerge from this tumult with his head held high and as proudly as he had entered it.

It was thus agreed between them that Sidi Ahmad's departure from Cyrenaica should in no way be allowed to indicate to the pact he made with Sidi Idris. It was of paramount importance that this pact remained a secret even from Sidi Ahmad's sons since it was feared that if the enemy learnt of it, they may insist on either Sidi Ahmad's presence during the negotiations, or demand a confirmation of his approval on any peace treaty Sidi Idris would succeed in achieving. This caused Sidi Idris a great deal of trouble, instigated much enmity towards him and shrouded his efforts with many rumours and suspicions which include falsely accusing him of usurping Sidi Ahmad's leading role and expelling him from Cyrenaica. Sidi Idris always refrained from defending himself so as not to place his beloved Sheikh (Sidi Ahmad) in a situation he would rather avoid.

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insisted upon referring everything to the Italian Government who refused to approve the agreement despite the fact it had been reached locally. In view of this, it was impossible for us to continue the negotiations and they were broken off in early October 1916. The British and Italian representatives returned whence they had come'.

The main reason for the failure of the negotiations at Zuetina was the enmity between the Italians and the Senussi. The Italians tried to drive a much harder bargain than the British, insisting upon the hand-over of the Italian prisoners and the disbanding of the Senussi camps.

During Sayyid Idris' negotiations with the British and Italians at Zuetina, Sayyid Ahmad was in retreat from Dakhla and too far away to affect Sayyid Idris' efforts to come to terms. His arrival at Siwa made it imperative for Sayyid Idris to achieve a settlement before Sayyid Ahmad returned to divide the loyalties of the Cyrenaican tribes and so make peace negotiations impossible.

In the late autumn of 1916 Sayyid Idris moved from Agedabia to Marassas in Eastern Cyrenaica and again contacted the British High Commissioner in Egypt (then General Wingate) asking for a resumption of negotiations. This request was accepted and Colonel Talbot was again despatched to Cyrenaica. The journey was by motor car from Alexandria to Sollum where an Italian torpedo boat met the party and brought them to Tobruk. There they joined the Italian delegates, Colonel di Vita and Dottore Luigi Pinta. The negotiations took place in January 1917 at Akroma, a desolate desert place about twenty miles from Tobruk. There Sayyid Idris was encamped with his advisers, including Mohammed Sherif Idris, of the Luxor Idrisis, who was his go-between with the British in Egypt. The Italian and British negotiators stayed in Tobruk and came out by car for the meetings. Sayyid Idris' position was a difficult one. The debacle of Sayyid Ahmed Sherif's army in Egypt had left the Senussi without any military force and Sayyid Idris had to negotiate from a position of military weakness, his only asset being the loyal support of the Cyrenaican Arab tribes. An astute and courteous negotiator, Sayyid Idris managed to pull some chestnuts out of the fire and conclude a somewhat complicated agreement. The discussions continued for three months and resulted in two



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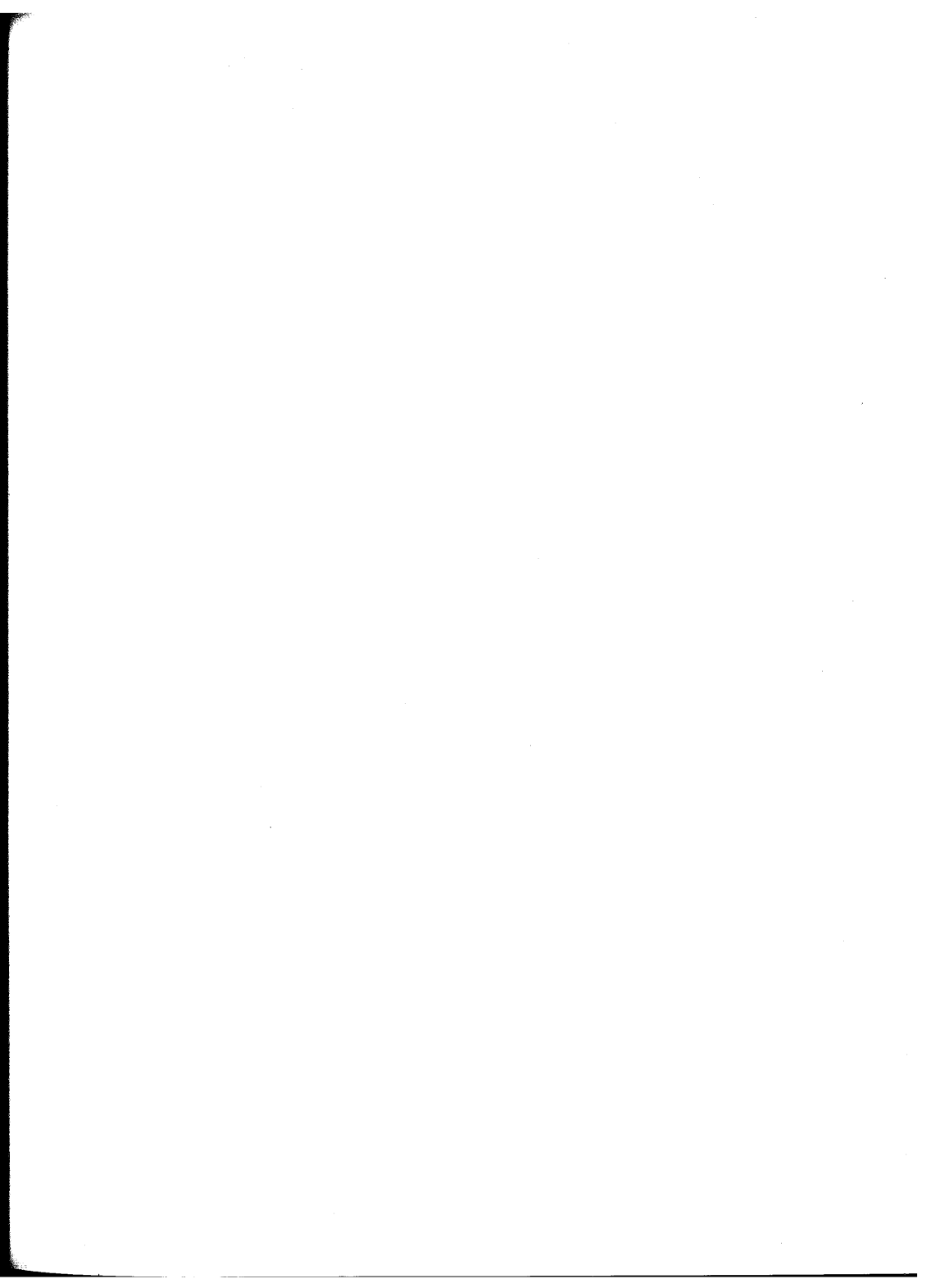
separate agreements, between the British and Italians, and Sayyid Idris.. The British agreement, following the general terms accepted by Idris at Zuetina, included the hand-over of all allied and Egyptian prisoners and an understanding that no armed Senussi would remain on Egyptian territory or armed gathering be held in the proximity of the frontier. In return, Sollum was to be opened for trade but the Alexandria – Sollum route was to be the only one by which goods might enter Cyrenaica from Egypt and only on condition that nothing should fall into German or Turkish hands. No Senussi zawias were to remain on Egyptian

territories though alms might be collected from Egyptian followers of the Order. Sayyid Idris' property in Egypt was to be inspected and the Jaghub oasis was to be administered by the Sayyid.

The negotiations with the Italians were far more complicated and no less than four separate proposals were drawn up before agreement was reached in which Sayyid Idris committed himself to very little. The important points were the cessation of hostilities, the freedom of trade for the Senussi tribes with Benghazi, Derna and Tobruk and the recognition of Sayyid Idris' political authority over the Tobruk hinterland. There was to be no encroachment by either party on the territory of the other nor on the inviolability of the Sharia Courts and Koranic schools and the restoration of the zawias in the Italian zone was to be started. The tribes were allowed to keep their arms but the Sayyid undertook to disarm them summarily at a later date. The disbandment of the armed camps was left for the future.

The settlement of Akroma owed much to the skill of Colonel Talbot whose understanding and integrity earned him the respect of the Arabs. A Royal Engineer officer, he had served with distinction in the Sudan as Director of Surveys under Kitchener and Wingate from 1896 to 1905. The settlement was also a personal triumph for Sayyid Idris much enhancing his reputation with the Cyrenaicans, consolidating his position as head of the Order and virtual ruler of the interior of Cyrenaica.* Starting

* With that agreement Sidi Idris won the first Western recognition to the existence of a national authority in Cyrenaica whereas previously the entire region was regarded as a profiteering area gained from the Othman Empire.





Salih Pasha al Harb (in military suit) standing by Sayyid Ahmad (seated).

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from a desperately weak position with the Senussi forces thoroughly beaten and demoralised, with Sayyid Ahmad in ignominious flight and the Cyrenaicans brought to the brink of surrender to the Italians by near-starvation, he achieved an honourable settlement which brought peace to the country and acknowledgement of his political as well as religious authority; and all without making any important concessions to the Italians. At the same time it must be emphasised that by its imprecision the agreement contained within itself the seeds of future misunderstanding. For the British, it left no problem since it achieved the security of Egypt's western frontier which was their main concern. For the Italians, however, the Akroma agreement, though it meant peace during the European war and the opportunity to entrench themselves more firmly later on, was by no means a final and lasting settlement. Let us continue with Idris' account:

'The agreement of Akroma was a final settlement with the British but with the Italians it was a provisional pact subject to future ratification. It left the future status of the country undecided, but at any rate it did not represent a capitulation to the Italians. Soon after its signature, while I was still at Marassas, I received a letter from Colonel Talbot demanding the surrender of Sayyid Ahmad and giving him six weeks to give himself up. I sent the letter to Sayyid Ahmad who was then at Jaghbub. He immediately fled to Jalo and thence to Tripolitania. I meanwhile returned to Ajedabia where the Turkish fort was repaired and houses built for our occupation.

A year or more after this, Sayyid Ahmad was forced by the Tripolitaniens to leave Fezzan. His noble character would not permit him to enter Cyrenaica for fear of worsening our relations with the British and the Italians. He stayed for a time at Al Aqaila (a village on the Gulf of Sirte) from where he sent a message to Anwar Pasha in Turkey asking for him to arrange his transport to Istanbul. Anwar in turn asked the Germans to send a submarine to take him to Marsa Pola (near Trieste). This request was duly met.

One evening in August 1918 when I was at Zuwaitina, Ali Pasha al-Abdiyya (later President of the Libyan Senate 1954 - 56) came to tell me that Seleh Pasha al Harb (an Egyptian officer who first joined the Senussi in 1915 and stayed on) had come from Sayyid Ahmad, to see me. I received him in the presence of Ali Pasha. He conveyed the



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greetings of Sayyid Ahmad who, he said, intended to leave shortly for Turkey. As he believed that the Allies would capitulate he thought it prudent to go to Istanbul to influence the Turks to intercede with Germany for the independence of our country in the peace Treaty. He said that I, Mohammed Idris, would be Amir of the country and asked me to write on the back of a copy of the Quran my agreement for his son Sayyid al Arabi (second son of Ahmad Sharif: d.1963) to be my successor. He would have to cross the frontiers of Austria and Bulgaria and if the writing was on a sheet other than the Qoran it would be liable to be discovered and lost. I wrote, complying with his request.

Sayyid Ahmad duly embarked on a German submarine from Al Aqaila and landed at Marsa Pola. He reached Istanbul about the time that Bulgaria capitulated, followed shortly after by Germany and Turkey. In this way things turned out to be absolutely contrary to what Sayyid Ahmad (May God have mercy on him) had expected.'*

The exit of Sayyid Ahmad al Sharif from Libya was in keeping with his dramatic and adventurous life. Arriving in Turkey, he was received with honours as a friend of Enver Pasha and a faithful ally who had stood loyally by the Turks in their adversities. During the troubled times which followed their defeat in World War I, he devoted his energies to supporting Mustafa Kemal in his struggle to save Turkey from extinction as a nation and to restoring friendly relations between Turks and Arabs. In 1921, at the Assembly of Ankara, he was elected to the throne of the new kingdom of Iraq but British influence prevailed in securing the appointment of Amir Faisal of the Hejaz. As time went

* Sidi Ahmad's stipulation that his son Sayyid al Arabi be proclaimed as heir to the Amirate was dependnt upon the victory of Turkey and Germany. As expected by Sidi Idris the result of the war was victory to the Allies a fact which made Sidi Idris no longer feel bound by the pact made with Sidi Ahmad. This offended Sidi Ahmad's sons for some time.

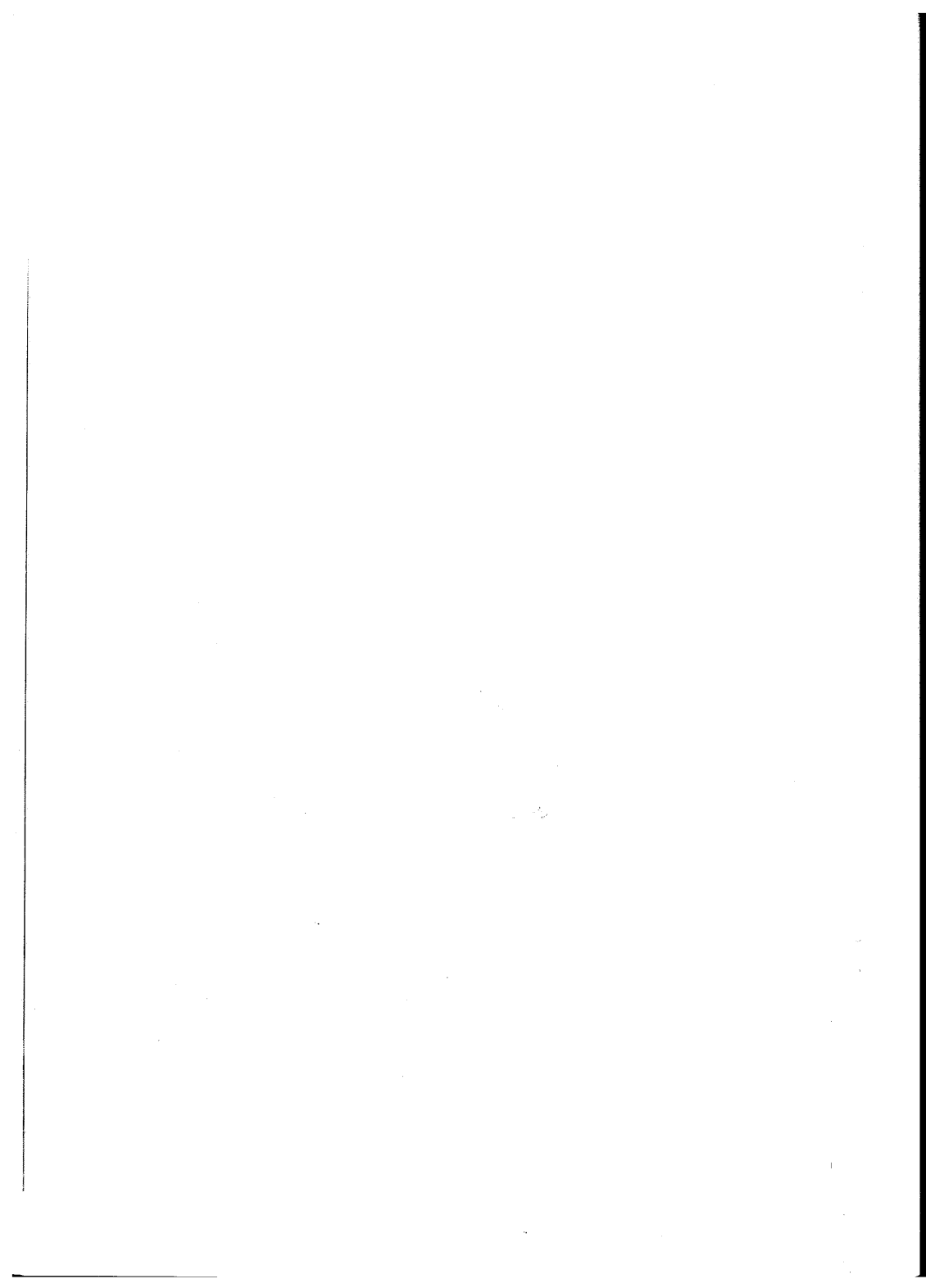
(Refer to the translation of Sidi Idris's Memoirs which were published with his lamentation of Ibrahim Shelhi in the al Zaman newspaper on 27 January 1955 in "The Arab States and the Arab League" by Dr. Mohammad Khalil. Published by al Ka'yat, Beirut, 1962. The following is a quotation from the aforementioned Memoirs:

An understanding was reached between us and the Italians in 1920 on (the basis of) the well-known ar-Rajma Agreement, according to which Italy recognized me as Amir, and I appointed Sayyid ar-Rida as my Crown Prince. At that time Sayyid Ahmad was in Mersin in Turkey, from which he moved to the Sa'udi Arabian Kingdom in 1925 and remained there until he died in 1933 in Madina. He never in any way mentioned to me or to any one else the question of the Crown Prince, nor did he criticize my having reserved (that post) for Sayyid ar-Rida and not for Sayyid al-'Arabi, for Sayyid Ahmad (May God have mercy on him) was a wise man and deeply learned in religion, and he knew well that his stipulation with regard to the appointment of his son as Crown Prince was not entirely unconditional. He also knew well that the stipulation (being dependent on a condition—the defeat of the Allies) lost its force (because of the nonfulfilment of the condition).



Sayyid Al Arabi, son of Sayyid Ahmad Al Sharif.

www.libyanconstitutionalunion.org





Sayyid Mohammad al Rida, younger brother of Sayyid Idris.

www.libyanconstitutionalunion.org

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on it became evident that Sayyid Ahmad was not in tune with the new republican regime which had replaced the Ottoman Sultanate. In 1926 he was asked by Mustafa Kemal to leave Turkey. Like other Arab patriots who were rejected by their own countrymen, this robust and colourful character was given asylum by another great Arab fighter, King Ibn Saud,[★] and spent the rest of his life as a respected elder statesman at Medina in the Hejaz. He died in 1932.

Unlike his two predecessors, Sayyid Ahmad had secular ambitions. He combined a flamboyant character with strong religious devotion. Lacking the discernment and moderation of his younger cousin, Sayyid Idris, he easily succumbed to the flattery of the Turkish officers and allowed himself to be used as a tool for the advancement of German ambitions. Nevertheless, he was a man of strong convictions and great influence among the desert Arabs and his name was long held in esteem among the older generation of Cyrenaicans. He left several sons and daughters at Kufra, among them the gracious wife of King Idris to whom reference will be made later in this story.

★ During a meeting which took place between his Majesty King AbdelAziz and Sidi Ahmad at the residence of Shaikh Muhammad Hussyn Na'syf in Jeddah, His Majesty conveyed to Sidi Ahmad the official wish of the Italians to involve him (Sidi Ahmad) in the treaties being discussed in Cyrenaica. His majesty also showed his readiness and Italy's approval of his participation in these treaties so as he could use his weight in obtaining the assurances which may be requested by Sidi Ahmad. Sidi Ahmad informed His Majesty of his refusal. He also stated to him that Amir Idris al Senussi who was present in Cyrenaicia represented both Sidi Ahmad and the people of Cyrenaica. (Extracts from "Al Fa'wayd al Ja'lyya" by AbdelMalik ben Ali. Damascus, 1966).

THE FIRST AMIRATE

The departure of Sayyid Ahmad al Sherif into exile left Sayyid Idris as the unchallenged leader of the Cyrenai-cans. He enjoyed the political authority of a ruler recognised by the Italian Government as well as the prestige of the headship of the Senussi Order. However, his authority extended only to Cyrenaica and events in Tripolitania pursued a very different course. Nuri Pasha had been sent by the Turks to Tripolitania in 1917 to foster the resistance to the Italians and stir up hostility to Sayyid Idris for making peace with the British and Italians. Relations between Cyrenaica and Tripolitania were therefore unfriendly at a time when unity and cooperation were essential to face the Italian colonial government. By now the Italians, exhausted by the war in Europe, were in no mood for fighting a colonial war and were disposed to come to terms with the Tripolitani-ans as they had with the Cyrenai-cans.

Instead of adopting a policy of collaboration with the Cyrenai-cans, the principal Tripolitanian leader, Ramadan al Shutaywi concentrated on harassing the Senussi supporters in the Sirte area. To meet this danger Sayyid Idris was obliged to appeal for assistance to the Italian governor at Benghazi who supplied money and arms with which to establish a defensive line at Agaila. The anarchy which prevailed in Tripolitania during the

THE FIRST AMIRATE

period following the end of the Great War, with powerful factional leaders striving for supremacy, made a settlement with the Italians as difficult as cooperation with the Cyrenaicans.

In Cyrenaica, Sayyid Idris conducted his relations with the Italians with great caution and tact. He got on especially well with the Italian governor, Conte Giacomo di Martino. Sayyid Idris was represented by Omar Pasha Mansur al Kekhia who had been instrumental in bringing the Turks and the Senussi together in 1908. The 1920 negotiations took several months to complete. Sayyid Idris was genuinely convinced of the need for a friendly and permanent settlement with the Italians. They, in turn, recognised that Senussi influence was necessary for the pacification of the country. The tribal warriors who had fought against the Italians did not all share Sayyid Idris' views and there was some opposition among the diehards to any settlement which savoured of surrender to a foreign power. The young Senussi leader (for he was still under 30) had therefore to walk warily. He had the hard task of overcoming the deep-seated opposition of the tribes to any recognition of Italian authority.

In November 1920, the negotiations culminated in the signing of the agreement known as the Treaty of Rejima. The leading provision was the recognition of Sayyid Idris as Senussi Amir of the autonomous administration of the oases of Jaghbug, Aujila, Jalu and Kufra with headquarters at Ajidabia[★]. He was allowed his own flag, the first place of honour after the Governor on official occasions, a salute of guns on official visits and the use of an official steamer. The Amir appointed his own officials, police and an army which was not to exceed 1000 men. The financial provisions were generous; the Amir received a personal monthly allowance of L63,000 (£685) and a further L2,600,000 (£28,305) annually for general expenses and L93,000 (£1,000) monthly for members of his family. In addition, the Italians paid the police and army and tribal and zawia shaikhs. On his side, the Amir had to suppress within eight months the armed camps and posts and other Senussi organisations of a political, administrative or military character.

The conclusion of this agreement happened to coincide with

★ Sidi Idris thus secured the first official recognition for the birth of the Libyan state and the government of Ajidabia became the first national Cyrenaican government.



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the visit of an English traveller who wrote an interesting, if highly coloured, description of Sayyid Idris at the time.

‘To celebrate this agreement, a great banquet was given by Omar Pasha al Kekhia at Benghazi. It was attended by the Italian Governor, Conte di Martino, the new Amir and leading Senussi Ikhwan, including Ali Pasha al Abidiyya and Sharif Pasha al Ghariani, the venerable old man who had been Sayyid Idris’ teacher at Kufra and was now his most trusted counsellor. Sayyid Idris was wearing a white silken qufan and burnous and rich kufiya flowing beneath a golden aqal. He was then about thirty years of age and of ascetic appearance. The brooding eyes softened and a smile flashed across his face. If graciousness be the token of royalty then Sayyid Idris is crowned by his smile. For such a look, the Beduin prostrates himself to kiss the dust the holy feet have pressed. He blessed me in his frail voice smiling and saying ‘May Allah grant your wish.’

Soon after this, the Amir was invited to pay an official visit to Italy as his own account describes:

‘The Italian Governor at Benghazi was a friendly and reasonable man who had absorbed some of the British ideas of colonial administration during his previous service in Eritrea. After the treaty of Rejima, I accompanied him on an official visit to Rome. On 19 November 1920 we left Benghazi on an Italian destroyer. I was accompanied by Omar Pasha al Khekhia, Shaikh Abdul Aziz al Issawi, Shaikh Himmada al Mahjub, Muhammad al Feizani, Ali Pasha al Abidiya, Sharif al Ghariani, Hassan bu Khadra, Abdul Qader Farqash, Muhammad Saqisli as clerk and Ibrahim Shelhi^{*} my steward. We had a very rough passage to Naples where we disembarked. Then we went to Rome by train where I was entertained at a banquet by King Victor Emmanuel. We afterwards visited Florence where Mahmud al Muntasser, then a student, was presented to me. We went on to Venice where we were shown the ancient

* Ibrahim Ahmad Shelhi was a member of the private guard of Sidi Ahmad al Sherif which he founded following his nomination as representative of the Caliph. This royal guard was known as the Battalion of Attendants (Tabour al Ma'iyya) and included the sons of the heads of the Zawias, as well as those of the Shaikhs of the tribes and those of the eminent followers (Ikhwan). Ibrahim Shelhi was born in the Zawia of Qfinta in Jebel al Akhdar and was trained at the Zawia of al Beida and Zawia of al Faydia and his father, Ahmad Shelhi was one of the eminent followers. Following the return of Sidi Idris from al Haj and upon taking over his duties in 1915, Sidi Ahmad chose Ibrahim Shelhi to serve him (Sidi Idris). From that day until his assassination in the 50s he remained in the company and service of Sidi Idris.

(Extracts from "Barqa al Arabya" by Ta'ib al Ashhab).

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buildings and the glass factories at Murano.

Remembering the discomfort of the outward passage I asked to return by a large steamer and we accordingly went to Sicily and travelled on a large steamer from Palermo to Benghazi. I arrived back in Ajidabiya on 1st January 1921 to find affairs in Libya in a confused state. In Cyrenaica, the Italians were pressing for immediate disbandment of the armed camps but it was necessary to do this gradually and judiciously. The Cyrenaican tribesmen, who had borne the brunt of the resistance to the Italians, were unwilling to give up their arms and so place themselves at the mercy of the Italians. I advised caution and compromise. After further discussion with Governor di Martino it was decided that as a first step towards the disbandment of the five armed camps at Al Abiar, Teknis, Slonta, Akroma and Mechili, these camps should be manned jointly by Italian and Senussi soldiers. This was agreed by the Pact of Bu Mariam in November 1921. The arrangement worked very badly.'

While conditions in Cyrenaica were worsening, it was events in Tripolitania which contributed most to the breakdown of Sayyid Idris' relations with the Italians. The Tripolitanian leaders, having failed to come to terms with the Italian authorities, turned to Sayyid Idris for assistance. In November 1920 they held a conference at Gharian. It was decided that Sayyid Idris should become Amir of Tripolitania. This might have succeeded three years earlier but now it was too late. Aware of the rivalry among the Tripolitanian leaders, the Italians were not prepared to grant a similar status to Tripolitania. Furthermore, it was the Italian policy to govern the two territories separately and they would agree to no arrangement that might lead to a united Libya. Sayyid Idris was therefore placed in a most embarrassing position by the Tripolitanian offer as he describes:

'At a conference of Tripolitanian notables at Gharian in November 1921, it was decided to form a Tripolitanian Amirate and offer the BAYA (Oath of Allegiance) to me. They asked me to send representatives to Sirte to discuss the matter. I sent my cousin Safi al Din to meet them, at the same time informing the Governor at Benghazi. The Tripolitanians repeated their offer for me to become their Amir.

This put me in an extremely difficult position since while sympathising with the Tripolitanians' desire to have an Arab at their head, I



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did not wish to compromise my relations with the Italians. I therefore refused to give a decision but asked the Italian government for permission to mediate between them and the Tripolitarians. This request was forcefully turned down. The Italian government forbade me to take any part in Tripolitanian affairs as they regarded Cyrenaica and Tripolitania as two separate countries.

In July 1922 another Tripolitanian delegation, consisting of Beshir al Saadawi, Bil Khair and Abdul Rahman Azzam, came to Ajidabiya and I again informed the Italian Governor of their arrival. While the delegation was at Ajidabiya Amendola, the Italian Colonial Minister and Volpi, the Governor of Tripolitania, came to Cyrenaica and I met them at Jerdis al Abid. I again requested to be allowed to mediate but was refused. I returned to Ajidabia and advised the Tripolitarians to approach the Italian government themselves. I could do no more.

Meanwhile, Conte di Martino had died and been replaced by a much less liberal governor whose attitude was unfriendly to me. I realised that the Italian government's policy had changed and my position was becoming impossible. After discussion with my advisers and Abdul Rahman al Azzam, I decided to leave the country and wrote to King Fuad informing him of my intention to visit Egypt for medical treatment. I was badly in need of change and rest after all the worries and difficulties of the last seven years'.

Amir Idris was placed in a most difficult dilemma by the Tripolitanian pressure on him to become their ruler – an invitation which, in the face of the uncompromising Italian prohibition, it was impossible for him to accept. To do so would have meant breaking off relations with the Italians and leading a revolt which he was, by character, quite unable to do. Furthermore, he did not feel able to rely on the undivided loyalty of the Tripolitarians or their capacity to fight the Italians. To the Tripolitarians, it seemed a let-down. The Cyrenaicans however, who knew how resolutely he had struggled to preserve them from total subjugation to a foreign rule, did not abandon their loyalty to him.*

* Sidi Idris accepted the offer of Baya (Oath of Allegiance) from the Tripolitarians following their persistence in this demand.

The contents of the Tripolitanian Baya (Oath of Allegiance) and Sidi Idris's reply are given in the Publisher's appendices 2 and 3 respectively.

8

SAYYID IDRIS GOES INTO EXILE *

'On 30th November 1922 I left Ajedabia by horse, accompanied by Mohammed al Faizani, Haj Mohammed Tawati, Abdul Rahman Azzam and my steward, Ibrahim Shelhi. I left my brother Sayyid Mohammed al Rida as my representative in Cyrenaica and Ali Pasha al Abidiya as mutasarraf of Ajidabia. We travelled via Jalo and Jaghbul to Siwa. Soon after leaving Jaghbul we met Ahmad Hassain Bey who was just starting on his famous exploration of the Libyan desert. He gave me the reply to my letter to King Fuad agreeing to my visiting Egypt for medical reasons.

When we reached Siwa on 20th January 1923, the Egyptian mamur (frontier officer) in charge was unwilling to allow Abdul Rahman Azzam to enter Egypt because he was on the black list as an Egyptian who had fought for the Turks in World War I. I refused to proceed without Azzam, in accordance with the Islamic obligation towards a travelling companion. This difficulty was referred to the Muhafiz (governor) of the Western Desert at Mersa Matruh, who gave orders

* In my opinion Sidi Idris did not embark on the decision to go into exile lightly, but that it was taken after a thorough study of all the possibilities. He was always aware of the impossibility of a military solution and did all that was in his power to convince others with this truth in order to preserve the lives of the people which would otherwise be lost in vain. This would have lowered the national morale and allowed the enemy to take a firm grip of the country for good. He could clearly visualize that the armed Libyan resistance would never be able to defeat the Italian mighty. Additionally, the rewards of his diplomatic efforts during that period had already been expended. He therefore left the country in order to preserve his freedom and to survey and observe the international climate so as to be able to seize the favourable opportunities when they arose. All his eminent followers and leaders of the Mujahidin were of his opinion and once he was granted permission to stay in Egypt he was joined by the majority of them headed by Sisi Omar al Muktar. It is mentioned in the book "The Life of Omar al Muktar" by Mahmud Shalabi that Sidi Omar refused to receive Sidi Idris's adversaries who tried to meet him upon his arrival in Egypt.



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for the admission of all our party. He also sent motor cars to convey us to Mersa Matruh. We left Siwa after three days and drove to Mersa Matruh where we received a friendly welcome from the Muhafiz. From Mersa Matruh, we proceeded by car to Hammama and travelled to Alexandria by train on the royal saloon which was placed at my disposal. I received a most friendly welcome from the Egyptians, who sympathised with us in our difficulties with the Italians.

At Alexandria, I stayed at Hotel Safwai, near the Bourse, in the centre of the city. After eight days I received a message to go to Cairo to see the King. I travelled to Cairo by the morning train and had a friendly talk with King Fuad (King of Egypt 1922-36) who raised no objection to my staying in Egypt. I remained about ten days in Cairo as the guest of my friend Mohammed Sharif Idris. I then returned to Alexandria and stayed at Hotel Majestic and later at Hotel San Stefano'.

