

JIHAD IN EXILE : AHMAD AL-SHARIF AL-SANUSI 1918-1933

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ABSTRACT

This work traces the fifteen-year-long exile of Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi (1875-1933), the spiritual leader of the Sanusiyya brotherhood of North Africa. Scholars have studied closely al-Sanusi's religious leadership and his jihadist activity against the foreign occupation of current-day Libya, but few have cared to look at his activities in exile, which from 1918 to 1933 took him to Turkey, Syria, Palestine and Arabia. This research, shows that during his extended exile the Libyan religious leader was a key protagonist in events that shaped the modern Middle East. His life in exile can, therefore, no longer go unnoticed.

In Istanbul, he mediated between the Sultan and the Ankara government; in 1920 he fought alongside the Kemalist forces in southeastern Anatolia and, on their behalf, he waged a pro-Turkish and pan-Islamic propaganda in Syria and Iraq. After 1924 al-Sanusi, backed by some Turkish and Arab nationalist circles, became a candidate for the vacant seat of the Caliphate and proceeded to Mecca where he believed the convened Islamic Congress would elect him to office. The election never took place, but al-Sanusi became Ibn Sa'ud's envoy in 'Asir and aided the Wahhabi expansionist policy in Arabia, where he eventually died in 1933.

His unexpected involvement in the Turkish *jihad*, his candidature to the Caliphate and his flight to Arabia, were all aimed at restoring the unity of the Muslim world and defending what he perceived to be the imperative need for an independent and supreme Islamic authority. But he failed. During his life-time the Middle East went from being Ottoman to Arab, from Islamic to national. Al-Sanusi's exile, therefore, illustrates these emerging tensions of the post-WWI settlement of the Middle East.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AP	Archivio Politico 1919-1930, Archivio del Ministero degli Esteri, Rome
ASMAI	Archivio Storico Ministero Africa Italiana 1859-1945, Archivio del Ministero degli Esteri, Rome
CAB	Cabinet Papers, Public Record Office, London
FO	Foreign Office, Public Record Office, London
IJMES	International Journal for Middle Eastern Studies
OM	Oriente Moderno
RoI	Records of Iraq 1914-1966, Slough Archive Editions, 2001, 15 vols
USNA	Microfilm of the U.S. Department of State, National Archives and Records Service, Washington D.C.

NOTE ON TRASLITERATION

The proper names of people and places in Arabic are transliterated following the standards of the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies. Thus dots and macrons will not be used; qaf=q not k; jim=j not dj; Roman double-letter equivalents are not underlined: the l of al- is not assimilated to the following consonant; ta marbuta is rendered a not ah; the adjectival -ya followed by ta marbuta is rendered iyya; ‘ayn and hamza shall be respectively marked as ‘ and ’.

When Arabic names are rendered as adjectives, the more common English form is used (therefore *al-Sa‘ud* as a proper name, but also *Saudi* as an adjective).

The exception is when Arabic or Turkish names rendered in English appear in direct quotation. In these cases, the original English spelling of the quoted author is left, but might be followed by the English rendering in current usage. So, for example, when quoting British documents, I shall refer to the Angora [Ankara] government.

- INTRODUCTION -

In 1913 Sayyid Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi, the leader of the Sanusiyya mystical brotherhood in North Africa, proclaimed *jihad*. He urged all Muslims, “especially in such countries as have been occupied by the enemies of the religion” to support the struggle against foreign occupation, calling *jihad* a collective duty at a time when the land of Islam came under attack.¹ Collaborating with Western powers rather than fighting against them was, for al-Sanusi, tantamount to unbelief.

At the time of this declaration, which echoed throughout the Islamic world, al-Sanusi (1875-1933) was known for both his spiritual and military leadership. He headed the Sanusiyya, a Sufi brotherhood that advocated a return to an Islam modeled on the example of the Prophet, whose influence extended beyond its stronghold in current-day Libya, to Arabia and the East. Al-Sanusi’s wars against France, Italy and Great Britain made him a world figure, and in the eyes of some Muslims one of the great fighters of Islam – an *Imam al-Mujahidin*.²

Only a few years after his call for *jihad*, however, al-Sanusi put an end to his armed struggle against the Italians and British forces; he ceded the political leadership of the Sanusiyya movement to his cousin (though maintaining its religious direction) and in 1918 fled into exile. Emulating prophet Muhammad, who had fled to Medina when attacked by the Meccans, Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi performed his own *hijra*.³ He

¹ Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi’s treatise on jihad was published in 1913 and titled *Bughyat al-musa`id fi ahkam al-mujahid fi l-hathth `ala l-jihad* [The goal of the helper in the rules of the Holy War fighter in urging for Jihad] (Cairo: Matba`at jaridat al-sha`b, 1332/1913-4). It will be analyzed in detail in the following chapter.

² *OM* xviii (1933), 180.

³ In Islamic legal thought, *hijra* is amply discussed in relation to the rules and obligations of war: when is it incumbent on a Muslim to fight, when can he submit to a foreign power and when must he leave the *dar al-*

retired to the capital of the Ottoman Empire, whence, he believed, the struggle against European powers could be better waged. In his eyes, Constantinople represented what al-Medina had been for the Prophet: a safe haven from which the defense of the Islamic lands could be reorganized. But unlike the Prophet's exile, al-Sanusi's turned out to be perpetual. He never succeeded in returning to Cyrenaica, let alone to liberate it from the Italian occupation. Yet he never gave up opposing foreign rule and, through different means, continued his *jihad* in exile.

This work is a study of Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi's *hijra*. It provides an analysis of the political and military role of the former Cyrenaican sheikh whose 15-year-long exile represents the failure to resurrect the Ottoman primacy and to defend the unity of Muslim lands. We shall trace the life of al-Sanusi after his departure from North Africa as an example of a Muslim leader at odds with the post-World War I settlement of the Arab Middle East.

Al-Sanusi's long journey from Constantinople to 'Asir followed a path that was not of his own choosing, but was dictated by the unexpected disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and by the sudden emergence of foreign rule and ideologies. His retreat from the battlefield in Cyrenaica, intended to be temporary, resulted in a permanent *hijra* from three forces of modernity. He performed a *hijra* from colonial rule: in 1918 he fled from the Italian advance in Cyrenaica and retreated to Constantinople only to flee from it soon after, in the wake of the British occupation of the Ottoman capital. His was also a *hijra* from secularism: he spearheaded a pan-Islamic campaign among the Arab tribes in eastern Anatolia and became the Turkish candidate for the Iraqi throne; but in 1924 the strong secularist stance adopted by the new Turkish Republic appalled him and, having failed to revive the authority of the Caliph, he fled again. Ultimately, his *hijra* was also a

harb to migrate to the *dar al-Islam*. For a complete presentation on *hijra* in classical and contemporary Islamic thought, see Sami Aldeeb Abu-Sahlieh, "La migration dans la conception musulmane," *OM* vii-xiii (1994), 219-283.

retreat from the triumph of nationalism: he attempted to collaborate with the Turkish successors to the Ottoman Empire but was marginalized by the fiercely nationalist aspirations of the Turkish Republic. Eventually he attempted to settle with the colonial powers, only to find unconditional refusal: the French in Syria, the British in Egypt and the Sudan and the Italians in Libya all denied him the right to live in their domains. Only under the Saudi rule of Arabia al-Sanusi found a safe haven from what he came to view as the malaise of the modern Islamic world: Western influence, secularism and nationalism.

The dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire after World War I gave birth to a modern Middle East with which al-Sanusi simply could not come to terms. How could he reach a settlement with European powers, after declaring that a collaboration with them was tantamount to unbelief? Where could he – an Algerian by descent, leader of the Bedouins of Cyrenaica and representative of the Ottoman Sultan – fit in an age of emerging nation states concealed by the aspirations for Arab unity? How could he reconcile his religious leadership with the triumph of what he perceived to be anti-Islamic forces?

Al-Sanusi was a mystical religious leader who believed in the regenerative power of Islam. Like some of his contemporaries, such as Rashid Rida, he was concerned with restoring the glory of the Muslim world by calling for a return to the roots of Islam and by spreading its humanistic teachings among Muslims. Only through a new, united Islam, ridden of the divisions among the four Islamic legal schools, could the Muslim world revive itself and face the new challenges of modernity. As much as he stressed the need for an Islamic rebirth, he always maintained that it could only occur within the framework of a universal Islamic leadership. Therefore, his pro-Ottoman stance, followed his own candidature to the Caliphate, and ultimately by his alliance with the

Saudi government are the results of his utopian attempt to regenerate the *dar al-Islam* within the traditional framework of an Islamic government. Thus his *hijra* was not only a retreat from the triumph of modernity, but was also a quest for the creation of Muslim-ruled land. World War I had sealed the complete foreign domination in the Middle East, from Algeria to the Holy Land. And al-Sanusi was out to defend a strip of exclusively Muslim land.

To the extent that al-Sanusi represents a local Islamic leader convinced of the necessity of an Islamic empire, the study of his 15-year exile also presents some general considerations on the historical and ideological evolution of the Islamic world during the interwar years. The exile of al-Sanusi marks a revolutionary time for the Middle East - from Ottoman to Arab, from Islamic to national – and al-Sanusi's own life tells the story of these emerging tensions.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

Ahmad al-Sharif's exile consisted in 15 years rife with political activism which have so far passed unnoticed. No monograph on Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi exists in Arabic or in any other language, and relatively little mention of his exile years can be found in either works on the Sanusiyya, North African history, or Middle Eastern history. Since he was the head of the Sanusi brotherhood for over 15 years and played an important role in anti-colonial struggle, one would expect that over 90 years of prolific Sanusi studies might have produced some research on his life in exile. But that is not so. Western historiography of the Sanusiyya is abundant and wide in scope, but most of these works barely mention al-Sanusi's political activity after his departure from Cyrenaica. A first wave of Sanusi studies, which dominated the inter-war years, was predominantly a by-product of the Italian occupation of Libya. Works such as Macaluso and Giglio for

example, intentionally dismissed the authority of the Grand Sanusi in order not to undermine their own precarious rule in current-day Libya.⁴ After the war, the Sanusiyya was an object of international scholarly attention and a second group of publications on the brotherhood focused on its religious and social customs. The pioneering work by the British anthropologist Evans-Pritchard was then followed by numerous others, such as Ziadeh and Vikør.⁵ A third and more recent group of studies on the Sanusiyya is concerned with the brotherhood mainly from the perspective of its relations with the Ottomans (Simon, Le Gall), whether as a social phenomenon (Anderson) or as Libyan proto-nationalist (Ahmida).⁶ Among these scholars who have dealt extensively with the Sanusiyya from different perspectives, only Ziadeh and Evans-Pritchard even mention (albeit briefly) Ahmad al-Sanusi's exile.⁷ No exhaustive investigation of his life exists, and in general all references to his role beyond the shores of Cyrenaica are incomplete.⁸ Arab writers studying the Sanusiyya (Ashhab, Arslan, Shukri and al-Dajani) have underscored Ahmad al-Sharif's life-long attachment to Cyrenaica and his religious devotion; but offer only a glimpse – if at all – into his political activity in exile.⁹ A leading

⁴ Carlo Giglio, *La Confraternita Senussita dalle sue Origini ad Oggi* (Padova: CEDAM, 1932); Giuseppe Macaluso, *Turchi, Senussi e Italiani in Libia* (Bengasi: G. Vitale, 1930).

⁵ Nicola A. Ziadeh, *Sanusiyya: A Study of a Revivalist Movement in Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1958); E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949); Knut S. Vikør, *Sufi and Scholar on the Desert Edge* (London: Hurst and Co., 1995).

⁶ Michel Le Gall, "The Ottoman government and the Sanusiyya : a Reappraisal," *IJMES* vol. 21 no. 1 (Feb. 1989): 91-106; idem, "Pan-islamism and the Brotherhoods during the reign of Abdulhamid II: notes on Ottoman and Sanusi relations," in Abdeljelil Temini (ed.), *Les provinces arabes à l'époque ottomane* (Zaghuan: Ceroma, 1987); Lisa Anderson, *The State and Social Transformations in Tunisia and Libya, 1830-1980* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Rachel Simon, *Libya between Ottomanism and nationalism: the Ottoman involvement in Libya during the war with Italy, 1911-1919* (Berlin: K. Schwarz, 1987); Ali Abdullatif Ahmida, *The Making of Modern Libya: State Formation, Colonization and Resistance, 1830-1932* (Albany: State of New York University Press, 1994).

⁷ Ziadeh, 70-71; Evans-Pritchard, 130-133.

⁸ The EI, s.v. Sanusi Al-, Ahmad Al-Sharif, does refer to his years in exile, but fails to mention some salient episodes, such as his role among the Iraqi rebels, his affiliation with Ibn Saud and the Idrisi.

⁹ Muhammad Fu'ad Shukri, *Al-Sanusiyya: Din wa Dawla* [Sanusiyya: Religion and State]. ([Cairo]: Dar al-fikr al-'arabi, 1948); Shakib Arslan, *Hadir al-'alam al-islami* [Comments on the Arabic Translation of Lothrop Stoddard's *The Moslem World*] (Cairo: 1343/1924-5; reprint, 2 vols, [Bayrut]: Dar al-Fikr, 1391/1971); Ahmad Sidqi al-Dajani, *Al-Haraka al-Sanusiyya nasha'atuha wa-namu'uha fi al-qarn al-tasi'*

pro-Ottoman Arab intellectual, Shakib Arslan, remembers al-Sanusi as the former leader of Libya who until the very end of his exile attempted to find a solution for occupied Cyrenaica.¹⁰ Another author brings up Ahmad al-Sanusi's exile only to state that "during the last fourteen years of his life, which he spent in the Hijaz, he maintained his life-long practice of piety and ascetism."¹¹ Similarly, the most recent book on the topic by a Libyan scholar simply states that "in exile al-Sanusi did not change his anti-colonial policy and kept in contact with his followers in Cyrenaica."¹² The only exception to this barren field is a 1980 article (published in an Arabic journal) by Mohamed E. Salhiya who looks into al-Sanusi's "jihad in exile."¹³

Scholars have ignored Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi's exile years for three reasons: a predominant nationalist outlook dominated the field of contemporary Middle Eastern studies; a general lack of interest in Libyan history, considered by most English-language scholars marginal to the modern Middle East; and the apparent absence of sources on al-Sanusi's exile.

Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi's exile in Anatolia, Syria and Arabia has been shunned by an overwhelmingly nationalist historiography, be it Turkish or Arab. Turkish historiography tended to emphasize the nationalist and secularist nature of the early years of the Republic and has increasingly disassociated Turkey's national movement from any

'*ashar* [ta'lif], 2 vols. (Cairo: 1967, vol. 1; Cairo: 1988, vol. 2); Tayyib al-Ashhab, *Al-Mahdi al-Sanusi* (Tripoli, 1952).

¹⁰ Shakib Arslan, *La Nation Arabe* (January-March 1933), 1-3.

¹¹ *Al-Lataif al-Musawara*, no. 945 (20 March, 1933) quoted in al-Ashhab, 323.

¹² Ahmida, 123

¹³ Muhammad 'Isa Salhiya, "Safhat majhula min tarikh libiya: watha'iq min tarikh al-sayyid Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi" [Libyan Papers: Documented secret letters of Ahmad al-Sharif], *Annals of the College of Arts of Kuwait University*. 1 (1980).

religious or Arab underpinning.¹⁴ Western authors studying the Turkish war of 1918-1923 have also been accomplices in this attempt to construct a Turkish secularist and nationalist myth.¹⁵ Similar in its outlook, Arab historians have dwelled on what they saw as the four-centuries-long-oppression under the Turks and have emphasized the historical re-birth of the Arab nation under the banner of the Hashemites. They have therefore constructed a fierce anti-Ottoman literature, in which al-Sanusi clearly does not fit. In this sense, Lisa Anderson's apt definition of al-Sanusi as the "reverse Arab Revolt" – supported by the Turks to fight against Western forces – well exemplifies how al-Sanusi stands at odds with a celebratory literature on the unity of the Arab nation.¹⁶ Sanusi's exile as an Islamic leader, ally of the Turks, enemy of the Hashemites, then friend of 'Abd al-'Aziz Ibn Sa'ud, is anathema to a historiography based on a Turkish-Arab dichotomy.

Libyan historiography has neglected to follow the footsteps of al-Sanusi around the Mediterranean, being too concentrated on locating the roots of its own national identity in al-Sanusi's jihadist activity prior to his exile. In a certain sense, brushing away the layers of dust from those documents which testify to Al-Sanusi's close relations with the

¹⁴ A reevaluation of the Arab and Turkish bonds during the Young Turk period has been successfully accomplished in Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks. Ottomanism, Arabism and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire (1908-1918)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). But Kayali's narrative stops in 1918, and after the end of the Ottoman Empire Turkish historians have tended to distance Turkey from its Islamic heritage and its Arab linkage. For an overview of the anti-Islamic rethoric in the early years of the Turkish Republic, Dankwart Rustow, "Politics and Islam in Turkey, 1920-1955," in Richard N. Frye (ed.), *Islam and the West: Proceedings of the Harvard Summer School on the Middle East, July 25-27, 1955* (The Hague: Mouton, 1957): 67-107. For an overview of the evolution of Turkey's relation to the Arab world see also Andrew Mango, "Turkey and the Middle East," *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 3 no. 3 (July 1968): 225-236.

¹⁵ The five volume encyclopedic work by Stanford J. Shaw is an example of this mystifying trend. Cf. Stanford J. Shaw, *From Empire to Republic. The Turkish War of National Liberation 1918-1923: A Documentary Study* (Ankara: Turkish Historical Society, 2000). In all its 2500 pages there are few references to the collaboration with Islamic or Arab leaders, and absolutely no mention of Ahmad al-Sanusi.

¹⁶ Lisa Anderson, "The development of nationalist sentiment in Libya, 1908-1922," Khalidi et al. (eds.), *The Origins of Arab Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991): 225-242.

Turkish nationalists and the Wahhabis would be counterproductive to the construction of a national myth based on local anti-colonial resistance.

The issue of deported and exiled Libyans in the early years of Italian rule has recently gained considerable attention from both Libyan and Italian historians who have, starting in the year 2000, promoted annual conferences specifically on this topic.¹⁷ Mario Genco has looked into the case of Libyans deported to the Italian island of Ustica; Luciano Nisticò and Claudio Moffa have shed light on the policy of forced exile and deportation promoted by the Italians throughout their rule in Libya.¹⁸ In Tripoli, the Libyan Studies Center has also been supporting investigations on Libyan exiles.¹⁹

Despite these efforts, Libyan and Italian historians have so far totally ignored Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi's exile. This absence is due to the fact that most of these works concentrate on the Italian policy of deporting and exiling its subjects as a reflection of the dark side and unwritten history of the Italian colonial adventures. The studies so far produced on exiled Libyans, their internment and their deaths in remote islands off the Sicilian coast, fit within a broader bulk of anti-colonial historiography. Since the 1970s, historians of Italian imperialism have been attempting to demystify the fascist rhetoric of the colonial mission.²⁰ Although Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi was a leading figure of the anti-Italian resistance and his exile was motivated by his unconciliatory attitude towards

¹⁷ The papers of the first conference on Libyan exiles are published as Suplizi, Francesco and Sury, Salaheddin Hasan (eds.). *Primo convegno su Gli Esiliati Libici nel periodo coloniale 28-29 Ottobre 2000 Isole Tremiti* (Rome, Tripoli: IsIAO [Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente] and Centro Libico per gli Studi Storici, 2002).

¹⁸ Mario Genco, "L'agonia dei deportati libici nella colonia penale di Ustica," *Studi Piacentini*, no. 5 (1989): 89-114; Claudio Moffa, "I deportati libici della guerra 1911-1912," in *Rivista di Storia Contemporanea*, 1 (1990): 32-56; Luciano Nisticò, "Relegati libici in Italia. Un aspetto poco noto della conquista coloniale," *Islam: Storia e Civiltà*, VIII (1989): 275-285.

¹⁹ M.T. Jerary, "The Libyan Studies Centre: Its History and its aims," in *Würzburger Geographische Manuskripte*, 51 (1999): 147-149.

²⁰ Salvatore Bono, "L'historiographie sur la résistance anticoloniale en Libye (1911-1912)," Anna Baldinetti (ed.), *Modern and Contemporary Libya: Sources and Historiographies* (Rome: IsIAO [Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente], 2003).

the colonial powers, the anti-Italian evocative power of his exile is less powerful than the detailed accounts of the deportation of Libyans (including one of Ahmad al-Sharif's sons and his uncle Rida) to Italian internment camps. Al-Sanusi's absence from this recent prolific field, which we might call "Libyan exile studies," can therefore be seen as the outcome of the field's strictly anti-colonial and anti-fascist outlook.

The existing historiography on Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi therefore fails to give a full portrait of his exile. During those 15 years al-Sanusi did not live in spiritual or political isolation, nor was his field of action limited to Libya, as some authors contend. Quite the contrary, during his exile Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi was politically active and played a self-conscious role in Middle Eastern affairs from the end of WWI until the late 1920s. In this work, we shall attempt to cross the boundaries of various national historiographies in order to provide a complete picture of Al-Sanusi's political role in Turkey, Syria, Hijaz and 'Asir from 1918 to 1933, and we shall also trace parallels with the region's historical evolution during those same years.

SOURCES

Apart from conflicting nationalist trends and a strictly anti-colonial Italian historiography that have so far impeded an investigation of al-Sanusi's exile, there is a more practical factor which certainly has not encouraged such an investigation: the apparent lack of adequate sources. Al-Sanusi himself only wrote four books, mainly concerned with theological and devotional issues regarding the Sanusiyya brotherhood, bereft of any autobiographical details.²¹ He did not keep a diary. Of his private correspondence, we

²¹ Apart from al-Sanusi's already cited treatise on *jihad* (1913), his other works are compendiums of Sanusiyya history and beliefs: *Al-Anwar al-qudsiyya fi muqaddima al-tariqa al-Sanusiyya* (Istanbul, 1339-42/1920-24); *al-Durra al-afdiyya fi bayan mabna al-tariqa al-Sanusiyya al-Muhammadiyya* (Bombay, n.d.).

know that he regularly wrote to Shakib Arslan, to the ex-Khedive of Egypt ‘Abbas II, and to his many other followers in the Muslim world. But only few of these letters survive today.²² Some of his letters to U.S., British and Italian diplomats have been preserved in the Records of the State Department, the Public Records Office and the Archives of the Italian Foreign Ministry. In this work we have tried to draw as much as possible from al-Sanusi’s correspondence – both private and official – since we believe that his letters shed light on the inner motivations determining the exiled leader’s actions.²³

The poverty of available documentation on al-Sanusi after his departure from Cyrenaica in 1918 has made the task of reconstructing his exile somewhat troublesome. Aside from the secondary sources and correspondence, this work has had to rely on memoirs of his contemporaries, clippings from the Arab, British and Italian press and, to a large degree, British, French, Italian and American diplomatic dispatches and intelligence reports.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FIELD

Ahmad al-Sanusi’s exile years are of interest to the scholarship on the contemporary Middle East, not only because their study will complete his fragmented biographical portrait, but also because his activities, in Turkey and Arabia especially, provide interesting insights into some significant episodes of Middle Eastern history. In Anatolia, for example, the fact that Mustafa Kemal financed al-Sanusi’s pro-Turkish and pan-

before 1931); *al-Fuyuda al-rabbaniya fi ijaza al-tariqa al-sanusiyya al-Ahmadiya al-Idrisiya* (Istanbul, 1342/1924-5).

²² ‘Abbas II papers are archived in the University of Durham Library. However, this author has not had an opportunity to consult that archive.

²³ Unlike the British Public Record Office equipped with an online catalog and numerous detailed printed catalogs available in major research libraries, the catalogs of the Italian Foreign Ministry are not detailed and are hard to find abroad. An excellent starting point to find Italian documents on North Africa prior to 1922 is the very detailed 5 volume compendium edited by Carlo Giglio, *Inventario delle fonti manoscritte relative alla storia dell’Africa del Nord esistenti in Italia* (Leiden: Brill, 1971-). The University of Pavia is currently working on a new publication covering documents from 1922 to 1945.

Islamic propaganda among the Arab tribes of northern Iraq and northern Syria, raises many questions on the nature of Arab-Turkish relations from 1919 to 1924. Al-Sanusi's role in those years, at the side of the Turks, shows that what has been dubbed "the Turkish war of liberation" was neither exclusively Turkish nor inherently secularist from the outset. Al-Sanusi's activity also sheds some light on the Turkish use of propaganda on the Eastern front where military forces were inadequate to engage in a direct armed confrontation. Evidence of his affiliation with the anti-French uprisings in northern Syria in the early 1920s also illustrates the Turkish support to these revolts. Furthermore, al-Sanusi's correspondence regarding the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924 calls for a reassessment of that important episode which put an end to the highest institution of the Islamic world. In fact, it seems that al-Sanusi was a candidate for a spiritual Caliphate outside Turkey: he was supported in Asian pan-Islamist circles and might have also been backed by Mustafa Kemal himself. A further contribution of studying Ahmad al-Sharif's exile emerges out of his activities in Arabia. Immediately after the Wahhabis take over Mecca, al-Sanusi was invited by Ibn Sa'ud to govern the Holy City of Islam and later acted as his emissary in 'Asir. Considering that Ahmad al-Sharif remained throughout his life the leader of the Sanusi brotherhood – a puritan, yet Sufi order – his prominent role under Ibn Sa'ud illuminates a surprising Wahhabi collaboration with Muslim mystical orders.