Sayyid Idris has sometimes been criticised for leaving his people at a difficult juncture in 1922. Though he voluntarily left Cyrenaica to live in Egypt, the cause lay in differences with the Italian Government which it was beyond his power to overcome. As we have seen, the Treaty of Rejima proved an unhappy attempt at a condominium between the Italians and the Senussi which never worked satisfactorily and had no hope of survival after the advent of the Fascists. There was no place for a Senussi Amir under the Fascist regime: To have stayed in Libya would have meant arrest and confinement in Italy. Sayyid Idris was not qualified to head a guerilla resistance in the field. He was by character a man of peace and religion in the pattern of his grandfather and father, the first two heads of the Senussi Order.* His value to the Libyans lay in his prestige in the Arab world as head of the great Senussi Order, the loyalty he inspired in his followers and his skill in negotiation and experience of affairs. Cyrenaican opinion has never questioned the wisdom of his decision to escape from Fascist clutches, since his removal to Italy would

* Sidi ibn al Senussi prophesied during his lifetime the European invasion of the region and the Italian occupation of Libya. In his prophesy he referred to them as Napolitanians—pertaining to the Kingdom of Napoli. He ordered his followers (Ikhwan) and representatives to provide their sons with military training and thus prepare them to defend the faith and the land. He also stressed upon all, the importance of the possession of guns and ammunition as well as the establishment of contacts with markets selling such equipment. The preparation of the Zawias, their location and the choice of their Shaikh's later by Sidi al Mahdi, himself a great warrior, was coloured by his father's prophesy (For more details see "Barqa al Arabiya" by Ta'ib al Ashhab and Al Fa'wayd al Ja'lyya by AbdelMalik ben Ali).

SAYYID IDRIS GOES INTO EXILE

have brought about the collapse of the Senussi organisation and the speedy subjugation of Cyrenaica and its integration into the Italian imperial system. His presence in Egypt nearby was a source of constant encouragement to the Cyrenaicans and kept alive the spirit of resistance and the hope of ultimate freedom.

His position in exile was a precarious one and in the years that followed his freedom was in constant jeopardy, as is shown by his account of the events which followed his arrival in Egypt:

‘Some months after my arrival in Egypt, I was informed by the Italian Minister in Cairo that Mussolini’s government had annulled all accords and conventions entered into with the Senussi (May 1923). Omar Pasha al Kekhia had been arrested by the Italians on charges of conniving in my escape. He was imprisoned in Benghazi and later taken to confinement in Italy. A few months later I was informed that the Italian Government had applied to the Egyptian Government for my extradition, promising that I would not be harmed if I was handed over.

I was clearly in great danger, since King Fuad’s mother was an Italian and he had been educated in Italy and was on very friendly terms with the Italians and might therefore be disposed to meet their wishes. I therefore appealed to the British High Commissioner, who was at that time Mr Clark Kerr, as Lord Allenby was on leave. Mr Kerr went to see King Fuad at Abdin Palace and by chance met Ali Pasha Ibrahim, the Prime Minister, who was seeing the King about the same matter. Mr Kerr persuaded Ali Pasha to support his intervention which was fortunately successful. I was granted political asylum in Egypt, subject to an undertaking not to engage in any activity against the Italian rule in Libya nor to leave the Nile Delta. The Libyans who had accompanied me were not allowed to stay in Egypt and had to go to other Arab countries, except for my steward, Ibrahim Shelhi. Ali Pasha al Abidiya went to live in Palestine. Others who had followed me, such as Omar Mukhtar, returned to Cyrenaica, to carry on the resistance. ★

I was courteously treated by the Egyptians, who sympathised with the plight of their fellow Arabs in Libya. For the first five years of my time in Egypt I lived in Cairo, first at a house in Shari Kommous Pasha, then in Shari Omar ben Abdul Aziz at Munira and finally in Shari Rushdi Pasha, in Garden City. I used to spend summers in Alexandria in a house at Bulkelay which I rented from a British

★ See footnote on following page.



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official while he was on leave. I became a member of the Gazira Sporting Club and used to play tennis and golf there. Although I was under surveillance, this was courteously carried out by the Egyptian Police, whose commandant then was FitzPatrick Bey. In 1928 I went to live permanently in Alexandria, where I bought two adjoining houses at San Stefano. I had some property in Siwa which had originally belonged to Sayyid Ahmad but had been confiscated by the British in 1917. I bought these properties from those who had become the owners by purchase in 1922. In 1925 I granted the revenues from these properties to the two sons of Sayyid Ahmad, Sayyid Ibrahim and Sayyid Mohi al Din, who had escaped from the Italians in 1925. Eventually, on account of complaints by the Italians to the Egyptian Government because of the frequent visits of the Senussi to Siwa, the Egyptian Government exchanged these properties for their equivalent in the Nile valley. The value of these properties was estimated to our advantage, a course for which we were very grateful to the Egyptian government.

In the year 1930 the ban on my movements outside the Delta was raised and I bought a piece of land in the desert at Hammama Mariut, about 50 kilometres west of Alexandria and 20 kilometres from the coast. I built a small house and made a garden there. It was near the house of Major Jennings Bramley at Burj al Arab. Major Bramley

★ After spending a few months in Egypt and after having considered all the possibilities, Sidi Idris was undoubtedly convinced that his political efforts would be useless and would have no repercussions on international events unless he had a powerful resistance inside the country. Sidi Omar al Muktar volunteered to undertake this role which suited his personality, capabilities and tendencies. It is thus evident that Sidi Omar returned to Libya only after having formed a pact with Sidi Idris and after having discussed all the details of the plan in all its stages. Sidi Omar's return to the country was meant to revive and maintain the armed resistance at a level high enough to draw international attention and to disrupt the Italians for as long as possible. This would provide Sidi Idris with the political weight needed and allow him to force the Libyan case upon the international stage, in his efforts to free the country from the Italian colonization. (The outcome of events have proved the accuracy of that policy and the wisdom of that course of action). Sidi Omar never believed that it was possible to defeat Italy and banish them from the country through a military effort alone, for he was known to be a clever and pragmatic man. This was clearly evident in his replies to Gratziani at the governments Palace following his arrest:

Gratziani: Did you harbour any hope of driving us out of Cyrenaica fighting as you did with a small group of men and using inadequate equipment?

Sidi Omar: No, for it seems that was an impossible task.

Gratziani: Then what was your motive and what were you after?

Sidi Omar: I was only a Mujahed.

Gratziani: No, the truth is that you only fought for the Senussiya.

Gratziani then proceeded to criticize the Senussiya and although Sidi Omar did not answer him, yet (according to Gratziani's Memoirs) the criticizing (of the Senussiya movement) caused Sidi Omar a great deal of pain. Sidi Omar realized and knew for a fact that his military role formed a very important part of an extensive plan which consisted of a series of cohesive stages. All along he acted on that basis.

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was a British officer who, after long service in Egypt and the Sudan retired to Italy. Finding the climate there unpropitious, he returned to the Egyptian desert where he had previously served and built a house at Burj al Arab. He was much respected by the Bedouin of that area and did much to help them establish small industries. He had a good understanding and warm sympathy for the Arabs and he became a great friend of mine. He continued to live at Burj al Arab until 1956 when he was obliged to leave at the time of the Suez crisis. I have not seen him since. His house at Burj al Arab now belongs to the Egyptian Commander-in-Chief, Field-Marshal Abdul Hakim Amer. From 1931 until 1940 I lived at Hammama permanently.

This was a very unhappy period. Many of my most faithful friends and supporters were killed in the resistance to the Italians. The sufferings of the Cyrenaicans filled us with great sorrow. After the capture of Kufra, the mosque, in which was my father's tomb, was destroyed, and the library with our books and manuscripts plundered and scattered. Through these difficult times I was sustained only by trust in God and the sympathy of our friends in the Arab World.'

THE CYRENAICAN RESISTANCE

Let us turn now to the tragic story of the Senussi resistance in Cyrenaica during the period 1923-31. During this time Cyrenaica was enclosed in an iron curtain set up to keep the knowledge of what was going on inside from the outside world. The story has been pieced together from information given by Cyrenaican survivors. It may therefore be thought to be weighted on the Arab side but care has been taken to keep closely to the established facts.

Cooperation with native authorities on the lines of the Treaty of Rejima had no place in the Fascist plans and Mussolini gave orders to the new governor, General Bon Giovanni, to bring the whole country under direct control by force of arms. In March 1923 he launched operations against the armed camps which took the latter by surprise and resulted in the capture of about half the muhafidhia (Senussi soldiers) who manned them. This was followed by the capture of Ajidabia, the Senussi headquarters, in April, forcing Sayyid Mohammed al Rida to take refuge in the oasis of Jalo 120 miles to the south. The Senussi reacted sharply to what they regarded as flagrant breaches of the Treaty of Rejima and immediately resumed the war against the Italians. In actions south of Ajidabia and near Marsa Breiga,

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Magharba tribesmen defeated an Italian column which was moving towards Jalo and after fierce fighting annihilated the Eritrean troops which comprised it (June 1923). The victorious Senussi force was commanded by a Kuraani tribesman, (the Kuraan inhabit the Tibesti area of northern Chad), Qujja Abdulla, who had fought against the French in Wadai in 1905.

The Italians now concentrated on rounding up the Senussi tribes in the Jebel al Akhdar area from which the muhafidhia were mainly drawn. Heavy casualties were inflicted on these tribesmen and many of their herds were killed or captured. These measures only served to stiffen the resolution of the fighting men to continue the war.

In 1925 when Ahmad Zivar Pasha was Prime Minister of Egypt, negotiations were held between the Italian and Egyptian governments to delimit the boundary between Libya and Egypt. The agreement provided for the frontier to start from Bir Ramla on the coast, 7 miles north of Sollum, and proceed in a southerly direction to Qaiqab, 40 miles NW of Siwa. This left Jaghbub, the centre of the Senussi Order, in Cyrenaica. From there it ran SSE to the 25th parallel of longitude which it followed southward to Jebel 'Uweinat 600 miles from the coast. This was the western extremity of the boundary of Egypt with the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. From 'Unweinat it continued southwards for a further 190 miles until it reached the northern boundary of the Chad territory of French Equatorial Africa. Through almost its entire 790 miles, this boundary traversed the waterless uninhabited Libyan desert. South of Jaghbub, it ran through almost impassable sand dunes for 150 miles and after that crossed an elevated sandy plateau with occasional rocky outcrops, rising to an altitude of 2,000 feet in the extreme south. This agreement was not entirely acceptable to Egyptian opinion since it gave the Jaghbub oasis, which had previously been considered to lie in Egypt, to Cyrenaica. It did, however, conform roughly to the position in the Ottoman period when Egyptian frontier posts were maintained at Sollum and Qaiqab. It was, of course, a serious set-back to the Senussi, since it deprived them of the centre of the Order which was immediately occupied by Italian forces.

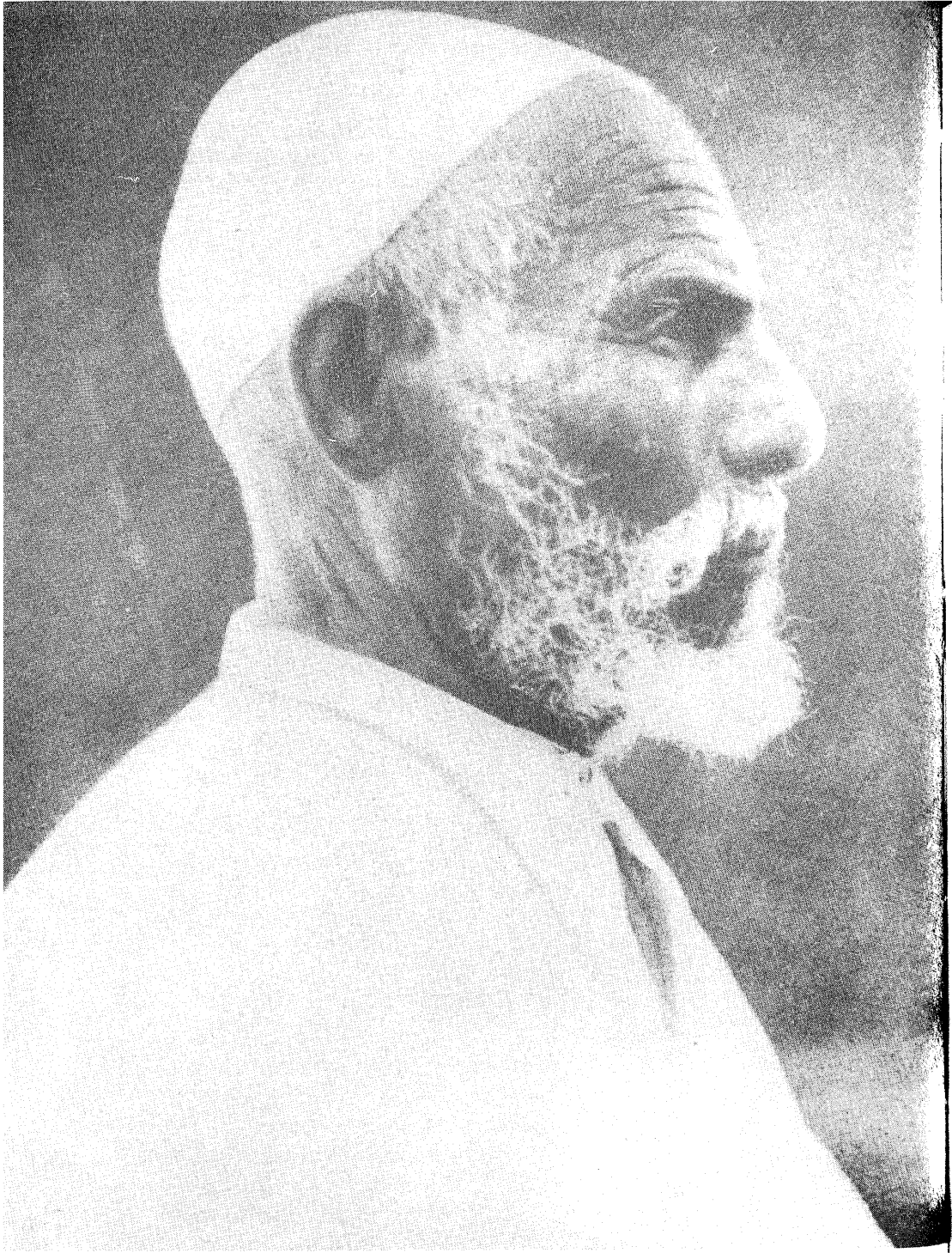
Although the Italian measures to complete the conquest of



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Libya made a good deal of progress during the period 1923-1926, they were more successful in Tripolitania than in Cyrenaica and by 1925 the Italians had established effective control over the whole of Northern Tripolitania. In Cyrenaica, General Mombelli, who replaced Bon Giovanni in 1924, set up a line of strong points along the fringe of the desert to provide bases for his columns which continued to attack Arab encampments and capture large numbers of livestock. As a result of these operations the Italians won the submission of a number of tribes. The position of Sayyid Mohammed al Rida, the representative of Sayyid Idris, was a parlous one. Anyone less qualified to be a military leader it would be difficult to imagine. A man of pious and peaceful disposition, his main desire was to get as far away as possible from the scene of action. When it became apparent that his safety was threatened Sayyid Idris tried to arrange for his evacuation from Cyrenaica. He succeeded in obtaining the consent of the Governor-General of the Sudan, Sir Geoffrey Archer, to his being given refuge in the Sudan. But, unfortunately for him, Jalo was occupied by Italian forces before he could escape to Kufra. In January 1928 he came to Ajidabia and surrendered to the Italians. He was exiled to Sicily until 1935 when he was permitted to return to Benghazi where he lived on a minute pension until the defeat of the Italians in World War II.

As we have seen, the Cyrenaicans, unlike the Tripolitarians, were not prepared to submit to the Italians. They set up a determined guerilla resistance which was only finally overcome by intensive military operations involving a very large Italian force of about 20,000 men, equipped with artillery, armoured cars and aircraft. That a force of Cyrenaican tribesmen, never exceeding two thousand in number, armed only with old-fashioned rifles and with virtually no supplies or equipment, was able to resist these forces for several years was a great tribute to the Senussi influence and the steadfast and independent spirit of the Cyrenaicans. While the resistance was carried on in the name of the Senussi and under the inspiration of Sayyid Idris, it is best understood as a spontaneous and voluntary struggle of the people of Cyrenaica to defend their independence.



Omar Al Muktar.

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The Cyrenaican resistance was directed by Omar al Mukhtar ★ who returned to Cyrenaica from Egypt and became Sayyid Idris' representative after the banishment of Sayyid Mohammed al Rida by the Italians. As a Minifa tribesman, he had been trained in the Senussi College at Jaghub and had fought against the Italians in the 1911-1917 war. He was a doughty and resolute old warrior who became a legendary hero of the Senussi resistance of 1923-1931. The guerillas he commanded came from the Cyrenaica Bedu – the Abid, Awaqir, Braasa, Dorsa, Ebeidat, Hasa and Magharba tribes – all fiercely proud of their Arabian origin. They were the backbone of the resistance to Italian rule, won many successes and were never conquered. They regarded themselves as free men fighting in defence of their country against foreign aggressors who sought to deprive them of their land and liberty. Foremost among them were such men as Fadil bu Omar, Yusif bu Rahi al Masmari, Osman al Shami, Isa al Wahwah, Salih Pasha al Atewish, Mohammed bu Najwa, Shaikh Abdul Hamid al Abbar, Hussain al Juwafi and Ahmad Seif al Nasr. Many of these Mujahidin as they were known, were killed in action, some managed to escape to Egypt and later joined the Libyan Arab Force in 1940.

The resistance was carried on first from the armed camps which had been set up by Enver Bey in 1912, and after these were captured, from hiding places in the Jebel Akhdar and the desert to the south. Lying up by day and emerging at night, they harassed the Italian lines of communication and moving columns, ambushing them in the wooded ravines of the Jebel and attacking their camps under cover of darkness. They formed mobile units with their own horse and rifles – mostly German Mausers from World War I and supplied by the tribes in the different areas. These were augmented by Italian rifles captured during the

★ Sidi Omar al Mukhtar was born in 1862 of parents who were among the most loyal followers of the Senussiya movement (Ikhwan). He was trained at the Zawia of al Jaghub and accompanied Sidi al Mahdi to Kufra and was appointed by him in 1897 as Shaikh of the Zawia of al Kusur at Jebel Akhdar near al Marig. When Sidi al Mahdi decided upon moving to Chad he sent for Sidi Omar to accompany him which he did and he remained with him for some time in "Quru". He then appointed him Shaikh of the Zawia of Ain Kallack.

When Sidi al Mahdi passed away Sidi Ahmad re-appointed Sidi Omar Shaikh of the Zawia of al Kusur. Sidi Omar then placed himself at the disposal of Sidi Idris after he had taken charge from Sidi Ahmad. Sidi Omar was executed by the Italians in September 1931 in the village of Sulluq and was buried by the citizens in the cemetery of Sidi Ebayd in Benghazi. During the years of Independence his holy coffin was moved to a beautiful tomb especially erected for him in the heart of Benghazi. On Mu'amar Gaddafi's instructions this tomb was demolished in the 80's and the body of Sidi Omar was transported to Sulluq.



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course of the fighting. Up to 1927 the mujahidin were largely successful in containing the Italians in their fortified positions. After that date the resistance became much more difficult and the Senussi losses much heavier. Not only had the Senussi lost their main bases at Ajidabia, Jalo and Jaghub, their supply line from Egypt and their permanent armed camps and stores, but the Italians had constructed at enormous expense a huge wire fence running along the Egyptian/Libyan frontier from the sea at Musaid to a point beyond Jaghub some 180 miles from the coast. It consisted of a quadruple line of five foot metal stakes firmly bedded in concrete and closely woven with barbed wire to a depth of some ten feet. This barrier was closely guarded by motorised patrols operating from strong points at regular intervals along its course. It effectively cut off the Senussi from their supporters among the Beduin of western Egypt. Henceforward the Senussi had to rely entirely on their own exiguous resources.

At the beginning of 1929 Mussolini appointed Marshall Badoglio Governor – General of Libya with orders to suppress the resistance in Cyrenaica and complete the subjugation of the country. The Marshal immediately issued a proclamation couched in the most arrogant and uncompromising terms, offering the Senussi a choice: surrender or complete extermination. The Arabs, who did not consider themselves to have been defeated, apparently interpreted this proclamation as a sign that the Italians were tired of the war and wished to negotiate for peace. It was this that induced Omar al Mukhtar to contact the Italians with a view to arranging a truce. The Arab account of the negotiations reads as follows:

‘After meetings[★] with Italian officials a list of the Senussi proposals for a peace settlement was drawn up and presented at a meeting at Sidi Rahuma [near Barce] which was attended by the Senussi leaders and Marshal Badoglio and his staff. The proposals, after asking that representatives of the Governments of Egypt and Tunisia should attend a peace conference, set out demands for non-interference with the Muslim religion, recognition and use of the Arabic language, the

★ Following a series of contacts a preparatory meeting took place at al Shalyoni. This was followed by another at Gandola and the final meeting at Sidi Rahouma.

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opening of religious and secular schools in which Arabic and Italian should be taught equally, the return of all confiscated property, the sharing of Government appointments between Italians and indigenous Arabs and the freedom to possess arms. These proposals were read out and Marshal Badoglio said he would agree to them.'

According to the Italian account, a list of Italian proposals was submitted which Omar al Mukhtar found acceptable but subsequently repudiated. Nothing was said about the Senussi proposals. Whichever version was correct, there is no doubt that the official Italian report of the meeting was misleading since it stated that Omar Mukhtar had unconditionally surrendered. The whole-business seems to have been fraught with misunderstanding, caused partly by the well-meant but misleading efforts of some of the more pacific Senussi, including the young Sayyid al Hassanal Rida, who appears to have concluded a separate agreement with the Italians based on a list of the Italian proposals which Omar al Mukhtar had certainly never accepted. This agreement was summarily rejected by Omar al Mukhtar and towards the end of 1929 hostilities again broke out. There were such fundamental differences between the two standpoints that it is difficult to see how they could have been reconciled. The Italians treated the Senussi resistance as a rebellion against the de jure government: The Cyrenaican tribesmen considered themselves as the rightful owners of the country and regarded the Italians as aggressors and usurpers.

In May 1930, the notorious General Graziani, fresh from a successful campaign in the Fezzan, was appointed as Vice Governor at Benghazi. He immediately issued orders closing all zawias, confiscating the property of the Senussi Order and making the possession of firearms a capital offence. Zawai and tribal Shaikhs were arrested. The most stringent and unjustifiable of his measures was the confinement of virtually the whole rural population in concentration camps in the Syrtie area. It was clear that the Cyrenaicans could expect no mercy from the new governor.

THE CAPTURE OF KUFRA AND THE END OF THE RESISTANCE

At this point we may conveniently digress to consider the fortunes of Kufra which we left at the time of Sayyid Idris' departure on pilgrimage in 1913. The shift of the main focus of Senussi activity to the coast, the change in the character of the Order from a peaceful to a militant one and the closing of the caravan route to Wadai by the French occupation, all very much reduced the importance of Kufra which became a mere backwater in the years that followed. Sayyid Mohammed al Abid, a brother of Ahmad Sharif, was left in charge with the wives and children of the Senussi family who continued their education at the school at Al Taj. The peaceful seclusion of life at Kufra in these years was well described by Ahmad Hassanain Bey and Rosita Forbes who were virtually the only visitors from the outside world. Hassanain's book, 'The Last Oasis', describing his famous exploration of the Libyan Desert by camel from Siwa to Al Fasher in Darfur contains the best description of the Senussi Order and life at Kufra in existence.

Protected by the vast desert wastes which surrounded it, Kufra was the last Senussi stronghold where life still went on very much as in the days of the great Sayyid al Mahdi, little disturbed by the vicissitudes which beset the Senussi on the Libyan coast.

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Yet this halcyon serenity was unfortunately drawing to a tragic end. Mohammed al Abid, a charming but indolent figurehead, was not built in the stern mould of his warlike brother. When the Italians occupied Jalo in 1927 he began to panic about his own safety and, without any reference to Sayyid Idris or consultation with the local tribesmen, made overtures to the Italians. The Italians gladly seized this opportunity to send an exploratory mission, under the leadership of a Captain Fornari, in friendly guise to the little-known oasis. When the Zuwaya tribesmen of Kufra heard that their jealously guarded isolation was to be thus violated they were extremely angry with al Abid. When the Italian party reached Bir Zieghen they were arrested and taken to Kufra as prisoners. Mohammed al Abid was summarily tried and convicted of conspiracy with the Italians and given a week's grace to leave Kufra. He duly set off with his family by camel to Chad territory where he surrendered to the French and was given asylum. The party were settled at Ati, a French post between Abeshr and Fort Lamy, where they lived in very humble circumstances. In the course of my duties on the western frontier of the Sudan I used to visit Ati from time to time and heard from this Senussi family the sorry tale of their expulsion from Kufra. The last time I saw Mohammed al Abid was just before his death in 1938 when he stayed with me at Geneina on his way through the Sudan to Mecca on pilgrimage. He was in poor health but would not stop for hospital treatment and died three days later in the lorry which was taking him home. Three of his sons^{*} returned to Cyrenaica, one of them serving as an officer in the Cyrenaican Defence Force while another has grown rich as a contractor.

To return to the Italian mission at Kufra. For some time the fate of Captain Fornari and his companions hung in the balance since the Zuwaya had always prevented European visits to Kufra in order to preserve the inviolability of their native oases. Eventually, at his own suggestion, Fornari was allowed to go and fetch a sum of money to ransom his companions. He travelled on camel by the very difficult route across waterless desert to Kharga in Egypt. Apart from the Long Range Desert Group which returned this way from their daring raid on the

^{*} Sayyid Abdalla Abid, al Sayyid Sidiq Abid and Sayyid al Taher Abid.



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Fezzan in the Christmas of 1940, he and his companions were the only Europeans to make this hazardous journey. From Kharga, Fornari went to Cairo and on to Italy where he collected the ransom and returned to Kharga to await his companions. In due course the members of the party arrived, the ransom was paid over and the adventure ended happily with the return of the whole party safely to Benghazi.

After the departure of al Abid, the direction of Senussi affairs at Kufra passed to Siddiq, son of Muhammad al Rida. Soon afterwards, owing to quarrels with the Zuwaya, he went to Siwa in Egypt and then settled at Buhayra. Sayyid Shams al Din, a youth of 20, then took over at Kufra with his younger brother Hassan. They were joined in 1929 by Saleh al Ataiwish of the Magharba tribe and Shaikh Abdul Jalil Saif al Nasr and his brother Ahmad of the Fezzan ruling family. At the end of 1930, aerial reconnaissance missions were made by the Italians, in preparation for the capture of Kufra. The Senussi wives and children, including Sayyid Ahmad's daughter, Fatima, left Kufra by camel a week before the attack started and arrived safely at Siwa. To a Senussi girl, a camel journey of 400 miles through the Libyan and Egyptian sand seas was nothing to boast about and Fatima, who is a most courageous and forthright lady, does not admit that it was more than a little tiring. Her only regret is that they could not evacuate all the women and children. The year after her arrival in Egypt she married Sayyid Idris and they have lived happily together ever since. [Fatima continued living in Egypt after the death of Sayyid Idris in 1983 and lives there still:ED]

The Italian attack on Kufra was launched by three motorised columns, supported by aircraft, from Jalo, Zella and Murzuk. The force numbered about 5,000, mainly Eritrean soldiers. Only about 400 Senussi men had remained in the oasis as a number of the Zuwaya had previously gone to Syrta, to support the Cyrenaican resistance. In spite of a spirited resistance, they were quickly overcome by the vastly superior Italian forces. A survivor gave the following account of the fight at Kufra:

‘The Italians came upon us in three columns from three directions with armoured cars. Their aeroplanes flew low and bombed houses, mosques and palm groves indiscriminately and machine-gunned

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people in the gardens and villages. We had only a few hundred men able to bear arms – the rest were old men, women and children. We fought from house to house and in the end only the village of Hawari was left to us. Our rifles were useless against their armoured cars and they overwhelmed us. Only a few escaped. I hid myself in a palm grove waiting for a chance to make my way through the Italian lines and all through the night I heard the screams of the Arab women as they were raped by the Eritrean soldiers.'

As this account states, there were very few survivors of this savage affair. A graphic account of the sufferings of the fugitives from Kufra was given me by Senussi al Ataiwish, formerly Commander of the Libyan Army and later, Minister of Communications in the Libyan Government. The tragedies which beset the Ataiwish, a shaikhly family of the Magharba tribe, were typical of those suffered by Cyrenaican families who were prominent in the long struggle against the Italians. Kailani al Ataiwish, who we may recollect, was appointed by the Turkish governor as Qaimaqam at Kufra in 1910, died in 1911 while riding to Jalo to join the Turkish resistance of the Italian invasion. His brother, Saied, died in an Italian prison camp at Al Agoila. A nephew was hanged by the Italians at Syrte. Abdulla was killed in action at Nofilia and two others, Ali and Ahmad Abdul Qadar, at Breiga. Two of Kailani's nephews were also killed – Abdul Hadi at Syrte in 1918 and another near Ajidabia. No less than four more of the family lost their lives in the flight from Kufra.

When the Italians attacked Kufra on 20th January 1931, Saleh Pasha al Ataiwish, the Qaimaqam and his family, including his nephew, Senussi, and some others escaped by camel making first for Oweinat on the Sudan boundary which they reached after six days riding. Here the party filled their water skins and split into two groups, one making north east for the Nile and the other heading for Merga, a tiny uninhabited oasis to the south-east in the Sudan. The respective distances were 500 miles and 300 miles, that is to say 25 days and 15 days at a normal camel march. There were no tracks to follow nor water on the way. Only those who have trekked by camel across this remorseless desert can realise the danger of the journey. To follow the account of Senussi al Ataiwish, who accompanied his uncle, Salib Pasha, in the Merga-bound party..



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'After riding for several days we failed to reach Merga and realising we were lost, turned back on our tracks for Oweinat. As we were out of water, we had to slaughter a camel each day and drink the water in its belly. We put the flesh of the slaughtered camel into our saddle bags and ate it as we travelled. We had taken eight days on the outward journey but so desperate was our plight that we covered the return to Oweinat in four days riding or walking day and night.

At Oweinat we refilled our water skins and after a short rest, set off making directly for the Nile, following the tracks of the other party. On the way, we passed the bodies of other fugitives, including my mother and sister and two brothers who had been bombed by Italian aircraft or died of thirst. Riding day and night, we reached Karim wells after nine days, more dead than alive. There, we were fortunate enough to be picked up by a desert exploration party, organised by Prince Omar Tossoun and commanded by a British officer, which conveyed us to Kharga and Dakhla. From Dakhla we went to Minya where we settled with people of the Jawazi tribe who are related to the Magharba. We stayed there until 1940 when we joined the Libyan Arab Force at the Amir's call.'

This simple account gives us some idea of the privations endured by those who managed to escape from Graziani's merciless attack on Kufra. Such barbarism was matched only by the philistinism which followed: The Italians destroyed the Mahdi's tomb at Al Taj and ransacked Sayyid Idris' famous library which included priceless Arab manuscripts on ancient parchment, illuminated manuscripts of the Koran, works on philosophy, Arabic Sufism, poetry and mysticism. The Senussi houses at Al Taj were turned into barracks for the Italian troops.

The capture of Kufra marked a decisive point in the campaign which brought to a close the epic Senussi resistance in Cyrenaica. By the summer of 1931 organised resistance in Cyrenaica was coming to an end. Omar al Mukhtar had only a few devoted followers left and the Italian net was closing in on him. On 11th September he was surrounded in a ravine just south of Baida, in the heart of Jebel al Akhdar. He was slightly wounded and pinned down by his horse and before he could recover – he was over seventy – he was seized by the Italians. He was taken by cruiser from Apollonia to Benghazi where he was brought

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before Graziani and after a swift trial by a military court, he was publicly hanged at Soluck, five days after his capture. The Italians paraded all the occupants of the neighbouring concentration camp and a special train brought the notables of Benghazi to witness the execution of the brave old warrior. The name of Omar al Mukhtar is rightly honoured to this day as a great Arab hero. With dauntless courage, incredible fortitude and with nothing but the loyalty and fighting spirit of a handful of tribesmen sustained by their religious faith, he held out for over eight years against the whole might of the Fascist military machine equipped with all the resources of modern warfare.

Graziani's campaign was carried out by a force composed of Eritrean battalions with supporting cavalry, armoured cars and aircraft. The aim was to stamp out the resistance by the complete destruction of the Cyrenaican tribes and the eradication of the Senussi Order. When a Cyrenaican tribal encampment was spotted by reconnaissance planes, armoured cars were rushed up and driven straight through them indiscriminately machine gunning everyone and everything on their way – men, women, children and animals. Any survivor captured received summary treatment; the men being executed and the women and children sent to the prison camps. The Eritrean troops were encouraged to give full play to the brothels set up for the use of these troops.

Among the few mujahidin who escaped from Cyrenaica to Egypt was the intrepid Dorsa Shaikh Abdul Hamid al Abbar, who, with fifty others, managed to cut through the wire fence on the frontier while four of their companions led by Shaikh Yusif bu Rahil al Masmari bravely held off the Italian pursuers until they themselves were killed. This heroic action brought a tribute from the Italians, whose communiqué reported as follows:

'Shaikh Yusif and three others showed conspicuous courage in battle to the last. When firing ceased, Lieutenant Brindisi went forward to their position where he found four dead men still grasping their hot rifles'.

The Fascist Government now took steps not only to eradicate all traces of the Senussi Order but to destroy the tribal structure which supported it. Use of the Senussi prayers was forbidden in



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the mosques. The Zawias were either destroyed or converted to other uses and their lands confiscated. Tribal Shaikhs were dismissed and the tribes and their sections formerly abolished. The aim was to substitute among the young Arabs the ideals of the Fascist organisation and Italian citizenship for the traditional loyalties to Islam and the tribal system. The Fascist policy was to populate Libya with Italians, concentrating in their hands the agricultural, industrial and commercial advantages of the country. Thus on 30 November 1938, Libya was incorporated, 'by law', into the Kingdom of Italy – its four provinces of Tripoli, Misurata, Benghazi and Derna becoming 'Prefectures of the Kingdom'. The best land was acquired by the State, either by confiscation, purchase or expropriation of the tribal rights under which it had previously been held, (by 1939, 121,000 hectares had been so acquired). It was then allocated to Italian peasant families from Sicily and Southern Italy under a much publicised programme of demographic colonisation known as the *Ente per la Colonizzazione della Cirenaica*. They were organised in agricultural colonies of neat white farmhouses, in holdings averaging some forty to fifty acres. There was an administrative and social centre for each colony, with a church, school, dispensary and administration offices. There were a dozen of these colonies in Cyrenaica, each with its Italian name, and by the end of 1939 over 1700 Italian families had been settled. The success of this scheme was still to be proved when the War overtook Cyrenaica: Water had not yet been laid on and the farmsteads were still being heavily subsidised. The farms on the more fertile soil of the Jebel al Akhdar were already showing good results in viticulture and the production of olives and other fruit.

Meanwhile, as we have seen, almost the entire rural and tribal Arab population had been confined in large concentration camps. These were barbed wire enclosures, sited between Benghazi and Al Aghaila, into which Arab families were driven on foot from all over Cyrenaica and there crowded with their animals. It is not difficult to imagine what such confinement meant to the Arabs: To confine nomads, whose freedom to range their traditional pastures was the very basis of existence, was a terrible retribution. Cyrenaican leaders estimate that half the population

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of these camps died and Italian figures show that their herds were reduced to one-tenth of their number.

In the towns, the Arabs fared better since those who had not participated in the resistance (and many had been forced to collaborate with the Italians to survive) were permitted to acquire second-class nationality – Italian Libyan citizens as distinct from those of metropolitan status. These Arabs were enrolled at the earliest possible age into a Blackshirt organisation where they were indoctrinated in the Fascist tenets. From there they were drafted into Italian military service, where they found themselves in conflict with their own kith and kin both during the resistance and in the Second World War. One of the worst wrongs inflicted on the Libyans was the deprivation of their birthright – the Arabic language and its distinguished culture. Italian was the official language and the language of the schools. The result of this was seen when Libya was freed from Italian rule in the Second World War. A whole generation who had grown to manhood under the Italians could hardly read or write Arabic. They had become imitation Italians, living on the fringe of Italian citizenship and dependent for their existence on Italian favour.

The Italians are normally a warm-hearted, kindly people proud of their civilisation and their historic culture but the Fascist record in Libya is an ugly stain on a proud escutcheon which will take a long time to erase. Not all Italians approved the Fascist policy in Libya and many of the humbler Italians lived on friendly terms with the Arabs. The Italians also did notably good work in the area of town planning, design and construction of buildings, roads, harbours and public work and horticultural improvement. Many of these have lasted to this day as a tribute to Italian technical skill and initiative. In the last part of Italian rule an attempt was made, under Marshal Balbo's more enlightened rule, to make amends for the Fascist record by improving the conditions of the Libyans and showing some respect for their religion. Endeavours were made to push ahead with secondary education for the Arabs and many were admitted to the civil service and even appointed as Mayors in towns. Some old mosques were renovated and new ones built and a school of higher Islamic studies was founded in Tripoli. In Cyrenaica, two



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agricultural colonies were established for Arabs, named Fiorita and Alba, on the beautiful Ras al Hilal coast, complete with farmsteads, schools and mosques. A grazing reserve was demarcated in the Jebel al Akhdar and some Roman cisterns repaired, wind pumps installed and cement water troughs provided for the animals.

This policy met with some success in Tripolitania where peaceful conditions had been established much earlier and where Arabs shared in the common benefits of the Italian developments. But it was a participation based on subservience rather than genuine goodwill: The pattern of the developments was directed more for the benefit of the Italian settlers than the Arab population. In Cyrenaica, the bitterness caused by the brutality of Graziani's measures was too acute and their sorrows too recent to cooperate with the Fascist regime. Instead, they bided their time sullenly and with hearts full of hatred, waited patiently for the opportunity to throw off the hated foreign yoke.

SAYYID IDRIS IN EGYPT AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR

During the period 1923 to 1939 Sayyid Idris led a very retiring life in Egypt. He had to be on his guard against the Italians who formed a large community with influence in Palace and political circles and did all possible to discredit him. He had to be very careful to do nothing to infringe the ban on political activity and did not seek the role of a prince in exile nor did the Egyptians treat him as such. He led a quiet domestic life in a small villa with his secretary^{*} and two servants. Apart from going to the Gezira Club for a little tennis he remained alone and took no part in political or social life. Always an abstemious person, he did not smoke or drink, nor frequent coffee houses, race meetings or places of entertainment. Attempts by Italians to compromise him with women failed completely: He was too strict in his religious position to participate in anything remotely savouring of dissipation. He was treated by the Egyptian authorities with the respect due to his religious position and after 1930, when the ban on his movements was lifted, he was able to go on pilgrimage to Mecca. He did not apply for Egyptian nationality and being a technically stateless person travelled on an Egyptian laissez-passer. In 1931 he married a cousin, Fatima,^{**} the daughter of Ahmad Sharif and went to live

* Ibrahim Shelhi

** See footnote on following page.



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at Hammama.

Since the Senussi were considered by the Egyptians to be a very poor and unimportant sect carrying no political weight, neither the King nor Egyptian political leaders took any interest in the welfare and future of Sayyid Idris and his people. His only influential friends were Abdul Sattar Bassel in the Faiyum and Abdulla Lamun Pasha of Assiut. In the course of time a good many Libyan refugees found their way to Egypt in a destitute condition and eked out a penurious existence as ghaffirs or labourers in Faiyum or Assiut. A British resident who knew about the Senussi commented:

‘Not a single Senussi I met had any means of livelihood whatever. They were all penniless living from hand to mouth. Sayyid Idris himself was always hard up, the little property he had being heavily mortgaged.’

In spite of these depressing circumstances and the obscurity into which they had fallen neither Sayyid Idris nor the Senussi refugees abandoned hope of eventual return to their country. It was on the British that they pinned their hopes of salvation. They believed that, in the course of time, the overbearing behaviour of the Fascists would bring them into collision with the free democracies. They watched anxiously for signs of an impending clash such as the sharp reaction to the Italian aggression in Ethiopia in 1936 which led to the resignation of Foreign Secretary Eden and brought Britain to the verge of war with Italy. The conquest of Ethiopia aroused the Fascist pride and with the signing of the Axis agreement it seemed to them that the whole of North Africa was within their grasp. In 1939 Marshal Balbo visited Cairo in an unsuccessful attempt to persuade the Egyptians to repudiate their treaty with the British. The stage was set for war.

Soon after the outbreak of World War Two a meeting of exiled Libyan notables was held in Alexandria to discuss their plans in the event of an alliance between Italy and Germany. At this meeting resolutions were passed and sent to the Egyptian Prime

★★ Present at the wedding ceremony were two of Sayyida Fatima's brothers, Sayyid Mohi al Din and Sayyid Ibrahim as well as two of the most eminent Senussi followers (Ikhwan), Sidi Abdelkadir al Zintani and Sidi al Akhdar al Issawi. The bride's dowry was 25 Egyptian piasters and seven pieces of fabrics, one of which was velver and the rest were cotton. These were sewn into dresses for the bride by the wife of Sidi Idris's follower and friend, Ali al Magboub.

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Minister and the British Ambassador. They affirmed that the Cyrenaicans still recognised Sayyid Idris as their Amir and that the Tripolitanian invitation to Idris, first made in 1921, to become the Amir of Tripolitania still held good. They also authorised him, as Amir of all Libya, to represent them in their affairs. To continue Sayyid Idris' narrative.

'When Italy declared war on the British on 10th June 1940, General Wilson, who commanded the British troops in Egypt under General Wavell, contacted me at Hammama and invited my assistance against the Italians. I summoned the Libyan leaders to a meeting in Cairo in August to discuss what action we should take regarding the war. The Cyrenaicans had no reservations in embracing the opportunity to resume the struggle against the Italians. They had nothing to lose and everything to gain. The position of the Tripolitanians was more delicate. They feared that the Axis might win the war and to join the enemies of Italy would be to compromise themselves irreparably with the Italians. Personally I had complete confidence in the ultimate British triumph. I believed that freedom was bound to prevail over tyranny. I did my best to persuade the meeting to put their trust in the British and give them our united support.

'The decision of the majority (some of the Tripolitanians dissenting) was a vote of confidence in the British Government, the recognition of myself as representative of the Libyans with the British and agreement to form a Libyan army, to be called the Libyan Arab Force, to fight with the British against the Italians. I immediately gave instructions for the recruitment of an army from the Libyans in Egypt. A British officer called Colonel Bromilow, who had served with Arab forces in Iraq, was appointed as commander with headquarters in the Semiramis Hotel in Cairo. The liaison officer was Colonel Anderson, a good Arabist who had lived in Egypt for some time, whose local knowledge was of the greatest help in the formation of the army. [J.N.D. Anderson later became Professor of Islamic Law at London University] My office was in Shari Barakat and I lived in a ground floor flat in Shari Hikmet Pasha in Zamalek with a British family in the flat above me.

The Libyan Arab force was mainly recruited from Cyrenaican refugees in Egypt including some mujahidin who had escaped after taking part in the resistance to the Italians. The army was soon raised to a strength of four line battalions and a headquarters battalion. The depot and training camp was at Kilo Nine near the Pyramids. I was



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kept very busy supervising recruitment and dealing with the many problems in connection with raising the Army which was keen to get into the fighting as soon as possible. After the first defeat of Grazianni's army near Sidi Barrani in December 1940 thousands of Libyans serving in the Italian army were captured and sent to prisoner of war camps on the Suez Canal. I used to visit these camps to try and persuade these men to join the Libyan Arab Force. Most of the Tripolitarians refused, fearing reprisals on their families and thankful to be out of the fighting. Meanwhile as units completed their training they were sent into the line and two battalions participated in the defence of Tobruk in 1941.'

It should perhaps be made clear that in dealing with the Senussi in World War Two there was no distribution of money by the British to gain their support: It was offered freely in the hope that it would help to defeat the Italians and secure the freedom of their country. A British liaison officer in contact with Sayyid Idris at that time commented:

'Sayyid Idris was granted an allowance of £1200 a year plus the rental of a flat at Zamalek at £360 a year. A few members of his family had small allowances of between £180 and £250 a year. They were all very poor. Sayyid Idris proved to be from the very start a very loyal and staunch ally. I always found him reasonable, understanding, straight-forward and reliable in all his dealings with me.'

During this eventful time, while the tide of war swung forwards and backwards across the desert, the Cyrenaicans, under the leadership of Sayyid Idris, gave all they had to help the British cause. Not only did the Libyan Arab Force play a worthy part in the desert campaigns, but the civilian inhabitants, carrying on as best they could with their country turned into an enormous mine-sewn battlefield, gave courageous assistance to the British. Many British soldiers, including escaping prisoners, were given shelter and food, even guidance to rejoin their units by Cyrenaican tribesmen. This help was given at great personal risk: The Italians dealt severely with enemy collaborators. This cooperation was of great value to those British units operating behind the enemy lines such as the Long Range Desert Group raiding Italian outposts in the Libyan desert and Peniakoff's guerilla

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force, popularly known as 'Popski's Private Army'.

Their cooperation earned the Senussi the British Government's recognition and on 8th January 1942 the Foreign Secretary, Eden, paid the following tribute in the House of Commons:

'The Sayyid Idris al Senussi made contact with the British authorities in Egypt within a month of the collapse of France at a time when the situation in Africa was most unfavourable to us. A Senussi force was subsequently raised from those of his followers who had escaped from Italian oppression at various times during the past twenty years. This performed considerable ancillary duties during the successful fighting in the Western Desert in the winter of 1940-41 and is again playing a useful part in the campaign now in progress.

I take this opportunity to express the warm appreciation of his Majesty's Government for the contribution which Sayyid Idris al Senussi and his followers have made and are making to the British war effort. We welcome their association with His Majesty's forces in the task of defeating the common enemies. *His Majesty's Government is determined that at the end of the war the Senussi in Cyrenaica will in no circumstances again fall under Italian domination*'. [My emphasis]

Although this statement did not (and could not) make any promise of Cyrenaican independence it was warmly welcomed by the Cyrenaicans and became for them a sort of Declaration of Rights of which they were to make full use in their subsequent negotiations with the Tripolitarians regarding the future form of the Libyan state.

The hopes of the Libyans raised by Eden's declaration were to receive a set back during the months that followed from one of those sudden changes which are typical of the fortunes of war. In some very fierce fighting which took place in eastern Cyrenaica in the early summer of 1942, Rommel scored a series of striking successes against the British which enabled him to capture Tobruk and to advance into Egypt to a point on the coast only sixty miles from Alexandria. The road seemed clear for the Axis capture of Egypt and Mussolini flew from Rome to Al Qubba in the Cyrenaican Jebel al Akhdar ready to lead his victorious armies into Cairo riding on a white horse. This dramatic turn of events caused some consternation in Egypt and the British head-



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quarters began to prepare for evacuation since the possibility of a withdrawal from lower Egypt could not be excluded. Among those who had to leave were Libyan leaders who supported the Allies including Sayyid Idris, who was persuaded to go to Jerusalem because King Ibn Saud did not show much willingness to receive him in Saudi Arabia apparently owing to theological objections by the Wahhabi leaders. Other Libyan civilians were evacuated to Palestine and the Sudan where they remained until after the battle of Alamain. It was fortunate for the Allies that the British Air Force was undefeated and by the fury of its attacks was able to bring Rommel to a halt in the narrow gap between the Qattara depression and the sea. This gave the British forces a breathing space which enabled them to turn and face the victorious African Corps and check its further advance. By the middle of August 1942, Rommel ceased to attack and the 8th Army was reorganised and strengthened until, with superior force and much improved morale, it was ready to turn again to the offensive. On 23 October 1942, General Montgomery attacked the German positions at Alamain with all his might and after twelve days fierce fighting the Axis forces were in full retreat across Cyrenaica. This time there was to be no return.

The rains came early in the winter of 1942-3 and in November as the 8th Army advanced through Cyrenaica they found a scene of chaos and desolation under the lowering skies. The Italians had evacuated the whole of the Italian civilian population numbering some forty to fifty thousand. Tobruk had become a city of the dead with scarcely a building left standing, and the spacious harbour chock-full with the wrecks of a hundred and thirty sunken ships. Bomb damage was extensive in Bardiya, Derna and particularly in Benghazi, with the result that many of the inhabitants had taken refuge in hills and caves outside the towns. The Marmarican escarpment, littered with the wreckage of burnt-out tanks and trucks, was one enormous minefield and vehicles left the road only at their peril. All public services of electricity, water and sanitation had broken down. Before leaving Benghazi the retreating enemy had demolished the power station and blown great gaps in the harbour moles. The water supply had been polluted by diverting the conduits through the

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town sewers. Any buildings still standing by the roadside were heavily booby-trapped. In the Jebel al Akhdar, where there had been little fighting, there was less damage but the white farmsteads deserted by their Italian occupants stood forlorn and empty and there was little sign of any agriculture and none at all of any trade or business. Normal life had been completely destroyed.

By the beginning of December Cyrenaica was completely free of Axis forces. On 23rd January the Eighth Army entered Tripoli and simultaneously, the Fezzan was occupied by the French. Italy's African Empire had come to an end.

CYRENAICA UNDER THE BRITISH (I) 1942-1945

For the next nine years, in accordance with the terms of the Hague Convention the British were responsible for the government of Cyrenaica (in common with the rest of the Italian colonies) as an occupied enemy territory. The position in Cyrenaica was unusual, since the sovereign power – Italy – had completely abandoned the country – army, police, government officials and settlers alike had fled in the face of the arrival of the 8th Army in November 1942. There was nobody left to represent the Italian civil officials and the administrative and judicial organisations continued to function under British Army control. The main difference between Cyrenaica and the other Italian colonies was that the inhabitants had not fought with the Italians against the British, but on the contrary, all who were able to do so had fought on the British side. As British allies they expected special consideration because they had never collaborated with the Italians. Thus, it was very disappointing for them to find that under the terms of the Hague Convention, Britain was obliged to respect the latent Italian sovereignty and was precluded from making any constitutional change affecting the future status of the country.

The position of Sayyid Idris was especially delicate. Very

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astute in his political judgement, he estimated that to return to reside in Cyrenaica other than on his own terms would weaken his case for early independence: It would be tantamount to submitting himself to the rule of a foreign power. This would have constituted a denial of the fundamental principles for which the Cyrenaicans had fought for thirty years. To the British invitation to return to reside in Cyrenaica, with all the honours that could be accorded him short of recognition as a ruler, he therefore gave a polite refusal, explaining that until his position could be clearly defined, it would be derogatory to himself and possibly embarrassing to the military administration if he returned. Sayyid Idris has sometimes been criticised for a lack of cooperation in this attitude but there is no substance for such a view. His attitude from the first had been entirely consistent; independence of Libya in its internal affairs and recognition of a Muslim ruler as its head of government at the earliest opportunity.

For the first five or six years of British occupation the Sayyid remained in Egypt with infrequent visits to Cyrenaica. He occupied himself mainly with the repatriation of Libyan refugees, of whom some 20,000 returned from Egypt, the Sudan and Palestine during the months following Alamain. Throughout this period his relations with the British were governed by the most scrupulous good faith and moderation. He not only refrained from any criticism of the failure to meet his repeated demands for some guarantees of independence but continually urged his followers to exercise patience and restraint and cooperate loyally with the British administration. He would have no part in the anti-British intrigues so sedulously fostered by subversive influences in Cairo. Having dedicated his life to the struggle of the Libyans against colonisation he was himself a leading adocate of Arab independence. He was also a strong supporter of Arab unity: He did not believe in artificial barriers between Arabs with their common heritage of religion, language and race. But neither did he approve of the intimidation, assassination and subversive methods used to further the so-called struggle against imperialism, since these methods were contrary to the teaching of Islam and abhorrent to a man of peace and religion. Nor did he



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believe in the attempt of a group in one part of the Arab world to impose their control over other parts of the Arab world, since such ambitions created antipathies and unrest which could only weaken the cause of Arab unity.

For his good faith towards the British, the Sayyid incurred some unpopularity among Arab extremists, who accused him of being an English puppet. This was wrong. There wasn't a more uncompromising champion of Arab freedom or more forthright advocate of complete independence from foreign rule. When a National Front was eventually set up by the tribal chiefs with Sayyid Idris' approval, to represent the Cyrenaican case internationally, the Sayyid forbade it to cooperate formally with the British authorities on the grounds that to do so would detract from the national integrity of the organisation. For this reason no Cyrenaican employed by the British military administration was included in this body.

The military administration's aim during the period following Alamain had been to give the country a period of rest and peace to sort out their domestic affairs, while doing all possible to restore public services and increase the production of food. There was a feeling of optimism and renewed vitality in the air and, most noticeable, great goodwill towards the British soldiers who had liberated the country. The Arabs, though desperately poor, were profiting from their new won freedom to restore their traditional way of life. Families were reunited, flocks increasing and land which had been taken from them being restored to its former use. They began to make full use of the return of freedom of speech and opinion.

In accordance with the care and maintenance policy to which military administration is inevitably confined, new projects were excluded, and in any case, the limited funds available meant that the administration had to be run on a shoestring basis. Even to feed the population was a difficult task since, during the Italian period, the Arabs' resources had been seriously impaired and the rigours of war had severely reduced the cultivation of the restricted areas left to them. In spite of the outward signs of development in the shape of roads, civic centres and farmsteads, Cyrenaica was a war-ravaged country and the condition of most of the inhabitants was extremely poor.

CYRENAICA UNDER THE BRITISH (I) 1942-1945

The first task had been to set up an administrative organisation to fill the vacuum caused by the Italian evacuation. This was staffed by a group of British officers, led by a very able political officer from the Sudan, Brigadier Duncan Cumming, assisted by Arabs who had served in the Libyan Arab Force or had experience under the Italians. There were not many. In the early stages there were barely a hundred British officers and a dozen Arab officials to man the government. Some of the British offices had colonial government experience, but most were ordinary officers detached from their units for the purpose. The Arabs included men like Hussain Mazik, Abdul Salam bu Saikry, Mahmud bu Quweitin, Senussi al Ateiwish and Ali Jerby who were afterwards to reach high positions in the independent Libyan Government.

The friendly young Englishmen in Khaki shirts and shorts were a great contrast to the elaborate administration of 15,000 officials in Italian times. Dashing about the countryside in dilapidated fifteen-hundredweight trucks, they distributed food supplies and helped the tribal and urban leaders to reestablish their affairs on Arab lines. The great cry was for jerricans (a stout petrol container abandoned in numbers by the retreating Germans) which were needed for the water supplies constantly going forward from the railhead at Tobruk to the 8th Army still fighting in Tunisia. As an incentive to the Arabs an extra ration of sugar was given for each six jerricans handed in.

In addition to the issue of rations to the civilian population (which came from British Army sources in Egypt), a major problem was the number of casualties caused by the mines and booby-traps left by the departing enemy. To cope with this problem and the high incidence of disease among the Libyan population early priority was given to the reopening of the four former Italian civil hospitals at Benghazi, Derna, Barce and Messas. These had to deal with sporadic outbreaks of smallpox and relapsing fever, a very high incidence of pulmonary tuberculosis and trachoma, and a high venereal disease rate estimated at 25% in gonorrhoea and 17% in syphilis – which was considered responsible for the prevalent sterility and high infant mortality. Doctors were very scarce but sterling service was



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rendered by the Italian nurses who, with the priests, were the only Italians remaining. Throughout the period of military administration they were the mainstay of hospital treatment.

The public services of electricity, water and sanitation had been completely destroyed and it was only possible to restore them very gradually on a makeshift basis. The buildings had largely collapsed into heaps of rat-infested rubble over which the stench of death and decay hung obstinately for many months. Even had the materials and technicians been available it would not have been possible to restore the water mains and sewers, since these had been deliberately sabotaged and no plans showing their lay-out survived.

The maintenance of public order was fortunately not a problem. It was speedily and efficiently taken over by the Libyan Arab Force who were converted into a gendarmerie, known as the Cyrenaican Defence Force, for this purpose. This loyal and well-trained force was a great strength to the administration. It was a remarkable tribute to their effectiveness that there was very little crime or disorder during the whole period of British Administration despite the fact that there was an enormous quantity of arms and ammunition picked up on the battlefields in civilian hands. The administration, mindful of the tribesmen's pride in the possession of his rifle, wisely made no attempt to disarm them.

The comparatively small population was an important factor in restoring normal conditions to the territory. Never a well-populated country owing to the aridity of the interior and the capricious rainfall, the Arab population had been much reduced, as we have seen, under Italian rule. The towns had been inhabited mainly by Italians and the tribes disendowed by the Italian suppression. A British officer, Major E. E. Evans-Pritchard, later, of course, Professor of Anthropology at Oxford University, travelled extensively over the territory in the early period of the administration. He estimated the number of Bedouins and oasis dwellers at 150,000 and to that could be added another 30,000 in the only four or five inhabited towns and villages. The size of the population made the task of providing the necessary food much easier during the early stages when local supplies were virtually

CYRENAICA UNDER THE BRITISH (I) 1942-1945

non-existent. It is a significant fact that at the beginning of the 1939-45 war the Italian Army in Cyrenaica must have exceeded the Arab population by about 2¹/₂ to 1.

The visit of Sayyid Idris to Cyrenaica in July 1944 was an event of great importance, for he had been in exile for twenty-two years. He received a tumultuous welcome which threw an interesting light on the political postures existing among the population. The tribesmen showed the reverence they felt for him as the head of the Senussi Order and as the leader of the struggle against the Italians. In the towns the younger men, who had grown up under the Italian rule, adopted what they could remember of Fascist ceremonial, suitably modified for the occasion. Both town and country used the catch-phrases of Arab nationalism, showing the influence of the large numbers of refugees who had returned from Egypt and other Arab countries. The Sayyid himself addressed large gatherings calling for unity, high moral conduct and support of the military administration. He was clearly highly impressed by the good progress made by the administration in restoring a measure of prosperity to the territory and by the easy relations between the British officers and the people. Brigadier Cumming and his handful of British officers did a fine job. Cumming was a most able administrator, a man of vision and energy who did much to encourage the Cyrenaicans to manage their own affairs and deservedly, he became a legend in Cyrenaica.

CYRENAICA UNDER THE BRITISH (2) 1946-1948

The rains set in early in the winter of 1946-47 and Benina airfield was overshadowed by threatening clouds massing over the Abiar escarpment when I arrived for service in the British administration on a December afternoon. A chilly wind blew across the monotonous twelve miles of plain separating the airfield from the town. The only signs of life were a few herds of sheep huddled against the cold drizzle while their shepherds, wrapped closely in their shawls, drove them stoically towards the uncertain shelter of the Beduin encampment dotted over the countryside. In the garden suburb of Fueihat lights twinkled along the fence of the P.O.W. Camp but in town the streets were dark and empty.

Four years of British military administration, in spite of restrictions, had restored the territory to something near normal life, but austerity and improvisation were still the keynote of the territory's life and government. Benghazi was still a badly dilapidated town with most of its former Italian buildings in ruins. Most of the Fascist slogans had disappeared from the remaining buildings and been replaced by the grave bespectacled silhouette of Sayyid Idris, the great Senussi leader. The Italian inhabitants had made no attempt to return to Cyrenaica – there was no

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further place for them in a territory where the name of Italy was still a synonym for hatred. No peace treaty having yet been made, no-one knew what was the status of the ex-Italian properties which had been abandoned with such finality: They remained untidy heaps of rubble, a sorrowful witness to the waste and destruction of war. Periodical explosions still shook the few upstanding buildings when unexploded bombs or mines were accidentally detonated by unwary intruders. Accommodation was still very scarce: In the Arab quarters, most of the surviving dwellings were without light or water and conditions in the Italian quarters were little better. Although the war had been over for eighteen months the army was still in charge. The territory lived under the stress of war conditions.

This was a time of great uncertainty for Libya. The disposal of the ex-Italian Colonies aroused more passion and acerbity than any other matter dealt with by the Council of Foreign Ministers, made up of Great Britain, USA, Soviet Union and France. In September 1945, USA presented a plan for collective trusteeship by the United Nations with a neutral administrator assisted by an advisory council of representatives from Britain, USA, Soviet Union, France, and Italy plus two Libyans. After ten years Libya and Eritrea would become independent. France, concerned to maintain the status quo in her adjoining colonies, opposed the proposal in favour of Italian administration. The Soviet Union was equally hostile to the plan, arguing that it was impracticable, quoting the Russian proverb 'A child which has seven nurses does not get nursed at all'. She proposed that each of the Big Three (France was to be excluded) should assume trusteeship over one of the colonies with herself taking responsibility for Tripolitania on the grounds that she needed a Mediterranean base for her merchant fleet.

None of these proposals were endorsed by Britain who, while giving qualified support to the USA's proposal, categorically rejected the Soviet bid and refused to agree to put Cyrenaica under Italian rule because of the war-time pledge to the Senussi. At the next Council meeting in April 1946, Britain presented for the first time a distinct proposal of her own, calling for the immediate grant of independence to Libya. This liberal proposal



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was not supported, it being regarded as an attempt to establish influence behind a fair-sounding scheme. Instead, The Soviet Union persisted in seeking a trusteeship over Tripolitania but after some weeks of deadlock offered to abandon claims to Tripolitania if, in return, it were agreed that Trieste would go to Yugoslavia. This was perhaps the most cynical of the bargaining attempts made in utter disregard of the wishes of the inhabitants. It was a pity that the British proposal failed: It would have forestalled all the horse-trading which went on over the next three years and put the Libyans on their mettle to work out their own destiny.

With all this uncertainty, it was not surprising that the Libyan people grew impatient. They believed that they were just as fit for independence as their fellow Arabs in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan. With the failure of the Council of Foreign Ministers to agree on the disposal of the Italian Colonies the problem had to be referred to the General Assembly of the United Nations for settlement. The Libyans themselves still pinned their faith on the British as the known visible liberators of the country, mistrusting any plan which might involve foreign control, however benevolent its intention. Meanwhile the Council of Foreign Minister continued to wrangle with the knotty problem without reaching any agreement.

Towards the end of 1946, preparations were started for the visit of Sayyid Idris, still in Egypt, to receive an honorary knighthood which he had been awarded in recognition of his services to the British cause in the war. On another miserably wet and chilly afternoon later in December 1946, a small party of British officers waited near Mussolini's triumphal arch outside Benghazi to welcome the Sayyid's arrival. In the distance appeared a Cyrenaican Defence Force jeep travelling very fast, followed closely by a black Humber which pulled up briefly while the Sayyid dismounted to greet the reception committee. The investiture took place the following day at Graziani's old palace in the centre of the town. It was only the third visit of the Sayyid to Benghazi since the banquet given by Omar Pasha al Kekhia to celebrate the treaty of Rejima twenty-five years earlier, in 1921. But this, of course, was a much happier occasion,

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the shadow of Italian colonisation having been lifted for ever. The showy Italian uniforms had been replaced by the working day battledress of the British officers who still remained to carry on the caretaker administration.

The guard of honour drawn up outside the Palace was made up of British and Cyrenaican soldiers who had fought side by side in the desert war. The Senussi guests, who occupied the principal seats in the Great Hall of the Palace, included some of the same men who fought with Omar al Mukhtar in the resistance fifteen or twenty years earlier – tribal shaikhs such as Abd al-Hamid al Abbar, Mansur bu Shideiq, Bu Bakr bu Dhan, Suliman Raqraq, Alid Abidiyy Saleh Pasha al Atawish and Nars al Kizzea. There was also Omar Pasha al Kekhia, resplendent in fez and Osmanleh sash and old-fashioned frock coat, and Sayyid Mohammed al Rida, the brother of Sayyid Idris. Sayyid Safi al Din, a half-brother of Sayyid Ahmad Sharif, who had held the rank of a Turkish general in the first Italian war, was there, along with four of his sons who had returned from exile in Egypt. Included in the gathering was a delegation of Tripolitanian leaders who had come to Benghazi to discuss the question of Libyan unity.