OUTLINE OF THE DISCUSSION

The narration of al-Sanusi's life and of the corresponding Middle Eastern context proceeds chronologically. The first chapter provides the background to the Sanusiyya brotherhood and its role in late Ottoman history. We shall give a general overview of the anti-colonial resistance headed by Ahmad al-Sharif prior to his voluntary exile in 1918

and analyze his treatise on *jihad*, which should be considered Ahmad al-Sharif's political testament.

In the second chapter we look into al-Sanusi's activities in Constantinople and Bursa from 1918 until 1920. During these years al-Sanusi covets the idea of returning to Libya and attempts repeatedly to establish a dialog with Italian authorities. But after failing to do so, he reinforces his cooperation with former Young Turks and his contacts with other exiled pro-Ottoman Arabs in exile. Al-Sanusi becomes part of an intellectual milieu of pro-Ottoman Arabs, who were bewildered by the collapse of the empire following the Armistice of Mudros and the ignominious treaty of Sèvres. In this chapter we shall analyze al-Sanusi both in relation to the emerging fascist foreign policy of Italy, which hindered his efforts to return to his homeland and reunite with his family, as well as in the context of the post-World War I settlement of Anatolia.

In the third chapter we shall follow al-Sanusi to southeastern Anatolia and northern Iraq where, from 1920 to 1923, he waged a pan-Islamic and anti-colonial campaign at the service of the Turkish nationalists. The threatening advance of foreign forces in the region and his realization that dialogue with the occupying forces of Italy were of no avail pushes al-Sanusi to engage directly in aiding the Turkish war of liberation. The presence of Greek troops of occupation in Turkey, the British mandate in Iraq, their support for the Hashemites, and French mandate over Syria, provide the context for al-Sanusi's direct involvement on the side of Mustafa Kemal. We shall therefore analyze the regional outlook prompting al-Sanusi to engage directly in a new *jihad* against Western forces.

The fourth chapter deals with the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924 and the Islamic world's response to it. We shall analyze al-Sanusi's involvement in the Caliphate question and look into his candidature to the highest spiritual institution of Islam. In particular, we shall investigate the stance taken by Turkish nationalists, Indian pan-Islamists and Ibn Sa'ud, to whom he looked for support.

The fifth chapter presents al-Sanusi's troubled journey from Turkey to Mecca in 1925, and then looks into his role in Arabia until his death in 1933. These years overlap with the consolidation of Wahhabi rule in the Hijaz and its expansion in Southern Arabia, in which al-Sanusi played a pivotal role. It also coincides with the gradual consolidation of the figure of Ibn Sa'ud as the champion of Islam – one of the only Muslim leaders free from the shackles of Western authority.

“Exile brings you overnight where it normally would take you a lifetime to go,” says Russian émigré Joseph Brodsky.²⁴ Going into exile is like being placed in a capsule and hurtled into outer space. For Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi, exile suddenly thrust him in the midst of the modern Middle East, with all its tensions and contradictions. To study his life is to investigate the troubled transition from the Ottoman world to the modern Middle East.

²⁴ Joseph Brodsky, “The Condition we call Exile,” *Renaissance and Modern Studies*, vol. 34 (1991), 1-8.

THE SANUSIYYA, AHMAD AL-SHARIF and THE OTTOMANS

The British called him a “deposed Pope”.²⁵ The French referred to him bitterly as “a black legend” and the Italians differed little in their chastising portrait of the Sanusi leader.²⁶ But for many Muslims – Arab, Turkish or Indian alike – he was the *imam al-mujahidin*, the leader of the fighters of the holy war.²⁷ Behind these different mystifying descriptions of Sayyid Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi rests the essential fact that he was the third spiritual leader of the Sanusiyya, a Sufi brotherhood with Islamic puritan beliefs founded in the middle of the 19th century, which had its stronghold in current-day Libya but whose influence spread throughout the Islamic world. To better understand al-Sanusi’s position during his exile it is important to recall that his leadership during the Italo-Turkish war and later during WWI played an important role in determining his social, political and religious status until his death. This legacy – his religious standing as head of the Sanusiyya order, his allegiance to the Young Turk Ottoman government during the war, and his role in fighting the British, French and Italians simultaneously – vested al-Sanusi with a prestige that followed him throughout the Middle East.

²⁵ “The Senussi Chief in Exile: a deposed Pope” in *Times* (London), Oct. 28, 1919.

²⁶ For a French and Italian anti-Sanusi literature see respectively the excellent and encyclopedic study by Jean-Louis Triaud, *La Légende noire de la Sanusiyya: Une confrérie Musulmane Saharienne sous le regard Français (1840-1930)* (Paris: Edition de la Maison des sciences de l’homme, 1995); G. Albergoni, “Variations italiennes sur un thème français: la Sanusiyya” in *CRESM, Connaissance du Maghreb. Science sociales et colonisation* (Paris-Aix: 1984).

²⁷ *OM* xiii (1933), 180.

THE SANUSIYYA

The Sanusi brotherhood was founded by Ahmad al-Sharif's grandfather, Muhammad b. 'Ali al-Sanusi al-Khattabi al-Hasani al-Idrisi (1787-1859), an Algerian of Moroccan descent.²⁸ After studying in Fez in the 1820s, Mohammad b. 'Ali went to Cairo intending to study at al-Azhar, but was soon condemned for his innovating and reformist ideas.²⁹ So he moved on to Mecca where he became one of the disciples of the Ahmad b. Idris al-Fasi, an influential Moroccan Sufi leader whose mission was to unite all Moslem religious orders. After the death of the Ahmad b. Idris in 1837, his followers divided into three distinct groups: Idris al-Fasi's direct descendants continued his religious teachings in southern Arabia and became the rulers of the short-lived Idrisi state in 'Asir between 1906 and 1930; Sharif Muhammad b. 'Uthman al-Mirghani, who later moved to Sudan, founded a *tariqa* that would later give life to the Khatmiyya order; and ultimately al-Sanusi, who expanded his master's syncretic yet puritan beliefs throughout north Africa.³⁰ Beyond providing the religious inspiration for the appeal to a syncretic Islam and establishing regional affiliations, the founding link with Ahmad b. Idris al-Fasi played an important role in the Sanusi political philosophy. Though forceful, the Idrisi ascendance successfully linked the Sanusi with the Qurayshi tribe thereby creating a Sanusi *isnad* (genealogical chain) going back to the prophet Muhammad himself, a strong source of religious and political legitimacy in Islam.³¹

²⁸ Hereafter simply referred to as Muhammad b. 'Ali al-Sanusi.

²⁹ J. R. Willis, "The fatwas of Condemnation" in Masud, et al. (eds.), *Islamic legal interpretation: muftis and their fatwas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 153-161; Ziadeh, 40.

³⁰ On the influence of Ahmad b. Idris, see R.S. O'Fahey and A.S. Karrar, "The Enigmatic Imam: The influence of Ahmad Ibn Idris" in *JMES* 19 (1987), 205-220.

³¹ Mohammad b. 'Ali Al-Sanusi, *Al-Durar al-saniya fi akhbar al-sulala al-Idrisiya* [The gleaming pearls, on the reports of the Idrisi family] (Beirut: 1986). B.G. Martin illustrates how this Sanusi tracts aims at demonstrating the brotherhood's link to the prophet in his "A future Sanusi Caliphate? Muhammad 'Ali Al-Sanusi and his durar al-saniya," in *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 26ii (1992), 160-8.

The founder of the brotherhood that would be later known as the Sanusiyya, initially it called “Tariqa al-Muhammadiyya,” literally indicating his yearning for a return to an Islam modeled on the example of the Prophet Mohammad.³² The return to the sources was aimed at uniting the different religious orders as well as reaching a syncretic union of the four *madhabs*. The Sanusiyya doctrine combines traits of Salafism (insofar as it aims to recreate the Prophet’s society), Reformism (by advocating a large recourse to *ijtihad*, reinterpretation of the law) and Sufism (based on community life and *dhikr*).³³ The syncretic aim of the founder is manifested in his writing by his recourse to an ample spectrum of Islamic thinkers ranging from the mystic al-Ghazzali to the Hanbali Ibn Taymiyya.³⁴ The Sanusiyya never aimed at a unity with *Allah*, but rather closeness to the Prophet. This property is considered by the Sanusis as one of the greatest privileges granted to the Grand Sanusi (the title reserved to the leader of the order) who “used to receive communications directly from the Prophet without intermediary.”³⁵ In order to reach this objective, they claimed the need for study, training and intention, but not ecstasy. Thus the *dhikr* (the ceremony of incessant repetition of words and formulae in praise of *Allah*) of the Sanusiyya is not ecstatic, and is not accompanied by music and dancing.

Mohammad b. ‘Ali al-Sanusi established his first *zawiya* (religious compound) near Mecca, and by the end of his life there were 12 Sanusi compounds in the Hijaz. These Hijazi *zawiyas* played an important function in molding ideological ties with Muslims in

³² In all the works written by the Sanusis the brotherhood is referred to as *tariqa al-Muhammadiyya*. As late as 1924, Ahmad al-Sharif uses the expression *tariqa al-Sanusiyya* in the title of his compendium on the beliefs and the history of the brotherhood, but in the text refers to it always as the *al-Muhammadiyya*.

³³ Ziadeh, 73-98.

³⁴ Muhammad b. ‘Ali al-Sanusi is believed to have written fifty books, but only ten survive today covering poetry, history, fiqh and tasawwuf. Most of these were put together in a joint publication called *al-Majmu‘a al-Mukhtara* [The Select Collection]. Beirut: 1968. For a complete bibliography and explanation of Mohammad b. ‘Ali al-Sanusi’s writings, see Vikor, *Sufi and Scholar*, 218-240.

³⁵ Sayyid Ahmad al-Sharif, quoted in Adams, 22.

the East, especially in Indonesia and India. Thanks to contacts made during the Pilgrimage season, in fact, al-Sanusi's ideas spread to faraway places in Asia and Africa and the Sanusiyya gathered a following which spread well beyond the African hinterland. In the following generations of Sanusi leaders, and in the case of Ahmad al-Sharif especially, this international outreach of the brotherhood provided significant ideological and religious sympathies and also bestowed a steady flow of financial contributions to the Sanusi resistance.

Wanting to avoid growing disputes with Meccan shaykhs, in 1838 al-Sanusi moved to Cyrenaica (in today's eastern Libya), a largely tribal region that had several important advantages: other orders and the orthodox '*ulama*' that might have been able to condemn his preaching hardly operated there; the region was mainly inhabited by bedouins, amongst whom he had already worked successfully in the Hijaz; Ottoman central control over Cyrenaica, although reimposed since 1835, was limited to its shores; and being an important trade junction, there were good chances for the spread of the Sanusiyya in the wake of the caravans, just as Islam had spread in Africa ten centuries earlier.

Under its subsequent leader, Muhammad al-Mahdi (1844-1902), the Sanusiyya became a political force in north and subsaharan Africa, capable of mobilizing and uniting the bedouin tribes. By 1880 there were already 38 Sanusi zawiyas in Cyrenaica and Sirtica, 18 in Tripolitania and Fezzan, 17 in Egypt, 13 in the Arabian peninsula and other in north and central Africa, and by the beginning of the twentieth century their total number of zawiyas had already exceeded 150.³⁶ Thanks to a system of direct alliances with local tribes, under al-Mahdi's leadership the Sanusiyya reached its zenith with its influence

³⁶ Simon, 9.

extending over Central Sudan, from Lake Chad to the Senegal, on top of its earlier expansion in the Hijaz and Asia. This great influence was due not only to al-Mahdi's personality, and the great tradition founded by his father, but also to expectations associated by his followers of the idea of al-Mahdi, the Hidden Imam, whom Muslims, at various periods of their history, had expected to appear to spread justice in the world which was dominated by evil and oppression. Nevertheless under the leadership of al-Mahdi, the Sanusiyya continued its religious preaching in the periphery of the Muslim lands and avoided as much as possible direct confrontation with foreign powers. In 1883, the Grand Sanusi rejected the call of the Sudanese self-proclaimed Mahdi, Muhammad Ahmad of Dongola, to join forces in a *jihad* against the British forces who had occupied Egypt the previous year and declared him an impostor. Al-Mahdi also refused to engage in anti-British activity when 'Arabi Pasha, the Egyptian national leader and revolutionary asked the Grand Sanusi to collaborate with him by marching from Jaghrub and help him drive out the British.³⁷

Until the end of the nineteenth century therefore the expansion of the Sanusiyya in Africa occurred without confronting outside resistance. The Sufi tariqa had grounded itself in a corner of the Muslim world that had so far been divided into separate tribal regions and was still largely untouched by western influence: its net of *zawiyas* linked oasis and tribal centers scattered along interior caravan routes that were distant from British-controlled Egypt and French Algeria.

The situation changed at the turn of the century when the brotherhood's influence reached Central Africa and clashed with the French who had begun expanding in the Chad region. From then on the growth of the brotherhood and the consolidation of its social and political power took place in the face of Western regional penetration. Thus

³⁷ Ziadeh, 53 and Vikor, 155.

the death of al-Mahdi in 1902 marked a turning point in the history of the Sanusiyya: under its subsequent leader, the Sanusiyya stopped being exclusively a Sufi order engaged a pedagogic and religious mission on the edges of the Islamic world.³⁸ Under Ahmed al-Sharif al-Sanusi, in fact, the Sanusiyya became a political and military force capable of organizing the Bedouin armed resistance against the French colonial advance from the south and, after 1911, against the Italian occupation of Libya. Its audacity, at one point fighting against France, Britain, and Italy simultaneously, and its tenacious resistance holding out for twenty years, gave it an image of a militant and jihadi order, built with the aim of defending Islam against Western intrusion.

AHMAD AL-SHARIF AND JIHAD

The concept of *jihad* was not absent from the writings of the first leaders of the Sanusi brotherhood, but for them Holy War was confined to a theoretical perspective, never to be actively engaged. The founder of the brotherhood refrained from taking part in ‘Abd al-Qadir’s anti-French struggle in Algeria in 1840.³⁹ Similarly, his successor, al-Mahdi al-Sanusi, refused to engage in a joint anti-British *jihad* with Egyptian and Sudanese leaders.⁴⁰ Neither of them even bothered to comment on the western take over of neighboring Egypt and Algeria. The founding beliefs of the brotherhood in fact contain no trace whatsoever of a concern with Western powers or of the need to resist them –

³⁸ Sayyid al-Mahdi died during a journey in Sudan. He left no officially appointed successor and his sons, Sayyid Idris (12 years) and Sayyid al-Rida (10 years) were considered too young to be shouldered with the responsibilities of running the affairs of the Order, so the family entrusted the leadership to Sayyid Ahmad al-Sharif, the sixteen-year-old grandson of the founder of the brotherhood. Scholars disagree on the procedure for succession among the Sanusis – whether it had been decided that the leadership would pass to the first born male child of the Gran Sanusi, or, as in the case of many tribal societies, the successor must be agreed upon by the family council. Cf. Ziadeh, 66. Depending on what they consider to be the legitimate succession, scholars have considered Ahmad al-Sharif either as a regent until Muhammad Idris became of age (Shukri), or as a legitimate ruler of the Sanusiyya (Evans-Pritchard). This debate over the legitimacy of Ahmad al-Sharif’s rise to Grand Sanusi resurfaces dramatically in 1916, when Muhammad Idris initiated talks with the Italians and the British.

³⁹ Vikør, 139

⁴⁰ For an analysis of the use of the concept of *jihad* in the Algerian, Sudanese and Egyptian resistance movements, see Rudolf Peters, *Islam and Colonialism. The doctrine of Jihad in Modern History* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1979), 39-104.

and we can be fairly certain that if the founder had ever voiced such views in any of his writings, they would not have been forgotten in the struggle that was to come.⁴¹ It seems therefore plausible to assume that the early writings of the Sanusiyya did not discuss the issue of the confrontation with the West simply because in the time of its founder, the brotherhood had no practical reason to formulate it: the Sanusiyya never really had to face the menace of the West.

But under Ahmad al-Sharif's leadership, the Sanusis called for a military *jihad*. The Grand Sanusi proclaimed it as the explicit duty of every Muslim: he dispatched *jihad* proclamations to be published in Arab papers; and he also wrote a lengthy treatise justifying the obligation to resist foreign domination through armed resistance.⁴² This ideological change was not due to a sudden innovation of the new leader. Ahmad al-Sharif's treatise, in fact, follows a rather traditional methodology consisting in quoting different Islamic thinkers and discussing their views. Although he refers to Quranic citations and more contemporary thinkers than his predecessors had in any of their legal discussion, the overall style of his *jihad* tract is not inherently innovative with respect to other Sanusiyya works.⁴³ He does not deviate from the main beliefs of the brotherhood. This shift from verbal support of *jihad* to a direct military engagement invoked by Ahmad al-Sharif appears to have been prompted by the change in the surrounding historical reality. In 1911, in fact, in the wake of the jubilant atmosphere of European colonial expansion and in alleged defense of its economic interests, an Italian

⁴¹ Ziadeh, 73-98. Muhammad b. 'Ali al-Sanusi wrote many books, some of which have gone lost. Although one day some writings against the West might surface, the Sanusi writings we have today show no evidence of an inherent anti-Westernism.

⁴² Although Ahmad al-Sharif's call for jihad was made earlier in his reign, the written treatise on jihad dates to after the Italian occupation. Al-Sanusi, Ahmad al-Sharif. *Bughya l-musa'id fi ahkam al-mujahid fi l-hathth 'ala l-jihad* (Cairo: Matba'at Jaridat al-Shab, 1332/1913-4). A shorter declaration was also published the previous year in an Egyptian paper: "Manshur Sayyid Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi fi l-tahrid 'ala l-jihad" in *al-Mu'ayyad*, Cairo, 9 Safar 1330/ Jan. 29, 1912.

⁴³ As suggested by Knut Vikør, "A Sanusi Treatise on Jihad" in *BRIMES Proceedings of the 1991 International conference on Middle Eastern Studies* (London: SOAS, 1991), 509-520.

expeditionary force of more than 60,000 troops had occupied the Libyan coast. And the Sanusi *jihad* was a call for active resistance to foreign domination – a resistance which lasted for over 20 years. As al-Sanusi himself states, it is because of the “attack of the enemy,” that *jihad* becomes obligatory.

What is incumbent upon you is to wage jihad against the enemies, giving them a tough time, establishing Islam, assisting the Religion and its adherents, raising Allah’s words and subjugating unbelief and the unbelievers. This implies that abandoning jihad means leaving the Religion, since one can only return to something when one has left it. This goes for the jihad that is a collective duty and therefore a fortiori for the jihad that has become an individual duty because of an attack by the enemy.⁴⁴

According to Rudolf Peters, who has studied modern works on *jihad*, the Sanusi’s proclamation exemplifies a combination of both a modern mobilizing and a classical instructive work on *jihad*.⁴⁵ Knut Vikør has further elaborated this dichotomy, by considering the Sanusi *jihad*, not so much a combination of tradition and modernity, but rather as the manifestation of the brotherhood’s emancipation from classical Islam and its attempt to come to grips with modernity.⁴⁶ Considering the *Bughya* (al-Sanusi’s *jihad* treatise) a classical work on the basis of its form, he says, would ignore the reason for which it was written, and the context in which it was received. At the same time, it is not yet modern in the sense of its being a direct ideological challenge to European ideas. Vikør concurs with the opinion that the brotherhood’s passage from classical tradition to modernity, as manifested in Ahmad al-Sharif’s call for *jihad*, was prompted by the changing times, by the growing penetration of western forces, and by the surfacing of a

⁴⁴ From the 1912 jihad declaration published in *al-Mu’ayyad*, quoted in Peters, 86

⁴⁵ Peters, 84-89. According to Peters, this treatise is mobilizing, inasmuch as it was occasioned in reaction of a contingent political situation and extols the virtues of jihad and requirement of the Muslims to take part in it, while maintaining a traditional pedagogic approach of presenting the opinions of various classical and contemporary islamic thinkers.

⁴⁶ Vikør, *A Sanusi Treatise*, 520.

direct menace from a non-Muslim power. It was an “imposed” struggle - imposed by colonial expansion.

Although it is undeniable that the direct confrontation with a foreign power unleashed the new jihadist stance of the Sanusiyya, considering it as the sole reason for the protracted resistance is unsatisfactory. Colonialism alone does not explain why a *jihad* was launched. By the time of the Sanusi, many other nations had been subjected to foreign rule without necessarily putting up a resourceful and variegated armed resistance. Furthermore anti-colonialism alone does not fit with Ahmad al-Sharif's purporting to maintain a continuity with the brotherhood's general doctrine. In fact, as we have said previously, Al-Sanusi's theorization of the need for active resistance against Western powers does not stem out of an inherently anti-Christian ideology of the brotherhood (a myth spread by French colonizers). What elements of the Sanusi philosophy enabled Ahmad al-Sharif to call for *jihad*, a historical innovation in the brotherhood's history, without breaking away from the overall Sanusi's belief?

An answer appears to be coming from Lisa Anderson, who has suggested that the Libyan *jihad* was a simple and eloquent way to rally support for the political and economic status quo of the Ottoman Empire.⁴⁷ The call for *jihad*, in fact, does express an attempt to maintain the status quo, but it was primarily a political-religious status quo that al-Sanusi supported.

Al-Sanusi's “fight against the enemies of religion” was framed within the Sanusiyya's belief in the sanctity of Islam and in the obligation of Islamic governance. Following the teachings of brotherhood's founder, Ahmad al-Sharif upheld the need for the *Imama* (a supreme Islamic governing body). The brotherhood accepted the view, first expressed by Yahya ibn al-Sharif al-Shafi'i (d.1277), that Muslims had no business living under the

⁴⁷ Lisa Anderson, “Nineteenth-Century Reform in Ottoman Libya,” *IJMES*, xvi (1984), 325-48.

domination of non-Muslim powers.⁴⁸ The Sanusi's call for *jihad* therefore appears not to be so much expression of an inherently anti-western belief, but was rather a defensive response to what he and his brotherhood considered to be the inviolability of Islamic rule. The main tenet, in fact, conveyed throughout this treatise is Al-Sanusi's adamant rejection of foreign rule. Thus his vivid depiction of the horrifying prospect of being dominated by Westerners is as follows:

How can you live with vipers and scorpions and with those who openly profess polytheism and the trinity [of god] and who destroy the mihrabs? How can the light of the sun of Islam shine over you when the Banner of the Cross and the Darkness flutters amongst you?⁴⁹

As we have noted previously, the Sanusi brotherhood had been created for the purpose of reviving Islamic learning and piety, and to unite the Muslim world. But in order to achieve this goal, the Sanusiyya believed, it was necessary to have an Islamic state, governed by a Muslim ruler. This is the central and dominating idea of the Sanusiyya's political philosophy, and this is what prompted Ahmad al-Sharif to proclaim his *jihad*. He called for an armed struggle, in fact, to protect the brotherhood's belief in *imama*. The colonial advance was a menace to al-Sanusi, not so much for the values upheld by the Western powers nor for the faith they proclaimed (there is no such doctrinal refutation in al-Sanusi's writings), but because yielding to them meant subverting Islam's political and religious order. For this reason, Al-Sanusi also exhorted his followers not to listen to the defeatists that called for terminating the *jihad* and surrendering to the enemy. Abandoning the *jihad* when one still has the means to fight is tantamount to apostasy, because it paves the way for the defeat of Islam:

⁴⁸ Ziadeh, 90

⁴⁹ Al-Sanusi, *Bughya*, 7.

Allah forbids that we yield to the enemy as long as our veins are pulsating and our blood is running through them. Those who incited us to conclude peace and to submit to the enemy must be fought.⁵⁰

This intentionally extended discussion on Sanusi's *Bughya* aims at explicating the main ideological tenets that Ahmad al-Sharif adhered to throughout his life, and the motivations for his exile.⁵¹ In this treatise, a part from exhorting the defense of Islamic rule, which determined his activity in Turkey and in Arabia, we also find the explanation for Al-Sanusi's *hijra*. In the midst of a discussion on practical issues (taxation, exemption, etc) of the *jihad*, al-Sanusi concedes that in certain circumstances it is permissible for the believer to give up the battle. Only if the *mujahid* has really exhausted all his means; if has failed to recapture the cities lost to foreign occupation; if he has invited other muslims to join the struggle, but these reinforcements have failed to bring victory; only under these circumstances is the Imam allowed to retreat until more suitable times present themselves to confront the enemy. Al-Sanusi quotes Sidi al-'Arabi al-Fazi to state:

Muslims are not absolved from the obligation to defend [their land] or to bring aid except if they have already exhausted all their efforts to removing the unbelievers from the cities they [the unbelievers] have captured from the Muslims, and if after having battled with them they failed to win, then it is incumbent on them to return whenever they will have the possibility to do so, until God grants them victory.⁵²

The believer, al-Sanusi states as if foreseeing his own defeat in battle, must defend the primacy of an Islamic government, but when that is not possible, he ought to retreat to

⁵⁰ Al-Sanusi, *Bughya*, 35-36.