Sayyid Mohammed Idris, the principal figure in the ceremony, dressed simply in a white quftan with black abaya and white jird over his shoulder, was now in his middle fifties. He had not changed much in the passage of twenty-five years. The same dignified presence, his ascetic countenance lit up by an occasional flash of his gracious smile. A hush fell over the assembly as he walked slowly, almost remotely, by the side of General Dempsey who had come from Cairo for this occasion. A short speech of welcome by the General was followed by the reading of the citation in English and Arabic; the award of a KBE by His Majesty King George VI in recognition of the Sayyid's distinguished services to the British cause. The presentation was followed by a brief reply of thanks read by the Sayyid in his frail voice, and translated into English. The impression given was one of unassuming simplicity and personal sincerity. Here was a born leader whose dignified bearing set him apart from those gathered to do him honour. The ceremony was soon over and the guests – Senussi Shaikhs in tribal dress, town notables and



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officials in shabby suits and British officers in battledress – trooped out into the darkening, war-scarred streets where a group of tribal horsemen waited to fire a volley of salutation.

Later that evening, with some diffidence, not knowing how to request an appointment, I called at the modest Italian villa in the Via di Martino where the Sayyid was lodged during his short stay. I was at once shown by his secretary, Ibrahim Shelhi, into the small, sparsely-furnished room where the Sayyid was sitting. My doubts were quickly dispelled by a most gracious welcome to a wholly unexpected visit. I was at once impressed by his friendly manner and air of quiet authority. Perhaps he was pleased to find someone he could talk to without the need of an interpreter: Then, as ever, he spoke no language other than Arabic.

In the course of the long conversation that followed, I was amazed at his keen and well-informed insights into current affairs. His intelligence and integrity were apparent in all he told me. Nothing had mattered to him except freedom, if not for all of Libya, at least for Cyrenaica. In a masterly exposition, both lucid and moderate, he described the long struggle against the Italians and his confidence in British good faith. He then set out in simple but cogent terms the Libyan case for immediate independence. In all this, there was no striving for effect or self-glorification. His manner was modest, friendly and sympathetic and he talked readily with penetration and charm. He explained the sacrifices made by the Cyrenaicans in their thirty year struggle against the Italians and their determination to accept nothing short of unconditional independence under a Muslim government of their own choice. He had told the Tripolitanian delegation that if the people of Tripolitania and Fezzan would join them, the Cyrenaicans would welcome their inclusion in a united Libyan State. He expressed great disappointment that more than a year after the end of the war they were no nearer to the realisation of their national aspirations. The tribal chiefs had pressed him, he said, not to return to Cairo but he felt that until he could be given some official recognition of his right to represent Libyans in the negotiations, he must continue to reside in

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Egypt. He had, however, acceded to the Cyrenaican tribal leaders' demand to form their own National Front (al Jabha al Watar-riya) to present their case to the authorities responsible for deciding the future of Libya.

His earlier hopes, raised by the British proposal in U.N. for immediate independence, had been damped by the manoeuvres of other powers in their attempts to secure some control over Libyan territory. He was especially opposed to any return of Italian control in any shape or form in any part of Libya, since this would be the negation of all the people had struggled for for so long. He was also averse to any form of trusteeship which to him meant foreign control in substance if not in name.

I left the villa that evening convinced that Sayyid Idris was a man equipped to be the head of a Libyan State by character, erudition, integrity and the religious and political prestige necessary for such a position. I had, I must admit, fallen under the spell of his personal magnetism. Indeed, over the years to come, in the many conversations I was to have with him, I never left his presence without the stimulus that comes from contact with an exceptional personality. The next day, when I enquired about him, I was told that he had left soon after dawn and was already far on his way back to Egypt.

The months that followed were busy ones, spent in dealing with the many problems involved in administering a large territory on a shoestring – which fell to the lot of a Chief Secretary. I was fortunate in serving for the first few months under a wise and understanding chief, Brigadier Haugh, who gave me plenty of opportunity to travel about the country and get to know the people. My first task was to look after a working party sent out by the War Office to study and report on the administration of Libya. This was, I'm afraid, a case of the blind leading the blind: Having been barely a week out of the Sudan, I was hardly qualified to act as their guide and mentor in Cyrenaica. As our researches went deeper we became more and more depressed at the magnitude of the problems which faced the administration. How could the ravages of war be adequately repaired with the meagre funds at our disposal? How could a nomadic shepherd population be induced to adopt the life of settled farmers on the



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abandoned Italian holdings? Where could the staff be found to man the departments of Government which British officers were leaving daily on demobilisation without hardly a single Cyrenai-can with any professional or technical experience or qualifications to replace them? The only positive factor was the determination of the tribal leaders who left no doubts about the unanimity of the political aspirations of the population.

In the course of an extended tour, in desert Beduin camps, by the roadsides or in dilapidated administrative offices in towns, villages and hamlets from the Tripolitanian boundary to the borders of Egypt we listened patiently to impassioned harangues with one unvarying theme: 'Give us independence now under Sayyid Idris and we will manage the rest ourselves'. Where there was such passion and unanimity it seemed fruitless to urge patience and trust in the wisdom of the foreign powers. Such advice was brushed aside in the flush of emotion created by sudden emancipation after a generation of repression. Was not independence in such circumstances an illusion? Should a people be set free without the means to maintain their freedom? My sympathies lay with the deep-felt emotions of this much harassed people, but would it be right to abandon them to the mercies of rapacious neighbours? These were questions for the Great Powers to decide. All we could do was to advise our Government of the strength of the spirit of independence, the good will towards the British and the universal loyalty to Sayyid Idris. The War Office working party, being experienced and practical men, saw the urgency of doing all possible to train the people for self-government, to prepare the way for the termination of British military administration and the transfer of power from British to Cyrenaican leaders. Their recommendations, submitted in January 1947, were for a three-stage development programme:

1. The military administration to continue for a short period.
2. The establishment of an Arab State under British trusteeship under which financial assistance should be given for not less than ten years, including administrative training and the promotion of educational and technical development.
3. The establishment of a fully independent state. During the

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second and third stages, Cyrenaica might be connected with Tripolitania in a unified Libya. A treaty of alliance with a major power was recommended.

This programme became, in due course, the British Government's policy towards Libya and thereafter was consistently maintained. Its weakness was its dependence on uncertain factors; firstly, it presupposed that Britain would be able to secure the acceptance of plans for a trusteeship by the three other powers responsible for the disposal of the ex-Italian colonies. Secondly, it assumed that a ten year trusteeship, or indeed any period of trusteeship, would be acceptable to the Libyan people. As time went on, the disposal of the Italian colonies became a matter of international bargaining. It was vitally affected by the terms of the Peace Treaty with Italy which brought the United Nations into the picture. Under this treaty, the Four Powers were given one year to determine jointly the final disposal of the Italian Colonies. If this was not achieved by February 10th 1948, the matter had to be referred to the General Assembly of the United Nations, whose recommendations the Four Powers were committed to accept.

The improvement of education was a main task and one which gave me especial interest. Starting from scratch in 1943, the Administration had opened about fifty Elementary and Primary Schools, providing a basic Arabic education. These were housed in the former Italian schools in the towns and village centres. They were staffed by local teachers mostly educated in Egypt. During the period 1947-49 a Secondary School with a boarding section was opened in Benghazi and another in Derna. Four boarding schools to cater for boys from the scattered nomad tribes were opened at El Abiar, Qubba, Jerdis al Abid and Tobruk. Girls schools were opened at Benghazi and Apollonia and training centres for male and female teachers in Benghazi. A Trade school was established in Benghazi. We were limited in what we could do by the scarcity of trained teachers, of books and equipment. This situation was much improved by the loan of qualified teachers and the supply of books and equipment from Egypt. During 1948, 42 male and 10 female teachers arrived from Egypt and were posted to schools throughout the



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territory. This source proved an indispensable one and, with the passage of time, tended to increase. It enabled the establishment of an efficient system of vernacular, and eventually higher, education which would have been impossible otherwise.

Since the first days of the occupation the departments of the Military Administration had been staffed mainly by Cyrenaicans, over a thousand of whom were employed in clerical and administrative posts, including all sub-district officers, judges of the Sharia and Civil Courts, teachers, agricultural and forestry staff and postal and telecommunications staff. In this period nine Cyrenaicans were appointed to senior posts including Deputy Controllers of the Interior, Development and Finance, Deputy Commissioner of Police, Assistant Directors of Education and Posts and Telegraphs and District Commissioners for Benghazi, Jebel and Derna.

The development of agriculture, livestock and afforestation was another important preoccupation. Although traditionally a sheep breeding country, Cyrenaica offered great possibilities for agriculture and horticulture, particularly the culture of fruit and vegetables. In addition to the Barce Plain Scheme – where 19,000 acres were under wheat cultivation directly farmed by the Administration, providing the main supply of food for the inhabitants – good progress was made in rehabilitating the ex-Italian farms in the Jebel al Akhdar. These were let out to local tenants who were supervised and provided with seed and cuttings. Three experimental stations were maintained by the Authorities for the purpose. The production of cereals, grapes and vegetables was thereby greatly increased and an annual export of some 10,000 tons of barley valued at £140,000, which went mainly to Tripolitania, achieved.

More spectacular results were achieved in the field of livestock improvement with the repair of wells and the provision of watering troughs and the opening of veterinary centres for the treatment of diseases. The export of surplus livestock brought a measure of prosperity to the rural areas: In 1948 nearly 7,000 cattle and 100,000 sheep were exported, mainly to Malta and Greece from Benghazi and Derna, in addition to the customary export of a similar number to Egypt on the hoof.

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In the late summer of 1947 I visited Headquarters, Middle East Land Force for consultations with the Chief Civil Affairs Officer, Major-General Cumming. The H. Q. had recently moved from Cairo to Fayid on the Suez Canal. On my way through Cairo I took the opportunity to call on Sayyid Idris in his flat in Shari Hiskmat Pasha in Zamalek and lunched with him. I gave him a resumé of recent developments by the administration and passed on the messages from many tribal and town people in Cyrenaica begging him to return to his country. He was reluctant to make any promises about returning without official recognition of his status which Her Majesty's Government was unwilling to accord lest it should contravene the Hague Convention. He also insisted that the Libyans would accept no settlement for Libya short of full independence and that this should take place without waiting for the result of the international haggling over the future of the ex-Italian colonies. He considered that independence could be adequately safeguarded by a treaty with the British. I explained that Her Majesty's Government was bound by the Italian Peace Treaty. He said he would pay a longer visit to Benghazi in November 1947.

In the meantime, we set about repairing and furnishing the bomb-damaged Manar Palace which we thought would be more in keeping than the cramped little villa in Via di Martino where Sayyid Idris stayed during his previous visit to Cyrenaica. We did our best and restored the large upstairs salon and two bedrooms. It was necessary to accommodate his cook and another servant in a neighbouring building. In due course we received a letter saying that the Sayyid would leave Cairo by road on 3rd. November so we sent our only two Humber Saloons to Cairo to fetch him. Everybody having been alerted, large numbers of tribesmen started gathering all along the 400 miles from the Egyptian frontier. The journey was a triumphal progress carried out at top speed with occasional halts at large groups of mounted tribesmen who greeted their leader in traditional fashion. This involved some risk to anybody in the vicinity since volleys were fired into the air (and not always into the air) and ball ammunition was used. The local hospitals were unusually busy after a



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fantasia of this kind. A triumphal arch had been erected over the road near the entrance to Benghazi where we waited. Entering the shabby town, the Sayyid got out of the Humber in front of the Manar Palace where guards of honour were provided by the Royal Navy, the King's Dragoon Guards and the Cyrenaican Defence Force. Inside the Palace the tribal sheikhs and principal Benghazi citizens were again assembled to do him honour. This was a Cyrenaican occasion and few British officers had found places in the crowded room. Brigadier Haugh having left on promotion to a higher command it fell to me to make a speech of welcome, which I did in Arabic, a compliment well received by the large assembly. After welcoming the Sayyid's return to his own people from whom he had been separated for so long, I referred to Mr. Eden's promise of 1942 – that Cyrenaica would not go back to Italian rule owing to the Senussi support of the British army in the war – and appealed for patience and cooperation in the steps being taken to prepare the country for self-government. My very brief remarks were, to my surprise, received with great applause and when later that day I asked a leading Arab why, he said that strong rumours (of which I was unaware) had been circulating that Libya was going to be handed back to Italy.

Before my departure from Benghazi some three months later I saw a good deal of Sayyid Idris and had much help from him in an unofficial capacity in handling the local politicians and advising on the most suitable Cyrenaicans to fill higher posts in the administration. The presence of Sayyid Idris in their midst was a great encouragement to the independence-seekers and spared me a lot of discussion: On their periodical visits to Benghazi they now went to see Sayyid Idris instead of me and so I had more time for administration. The question of the Sayyid's status was delicately handled by giving him the honorific title of Amir while avoiding any official announcements.

We had in the past had a certain amount of bother from various budding political youth organisations formed under the aegis of the Egyptian Consulate, which had been opened in Benghazi a few months earlier. There was a youth society called Rabitat al Shabab and a so-called football club called Omar al Mukhtar

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which were supposed to be for social and sporting purposes. There was also a more conservative committee called the Jabha al Watiniya with reactionary and outdated ideas consisting entirely of the elderly among whom the memory of the resistance to the Italians of the nineteen-twenties and thirties was still fresh. The first two organisations mentioned were weak, and were confined to a small following of young men in Benghazi and Derna, but becoming increasingly vociferous in their support of Arab nationalism. They had not, however, attracted much public attention or engaged in unlawful activities. To replace the dissolved parties a National Congress was formed in January 1948, composed of leading tribal chiefs, urban notables (including a representative of the Jewish community) and representatives of the younger townsmen.

An executive committee under the leadership of the Sayyid's brother, Muhammed al Rida, was elected to draw up a programme for the future of the country based on the principles of independence and the Senussi Amirate. The aim of the programme was to impress upon the outside world the determination of the people to have the principal voice in the settlement of their own future. When a Four Power Commission of Investigation, (composed of John E. Uther (USA), F.E. Stafford (UK), Burin des Roziers (France) and Artemy Fedorov (USSR)), visited Cyrenaica in April 1948, the National Congress submitted the following proposals on behalf of the Cyrenaican people:

1. Complete and immediate independence for Cyrenaica.
2. Recognition of Amir Idris as King of a constitutional Cyrenaican State.
3. With regard to Cyrenaica's relations with Tripolitania it was stated that 'Thereafter, if our Tripolitanian brothers wish to come under the Senussi crown, this will enable the unification of the Libyan territories in our State: otherwise Cyrenaica will retain its own independence'.

When questioned by the Commission, the wishes of the tribesmen were vociferously expressed as 'Independence under Amir Idris', but when asked about trusteeship Britain was the only acceptable trustee. The demand for immediate independence



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was unanimous and there was no support for a period of transition, particularly among the nationally-minded townsmen who considered that trusteeship 'simply meant colonisation, with the replacement of the Italian tyrants by benevolent English'.

The announcement of the Commission's findings was made in July 1948. It stated that Cyrenaica, in common with the other former Italian colonies, was unfit for independence and should be placed under trusteeship. This came as a shock to the Libyans and caused bitter resentment and disillusionment. They saw it as proof that the four powers were determined to foster their own interests in Libya, even if it meant dismembering the country, rather than endorse the unanimous desire of the inhabitants for immediate independence. Amir Idris was bitterly disappointed. I had left Cyrenaica in early in 1948 and was therefore not present during the Commission's visit but the Amir subsequently told me that he was considering retiring to Egypt. I urged him not to give up as the wishes of the inhabitants were bound to prevail in the end.

POLITICAL ACTIVITY IN CYRENAICA

I returned to Benghazi in November 1948, after nine months absence, to take up the post of Chief Administrator and found a distinct change in atmosphere. The failure to reach a decision over the future status of the country had led to growing doubt whether the British pledge over Italian rule would be met. This feeling of frustration was made worse by the war between the Arabs and the Jews in Palestine which had repercussions in Libya. Although Libya was not directly involved in these hostilities, they gave a tremendous stimulus to hitherto latent Arab nationalism for which Egypt became the leader and spokesman and whose propaganda had a strong influence in Cyrenaica. Amir Idris was inevitably affected by the anti-British feeling associated with the birth of the new Israeli State: He was known as a friend and ally of the British to whom he continued to remain consistently loyal. He was, however, becoming increasingly impatient and insistent in his pressure for the British to take action to bring an end to wartime military administration in favour of independence.

During my previous service in Cyrenaica the only noticeable political activity had been the vociferous demands of the tribal and urban leaders for immediate independence under Sayyid Idris. Those who were responsible for the administration of the



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territory sympathised with this aspiration, partly because its advocates had co-operated so loyally with the British Army in the desert campaigns and partly because the longer a decision was delayed the more opportunity there would be for trouble makers to disturb the stability so necessary for the rehabilitation of the country.

It was not the policy of the British administration to attempt to influence local opinion on the future status of the country. Indeed, so punctiliously did they adhere to this principle that certain disruptive influences were able to organise themselves almost unnoticed by the military administration. Foremost amongst these was the interest of Egypt in the disposal of Libya and of Cyrenaica particularly. The return of a large number of exiled Libyans following the liberation of the country from Italian rule included many who had taken part in political activities in neighbouring Arab countries still struggling for independence and who had learnt the techniques of nationalist agitation. On their return to Libya it was to be expected that young Libyans who had studied abroad and been exposed to nationalist influences should engage in political activity at home, especially since British policy gave far more latitude to this than would have been possible under Italian rule. What was not to be expected however, was that some of these young men would be misguided enough to intrigue against the Amir and the Senussi loyalists who had suffered so much in the struggle for freedom.

It was no secret that outside influences were behind a good deal of the nationalist activity which went on in Libya in the period 1948-1951 and it was not necessary to look far for their inspiration. Egyptian interest in the disposal of the Italian colonies had been growing since the end of the war. In 1943 Egypt submitted a memorandum to the Council of Foreign Ministers at their first meeting in London. In it, they asked that they be consulted on the final disposition of Libya and Eritrea in recognition of the close bonds which had bound those countries to Egypt in the past. She suggested that a plebiscite be held in Libya to determine whether its people would prefer to attain independence or unity with Egypt. In the case of trusteeship, she urged that this should be entrusted either to Egypt or the Arab League.

POLITICAL ACTIVITY IN CYRENAICA

There might have been some merit in these proposals if Sayyid Idris and the Libyan leaders had been consulted in their promulgation but this was not the case. They were formulated by Abdul Rahman Azzam, the Egyptian Secretary-General of the Arab League, with the object of bringing Libya under Egyptian control. In various resolutions passed by the Arab League in the period 1945-1948 it was clear that the personal views of Azzam concerning the Libyan question were predominant. He was tireless in advocating in international circles the view that Libya should be placed under Arab League trusteeship with Egypt assuming the major responsibility. Azzam was also in favour of the unity of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania but said that if the unity and independence of the two territories were not possible then Cyrenaica might be incorporated into Egypt. At the time of the Italian Peace Treaty in 1946, Egypt raised a claim to be the administering authority under a United Nations trusteeship. She also presented certain territorial claims in the vicinity of the Egyptian-Libyan frontier including the plateau of Sollum, the port of Bardiya and the oases of Jaghbub, Arkenu, Unwaynat and Sara. Neither the proposal for Egyptian/Arab League trusteeship nor the demands for boundary changes commended themselves to the Libyan leaders: They were submitted without consulting the Libyan people and Azzam's personal animosity to Amir Idris was well known.

By the end of 1948 it was clear that Egyptian propaganda had made some headway both in Cyrenaica and Tripolitania. In Cyrenaica, the Omar al Mukhtar Club, originally a sporting association, had quickly developed into a political society organised on the familiar Egyptian inspired subversive pattern. Soon after my return to Cyrenaica in 1948 I was to have a painful experience of the danger to public security these influences presented. I spent some time touring the country, meeting new British staff and renewing my acquaintance with tribal and country leaders as well as local officials. At each tribal and village centre I addressed groups and explained the status of the ex-Italian colonies question, urging patience and trust in their leader, the Amir, and in British good faith. This tour involved some arduous travelling and my wife therefore remained at home in Benghazi.



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I returned to discover that during my absence our house had been attacked by a street mob who had hurled stones at the windows and were only turned aside by the action of a young Arabic-speaking Belgian officer employed in the Military Administration. He had intervened at great personal risk and prevented the rioters from entering the house. My wife and another lady were completely alone, the servants having fled at the first sign of trouble and the police were nowhere to be seen. This was a most vicious and premeditated affair and quite out of character with the traditional courtesy and respect for women for which the Libyans, in common with all Arabs, are noted. Further enquiries revealed that this violence was the work of the Omar al Mukhtar Club who, with outside encouragement, had achieved a measure of urban influence through the intimidation of peaceful citizens in both Benghazi and Derna. It seems that the Club had been influenced by the example of the Muslim Brotherhood, active in Egypt at this time. My first instinct was to suppress the Club but on reflection I decided that to persecute it too severely would be to drive it underground and might even give it a more popular appeal under the mantle of Arab nationalism. I knew the group's leader and had some sympathy with their grievances; their indignation at the outcome of the Arab war with the Jews and the lack of progress on the future of Libya.

THE SECOND AMIRATE

With the approach of the settlement date of the future of the ex-Italian colonies, Amir Idris decided to live permanently in Cyrenaica. Since he did not like town life, an isolated country villa known as Ali Ghadir, some seven miles outside Benghazi, was prepared for him. The house adjoined the famous grotto pool of Lethe, associated in Greek mythology with the stream at which the spirits of the departed drank the soothing draught of forgetfulness. Descending a steep path in a deep cleft in the limestone, you reach a cave in which there is an underground pool. It was possible to push one's way in a flat bottomed boat into a second cave and we liked to believe that from here, an underground stream went as far as the sea at the mouth of the Blue Lagoon, a lake by the shore a few miles from Benghazi. There was a fresh water current flowing into the sea at this point and it made an ideal place for a bathing picnic. When the Amir lived at Lethe he used to send us drinking water from the cave which was much sweeter than the chlorinated town supply.

The Amir used Al Manar Palace in town as an office and reception place and there he collected a small staff including Omar Pasha al Kekhia, as his chamberlain, and Dr. Wahba al Buri, (who afterwards became Libyan representative at the



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United Nations), as his secretary. His first action was to make the National Congress more representative of the Jewish and Greek communities. These men included some of the former Omar Mukhtar Club leaders in the persons of Khalil Qallal, Yusif bin Katu, Mustafa bin Amer and Muhammed al Mutardi. To this reconstituted body was entrusted the duty of presenting the Cyrenaican case for independence to the United Nations.

Since the Amir's previous visits to Cyrenaica had been so brief, his presence during the next few months gave me the opportunity to consult him regularly on the preparations we were making for self-government. Under the modus operandi we established, I concentrated on administrative matters and left political questions entirely to him. This arrangement satisfied most people although at times those who were discontented with his policies vented their displeasure on me, usually in the form of criticism in the local press. The Amir was very sensitive to criticism and I asked the Editors to give him all possible support: The important thing was to present a united face, so essential if they were to convince the world that the Libyans were fully equipped for early independence.

The Italian Colonies question was not discussed by the United Nations at their Paris meeting in September 1948, having been postponed to April 1949. Delegations from both Tripolitania and Cyrenaica attended this meeting, held at Lake Success, with slightly different viewpoints. The Tripolitarians put independence first and unity second, the Cyrenaicans put independence first, the Senussi Amirate second and unity third. In the outside world there was still greater divergence. A strong Latin-American bloc, influenced by the bonds of the Catholic religion, urged Italian trusteeship over Libya. The Arab-Asian bloc demanded immediate unconditional independence. Britain and France sought a compromise which would meet their strategic needs in Cyrenaica and the Fezzan. It was clear that no proposal by the Western powers had a chance of success that did not have the support of one or other of the aforesaid blocs. Since the Arab-Asian bloc opposed any form of western participation in Libya much depended on the attitude of the Latin Americans. British and French diplomacy had been busy at work to find a

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compromise which would satisfy the Latins while maintaining their interests in Libya. This emerged in the form of a plan agreed between Ernest Bevin and Carlo Sforza, the British and Italian Foreign Ministers.

The Bevin-Sforza plan was a sophisticated though curious compromise combining the British war promise that the Senussi would never again fall under Italian rule with the Latin-American desire for Italy to regain some of her colonial influence. It satisfied Italy by promising her a trusteeship over Tripolitania and Britain by offering her a trusteeship over Cyrenaica. France was to receive the trusteeship over Fezzan. Libya was to become an independent state after ten years if the United Nations decided that such a step was appropriate. This move came as a complete surprise to Libya and particularly to the Tripolitarians. There were indignant street demonstrations in protest in Tripoli, which only ended with the rejection of the proposals on 17th May. The Cyrenaicans disliked it since they had no wish to have the Italians back in power on their doorstep and they were in no mood to accept a further ten year postponement of their long-cherished hope of full independence. To the Arab-Asian bloc the plan appeared as a cynical attempt by the European powers to further their colonial ambitions at the cost of dismembering Libya. Their attitude was expressed forcibly by Sir Azfrulla Khan of Pakistan:

‘Libya was faced with the prospect of division into three parts with three forms of administration, using three different tongues, which would ensure the further disruption of its economy and indefinite postponement of its independence.’

The plan met with Amir Idris’ strong disapproval. Not only had it provoked a most unpopular reaction in Libya but it had given ammunition to the extremist elements in their opposition to the Amir as a British puppet. He was seriously disturbed by an Egyptian newspaper campaign designed to discredit him in the eyes of the Arabs. King Farouk, with typical malevolence and ill manners, referred contemptuously to Amir Idris as an ‘ignorant fakir’. The news from Lake Success provoked one of the Amir’s rare outbursts of anger in the course of one of my daily interviews with him. He felt, he said, that he had been misled,



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having been informed by my predecessor that he would be able to form a national government for Cyrenaica which Tripolitania and the Fezzan would be able to join eventually. He had made promises to his people to this effect. He asked for immediate British agreement in forming a Cyrenaican government and the signing of a treaty of co-operation and defence.

‘If Britain delays any further, I shall have to tell the people that I must give up the struggle and take no further part in Libyan affairs. I shall either return to Egypt or live in Cyrenaica as a private citizen. I shall be accused of breaking my word after all these years and betraying my people after advising them to be patient for so long. I was assured that if the United Nations could not agree on the future of Libya, Britain would consider the grant of Cyrenaican independence and the negotiation of a treaty of co-operation and defence. The Cyrenaican respect for the British is weakening and the criticism of the British and of myself as a British tool is becoming widespread. The freedom for which we fought so long is in jeopardy.’

Thoroughly disillusioned by events at Lake Success, the Cyrenaican National Congress instructed its delegates to return at once, expressing its indignation in two forthright cables. To the UN Secretary-General they cabled:

‘We will accept no decision except independence and we reject trusteeship completely. We deem ourselves independent and free to associate and negotiate a treaty with whomsoever we wish.’

To the British Foreign Secretary they cabled:

‘We reject any trusteeship and are ready to announce our full independence and conclude a treaty of alliance with Britain.’

When the vote was taken on the Bevin-Sforza resolution at the UN, 33 voted in favour of Italian trusteeship over Tripolitania. 17 against, with 8 abstaining, only one vote less than the required two-thirds majority. The Haitian* delegate unexpectedly voted

* Dr. Ali Nuraddin al Anezi, member of the Libyan delegation noted the conscientious nature of the Haitian representative Mr. Emile Saint Lu. Acting upon his own initiative he consolidated his contacts with Mr. Saint Lu and established a friendship with him through which he described to him the struggle of the Libyan nation and suffering from the cruelty of the Italian occupation and their hopes for Independence. As a result of his conscientious and humane character, and in response to Dr. Ali al Anezi's plea, he voted against the resolution contradicting as he did so, his governments instructions.

Mr. Saint Lu was removed from office and lived as a refugee in the United States. As an acknowledgement of the role he played he was invited to visit Libya in 1954 and was given a huge official reception. He was also appointed as an adviser to the Libyan Embassy in the United States of America.

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against the plan. As the resolution was acceptable to the Latin-American block only if Italy was to get trusteeship over Tripolitania, they withdrew their support for the whole plan which was overwhelmingly defeated by 37 to 14 with 7 absentions.

With the collapse of the attempt to settle the fate of Libya by international bargaining, it became clear that the plans for trusteeship were out and that early Libyan independence was inevitable. The question was now deferred to the next session in October, but the Cyrenaicans, who had lost faith in the United Nations, were not prepared to wait till then. Fortified by the failure of the proposal for trusteeship, the Amir and the National Congress pressed for an immediate transfer of power to their hands. Conscious of their isolation and the need for a powerful friend, they linked this demand with a desire for a treaty with Britain. In the impasse which ensued, my main concern was to avoid any precipitate unilateral declaration of independence which would impair our relations with the local leaders and endanger the measured progress to self-government which was our policy.

Britain was not prepared to go as far as the Amir demanded in recognising Cyrenaican independence and concluding a treaty with her at this stage. Her Majesty's Government was prepared, however, to grant Cyrenaica self-government under the Amir as a first step in preparing for eventual independence and a possible link with the other Libyan territories. Britain insisted that the transfer of authority must be carried out in a gradual and orderly measure and that Britain must continue to exercise her responsibilities until the question of sovereignty was finally decided by the United Nations. The intentions of Britain were no secret. They had been communicated to the United States and approved by them, and everybody in Cyrenaica knew that self-government under the Amir was imminent. In fact, the only dissenting voice came from Egypt, who preferred to regard the matter as a British plot to dismember Libya. Their attitude was, therefore, to oppose it and instructions were given accordingly to their supporters in Benghazi.



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The Amir was meanwhile pressing for an early announcement to satisfy public opinion and it was agreed by Her Majesty's Government that the Chief Administrator might make a prepared statement announcing the grant of limited self-government to the National Congress. On the 1st June 1949, I arrived at the Manar Palace to find a crowd of about 3,000 men assembled outside, chanting in unison their slogan 'Libya wahida' (Libya united). In the Upper Hall of the Palace the Amir and the members of the Congress, 165 of them, were already assembled. The proceedings commenced with a short speech by the Amir saying that he had asked Great Britain and the other powers, including the Arab and Islamic countries, to recognise the independence of Cyrenaica and his assumption of the functions of government. This was received with loud applause both inside and outside the walls of the Palace. When, however, he added that he wished his brothers in Tripolitania to achieve what Cyrenaica had achieved and to unite with Cyrenaica under one leadership, loud cries were heard from members of the Omar Mukhtar group among the crowd outside the Palace. They shouted: 'No independence before unity is achieved: we do not rejoice while Tripolitania is weeping: down with sham independence.' The Amir, though interrupted by the clamour outside the Palace, went on to declare his intention to form a national government and to call a Parliament elected by the people.

In reply, as Chief Administrator, I made the following statement in Arabic:

'The British Government recognise the Amir, the freely chosen leader of his people, as the head of the Cyrenaican Government. They formally recognise the desire of the Cyrenaicans for self-government and will take all steps compatible with their international obligations to promote it. They agree to the formation of a Cyrenaican Government with responsibility over internal affairs. They invite the Amir to visit London for discussion on the matter. Finally, in taking these steps, they wish to emphasise that nothing will be done to prejudice the eventual future of Libya as a whole.'

The statement ended with an expression of friendship and goodwill towards the Amir and the people of Cyrenaica and this

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concluded the proceedings. On leaving the Palace, the Amir was accosted in an unseemly manner by some of the Omar Mukhtar leaders. In reply to their excited protests he said that unity would be achieved by patience and wisdom. He later told me that the disorderly behaviour of the crowd was entirely due to the Omar Mukhtar group, numbering about a hundred, who incited the crowd to shout and insulted the Congress members as they were leaving the meeting and caused them great anger. He also criticised the police for not dealing with the crowd more effectively, but I felt some sympathy with the police, since no one had expected disorder on an occasion which was generally regarded as a great triumph for the Arabs. It was clear that external agencies had been at work on the young hotheads.

Apart from this vociferous but numerically small group, the 1st June announcement was received with widespread approval and the tension caused by the lengthy delays over the country's future was completely dissipated. The National Congress sent a cable to the Tripolitanian leaders assuring them that the Amir would continue to work for the unity of Tripolitania with Cyrenaica. The Tripolitanian National Front on its own initiative sent a deputation to congratulate the Amir and request his support in achieving the unity of the two sister provinces. They invited him to visit Tripoli on the way to his state visit to England. Omar Pasha al Kekhi cabled Turkey and other foreign governments asking for recognition of Cyrenaican independence. The next few weeks were taken up with discussions about the formation of the new government and arrangements for the Amir's visit to London. The Amir decided to designate his future Prime Minister immediately as he wished him to accompany him to London where the necessary steps for implementing the transfer of authority and promulgating a constitution would be discussed. The National Congress would remain in being until the Council of Ministers was appointed.

The Amir insisted that the Senussi family should be entirely excluded from holding office in the government other than diplomatic positions, citing British precedent in support of his contention. In this matter his judgement was clearly sound. Although the senior branch of the family was small, comprising



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the Amir himself, his only brother and four nephews, there were about twenty-five sons and grandsons of the junior branch descended from Sayyid Mohammed al Sherif, and if encouraged to batten on their birth-right, they would in time become a serious liability. The Amir decided that even those members of the Senussi family with distinguished records in the British Administration must be excluded from the new government. The senior members of the family, including some of the ladies, were awarded allowances from the privy purse, while the younger members had to rely on their own efforts to gain a living. This policy was bound to involve the Amir in some odium and to help him enforce it, assistance was given to members of the family to fend for themselves by the allotment of farms and houses at nominal rents and the setting up of commercial enterprises. Among the latter were Sayyid Bil Qasim, a former Libyan Arab Force officer who had held a senior post in the administration: He was awarded the contract for desert scrap. Sayyid Siddiq al Rida, eldest son of Sayyid Mohammed al Rida, the Amir's brother, was allotted the Ceresola Farm tenancy and Sayyid Abdalla al Abid was helped to set up a contracting business. Educational assistance was given to some of the younger members, such as the sons of Sayyid alArabi, who were sent to the Wadi Sayyidna School near Khartoum and the sons of Sayyid Ali al Khattab and Sayyid Safi al Din who were also sent abroad for higher education. As a result of this prudent policy the Senussi family have never become a charge on the exchequer.

The transfer of authority to the Amir was deferred until after the London visit. Meanwhile a Prime-Minister-designate was appointed in the person of Fathia al Kekhia, son of the veteran Cyrenaican notable, Omar Pasha. This curious appointment came as a complete surprise to everyone. The date of 9th July was fixed for the Amir's departure, but earlier an incident of more than local significance occurred.

One day early in July, in the course of a routine call on the Amir, he told me that on the previous evening he heard a tapping on the window. On investigation he found three young men asking to see him urgently. On being admitted, they explained that they were fugitives from Egypt, having been falsely incrimi-

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nated of participating in the assassination of Nokhrashy Pasha.* They had demanded sanctuary, pleading the Islamic obligations to which the Amir had felt bound to accede. They had accordingly been lodged in the Manar Palace. I frankly told the Amir that this action put me in an embarrassing position, since I was still responsible for public security and external relations. He insisted that there was nothing he could do but comply with their demand. On returning to Benghazi, I was informed that two senior Egyptian police officers had arrived by air from Cairo in pursuit of the three men who had been traced to the Cyrenaican border. They had gone straight to Police Headquarters and a search had been started for the wanted men. It seems surprising that no information about the affair had been received from the Egyptian Consulate in the absence of which there was nothing much I could do other than report the matter to Her Majesty's Government. The search was unsuccessful (it could hardly have been otherwise) and the Egyptian police duly returned to Cairo.

Egyptian retaliation for the Amir's action was swift. The next day the Egyptian frontier with Cyrenaica was closed and two prominent Cyrenaicans visiting Egypt were arrested. There followed a demand from the Egyptian Government to the British Government for the extradition of the fugitives. In reply, I could only cite Islamic obligations and leave the British Embassy in Cairo to argue the toss with the Egyptian Government. It was in this way that the Amir's first action after his official recognition brought him into collision with the Egyptian Government. My own instinct was to hand the men over in the interests of public security and relations with Egypt, but the Amir remained adamant and I could hardly order the violation of his private residence. The secretary of the Egyptian Consulate-General, who was accused of complicity with the fugitives, absconded from the Consulate but was arrested by the Benghazi Police. He was charged with theft of Consulate funds and handed over to the Egyptian police at the frontier.

Later on in London I asked to see the Egyptian Ambassador and gave him the facts. I was able to satisfy him that there was no

* All three were members of the Moslem Brotherhood movement.



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motive for the failure to hand over the fugitives other than established Arab custom. I also took the opportunity to urge that the staff of the Egyptian consulate should refrain from provocative behaviour, citing the complicity of members of their staff in local subversive activities. The Ambassador, who had been educated at Oxford, was very understanding.

LONDON AND THE BEGINNING OF SELF-GOVERNMENT FOR CYRENAICA

On 9th July 1949 the Amir left Benghazi by road en route for Tripoli, where he was to embark for Europe. He had never travelled by air and declined to do so on this occasion. After a night stop at Misurata he spent two days at Tripoli in conference with the Tripolitanian leaders, as a result of which he agreed to press three matters on their behalf with the British Government. They were the following:

1. The early establishment of a Tripolitanian government on the same lines as Cyrenaica.
2. Federal Union of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica under the Senussi crown for economics and defence.
3. A combined Libyan delegation to U.N. General Assembly in September 1949.

Recollecting his rough passage to Italy in 1920 the Amir had asked to be conveyed on a large ship by a short sea route. The British government nobly rose to the occasion and sent their newest battleship, H.M.S. Vanguard of 42,000 tons and 20 knots. The party, consisting of the Amir, Ibrahim Shelhi, Fathi al Kekhia (Prime-Minister-Designate) and myself duly embarked on 12th July. We had a delightful voyage, thanks to the kindness of Captain Parham and his officers, and the Mediter-



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ranean was at its calmest. Disembarking at Marseilles on the 14th we were met by the British Consul and taken on a tour of the city, lunching at Hotel Noailles. Taking the night train we reached Paris early the next morning and had a short tour of the city before catching the boat train for London at the Gare du Nord. This was only the Amir's second visit to Europe (his first being to Italy in 1920) and he was delighted with the trip. He was throughout in the best of spirits and full of charm and humour.

In London the Amir was joined by his wife, Amira Fatima al Shifa, who had flown to London accompanied by my wife and her Cyrenaican secretary Sayyid Ahmad Mohi al Din and as lady-in-waiting, Azza, the daughter of Ibrahim Shelhi. The whole party stayed at Claridges Hotel for the two weeks of the visit. The Amir had a meeting with Mr. Bevin, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, at which he raised the Tripolitanian demands and pressed for early transfer of complete powers to the Cyrenaican government. He also asked for the early transfer of Italian property in Cyrenaica to the government and expressed the general wish for a treaty with Britain. This meeting was followed by lunch at Carlton House Terrace at which the Lord Chancellor, Lord Jowitt and the Minister of Defence were also present. On both occasions I acted as interpreter. Bevin's directness and sincerity greatly impressed the Amir. In the course of a visit to the Houses of Parliament he met the Prime Minister, Mr. A. V. Attlee and later called on Sir Winston Churchill, the leader of the Opposition.

The programme included a royal garden party at Buckingham Palace where the Amir and Amira had a short conversation with the King and Queen. There were also visits to Oxford, Cambridge and Eastbourne, all in lovely weather. At Oxford the Amir was entertained to lunch by Professor Hamilton Gibb at St. John's and at Cambridge by the Master of Trinity and Professor Norman Anderson. The Amir had especially requested to be spared large receptions, but the programme included a dinner with Sir Edward Spears at the Ritz where he met Lord Wavell and Sir Harold MacMichael and another with Sir Hubert Huddleston where he met Sayyid Abdul Rahman al Mahdi, the Sudanese leader who was also visiting London. Several meetings

BEGINNING OF CYRENAICAN SELF-GOVERNMENT

were held at the Foreign Office to discuss the stages for the establishment of the new Cyrenaican Government and the form of the Cyrenaican Constitution. These were attended by the Prime Minister designate and myself. It was decided that the transfer of powers should be effected by a proclamation to be made by the Chief Administrator on the Amir's return, after which the new government would formally take office and the Chief Administrator become the British Resident. No particular difficulties arose in the discussions.

The Amir and Amira were both delighted with the visit and their cordial reception. Both were especially charmed with the English countryside, which was at its best, in this exceptionally warm summer. After London the party travelled to Paris and spent two days at Hotel Vendome and then went to Chatelguyon where they spent a month taking the waters, which were reported to be beneficial for liver and internal complaints. On 3rd September the Amir returned from his visit to Europe, having travelled from Marseilles to Algiers by the French steamer 'Ville d'Alger' and thence by road via Tunis and Tripoli. He was not accompanied by the Prime-Minister designate, Fathial Kekhia, of whom nothing had been heard since his visit to London in July. It transpired, however, that after a holiday in France at the Cyrenaican Government's expense he returned to Alexandria to resume his law practice without the courtesy of any explanation.

On 7th September an official reception was held at the Manar Palace to welcome the Amir's return. A salute of nineteen guns was fired and the Amir took the salute at a combined march past of detachments of the British Army and Cyrenaican Defence Force. A large crowd gave him an enthusiastic welcome. On 16th September the Chief Administrator issued the transitional powers proclamation empowering the Amir to enact a constitution and defining its limits and the powers reserved to the Chief Administrator who would henceforward become the British Resident. The Cyrenaican Government was granted powers over all internal matters though on certain legal and financial matters the Resident would be entitled to give advice and have it



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Committee. The date of the opening of the first session was fixed for 25th November 1950.

Working on the assumption that the U.N. resolution meant that Libya was to be a fully united State and that the form of government would be decided by an assembly elected on a basis of population, Mr Pelt soon found that the Cyrenaicans and Fezzanese had quite different ideas. After repeated discussions with the leaders of opinion in these territories he concluded that the only hope of completing his task within the period set by the U.N. resolution lay in accepting the principle of equal representation in the National Assembly which had been set up to carry out the steps towards independence. He also found out that local opinion in Cyrenaica and Fezzan was in favour of a fairly loose federation and was not prepared to cooperate in a fully integrated union. The only principle on which he found unanimity in the three territories was in the choice of Amir Idris as the head of the new State.

When the Commissioner's first annual report was considered by the U.N. political committee at the General Assembly in October 1950 the Arab delegations concentrated their attack on the so-called undemocratic character of the National Assembly and the separatist tendencies of the three component territories of Libya. They accused Britain and France of attempting the dismemberment of Libya, ignoring the fact that all the Commissioner's actions were determined with the Libyans and the respective British and French administrators took no part in their formulation. In his speech to the General Assembly Mr Pelt said that the decision that the National Assembly was to be appointed and not elected was taken very much against his advice and that equality of representation between the three territories had to be adopted as a matter of unavoidable political expediency. Both Cyrenaica and Fezzan had made this equality of representation a *sine qua non* for their participation both in the preparatory committee and in the National Assembly. Neither of these two bodies, he said, could have been formed on any other basis and the first essential step towards Libyan unity would not have been realised. He pointed out that preparations for elections could not be completed until well into 1951, which would have made it

PREPARATIONS FOR INDEPENDENCE

impossible to achieve independence by 31st December 1951, the date set by the U.N. resolution. Nevertheless the Egyptian delegate pressed an amendment demanding elections which failed to secure the necessary two-thirds majority and was accordingly rejected. Mr Pelt pointed out that the progress achieved towards the U.N. resolution was the result of a carefully worked out compromise among the Libyans of the three territories and to upset this might involve the breakdown of the whole principle of Libyan unity. The National Assembly was duly convened in Tripoli on 16th November 1950 and on 2nd December decided that Libya should be a Federal State.

The next step was a resolution that the form of government should be monarchical and that the throne should be offered to Amir Idris of Cyrenaica which was carried with acclamation. The Amir in reply thanked the Assembly for their confidence but asked the Assembly that his proclamation as King should be deferred until the promulgation of the new constitution and the completion of the preparatory steps laid down in the U.N. resolution. The members of the Assembly decided to offer the traditional baya* or oath of allegiance to the King-designate in person. This duly took place on 17th December 1950 when the sixty members came to Benghazi and offered their homage at Al Manar Palace. This was an act of especial significance since according to Islamic tradition the baya once offered cannot be withdrawn. The loyalty of the inhabitants of the three parts of Libya was thus fully pledged to Amir Idris by their lawful representatives appointed under the terms of the United Nations resolution.

* Publisher's appendix number 1.

INDEPENDENCE AT LAST

Throughout the year 1951 preparations for independence proceeded energetically under the vigorous direction of Adrian Pelt who was indefatigable in consulting local opinion – and organising the programme necessary for carrying out the United Nations resolution. The form of the future Libyan State was largely his creation. Working on the generally accepted principles of a Senussi monarchy and a federal government system, he persuaded the doubters that it was on these pillars alone that independence and unity could be erected within the narrow time limits allowed by the United Nations resolution. He came to understand the strength of the political differences and emotional animosities which had divided Cyrenaica and Tripolitania for long periods of their history and particularly during the period of Italian colonisation. He therefore worked unceasingly for a compromise.

The Libyan Constitution was drafted by a committee composed of 18 members of the National Assembly at whose disposal Pelt placed all the legal and technical assistance he was able to provide. This committee appointed a working group of six members, two from each territory, who held ninety-six meetings during the period December 1950 to November 1951. Meanwhile certain steps were taken, in agreement with the

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administering powers, as a preliminary towards the implementation of independence.

In March 1951 local provisional governments were created for Tripolitania and the Fezzan on the same lines as those already existing in Cyrenaica. The next step was to establish a provisional federal government. Mahmud al Muntasir was the head both of the Tripolitanian provincial government and the provisional federal government. Ahmad Saif al Nasr became Chief of the Fezzan Territory. The functions of these governments was to take over the powers progressively transferred from the two administering powers in Libya. The process was completed by the beginning of January 1952.

The working group drafting the constitution, after studying a number of constitutions of federal systems, proceeded with the help of Pelt's legal adviser to draw up the articles concerning the distribution of powers between the federal and provincial governments. It was decided that foreign affairs, national defence, finance, communications, justice, public education and health should be handled by the federal government, residual powers being left to the provinces. The working group then proceeded to prepare the clauses on fundamental rights based on the constitutions of Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Transjordan and the declaration of Human Rights. In turn, the important questions of the King's prerogatives, the Cabinet, the House of Representatives, the Senate and the location of the Capital were discussed and agreed. In all, the draft Constitution consisted of twelve chapters and as each chapter was completed it was forwarded to the Constitutional Committee for approval. No important changes were made by the Committee which held twenty-five meetings.

On 10th September 1951 discussion on the draft constitution began in the National Assembly. Owing to constant pressure by the opposition in Tripoli which impeded progress, the Assembly was moved to Benghazi in October to enable its members to debate the constitution in a quieter atmosphere. With the assistance of Adrian Pelt and the influence of the King-designate exercised informally, the controversial points were gradually hammered out. Two proposals had been advanced for the lo-



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cations of the capital, one that Tripoli and Benghazi should be the two capitals with equal status and the other that the seat of the federal government should normally be in Tripoli. After unofficial consultation with the King and Pelt, the Assembly approved the first proposal. The Constitution was adopted by a resolution of the National Assembly and promulgated on 7th October 1951.

The remaining session of the National Assembly was devoted to the discussion of the electoral law which was adopted unanimously on 6th November 1951. The Assembly's work was now complete but it remained in session until the proclamation of independence. Adrian Pelt paid tribute to its work in his report to the United Nations. In spite of divergent viewpoints the members showed much restraint and worked very hard to complete their work within the allotted period. The stage was now set for the formal proclamation of independence for which the date of 24th December 1951 was set. On 23rd December the last proclamations under British Administration transferring the powers retained by the British Resident to the King were signed in Tripoli and Benghazi.

From early morning on 24th December crowds began to gather outside the Al Manar Palace in Benghazi. This time there were no discordant voices to mar the universal acclamation. It was an historic occasion. In the upper hall of the palace the invited guests assembled. With the King-designate were the Ministers of the provisional Federal government headed by Mahmud al Muntasir. Mr Adrian Pelt, the United Nations Commissioner to whose energy and determination the fulfilment of the U.N. resolution by the required date was mainly due, was a prominent figure. There was a small group of British diplomats headed by the Minister-designate Sir Alec Kirkbride recently transferred from Amman, and the retiring British Resident. There was also a group of leading Libyan notables headed by the Mufti of Tripolitania, Abu al Isad al Alim and Omar Pasha al Kekhia resplendent in frock coat and Osmanli sash and other tribal leaders who had played their part in the resistance to the Italians and the struggle for independence following World War



King Idris announcing the Libyan Independence on 24 December 1951, seen behind him is Prime Minister Mahmoud Al Muntasir.



INDEPENDENCE AT LAST

Two. This day crowned the efforts and sacrifices of forty years. It could rightly be said that Libyan independence was forged in the furnace of war and watered by the blood of Omar Mukhtar and those who fell by his side fighting for freedom in the long war against the Fascists.

When the king-designate entered the gathering all stood up and applauded as he moved slowly to the balcony to proclaim formally the independence of his country to the waiting crowd.

'We joyfully proclaim to the noble people of Libya that in fulfilment of their endeavours and of the United Nations resolution of 21st November 1941, our beloved country has, with the help of God, attained independence. We formally proclaim that Libya, from to-day, become an independent sovereign state and in compliance with the resolution of the Libyan National Assembly of 2nd December 1950 we take to ourselves the title of King of the United Kingdom of Libya. We intend to exercise our powers in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution. It is our duty one and all to preserve what we have gained at so dear a price and to hand it down carefully and faithfully to our posterity.

At this blessed hour we are mindful also of our heroes of the past. We invoke the dew of God's mercy and reward upon the souls of our righteous martyrs and we salute the sacred banner, the legacy of our fathers and the hard-earned symbol of our unity in the hope that the new era which dawns to-day will be for our country an era of well-being and of peace.'

LIBYA UNDER KING IDRIS

From the outset the King, conscious of the weakness of the new State and the dangers which beset it, set about making the best provision possible for maintaining the independence so painfully achieved. Although many observers at the time of independence foresaw little but tribulation or even disaster ahead for a nascent state with an ageing king, a divided population and a pitifully small revenue, for over seventeen years King Idris steered his country with foresight, wisdom, integrity and determination through very stormy seas.

The prime need he saw at the start was for a powerful and trustworthy ally to protect Libya's new-won statehood. In his lifetime he had seen weak nations overrun by more powerful ones while the world stood idly by. Might was still right and little confidence could be placed in the power of the United Nations to protect even her latest-born child. The second need was for financial help to enable Libya to build up a stable economy. For both these needs he turned first to the British in whose political judgement, strength and sense of justice he placed great confidence. Indeed, he had consistently wished for a treaty with Britain ever since 1940 when he had staked everything on her final victory which he had never doubted. The treaty of friendship and alliance between Britain and Libya was negotiated by

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the able first Libyan Prime Minister, Mahmud al Muntasser and the experienced British Ambassador, Alec Kirkbride, whose whole life had been spent among Arabs. King Idris closely guided the proceedings. It was signed on 29th July 1953. The treaty was implemented in a discreet and understanding way and there is no doubt that it was of great advantage to Libya both as a guarantee against outside interference and as a financial support for her minimal resources. The terms of the Treaty were simple and straightforward. It provided for peace and friendship and a close alliance. Each party undertook not to adopt an attitude to a third country inconsistent with the alliance or which might create difficulties for the other party. Each party, whether in war or armed conflict, would come to the aid of the other as a measure of collective defence.

Two separate agreements dealt with financial and military matters. Britain provided a grant-in-aid of £2,750,000 which at the beginning was the only outside support available to balance the Libyan budget and which kept Libya viable for the first difficult years. In return Britain was granted certain facilities for the accommodation and training of military forces and for the use of the airfield at El Adem. After five years the grant-in-aid was raised to £3,250,000 and thereafter further increased in years of special stringency. These payments continued until 1966 when Libya's revenues from oil made them unnecessary. The treaty was for a period of twenty years subject to revision after ten years and renewable by mutual agreement at the end of that period. The British garrisons, never much more than a brigade group in strength, were withdrawn from Tripoli in 1966, and Benghazi in 1967, leaving only a small contingent at Tobruk and at El Adem airfield. There was never a major British base in Libya and the British forces have never been called upon to assist the Libyan security forces nor has Libya been used as a base for operations elsewhere. Neither at the time of the Suez war nor the Arab/Israeli war of 1967 was there any deployment from Libya as was so mendaciously suggested by Cairo radio.*

King Idris, with remarkable consistency and steadfast loyalty to old friends, was a little concerned over the withdrawal of British forces but realised that their continued presence was a

* See footnote on following page.



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matter of controversy and brought some odium from extremist Arab Nationalists both outside and inside the country. He felt that until Libya was strong enough to deter any interference by more powerful neighbours she needed the support of her treaty alliances. While in the first stage of independence it was his policy to rely entirely on Britain for outside support, as time went on King Idris saw the advantage of enlisting the protection of another powerful ally in the shape of the United States. The opportunity for this came in the early fifties when deteriorating relations with Soviet Russia caused the U.S.A. to build up its military power in the Mediterranean. The Mellaha Airfield near Tripoli had, by arrangement with the British, been used by the U.S. Air Force in the Second World War after which the U.S. Government showed no disposition to expand it or even continue its use and the small airfield fell into disuse. The cold war caused the U.S.A. to set up a chain of air bases in the Mediterranean against the Soviet Union and Mellaha with its important strategic position in the central Mediterranean was an obvious choice for inclusion.

The treaty with the British satisfactorily concluded, Mustafa ben Halim, who succeeded Mahmud al Muntasir as Prime Minister in 1954, turned his attention to the American request for a formal agreement on their use of the Mellaha airfield. King Idris, who feared the potentially subversive Soviet influence in Arab countries and was openly pro-Western in his foreign policy, encouraged a favourable response to the American approach. Negotiations were carried out by Ben Halim and Henry S. Villard, the U.S. Ambassador and resulted in an agreement signed in Benghazi in September 1954 which was approved by the Libyan Parliament on 30th October and ratified by the King on the same day. The terms of the agreement gave U.S.A. wide

★ (Mentioned in "From Three Worlds—Memoirs" by William Clark, press secretary at No. 10 from October 1955 to November 1956 (Sidgwick and Jackson, 1986).

"Thursday 9th August

A rather ominously quiet day. At about 5 p.m. the PM blew up over the evening papers which had headlined 'Hitch in air lift to Med'. This is in fact true and due to the Libyans having kicked up rough over our plans for using them as a base (in other words, all the bases we pay so much for are worth nothing to us on the only occasion we might wish to use them). But the PM had been assured by the Minister of Defence that nothing would leak out. Hence the explosion. Then at eight o'clock when I'd gone out to dinner he rang up again, said why hadn't any one told him, etc., etc. It was a peculiar example of hysteria".

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facilities for the development of Mellaha (named by the Americans 'Wheelus Field') including the use of other specific areas, control over entry to them and unrestricted freedom to station U.S. forces for a period of twenty years. The quid pro quo for this generous grant of military facilities took the form of a technical co-operation agreement negotiated by ben Halim in Washington which gave Libya during the first year \$7m. in development assistance and 24,000 tons of grain and subsequently \$4m. annually for six years and \$1m. annually for the next eleven years.

Although the U.S. agreement was important to Libya in securing a powerful friend the main benefits were to the Americans who not only secured a much larger base than anything the British had at a much lower cost but also an important economic foothold which gave American oil companies a virtual monopoly of oil production after the oil discoveries commencing in 1958. There was at the time some opposition to the agreement in the Libyan parliament and some open criticism of the somewhat meagre American financial assistance. Ben Halim coped cleverly with these difficulties but the King was forced to dismiss the veteran statesman Omar Pasha al Kekhia from his post as President of the Senate on account of his public denunciation of the agreement. On the whole however, the agreement has been a strength to Libya and the good relations arising from it have been of value in securing American diplomatic support in other fields and the investment of capital for oil exploration.

It was during Ben Halim's extremely active period of office that problems with Italy, France and entry to the United Nations were also solved. In October 1955, an agreement was concluded which provided that Libya should succeed the Italian Government in the ownership of state property but that private property should be retained by the Italian owners. In the course of time all the private properties in Cyrenaica and most of those in Tripolitania were in fact purchased by Libyans. The agreement also provided for the payment of L1,000,000 for economic reconstruction and L1,750,000 as a credit for the purchase of Italian goods in lieu of compensation for war damage.



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Relations with France was the next and perhaps the trickiest problem Ben Halim had to handle. The French presence in the Fezzan had a psychological as well as a strategic significance for France. The occupation of the Fezzan had been the first independent success of the Free French forces in the war and the territory formed an important link between Tunisia and Algeria and the Chad colony. France had set great store on obtaining a trusteeship over the Fezzan and when this failed in 1949 had abstained from voting on the U.N. resolution for Libyan independence. France found it difficult to relinquish her control over the Fezzan when Libya became independent and negotiations for an agreement had been protracted and difficult. The French proposals appeared to the Libyans to involve the retention of a greater measure of influence in Fezzan than the British sought in Cyrenaica.

By the end of 1954 more liberal views were prevailing in France and in the course of negotiations during 1955 agreement was achieved between Ben Halim and the French Prime Minister. France agreed to evacuate her forces within twelve months and hand over the airfield on condition that Libya employed French civilian technicians for their operation. France also contributed Fr.130,000,000 in 1955 and Fr.350,000,000 in 1956. The treaty also provided for a revision of the Libyan-Algerian frontier in favour of France – an adroit bargain by the French since it resulted in the gain to Algeria of a slice of oil-bearing territory. This concession was unpopular in Libya and Ben Halim incurred some criticism on its account. There was certainly little justification for surrendering territory. The treaty was signed in August 1955 and ratified in April 1956.

A major achievement of Ben Halim's period of office was the admission of Libya to membership of the United Nations, which had been consistently vetoed by the Soviet Union in the period 1952-55. Early in 1955 Libya established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union which paved the way for Libya's admission in December 1955 in a 'package deal' which included sixteen new members. This was a signal success for Ben Halim although the idea of a Soviet Embassy in their midst was disliked by conservative Libyans. In the event it did not cause the growth of

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communist influence since the King made it clear that communist activities would not be tolerated and the Soviet Ambassador promised that this would not take place. This promise has been observed.

No account of Libya under King Idris would be complete without some reference to the personal and political problems arising from the insecure position of the Libyan monarchy and its chance of survival in the long term. The choice by the Libyan people of a monarchical system had been due to the differences between the inhabitants of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan on the form of government of the new Libyan State. For the Cyrenaicans the choice of Sayyid Idris as hereditary ruler was overwhelming but was by no means as unanimous among the Tripolitarians who were the most numerous and politically-minded element in the new State. They accepted the monarchy as a compromise without which agreement in the limited time available could not have been reached. They were more suspicious of monarchies as colonial devices designed to support backstairs foreign influence. The overthrow of the monarchy in Egypt and the campaign for Arab nationalism fostered assiduously by Cairo Radio were both inimical to the Libyan set-up.