⁵¹ The *Bughya*, as his Jihad treatise is known, is in fact the only original written work by Ahmad al-Sharif. His other two books (cf. bibliography) are simply summaries of earlier Sanusiyya works.

⁵² Al-Sanusi, *Bughya*, 45.

other lands of the *dar al-Islam*, rather than being an accomplice to the non-Muslim conqueror of the *dar al-harb*.

AHMAD AL-SHARIF AND THE OTTOMANS

Since members of the Sanusiyya had always considered Islamic leadership as indispensable, they had historically recognized - in one way or another - Ottoman authority. Unlike other late nineteenth century jihadist movements whose struggle was aimed at ending submission to Turkish rule, the Sanusiyya had always showed loose yet cordial respect to the Porte. Ottoman governors occasionally visited the Grand Sanusis and in turn they named some of their *zawiyas* after Ottoman notables.⁵³ Ahmad al-Sharif was personally a strong supporter of the pan-Islamist policies of Sultan Abdülhamid II (r.1876-1909), but this closeness made place to a certain animosity with the Ottoman authorities following the Young Turk Revolution of 1908. The Sanusi was opposed to their liberal and secular reforms, to the strong Turkist tendencies and especially to the deposition of Sultan Abdülhamid II.⁵⁴

When the Italian landed in 1911, any misgivings were in any case put aside, and the Sanusi shayks and brethren volunteered to fight under Ottoman command in Cyrenaica, as other Bedouins did in Tripolitania. Confronted by the menace of direct foreign occupation, Ahmad al-Sharif placed himself and his people behind Ottoman ranks: his *zawiyas* became logistical centers for the war and the bulk of Bedouin tribes headed by Ahmad al-Sharif generated the manpower to resist foreign penetration. He coordinated the battle with Ottoman officers and thus Ahmad al-Sharif enjoyed regular contacts with two personalities who would later become providential during his exile in Turkey: Enver

⁵³ As suggested by Le Gall, *The Ottoman government and the Sanusiyya*, passim.

⁵⁴ Peters, 85.

Bey, who headed the Ottoman forces in Cyrenaica and would later become a Pasha and Minister of War, and his rival Mustafa Kemal, who then became the first President of Turkey. Nuri Pasha, Enver's half-brother, and Ja'far Bey al-Askari, who turned into a British ally and was later appointed Prime Minister of Iraq, and 'Aziz 'Ali Al-Masri, who founded the Covenant society, were also among the leaders of the Ottoman forces in Libya during WWI.⁵⁵

Although Ahmad al-Sharif himself did not personally engage in the fighting (his spiritual authority as Grand Sanusi did not allow him to), he was active in rallying Bedouins and coordinating their movements with the Ottoman officers. He sent letters to Sanusi shaykhs calling on his followers to fight along side the Ottomans. He also sent numerous flags with quotes from the Qur'an and the call of the *jihad* embroidered on them in order to rouse the troops, who were considered to be "holy fighters".⁵⁶

However, the Balkan wars in Europe forced the Ottomans to withdraw their troops from Libya and the Lausanne Peace agreement was signed in November 1912, after exactly one year of fighting. The terms of the agreement were somewhat unclear; Italian sovereignty over Cyrenaica and Tripolitania were admitted, but in turn Italy recognized the Ottoman Sultan as the spiritual leader of the Muslims of Libya.⁵⁷ The Sultan dispatched the Ottoman commander, Enver Bey, to Ahmad al-Sharif requesting him to go on fighting in the name of the Caliph.

⁵⁵ The recently published memoirs of al-Askari contain interesting reference to Sanusi-Turkish collaboration during the Italo-Turkish war. Jafar al-Askari, *A soldier's story. From Ottoman rule to Independent Iraq*. (London: Arabian Publishing, 2003).

⁵⁶ Simon, 242

⁵⁷ By maintaining a nominal authority over the faithful, the Caliph preserved the right to nominate the chief Qadi. In Islamic legal terms, if it is a Muslim ruler who appoints the chief justice, then the land belongs to the dar al-Islam. Thus although Libya had been occupied by foreign forces, it had not become a dar al-harb and resistance against foreign invasion, rather than *hijra*, was still an obligation.

The fight against Italian forces went on, and in spite of the anger at the departure of the Ottomans, contacts with them were not severed because the Sanusis recognized the importance of the existence of a political and military rear in this struggle against Italian penetration. The contacts with the Ottomans continued in two ways: through Ottoman personalities in Egypt, and by the sending of Sanusi notables to Ottoman centers, especially to Istanbul. Al-Sanusi was much sought after by the pan-Islamists of Istanbul, who wished to use his name in their propaganda directed to bringing Turks and Arabs more closely together.⁵⁸ When Sanusi delegations visited Istanbul, they were received with great honor and hosted at the Sultan's palace. There were also regular contact, carried out mainly on a social, family, religious and economic basis, between Cyrenaica and Egypt where the Sanusiyya had numerous *zawiyas* and supporters within both the rural and urban communities. Within the framework of these regular visits the Sanusis often included meetings with Ottoman personalities in Cairo and Alexandria, including the Ottoman representative in Egypt. In addition, there were meetings between Sanusis and supporters of the Libyan struggle within both the Egyptian Khedival family and the Egyptian national movement. The Khedive also attempted a mediation with the Italians on behalf of al-Sanusi.

Pro-Sanusi propaganda during the war was not only conducted at the Empire's centre. Thus, for example, another Sanusi delegation visited Syrian and Lebanese towns in the first half of 1914, meeting statesmen and notables. The Sanusis spoke to the population in these places about the Holy War which was being conducted in Cyrenaica under Sanusi leadership. They called upon their audiences to join them and fight the Italians; if not that, at least to support them materially. The Sanusi struggle against the Italians was widely echoed in the Arab press and generated a considerable financial mobilization for

⁵⁸ Evans-Pritchard, 133

the fighters in Cyrenaica. An Iraqi poet decried the battle between West and Islam taking place in Libya, “don’t you see them between Egypt and Tunis, unleashing war and destruction against Islam? The Italians alone do not seek to do wrong, but rather the West in its entirety.”⁵⁹ As far away as in India, Muslims and Hindu alike viewed the Tripoli war as “a shameless brigandage”, which infused a new life in their pan-Islamic sentiment and fostered pro-Sanusi and pro-Turkish sentiment which sparked resistance to British rule.⁶⁰

At the outbreak of WWI, Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi allied himself once again directly with the Sultan against the Italians. Although Italy did not join the war until May 1915, the participation in it of the Ottoman Empire, the most important Muslim power, and its declaration of a *jihad* against its enemies, were enough to incite a new wave of rebellion in Libya.⁶¹ When Italy eventually did enter the war on the British side, at the insistence of the Central Powers, al-Sanusi’s forces fought on two fronts: they attacked the British in Egypt and expelled the Italians from Tripolitania and the Fezzan. Because of his services and his alliance to the Ottomans, in 1915 Ahmad al-Sharif was secretly appointed the Sultan’s representative (*na’ib al-Sultan*) with the rank of Vizier and the title of Pasha.⁶²

The Sanusi forces led by Ottoman officers were devastated by the war and by 1916 were defeated on most fronts. The suffering due to the prolonged war against the Italians and the defeat against the British was made even worse by the British-imposed blockade of the coast and the closing of trade with Egypt. With the exception of German submarines delivering military reinforcements, Cyrenaica had been cut off both by land and by sea.

⁵⁹ Iraqi poet Maruf al-Rusafi, quoted in Muhammad Tayyib al-Ashhab, *Barqa al-Arabiyya: ams wa l-yawm* (Cairo: 1947), 286.

⁶⁰ Sadiq, 27.

⁶¹ On the Ottoman *jihad* declaration of 1914, see Peters, 90

⁶² Irade of Aug. 6, 1915. Al-Sanusi had already been named *na’ib al-Sultan* at the end of the Italo-Turkish war in 1912. Cf. Simon (1987), 159. E.A.V. De Candole, *The Life and Times of King Idris of Libya* (Manchester: Mohamed Ben Ghalbon, 1990), describes al-Sanusi during WWI as wearing an Ottoman military uniform and directing military operations against Egypt, but this seems somewhat improbable.

When a Sanusi faction, led by Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi's cousin, Muhammad Idris, opened negotiations with both British and the Italians, and signed a modus vivendi with them in 1917, Ahmad al-Sharif retreated to Jaghub and gave up his political leadership of the brotherhood, retaining only his religious primacy.⁶³ According to Muhammad Idris, Ahmad al-Sharif had volunteered to relinquish his political authority in order to enable his people to reach a truce and thus authorized his cousin to initiate peace talks with the British, but not with the Italians who he continued to view as illegitimate occupiers. Ahmad al-Sharif himself refused to sign an agreement with the foreign powers, because it compromised the religious principles he adhered to: as expressed in his *Bughya*, the amir of the *mujtahids* must not succumb to a non-Muslim power, but was compelled to either continue waging the *jihad* or retire in *hijra*. By handing over the political authority to his cousin, and retreating to religious meditations in one of the Sanusi oasis in the interior, Ahmad al-Sharif was holding on to the principles stated in his *jihad* proclamation that never should a real believer agree on foreign rule.⁶⁴ His *jihad* had failed and his flight to find another part of *dar al-Islam* had begun.

I realized that Sidi Ahmad al-Sherif [Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi] had recognized beyond doubt the impossibility of the achievement of military victory. They had also recognized that the cessation of fighting and the entrance into peace negotiation with the enemy in to order to save the people from the famine which hit the country at the time had become a persistent necessity. However, negotiation was one of the most difficult tasks to Sidi Ahmad who always proudly

⁶³ For a detailed account of the Sanusi peace agreements, see Evans-Pritchard. For a British perspective of the agreements see CAB44/14, Report on the Relations between Great Britain, Italy and the Senussi, 1912-1924, prepared by the Foreign Office.

⁶⁴ Ahmad al-Sharif reiterated this position in letters sent during his exile to his companions of the Ansar al-Jihad who remain in Cyrenaica and went on fighting against the Italians. See Muhammad 'Isa Salhiya, *Libyan Papers, op. cit.*

stated that he never extended his hand to the enemy of his country unless it was carrying a sword.⁶⁵

While his cousin Muhammad Idris was engaging in talks with the British, which eventually resulted in the 1917 Akroma Agreement delimitating the border between Sanusi territory and western Egypt, and was attempting to reach an understanding with the Italians, Ahmad al-Sharif was fleeing from oasis to oasis: from Jaghbub to Jalo, thence to Tripolitania and back to Fezzan. According to Muhammad Idris, Ahmad al-Sharif could not simply retire to a quiet life in Cyrenaica, the traditional Sanusi stronghold, because the British, who had temporarily occupied the Sanusi zawiyas there, had demanded that the Grand Sanusi give himself up to the Allies.

Thus on the eve of the armistice, Ahmad al-Sharif sent a message to the Ottoman Minister of War Enver Pasha asking for him to arrange his transport to Istanbul. As al-Sanusi understood that his allies would soon capitulate, and since he refused to accept Italian sovereignty over the Sanusi strongholds, he thought it prudent to go to the Ottoman capital. Al-Sanusi believed that once in Istanbul, he could reorganize the defense of Libya. He thought that he could intercede with Germany and the Ottomans for the independence of his homeland.⁶⁶ He was not aware that the armistice and the peace treaty imposed on the Ottoman Empire would soon give a fatal blow to all his aspirations.

At the end of August 1918 in the port of al-Aqaila, al-Sanusi embarked on a German submarine. Leaving behind his sons, daughters and wife, he set forth to Istanbul holding

⁶⁵ From an interview with Muhammad Idris al-Sanusi after he became King of independent Libya, in De Candole, 32.

⁶⁶ Ahmad al-Sharif really believed that he would be returning victorious to Libya soon after. He had in fact agreed with Muhammad Idris that Ahmad Al-Sharif's son Sayyid al-'Arabi would be Muhammad Idris's heir to the throne. De Candole, *Life and Times*, 36.

on to his belief, that never should a Muslim leader succumb to foreign rule. Thus his *hijra* began.

THE HIJRA BEGINS

The German submarine bearing the Grand Sanusi crossed the Mediterranean on a summer night and dropped him off in Pola on the Adriatic. From the Dalmatian port, together with a group of tribesmen, he was escorted to Trieste from where he continued to Vienna. After spending a night in the Austrian capital, al-Sanusi proceeded by train to the Ottoman capital.⁶⁷

On 30 August 1918, Sanusi finally arrived in Istanbul and was received by what Reuters called an “elaborate ceremony” and *The Times* “a flattering reception”. Attending him at the train station were the Minister of War Enver Pasha, representatives of the Sultan and the Grand Vizir, the Shaykh al-Islam, and a “large and enthusiastic crowd.”⁶⁸ Mustafa Kemal, who would soonafter become the undisputed leader of the Turkish national movement, was also among those greeting the arrival of the Libyan leader.⁶⁹ The welcome ceremony organized for him and the display of dignitaries lined up for the occasion reflected the considerable standing the Grand Sanusi enjoyed in Turkey. In the eyes of the Ottoman notables and the populace alike, Ahmad al-Sharif had been a strategic ally in North Africa, opening a southern front against the Entente powers as well as an adamant defender of Islam in the face of consolidating Allied victories.

⁶⁷ Al-Sanusi’s journey was echoed in the German and British Press. *Reuters* telegram, Constantinople, Sept. 2, 1918 and *Cologne Gazzette* quoted in *Times* (London), Aug. 28, 1918, p. 7, col. F.

⁶⁸ *Reuters* Telegram, Amsterdam, Sept. 2, 1918 and *Times* (London), March 14, 1933, p. 16, col. D.

⁶⁹ According to Shakib Arslan, quoted in Cleveland W.L. “Ataturk viewed by his Arab contemporaries: the opinions of Sati’ al-Husri and Shakib Arslan,” Princeton Near East Papers no. 34 (1982).

Al-Sanusi's lasting prestige in Ottoman circles was also evident from the fact that soon after his arrival he was chosen to officiate at the ceremonial girding of the sword of the new Ottoman sultan, Muhammad VI Wahid al-Din, in the Eyüb mosque complex of Istanbul.⁷⁰ The ceremony, which was traditionally performed by the leader of the Mawlawiyya (modern Mevlevi) order, was symbolic in assessing the Sultan's political allegiance to the Mevlevi order.⁷¹ The fact that the newcomer al-Sanusi was invested with this role was seen as an official recognition of his high standing in palace circles. As the British put it:

The presence of the Sheikh el-Senussi [Shaykh al-Sanusi] in Constantinople to gird the sword of Othman on the new Sultan is an incident which will not have been lost on observers who know the relations between religion and politics in the Moslem world.⁷²

Upon arrival in the Ottoman capital, the Grand Sanusi was not aware that his exile from Cyrenaica would last until his death; he hoped that he would be able to put a quick end to his residence in Istanbul once the Ottoman government concluded the peace talks with the Entente powers, and return to Libya within a year or two. He had journeyed to Istanbul to visit the Sultan and to reorganize together with him what he believed could be the defense of Muslim lands.⁷³ Naïvely, he believed that, although defeated, his two allies, the Caliph and the Germans, would either be able to guarantee sufficient leverage in the peace talks to push for his cause or provide material backing for the continuation of

⁷⁰ Report on the Relations between the Sanusis, Italy and Britain, 1917-1924, CAB 44/14, 79.

⁷¹ Reformist Sultans used the Sufi order of the Mawlawis as a counterweight against the Bektashis, who supported the Janissaries, and then against the 'ulama, who supported the treatment of the Muslim community as a privileged community against the dhimmis. The late Sultan Mohammad V had been a member of the order. EI, s.v. "Mawlawiyya".

⁷² *Times* (London), Oct. 21, 1919, p. 13 col. E.

⁷³ As suggested by Ahmad al-Sharif's cousin, Muhammad Idris, quoted in De Candole, *Life and Times*, ch. 6 passim.

his resistance at a later date.⁷⁴ However several factors hindered al-Sanusi's ability to reorganize his *jihad* and reassert his authority in his homeland.

First of all, al-Sanusi's efforts to gather support in the Ottoman capital for the fight against the Italian occupation of his country was hindered by the contingent Anatolian reality.⁷⁵ Soon after his arrival, it became clear that Turkey's internal struggle against the menace of disintegration forced the Ottoman government to set aside the requests made by its African ally. The Entente powers had taken advantage of some ambiguous provision stated in the seventh article of the Mudros Armistice to occupy any region of the Ottoman Empire and gradually extend their control in the heartland of Anatolia. In the following few months, British and French forces occupied the Straits and Istanbul; Italian troops landed in Antalya; French troops took over Cilicia and Alexandretta; Greek troops invaded Izmir, a major Ottoman port on the Aegean. Al-Sanusi thought he would find support to continue his *jihad* in the Ottoman government, but they were busy fighting their own struggle against foreign rule. Thus, after fleeing from Libya to Istanbul in order to avoid surrendering to Italian troops, al-Sanusi was once again forced to continue zig-zagging in order to escape submitting to Western authorities. The Ottomans provided him

⁷⁴ Ahmad al-Sharif shared the view held by several former CUP officers that support from Germany and Bolshevik Russia would help derail the postwar settlement taking shape by will of the Entente powers and would thus positively effect also the Libyan resistance movement. They thought that direct military assistance from Moscow, channelled either through Berlin or through the Muslim states of the Caucasus, would support a CUP restoration and bring about European defeat in Anatolia and effect also the periferal ottoman territories. Cf. William L. Cleveland, *Islam agaisnt the West: Shakib Arslan and the Campaign for Islamic Nationalism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985) and EI², s.v. "Enwer Pasha".

⁷⁵ In this chapter we shall look exclusively at the post-World War I settlement of what would become current-day Turkey. Secondary literature on which the following considerations are based are: Stanford J. Shaw, *From Empire to Republic*; Salahi Ramsdan [Ramadan] Sonyel, *Turkish Diplomacy (1918-1923): Mustafa Kemal and the Turkish National Movement* (London and Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1975). In the following chapter, we shall analyze the effect of the peace settlements on the Arab lands of the former Ottoman Empire.

with a residence in Bursa, the ancient Ottoman capital across the straits in Asia Minor, where he lived until the summer of 1920, and assigned to him a living allowance.⁷⁶

The second unexpected outcome of Ottoman reality after the peace treaty was the split of the Turkish leadership into an Ottoman government, based in Istanbul and centered around the authority of the Sultan, and a nationalist one based in Ankara after April 1920 centered around a group of former CUP officers, among whom Mustafa Kemal was soon to emerge as a leader. Al-Sanusi's allegiance was also split. On the one hand, he considered himself the *Na'ib al-Khalifa al-'Uzma* (representative of the Great Caliph), and owed his primary religious and political allegiance to the Sultan, whom he recognized as the highest authority of the Muslim world.⁷⁷ On the other, al-Sanusi, seeing that the Sultan had been deeply weakened in his resistance against foreign powers following the British occupation of the Ottoman capital, gradually realized that his political goals, the eradication of foreign rule, were best pursued through the Nationalists who had taken the leadership in the military resistance against occupying power.

A further complication for Sanusi's ability to lobby for his homeland was that the group of former Turkish officers, whom al-Sanusi had fought with back in Libya and to whom he looked at for support, fled the Ottoman capital shortly after his arrival (Enver and Tal'at Pasha to Berlin, and later Nuri Pasha in the Caucasus)⁷⁸ or else favored maintaining

⁷⁶ Report on the Relations between the Sanusis, Italy and Britain, 1917-1924, CAB 44/14, 82.

⁷⁷ The official letters al-Sanusi sent to Italian authorities display a remarkable Arabic letterhead in traditional Ottoman calligraphy, in which al-Sanusi's complete title appears as "al-mu'ayyid bil-allah al-ghazi fi sabil rabbihi khalifa al-ghina ustadhuhu al-mahdi al-ahmad al-sharif al-sanusi", and close to it repeated the attribute "al-ghazi" and the title "na'ib al-Khalifa al-'Uzma". Letter from Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi to the King of Italy, Oct. 16 1921, in ASMAI 134/20-149 (reproduced in chapter 3 of this study).

⁷⁸ Enver Pasha fled, together Tal'at and Cemal Pasha, from Istanbul in November 1918 on board a German naval vessel that took him to Odessa, and from there by land to Berlin. After spending the winter of 1919 in Berlin, Enver proceeded to the Caucasus and then to Moscow gaining Soviet support for Islamic revolutionary movement. He was killed in 1922 by Russian forces. Nuri Pasha remained in Libya until the end of 1918

close ties with the Italians (Mustafa Kemal). The Italians, who sought to extend their colonial empire to the shores of Asia Minor, were providing substantial aid to Turkish nationalists in their fight against the British and the Greeks. The British supported the establishment of a Greater Greece extending throughout much of south-western Anatolia, and which would dominate the entire Eastern Mediterranean, threatening local Italian claims and economic goals.⁷⁹ Thus, because of their shared strategic interests with the Italians, the Turkish nationalists were initially hesitant in granting the Sanusi the immediate support he required to counter the Italians demands in Libya and encouraged him to reverse his strategy of direct military confrontation by attempting the path of negotiation with his former enemies.

During the first two years in Anatolia, therefore, Ahmad al-Sharif remained relatively marginal to internal Turkish affairs. Although his spiritual authority was recognized and his past military contributions were rewarded, Turkish interests hindered his ability to return to his Libyan *jihād*. In spite of this, in the remainder of this chapter, we shall nevertheless analyze with some detail Ahmad al-Sharif's life in 1919 and 1920, prior to his direct involvement in Turkey's national war. These two years and the parallel political context in both Turkey and Libya reveal how both al-Sanusi's failed diplomatic negotiations and the political consolidation of Italian rule in Cyrenaica paved the way to his gradual adoption of Mustafa Kemal's war as his own *jihād*.

aiding the Tripolitanian resistance against the Italian, and was then dispatched to the Caucasus. EI, s.v. *Enver Pasha*.

⁷⁹ As Sonyel highlights, Italian cooperation with Turks was not only the result of its frustrated territorial aspirations in Anatolia, but was also triggered by Italian interest in receiving economic privileges and concessions, especially over the Heraclea coal mines, in Anatolia after the war. For details on the Italian assistance to Turkish nationalists, their aims supply and the expected returns see: Sonyel, 24, 103; Shaw, 607-13.

AL-SANUSI BETWEEN THE ITALIANS AND THE BRITISH

Throughout his 18-month-residence in Bursa, al-Sanusi sought to overcome the bogged reality he found himself in, facing the impossibility of renewed military support from the Turks, by attempting direct talks with both the Italians and the British. He engaged in lengthy discussions with the Italian High Commissioner in Constantinople, Count Carlo Sforza, who offered to grant him autonomy over certain Sanusi strongholds on condition that Ahmad al-Sharif recognize Italian overall sovereignty – a stipulation al-Sanusi refused.⁸⁰ As Sforza states in his memoirs:

Convinced as I was – and am – that only a policy of local autonomy and peace will give prosperity to our African colonies, I entered upon patient and lengthy parley with the Senussi fief [Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi], offering to reinstate him in his possessions and to grant him a large share of autonomy if he would loyally and formally acknowledge the suzerainty of Italy and would bind himself to further our political and economic interest in Bengasi [Bangasi] and Tripoli.⁸¹

The Italian High Commissioner, eager to secure for Italy the allegiance of the Sanusi, but aware of the fact that the Turks were paying for al-Sanusi's sojourn, went through the trouble of requesting Mustafa Kemal and his entourage to authorize Italian diplomatic contacts with the Sanusi. "Let them settle matters with you as they please, and as you please," replied Mustafa Kemal's aides, stressing the notion that the defense of Turkish heartland had become their main priority, and thereby disengaging from direct involvement in the future of the Arab Middle East. But to underscore this point they added: "the maintenance of Turkish dominion over the Arabs has been one of the causes

⁸⁰ Several reports regarding the contacts between the Italian High Commissioner Count Carlo Sforza and Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi in ASMAI 140/5-29.

⁸¹ Count Carlo Sforza, *European Dictatorships* (New York: Brentano's Publisher, 1931), 202.

of our decline. We do not want to hear any more about them.”⁸² Such statements do not prove that the Turkish nationalists were directly encouraging the Sanusi to make contact with the Italians in early 1919, when the above mentioned Italo-Turkish meeting occurred, nor do the documents in our possession prove such a case. However, in light of Mustafa Kemal’s quest for Italian support and his contingent strategic interests in resisting the British, it is possible to advance the hypothesis that the Turkish nationalists might have encouraged such overtures.⁸³ Similarly, Sanusi contacts with the Italians might also have been encouraged by the Sultan, who believed that reliance on the goodwill of the victors of the Great War was the only way to rescue the Empire from dismemberment.⁸⁴ The Italians themselves were attempting to reconcile the Istanbul and the Ankara governments and cooperation with the Sanusi, who meddled in both the Sultan’s and Mustafa Kemal’s entourage, might have been a strategy of Turkish reconciliation.⁸⁵ From an analytical perspective, at the beginning of his *hijra*, the Sanusi did not have many options: he was in exile, with a small entourage of his tribesmen, without any Ottoman military support, with the Nationalists eager to consolidate friendly ties with the Italians and the Sultan urging to minimize direct confrontation against the Allies.