King Idris himself was very aware of the dangers which threatened the existence of the monarchy. One of the main problems was the issue of succession: Although Idris himself enjoyed universal respect, the Senussi family did not share in his prestige. The heir-apparent, his brother Mohammed al Rida, was not only an old and ailing man but lacked the qualities and prestige necessary for the position. Aware of the growing unpopularity of monarchies among Arab nationalities and finding the burden of kingship intolerable, Idris tried to get rid of his unwanted crown by seeking to change the constitution from a monarchical to a republican one. He instructed Prime Minister Ben Halim to prepare a plan to effect this change. Ben Halim's proposals were for the replacement of the monarchy by a presidential system on the American model as well as for the federal system to be changed to a unitary one on account of its heavy cost. The king then called upon his old friend the U.N. Commissioner, Adrian Pelt, for assistance. In January 1955 meetings were held in To-

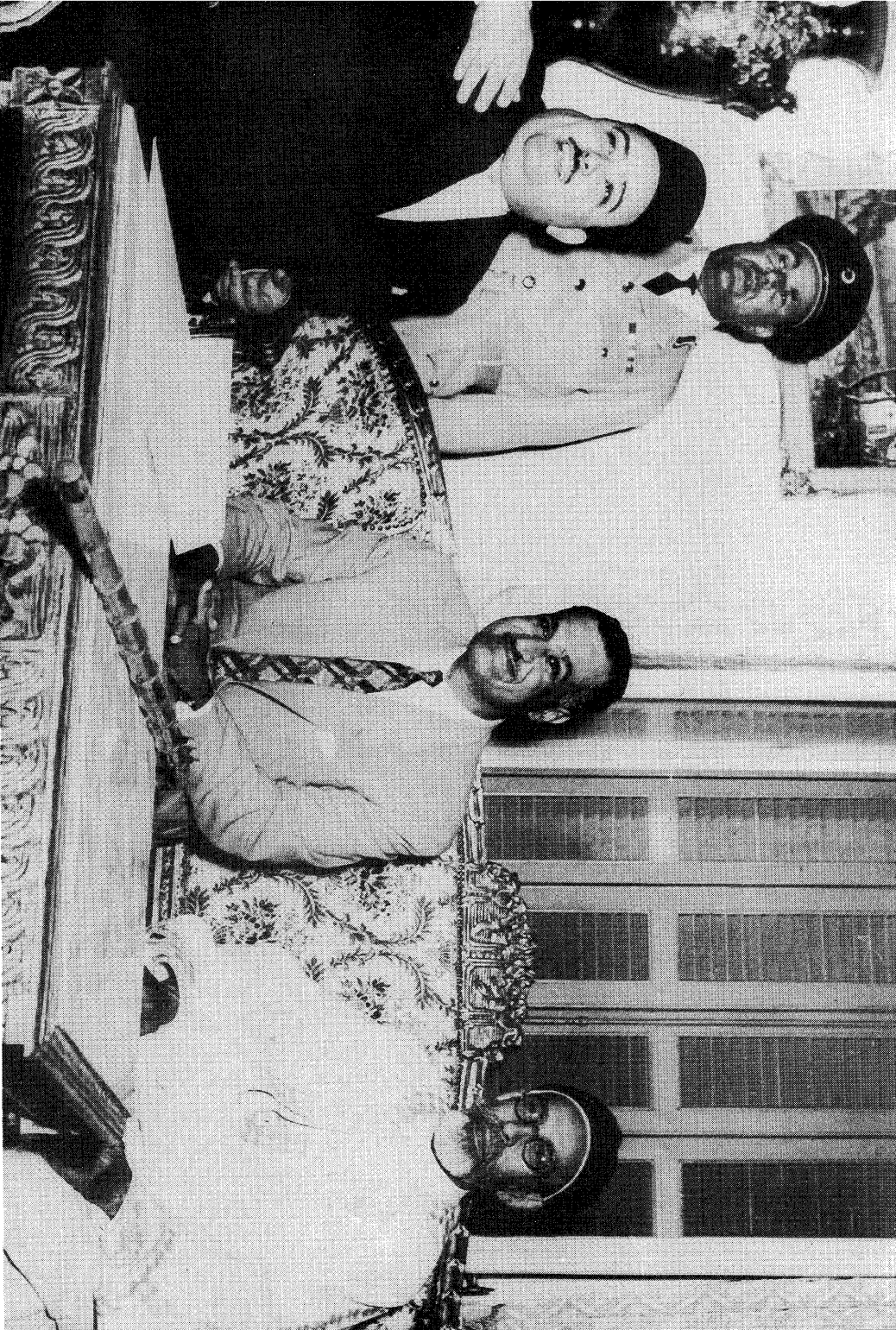


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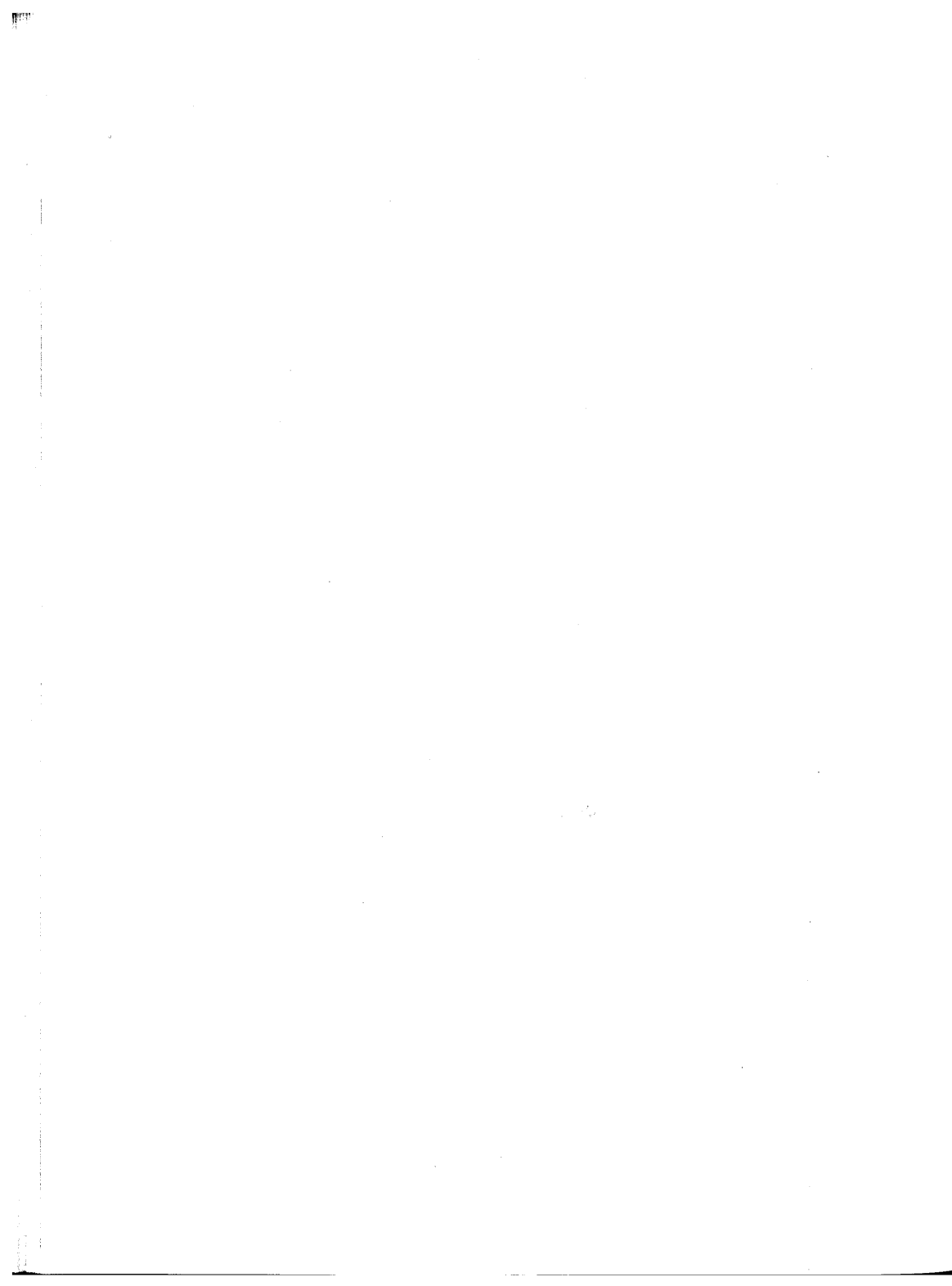
bruk presided over by the king with Pelt, Busiri Shelhi (who had succeeded his father as Palace Minister) Hussain Mazik, Governor of Cyrenaica, and Abdul Salam Busiri, head of the Royal Diwan, attending. Mr Pelt, no doubt recollecting the decisive part played by Idris in securing the implementation of the United Nations' resolution for Libyan independence, was strongly in favour of preserving the monarchy and his influence, with all the weight of the U.N. behind him, won the day. This was only the first of several attempts by Idris to give up his throne and it should be understood that he was always a reluctant monarch.* Each time he attempted to do so, he was thwarted by the intransigence of his advisers, particularly the Cyrenaicans, who feared Tripolitanian supremacy would follow the disappearance of the monarchy. The attitude towards the monarchy and the federal system revealed the divergence of opinion in the three component territories. The Cyrenaicans were deeply attached to the King and the federal principle whereas the Tripolitani-ans and the Fezzanese felt no particular loyalty to the Senussi regime and preferred a unitary system. It was evident that in the event of a crisis the King could rely only on the Cyrenaicans.

The question of the succession was still unsolved. Mr Pelt suggested the adoption of a son to be appointed heir-apparent in due course but the King was not in favour of this because of the jealousies it would certainly arouse among his family. He was finally induced with reluctance to agree to contract a second marriage with the sole object of begetting a son and heir, which was of course quite permissible in Islamic law. The lady chosen was Aliya, the daughter of a faithful Senussi supporter, the Egyptian land-owner, Abdul Qader Pasha Lamlum. The marriage took place in Cairo on 30th June 1955. Pictures in the Cairo newspapers at the time showed Idris as a melancholy white-bearded figure shaking hands with President Nasser who was the principal witness. His age was stated to be 65 and that of the bride, a solemn full-faced lady, as 38. Hardly a month after this Mohammed al Rida, the heir-apparent, died and the question of the succession became all the more pressing. The king returned

* Sidi Idris reluctantly accepted the throne when he saw that it was necessary for the attainment of Independence. He relinquished it when he felt that such an act would serve the stability of the country.



King Idris, President Nasser and the Libyan Prime Minister Ben Halim at the Libyan Embassy in Cairo on the wedding day of King Idris to Aliya, daughter of Abdul Qader Pasha Lamllum.



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to Libya with his new wife and took up residence at Baida, while his other wife, Fatima al Shifa, was told by Busiri Shelhi to leave the king's house at Tobruk but refused to do so since she had not been divorced. The new marriage was not a success. After a few months the king suggested that she should take a holiday in Egypt and thankfully returned to Fatima to whom he was deeply devoted. Later that year the succession was settled by the appointment of Hassan al Rida, the king's nephew and third son of the late Mohammed al Rida. The new heir-apparent was a pious but ineffectual young man of 28 who had been educated at Al Azhar, the Islamic university in Cairo. The king did little to prepare him for his royal position and he never achieved any popular support.

The political honeymoon with Egypt fostered so assiduously by Ben Halim did not last much longer than that of the king's unsuccessful marriage. The friendly relations noticeable in 1955 were rudely shattered the following year by events quite outside Libyan control. In July 1956 President Nasser suddenly nationalised the Suez Canal, an action which shocked the Western countries who were its principal users – particularly Britain to whom it had great strategic importance and France who had provided the administration to operate it since its construction. In the Arab world Nasser's bold defiance of Egypt's former masters was greeted with tremendous enthusiasm especially by the younger Arab generation. Overnight his picture appeared in every shop window and on every car windscreen and cheering students acclaimed their hero in every Arab city. To the British government and public this arbitrary action came as a great shock stirring up a wave of popular resentment more intense than anything that had happened since the 1939/45 war. That the Suez Canal should fall under hostile control was unthinkable and the violence of the government's reaction undoubtedly represented public opinion. A strong case was however spoiled by inept handling; immediate British or French retaliation might have met with understanding and even some support but the results of the attack on Egypt when it came were disastrous. Nothing could have been more calculated to inflame Arab passions than



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collusion with France and Israel and to embark on this kind of punitive expedition against world opposition was imprudent beyond comprehension. British political and economic interests were placed in great jeopardy without any clear-sighted appreciation of the dangers involved and the ends to be achieved. So far from bringing about the downfall of Nasser and the restoration of the canal to its shareholders, the ignominious outcome immeasurably strengthened his position and caused severe financial loss to the unsuccessful participants. It also quickly brought about the liquidation of most of the remaining British influence in the Arab world.

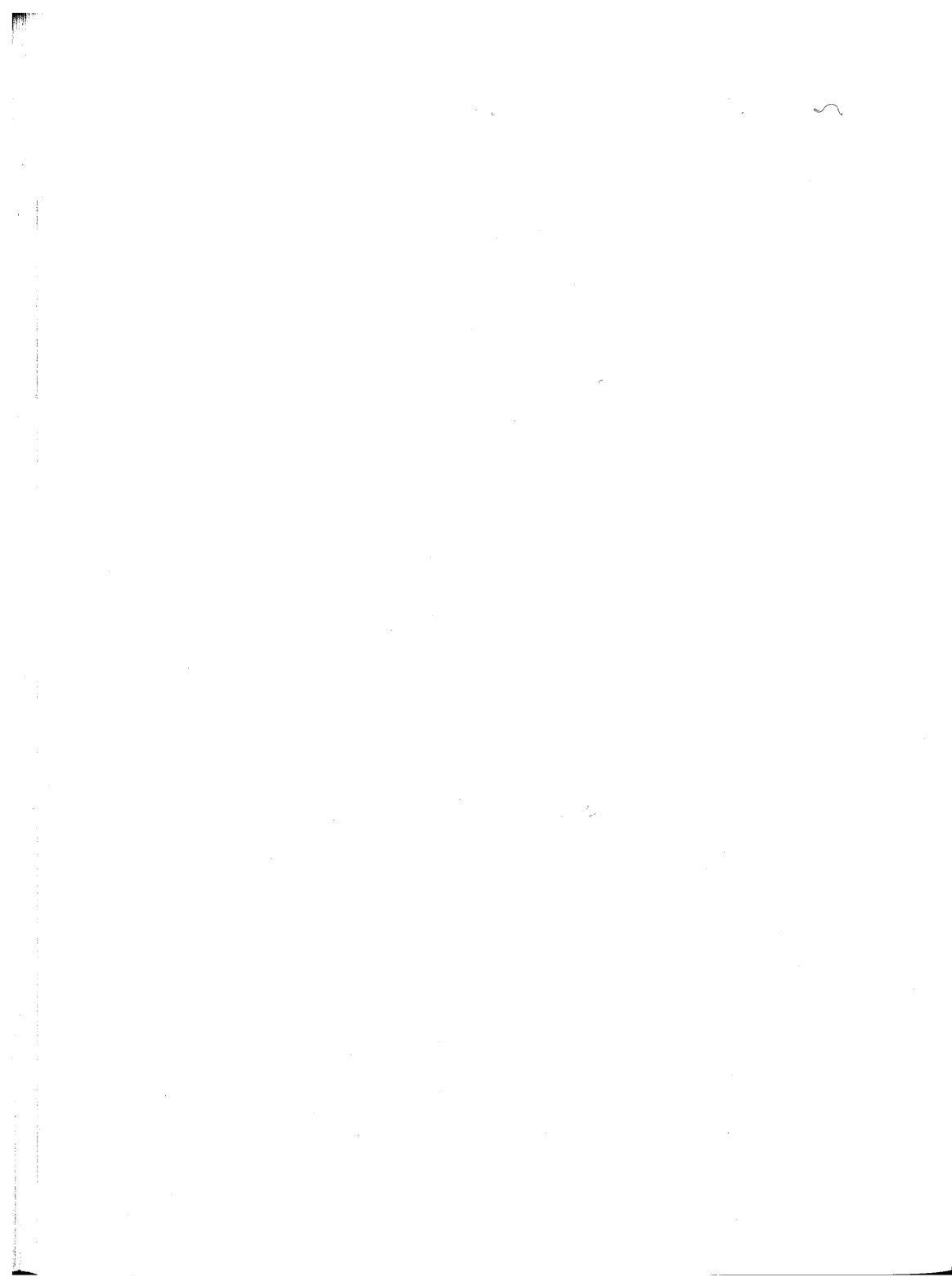
In no Arab country were the effects of Suez more harmful than in Libya where as a British ally the Government became an immediate target of Egyptian wrath. A torrent of unpleasant and false propaganda by Cairo radio alleging British attacks on Suez by British forces operating from Libyan bases caused a degree of unrest in Tripoli and Benghazi which the Government had difficulty in controlling. In fact the Libyan Government had taken immediate steps to ensure that British forces in Libya took no part in the Suez operations and the Egyptian Ambassador had been duly informed but it made no difference. At this juncture, the unbridled actions of Egyptian local staff outraged all the accepted canons of international behaviour. Everything short of armed invasion was done to intimidate the Libyan authorities into breaking off relations with Britain and into attacking the British bases. The Egyptian military attaché (from his office in the Egyptian embassy in Tripoli) distributed arms and ammunition to subversive elements for use against British soldiers and installations. Prime Minister Ben Halim handled this crisis with courage and skill. When he heard of this action he asked the Ambassador to send the attaché back to Egypt but the Ambassador pleaded that the attaché was under the orders of the Ministry of Defence and asked for a note. Soon after the note was delivered the attaché was recalled and President Nasser apologised to King Idris. But the harm had been done as the young men had been misled into believing that their leaders were traitors to the Arab cause.

The Suez war and its aftermath destroyed Ben Halim's efforts



His Royal Highness Sayyid Al Hassan Al Rida Assanusi, heir to the throne.

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for a closer relation with Egypt which was impossible to sustain in face of the antagonism aroused by the British attack. His resignation was due, however, to difficulties with the Royal Diwan typical of the jealousies which marred the stability so necessary to the young state. Much credit is due to Ben Halim for managing to reconcile Libya's total dependence on the West with growing Arab nationalism.

The Fourth Libyan Prime Minister was Abd al Majid Kubar, a Tripolitanian noted as a mediator, who had been speaker of the House of Representatives continuously since 1952 (except for two short terms in Ben Halim's cabinet). His first concern was to ensure the continuation of the vital foreign aid by making new agreements with the British and U.S. governments for annual grants of £3¹/₄ million and \$5¹/₂ million for five years and an economic co-operation agreement with West Germany which was followed by a long term loan of £5 million for agricultural and industrial development. At the same time he refused to allow his country to become beholden to the Soviets who were attempting to secure a footing in Libya by offering financial and medical assistance.

The revolution in Baghdad in July 1958 presented Kubar with a serious problem. The brutal murder of the young king and the royal family shocked the world and deeply grieved King Idris who ordered a period of mourning and refused at first to recognise the new government in Iraq. Public opinion in Libya supported the Egyptian approval of the revolution as a victory for Arab unity and Kubar persuaded the king to recognise the new regime on condition that the previous ambassador was retained. The Egypt-Iraq honeymoon did not last long and Nasser soon fell out with Abd al Karim Kassem on account of his aggressive attitude towards his Arab neighbours as well as his vindictive behaviour at home.

The cause of Kubar's fall in 1960 was the local storm over the contract for the Fezzan road^{*} awarded by Kubar, in 1958, to a firm whose head was Sayyid Abdalla al Abid, a member of the Senussi family. This led to criticism that the contract had been secured by personal influence and the contract price subsequently much increased. When the matter came to the king's notice he issued a

★ See footnote on following page.



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letter denouncing corruption and nepotism which encouraged the Prime Minister's opponents to mount an attack in Parliament with a vote of no-confidence which obliged Kubar to resign. His overthrow was unjustified since al Abid's firm was the only Libyan one capable of carrying out a difficult project of this kind and the price was not excessive as the subsequent parliamentary enquiry proved.

Kubar's successor was Mohammed bin Osman, a self-made man who had, since independence, been prominent as a leading Fezzan political representative. His main role was to give more effective publicity to the government's achievements. He toured the country giving public addresses and to enlighten the people in the efforts being made for social welfare. He tried to dispel the widespread belief that the foreign business firms attracted to Libya by oil discoveries (which began in 1955) were only interested in exploiting the country's resources to their own advantage. In fact it was impossible to develop the oil resources without the aid of foreign capital and expertise. Furthermore the Petroleum Law enacted in 1955 was a far more enlightened one than prevailed in other Middle East countries. It ensured a comprehensive exploration of the country's oil resources while at the same time protecting it from monopolistic exploitation. Unlike

★ A detailed account can be found in Maged Kaduri's book— "Modern Libya" (John Hopkins, 1963).

★★ This letter dated 13 July 1960 was published in all the national newspapers and a translation of it can be found in "Modern Libya" by Maged Kaduri and is quoted below.

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful:

This is an announcement to the people by virtue of which they would be admonished.

To the Head of the federal government, the Ministers, the Deputy Ministers, and all those responsible (in the federal government); to the Wali of Tripolitania, the wali of Cyrenaica, and the wali of Fazzan; to their Nazirs, Directors, Mutasarrifs and all those who are responsible (in the provinces).

Matters have come to a climax, as have deafening reports of the misconduct of responsible state personnel in taking bribes— in secret and in public— and in practicing nepotism— the two (evils) which will destroy the very existence of the state and its good reputation both at home and abroad, as well as the squandering of the (country's) wealth in secret and in public. (God), the Blessed and Most High, said:

"Do not consume your wealth amongst yourselves in vain and do not dangle it before the judges that you may sinfully and knowingly consume a part of the wealth of the people" (Qur'an, II, 184).

And the Prophet, God's blessing and peace be upon him, said in a Tradition of his:

"You shall command good and forbid evil, otherwise (God) will let those of you who are evil-doers dominate you, so that those of you who are good shall pray for you, but they will not be answered."

The Prophet also said in a Tradition of his:

"He of you who will see a wrong, he should correct it with his hand; if he cannot do so, then with his tongue; if he cannot do so thus, then by his heart— the latter is the weakest in degree of faith."

I, by God's blessing and His might, shall (try to) correct (evil) with my hand, God willing. I shall not be deterred from carrying out God's command to re-establish the good reputation of my country. Salutation.

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other countries Libya did not surrender concessions to one company or a group consortium of companies but divided the whole country in to small concession areas and regulated the granting of concessions, the terms, rents and relinquishment arrangements. It decreed that government revenue was to be 50 per cent of the income from company operations after deduction of operating costs. The result was that from 1955 to 1958 55% of the land area was allotted to fourteen international oil companies who carried out the necessary exploration with great speed and efficiency. This also involved heavy capital expenditure since local supplies and technical skill were non-existent and everything required had to be imported through the few undeveloped ports and into remote places without roads, water or food.

For the first four years exploration continued without success although in 1958 some drilling by Esso in their Zelten concession began to give promising results. Zelten was the first big find and by the end of 1959 six major oilfields were found in Syrta. In 1960 an oil shipment terminal was constructed at Mersa Brega on the gulf of Syrta and by August 1961 shipment commenced. In October the Brega terminal was officially opened by King Idris. Between October 1961 and the spring of 1968 the major Libyan oil terminals were opened and Libyan oil production had risen from 6.7 million barrels in 1961 to 916.6 million barrels in 1968. The reason for the rapid increase in oil production was the country's proximity to the large and rapidly growing oil markets of western Europe but the government's policy – of multiplying small concessions thereby attracting a large number of oil companies played an important part. Libya was fortunate in not being affected by the periodic instability in the Middle East involving the closing of the Suez Canal and the diversion of oil tanker traffic from the Persian Gulf to the longer route round the Cape. Libyan oil goes almost entirely to Europe, principally Western Germany who takes about 30%.

In foreign affairs Bin Osman's policy was mainly one of sustaining good relations with the western powers as well as Egypt and the Maghrib. Lukewarm support was given to the plan for unity with Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia in 1961 which soon fizzled out. Following the King's views, Libya kept out of



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Arab polemics and disputes and took little part in Arab councils although the Libyans in general were admirers of President Nasser and avidly listened to the Voice of the Arabs on Cairo Radio.

In 1963 Muhyieddin Fikini, an able young lawyer of a Tripolitanian family married to the daughter of Mansur Gadara, the former Minister of Finance, succeeded Bin Osman as Prime Minister. Belonging to the new generation of university trained Libyans, he had served as Ambassador in Washington where he had been a great success. An able and progressive man, he turned his attention to the replacement of the federal system with full unity. In this he was undoubtedly sensible, since a unitary State would clearly be stronger than a federation with its provincial rivalries and disintegrating potentialities. Federation was, furthermore, an expensive and inefficient arrangement, involving the upkeep of four governments instead of one. A constitutional law was duly passed on 27th April 1963 abolishing the provincial councils and transferring their executive authority to the Council of Ministers. Libya became a unitary State divided into ten administrative areas. Women were given the vote – an enlightened step well in advance of some other parts of the Arab world. It was a sign of strengthening unity that these constitutional changes met with little opposition in Cyrenaica, although there was some muttering among the diehards who remembered the Cyrenaican insistence on their local autonomy in 1950-51. The problem of the Libyan capital remained unsettled. Tripoli and Benghazi were joint capitals and the position had been complicated further by the establishment of a summer capital at Baida in the Jebel al Akhdar. Considerable expenditure had been incurred on government offices, houses and services and an imposing House of Parliament with seats in a vast domed roof. Communication with Baida was difficult – by road 700 miles from Tripoli and 150 miles from Benghazi and no airport. Many people regarded the summer capital as unnecessary and extravagant and thought the place should be turned to some more suitable use, such as a University. It was particularly disliked by government staff on for its remoteness.

In his foreign policy Fikini, like Ben Halim before him,

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favoured reaching an understanding with U.A.R. and Algeria. With the latter he made a pact in August 1963. He also raised the question of the Franco-Libyan agreement of 1955, under which France still retained military facilities including airfields and radio stations in south-west Libya, manned by French personnel albeit not in uniform. He argued that the recently acquired independence of Libya's southern neighbours, Niger and Chad, rendered the need for this communication obsolete, but he was unsuccessful in persuading the French to withdraw completely as long as British forces remained in the coastal area.

The cause of Fikini's downfall was the perennial one of U.A.R. interference. In January 1964 King Idris was unable for reasons of health to attend the Arab Summit Conference in Cairo and it was announced that the Crown Prince and Fikini would attend in his stead. An outbreak of student demonstrations in favour of President Nasser which occurred at this time was attributed by many Libyans to Egyptian instigation. The King was in Tripoli at the time and the demonstrators gathered outside the Palace shouting slogans in praise of Nasser and hostile to King Idris. There were clashes with the police and several students were injured. It was considered that the Prime Minister did not handle this serious threat to public security with sufficient firmness – indeed some of his utterances appeared to indicate subservience to U.A.R.

On 22nd January Fikini resigned and was replaced by Mahmud al Muntasser, the first Prime Minister. Egyptian propaganda chose to regard this change as signifying the intention to perpetuate the Anglo-Libyan treaty which was due for revision in 1964. There was a spate of radio propaganda denouncing Muntasser as a tool of the British. In his speech on Unity Day on 22nd February President Nasser called for the liquidation of foreign bases in Libya as a threat to U.A.R. and the Arab cause in general, on the grounds that they were designed to support Israel. Cairo radio falsely alleged that the bases had been used against the Egyptians in the Anglo-French invasion of the Suez Canal in 1956. This campaign continued with typical misrepresentations through February and March, in spite of the Libyan Government's assurances that the treaty specifically excluded the use of the Anglo-American bases for aggression against any Arab



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country.

In March the King moved to Baida for the new Parliamentary session. On 16th March the small group of pro-Nasser deputies demanded the abrogation of the treaties and the liquidation of the bases – a resolution which, in recognition of the prevailing state of public opinion, the Government did not feel strong enough to reject, and no voice was raised against it. The Prime Minister made a statement on 19th March promising that the Government would demand the termination of the treaties and set a time for the withdrawal of Anglo-American forces. The timing of this statement seems to have been unfortunate, since following so quickly after Nasser's speech it appeared to be surrendering to outside dictation. It would seem in the light of what followed that the terms of the statement went further than the King approved.

Whatever the exact facts, the King was extremely upset over the parliamentary resolution and the Prime Minister's statement, which he felt constituted an abject surrender to Egyptian intimidation.

The King wrote a letter of resignation to the Prime Minister, stating that he felt that he was too old to continue and had better give way to some other regime. He then retired to his private home at Tobruk. It seems that the King's action was prompted by a feeling that popular support might no longer be behind him over the maintenance of the agreements with Britain and the U.S.A., the pillars of his foreign policy. There was no element of bluff about this: King Idris has never set much store by kingship and would have at any time relinquished his crown if he thought that his country's interests would be best served by doing so.

The reaction to these events was sharp and immediate. As soon as his resignation became known thousands of loyal people flocked to Tobruk where large crowds appeared before the Palace to demonstrate their loyalty and affection and demand the withdrawal of his resignation. Inevitably this was mainly a Cyrenaican demonstration since distance alone did not permit the participation of the Tripolitanians. This manifestation of popular support gave the old man (he was 74) courage to carry on and he tore up his letter of resignation. On the question of foreign bases

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the King did nothing to repudiate the parliamentary resolution but left the matter for his government to negotiate with Britain and the U.S.A. The British Government, welcoming opportunities to cut down on overseas military expenditure, was responsive to the Libyan request for dates to be fixed for the evacuation of its forces. Agreement was reached for the withdrawal from Tripolitania to be carried out by 31 March 1966 and from Benghazi by the same date in 1967. The future of the small garrison in Tobruk and the Al Adem airfield were left for future consideration.

The parliamentary resolution had embraced the American agreement as well as the British – Wheelus Field being the only place involved. The U.S. Government was at first faced with an unequivocal demand for early evacuation of Wheelus, which she rightly refused as incompatible with the terms of the agreement which she had scrupulously observed. As time went on the pressure relaxed and in the end the Libyans accepted the American proposals that Wheelus should remain in their occupation for the duration of the agreement, which only had some five years to run. The attitude of King Idris over this delicate question was shrewd and statesmanlike. While accepting the parliament's resolution as an expression of the national will he made it clear that he regarded it as a vote of no-confidence in his policy. When he was confronted with an overwhelming and irresistible expression of confidence he withdrew his resignation but did nothing to divert his Government's decision from taking its constitutional course. He showed no displeasure at his Government's behaviour and when Prime Minister Muntasser resigned in the summer of 1965 it was solely on account of ill-health. The King showed his appreciation of his eminent services by appointing him head of the Royal Diwan in Tobruk.

The task of conducting the negotiations with the British and Americans fell mainly on Hussain Mazik, the new Prime Minister, a younger man who was to show considerable skill in his handling of this and other delicate negotiations which faced him. One might conclude that the King's part in the matter was to advise caution and discretion in view of Libya's vulnerability to unfriendly influences on her eastern and western flanks. The



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presence of British forces at the eastern and American forces at the western end might be expected to constitute a deterrent at any rate to external aggression but it did not cater for internal subversion.

When the six-day war between Egypt and Israel broke out on 5th June 1967 Libya suffered similar repercussions which had caused the government so much trouble in the Suez war of 1956. The overwhelming defeat of the Egyptian forces by the Israelis was blamed by Cairo Radio on the U.S.A. and Britain and the presence of their bases made Libya an easy target. There were big demonstrations in Tripoli and Benghazi, Jewish property was burned and oil workers refused to load tankers. It was reported that workers had been encouraged to destroy British and American installations. Fearing that the country was on the verge of revolt, prominent members of the Government and Royal Diwan were rumoured to have slipped away to Italy. For some days British and American lives were in danger, embassies were attacked and families advised to leave. The situation remained tense for some weeks and it was apparent that the influence of Cairo Radio had succeeded in undermining the traditional loyalty of the inhabitants to the Senussi regime. It seemed that the benevolent rule of the peaceloving and ageing King was not enough to resist the subversive influences which had been let loose by the hatred engendered by Arab defeat at the hands of Israel.

The immediate crisis was overcome by the appointment of a new government under a senior Cyrenaican named Abd el Qader Bedri who made up for his lack of education by a reputation for toughness and he proceeded to bring some of the trouble makers to trial.

This account has dealt mainly with King Idris's personal and political problems and it has not been possible to include much description of the country's social and economic development during its twenty years of independence. At the beginning Libya was probably the poorest country in the world with the lowest per capita income, depending for its existence on subsidies from Britain. There were no rich people and, with half a dozen exceptions, no-one was even moderately prosperous. Brought up in

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conditions of great austerity, the King remained frugal in his habits throughout his life. At the time of independence the King's privy purse amounted to £14,000 per annum and he continued to live simply in his modest bungalow outside Benghazi. The example of austerity set by the throne was reflected in the life of the people, especially in Cyrenaica where even in the towns poverty prevailed. I shall always remember the shabby suits and worn shirts and shoes of the Cyrenaican Ministers when they held their first Cabinet meeting in September 1949. There were few proper houses outside Benghazi and most of the Cyrenaicans lived in tents or shanties made of flattened oil drums. Doors and windows were makeshift and there was no heating in the winter. On my calls on the Amir in those winter mornings in 1950, I would find him huddled over a charcoal brazier in his sparsely furnished two-bedroom house at Al Ghadir. It was there that we met to discuss affairs of state before he went to the Manar Palace for his official duties, sitting over coffee served by Ibrahim Shelhi while the Amira, swathed in the voluminous garments of the Libyan ladies, perched unhappily on an ornate but rickety fauteuil. Another memory is of a picnic lunch on the forbidding stony plateau overlooking Tobruk where the King and his wife showed us with pride the narrow two-roomed mud walled house they had just built in 1961 for their private residence.

The discovery of oil in 1958 revolutionised the Libyan economy in much the same way as it had transformed the economy of Kuwait and some other fortunate Arab countries several years earlier. The King, himself always completely removed from financial and commercial affairs, left negotiations with the oil Companies and the administration of the resultant revenues to the Ministers and their advisers of whom Mr Pitt-Hardacre, formerly of the British Administration in Tripoli, and Nadim Pachachi, former Iraq Minister of Petroleum, were the principal ones. Mr A. Hogenhuis, a former Dutch employee of Shell, was the first Director of Petroleum Affairs. Before oil revenues started coming in, the exiguous agriculture was the mainstay of the country's economy but more than half of the country's revenue came from external aid. This amounted respectively to



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£10 million in 1956, £7.46 million in 1957 and £9.37 million in 1958. The budget for 1959/60 was approved at £13.38 million of which about half came from external aid of which British supplied the main part.

For oil purposes the country was divided up into a large number of comparatively small concessions thus encouraging the participation of the maximum number of oil companies. By the end of 1959 there were 18 oil companies operating 77 concessions covering an area of 1 million square kilometres or 65% of the total area of the country. By the end of 1959 some 90 exploratory wells had been drilled or were in process of being drilled and of these 15 had found oil. The first strikes were in Fezzan near the Algerian border but the most important one was in April 1959 by Esso Standard (Libya) Inc. at Bir Zelten, 150 miles inland from the Gulf of Sirte. On test, the field showed a production rate of 17,500 barrels a day, at a depth of 5,500 feet. Other discoveries followed in the Sirte Basin and in the Gialo area in the course of the next few years.

Even before oil revenues started flowing the expenditure of the oil companies on exploration began to have a profound effect on the country's economy. Beginning in 1956 at \$4.5 million it totalled £13.5 million in 1957, £24 million in 1959 and £30 million in 1959. By the end of 1958 6,400 persons of whom 4,600 were Libyans were directly employed by the oil companies and many more indirectly by contractors and suppliers for the companies. Starting at £11 million in 1952/53 the central revenues had risen to £64 million by 1962/3 and by 1967/8 to £226 million of which £170 million came from petroleum royalties. In order to make the best use of this vastly increased income the government called in the World Bank in 1960 to survey the country's economic situation and make recommendations. A Development Council was formed which drew up a Five Year Development Plan (1963-1969) providing for the expenditure of \$473,658 under eleven heads of which Public Works, Agriculture and Education were the largest. This plan was based on 70% of the oil revenues and as these continued to increase so the amount spent on developments went up.