In May 1919, in an attempt to foil Italian plans to annex the Sanusiyya’s religious centers along the Egyptian border, Ahmad al-Sharif also approached the British High Commissioner at Constantinople making overtures for a reconciliation. Reports that the

⁸² Ibid., 203.

⁸³ At that stage, the Turkish nationalists had yet to consider al-Sanusi as a strategic ally in generating Arab support in the Eastern province, as would be the case the following year. In 1919 their priority was in the western vilayets under British and Greek occupation; the quest for Arab support in eastern Anatolia became a Turkish priority a year later.

⁸⁴ As suggested by Shaw, 613.

⁸⁵ Italian High Commissioner Count Sforza was in favor of getting him back into the Istanbul government in order to break off the alliance between the Bolsheviks and the Turkish nationalists – an alliance regarded by them as a profound danger to the peace of the Eastern world. Sonyel, 87.

British intended to transfer to the Italians the oasis of Jaghbub, which they had occupied in 1917 following the Sanusi defeat, were circulating in the press.⁸⁶ The Grand Sanusi, in his authority as the religious leader of the brotherhood, appealed to the British High Commissioner:

Your Excellency is aware that Jaghbub and Kufra are both religious centres, and sacred places to the Sanusiyya. It is, from a religious standpoint, in no way admissible that these places should be placed under Italian administration. In my capacity as President of the Sanusi family and Sheikh of the Senussi Creed, I beg to insist on the fact that I am absolutely against this [Italian] annexation. [...] I consider that, on account of their religious and sacred character, Kufra and Jaghbub should be dependant on the Egyptian government, and therefore I sincerely hope that the British Government will interfere in the matter.”⁸⁷

The simultaneous approach, towards both the Italians and the British, show that al-Sanusi attempted to make use of the British-Italian rivalry to his advantage. Although during the war they had been allies, the Italians and the British faced growing animosity in the immediate post-War settlement of Egypt, Libya and Turkey, and was also manifested in their competing ambitions in the Red Sea. With regards to Egypt, the British were distrustful of Italian support of the former Khedive ‘Abbas Hilmi, whom the British had exiled in 1914.⁸⁸ With regard to the Italian presence in Libya, the British feared that they would seek modifications of the eastern border with Egypt in order to extend their domain in the Western desert. In Turkey, the British resented the Italian military occupation of the Antalya province in Asia Minor and their support of the Turks.

⁸⁶ In reality it was Muhammad Idris that was reaching a deal with the Italians over the oasis. The proposal, later known as the al-Rajma agreement of 1920, stipulated that the Sanusis would maintain administrative authority over the oasis, but overall sovereignty would be Italian.

⁸⁷ Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi to British High Commissioner in Constantinople, cited in Report on the Relations between the Sanusis, Italy and Britain, 1917-1924, CAB 44/14, 79.

⁸⁸ ‘Abbas Hilmi continued to aspire to Italian support for his claim to the Egyptian throne well into 1924, when he bartered alleged al-Sanusi collaboration with the Italians in exchange for them supporting the Ex-Khedive in Egypt. Cf. dispatch from acting British High Commissioner Cairo Clark Kerr to PM and Foreign Secretary Ramsey MacDonald, Aug. 30, 1924, E7703 in FO371/10037.

For their part, the Italians took exception to the British attempts to curtail Italian influence both in the Mediterranean and the Red Sea.⁸⁹ Scholars have analyzed in detail Italian-British animosity after the Great War from these different perspective, but none have so far pointed at Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi in exile as another focus of tension.⁹⁰ Yet the diplomatic records suggest that both in Rome and in London there was a growing consensus on the need to secure al-Sanusi's collaboration in order to prevent him from becoming a tool in the other party's hand. A British internal report from December 1919 calls on British diplomats not to feel a "sense of loyalty to the Italians" and urges them to collaborate with Ahmad al-Sharif:

Sidi Ahmed professes to be very pro-British, but his advances have always been ignored by our authorities from a sense of loyalty to the Italians. He still holds considerable influence in Pan-Islamic circles (incidentally he girded the present Sultan of Turkey with the sword of Osman) and he might conceivably prove to be most useful to us. I submit that we are under no such obligations to the Italians (who are intriguing against us both here and in Egypt) as to refrain out of deference to them, from utilizing Sidi Ahmed, should it be found that he could be profitably used.⁹¹

Although British foreign officers did attempt, at times, to win over the Sanusi, they never stopped perceiving al-Sanusi as a threat. On top of the already mentioned reasons concerning the Italians, the British also feared he could become a wildcard in the hands of the Turkish nationalists to be used in destabilizing both the eastern Anatolian provinces and their Iraqi dominions, which would eventually be the case. Furthermore, they rightly saw Ahmad al-Sharif as a symbolic figure of anti-colonial resistance and pan-

⁸⁹ Italian-Greek relations were slightly eased in late 1919 when, in exchange of Italian support to Greek claim over the Dodecanesian islands and Thrace, the Greek recognized Albania in the Italian sphere of influence. Shaw, 609.

⁹⁰ Shaw highlights the British-Italian rivalry during the Turkish war of liberation, but fails to even acknowledge al-Sanusi's presence in Anatolia at that time, let alone his role in Anglo-Italian relations. Sonyel notes al-Sanusi's collaboration with Mustafa Kemal, but does not mention him prior to 1921.

⁹¹ Foreign Office Report, Dec. 25, 1919, E851 in FO371/5178.

Islamic aspirations, which aroused great support among the supporters of the Indian Khilafat, a nascent non-violent, anti-British popular movement. From the British point of view, when Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi was divested of political authority, he retained a spiritual leadership which defied borders. Thus he remained a menacing political opponent for British rule over the Middle East and a disruptive element in India.

In the Italian Foreign Ministry there was also growing pressure to cooperate with the Sanusi during his exile in Turkey in order to distance him from possible agreements with British forces. On several occasions the former Khedive of Egypt 'Abbas Hilmi, who maintained close ties with Italian authorities and was also a close acquaintance of the Sanusi, provided the Italians with sufficiently alarming information regarding alleged French and British attempts to win over the Sanusi as to prompt the Italian diplomats to seek to keep al-Sanusi on their side.⁹² In the long-run, although their relations gradually improved, the Italians remained paranoid that another foreign power might break a deal with the Sanusi and, until the very last days of Sanusi's permanence in Turkey in 1925, Italian authorities in Rome or Cairo repeatedly warned the Foreign Office against helping the Libyan shaykh in exile.⁹³

⁹² Probably with the connivance of the Sanusi, the Ex-Khedive informed the Italian authorities with what they did not want to hear, namely, that the English were intending to host al-Sanusi in Egypt and utilize his influence to mobilize the Bedouins against the Italians along the border with Cyrenaica. He also secretly informed the Italians that the French intended to use al-Sanusi in the same way along the Tunisian border against the Italians. 'Abbas Hilmi quoted in Note no.32/95 from Balduino Caprini, Italian representative of the inter-Allied Police force in Constantinople, to the Italian High Commissioner in Constantinople, 25 July 1920, copied and sent to Colonial Minister in Aug. 2, 1920 dispatch in ASMAI 134/20-147.

⁹³ The Italians contacted the British on numerous occasions to pressure them not to cooperate with the Sanusi, cf. Enclosure no. 1 to Dispatch from British Embassy in Rome to Foreign Office, Jan. 23, 1923, E917 in FO371/8967 and Foreign Office memorandum to H.M. High Commissioner in Cairo, Dec. 11, 1923, in E11864 in FO371/8989. The Italians were mainly concerned that the British would permit al-Sanusi to return to Egypt from where he would be able to wage anti-Italian propaganda. British officers seemed to be accepting Italian paranoia with amusement. In January 1924, for example, they refer to "the fanstastic suggestion of the Italian Embassy that Lord Allenby had facilitated arrangements for Sayyid Ahmed's travelling to Egypt," in Dispatch from Acting High Commissioner in Egypt A.K. Clark Kerr to the Marquess Curzon of Kedleston, Jan. 1924, E646 in FO371/10023.

Spreading rumors about al-Sanusi's alleged collaboration with the British, were blatantly false because no such agreement was ever reached.⁹⁴ However, they had the desired effect of urging the Italians to make overtures with Sanusi. In fact, they dispatched officers from the Italian High Commissioner's office in Istanbul to meet the Sanusi in Bursa both to warn him against collaborating with the British and to see if there was a possibility for settlement.⁹⁵

Sanusi, possibly influenced by both the Turkish nationalists and Ottoman government in Istanbul who suggested that he attempt the diplomatic path with the Italians, and as a consequence of occasional positive gestures of the Italians, was led to believe that Rome might really have been willing to compromise in his favor in exchange of his guarantee pacification of Cyrenaica. Eventually, throughout those 18 months of attempted negotiations, the Italian gestures of rapprochement with the Sanusi never resulted in substantial concessions. Every time al-Sanusi made a request, the Italians would pretend to consider it, drag it on for many months and then drop it. In early 1920, he requested to return to Cyrenaica not as a ruler, but as the spiritual chief of the Sanusiyya under the political authority of his cousin. The Italians acknowledged his request, but eventually left it unanswered.⁹⁶ In early 1920 he sent through his emissaries a request that his family be able to join him, but the Italians never replied to his request with the pretext that his letter had gone lost.⁹⁷ During the summer of 1920, again, Ahmad al-Sharif asked to transit through Italy in order to reach Switzerland, where presumably he intended to join Shakib Arslan and other former pro-Ottoman Arabs appealing for the independence

⁹⁴ Al-Sanusi seems to have inflated the extent of his rapprochement with the British in order to use it as a bargaining chip with the Italians.

⁹⁵ Note no. 32/107 from from Italian representative of the inter-Allied Police force in Constantinople Balduino Caprini to the Italian High Commissioner in Constantinople, n.d. (probably July 1921), copied and sent to Colonial Minister in Aug. 2, 1920 dispatch in ASMAI 134/20-147.

⁹⁶ Telegram n. 4196 from Bengasi Government to Italian Colonial Ministry, Aug. 8, 1920, in ASMAI 134/20-147.

⁹⁷ Letter from Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi to Italian Prime Minister, Oct. 16, 1920, and reply from Colonial minister to Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi, Dec. 9, 1920, both in ASMAI 134/20-149.

of their countries at the League of Nations.⁹⁸ But once again the Italians refused him permission to reach what they sarcastically called “the Society of the Oppressed Nations”. The adventures of Tawfiq Bey ‘Abdin provide a good example of these frustrating attempts to negotiate with the Italians. A prominent Arab with close ties to Mustafa Kemal, Tawfiq Bey contacted the Italian authorities in Antalya in June 1920, and then again two months later, urging their Government to take a decision on the fate of the Sanusi.⁹⁹ No answer came. In December of the same year, Al-Sanusi asked Tawfiq Bey to go to Rome in order to intercede personally on his behalf. Tawfiq Bey sailed to Italy and met face-to-face with the head of the political office of the Italian Foreign Ministry, then with the Colonial Minister’s political secretary, and ultimately with the head of the Libya office. After waiting for two weeks, no answer had come. Frustrated, he understood that Italian silence meant denial. “I was stupefied that an issue as important as this, has not been decided upon, after four entire months,” he wrote in a letter to Italy’s Colonial Minister, referring to the time which had lagged since he first contacted the Italians in Turkey. Having spent all his money, he asked not for an answer, but that the Colonial Minister at least pay for his return journey to Turkey.

This ambivalent behavior of the Italians, on the one hand signaling willingness to dialogue with the Sanusi, on the other adamantly refusing to concede his requests, cannot be understood except in the light of conflicting aims of the Italian Foreign Ministry and the Colonial Ministry. The Foreign Ministry, in fact, believed that it was in Italy’s best interest to attract the Sanusi into the Italian sphere of influence in order to limit the damage he might provoke if he were to collaborate with Italy’s unfriendly allies, and for this reason made repeated attempts to initiate a dialogue with him. Count Carlo

⁹⁸ Dispatch from Italian Foreign Ministry to Italian Colonial Ministry, Nov. 17, 1920, in ASMAI 134/20-147. The Syro-Palestinian Congress, held in Geneva in late summer 1921, was the first Arab attempt to protest against the Mandate system through the League of Nations.

⁹⁹ Tawfiq Bey ‘Abdin’s mission to Rome is presented in detail in his hand-delivered letter to the Italian Colonial Minister, Dec. 29, 1920 in ASMAI 136/1-8.

Sforza, who became Italy's Foreign Minister in 1920, personally pushed for al-Sanusi to be allowed to return to Cyrenaica, or, alternatively, to be hosted either in Italy, or in Rhodes, one of the Aegean islands under Italian occupation, or eventually even in Belgium.¹⁰⁰ Sforza conveyed the matter to the Colonial Ministry in September 1920:

The presence of the Sanusi in Ottoman territory represents a danger for us, in the light of the possibility that he might be attracted to another Power, especially, as Your Excellency [Colonial Minister] noted, if he were to fall in Greek hands. On the contrary, if we could settle him in the territory of the Regno [Italy], it would be easier for us to check his movements."¹⁰¹

On the other hand, the Italian Colonial Ministry, whose responsibility it was to manage Libyan affairs, believed that any sort of overture - be it asylum in Rhodes, Italy, or Belgium, or practically any sort of assistance to al-Sanusi - would jeopardize their ability to reach a permanent settlement in Cyrenaica. The Italian government in Cyrenaica, in fact, was worried by the propositions of the Foreign Ministry that Italy ought to aid al-Sanusi, and in mid-1920 protested: "I call to the attention of the Foreign Ministry that Ahmad al-Sharif's return to Cyrenaica should be avoided at all costs."¹⁰² When rumors circulated in the press that, thanks to negotiations taking place in Turkey, the Sanusi would soon be returning to Libya, the Colonial ministry threw a fit and promptly denied any contact with the exiled Sanusi.¹⁰³ They were concerned that Ahmad al-Sharif might threaten the delicate negotiations underway with his cousin Muhammad Idris, negotiations they were hoping would result in the recognition of Italian sovereignty over Cyrenaica.

¹⁰⁰ Dispatch from Italian Foreign Ministry to Italian Colonial Ministry, Nov. 17, 1920, in ASMAI 134/20-147.

¹⁰¹ Telegram no. 1211 from Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs Count Carlo Sforza to Colonial Ministry Directorate of Political Affairs, Sept. 18, 1920, in ASMAI 134/20-148.

¹⁰² Telegram n. 4196 from Bangasi Government to Colonial Ministry, Aug. 3 1920, in ASMAI 134/20-147.

¹⁰³ Telegram no. 9884 from Foreign Ministry to Colonial Ministry Political Office, July 23, 1920, in ASMAI 134/20/147.

LINKS TO CYRENAICA

Following Ahmad al-Sharif's departure, the political leadership of Cyrenaica had passed to his cousin Muhammad Idris. After a failed attempt to co-opt Sharif Husayn of Mecca to accept nominal authority over Cyrenaica,¹⁰⁴ Muhammad Idris began to solidify his relations with the Italians. Italian authority over Cyrenaica had been loosely recognized since 1917, but the end of World War I had reinforced even further their military control. The armistice that ended active hostilities with the Central Powers and Turkey had stopped the supply of munitions and money from Europe and Turkey to the Arabs, and secured the surrender of rebellious Sanusi and Tripolitanian factions. By 1920, Italians sought to render their dominance official and initiated talks with the Sanusis. First, they invited Muhammad Idris's brother Rashid Rida for an exploratory visit to Italy in Spring 1920, the first ever visit of a Sanusi to Italy. The successful trip was followed by bilateral negotiations in Benghazi aimed at achieving the Sanusis official recognition of Italian sovereignty over Cyrenaica, which would have quenched, or so the Italians hoped, local resistance to their rule. In exchange, Italy would grant Muhammad Idris administrative autonomy of the Sanusiyya oases of Ajadabiya, Jaghbub, Aujila, Jalu and Kufra, which would be called "the Amirate of Cyrenaica". This proposal, which was formalized as the Agreement of al-Rajma on 25 October 1920, was also an Italian attempt to boost the local authority of Muhammad Idris, who would bear the title of "Sanusi Amir" and the honorific address of "Your Highness", and thereby deflate Ahmad al-Sharif's legacy.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ During the summer of 1919 Muhammad Idris al-Sanusi performed the Pilgrimage and, while in Mecca, in an attempt to undermine Italian occupation of the Sanusi strongholds by riding the rising star of the Hashemites, he asked the British ally King Husayn to accept the sovereignty of Cyrenaica. An August 12, 1919 letter to King Husayn states: "I beg to state that I, my followers, and all my country, both of the interior and exterior, or –if you do not agree to that – only in the places that are not occupied by the Italians, will be bound by your Majesty's Throne and read the Friday Khutbah in your name," in Report on the Relations between the Sanusis, Italy and Britain, 1917-1924, CAB 44/14, 58. The King communicated Muhammad Idris's proposal to British Agent in Jedda, who later informed Cairo, cf. correspondence in FO141/757/8. Nothing came out of the Sanusi overture to King Husayn.

¹⁰⁵ On the Italian-Sanusi negotiations taking place in Cyrenaica, see Evans-Prichard, 148-150.

On the basis of this agreement, Muhammad Idris would inherit both the political and spiritual leadership of the brotherhood. The latter had until then been retained by the Grand Sanusi Ahmad al-Sharif. The Italians claimed that Muhammad Idris had the right to be considered the head of the brotherhood both from a religious and a political point of view “by reason of his primogeniture descent from Muhammad al-Mahdi, first son and successor of Muhammad b. ‘Ali al-Sanusi.”¹⁰⁶ By reinforcing Muhammad Idris’s primogeniture right to the Sanusiyya, Ahmad al-Sharif in Anatolia was *de facto* being deprived of his official title of Grand Sanusi and of his function of religious leader of the Sanusiyya.

The Italian officers of the Colonial Ministry were therefore attempting to minimize the contacts with Ahmad al-Sharif lest his criticisms and official opposition to Muhammad Idris’s new title were to convince his cousin to renounce the agreement with the Italians, or rather induce him to think that the Italians were playing a double game.¹⁰⁷ Italians took great care to make a public display of their new ally Muhammad Idris and paraded him through a month-long visit to Italy.¹⁰⁸ By signing the al-Rajma agreement, Muhammad Idris had officially sealed Italian dominance over Cyrenaica, consequently, after 1920, the Italians had little interest and no need to engage in direct talks with Ahmad al-Sharif who remained in Turkey. Furthermore, the rise of a Fascist government the following year, fostered an unconciliatory attitude towards the exiled Sanusi, who became totally estranged from Italian diplomats following 1921.

¹⁰⁶ Italian Colonial Ministry Preparatory report to the al-Rajma Agreements, n.d. (probably Aug.-Sept. 1920), in ASMAI 134/20-151.

¹⁰⁷ They also refused Ahmad al-Sharif’s request to send a personal envoy to converse with Muhammad Idris, in ASMAI 143/6-54.

¹⁰⁸ Muhammad Idris’s trip, widely reported in the Italian press, also aimed at fostering internal consensus on the Italian policies in Libya.

One of the reasons adduced by the Italians to justify why, after 1921, they began to ignore Ahmad al-Sharif was the alleged claim that the relations between the Libyan regent and his exiled cousin had soured. This was a myth entirely fabricated by the Italians. In spite of his official spiritual dethronement caused by the al-Rajma agreement, Ahmad al-Sharif continued to hold considerable authority among the Sanusi followers in Libya, and throughout his exile maintained a friendly relationship with his political successor. When news reached him that Mohammad Idris had fallen severely ill in early 1920, for example, Ahmad Sharif promptly sent him a telegram enquiring about his conditions.¹⁰⁹ Muhammad Idris pressed on the Italian government to consider allowing Ahmad Sanusi return to Cyrenaica to join his family, which bore “the pains of the separation”.¹¹⁰ Furthermore during Muhammad Idris’s journey to Mecca in 1919, which kept him away from Cyrenaica for over four months, the Sanusi leader handed over the management of his affairs to Safi al-Din al-Sanusi, the brother of Ahmad al-Sharif,¹¹¹ who in 1921 became also the President of Libya’s Parliament. When Britain announced their intention to confiscate Ahmad al-Sanusi’s property in Egypt in mid-1920, Muhammad Idris requested that the Italian government file a protest.¹¹² And it is also noteworthy that, when Muhammad Idris himself would go into exile to Egypt in 1925, he married Ahmad al-Sharif’s daughter Fatima.¹¹³

Muhammad Idris was also the personal link with his exiled cousin since Ahmad al-Sharif’s correspondence with his family and his Sanusiyya followers in Cyrenaica would passed through Muhammad Idris before being forwarded to Turkey through Italian

¹⁰⁹ Letter from Tawfiq Bey ‘Abdin to the Italian Colonial Minister, Dec. 29, 1920 in ASMAI 136/1-8.

¹¹⁰ Muhammad Idris asked that Ahmad al-Sharif be allowed to return in 1921 and again in 1922. In Telegram from Muhammad Idris to Italy’s Colonial Minister, March 18, 1922, in ASMAI 136/1-11.

¹¹¹ Cairo Intelligence Report, Aug. 31, 1919, in FO141/757/7.

¹¹² Telegram n. 8195 from Benghazi to Italian Colonial Ministry, Oct. 30, 1920 in ASMAI 134/20-148

¹¹³ De Candole, *Life and Times*, vii.

authorities. These letters informed Ahmad al-Sanusi on the whereabouts of his family, but they also express the family's growing concern on the state of their finances giving also petty details on the going market price for livestock in the oasis.¹¹⁴ A letter from Ahmad al-Sharif's brother, for example, after the customary lengthy praises and calls for blessing, requests him to send "the large donation that you had promised", very much needed to cover the family expenses. 'Umar Mukhtar wrote to the Grand Sanusi to inform him that the person whom the Sanusi had appointed to administer his belongings in Cyrenaica, "was selling the flock" and keeping for himself most of the proceeds, low to begin with. Mukhtar, who would later become a hero of Libyan resistance to Italian rule, asked the Sanusi to give appropriate orders on what to do with his property since the members of the brotherhood could not agree among themselves.

These petty correspondence over financial issues reveal that, while in Turkey, money became a growing concern for Ahmad al-Sharif. Although the Sanusis' creed was based on modesty and the Sanusi leaders never lead an ostentatious life, during his exile Ahmad al-Sharif seemed to be always penniless. His properties in Egypt had been expropriated by the British, and the profits from his belongings in Cyrenaica were barely sufficient to take care of his family there. Al-Sanusi and his small entourage consisting of a secretary and dozen of students, depended entirely on the yearly allowance of LT 3,000, assigned to him by the Ottomans following his arrival in Istanbul.¹¹⁵ As the following letter shows, Ahmad al-Sharif was apologetic for not being able to send to his followers in Libya the money they requested:

¹¹⁴ Seven letters sent from Ahmad al-Sharif's sons and close associates written throughout 1919/1920 were forwarded by Muhammad Idris to the Italian consulate in Adana which then sent forwarded them to Ahmad al-Sharif. ASMAI 134/20-149. By handling Ahmad al-Sharif's mail, the Italians also managed to keep an eye on his activities and future intentions.

¹¹⁵ Report on the Relations between the Sanusis, Italy and Britain, 1917-1924, CAB 44/14, 82.

I received your letter and for the time being I am unable to pay you back, I will do so as soon as I can. Calculate with Salak Bey and Ahmad al-Abdia [sic], I will pay you the remainder with my private cheques. Don't think that I have forgotten you or that I have forgotten the country and its beloved inhabitants. But I am still obliged to remain afar.¹¹⁶

And on another occasion al-Sanusi went so far as to ask the Italians to cover the travelling expense of one of his secretaries to Cyrenaica, whom upon arrival in Benghazi would also have to receive a cash advance by the Banco di Roma.¹¹⁷

JOINING THE TURKISH NATIONALISTS

By mid 1920 these financial problems just added to al-Sanusi's concerns about the effectiveness of his exile in Bursa. The diplomatic channels he tried failed both with the Italians, whose colonial rule solidified in his absence, and with the British, who proceeded to disregard al-Sanusi's various protests over the *zawiyas* or his personal assets; there were slim chances that he would return to Africa with the authorization of the Italian, or even secretly. The *jihad* in Cyrenaica would have to continue without him, under the authority of one of the leaders of the al-Jihad Movement, whom al-Sanusi wrote to regularly.¹¹⁸ He did not manage to secure from the Turks the military backing he needed to return to fight against the occupiers of Cyrenaica; the peace treaties that the Ottoman government concluded with the Europeans failed entirely since they enabled further foreign penetration into the heart of the only remaining Islamic Empire.

Therefore, after more than a year and a half in Turkey, Ahmad al-Sharif revived his ideals of *jihad* against foreign rule and his *hijra* by shifting his focus from his personal

¹¹⁶ Letter from Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi to Ahmad Mauhub, 12 Safar 1339/26 Oct. 1920, in ASMAI 134/21-156.

¹¹⁷ Letter from Sanusi to Colonial Ministry, in dispatch from Italian Foreign Ministry to Colonial Ministry, June 2, 1922, in ASMAI 136/1-13.

¹¹⁸ Letters to the heads of the al-Jihad movement are discussed in Muhammad 'Isa Salhiya, *Libyan Papers*, op. cit.

interest attached to Cyrenaica, to a wider defense of what remained of the Muslim lands of the Ottoman Empire.

During the summer of 1920, Greek troops occupied Bursa, where Ahmad al-Sharif had been living for eighteen months. He hurriedly gathered his belongings and fled with a group of followers, including Circassians, Albanians and Libyans, calling themselves “the Army of the Shaykh al-Sanusi.” Greek soldiers attacked him in the outskirts of the city.¹¹⁹ After brief fighting, he managed to escape to Konya, but this accident had a lasting effect on the Shaykh’s exile because it proved to him that not only Libya, but also the very heart of the Ottoman Empire, risked being lost to foreign powers. Consequentially, although he longed to be reunited with the family and to aid the resistance movement in Cyrenaica which his followers eventually resumed after 1923, he began to consider the proposals of the Turkish nationalists, that he aid them in their defense of Anatolia.

Following al-Sanusi’s flight from Bursa, the Sultan allegedly suggested to him that he head off to Mesopotamia to fight the British there, but Ahmad al-Sharif hesitated.¹²⁰ In September of that same year, frustrated Armenian attempts to create an independent state extending from the Caucasus to Alexandretta, sparked bloody hostilities with the Turks and this time Mustafa Kemal asked the Sanusi to join the fight.¹²¹ The Sanusi did not accept this offer either, probably because he was still hoping to join his cousin Muhammad Idris and return to Cyrenaica.¹²² However, by the end of 1920 most hesitation was left behind. His attempts to reach an agreement with the Italians were definitely abandoned after the al-Rajma agreement; Mustafa Kemal began to gain victories that made him the undisputed leader of the Turkish resistance movement; from

¹¹⁹ *Le Bosphore*, July 28, 1920.

¹²⁰ Letter from Tawfiq Bey ‘Abdin to the Italian Colonial Minister, Dec. 29, 1920 in ASMAI 136/1-8.

¹²¹ Telegram from Rhodes to Italian Foreign Ministry, 9 Nov. 1920, in ASMAI 134/20-149.

¹²² In a letter from Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi to Ahmad Mauhub dated 12 Safar 1339/Oct. 26 1920, Ahmad al-Sanusi states that he intended to visit Mecca and then proceed to Egypt. ASMAI 134/21-156.

Baku, Enver Pasha had declared that Islamic revolutionary movements were triumphing from Morocco to India.¹²³ These different occurrences produced a general optimism, which might have encouraged al-Sanusi to recommence his *jihād* within Anatolia. Therefore, when Sultan Wahid al-Din entrusted Ahmad al-Sharif with a mission to contact Mustafa Kemal in order to request that he cooperate with the Ottoman government, instead of only acting as a liaison between the Sultan and the nationalist leader, al-Sanusi decided to endorse the Turkish war headed by Mustafa Kemal.¹²⁴ He did this at a large banquet held by Mustafa Kemal in al-Sanusi's honor in Ankara on 25 November 1920, when he addressed the audience and stated:

Islam in Anatolia was threatened and in that situation, under Mustafa Kemal's leadership, Muslims started a national *jihād*. This is a proof of the survival of the Muslim world and it also proves that Islam will last forever.¹²⁵

Al-Sanusi quoted a Prophetic hadith to state that whenever Islam is threatened *jihād* is legitimate, and readapted the main message of his 1913 *jihād* treatise – namely the imperative of Islamic rule - to the Anatolian reality. Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi's declared support was immediately used by Mustafa Kemal to show that his armed fight was actually a legitimate struggle in the eyes of Islam. At the banquet, Mustafa Kemal made a long, laudatory speech concerning the importance of the Sanusi as a leader of the Pan-Islamic movement and portrayed his nationalist struggle with the colors of Islamic symbolism:

¹²³ In September 1920, Enver Pasha proclaimed, with the encouragement of the Soviet authorities, the formation of a "Union of Islamic Revolutionary Societies" and a Soviet-Sponsored Congress of the Peoples of the East was held in Baku with participants from Libya, Tunis, Algeria and Morocco. EI, s.v. *Enver Pasha*.

¹²⁴ As suggested by the memoirs of Turkish general Hüsameddin Ertürk, *İki Devrin Perde Arkas. Hüsameddin Ertürk Anlatıyor, Yazan Samih Nafiz Tansu* (Istanbul: Hilmi Kitabevi, 1957), 476-81.

¹²⁵ Ibid. The alleged use of the expression 'national *jihād*' (*chihad-i milliye*) is problematic and its authenticity is disputable. The idea of nationalist *jihād*, whereby 'milliye' is understood in its ambivalent meanings either a 'peoples' or as 'nation', is absent from al-Sanusi's previous writings. Although the word started conveying the meaning of 'national' in Turkish circles since 1919, such a usage on the part of al-Sanusi must be questioned.

The sheikh of the Senussi is one of the most prominent and sacred figures in Islam, and the services which he has rendered will be crowned by the services which he will render hereafter. By them he will have helped to consolidate the Turkish Empire, which is the fulcrum of the whole Moslem world. I express to his excellency Seyid Ahmed el Senussi, both in my own name and in that of the Great National Assembly, my thanks for his future services.¹²⁶

By winning over the Libyan shaykh, recognized by all as an Islamic authority, a resistance leader and as the Sultan's envoy to Ankara, Mustafa Kemal had in fact managed to legitimize his national and political revolution as an Islamic war of liberation against foreign invasion. "Today Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi has made our struggle against this catastrophe [foreign occupation] a legitimate struggle," Mustafa Kemal stated.¹²⁷ As Berkes has pointed out, by legitimizing his struggle as a war for national self-preservation, Mustafa Kemal was able to conceal the revolutionary implications of his nationalist movement and thus not jeopardize the allegiance of the traditional and religious classes.¹²⁸ By appealing to Islamic sentiment and by calling for a political resurgence of what he considered the center of the Muslim world against Western imperialism, Mustafa Kemal had welcomed Ahmad al-Sharif in the Turkish struggle. It must be noted that the speeches delivered at the Ankara banquet displayed the divergent political and religious aspirations expressed by the Libyan and Turkish leader respectively. What Mustafa Kemal called the struggle "to consolidate the Turkish Empire," Ahmad al-Sharif referred to as the *jihad* for Islamic unity and sovereignty;¹²⁹ whereas the Turkish leader proclaimed his allegiance to the Turkish National Assembly,

¹²⁶ As transcribed in Intelligence report issued by the British Secret Intelligence Service Constantinople branch for the week ending December 16, 1920, enclosure no. 1 in dispatch from British High Commissioner in Constantinople Horace Rumbold to Foreign Minister Earl Curzon, Dec. 31, 1920, E477 in FO 371/6497.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Niyazi Berkes, "The Two Facets of the Kemalist Revolution," *Muslim World* 64 (1974), 292-306.

¹²⁹ British Secret Intelligence Service Constantinople branch for the week ending December 16, 1920, enclosure no. 1 in dispatch from British High Commissioner in Constantinople Horace Rumbold to Foreign Minister Earl Curzon, Dec. 31, 1920, E477 in FO 371/6497.

al-Sanusi stated that he was fighting for “the one cause he was ready to devote himself at all times – the union of Islam.”¹³⁰ Whatever he was planning in secret, to the outside world Mustafa Kemal was still an Ottoman. His tactful noncommittal exposition of his political philosophy at this banquet, and in general during the first years of his leadership, did not reveal the extent of his rupture with the sultanate. Therefore al-Sanusi proclaimed his support and direct participation in Mustafa Kemal’s struggle on the basis of principles of Islamic unity and Muslim self-preservation embodied by the Caliph.¹³¹

Here it is important to highlight a neglected aspect of the Kemalist Turkish national movement during its earlier phase. The composition of the movement then was not free of an Islamic “religious tinge.”¹³² The Turkish nationalist leaders who were struggling against European occupation of their lands at the time stressed the religious aspect of their movement “to gain moral support from Muslims throughout the world.”¹³³ For al-Sanusi, the collaboration with Mustafa Kemal must have simply appeared as the continuation of the Ottoman wars in Africa during which Turkish officers, among which Mustafa Kemal himself, fought along side local troops. National and ethnic identities were blurred away by the common Islamic one. As Dawn illustrated, nationality was incidental to a scheme of thought which was directed chiefly at expounding a plan for progress and at vindicating a way of life.¹³⁴ Sanusi’s affinity to Mustafa Kemal was the manifestation of Ottoman patriotism and of the belief that one belonged, not to a nation-

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ On another occasion, in August 1921, al-Sanusi went so far as to state that Sultan Wahid al-Din was in complete agreement with Mustafa Kemal, “though obliged to dissemble his feelings.” *Alif Ba*, Aug. 22, 1921, cited in dispatch dated Aug. 23, 1921 from British Consul in Damascus C.E.S. Palmer to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, E10102 in FO371/6528.

¹³² Rustow, *Politics and Islam*, op. cit., 73.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ernest Dawn, *From Ottomanism to Arabism* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 146.

state, but to the Islamic nation.¹³⁵ These scholars have argued that the categorization of Middle Eastern national identity into Ottomanism or Arabism ought not to be considered a historical succession, but rather as similar responses to the same problem of constructing cultural identity in a world dominated by European civilization. For al-Sanusi, adherence to the Ottoman political and religious framework did not negate his Arab origin. He regarded the two, Ottoman and Arab identity, as subordinate to a general Islamic one. Two written fragments illustrate al-Sanusi's syncretism: the first is al-Sanusi's personal tughra (monogram), a unique example of an Ottoman-style seal readapted and used by a local Arab ruler.¹³⁶



Tughras were reserved for the Ottoman Sultans. They functioned as the personal signature and imperial seal together. Al-Sanusi, however, took the unprecedented step of appropriating this symbol of Ottoman power and of transforming it. Firstly, he replaces the customary Ottoman Turkish with Arabic; secondly, he divests the Sultans of their

¹³⁵ Cleveland inaugurated the expression “Islamic nationalist” to describe that generation of Arabs who grew under the Ottoman Empire and whose allegiances remained within the boundaries of the ‘Umma, rather than of individual nations. William Cleveland, *Islam against the West: Shakib Arslan and the campaign for Islamic Nationalism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985).

¹³⁶ Letterhead in Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi's letter to the King of Italy, Oct. 16 1921, in ASMAI 134/20-149. Al-Sanusi's title, read from bottom to top, as customary for tughras, appears to be: *muwayyad bil-allah, al-ghazi fi sabil rabbihi l-ghani, khalifat ustadhihi wa mamlukihi al-Sayyad al-Mahdi Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi*. On the right of the main tughra, the small circular calligraphy reads *al-Ghazi*, whereas the horizontal title at the bottom is *na'ib al-khalifa l-'uzma*.

monopoly over *tughras* and arrogates it to himself, thus elevating his own genealogy and religious function to that of authority parallel to the Sultan; and thirdly he also appropriates for himself the title of *al-Ghazi*, which referred to Abdülhamid II in late Ottoman history, as well as some other Sultans of the classical period; ultimately he introduces a novel manner to address the Caliph (*al-khalifa l-'uzma*) which appears to be a hybrid between the title used for the Ottoman Grand Vizirate (*Sadaret-i Uzma*) and the more grandiose title reserved for the Caliphate (*Hilafet-i Kubra* or *Hilafet-i Kubra-yi islamiye*).

We do not know whether al-Sanusi's use of such official titles and *tughras* are the consequence of any official investiture he might have received by either the Ottoman or the Nationalist government. However, al-Sanusi's unorthodox reshuffling of the symbolic categories of Ottoman power can be interpreted as indicating the perseverance of his sense of belonging to the Ottoman world, although reaffirming his own political and religious stature. The combined use of Arabic within an Ottoman apparatus might also suggest that al-Sanusi viewed his cultural identity, qua Arab and reaffirmed by his using Arabic, as perfectly compatible to the Ottoman framework. Furthermore his use of the title of Ghazi, separated on the side, might be an indication that the Sanusi viewed himself as the successor to the Sultan Abdülhamid II whose Pan-Islamic policies the Grand Sanusi had eagerly supported. It is therefore possible for us to suggest that the use of Arabic words engraved in the Ottoman calligraphy is the physical representation of al-Sanusi's adherence as an Arab leader to Ottoman rule. However, this alone does not come as a surprise, knowing al-Sanusi's close relations to the Ottomans until then. What is noteworthy is his use of this Ottoman style, with Arabic script, within a November 1921 letter aimed at gathering a small army of al-Sanusi followers from Cyrenaica to join Mustafa Kemal's war in eastern Anatolia. This novel use of this

calligraphy might also suggest that al-Sanusi's collaboration with Mustafa Kemal was perceived as an outcome of his Ottoman patriotism, which he considered to be a superstructure encompassing both Sanusi's identity as an Arab shaykh of North Africa and *na'ib al-Khalifa*, and Mustapha Kemal's political project.

The other fragment illustrating al-Sanusi's reference to Arabism as a religious prerogative, rather than an ethnic distinction, is the following passage from an October 1920 letter:

During the truces, the Arabs risked being destroyed, but now their conditions have improved and the enemy is suffering. [...] From Iraq to Afghanistan Muslims are ruling. Foreigners have no longer command. This is God's will.¹³⁷

Who are those "Arabs" who risked being destroyed? Are they the members of the Great Arab Revolt who had taken over Damascus and reaffirmed the need of Arab liberation from Ottoman yoke? Certainly not: the so called "great Arab revolt" had been, for Sanusi, neither great nor Arab, because under Hashemite leadership the Arabs had allied themselves with non-Muslims in order to oust a Muslim ruler, the Ottomans. In this passage, al-Sanusi appears to be using the word "Arab," not as a national or ethnic mark, but rather as a religious category synonymous with Muslims, including Turks, Afghans, and Iraqis. Considering that the letter was written during Al-Sanusi's sojourn in eastern Anatolia in the midst of the Turkish clashes with Armenians and Greeks, and considering that it describes to his followers in Libya the reality he found himself in, it is possible that those "Arabs who risked being destroyed" also included the Turkish fighters surrounding him. And the enemy, which is "now suffering," ought to be considered foreign, non-Muslim, troops. Thus, with a surprising disassociation of the word "Arab" from any

¹³⁷ This letter was written during al-Sanusi's sojourn in Eastern Anatolia, exactly where we do not know, in October 1920. Given the location and the time he was writing, it would have been inconceivable for him not to have described the contingent reality he found himself in, namely the Turkish war. Letter from Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi to Ahmad Mauhub, 12 Safar 1339/26 Oct. 1920, in ASMAI 134/21-156.

ethnic connotations, the Sanusi managed to include the Turks of Anatolia as part of the “Arabs” fighting against foreign rule.

By reaffirming his Ottoman patriotism, making space for his Arab cultural roots, and expanding the meaning of being Arab to a general Islamic identity, the Libyan shaykh had ideologically linked Mustafa Kemal’s struggle for the Turkish Independence to a general Ottoman and Arab struggle against foreign rule. Al-Sanusi’s *jihad* had thus recommenced on the side of Mustafa Kemal, whom, at that time, he viewed as another defender of Islam.

THE ARAB FACE OF KEMALISM

Between 1921 and 1923 Ahmad al-Sharif became the leading Muslim and Arab supporter of the Kemalists. While the bulk of Turkish forces were engaged in confronting Greek forces in Western Anatolia, al-Sanusi mediated between the Turkish nationalists and the Kurdish and Arab tribes of Southeastern Anatolia; he spearheaded Turkish anti-British and anti-French propaganda in the region and recruited new volunteers to join the Kemalist fight; although not directly engaged in military actions in Cilicia, Syria or in Northern Iraq, he was a leading voice in these areas calling for a rebellion against foreign powers and advocating allegiance to the Kemalist forces. In brief, he became an ideological and religious pillar sustaining the Kemalist *jihād*.

An often forgotten chapter in the history of the modern Middle East is the cooperation between the Arab nationalist movement in Syria and the Turkish nationalist movement, in the early 1920s. Becoming hostile to the French occupation of their country, a Syrian Arab nationalist trend emerged with the view that an Arab-Turkish alliance was preferable to coming under French control. Rashid Rida, who became president of the Syrian National Congress in 1920, sent a long letter to Mustafa Kemal urging him to strengthen the Turkish national bond among the Turks, but at the same time to maintain the Muslim bond between Turks and Arabs.¹³⁸ On his part, Mustafa Kemal seemed eager to suggest that a confederation should be set up between Syria, Iraq and Turkey after emancipation.¹³⁹ The Turkish nationalists rejected the treaty of Sèvres, signed by the Ottoman government and the European Allies during the summer of 1920, which had

¹³⁸ In a letter to Shakib Arslan dated Jan. 28, 1926, in Arslan, *al-Sayyid*, 434-37.

¹³⁹ Sonyel, *Turkish Diplomacy*, 22

placed Syria, Lebanon and Cilicia under French rule, Mesopotamia and Palestine under British mandate, and rendered the Kingdom of Hijaz autonomous. The major points of contention between the provisions of the treaty and the Kemalists' territorial aspirations were Cilicia (under French occupation) and Kurdistan (especially Mosul in Northern Iraq, under British control). Given the lack of military means to recapture those territories which were considered integral parts of the future Turkish state, distributing pro-Kemalist propaganda, putting pressure on local leaders, and destabilizing Iraqi and Syrian affairs by supporting internal revolts became a strategic alternative to direct Turkish military engagement. Al-Sanusi's support of the Kemalists played therefore an important moral and legitimizing role in the Turkish engagements in the Arab provinces. During these four years al-Sanusi stationed himself in central and southastern Anatolia, setting up base temporarily in Konya, later in Diyar-i Bekir or in the nearby Urfa, and after the French withdrawal from Cilicia in Nov. 1922, either in Tarsus or Mersin.¹⁴⁰ Using these different locations as a base, al-Sanusi's strategy consisted of touring the surrounding villages to call for Turkish support and coordinating with nationalist officers the distribution of pro-Turkish propaganda in the territories under French and British control. We shall first describe al-Sanusi's activities in Syria, an account limited by the scarce mention of him in French sources; next we shall turn our attention to his well-documented *jihād* in Mesopotamia.

¹⁴⁰ The exact movements of the Sanusi are hard to pin down. He appears to have lived in Urfa until August 1922 (dispatch from British Consul Aleppo, Aug. 18, 1922, E8942 in FO371/7848), then, according to a close acquaintance, Mahmoud Deifullah, he moved to Tarsus (dispatch from British Consul Damascus to Foreign Secretary London, Nov. 30 1922, E14042 in F371/7943). But soonafter the Ex-Khedive informs the British that the Sanusi lives in Adana (memorandum from Lausanne to Colonial Office London, Jan. 2, 1923, E337 in FO371/8936), and all the while there are also occasional mentions of him in Mardin (E8423 in FO371/6352).

AGAINST THE FRENCH

The Kemalists initiated guerrilla activities in Mersin, Tarsus and Urfa in early 1920. They supported the Arab Club of Aleppo, an association of Aleppine notables aimed at propagating the idea of Syrian national unity independent from French rule; they contributed with men, money, and arms to the revolt headed by former Ottoman bureaucrat Ibrahim Hananu, and also disseminated pro-Turkish and anti-French propaganda throughout Syria.¹⁴¹ Al-Sanusi's support of the Arab Club predated his joining ranks with Mustafa Kemal. He was listed as a supporter of the armed militias of the Arab Club in a February 1920 report along with Hananu, prosperous Aleppine merchant Sami al-Kayyali, and Aleppo's leading religious figure Shaykh Mas'ud al-Kawakibi.¹⁴² We do not have details regarding al-Sanusi's links to the Syrian anti-French uprisings in this period, but it appears that he exerted ideological influence in the north of the country by rallying Kurdish tribes and by disseminating pro-Kemalist propaganda within the French mandate territory, and beyond. Foreign diplomats, fearful of al-Sanusi's collaboration with the Kemalists, reported alarmingly that al-Sanusi "was promoting uprisings in the whole Muslim world."¹⁴³ Although such concerns might have been over-stated, it must be acknowledged that al-Sanusi's propaganda in Syria was not simply a local phenomenon, targetting the immediate and contingent Aleppine and Damascene reality. It spoke to the Indians of the Khilafat movement, some of whose

¹⁴¹ On the Hananu Revolt, see Philip S. Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism (1920-1945)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 102-110. In this study of French-ruled Syria, Khoury does not mention al-Sanusi at all.

¹⁴² French Ministry of Defence, 4H112/2A/38R, "Resignments," Feb. 20, 1920, cited in James Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties. Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the close of the Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 131 n.105. Al-Sanusi was certainly not in Aleppo at the time of this report, thus the presence of his name is troubling. He could have been an ideological supporter of the revolt, and his name inserted as an ideological contributor to the Revolt thanks to his ties with religious figures, like Kawakibi.

¹⁴³ "Ahmad al-Sharif is serving the Kemalist movement and is in continuous agreement with Mustafa Kemal, who is attempting to promote uprisings in the whole muslim world and, through his pan-Islamic ideas he is trying to embarass European powers." Telegram from Colonial Ministry to Tripoli government, Sept 14, 1921, in ASMAI 136/1-9.

member came to join his fight in the kemalist jihad¹⁴⁴; it generated the support of the far-away Aghans, whose ambassador to Ankara remained a staunch supporter of the Sanusi; and, as the following card testifies, Al-Sanusi became an icon, used together with twelfth century warrior Salah al-Din, to frame and sustain Mustafa Kemal's war as a modern anti-crusade.¹⁴⁵



Pro-Kemalist propaganda distributed in Syria in 1922, depicting Mustafa Kemal, center, Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi, left, and Salah al-Din gathered around a Quran.

Numerous postcards depicting this triumvirate were being sold by boys on the streets of Damascus “at a price slightly under the equivalent of two cents.”¹⁴⁶ The distribution of this type of propaganda had a three-fold aim: by placing the Turkish Ghazi between al-Sanusi and Salah al-Din, Mustafa Kemal was reaffirming his qualifications as a warrior, as a believer, as well as undermining the exclusive authority of the Ottomans. The two

¹⁴⁴ Mention of Indians of the Khilafat movement reaching Mardin, in Mesopotamia Intelligence Report no. 2 (Nov. 30, 1920), CO10659 in FO371/6349.

¹⁴⁵ USNA Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal affairs of Asia (1910-1929), dispatch from US Consul Damascus Charles E. Allen to Secretary of State Washington, Nov. 16, 1922, index no. 890d.00/154, enclosure 2. Other pro-Kemalist cards which made their way to Damascus (enclosed in this file) include Mustafa Kemal and Enver Pasha pointing at a map of Syria and bucolic scenes of happy Turkish girls.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

men flanking him were popularly known for their military role against Christian armies, and the symbolic use of their images in these cards aimed at presenting the Turkish Ghazi as defender of the Muslim lands from foreign occupation. This iconographic representation also intended to legitimize Mustafa Kemal from a religious perspective: the two shaykhs known for their respective religious fervor (Salah al-Din returned Sunni Islam to Cairo and liberated Jerusalem from the Crusaders; the former Grand Sanusi as recognized contemporary pious scholar) appear, in fact, to be sustaining towards the Turkish Ghazi a Qur'an framed by the words *'adltum fanaltum* (you were just, thus you were rewarded).¹⁴⁷ Through these words, a common Arabic expression emphasizing a believer's adherence to the Islamic sense of justice (*'adl*), the Sanusi becomes a guarantor of al-Ghazi's religious piety. It is particularly significant that in this picture the traditional source of religious authority, the Caliph, has been replaced by two men who were never officially part of the dynastic establishments, Ottoman or other. Al-Sanusi appears here to have almost replaced the Ottoman Caliph and become an alternative source of Islamic authority capable of resurrecting Mustafa Kemal's Muslim credentials from the state of unbelief, which the Ottoman Caliph had thrustured him into.

The use of Salah al-Din, arguably the most famous Kurd in Islamic history, in association with al-Sanusi could also have been aimed at arousing in particular the support of the Kurdish population, among whom the Sanusi was active in spreading pro-Turkish propaganda. We know that during his visits to tribal villages north of Syria, thousands would gather to welcome him.¹⁴⁸ Al-Sanusi was particularly engaged with the leaders of the 'Anazeh and Shammar, the two major tribes on the west and eastern bank of the Euphrates; feeling betrayed at being accorded a mandate status, the tribes had sought

¹⁴⁷ Given that in the picture there appears to be a pen, which is normally never placed next to the Holy book, it could also be that what the American consul had indentified as the Qur'an is in reality a man-made book. But if this were the case, it would be difficult for us to relate it with the symbolism of the two other shaykhs.