One of the major developments carried out under this pro-

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gramme was the Idris Housing Scheme which aimed at replacing the shanty towns on the fringe of the urban areas in which some 20% of the population lived by decent modern houses with water, electricity and drainage services. One of the places which benefitted particularly from this project was war-torn Tobruk which not only had a large area rebuilt but also a fine housing estate as a gift to the town from B.P. who built their oil terminal there. Educational development benefitted immensely from this programme including schemes for a spacious modern University on the south side of Benghazi, new primary schools in all towns and villages and a fine Technical College outside Tobruk. In the field of Public Works was the construction of new Power Stations in Tripoli and Benghazi and the construction of double-track motor ways along most of the 1200 mile-long coast road linking the Tunisian and the Egyptian frontiers. A second Five-Year Plan (1969-1974) also based on the allocation of 70% of oil revenues to development purposes appears to be defunct. It seems that the revolutionary government is substituting military for economic and social development. Ever since 1967 Libya had contributed generously to the Egyptian exchequer. In 1971 she cut off similar aid to Jordan and instead subsidised the Palestinian guerilla organisations.

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The history of Libya in the last few years of King Idris' reign is one of increasing political instability and governmental vacillation due both to a lack of firm control and external pressures. As the king grew older he became too tired to cope with the problems created by the great access of wealth which followed the discovery of oil. Not a royalist himself, he had little long term confidence in a hereditary monarchy and sought on several occasions to retire in favour of a republican system which he considered would be more in keeping with the times. It was a pity that having selected a successor in the person of his nephew Crown Prince Hassan al Rida, he did so little to prepare him for his responsibilities: The uncertainty of the succession was a factor which contributed to instability. Another demoralising factor was the frequent changes of government. Prime Minister followed Prime Minister with bewildering rapidity – in the last five years there were no fewer than five changes.

Rumours of ministerial corruption were widespread and this was both the cause and the effect of the frequent cabinet changes. Some ministers and senior officials, feeling that their tenure of office would be brief, made hay while the sun shone though probably none became very rich. In Libya, unlike most oil-rich

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countries, the number of millionaires could be counted on one hand and they were merchants who had worked hard to build up their businesses. In other Arab countries members of the royal family took advantage of their connections to enrich themselves but this did not happen in Libya (except in one case) to the best of my knowledge.

The ground was prepared for the Libyan revolution by the disorders which took place at the time of the 1967 Arab/Israeli war, disorders initiated in very large part by Cairo Radio exciting mob passions and students demonstrations. It would be only fair to say that the sympathies of many of the younger Libyans, particularly in Tripolitania, lay with the spread of Arab nationalism propagated by President Nasser who had, as we have seen, adopted a violent anti-British attitude ever since the British attacks after the nationalisation of the Suez Canal in 1956. In that sense, the Libyan revolution was among the many disasters brought about by the mistaken policy of the British government at that time.

For some time the King had been preparing to give up his throne and on August 4th, while in Greece, before going to Borsa for medical treatment, had signed his abdication and entrusted it to Abd el Hamid Abbar who was supposed to deliver it to the Libyan Parliament on September 2nd* The King and his wife then proceeded to Borsa intending to return to Tobruk in September to live there in retirement. The signature of the deed of abdication became known to the revolutionary plotters who had now to act quickly as the announcements of the abdication would have upset their plan to portray their movement as a popular revolution, having as its main purpose the deposition of a reactionary and oppressive monarch. It was essential to act before the 2nd September. The coup d'état was planned and carried out with a consummate degree of secrecy and skill which made it difficult to believe that subversive experts were not responsible for its planning. The date chosen was the night of 31st August, (a British Bank holiday even for the British garrison at Tobruk). Commencing at midnight, the young officers moved out of barracks in armoured cars and seized key points in

* Publisher's appendix number 4.



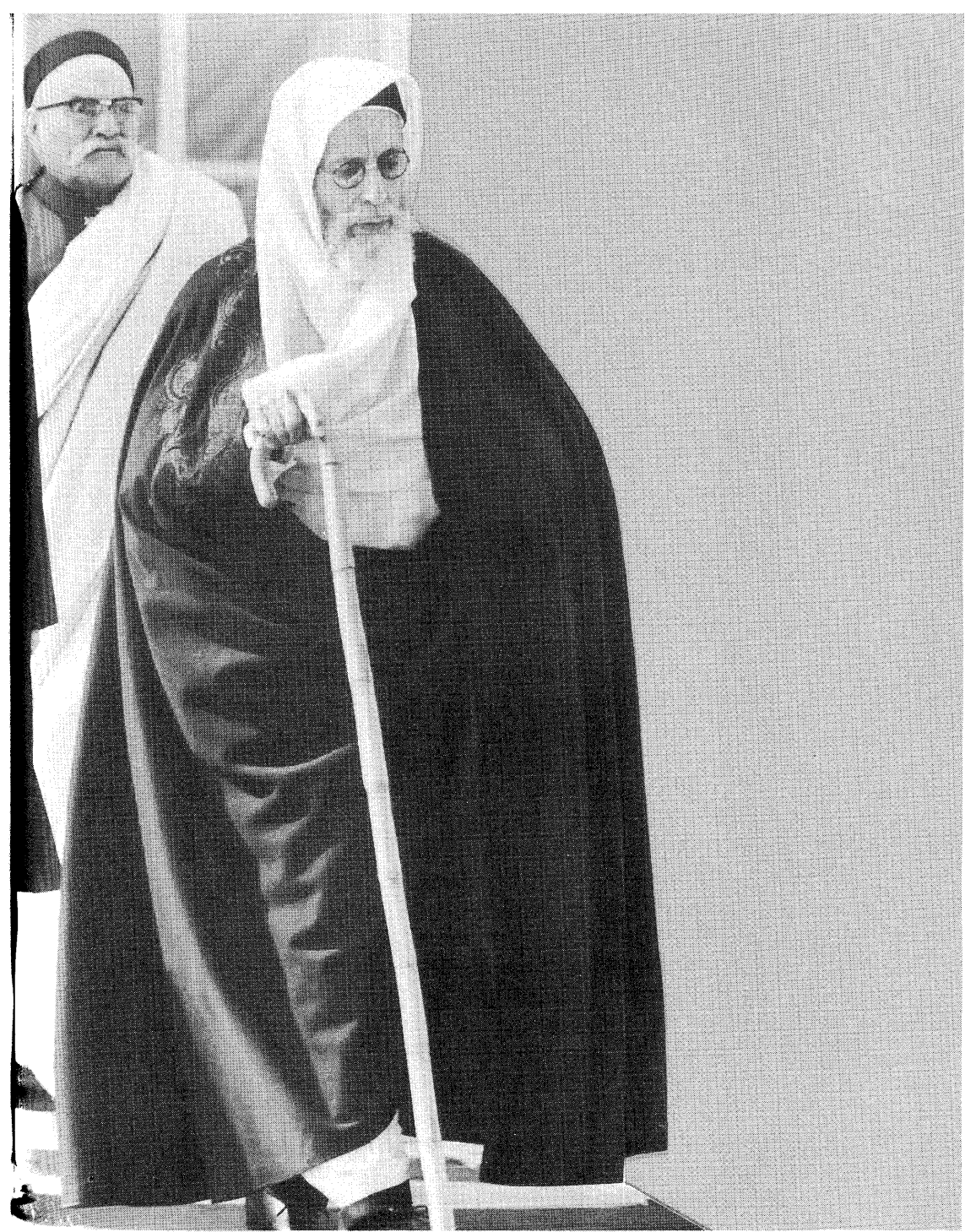
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and around Tripoli, Benghazi and Baida. The radio stations were first occupied, martial music played and the coup announced with the imposition of a curfew and threats to execute anyone who broke it. Telephone and air services were suspended and post offices and airports occupied by troops. The propaganda accompanying the coup was mendacious and perverse in its allegations against the King who was portrayed as another Faruq – dissolute, profligate and corrupt. Nothing could have been further from the truth. His personal reputation as a highly religious man who had dedicated his life to the freedom and prosperity of his people and who in his personal life stood out as a model of temperance, was unquestioned in his own country and the Arab world in general. The kind of propaganda so assiduously used was base and ill-founded and quite out of character with the Libyans who, although divided by jealousies, were well aware of the virtues of the King and had no genuine cause for discontent with his rule. It was plain that the propaganda which misrepresented the coup d'état of 1969 as a popular revolution against an unjust government was derived from outside sources jealous of Libya's oil wealth and displeased with the King's unwillingness to identify himself with extreme Arab nationalism and in particular his policy of non-involvement in the confrontation between Egypt and Israel and his friendly relations with the West.

When the news of the coup reached Borsa the King and Queen were alone. The few courtiers who had accompanied them there hurriedly decamped to save their own skins. With the help of the Turkish Government they returned to the Gallini Hotel in Kanmena Yourla in Greece, forlorn and virtually penniless. According to the King's philosophy – of taking little thought for the morrow – they had left Libya with few funds. As the Queen wrote on 13th September of that year (See Appendix for a complete copy of this letter):

'We could not answer your cables and letters as I was alone with my husband when the coup took place without any money at all until the Turkish Government came to our help, paid our hotel and arranged our journey to Greece.'

The stories spread in Egyptian and even English papers of mil-



King Idris, seen behind him is Abdul Hamid Al Abbar, head of the Libyan Congress.



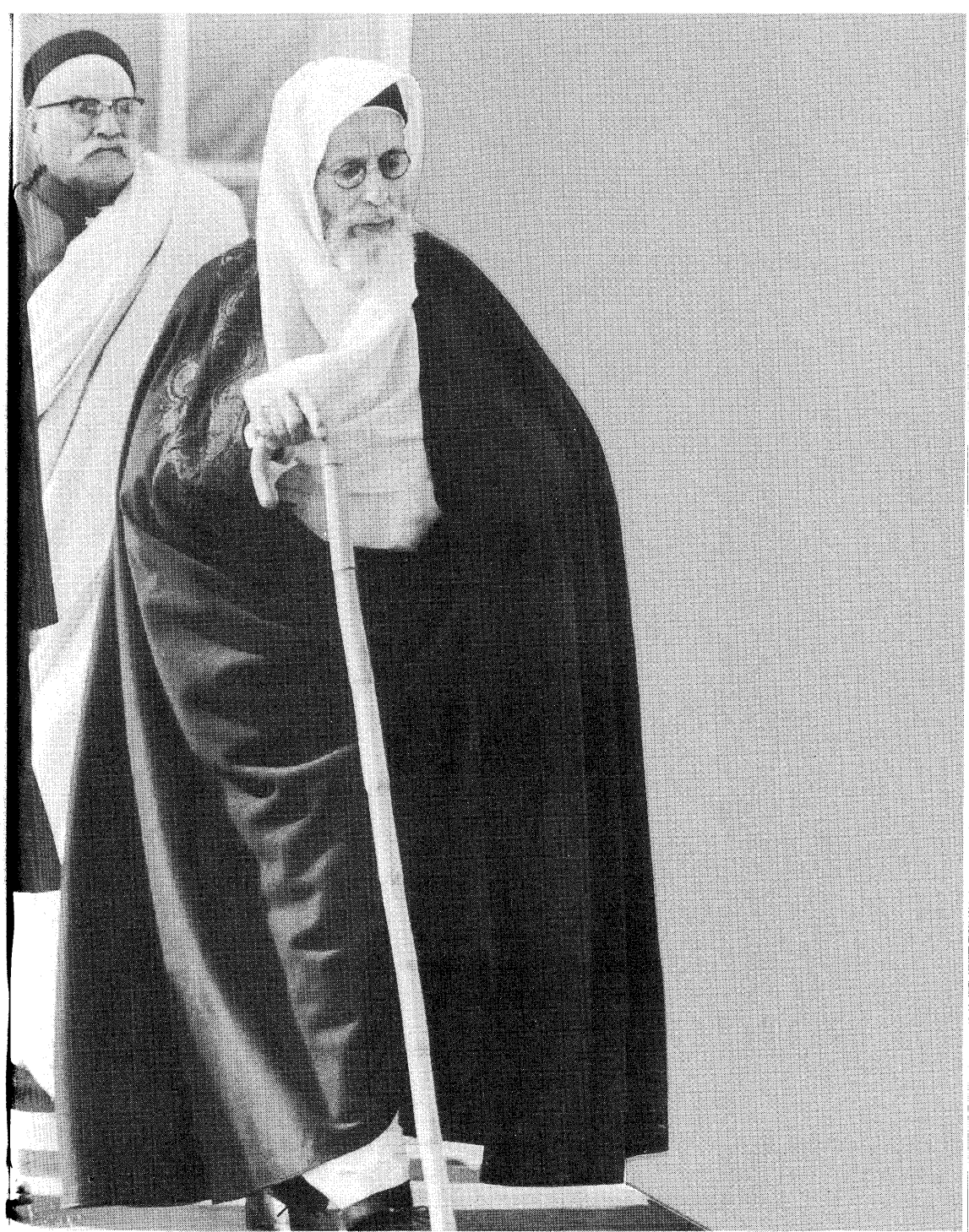
THE LIFE AND TIMES OF KING IDRIS OF LIBYA

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www.libyanconstitutionalunion.org



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lions of pounds in foreign banks were false. 'The Times' correspondent in Ankara referred to *sources* which alleged that the King had deposited \$50m. in the safe of his hotel in Greece. To my personal and certain knowledge the King and Queen had no money anywhere in the world apart from their modest account in the Tobruk bank supplied from the meagre privy purse provided by the government. Apart from their personal baggage they had brought nothing with them from Libya and their clothing and personal belongings in their home at Tobruk were plundered by the revolutionary junta. Apparently these clothes together with some photographs of picnics on the beach and the children water-skiing were put on show as evidence of the dissolute 'palace' life. During their two months stay in Greece they were looked after by Greeks whose government and people treated them with great hospitality and generosity. Their main worry was the safety of their young daughter Suleima* and the Palestinian secretary who were both arrested and imprisoned by the junta and only allowed to leave Tripoli for Cairo some two months later.

The King bore these vicissitudes with calm and dignity but was deeply upset that hardly a voice was raised in the British press to recall his consistent loyalty and friendship since the difficult days of 1940 when he declared his support for the British cause. In her letter of 13th September the Queen wrote thanking us for our cables and letters of sympathy and saying:

'We appreciate your sympathy at this time, especially that in all Great Britain you are our only two friends, after a friendship of twenty years with England...I thought the Italians would be the first to attack us, because they were our enemies, and one day we had fought against them, but on the contrary. In their press they did not say any word against the King, but said that they who had fought against him, can say that he was a faithful friend and a fair ruler.'

On 26th October the Queen wrote that after deep thought the King had decided to live in Egypt:

'The weather here is cold and Ramadan will soon start and we cannot perform the fasting obligations in any European country. It is

★ Their adopted daughter.



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the will of God and may it be for the benefits of all. We shall sail next Friday for Alexandria and the same day get to Cairo. Sahar and my dear Suleima will meet us there'.

We wrote to Egyptian friends to help them and wished them God-speed. On 13th November the Queen's secretary wrote:

'We arrived in Cairo ten days ago and the reception given His Majesty was most friendly and attentive. The palace where we are staying is most beautiful and we are surrounded by kindness and generosity.'

Since 3rd November 1969 Sayyid Idris and his wife Fatima and daughter Suleima have lived comfortably at the Soltan Palace, Dokki, Cairo as the guests of the Egyptian government and under their protection in accordance with Islamic obligations. There was however another side to this hospitality; given Nasser's support for the Libyan revolution the presence of Sayyid Idris under strict watch in Cairo was a clever move to insure against possible opposition to the new regime. Certainly during their early period in Cairo it was impossible for Idris to see any of his loyal friends who were outside Libya at the time of the coup or were subsequently able to visit Egypt.

Meanwhile in Libya the military junta pursued a vicious persecution of the former regime with a ferocity uncharacteristic of Arab behaviour in similar circumstances. Many Libyans who had served King Idris' government including men of distinction and well-known probity like former Prime Minister Wahmud Muntasser were arrested and clapped into jail at Tripoli. There they were subjected to brutality and humiliation and in some cases were deprived of all their property. The culmination of this persecution was the trial of the venerable King by military court *par contumace* and his sentence to execution by shooting. Thanks to Nasser's protection Idris' asylum in Egypt was not violated and the sentence was not carried out. A few manipulated anti-Idris demonstrations in Cairo were quickly quelled by the police who deported the ring leaders; one feels however that considering his influence over Gaddafhi much more might have been done by Nasser to guide the revolutionaries into more moderate

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behaviour. As it was, the 1969-1972 period was a time of great anxiety for the ex-King and his family. Deprived of all contact with Libyan friends and virtually under house arrest they were even intimidated for correspondence with outside friends and communication could only be maintained by devious channels in Amman and Beirut.

The position was much improved after Nasser's death by the justice and good sense of President Sadat who denounced the unbalanced behaviour of the Libyan revolutionary regime. Since then Sayyid Idris and his family have been treated with the honour and respect due to them and are able to lead a normal life.

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Although efforts have been made to discredit King Idris and exaggerate the weaknesses to which he, like any other, is prone, his long record of service to his people is sufficiently well-established in history to withstand the malicious falsifications which have been attempted.

King Idris represents an era which has now passed and cannot be revived, but one of which all Libyans and Arabs in general should be proud. In Arab Libyan history there is no more glorious period than the Senussi golden age and the heroic and desperate struggle of the Cyrenaicans against Italian colonisation. Idris is virtually the only survivor of this epoch with its stirring associations. Furthermore, it was he who kept the spirit of independence alive though only faintly burning during Italian rule and guided his country to a freedom so painfully achieved and now in danger of being lost, not to foreign colonisation but to stronger neighbours of his own race, language and religion. King Idris was too unworldly to be a popular figure. He has been criticised for his aloofness and detachment from affairs. He could not forsake the traditions in which he had been nurtured; his devotion to the faith of Islam involving strict performance of prayer and fasting; his dislike of pomp and ceremony; his consistent loyalty to old friends and time-honoured customs; the strict

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and honourable observance of his given word; his love of horses and above all his love of the desert with its cleanliness and clarity unlike the cities where intrigue and corruption flourish. A Danish writer who interviewed him during his time in exile asked him about his attitude to the Italian occupation of Libya. His reply illustrates the precedence he gave to a spiritual over a material existence:

‘The civilization which the Italians want to introduce makes us the slaves of circumstances and therefore we must fight against it. It exaggerates the outward side – technical progress and machinery – it makes external splendour and power the ruling facts in the judgement of a person or a nation and it despises the inner development of man. I can only tell you that where the Senussi rule there is peace and contentment on all sides.’

Though a retiring person who preferred the quiet of the country or the desert to city life, he was not a hermit. He liked the company of a few friends who were happy to sit and talk about the simple and familiar things of life – the weather, the stars, horses, birds, the desert, health, past memories and present joys and sorrows. He always dealt most punctiliously with his State duties although the long inaction of his middle life had accustomed him to a somewhat sedentary existence. Long discussions bored him and his natural inertia conspired with the influence of his courtiers to put off irksome tasks and keep visitors away in order to maintain their own privileged position. His dislike of publicity put the seal of anonymity on the admirable development which took place in Libya which was a pity because much of this was the result of his own initiatives and he should have credit for it. He trusted his Ministers to carry out their duties conscientiously but they often let him down. He relied entirely on the loyalty of his people and took no measures for his personal protection. There was no armed guard on his places of residence and he was never accompanied by bodyguards on his journeys. He even neglected the simple precaution of having his servants screened.

An example of King Idris’ honesty and foresight was his attitude towards his own relations. Setting his face resolutely



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against the nepotism which often bedevils a monarchy from an every-growing royal family exploiting their relationship for political power and wealth, he forbade the use of the title of prince and strictly excluded the Senussi family from offices of State. No member of the royal family could be a minister or deputy nor were they employed by the government except in the rare case of a younger cousin who had long service in the army.

King Idris' obsession with the Shelhi family was his Achilles heel. It was due to his great affection for Ibrahim Shelhi who served him with devotion for forty years in good times and bad. This was a David and Jonathan relation. The trust he placed in Ibrahim Shelhi had stood the test of time and was not misplaced in a man of integrity and good sense whose judgement and tact had been of great service to the King in difficult moments. When Ibrahim was murdered in 1954, so great was the shock that the King lost his usual self-control and behaved in an unjust and unbalanced way. Some said that he never really recovered from the shock.

After the death of Ibrahim Shelhi his mantle as the King's confidant and principle assistant fell upon Busiri who was only 23 at the time of his father's death. Busiri married a charming English girl whom he met while a student at Exeter University. He was appointed director of the royal household although often called Minister of the Palace. Like his father, he acquired great influence with the king but unlike his father, became overbearing. He played a leading part in arranging the King's abortive marriage with an Egyptian girl, the daughter of Lamlun Pasha. The king was influenced a good deal by Busiri whom he employed on confidential missions which must have been rather tiresome for the Ministers. At that time the King's reputation stood so high that people would put up with the Shelhis rather than upset him. In fact Busiri had none of the qualities necessary for his high position. His death in a car crash while driving at excessive speed in 1964 was not so much of a shock to the king as people expected. In fact for a time he showed he could manage quite well without the Shelhis. There were however two more brothers – Omar who was a lawyer in Egypt and Abdul Aziz who was a senior officer in the Libyan army – to be reckoned

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with. They had by family privilege the entree to the Palace. Omar returned from Egypt and became a big business operator. Within a couple of years the King had come to rely on him in much the same way as he had done with his father and elder brother. It was noticed that when the King travelled to Greece for medical reasons in 1967 he was accompanied by Omar and Abdul Azia. Nevertheless it came as a surprise and a shock to some observers when the King appointed Omar as his personal adviser early in 1969 since Omar was not much liked nor respected in Libya.

The third brother Abdul Aziz who married the English widow of his brother Busiri was unpopular in the army because of his rapid promotion attributed to Palace favour. In the course of 1969 he was chairman of a committee which negotiated a defence deal with a British firm and another committee to reorganise the Libyan army. These appointments were almost as unpopular as his brother's appointment as the King's personal adviser. Libyans in general were rarely intimate with the Shelhi brothers who were regarded as upstarts who made themselves rich and powerful by exploiting the King's favour.

Malicious propaganda may, on account of the favour shown to the Shelhi family, seek to portray King Idris as a reactionary tyrant ruling unjustly and oppressively through corrupt court favourites. This would be an entirely false picture since the King's attachment to constitutional principles made him err, if anything, too much in the direction of democratic *laissez-faire*. In many ways he was far in advance of other Islamic rulers. This was particularly noticeable in his attitude towards the position of women. Libya was the first Islamic country to give the parliamentary vote to women. Women's education was well provided for and girls took a full part in University life in Benghazi and Tripoli. The King's progressive attitude was also apparent in the conduct of his family life. His charming and vivacious wife Fatima, to whom he has been married for nearly forty years, presided over their home with great efficiency, tact and good taste. A Libyan girl born and brought up in Kufra, she was entirely devoted to the King. Unlike many of the older generation of Libyan wives who live in seclusion wearing the old-fashioned garments and heavy veils of a past era she wears



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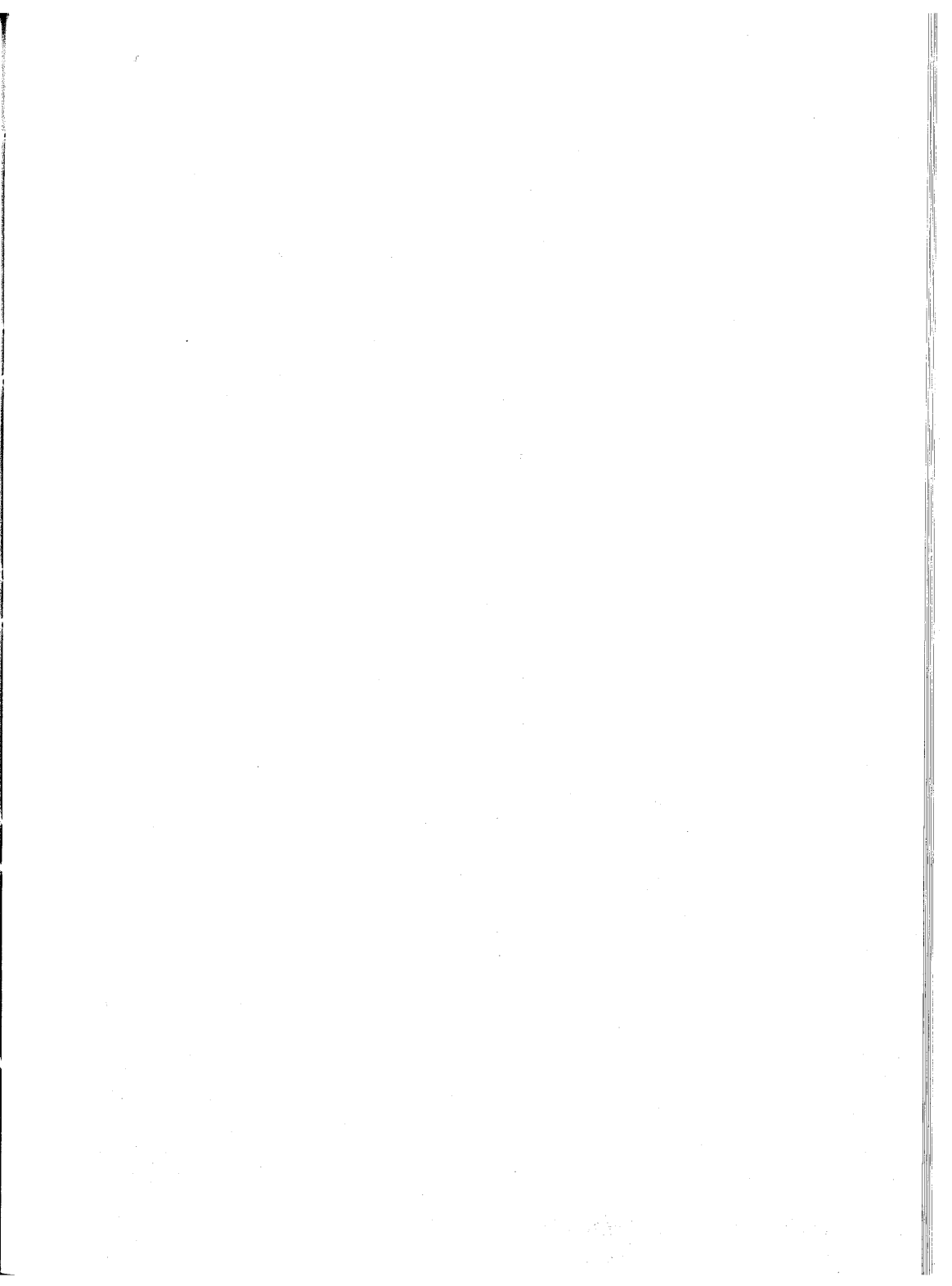
modern dress and shows excellent taste in clothes and house furnishings. She is fond of music and television, travels frequently by air, presides over women's associations and visits girl guide rallies, trade fairs, hospitals and schools. She liked to entertain young people in the family home and joins in simple games with great gaiety and enjoyment.

To their great sorrow the King and Queen never had children of their own. They adopted an orphan nephew* who has been well-educated, qualifying in chemistry and who now works in London. They also adopted an Algerian girl** - a refugee from the war against the French - who attended the girls school at Tobruk and is not only well educated, speaking Arabic, French, English and Italian, but an accomplished swimmer, tennis player and water skier. She married an Egyptian and now lives in Cairo.

Although the King and Queen lived simply, even ascetically, owing to their strict Islamic faith, it would be difficult to find anywhere a happier, more hospitable or civilised family life than existed in their simple home near Tobruk. Not for him the magnificence of the Saudi and Persian Gulf royal palaces. The family lived in a modest three-bedroomed house called 'Bab Zeitoun' some fifteen miles east of Tobruk which the King built to his own design. It stands four miles from the coast, high above sea-level. A short track leads off the Tobruk-Sollum road to a small white gate-house in the wall surrounding the house and gardens. The grounds include plots of fruit-trees and a small mosque near the entrance whose Iman is one of the few surviving Senussi brothers, Hajji Towati. There is nothing luxurious about the house which is plain and unadorned. At one side are stables housing half a dozen Arab horses, and a brood-mare which is the King's favourite, and some water-buffaloes. The syce is a dear old Wadaian who was originally brought from Abecher as a slave and has served the Senussi family for seventy years. The attraction of this barren site lies in its dry climate, sea breezes and open, slightly elevated position on the edge of the desert. The house lies among the battlefields of World War Two and a little further down the road are the British and Free-French war cemeteries,

* Sayyid Omar al Arabi, the grandson of Sidi Ahmad al Sherif.

** Suleima.





King Idris receiving Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh, Tobruq, 1954.

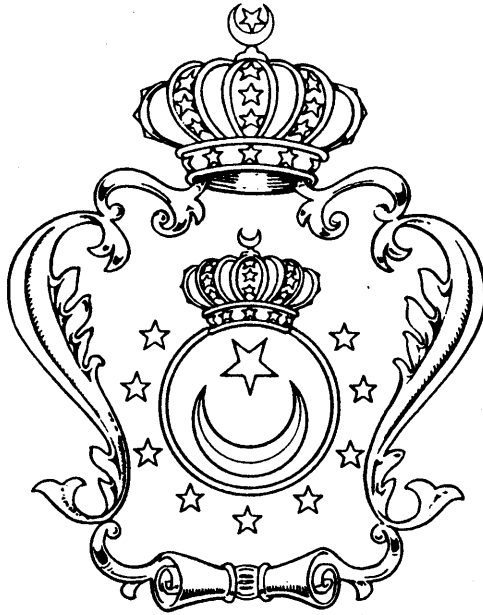
PROFILE OF KING IDRIS

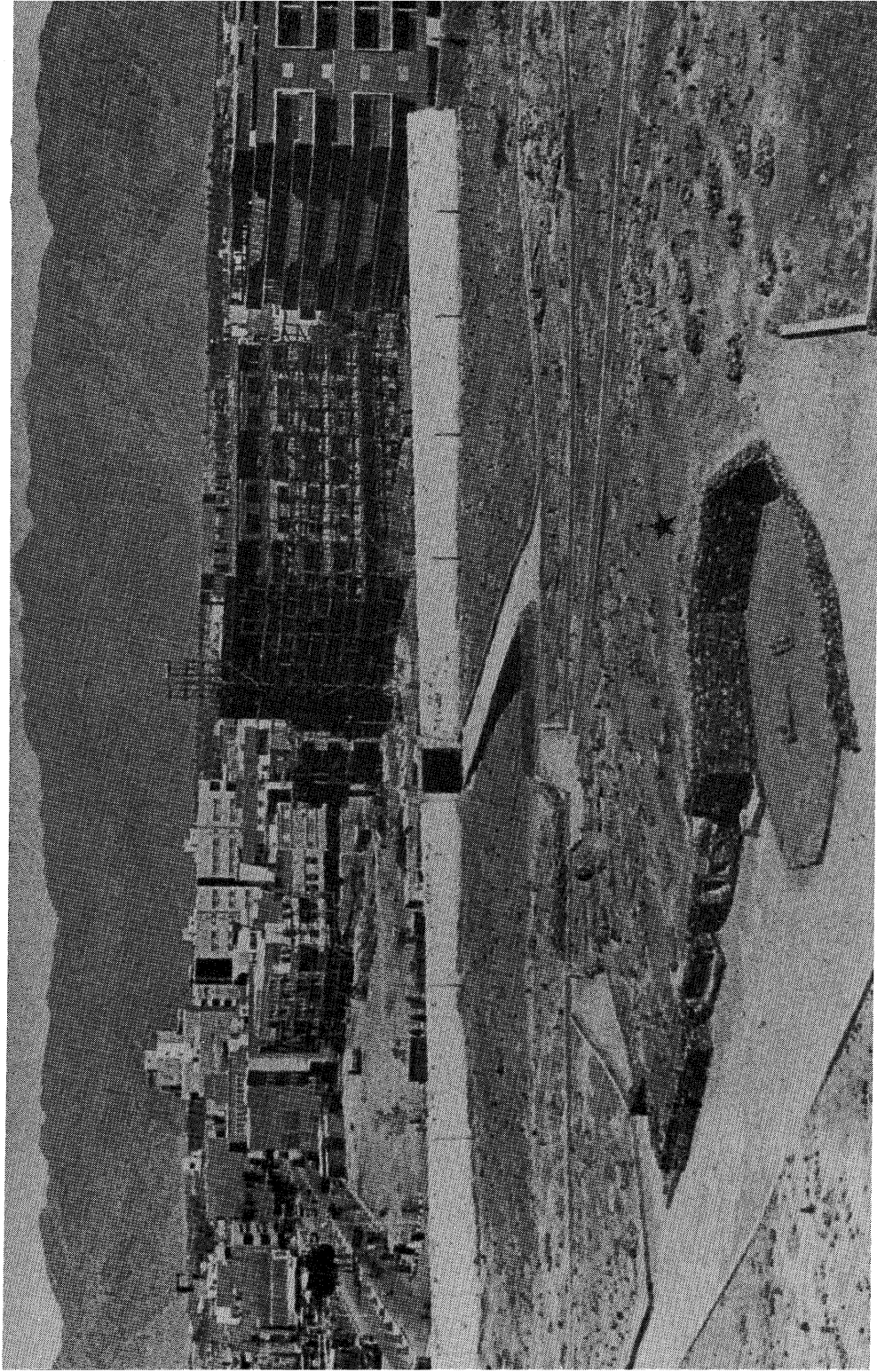
carefully tended in neat rows of white crosses. Along the white wall near the entrance of Tobruk, can be found the stencilled badges of the Eighth Army units. The King's study is simply furnished; on the wall is the lohwa or writing slate of his father, Sayiid al Mahdi, a wooden tablet which every boy carries to school and on which the Holy Book is written. On the study shelves were photographs of his brothers and of the Queen and Prince Philip during their visit to Tobruk.