¹⁴⁸ *Muslim Standard*, Jan. 26 1921, cited in *OM i* (1921), 653.

the support of the Ankara government. This type of propaganda might have also been aimed at those Kurdish tribes, who recognized neither Turkish nor British authority. Therefore the distribution of cards, like the one reproduced above, underlining the armed, religious and political links between Salah al-Din, the Sanusi and the Ghazi, could only have reinforced Ahmad al-Sharif's leverage among the Kurdish tribes and further emphasized Mustafa Kemal's attempt to reach out to them.

Al-Sanusi traveled throughout the Eastern provinces, meeting local tribes leaders and calling for Islamic unity and cooperation with the Kemalists, exhorting the tribes to help the Anatolian army, nourish them and form garrisons of volunteers.¹⁴⁹ On one occasion, while addressing a crowd at the Mardin mosque, al-Sanusi appealed to the people to take up arms against the "infidel" British and French. While the crowd gathered in front of Mardin's government palace cheering Mustafa Kemal and al-Sanusi, a local leader echoed al-Sanusi's speech by proclaiming:

The infidel British and French have invaded our sacred country and reviled our Koran and women, and for this reason, we Moslems must all be united as one soul, as are our brethren of Tripolitania who are here with us.

By fomenting pro-Turkish sentiment and by encouraging the tribes to take up arms against the mandate forces, al-Sanusi had managed to assemble a force mainly made up of Kurdish tribesmen from Mardin, Urfa and Anteb.¹⁵⁰ Although the number of this tribal force under the Sanusi did reach a peak of 2,000 men during the summer of 1921, their allegiance remained dependant on the whims of the tribal leaders who were acting as officers for their own followers and on the availability of financial resources to provide

¹⁴⁹ *Tevhid-i Efkar*, Oct. 11, 1921, cited in French in ASMAI 131/1-9.

¹⁵⁰ British Secret Intelligence Service undated report contained in dispatch from Istanbul to Foreign Office (June 12, 1922), E6056 in FO371/7943.

for their upkeep.¹⁵¹ Since both of these factors were volatile, al-Sanusi could not effectively employ these tribal recruits, who in any case were poorly equipped and flanked by a mere handful of Turkish officers armed with artillery, as an expeditionary force against the French in Syria. Such direct military actions never took place and, in general, al-Sanusi's activity among the tribes was never perceived as a direct threat to the French administration. Although General Goudard, the French commander in chief in Syria, eventually issued an order of expulsion against the Sanusi in November 1922,¹⁵² his memoirs do not even mention the Libyan shaykh.¹⁵³ Similarly, French military intelligence reports referring to the Sanusi, only do so in relation to his "propaganda activity" and his anti-British ambitions.¹⁵⁴

Al-Sanusi's calls for anti-French subversion, although significant, were certainly dwarfed in comparison to his anti-British *jihad*. The disparity between his actions in Syria and in Mesopotamia was so blatant that at the end of 1921 the British began to believe the Sanusi had been paid by the French to direct his "subversive action" exclusively against them in Mesopotamia.¹⁵⁵ However plausible this British speculation might seem in the light of British-French regional rivalry at that time, it appears somewhat unfounded: although armed actions against the French certainly did diminish following the Franco-Kemalist agreement of October 1921 and direct funding and arms resupply to the Hananu revolt were interrupted, a certain amount of hostilities, especially around Anteb,

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² The expulsion of the Sanusi is reported in a letter from British Consul Aleppo James Morgan to Foreign Office (Nov. 27, 1922), E13877 in FO371/7849.

¹⁵³ Philippe Gouraud, *Le Général Henri Gouraud au Liban et en Syrie 1919-1923* (Paris: Éditions L'Harmattan, 1993).

¹⁵⁴ This author did not consult French archives. However French Intelligence Reports were summarized by the British liaison officer to the French military headquarters in Beirut for British diplomatic use. Therefore a significant number of such reports is available in the PRO.

¹⁵⁵ According to an ex-officer of the Arab Army in Syria Ahmad Fakri, French Captain Duboin had personally paid the Sanusi 20,000 British pounds in Mardin. Intelligence Report Mesopotamia no. 21 (Sept. 15, 1921), E11315 in FO 371/6353.

continued throughout 1922 when the French finally pulled out of Cilicia. And as a report of a U.S. relief organization testifies, during the summer of 1922 the Sanusi continued to journey throughout the Urfa region conducting propaganda aimed at subverting the status quo both in Iraq and in Syria simultaneously.¹⁵⁶ In the eyes of the Sanusi, the two realities were interlinked. As the American report states, the Libyan shaykh believed that a permanent settlement of the Middle East would be achieved only once both countries were independent from Western rule, and more specifically when he would become king of Iraq and, in turn, Faysal would return to Damascus as King of Syria.¹⁵⁷

SANUSI KING OF IRAQ?

During his stay in Eastern Anatolia, Sanusi received mail from his followers addressed “to the King of Iraq.”¹⁵⁸ Similarly, in foreign press and diplomatic records of this period, there is repeated mention of him as either “the Turkish candidate for the throne of Iraq” or the “King of Northern Iraq.”¹⁵⁹

Such titles, which reflect a clear political ambition, were not simply fruit of al-Sanusi’s own idealism or extravagant aspirations. They were the result of Turkish attempts to back the Sanusi as their own candidate for Iraq in order to undermine British rule there.

In April 1921, the Grand National Assembly at Ankara appears to have nominated al-Sanusi for the throne of Mesopotamia.¹⁶⁰ What should be understood by such a

“nomination” is not immediately clear. Turkish sources do not comment on the matter.

In the encyclopedic work by Stanford J. Shaw on the early years of the Republic, there is

¹⁵⁶ The Near East Relief (NER) was a American medical relief organization operating in Turkey and Greece following World War I. Al-Sanusi appears to have exercised so much influence in Urfa that, despite what the Americans defined his “xenophobic propaganda”, they allowed him to use their private car to tour the region for over one month.

¹⁵⁷ “He is alleged to maintain that at the present moment there are two kings of Iraq, but that shortly one of them [Faysal] will again become King of Syria and he, Senussi, will then be the actual King of Iraq.” Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ *Times* (London), Sept. 27, 1921.

¹⁶⁰ *Times* (London), April 21, 1921, p. 9, col C.

no mention of such an official proclamation.¹⁶¹ British officials speculated that Mustafa Kemal's plan consisted in getting Abdülhamid II's favorite son, Burhan al-Din, appointed King of Mesopotamia and make the Sanusi Regent until the Prince arrived.¹⁶² But this idea of a joint appointment was short-lived: the name of Burhan al-Din appears in the British documents only as a hypothetical one and they stop referring to him as the Turkish candidate for Iraq soon after the installment of Emir Faysal on the Iraqi throne. What appears to be a more probable hypothesis is that Mustafa Kemal and his entourage endorsed Sanusi alone as the Turkish candidate for Iraq. Not only was he an Arab, and a partisan of the Kemalists, but he was also a religious authority who could promote pro-Turkish agitation in northern Iraq and thus outweigh the Hashemites.

Such a nomination, whether official or not, was the immediate and logical Turkish response to several set-backs the Turks received in Iraq. In March 1921 at the Cairo Conference, the British had officially endorsed Emir Faisal as King of Iraq;¹⁶³ at the same time, British authorities in Iraq also exiled Sayyid Taleb, who had brokered a deal between the Ottoman government and 'Abd al-Aziz ibn Saud and whom the Turks had so far supported as possible regent for the former Ottoman province.¹⁶⁴ Sayyid Taleb's confinement to Ceylon and the official British backing to the Hashemite Amir, combined with the dispute over the sovereignty of the British-occupied territory of Mosul, must have highlighted the urgent need of mobilizing a Turkish candidate capable of destabilizing British and Hashemite control. As Gertrude Bell remarked:

¹⁶¹ Shaw, *op. cit.*

¹⁶² Telegram from High Commissioner for Mesopotamia to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, June 2, 1921, CO730/2 in RoI vol. 2 (1918-1921), 775.

¹⁶³ Telegraphic correspondence between Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill and British Prime Minister during the Cairo Conference, 14-23 March 1921, CO 730/13 and RoI vol. 2 (1918-1921), 501-511.

¹⁶⁴ He was deported because he protested against British intention to force a ruler on Iraq without leaving the Iraqis the right to choose one themselves. He was deported to Ceylon and later transferred to Paris. Cf. extract from Intelligence Report Mesopotamia no. 12, May 1, 1921 on the deportation of Sayyid Taleb and public opinion, FO371/6351 in RoI vol. 2 (1918-1921), 601.

It is very significant that the Kamalists as soon as they heard that Faisal was coming began a hot propaganda in favor of their candidate, Shaykh Ahmad Idrisi, the Sanusi - he hails from the deserts west of Egypt.¹⁶⁵

Media reports of the time claimed that the Kemalists were preparing an expedition into northern Iraq to raise local tribes against King Faisal and replace him with the Sanusi.¹⁶⁶ However, it must be noted that the Kemalists never stipulated that the heart of Mesopotamia should return to Turkish rule; their only territorial concern was the fate of the oil-rich Mosul province. By endorsing the Sanusi, the Ankara Government most probably did not aspire to recapture Mesopotamia or return it under Turkish control, but simply to undermine the British and force them to cede the northern province of Mosul to Ankara. From this perspective, it is conceivable that Kemalists, eager to define the eastern border of Anatolia according to the National Pact, believed that al-Sanusi's religious status, Arab origin and anti-colonial record made him a suitable candidate. From the Sanusi's point of view, the necessity of an anti-British *jihad* in Northern Iraq stemmed out of his conviction, which we have reiterated on several occasions already, that political authority of Muslim lands should rest in the hands of the believers themselves. Yet also a religious motivation might have ensued urging him to mobilize forces for the liberation of northern Iraq, namely the creation of an extraterritorial enclave for the Caliph. Following the abolition of the Ottoman sultanate in March 1922, Mosul had officially been proposed as the seat of the Islamic spiritual Caliphate by Rashid Rida.¹⁶⁷ The Egyptian modernist thinker had suggested Mosul as an

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. In this letter, Bell renders the name of the former Libyan leader wrong. She calls him Shaikh Ahmed Idrisi, the Sanusi. She might have thought that Idris was the Sheikh's second name – which was not the case. Alternatively she might have attributed to him the name Sheikh Ahmad's cousin then Amir of Cyrenaica, Muhammad Idris.

¹⁶⁶ *Al-Ahram* (Cairo), Sept. 28, 1921, cited in dispatch from Italian Colonial Ministry to Embassy Constantinople, Oct. 6, 1921, in ASMAI 136/1-9.

¹⁶⁷ Henri Laoust, *Le Califat dans la doctrine de Rashid Rida* (Beirut: Mémoires de l'Institut Française de Damas: 1932), 131.

“intermediary zone” between Arabian Peninsula and Anatolia, where Arabs, Turks and Kurds live side by side, a cohabitation that would ground the unifying aspirations of a spiritual Caliph, void of specific political and national power. What I am suggesting is that the Sanusi might have shared the same ambition. Although we do not have any documents proving the link between the Libyan leader and the Cairnere reformer, we know for certain that Rashid Rida corresponded regularly with Shakib Arslan, who in turn was in contact with the Sanusi.¹⁶⁸ Could this idea of a spiritual Caliphate located in Northern Iraq have been one of the reasons the Sanusi had been so active in that area? Was al-Sanusi’s alleged election to “King of northern Iraq” paving the way for the creation of an extraterritorial seat for the Caliph? The implications stemming from such considerations shall be more fully analyzed in the following chapter on the Sanusi and the Caliphate question.

THE PROPAGANDA

Al-Sanusi coordinated his propaganda efforts in Northern Iraq with the Turkish military commander of the Eastern Front, Nihad Pasha, who had a small garrison in the Kurdish region near Lake Van. However neither al-Sanusi himself, nor his followers, ever engaged in direct military action.¹⁶⁹ Instead, throughout 1921 and 1922, al-Sanusi’s main activity consisted in sending messages and pamphlets through Kurdish, Turkish or Arab messengers to tribal and urban leaders calling for disobedience against the British and their appointed Amir and support of the Ankara Government – in the name of Islam.¹⁷⁰ Many examples of such pamphlets are found in the Public Record Office. Although we cannot be certain whether they were personally authored by al-Sanusi, we can

¹⁶⁸ For correspondance between Shakib Arslan and Rashid Rida, see Shakib Arslan, *Al-Sayyid Rashid Rida, aw Ikha’ arba’in sana* (Damascus: Matba’a Ibn Zabdun, 1937).

¹⁶⁹ Ahmad al-Sharif claimed that Mustafa Kemal had once offered him the military command of the troops in the eastern province, but he refused. See CAB44/14, 85.

¹⁷⁰ Intelligence Report no. 20, Set. 1, 1921, in FO684/1.

nevertheless assume that, given his official role as the head of the pro-Turkish propaganda activity among the Arabs, he must have had some direct role in compiling them, either as an ideologue, as the first-hand writer, or else simply as a supervisor.¹⁷¹ These pamphlets differ in theme and style, ranging from aseptic threats against Iraqis, such as the one signed by Mustafa Kemal announcing his imminent arrival with Turkish troops to fight against the British, to Bolshevik-style propaganda, to vehement appeals in the name of Islam.¹⁷² This last category of leaflets were written or inspired personally by the Sanusi since their reference to the sanctity of Islam, the fire of God's wrath, as well as Arab-Ottoman revenge, not only comply with al-Sanusi's ideological mind-frame, but also bear some similarity to the linguistic style used in his previously-examined jihad treatise. One such pamphlet, titled "Treachery of the Barbarian British nation," was signed by the "Arab-Ottoman Revenge Society" and posted in Baghdad in March 1921. It states:

By the name of the National Arab Spirit and the Muhammadan Sagacity, awake O Arabs, distress overflows the dales, time to revenge is on hand; quit you like men; fight and sacrifice your soul for victory.¹⁷³

What is surprising in this pamphlet is that the call for the awakening of the Arab spirit is not presented here as an antagonist force to the Ottoman nation. The language used defies the notion, traditionally upheld by Arab nationalist discourse and best exemplified

¹⁷¹ Other Turkish officers named by British Intelligence sources as being involved in conveying pamphlets into Iraq are also Nihad Pasha, 'Akif Bey, 'Ajaimi Pasha and Muhammad 'Ali Pasha. Turkish propaganda in Baghdad specifically is said to center around Muhammad 'Amin al-Sharshafti. Cf. entry dated Baghdad, Jan. 22, 1921 in Intelligence Report Mesopotamia no. 6, Jan. 31, 2001, E3824 in FO 371/6350.

¹⁷² A proclamation signed by Mustafa Kamal himself and posted in the suq of Khaniqin in northeastern Iraq read "the time is nearly come when Mustafa Kemal Pasha with the Turkish soldiers will come into 'Iraq and fight the British, so when we do come all the people working for the British Government now, will be fined, imprisoned and thrown our of their appointments." Intelligence Report from Ba'qubah, April 10, 1921 in FO 371/6351 and RoI vol. 2 (1918-1921), 761.

¹⁷³ Intelligence dated Feb. 12, 1921 in Intelligence Report Mesopotamia no. 8, March 1, 1921, E4506 in FO 371/6350.

in George Antonius's "The Arab Awakening", that this spiritual Arab resurrection would take place only after shedding away four centuries of Ottoman domination.¹⁷⁴ On the contrary, the national Arab spirit and the rise of Islamic sentiment are in this pamphlet both framed within an Arab-Ottoman "society."

In January 1922, numerous other pamphlets posted in east Baghdad, combined both reference to sanctity of Islamic rule and threats against collaborators, giving a vivid picture of the mortal dangers incurred by those who helped the British. In this case too, the stylistic similarities to Sanusi's *jihad* treatise are remarkable.

Fear God and his clemency. Fear the fire which burns between the ribs of the free patriots because one day it will destroy you. [...] Do not believe that the nation has been forced to submit. No! By the Tigris and Euphrates, No! not even if blood flows like a sea. The nation is quiet for a definite time in order that they may open discussions with those blinded to right which is as clear as the rising sun, and in order to regain the right they have usurped.[...] We betide you idolaters of money, and traitors of the Islamic homeland. Do not believe that you have really obtained what you so earnestly desired. Your arrow has not reached the target and your eyes have become "squinted." [...] The near future will reveal to you what is to happen in this dear blessed country; and then to where will you escape? The true liberators are advancing. They have occupied Arbil and Rawnduz and the detestable barbaric British army is retreating with losses and despair. The fire of our friends is still blazing on all sides of Mosul. How joyful the day will be when they enter our capital of Baghdad. Welcome to them and removal and destruction to you, o savage oppressors."¹⁷⁵

Although this pamphlet does not make direct mention to the troops of Mustafa Kemal, it is obvious that the "true liberators" who have occupied Arbil and Rawnduz, were the

¹⁷⁴ George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, c.1939).

¹⁷⁵ Intelligence from Baghdad, Jan. 22, 1921 in Intelligence Report Mesopotamia no. 6, Jan. 31, 2001, E3824 in FO 371/6350.

Turks. At the time of this pamphlet, they had in fact penetrated into these two cities of northern Iraq, although they would be later lost to the British.

This pro-Turkish propaganda, depicting the Kemalist triumph as imminent and British rule as un-Islamic, was not only targeted to the Arabs of Iraq; some were also written in Urdu for the Indian Muslim soldiers of the British army deployed to Iraq and incited them to disobey British rule. A pamphlet found in Diyar-i Bekir, for example, called on them to refuse service in an army whose declared aim is the destruction of Islam:

O you Indian Mohammedan Military Brethen who are ignorant of the events of the world. [...] Do you not know what the late Lord Kitchener once said, "My mind will not be at ease until I revoke the remains of Muhammad from his tomb at medina to the Museums of Paris." You people should think how the British with this object in view enslaved and ruined the Mohammedan Powers by means of vile tricks. At present the British are intriguing against the Khilafat and Ottoman Empire, which has protected all the Holy Places of Islam for the last 600 years.¹⁷⁶

This Sanusi propaganda was widespread: it reached Mosul, as well as Baghdad; it targeted Arabs, Kurds, Indian Muslims, and Shia leaders alike; his messengers managed to defy British security personnel and distributing al-Sanusi's proclamations on the roads and in houses.¹⁷⁷ On one occasion, a supporter of the Sanusi in Baghdad even made the blunt move of personally handing dozens of al-Sanusi's anti-British to an advisor of Faysal, demanding that he forward them to the Hashemite Emir. Al-Sanusi thought that by intimidating the Emir through widely distributed leaflets, which declared

¹⁷⁶ The pamphlet is titled "The Christians and the Jews are not satisfied with you until you follow their religion", in entry dated Baghdad, Jan. 22, 1921 in Intelligence Report Mesopotamia no. 6, dated Jan. 31, 2001, E3824 in FO 371/6350. The Urdu translation could have been made possible either through some Afghan supporters of the Sanusi or some Indian member of the Khilafat congress, some of whom were reported to have joined the Sanusi in eastern Anatolia.

¹⁷⁷ Gertrude Bell to her father, July 16, 1921 in <http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk/home/index.htm>.

un-Islamic his cooperation with the British, he might induce Faysal to abandon his western allies.

The effectiveness of al-Sanusi's campaign can be judged from the words of Gertrude Bell, the British advisor in Mesopotamia and staunch supporter of King Faisal, who describes the "Turkish-Sanusi propaganda" on several occasions as an annoying, although not a complete setback to British aims. In a letter dated December 1921, she describes al-Sanusi derogatorily as "a pole with a sheet draped over it" (in other contexts she had referred to him as a "fanatic marabout"), whose letters were stirring popular emotions:

There's an intensive propaganda going on and that pole with a sheet draped over it, Ahmad Sanusi, is sending down quantities of letters urging tribes and individuals to rise against us and Faisal in the name of Islam. I think it's almost negligible, but it just isn't quite. If we could catch a few of these messengers - but we've never succeeded in doing so yet, though many of the letters have come into our hands.¹⁷⁸

Al-Sanusi was also in contact with Iraqi Shia leaders, like Shaykh Mahdi al-Khalisi and Sayyid Muhammad al-Sadr, whom he encouraged to repudiate British authority overtly and declare allegiance to the Turks.¹⁷⁹ There are also allegations that he called on the Shia leaders gathered at the Karbala Congress of April 1922 to take a more decisive stance against King Faysal.

Although he had been proclaimed, back in April 1921, as the Turkish candidate for the throne of Iraq, it is unrealistic to imagine that al-Sanusi, the few Turkish garrisons deployed in the area, or even Mustafa Kemal himself really believed that he would succeed in becoming the King of Iraq. Faysal was well placed in Baghdad, and enjoyed

¹⁷⁸ Gertrude Bell to her father, Dec. 4, 1921, <http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk/home/index.htm>.

¹⁷⁹ Extract from Iraq Police Intelligence report no. 30 dated 26 Nov. 1921, CO15891 in CO730/21. Apparently al-Sanusi also hoped to make use of the shia gathering held in Karbala in April 1921 to encourage anti-British rebellion, at least this is what British authorities feared and thus advised Amir Faisal against taking part in the meeting.

obvious British support, which al-Sanusi certainly lacked. Rather, it seems more sensible to imagine that the Turkish decision early in 1921 to deploy a force in the Mardin region and to use al-Sanusi as their Arab agitator there was simply aimed at augmenting the Nationalists' bargaining power during the peace talks with the British.

In supporting al-Sanusi, the intention of the nationalists could only have been to use his fame as an indirect means to recapture Cilicia and Mosul, under French and British occupation respectively, but considered an integral part of the new Turkish state. It could very well be therefore that the so-called Turkish-Sanusi agitation in Northern Iraq was aimed not so much at challenging Faisal's throne, but rather to create a bargaining chip for gaining some leverage over the Turkish requests that Britain hand over Mosul and France cede Cilicia. An example of this tactic is what took place in Ankara while the Lausanne conference was underway. In January 1923, while the peace accords and territorial delimitations were ongoing, the Afghan ambassador in Ankara, Sultan Ahmad Khan, offered a banquet in Sanusi's honor that was attended by leading nationalist personalities whose words of praise for the Sanusi were echoed in the Turkish press.¹⁸⁰ The Turkish Premier, Ra'uf Bey, expressed the "dear gratefulness of the Turkish nation towards Ahmad al-Sharif for his help offered in moments of danger" and let it be known that the Sanusi was on his way back to Diyar-i Bekir.¹⁸¹ The British press quickly picked the news and questioned whether al-Sanusi's resumption of his anti-British propaganda in the east was a sign of Turkish uncompromising stance over Mosul.

While there is still an inclination among the British here to regard this attitude [Turkish threat to return to war] as bluff, information from usually trust-worthy sources seems indeed to point to the improbability of the National Assembly's

¹⁸⁰ Dispatch from Constantinople to Foreign Office dated Jan. 19, 1923, E1135 in FO371/9141. Other people attending were Ali Fuad Pasha, vice-President of the Grand National Assembly, Mehmed Veli Khan, head of an Indian delegation, as well as a member of the Egyptian Zaghlulist Delegation.

¹⁸¹ *Al-Akhbar*, Jan 30, 1923, cited in OM ii (1922), 583.

sanctioning any further delay in the solution of the problems submitted to the Lausanne Conference. Turkish preparations on the Mosul border are continuing, and the ex-Sheikh of the Senussi has arrived in Tarsus.¹⁸²

Whether al-Sanusi succeeded in his anti-British and anti-French campaign is not a critical issue here. Many elements beyond the Libyan shaykh determined Turkey's capability to retain or lose what it had considered to be an integral part of its territory. What is more important for the purpose of our biographical overview, is to acknowledge that the Libyan shaykh did have a prominent role in Mustafa Kemal's *jihad* in Eastern Anatolia, a collaboration which has rarely been mentioned. Moreover, this collaboration was mutually beneficial, because the Turkish Ghazi deemed the Sanusi as a sufficiently prominent personality to represent iconographically and ideologically his own struggle.

HIJRA FROM THE KEMALISTS

Al-Sanusi's presence in the eastern *vilayets* continued well into 1924, but by the beginning 1923 his authority in the eastern provinces had largely diminished. What remained of Turkish forces in the Kurdish provinces had been pulled out; the gradual successes of the nationalists first against the Italians (having recuperated Adana in 1921), then against the French (who finally ceded Cilicia in 1922), and against the Greeks (starting with the Greek defeat along the Sakarya river in 1921) had progressively rendered the Sanusi less strategic in the eyes of the Kemalist and was therefore deprived of Turkish troops. He had his Kurdish volunteers assembled from the tribes near Urfa,¹⁸³ and he hoped to be joined also by a group of followers from Libya. He wrote to the King of Italy, the Colonial Minister and Foreign Affairs minister demanding them all to allow this entourage of armed men to travel to Turkey, claiming that he needed them for

¹⁸² *Times* (London), Jan. 20, 1923, p. 10, col E.

¹⁸³ *Times* (London), June 9, 1922, p. 7, col F.

“personal service,”¹⁸⁴ while secretly informing his cousin Mohammad Idris that they were needed “to help realize his affairs in Iraq and elsewhere.”¹⁸⁵ Of the eighty requested, who might have served as leaders for the Kurdish volunteers, only six men were eventually dispatched to join the Sanusi in Iraq.¹⁸⁶ The total number of forces at his disposal was too small to continue his *jihad*.

The consolidation of the political authority of the Ankara Government, which obtained international recognition at the Lausanne conference, the anti-Ottoman stance of the Kemalist government, and the eventual marginalization of the Sanusi, strained his relations with Mustafa Kemal, who eventually slashed al-Sanusi’s allowance.¹⁸⁷ He kept in contact with the exiled Ottoman Sultan Wahid al-Din and journey with him in Arabia, where the former Sultan’s presence might have encouraged a revolt against the King Husayn.¹⁸⁸ However, the plan did not take place and in mid-1923 al-Sanusi retreated to Mersin where he remained until his definite flight from Anatolia at the end of the following year. Although there are allegations that some contacts were maintained over issues regarding the Caliphate and al-Sanusi’s relations with Ibn Sa‘ud it became nevertheless obvious that his honeymoon with the Kemalists had ended.

¹⁸⁴ Al-Sanusi letters (original Arabic) in dispatch from Italian Foreign Ministry to Colonial Ministry, June 2, 1922, in ASMAI 136/1-13. A part from the 80 members of the Sanusiyya, Ahmad al-Sharif also requested that 10 camelloads of books, the arms and swords he had left in Cyrenaica, and various utensils be sent to him.

¹⁸⁵ Letter from Al-Sanusi’s secretary Tawfiq Bey to Muhammad Idris (Italian traslation only) in dispatch from Italian Foreign Ministry to Colonial Ministry, June 2, 1922, in ASMAI 136/1-13.

¹⁸⁶ Dispatch from Foreign Ministry to Colonial Ministry, Feb. 7, 1922 in ASMAI 136/1-9.

¹⁸⁷ Dispatch from British Embassy Constantinople to Foreign Secretary MacDonald, May 12, 1924, E4098 in FO371/10023.

¹⁸⁸ According to ex-Khedive ‘Abbas Hilmi, quoted in dispatch dated Jan. 2, 1923 from British delegation in Lausanne to Foreign Office E337, in FO371/8936.

In September 1923 he met an emissary of the Italian Government, who claimed that Italy was anxious for peace with the Sanusi,¹⁸⁹ but the Libyan shaykh declared that “the Arabs of Libya would be satisfied with nothing less than complete independence.”¹⁹⁰

When on the March 2, 1924 the Turkish National Assembly voted for the abolition of the Caliphate, al-Sanusi justified his ambivalent allegiance to the Ottoman establishment in Istanbul and collaboration with the Ankara Government, which *a posteriori* was viewed as a betrayal of the former, by re-emphasizing that he had fought alongside the Kemalist for purely religious reasons: to defend Muslim soil. In a statement made to the Turkish press in March 1924, al-Sanusi argued that his *jihad* in Anatolia had been completed with no aim other than the well-being of Islam.¹⁹¹

Everyone knows that on leaving Bursa, I on the one hand joined the national forces which had resolved with strong conviction to defend faith and fatherland; on the other hand I perceived that it was the foremost of religious duties to diminish as far in me as lay by teaching and spreading injunctions the discord and strife sown among Moslems; and I passed forthwith into Anatolia and occupied myself with this important and strictly-defined duty.

In this statement, al-Sanusi also claimed that the continuation of his stay in Anatolia consisted in “being a guest of His Excellency the Ghazi Pasha, President of the Imperial Republic of Turkey.”¹⁹² However, the abolition of the Caliphate and the subsequent expulsion of Abdülmecid, made Sanusi’s permanence in Turkey untenable and it soon

¹⁸⁹ The Italian emissary was Balduino Caprini, former Italian representative of the inter-Allied Police force in Constantinople, who prior to returning to Italy in October 1923 embarked on a trip to Syria in order to discuss with the Sanusi “on strictly unofficial terms.” Telegram n.3392 from Italian Foreign Ministry to Constantinople Embassy, Sept. 23, 1923, in AP Turchia 1923, 1685/7826bis.

¹⁹⁰ CAB44/14, Report on the Relations between Great Britain, Italy and the Senussi, 1912-1924, prepared by the Foreign Office, p. 81.

¹⁹¹ *Tevhid-i Efkâr*, March 31, 1923, cited in dispatch from British Embassy Constantinople to Foreign Office, April 2, 1924, E3081 in FO371/10023.

¹⁹² Ibid.

became clear that he was an unwanted guest.¹⁹³ In May 1924, his secretary Fakhr al-Din met with several foreign representatives in Istanbul suggesting that al-Sanusi was ready to turn away from the Turks.¹⁹⁴

As a religious leader, who held forth his dogma of the need for Muslim sovereignty, al-Sanusi was pushed to search for such rule elsewhere. When the Caliph had been exiled, Turkey had stopped being a Muslim land. He thus embarked on a journey aimed at restoring the spiritual Caliphate, which eventually landed him in Arabia at the court of Ibn Sa'ud.

¹⁹³ According to the Adana paper *Dogru Söz* al-Sanusi was expelled from Turkey because he was in correspondence with the former Ottoman Caliph Abdülmecid and was collecting money for the banished princes. Cited in dispatch dated Nov. 19, 1924 from Constantinople to Foreign Office in FO686/66.

¹⁹⁴ Telegram dated May 12, 1924 from Constantinople to Foreign Office, E4098 in FO371/10023.

RESTORING THE CALIPHATE

The abolition of the Ottoman caliphate transpired in two phases. In November 1922, on the wave of the military successes against Allied powers, the Turkish Nationalists accused the Ottoman sultan-caliph, Wahid al-Din, of collaborating with the British, stripped him of his position and abolished the Sultanate. They retained the Caliphate as an exclusively spiritual office and appointed the heir apparent, Abdülmecid, as Caliph in Istanbul. Fourteen months later, however, reacting to protests staged in Istanbul by Indian Muslims who called upon the Turkish Government to place the caliphate “on a basis which would command confidence and esteem of Muslim nations,” Mustafa Kemal abolished the Ottoman Caliphate for good.¹⁹⁵ According to Bernard Lewis it was the crisis touched off by such protests, which threatened the authority and sovereignty of the Turkish Republic, that pushed the Turkish nationalist leader to send Abdülmecid into exile together with his family, bringing the Ottoman Caliphate to a definite end in March 1924.

Al-Sanusi’s involvement in the Caliphate issue is divided into three phases: the first, leading up to the final demise of Ottomans, during which the Libyan shaykh refused repeated proposals made by the nationalist that he take over the Caliphate in a seat outside Turkey’s borders; the second coincides with the six months following the March 1924 exile of the Ottoman family during which he busied himself to restore their power; however, by the end of 1924, he radically changed his stance and sought actively to become the next Caliph of the Muslim world.

¹⁹⁵ Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 258.

Lewis claims that since the Caliphate was the living symbol of Turkey's link to the Islamic past, Mustafa Kemal "was determined to break it."¹⁹⁶ However, an examination of the contacts held between the Sanusi and Mustafa Kemal before and after the abolition of the Caliphate suggests that the Turkish leader initially might not have been aiming at a full-blown abolition of the Caliphate, but only to transfer the seat of the Caliphate outside Turkish border and to reassign this symbolic Islamic institution to a religious dignitary other than the Ottomans. It appears, in fact, that Mustafa Kemal and his entourage approached the Libyan shaykh on various occasions in order that he assume the Caliphate. According to Shakib Arslan, who lived in Mersin during al-Sanusi's sojourn there in 1923, several Turkish nationalists asked al-Sanusi to replace the Ottomans and become spiritual Caliph, but in vain.¹⁹⁷ When al-Sanusi was asked over this alleged offer, he claimed that it was Mustafa Kemal himself who had asked him to take up the title of Caliph as early as 1922. "Mustafa Kemal broached this subject, but I declined" because "Sultan Wahid al-Din was then still Caliph," he stated in an interview two years later.¹⁹⁸ Sanusi refused this first Turkish offer on the basis of his allegiance to the House of Othman, and appears to have done so again at the beginning of 1924, when Mustafa Kemal was contemplating the abolition of the Caliphate. According to Sanusi's private secretary, on that occasion the Turkish leader offered Turkey's support to Shaykh Ahmad as a spiritual caliph, a "Muslim Pope", in some extraterritorial domain.¹⁹⁹

It is difficult to weigh the reliability of these claims, since the only sources that portray Mustafa Kemal as having offered the Caliphate to the Sanusi are Arslan, diplomatic

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ziadeh, 71, quoting Arslan, *Hadir al-'alam al-islami*, 123.

¹⁹⁸ *Times* (London), Nov. 12, 1924, p. 13, col. E.

¹⁹⁹ Dispatch of US High Commissioner in Constantinople Admiral Mark L. Bristol to Secretary of State, June 17, 1924, n. 867.00/1801, in USNA Records of the Department of State relating to the Internal Affairs of Turkey (1910-29).

dispatches and al-Sanusi's own letters. Available Turkish sources do not mention this issue. However, in light of al-Sanusi's role on the side of the Kemalist war in southeastern Anatolia and in northern Iraq, and considering those documents portraying al-Sanusi together with Mustafa Kemal that we examined previously, it is plausible that the Turkish leader envisioned al-Sanusi as an Arab alternative to the Ottomans. The reason for this could be imputed to the Turkish Nationalists' attempt to maintain the appearance of Islamic unity and cooperation, in order not to alienate the religious elements of the country and souring relations with the Muslim world, without, however, compromising the authority and independence of the Ankara government. Thus, it could have been possible that both in 1922 and in 1924, when Mustafa Kemal was contemplating the abolition of the Ottoman Sultanate and Caliphate respectively, he might have thought that al-Sanusi's own candidature could have softened the blow inside and outside Turkey with the termination of the Ottoman caliphate might have generated – as was the case.

The Sanusiyya had a religious following in an area stretching from Afghanistan to Morocco. Ahmad al-Sharif's leadership had been generally accepted as being praiseworthy for his efforts to defend Islam; he was an Arab who claimed (albeit ambiguously) descent from the Prophet;²⁰⁰ he had been in close contact with the last three Ottoman Sultans as well as aiding the Kemalist war; and, most importantly, he was a leader with only spiritual influence who could not rival the Nationalists' authority. All these factors must have influenced Mustafa Kemal in imagining that al-Sanusi could have acted as a new spiritual authority of the Islamic world, maybe from a seat in Mosul, as Rashid Rida had envisioned, or in Mecca, as many Arabs had aspired to. Either possibility would have

²⁰⁰ See B.G. Martin, "A future Sanusi Caliphate?" *op cit.*

enabled the Turkish nationalists to alienate the Ottomans yet maintain a friendly face towards the Muslim world.

However, for the first six months following the abolition of the Caliphate, al-Sanusi refused a direct involvement in the Caliphate debate on the basis of his fidelity to the Ottomans.²⁰¹ Throughout the summer of 1924 he reiterated his critical stance toward the fierce anti-clerical policy of Mustafa Kemal; he actively defended the legitimacy of the Ottoman Caliphate; he also took part in an organization which had as its avowed objective the return of Abdülmecid to Constantinople and the restoration of the Ottoman Caliphate.²⁰²

The British attempted to make the best out of the deteriorated relations between the Libyan shaykh and the Turkish nationalists by proposing a secret treaty negotiated on his behalf by Ahmad al-Sharif's cousin, Mohammad Idris, in June 1924. According to this treaty, the British would support the return of al-Sanusi to Libya if he agreed to publicly support King Husayn as Caliph and engage in pro-British propaganda throughout the Muslim world generally.²⁰³ King Husayn had declared himself the new Caliph immediately following the extradition of members of the Ottoman royal house from Turkey, without even waiting for an Islamic assembly to convene and had aroused the criticism of many Arab circles. But Ahmad al-Sharif did not accept the British proposal and refused to engage in any pro-Hashemite activity.

²⁰¹ Evans-Pritchard, 133; Ziaded, 71; EI², al-Sanusi, Ahmad al-Sherif

²⁰² Bristol, USNA n. 867.00/1801, cit. supra. Other members of the pro-Ottoman organization are indicated as being the former Grand Vizirs Izzet Pasha and Ali Riza Pasha, Refet Pasha, former CUP Minister Kemal Bey and a dozen of other local leaders.

²⁰³ "Treaty concluded between the nephew of the Sheik Senoussi, who is in Egypt, and Lord Allenby" dated 15 Shaban 1342. A translation of this treaty was enclosed in Bristol, Constantinople, June 17, 1924, n. 867.00/1801. However no such treaty or even a draft of it was found by this author in the PRO.

According to Ahmad al-Sharif's private secretary, after months of strained relations, in July 1924, Mustafa Kemal attempted to win back al-Sanusi's support.²⁰⁴ Mustafa Kemal became alarmed over the possibility of serious trouble on account of the religious situation and "is therefore doing all in his power to enlist the Sheik Senoussi in support of the Government."²⁰⁵ Allegedly Mustafa Kemal proposed to the Shaykh that, if he agreed to use his influence to pacify the religious elements in Turkey, the Ghazi would send a delegation to the Cairo Pan-Islamic Congress to work for the election of al-Sanusi as Caliph.²⁰⁶ Perhaps he also hoped al-Sanusi would continue his pro-Turkish activity in the Eastern provinces, where the Kurdish insurgents had sparked a fierce rebellion. Al-Sanusi refused Mustafa Kemal's proposal to aid the Turkish efforts against the Kurds or to publicly support the Ankara government, yet he continued to believe that the Turks would support his own candidature to an elected Caliphate.²⁰⁷ Supporting al-Sanusi was certainly a better alternative than having a Hashemite in that position another, or risk seeing an Ottoman return to power by election.

PASSING THROUGH SYRIA

In October 1924, al-Sanusi traveled to Damascus, went to Hebron via Beirut and Haifa for a brief visit, then returned to Damascus, before proceeding to Arabia at the end of the

²⁰⁴ Al-Sanusi's private secretary, 'Utman Fahr al-Din Bey, was a Libyan orphan who was brought to Turkey in 1912, trained in a military school, became a Turkish officer and then joined the service of al-Sanusi. According to some people Fahr al-Din was a "financial swindler" and "should not be trusted". Informants to the US Embassy in Constantinople claimed that "his every action has been dictated by his desire to obtain money". Cf. Jan. 29, 1925 War Diary of US High Commissioner Mark Bristol, contained in dispatch a Feb. 14, 1925 dispatch, no. 867.00/1849. It is difficult to know how much credence should be put in their testimony and whether such a negative characterization of him would have the effect of nullifying the accuracy of the information he provided to Bristol.

²⁰⁵ Bristol, Constantinople, July 26, 1924, no. 867.00/1812.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Sanusi told the British authorities in Damascus some months later that Mustafa Kemal had asked him to lead a force against the Kurds who were rebelling against the Ankara government, but he refused. Dispatch dated Nov. 6, 1924 from Damascus to Foreign Office, E10238 in FO371/10023.

year.²⁰⁸ This voyage through Syria and Palestine lasted only two months, but played a critical role in distancing al-Sanusi from his previous subservience to the Ottomans and in gaining public exposure to his own candidacy to the Caliphate. His departure from Turkey radically changed al-Sanusi's position with regard to the Caliphate. Probably at the insistence of the Arab leaders he met with on his journey, or because he was directly exposed to the extent of the support he enjoyed, or simply because he was driven by the enthusiasm for the organization of the Islamic Congresses of Cairo and Mecca, by the end of 1924 al-Sanusi started actively to seek support for his candidature to the Caliphate. Al-Sanusi could not have participated in the Cairo Congress called by the al-Azhar shaykh to elect a new Caliph due to British opposition to his physical presence in Egypt. However, when in October 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Sa'ud decided to convene another Islamic Congress in Mecca in order to counter the claims of the Egyptian King Fu'ad to obtain for himself the title of Caliph, the doors for al-Sanusi's election were opened, and al-Sanusi set off to Damascus whence he would proceed to Arabia.²⁰⁹

In Syria al-Sanusi was the guest of Sa'id al-Jaza'iri, the grandson of the Algerian resistance leader 'Abd al-Qadir who in the 1850s had been exiled to Syria by the French.²¹⁰ Al-Sanusi and al-Jaza'iri shared many common political and religious aims, their past pro-Ottoman stance and their infatigable call for Islamic unity. The influence this Damascene notable played on al-Sanusi's full-blown candidature to the caliphate justify a short analysis of him.²¹¹ Al-Jaza'iri's family had played an important role in

²⁰⁸ Al-Sanusi's journey to Syria was closely monitored by British authorities who feared that he might have been aiming to return to Egypt. For a summary of the intense diplomatic correspondences see CAB 44/14, 84 or dispatches assembled in FO686/88.

²⁰⁹ On King Fu'ad's claim to the Caliphate see Elie Kedourie, "Egypt and the Caliphate", *Chatman House Version and Other Middle Eastern Studies* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970) 177-207.

²¹⁰ Dispatch dated Nov. 6, 1924 from J.R. Vaugham-Russell, acting British consul in Damascus to Foreign Office in FO686/88.

²¹¹ Antonino Pellitteri, "Algerini in Siria tra Hijra, Unione Islamica ed Arabismo: un'indagine preliminare con riguardo alle biografie di 'Izz al-Din e Sa'id al-Jaza'iri secondo fonti siriane," *OM* no. 4 (2003), 119-131.

Damascene affairs under the Ottomans, during the Hashemite interlude as well as under the French occupation: his father had been a member of the Ottoman Parliament, but he was banished to Bursa by the Ottoman governor Cemal Pasha in 1916 when his brother ‘Umar was hanged for alleged anti-Ottoman activity. When they returned to Damascus at the end of the war it was Sa‘id himself who was placed in charge of the city and who declared Syria’s independence in 1918. His cooperation with the Hashemite reign was short-lived, but with the arrival of the French he engaged in anti-colonial activity. His brother ‘Izz al-Din was among the leaders of the 1925 Syrian Revolt. Like al-Sanusi, Sa‘id believed in Ottoman unity and one of his recurring slogans was “nahnu muslimuna qabla kull shay” (we are Muslims first of all) and became involved in restoring the Caliphate by heading the Association for the Caliphate.

Sa‘id al-Jaza’iri pleaded personally with the British authorities on Sanusi’s behalf. He requested them two authorizations: first, that they grant the Libyan shaykh permission to travel to Port Sa‘id from where the Sanusi might board a ship to the Arabian coast in order to complete his “pilgrimage”; and secondly, that he be allowed also to journey to Hebron, allegedly to visit a shrine of Ibrahim Khalil there.²¹² He attempted to reassure British hostility by emphasizing “the purely religious functions of Shaykh Sanusi and his detachment from political affairs.” Although the British delayed their reply regarding al-Sanusi’s transit through the Egyptian port, they did grant al-Sanusi and al-Jaza’iri permission to travel to Palestine while awaiting further instructions from London. The British acting consul in Damascus, J.R. Vaugham-Russell, was so concerned by the moral authority exercised by the Damascene notable and the stir that al-Sanusi’s

²¹² Dispatch dated Nov. 6, 1924 from J.R. Vaugham-Russell, acting British consul in Damascus to Foreign Office in FO686/88.

presence in the Syrian capital was creating, that he did not dare refuse them the right to a two-week long trip.²¹³

The two men journeyed to Beirut, then along the coast to Haifa and finally inland to Hebron. Few details about this journey are available in the diplomatic records. But given the importance of the al-Jazai'ri family throughout the Siro-lebanese region and also in light of al-Sanusi's personal support in the region, it is possible that the short journey was aimed at meeting local notables and religious leaders and to promote al-Sanusi's candidature to the Caliphate.

When al-Sanusi returned to Damascus at the end of November he was in high spirits and confident of the support of many dignitaries. He believed that the Islamic Congress of Mecca scheduled for March 1925 would celebrate his enthronement as Caliph and hurriedly wrote to the US High Commissioner in Constantinople about it.

I am writing you this [letter] to inform you that I left Mersin and reached Damascus, where I am preparing for my journey to Mecca where at the end of March, under my presidency, the Great Islamic Congress will be held to elect the new Caliph, an honor that many parties would like to give me, but for which I prefer to attend the decision of the Congress.²¹⁴

On account of his private secretary, al-Sanusi envisioned himself as a new Pope and the institution of the Caliphate as an Islamic equivalent of the Vatican. He was anxious to introduce a system somewhat resembling the Peter's Fithe whereby the dignity and

²¹³ Dispatch dated Nov. 6, 1924 from J.R. Vaughan-Russell, acting British consul in Damascus to Foreign Office in FO686/88.

²¹⁴ Letter of al-Sanusi (French) contained in dispatch from US High Commissioner in Constantinople Admiral Mark L. Bristol to Secretary of State, Jan. 23, 1925 n. 867.00/1845, in USNA Records of the Department of State relating to the Internal Affairs of Turkey (1910-29).

organization of the Caliphate would be financed by small contributions from a large number of faithful.²¹⁵

[T]he ideas of the Sheik Senoussi have undergone considerable modification. He is now not only willing but anxious to be elected Caliph and in the event of success has determined to create a Caliphal organization modeled insofar as is possible upon the Vatican, with a view to reviving and directing the Power of Islam.²¹⁶

According to his secretary, al-Sanusi thought that his election to Caliph was assured because he enjoyed the pledged support of the following elements: Ibn Sa'ud, who, as the recent conqueror of Mecca, had not yet laid claims to the Caliphate but thought that al-Sanusi could squelch all Hashemite ambitions as well as appeasing the criticisms that the Wahhabi take over of the Holy Cities had sparked; Imam Yahya in Yemen; the Shia in Persia, presumably on the grounds of their fear of Wahhabi anti-Shia ideology; Abdul Karim (his second cousin) in Morocco; the Egyptian nationalist leader Zaglul Pasha who opposed King Fu'ad of Egypt as possible Caliph; "the mass of the people (although not of the Government) in Iraq and India," on the basis of their government's obvious support of King Husayn; and finally scattered groups of Muslims in Java, the Philippines, Russia and elsewhere. The only major opposition he would be facing, al-Sanusi claimed, was "King Fu'ad of Egypt, King Hussein and his sons and one or two minor groups."²¹⁷

In Turkey opposition leaders were apparently friendly to the candidacy of the Shaykh, but support of Mustafa Kemal, al-Sanusi claimed, was conditional. Whereas some months earlier the Turkish leader was ready to send a Turkish delegation to Cairo to

²¹⁵ Dispatch of US High Commissioner in Constantinople Admiral Mark L. Bristol to Secretary of State, Jan. 23, 1925 n. 867.00/1844, in USNA Records of the Department of State relating to the Internal Affairs of Turkey (1910-29).

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid

support al-Sanusi's candidature, by the beginning of 1925 his support was bargained in exchange for al-Sanusi participation in Turkey's diplomacy.²¹⁸

According to Salhiya, the Turkish offer was conditional not on al-Sanusi's public re-appraisal of the Turks, but rather on condition (which appears rather as a pre-condition) that he gather the support of a "broad Islamic front," consisting, at the least, of the representatives from the Arabian peninsula, Syria, Iraq, Morocco.²¹⁹

AL-KHILAFAT

Al-Sanusi's hopes for the outcome of the Mecca Congress might have also been boosted by the publication in Cairo of a treatise which promoted him as the suitable candidate for the vacant seat of the Caliph. Written in 1924 by Mohammad Barakatullah, a member of the Indian *Khilafat* Movement among which al-Sanusi had traditionally enjoyed considerable support, this treatise appears as a re-adaptation in English of Rashid Rida's 1922 treatise on the same topic. The book, titled *The Khilafet*, also contains a preface by a prominent former pro-Ottoman Egyptian cleric, Shaykh Yusuf 'Ali, who also endorsed Ahmad al-Sharif.²²⁰ This publication offers the main general arguments adduced by the Indian Muslims in supporting al-Sanusi's candidature.

The author, writing in 1924 when the convocation of the Cairo and Mecca congress seemed imminent, begins by praising the government of Ankara for abolishing the Ottoman dynasty. Such a provision would allow the Islamic institution of the Caliphate to return to its initial spiritual vocation, and avoid being manipulated by the temporal

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Muhammad 'Isa Salhiya, *Libyan Papers*, op. cit., 28.

²²⁰ Barakatullah Mohammad (Maulavie) of Bhopal, India. *The Khilafet*. London: Luzac & Co., [1924]. According to *Revue du Monde Musulman* (cf. vol. LIX, 1925, p. 255), Barakatullah was one of "Bolshevized Indians" active in bringing down British rule in India. For this, he lived most of his life in Central Asia and Europe. But Qureishi's study on the Indian Khilafat movement, op. cit., p. 225, give a milder portrait of Barakatullah, who seems to have sought Bolshevik support, not out of ideological affinity, but simply to expel the British from the East. But there is no mention to how and when the author became acquainted with Al-Sanusi.

needs which some Ottoman sultans had succumbed to. As for Rida, he considered it essential that the new Caliphate bring together the military strength of the Turks and their ability to fend off foreign occupation with traditional Arab religiosity.