Sayyid Idris was sixty-one when he became King of Libya in 1951. By 1969, his face had lost much of its fullness and his beard and moustache had become completely white. His appearance had become venerable but his look was still straight and commanding and his bearing upright and dignified. His faculties were very good for his age, his sight a bit weaker but his hearing and his mind still keen and his memory excellent. He always wears Libyan Arab dress consisting of a long white gown with high collar and full skirt over which is a black full sleeved cloak with embroidered braid. Sometimes he wears a white cloak and in cold weather a long white jird or shawl over his left shoulder and under the cloak a white embroidered waistcoat. On his bare feet he wears soft leather slippers. On his head he always wears a soft red cap with narrow white border – high in front and reaching to his ears at the sides. His appearance is now patriarchal and rather frail but his constitution is, thanks to his temperate habits, still sound in spite of the rheumatism and sciatica from which he has suffered in recent years.



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Al Bakie graveyard, the grave of King Idris indicated on illustration with asterisk.

POSTSCRIPT

Our friendship with King Idris and Queen Fatima did not cease when we left Libya in 1952. Indeed friendship with him did not depend on rank or wealth but on loyalty and understanding. Since leaving Benghazi, and until their enforced exile, we frequently received an invitation to spend a holiday in their home. Some years it was just not possible to go, but often we went with our children and joined the family party, taking a full part in their life and interests. Following the military takeover in 1969, Sayyid Idris settled in Egypt and it was here that he spent the last thirteen years of his life. He lived quietly, conscious of the need to refrain from activity that might prove damaging to the stability of Libya. Apart from two pilgrimages made to Mecca, he did not leave Egypt. His death^{*} in Cairo on 25th May 1983 at the age of 94 saw the end of the great Senussi Movement.

E.A.V. de C. 1988

* In a meeting which took place during the season of pilgrimage in 1977, Sidi Idris requested from His Majesty King Khalid to permit his burial in the graveyard of al Bakie within the enclosure where particular senior members of the Prophet's (Peace be upon him) family and the martyrs of al Harra were buried. His Majesty King Khalid promised him this and His Majesty King Fahid upheld this promise following the death of His Majesty King Khalid. When Sidi Idris died the Saudi authorities opened the aforementioned enclosure and prepared a place for him inside it. His holy coffin was transported from Cairo to al Medina in an official Egyptian plane accompanied by Queen Fatima, Sayyid Na'fa al Arabi al Senussi and Omar Ibrahim Shelhi along with an official Egyptian delegation headed by a representative of the President. The coffin was met by a representative of the Prince of Medina, His Royal Highness Prince AbdelMohsin (who was abroad at the time receiving medical attention for a complaint from which he later died).



AUTHORS APPENDIX No. 1

Queen Fatima's Letter of 13th September, 1969, written twelve days after the military takeover.

KANNENA VOURLA
13 / 9 / 1969.

Dear Mr. and Mrs. De Candole,
I thank you for both your letters, and we have received only one cable.

We appreciate your feelings of sympathy at this time, especially that in all Great Britain we have found only two friends, after a friendship of twenty years with England.

I could not answer your letters and cable before, as I was alone with my husband when the coup took place in Libya. Both Sulcima and Sahar are in Libya, and they are our great worry. Hadia has joined us last week.

Dear Mr. De Candole.

I would have expected anything, but not the way the BBC has been giving our news especially concerning my husband. It is extremely unfriendly and very aggressive. This has been more a shock for me, than the coup of Libya. Everybody has noticed and noted the way the news were given in Arabic for



(2)

the BBC. The correspondent of the "Daily Express", who was in Karamna Vourla and heard the news for the BBC, has noticed this. He was very much surprised that this should happen...

You know very well the attitude of my husband towards the British government during its most difficult and hard times. He sided with you, knowing that this behaviour would create many enemies against him. Yet, he stood up with you. I do not tell you all this, because we wanted England to interfere in an internal affair of Libya. We knew that, constitutionally, this could not happen, and we do not feel sorry at all for what happened. My husband on the fourth of August had given his abdication, which is still in the hands of Mr. Albar, and who was supposed to return to Libya on the second of September, to deliver it. This is a well known fact, which is also known by the revolutionary council in Libya.

What has hurt me very much is the accent and way the news were given from the BBC.



(3)

When Omar Shelhi left for talks with the British Foreign Minister, it was a personal action on his part, because he thought he could help his brother and some of his friends in Libya. Yet, the Foreign Office did not check, if the king had really sent him. On his return, my husband blamed him, and, again, he tried to see officials from the U.S. government, but failed to do so. All this without the authority or consent of the king.

I thought that the Italians would be the first to attack us, because they were our enemies, and, one day, we had fought against them, but, on the contrary. In their press they did not say any word against the king, but said that they, who had fought against him, can say that he was a faithful friend and a fair ruler.

I did not write you this letter in order to hurt you. I wrote it to you, because you have proved to be a friend, and I can be sincere with you. My husband bears it all in silence, and all I have written to you in this letter is my personal opinion. He has asked me to thank you and Mrs. De Candole for



(4)

your good feelings during this hard time, because you have thought of us.

I would like to see you, because I have many more things to tell you, but, in the present time, it is difficult for both of us to meet. As soon as we settle, I would like you and Mrs. De Candole to visit us, so I can tell you personally what I have to say.

Before I end my letter, I would like to tell you that, we thank God that the monarchy has never dazzled us, and we have always lived modestly, so that now we do not feel sorry for losing it. We had always thought of this day. Also we thank God that we have not one penny in any BANK that would worry us. We have never changed our treatment to our friends, and it will never change.

Our best regards to Charles and Andrew. We wish them every success.

Onar, if we find a way, will leave on the twentieth for London, and if we find no way, we shall leave it in the hands of God.

With our best wishes to you & for continued good health and happiness.

25/1/61



Allegiance of The National Assembly to Prince Idris Al Sanausi to be a Constitutional King to The United Kingdom of Libya in the year 1950

In the Name of God the Beneficent the Merciful

"Verily those who plight Their fealty to thee Do no less than plight Their fealty to God: The Hand of God is Over their hands: Then any one who violates His oath, does so To the harm of his own Soul, and any one who Fulfils what he has Covenanted with God,—God will soon grant him A great Reward."

We, the representatives of the Libyan people from Cyrenaica, Tripoli and Fezzan who are holding a meeting in Tripoli in a National Assembly (God willing,) and who are provided with fully acknowledged and legal authorisation. We are aiming to form a union between us, and to establish an independent democratic united country with self-determination status. The governing structure (system) will be a Constitutional Kingdom. We start our task thanking God for the blessings in freeing our country and for its independence.

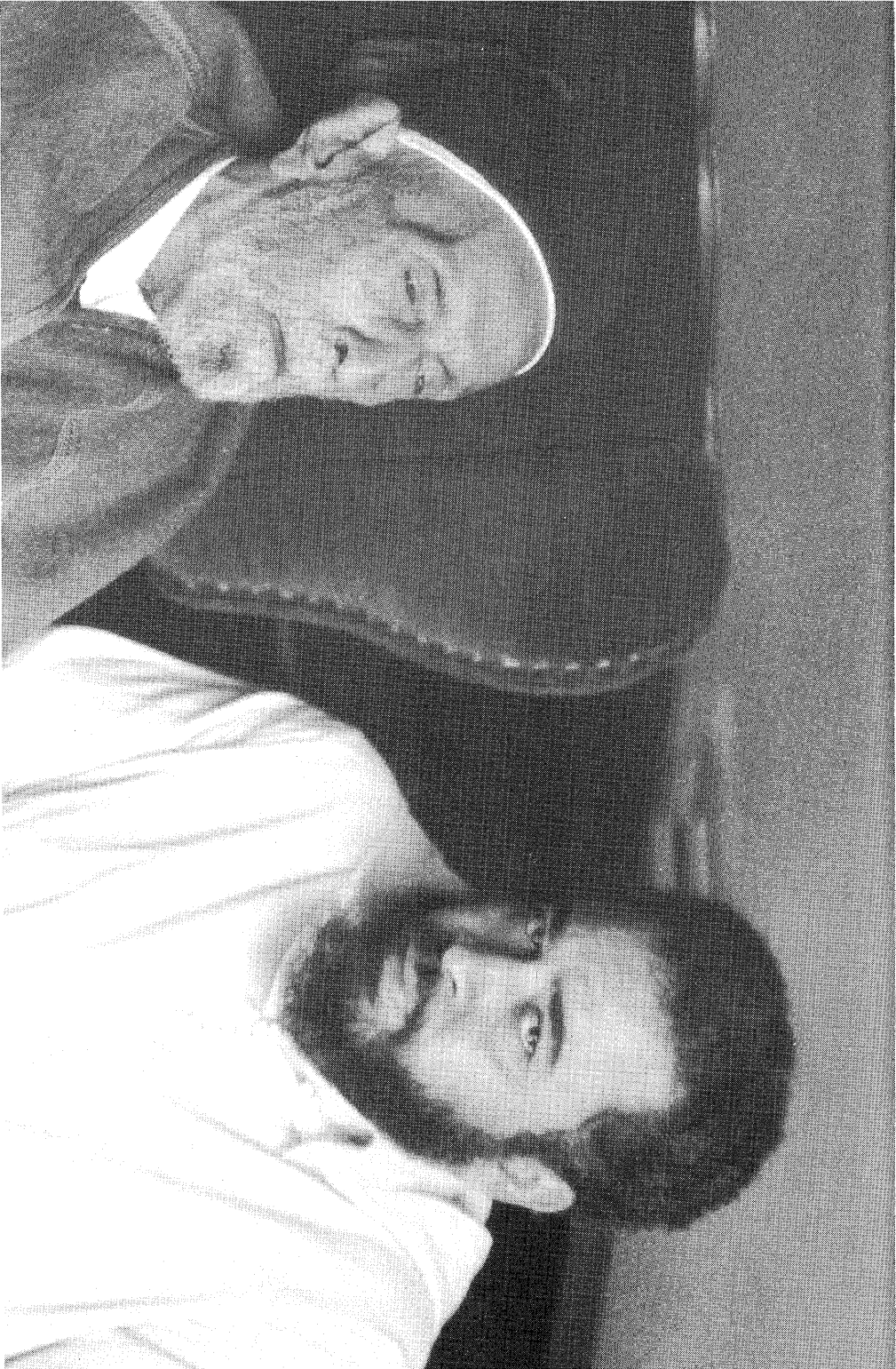
In acknowledgement of the sincerity of His Royal Highness Al Sayyed Mohammed Idris Al Mehdi Al Sanausi The Prince of Cyrenaica, and in acknowledgement of his long struggle (fruitful for the good of Libya and its people), and in order to achieve the wishes of the nation, and in accordance with the previous allegiances which were offered by the legal representatives of the people to His Highness, and in accordance with our concern for the good of our country and its unity under the crown of a King, we find in him the high standards demanded by this Highness position.

We call on His Highness Prince Mohammed Idris Al Mehdi Al Sanausi The Prince of Cyrenaica, and offer our allegiance to him to become a Constitutional King to the United Kingdom of Libya hoping that His Majesty will accept.

We have decided to transfer the National Assembly to Benghazi to deliver this historic decision to His Majesty and to greet his acceptance of the allegiance.

Tripoli, 2nd, Safar Islamic year 1370.

2d, December 1950.



The publisher Mohamed Ben Ghalib, seen with King Idris at his Majesty's residence, Cairo, Egypt in December 1982, five months prior to his majesty's death.



In The Name Of God The Beneficent The Merciful

To His Royal Highness Prince Al Sayyed Mohammed Idris Al Mehdi Al Sanausi, May God protect him. Most gracious greetings.

As Your Highness are aware the dispute between us and the Italian Government still exists, that is because they have concentrated their intentions to the destruction of our legal, political and civil rights. It (The Italian Government) has taken an excuse in its force to manipulate our future and national rights. We are of the best of nations given to man, who will not accept injustice and would not allow our Shari'ah (Islamic Law) to be curtailed, nor allow any kind of flaws to infiltrate our perfect religion, the case which led us to facing the danger and forcefully enter into repeated wars, relying on the strength of righteousness, until we achieve our national ambition—which is the establishment of a constitutional government headed by a Moslem Prince representing the three powers, religious, political and military and with a house of representatives, the members of which are elected by the nation. Then will our country become safe, our religious affairs complete and judiciary sound and our Shari'ah protected. This does not conflict with the claims made by Italy and the plans made by its leaders in that it has not occupied our country with the intention of exploitation but the pressures of international politics of The Mediterranean has led it to be here. If it were truthful in its claims, our country would not have been subjected to destruction by the repeated attacks and the use of deviousness and its power to divide and to spread chaos. It (Italy) has tried in different ways to split up the nation, but God would allow nothing but to unite the aims of the two States to rally round one Prince accepted by both. Because Your Highness comes from the noblest of families and the most generous of houses as well as the combined highly commendable and praiseworthy characters in your good self; The Central Association for Reform, which holds the representation powers resulting from the Gharian conference which represents the Tripolitanian nation (by an actual election), has found in your Highness a Prince who is firm, able to unite the nation and trusted and liked by all, and therefore it (The Association) offers its allegiance to Your Highness to become a Prince for both States, Tripoli and Cyrenaica, to lead them towards the realisation of their noble Islamic ambitions. It was our honour and pride to offer you allegiance since amalgamation was signed by the representatives of the two states (in Sirt), the reasons for the delay in its effecuation was that the emergencies of war have afflicted every member of The Association and the men in the State over a wide area of the war zones. With this allegiance (God willing) Your Highness becomes the beloved Prince of the two States, whenever the chance arises to pay us a visit (according to the expressed wishes of the nation), rallies suitable for Your Highness' position will be held to express and demonstrate loyalty and allegiance. May God provide you with the spirit from Thee and endow blessings in The House of Sanausi (the house built on obedience of God and on good deeds).



3rd De Al Hajja, Islamic year 1341.

Signatories;

Head of The Central Association for Reform, Ahmed Al Mariad;
Consultant to the Association, Abdul Al Rahman Azzam.

Members;

Bashir Al Saadawi, Hussayn Ben Jaberr, Mohammed Farhat, Abdul Al Rahman Zbydah, Mohammed Al Tayeb, Salem Al Bahbah.

Otman Al Ghezani, Omar Abu Dabbose, Mohammed Al Saddik Ben Al Haj Mohammed Muktar Kapar, Mohammed Fkini, Al Swaye Al Khaitoni.

Community Figures;

Mohammed Al Deeb, Mohammed Souf, Omar Habel, Ahmed Shteiwi, Farhat Al Khadi, Khalid Al Ghargani, Ahmed Al Sonni, Al Bagdadi Ben Mayoof, Mohammed Al Saghir Al Mariad.

Commander of the National Army;
Mohammed Saadon.



PUBLISHER'S APPENDIX No. 3

From the servant of Islam Mohammed Idris Al Mehdi Al Sanausi;

To the most gracious, the leader of the Central Association for Reform, all of the employees, the leaders of the armies and all figures and Tripolitanian Nationals — Peace and God's mercy and blessings be upon you.

With gratitude I received your petition in which you expressed your particular wish regarding my status (about which you met at the Gharian conference and for which you made sincere efforts and sacrificed life and wealth). I have received it praying to God that the ambitions of the nation may be realised and that its struggle may succeed.

Since the unification and the safety of the nation are the two aims for which I have strived, I found that it was my duty to meet your request by acceptance and to take the great responsibility which the nation chose me to undertake. I therefore must work with you with earnest. However, do not forget that without your resolute and your courage I cannot achieve a great deal. I do know that eternal life is for nations not for individuals, and that everlasting great feats (achievements) are the ones which work for the benefit of all, and so I pray to God that we may be led by Thee to the deeds which benefit the nation.

It is the right of every nation to master their own affairs; people are born free; our nation has shown in its engagements the extent of its love for freedom, and paid for it dearly. It is unjust for anyone to covet to enslave it (the nation) and to dominate its affairs.

You made consultation and debate a condition; this is the basis of our religion; I will work according to it.

I decided to leave the matters (in Tripoli) as they are till a national association meets to lay down the country's structure. Hence I delegate the Central Association, because of the resolute, fairness and devotion they showed, to continue to manage the affairs of the Tripolitanian State. I have full faith in the wisdom of its leader; the steadfast hero Ahmed (Bek) Al Mryed and his colleagues the gracious leaders and those who supported the efforts of the Central Association, to bear the hardships of the responsibility with patience to establish the basis of the national structure which they built. I pray to God to replenish all with His care, to support to stand fast and to conquer the enemy and to bestow the promised victory (for He is, of what He wishes, capable).

22nd Rabeeh, Islamic Year 1342.



In the Name of God The Beneficent The Merciful.
Praised to be God the cherisher and the sustainer of the
worlds, and prayers and peace be upon the Prophet
Mohammed and his family and companions.

Dear colleagues leader of the House of Lords and The House of Representatives, meaning The Libyan Parliament and the Libyan Prime Minister; Peace and God's mercy be upon you.

I forward to you this letter to say: since the investiture by this gracious Libyan nation with their valuable trust and my assuming this position, which I have held after our beloved country Libya declared its independence, I carried out (as destined) what I saw as my duty towards my country and its people; most men's work is not completely devoid of imperfections, and when I felt weak I offered my resignation some years before now, you returned it. I obeyed your wish and withdrew it. Now due to my advanced years and weak body I find myself obliged to say for the second time that I am unable to carry this heavy responsibility. It is obvious that I have been totally engrossed in it fifty five years before and after independence. The carrying out of duties and affaires has worn me down, and in the words of the poet, "life and its demands have become wearisome, when you have lived eighty years it is particularly no wonder."

I undertook the matters of the country when I was twenty seven, and now at eighty two (thanks to God) I leave it in a better state than when I began my testing task with it. Now I hand it over to the forty three year old Crown Prince Al Sayyed Al Hassan Rida Al Mehdi Al Sanausi., who is to be regarded from today as, King Al Hassan Rida Al Mehdi Al Sanausi The First. He is to carry the heavy burden of the case with justice and equality before God and the people of this gracious country according to the Islamic Shari'ah and the Libyan Constitution.

Accredit him as you did me for as long as he is obeying God and His Prophet and remains on the straight. After his authorization by The Parliament, he shall perform the Consitutional swearing in before The Parliament before he assumes his Constitutional powers.

I have, God willing, made a firm determination to entirely avoid politics.

I conclude my say (letter) by advising my fellow citizens to observe God in secret and in public and that you are all enjoying the richest of living and the best of giving; all from God.

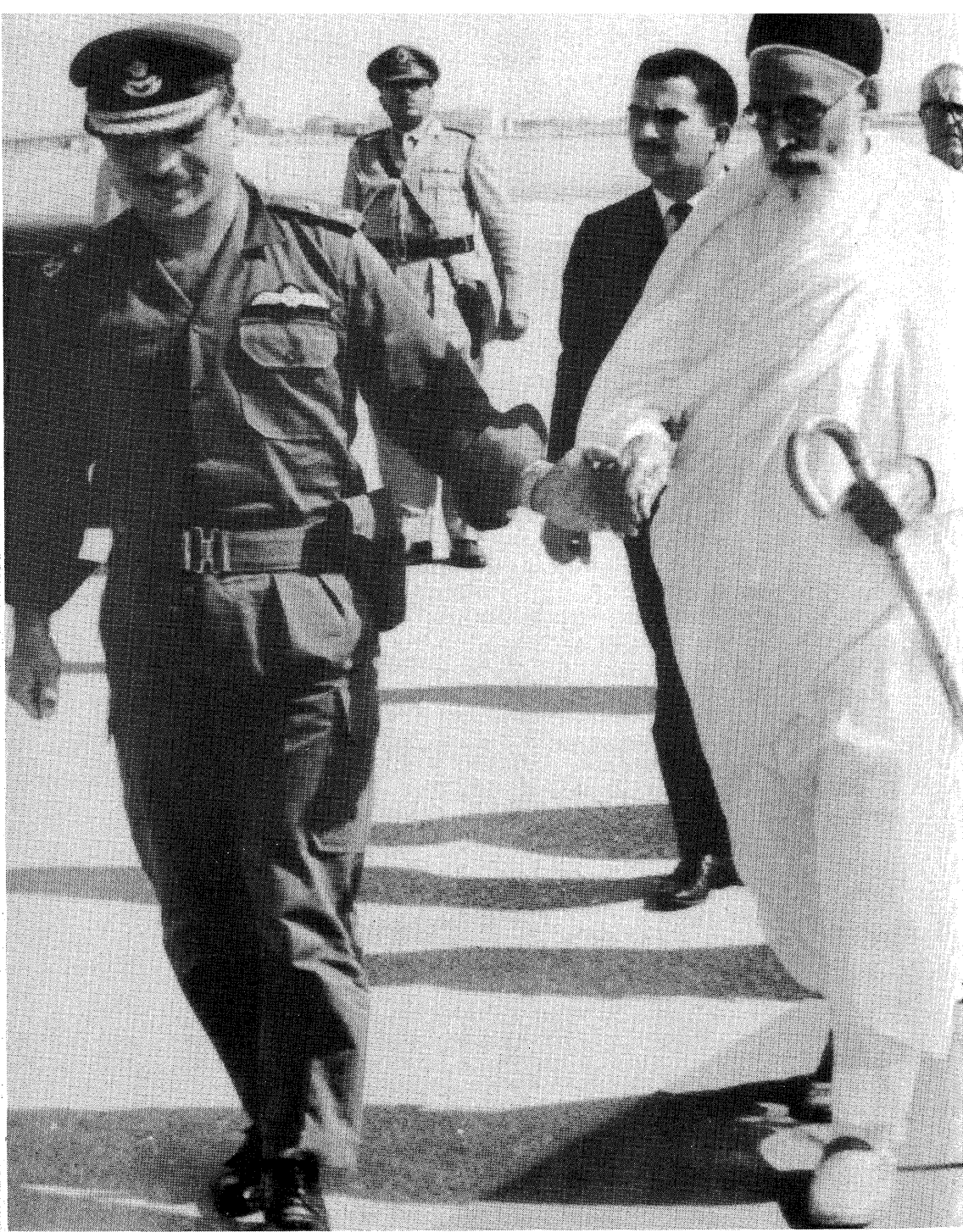
Beware that you do not become who is meant by Allah when says "*God sets forth a parapell; a city enjoying security and quiet, abundantly supplied with sustenance from every place, yet was ungrateful for the favours of God; so God made it taste anger and terror (in extremes) (closing in on it) like a garment from every side, because of the (evil) which (its people) wrought.*" Cooperate for the good and holy and do not cooperate in sins and animosities. The Prophet said; "Advise with the good and warn of the



abominable or God shall give the power to your evils. Your better ones would pray, but it will be in vain".
Peace and God's mercy be upon you.

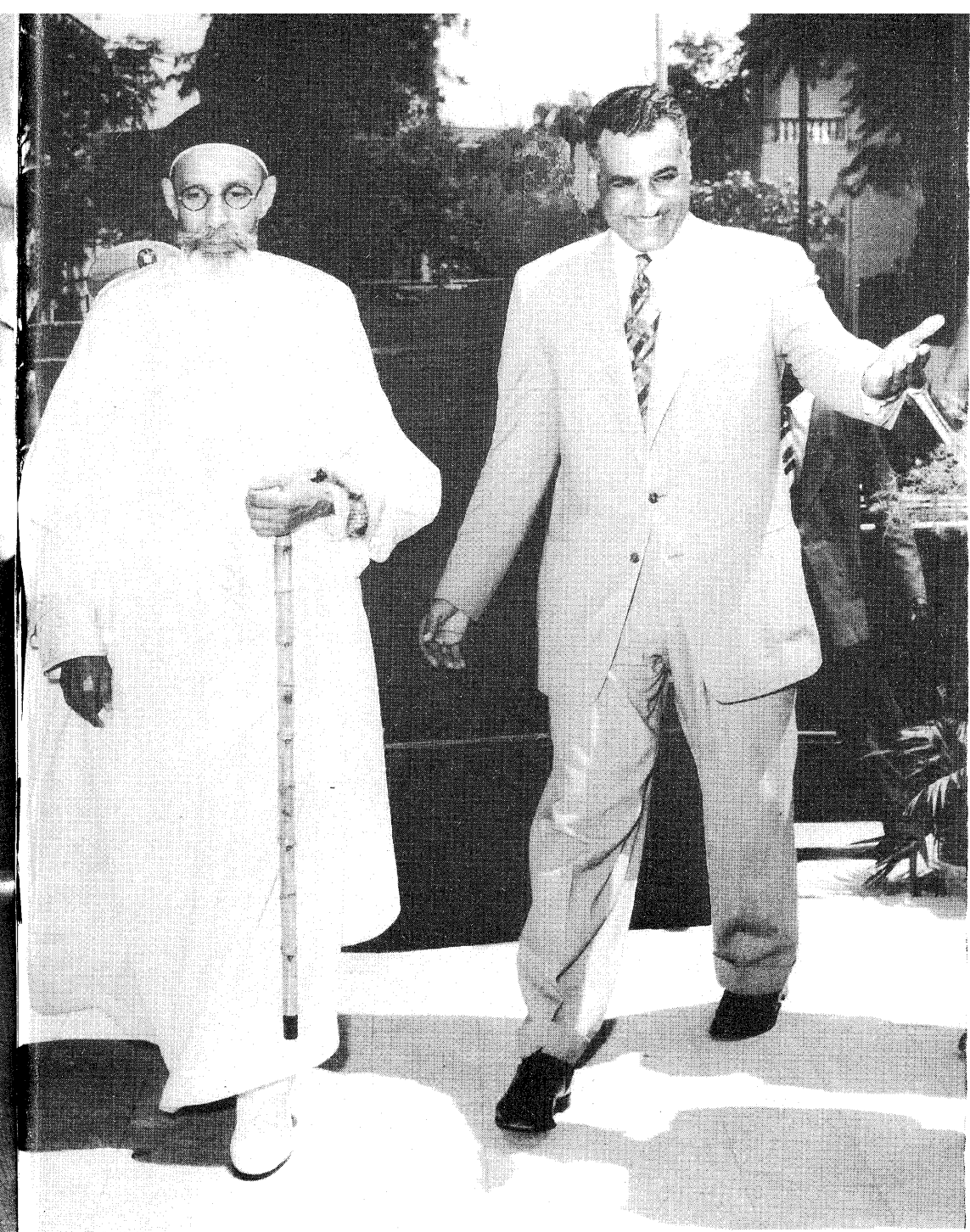
Mohammed Idris Al Mehdi Al Sanausi

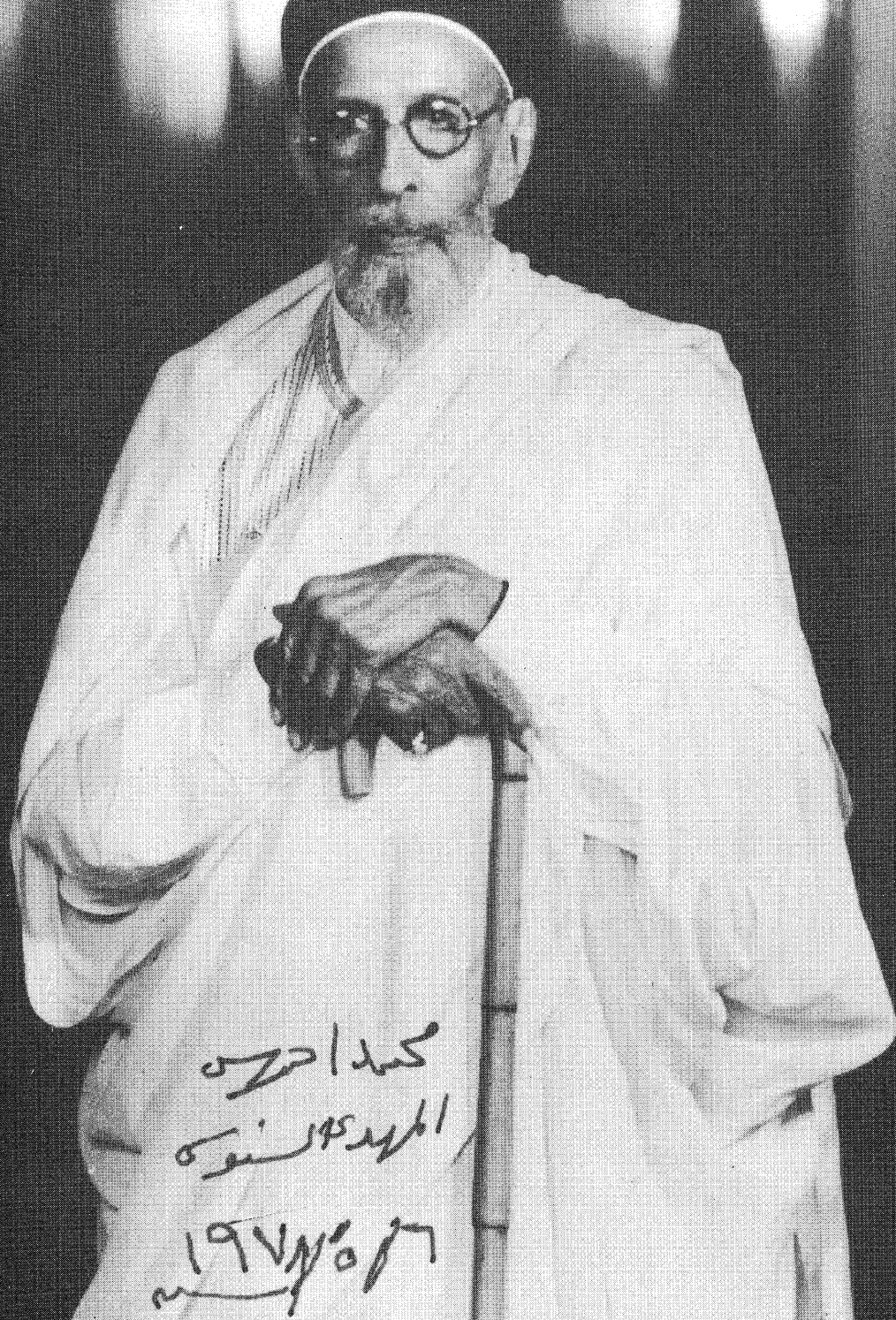
Greece, 4th August, 1969











محمد احمده
الميرزا شيخ
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