But who, Barakatullah asked, is the possible spiritual Caliph for the ‘*Umma*? The author dismisses Sharif Husayn of Mecca on the grounds that he is not supported by other rulers in Arabia and since his authority and that of his family are bolstered by foreign monetary and military props. “So long as they are dependent for their very existence upon such foreign aid they are creatures of a non-Moslem power,” he argued.²²¹ He also rebukes the possible election of King Fu’ad of Egypt and of Amir Amanullah Khan of Afghanistan to the post of Caliph, arguing that temporal duties of these men on their respective thrones requires them to “perform many important duties in the years to come before they will have set their house in order.”²²²

The author states that the Caliph must be solely a spiritual leader. And in the last pages of the book he resolves to answer his initial question of who is the most suitable person for an elected spiritual caliphate:

To find a man of such a broad outlook, wide vision, sublime ideal, unfaltering perseverance and willing sacrifice among Moslems today is a problem. We have however to find him somehow, if we do not find him in this generation, we must create him in the next. But we must, however, set ourselves at once to the task of solving the problem. We have, no doubt good men like Sheikh Ahmad Sunnosie, among us, who can fill the post of Khilafet with propriety.²²³

The treatise, published solely in English and French and but originally intended to appear also in Arabic and Urdu, praises al-Sanusi because he brought together the

²²¹ Barkatullah, *Khilafet*, 57.

²²² Ibid, 58.

²²³ Ibid, 91.

unifying spiritual qualities of the Muslim world. He fitted the genealogical Quraishi requirements, he lacked contingent political power which might instigate animosity between political actors at the time and because of his past cooperation with the Ottoman royal house and Turks. However, unfortunately for both the author and al-Sanusi, the book was never translated into Arabic and the ideas it proposed never attained prominence at the Cairene gathering on the caliphate. Nor did the debate it sought to raise ever reach Mecca.

Both Islamic Congresses were postponed by over a year and the election of al-Sanusi never even made it to the agenda of either of them. The Cairo Congress, originally scheduled to convene in March 1925, did not take place until May 1926. The Mecca Congress, for which appeals had been sent out at the end of 1924, convened only in June 1926. Although an election of the leader of the *‘umma* was initially intended to be broached at both gatherings, it soon became obvious that the congress system had become an arena for inter-Muslim rivalry and the election of a Caliph was postponed indefinitely.²²⁴ In any case, by mid-1926 al-Sanusi, who did not attend either congresses because of his commitments in ‘Asir, was no longer a candidate for the caliphate. His main supporter, Ibn Sa‘ud, who has been proclaimed King of Hijaz in Jan. 1926, began envisaging himself as a Caliph-candidate for the Mecca Congress. However, when al-Sanusi headed off to Arabia at the end of 1924, he did not know that the Congress would ultimately fail to elect a new Caliph. He embarked on a difficult journey through the desert to reach Mecca convinced he would be appointed to the highest spiritual position of the Islamic world.

²²⁴ Martin Kramer, *Islam Assembled, The advent of the Muslim Congresses* (New York. Columbia University Press, 1986), 106-122 and 168.

- 5 -
I N A R A B I A

Al-Sanusi's journey from Damascus to Arabia at the end of 1924 was beset with trouble. The British attempted to stop him by all means from joining 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Sa'ud in Mecca. They denied him permission to embark on a steamer in an Egyptian port and refused to grant him the travel documents necessary to enter the cities on the Arabian coast.²²⁵ Amir Abdullah, the brother of Sharif 'Ali who was then still governor of Mecca, had asked the British to stop his journey because al-Sanusi's "proposed visit to the Hijaz and Nejd would be most unwelcome to all ends."²²⁶ They feared that if al-Sanusi reached Arabia, apart from hindering their own attempts to aid Sharif 'Ali whose authority over the Holy Cities had eroded since the Saudi take over of the city, the Libyan shaykh could easily cross the Red Sea and reach Egypt whence he could then continue to Libya.²²⁷ Al-Sanusi himself had on various occasions expressed to the British consul in Damascus that his ultimate desire, after visiting Arabia, was eventually to return to his homeland. This information also reached the Italians who once again began flooding the British authorities in Cairo with requests not to concede to al-Sanusi's demands, as in 1920.²²⁸ Ibn Sa'ud's personal representative in Syria, Shaykh Sulayman ibn Mushaykhi, did not want to interfere with the British desire to hinder al-Sanusi's journey further east and, for this reason, was rather uncooperative. Unable to contact 'Abd al-'Aziz directly to enquire whether al-Sanusi was a wanted guest in Mecca, Shaykh Sulayman dared not

²²⁵ Dispatch from Damascus to Foreign Office dated Dec. 1, 1924, E11570 in FO 371/10023.

²²⁶ Dispatch dated Nov. 19, 1924 from High Commissioner for Palestine to Secretary State for Colonies, E10123 in FO371/10023.

²²⁷ Dispatch dated Dec. 5, 1924 from Foreign Office to Admiralty, and dispatch dated Jan. 30, 1925 from Jeddah Consulate to Foreign office, both in FO686/88.

²²⁸ Dispatch dated Nov. 5, 1924 from Damascus to Jeddah in FO686/88.

formally authorize his journey to the Holy Cities now under Saudi authority.²²⁹ Instead, using the telegraph of the British embassy in Damascus, Ibn Sa‘ud’s representative wrote to the British legation in Arabia, where St. John Philby was stationed, asking that they inform Ibn Sa‘ud “urgently” that al-Sanusi was on his way to Jawf and then to Medina.²³⁰

Despite these obstacles al-Sanusi could no longer wait. The French, who had originally granted al-Sanusi a transit visa through Syria, ordered his expulsion.²³¹ His presence in Damascus had created quite a stir in the media, and the fact that he had been stranded there, denied authorization to reach the Holy Land by foreign powers, made it an even greater public affair.

Unable to reach British-ruled Port Sa‘id, to travel through Hashemite Trans-Jordan, or to catch the Hijaz train (this most simple means of transportation was not running at that time), al-Sanusi had no other means but to travel along the caravan routes. Amir al-Jazai’ri helped him assemble the needed cars and al-Sanusi left Damascus with an entourage of five men on 21 December 1924. He traveled via Jawf, where he was ambushed by tribesmen who mistook his motorcade as a vanguard of a hostile movement by Amir Abdullah.²³² However, Ibn Sa‘ud’s deputy in Jawf managed to intervene, and rescued the party of the Libyan shaykh. Al-Sanusi was hosted in the town’s citadel until authorization arrived for them to proceed across the Nufud desert to Hail, from where a delegation sent by Ibn Sa‘ud escorted them. He eventually arrived at Mecca the end of January.²³³

²²⁹ Dispatch dated Nov. 25, 1924 from Damascus to Jeddah, in FO686/88

²³⁰ *ibid.*

²³¹ The French had ordered al-Sanusi’s expulsion three weeks after his arrival in Damascus. See dispatch dated Nov. 19, 1924 from Damascus to Foreign Office, E10090 in FO371/10023.

²³² Dispatch dated Jan. 13, 1925 from British Consul Damascus to Foreign Office in FO686/66.

²³³ *Alif Ba*, Jan. 27, 1925, cited in dispatch dated Jan. 28, 1925 from Damascus to Foreign Office, in FO686/88.

AL-SANUSI GOVERNOR OF MECCA?

Al-Sanusi rushed to the Holy City hoping to be elected Caliph by the Islamic Congress which was scheduled for March 1925, but, as we saw in the previous chapter, that congress was postponed and turned out to be much less effective than it initially hoped. Nevertheless, al-Sanusi's arrival in Mecca was welcomed by 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Sa'ud, who, it appears, hoped to use al-Sanusi's presence in the Holy City to counter the religious authority of the Hashemites. It is also possibly that he thought of making the Libyan the governor of the newly conquered Holy City, at least during his first year.

It must be remembered that the Sanusiyya brotherhood had a considerable following in the Hijaz. Several of its *zawiyas*, originally founded by Ahmad al-Sanusi's grandfather in the 1840s, were still operative. Some leaders of the Beni Harb, an important tribe stationed between Mecca and Medina, were also followers of the Sanusiyya *tariqa*.²³⁴ It is possible therefore that Ibn Sa'ud considered placing al-Sanusi at the head of the Holy City in order to overcome what today we would call a "legitimacy crisis", since the Najdi leader was no Quraishi, his Wahhabi creed was widely condemned in Muslim society and the memory for the Wahhabi devastation of Mecca the previous century was still alive.

This instance of cooperation between the Wahhabi leader and Libyan Sufi shaykh is surprising in light of the traditional Wahhabi anti-Sufi belief. However, al-Sanusi appears to have been an exception, in part probably because the Sanusiyya had some common traits with Wahhabi puritanism. But the main reason for such a peculiar collaboration could be that al-Sanusi's international prestige and respectability, added on to the explicit support he enjoyed in Indian Muslim circles, were useful to legitimize Ibn Sa'ud's rule over Mecca among the international Islamic community. Through al-Sanusi, Ibn Sa'ud could quench the uproar which his takeover of the Holy City had prompted among

²³⁴ Dispatch from Lausanne to Colonial Office London, Jan. 2, 1923, E337 in FO371/8936.

Muslims world-wide, or, as the British put it, cover “the acrid pill of Wahabi fanaticism with Libyan sugar.”²³⁵ Furthermore, Ibn Sa‘ud might have realized that that having al-Sanusi on his side could help him further Saudi expansion among other Arabian religious communities, who shared religious affinities with the Sanusiyya (as would be the case of the Idrisis in ‘Asir).

Several reports point to al-Sanusi as the possible governor chosen by Ibn Sa‘ud to replace the Hashemites. Italian news agencies claimed that the Sanusi was on his way to “take office in Mecca.”²³⁶ The Arabic paper *al-Mufid* claimed that Ibn Sa‘ud had asked al-Sanusi to occupy the post of Sharif of Mecca and be the guardian of the Holy Cities under the protection of the Sultan of Najd.²³⁷

The well-known British officer St. John Philby, who had been stationed in Arabia the previous year, threatened that “Ahmad esh-Sherif is on the verge of being nominated Emir of Mecca.” In an article published in the *Daily Telegraph* in May 1925, four months after the shaykh’s arrival in Mecca, the English officer denounced al-Sanusi’s nomination to such an important role as “a great failure for British diplomacy in the Middle East” because it would have far-reaching consequences for al-Sanusi’s standing in other Muslim lands.²³⁸ Philby credited Ibn Sa‘ud’s political genius for the Sanusi’s nomination to Amir of Mecca since, according to him, it would accommodate simultaneously the majority of the Islamic world and the Wahhabi.

The Senussi name has no terrors for the civilized Moslem, and Senussi fanaticism, being reserved for the infidel in the general acceptation of that term, is approved by political Islam; at the same time, the Senussi ‘way’ is generally regarded by the

²³⁵ J.B. Philby, “Senussi Emir of Mecca”, *Daily Telegraph* (London), May 11, 1925.

²³⁶ *OM v* (1925), 123

²³⁷ *Al-Mufid*, March 9, 1925, contained in dispatch dated March 11, 1925 from Damascus to Foreign Office in FO686/88.

²³⁸ J.B. Philby, “Senussi Emir of Mecca”, *Daily Telegraph* (London), May 11, 1925.

Wahabis as lying in the same plane as their own, both being the product of identical conditions in different countries, and Ibn Saud can, without serious difficulty, call upon his Arabian Ikhwan to regard the Ikhwan of Cyrenaica as long-lost brethen in the same faith. And so for modern Islam he coats the acrid pill of Wahabi fanaticism with Libyan sugar while for the propagation of the true faith as a basis for the furtherance of his own ambitions he adds the legions of desert Africa to the forces he has raised and trained in desert Arabia.²³⁹

According to the British officer, al-Sanusi would also provide Ibn Sa'ud with a direct diplomatic link to Turkey, and for this reason al-Sanusi's alleged nomination as leader of Mecca was seen as the embodiment of a "turkish-wahabi alliance."²⁴⁰

There is no documentation to prove that such a tacit agreement between the Turks and Ibn Sa'ud really existed and there is no indication that Mustafa Kemal himself had been seeking a diplomatic overture with the new ruler of Hijaz. What is plausible to advance as a hypothesis is that Ibn Sa'ud saw Ahmad al-Sharif as a personality that could act as a faithful ally to the Wahhabis and replace the Hashemite Sharif 'Ali, who still ruled the city during the first months following the Saudi take-over. For Ibn Sa'ud such a strategic move would indeed have meant simultaneously breaking away from the past Hashemite leadership in the Holy City and allowing for a gradual transition to direct Saudi rule.

However, Ahmad al-Sharif was never designated Amir of Mecca. A group of Javanese pilgrims who visited the Shaykh in his new residence in the Holy City in April 1925 reported that he "lives very quietly and offers no opinion on the situation; he refers all inquirers to Allah, the All-wise and all-knowing."²⁴¹ According to them, there was

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ The idea that Sanusi had been sent to the Hijaz as a Turkish emissary consolidated in British minds. As late as 1933 we find reference to the fact that "in 1924 he [al-Sanusi] was sent by the Turkish Government on a mission to discuss the future of the Hejaz with King Abdulaziz Ibn Saud." *Times* (London), March 14, 1933, p. 16, col. D.

²⁴¹ Dispatch dated April 11, 1925 from Jeddah to Foreign Office, E2484 in FO371/10807.

nothing in his actions to support the story current in Egypt that Ibn Sa‘ud has made him or intends to make him ruler of Mecca.

It is possible that initial plans to install him as head of the city were abandoned following an incident which caused an uproar among the *ikhwan*, a powerful group of zealot Bedouins whose support Ibn Sa‘ud could not afford to lose. According to Shaykh Hafiz Wahba, an Egyptian who had become civil governor of Mecca at the time and later Minister, the *ikhwan* had threatened to kill al-Sanusi when they spotted him near the tomb of Khadija, believing that he was seeking for an intercession from the Prophet’s wife.²⁴² The *ikhwan* condemned as folkloric and pagan praying at the tombs of the *ahl al-bayt* (the members family of the Prophet) and were therefore outraged by the action of the Libyan shaykh. In light of this episode it is possible that Ibn Sa‘ud might have recognized that, although al-Sanusi nomination as governor of the city could calm the anxieties of the Persian or Indian Muslims, it would have deteriorated Ibn Sa‘ud’s internal support.

Another reason for al-Sanusi’s missed governorship of Mecca could be that, given Ibn Sa‘ud’s rapid consolidation of power in the Hijaz, he no longer required al-Sanusi’s appeasing symbolic presence. In the few months following Ibn Saud’s capture of the Hijaz, it might have become apparent that there was no need to postpone a direct Saudi takeover of the city by installing al-Sanusi as a buffer governor of the Holy City. In fact, Ibn Sa‘ud himself was hailed as the King of Hijaz soon after.

IN ‘ASIR

It is in another region of Arabia that al-Sanusi’s religious authority proved to be particularly beneficial for Ibn Sa‘ud – ‘Asir. Ahmad al-Sharif enjoyed a religious affinity with the Idrisi family, the rulers of ‘Asir, a small state lying in between Saudi and

²⁴² Sheikh Hafiz Wahba, *Arabian Days* (London: Arthur Barker ltd, 1964), 131

Yemenite expansionist aims. The founder of the Sanusiyya had initially been a disciple of the Idrisi leader in Mecca in the 1820s and many principles of the Sanusi *tariqa* share common traits with the Idrisi. The two mystical movements, after being expelled from Mecca in the 1840s, developed independently in Libya and southern Arabia, but over the generations maintained a preferential relationship.²⁴³ Ahmad al-Sharif used his prestige and personal standing with Ibn Sa‘ud to act as his representative in ‘Asir, and it is possible that it was thanks to al-Sanusi’s negotiations and personal ties that ‘Asir was eventually annexed by the Saudi dominion. The Idrisis, like many other non-Wahhabi communities, despised Wahhabi fanaticism and it is very well possible that they might not have turned to him for protection had it not been for al-Sanusi’s mediation and ability to insert himself in ‘Asir’s ruling elite.

In the beginning of 1926, Ibn Sa‘ud dispatched Ahmad al-Sharif to ‘Asir, where a series of assassinations and family coups had rendered possible a Yemeni takeover of the small state. Al-Sanusi journeyed there and married the sister of the founder of the late Idrisi state (and aunt of the then ruler Amir ‘Ali al-Idrisi)²⁴⁴ and became the chief adviser to the new ruler, Sayyid Hasan al-Idrisi.²⁴⁵

Some accounts of the time give us an idea of the standing al-Sanusi enjoyed in ‘Asir. A British informant, Wolfgang von Weisel, described Hasan al-Idrisi as a “monkish nonentity” and claimed that the state was run *de facto* by a triumvirate consisting of Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi, Jamal Pasha al-Ghazi (a former Ottoman officer of Palestinian descent who became a Saudi officer), and Sayyid Mustafa al-Idrisi, cousin of

²⁴³ Anne K. Bang, *The Idrisi state in Asir, 1906-1934* (London: C. Hurst & co., 1986).

²⁴⁴ Dispatch dated Dec. 21, 1925, from Jeddah to Foreign Office, J3701 in FO371/10914.

²⁴⁵ News dispatch dated March 27, 1926 from Jeddah to Foreign Office, E2542 in FO371/11435.

the nominal ruler of 'Asir.²⁴⁶ Another British businessman in 'Asir described al-Sanusi as the decision-maker in the country.²⁴⁷

Al-Sanusi's residence in 'Asir coincided with growing Italian efforts to put pressure on the Idrisis to gain further advantages there. Italian agents were contacting 'Asiri tribal shaykhs to persuade the Idrisis to reach an accord with Imam Yahya of Yemen, instead of Ibn Sa'ud. However, al-Sanusi's presence in the small Idrisi state played a decisive role in turning the country away from Italian hegemony and in pushing Hasan al-Idrisi into Ibn Sa'ud's arms. Thanks to the Treaty of Mecca, which he brokered in October 1926, 'Asir was placed under Saudi protection, a protection that after 1930 turned into formal annexation.²⁴⁸

Following the Treaty of Mecca, al-Sanusi continued to busy himself with 'Asir and was engaged in prolonged attacks against Yemen. In December 1926 he was on the side of Hasan al-Idrisi and the Saudi artillery commander Jamal Pasha al-Ghazi in pushing an attack against Midi, besieged by 3,000 Yemenite forces.²⁴⁹ In May 1927 he launched another attack against Yemenite forces in Tihama.²⁵⁰ Yemen was being backed by Italian forces, and shipments of Italian weaponry were rearming its forces. It is possible therefore, that al-Sanusi's continued engagement on the battlefield against Imam Yahya of Yemen, became for him another way to continue the *jihad* against the Italians, which he had begun in 1911 in Cyrenaica.

As far as we know, these battles against Yemeni forces were Ahmad al-Sharif's last major public engagement in a border war that, although officially ended in 1934, continued to

²⁴⁶ Dispatch dated Dec. 14, 1926 from Jeddah to Aden, E38 in FO371/12235.

²⁴⁷ Dispatch dated July 24, 1928, J2046 in FO371/11619.

²⁴⁸ Ahmad al-Sharif traveled from 'Asir to Mecca to conduct the negotiations, and a Protectorate Treaty, known as Treaty of Mecca, was endorsed on October 21, 1926. It was signed by 'Abd al-Aziz b. Sa'ud and Hasan al-Idrisi in the presence of Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi. Bang, *The Idrisi State*, 125.

²⁴⁹ *OM* vii (1927), 26.

²⁵⁰ *OM* vii (1927), 279.

resurface on various occasions throughout the century. The Libyan shaykh became ill and attempted one last time to return to Cyrenaica in 1931, however permission for his journey was once again refused by the British and Italian authorities.²⁵¹

His death on 10 March 1933 ended a life dedicated to the restoration of an Islamic leadership and the defense of the Muslim world against foreign rule.

²⁵¹ Dispatch dated June 6, 1931 from Cairo di Jeddah, in FO141/769/13.

C O N C L U S I O N

Scholars have so far ignored Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi's life beyond the shores of Cyrenaica. This work, however, shows that during his 15-year-long exile in Turkey, Syria and Arabia, the Libyan shaykh was a protagonist in determining events that shaped the modern Middle East and his life in exile can, therefore, no longer go unnoticed.

From 1920 to 1922, he fought along side the Kemalist forces in Eastern Anatolia and, on their behalf, he waged pro-Turkish and pan-Islamic propaganda in Syria and Iraq. His *jihad* with the Turkish nationalists reveals a rarely acknowledged instance of Arab-Turkish collaboration in the immediate aftermath of WWI. Mustafa Kemal used al-Sanusi's prestige as a religious figure, as an anti-colonial fighter, and also his Arab descent, to consolidate the support of the local Arab population. Al-Sanusi became an ideological and iconographic envoy portraying the Turkish nationalist war in southeastern Anatolia as a joint anti-colonial struggle for the independence of Muslim world.

From 1922 to 1924, al-Sanusi was eyed as a possible alternative Caliph to Abdülmecid, the last Ottoman Caliph, whose contacts with Indian Muslims under British protection menaced the independence of the newly formed Ankara government. According to his own narrative, al-Sanusi was repeatedly asked by Mustafa Kemal and his associates to assume the spiritual leadership of the Islamic world in a seat outside Turkish borders. This claim has several important implications. First of all, if it was the case that Mustafa Kemal hoped to transfer the spiritual leadership of the Muslim world from the Ottoman Caliphs to al-Sanusi with a seat in Mosul or Mecca, it follows that the Turkish leader

never intended to undermine the religious functions of this institution. His abolition of the Caliphate in 1924 was not, therefore, motivated by an inherently secularist belief and was not aimed at giving a definite blow to this religious institution. Secondly, Mustafa Kemal's backing of al-Sanusi as a possible alternative Arab spiritual caliph reveals that the Turkish leader had attempted to accommodate the religious segments of Turkish and Arab society who considered it imperative to have a supreme religious leader. It might have been al-Sanusi's refusal to take over this institution out of respect for the Ottoman authority that caused the final and unrecoverable demise of the Caliphate.

After the final demise of Caliphate in 1924, al-Sanusi busied himself to restore the Ottomans to power, but when he realized that they had little chance of being elected in the Islamic congress system that was being set up to fill the vacant seat of the Caliph, he himself became a candidate for the Caliphate. He attempted to generate a constituency for himself, believing that he would be enthroned at the Islamic Congress of Mecca. Unfortunately, by then inter-Arab political rivalries had provoked from the outset the failure of Caliphate by election. Al-Sanusi's candidature to the most important Islamic institution and the alleged support he enjoyed from some Arab and Turkish nationalists forces us to re-examine the debate over the Caliphate.

In 1925, the new conqueror of the Hijaz, 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Sa'ud, suggested al-Sanusi as Governor of Mecca, but the intransigency of the most radical segment of the Wahhabi *ikhwan* impeded his nomination. Al-Sanusi proceeded to the Red Sea province of 'Asir where he aided Ibn Sa'ud's expansionist policy in Arabia. Al-Sanusi's role both in Mecca and in 'Asir reveals a surprising instance of a Wahhabi-Sufi collaboration motivated by *Realpolitik*. The initial suggestion of al-Sanusi as Governor of the newly conquered Mecca was aimed at reassuring the wider Muslim population that Ibn Sa'ud's capture of the Holy City of Islam would not entail fanatic Wahhabi measures. In 'Asir, al-Sanusi's

religious affiliations with the Idrisi family paved the way for a smooth Saudi takeover of the emirate. This cooperation between the Wahhabi leader and a Sufi shaykh leads us to question the how contingent political interests were able to brush aside, at least temporarily, a professed religious antagonism. It is this contingent political consideration that gave life to a Saudi political model, which still survives today, based on the two-sided alliance with both the most zealot religious factions and the more inclusivists. Ibn Sa'ud's ability to make use, for different purposes, of the *ikhwan* as well as al-Sanusi, resulted in what today some analysts consider to be the dichotomy of internal Saudi politics, divided by the people of *tawhid* and of *taqarub*. The Saudi's simultaneous recourse to these two factions is what determines the strength of the Saudi regime, and should not be viewed as a sign of its inevitable demise.

Al-Sanusi's life in exile, in sum, sheds light on some of the most important events of the post-WWI settlement of the Middle East.

Following his voluntary exile from Cyrenaica, al-Sanusi continued his *jihad*, physical and ideological, to restore the unity of the Muslim world and defend what he perceived to be the imperative need for an independent and supreme Islamic authority. Al-Sanusi's activities during his fifteen-year-long *hijra* were driven by his quest for Islamic unity and leadership needed to confront what he perceived as the destructive forces of modernity: colonialism, nationalism and secularism.

It was the gradual triumph of these forces, however, that ultimately shattered al-Sanusi's aspirations and molded what we know as the modern Middle East.

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