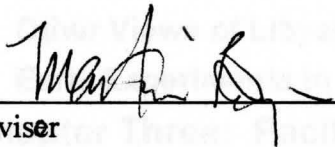


The Italian Colonization of Libya: 1911 to 1940

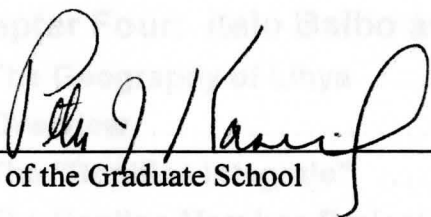
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Introduction

On September 28, 1911, the guns of Italian warships began to bombard the coast of Tripolitania, thus commencing the Turco-Italian War. This was Italy's first major effort to expand its colonial empire since the humiliating defeat at Adowa in 1896.

From the modern perspective, it is hard to see what could have drawn the Italians to Libya unless they knew of its vast oil resources. This, in fact, was definitely not the case since Libya's oil deposits were not discovered until after the Second World War. Ostensibly, Italy's purpose in obtaining the deserts of Libya was to make them into an agricultural "promised land" for Italy's excess peasant population so that they would not have to emigrate to other countries.

The purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which the Italians seriously tried to develop Libya into a rural paradise under both the Liberal and the Fascist regimes and to compare and contrast Liberal and Fascist policies toward the Libyan colony.

Chapter One: The Acquisition of Libya

A Brief History of Libya

Historically, Libya was always effectively divided between Tripolitania and Cirenaica. In ancient times, Cirenaica had been settled by the Greeks, who developed the area's agriculture and set up cities such as Cyrene. By contrast, Tripolitania was settled by the Phoenicians who developed it as trading center. This dichotomy remained even after the Romans took over both regions.¹

Both areas declined severely after the 5th century with the invasions of the barbarians and later the Arabs. The Arabs officially united the two regions and Tripoli continued to be a trading center though the agricultural tradition of the area was largely lost and the desert began to expand because of neglect. The population became largely nomadic.

The Diplomatic Prelude to the Turco-Italian War

Italy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a young, but poor, nation which desired great-power status. For the nations of this era, great-power status naturally meant building and maintaining a large colonial empire. In the late nineteenth century, the best that Italy, with its meager economic resources and limited military strength, could do was occupy Eritrea and parts of Somalia, two virtually worthless

¹ Martin Moore, Fourth Shore: Italy's Mass Colonization of Libya (London: George Routledge & Sons, Ltd., 1940), pp. 54-58.

territories. Italian ambitions in Tunisia were thwarted by the French. And an expedition to acquire Abyssinia met with disaster at Adowa.

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, it became clear to the Italians that Libya, under the weakening grip of a declining Ottoman Empire, was one of the few places left in Africa that was not under the control or imminent control of Italy's stronger imperial rivals, France and England. To avoid potential conflicts with these or any other potential rivals, Italy signed various diplomatic agreements with these countries to gradually win international recognition of Italian hegemony over Libya.

The Triple Alliance pact that Italy concluded with Germany and Austria in 1891 freed Italy from concern about German or Austrian intervention. The Mediterranean Accord with France in 1900 included provisions by which France agreed not to oppose Italian expansion into Libya.² A later agreement with France in 1902 clearly defined France's interest in Morocco and Italy's interest in Libya.³ The Italo-English Agreement of 1902 freed Italy from concern of English intervention and the Italo-Russian Agreement of 1909 took care of possible Russian intervention.⁴

That all these agreements provided a legal basis for Italian actions in 1911 is borne out by the New York Times which reported not only Italy's official grievances with Turkey but also that Italy saw Libya as compensation for Morocco, which had just been

² Glen St. J. Barclay, The Rise and Fall of the New Roman Empire (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1973), pp. 18-36.

³ Leonida Bissolati, La politica estera dell'Italia dal 1897 al 1920 (Milano: Fratelli Treves, Editori, 1923), p. 220.

⁴ Barclay, pp. 42-43.

acquired by France. It also reported that Germany, Austria, France, and Russia had already consented to Italy's moves and that England had recognized Italy's "special interests" in an agreement reached a year earlier.⁵

The Italian Debate Over the War

Besides laying the diplomatic groundwork for the acquisition of Libya, the Italian government and its pro-imperialist backers were compelled to conduct a propaganda campaign to win the support of the Italian populace for a war against Turkey. Later, this propaganda campaign was extended to other countries so as to win over foreign opinion to the Italian cause and to prevent the possibility of foreign intervention on behalf of the Turks.

The most famous and important piece of propaganda published in Italy to win over Italians was a book entitled La nostra terra promessa (translation: Our Promised Land), which was written by a nationalistic journalist named Giuseppe Piazza. Piazza's book was a compilation of articles about Libya he had written in early 1911 based on a report made by an Italian Consul named Medana several years earlier. In his book, Piazza vividly described Libya as a fertile land suitable for mass colonization by poor Italian farmers who were unable to acquire an adequate amount of land in Italy.⁶

⁵ "War At Hand Over Tripoli," New York Times, 25 Sept. 1911, p. 1.

⁶ Giuseppe Piazza, La nostra terra promessa (Rome, 1911).

Within Italy, the most articulate opponent of the war was Gaetano Salvemini, an important radical politician, journalist, historian and republican. In a highly detailed article, he directly challenged Piazza's book. He took seventeen excerpts from Medana's report emphasizing the major points of the report, numbered them, and then drew up a corresponding list from Piazza's book on the same exact points. He showed how Piazza had systematically weeded out negative comments from Medana's report and exaggerated positive comments. Even where Piazza told the truth, he always left misleading impressions. In this point by point manner, Salvemini demonstrated how Piazza's book greatly exaggerated Libya's agricultural potential.⁷

Besides Salvemini, however, voices of dissent within Italy were few. Even Leonida Bissolati, an important Socialist leader who expressed mild opposition at the beginning of the war, gradually let his nationalism surpass his politics and became pro-war as did many leftists. And those to the right of Bissolati, particularly the imperialists, almost unanimously supported the war as well.

With support for the war generally solid at home, Italian imperialists aimed much of their propaganda at the international arena to counter efforts by the Porte to win foreign sympathy and intervention. They tried to show that what Italy was doing was in keeping with what other great imperialist nations like France and Britain had done in the past.

A good example of one such imperialist is Chevalier Tullio Irace. He wrote a book in English entitled With the Italians in Tripoli: The Authentic History of the Turco-

⁷ Gaetano Salvemini, "Come si fabbrica una 'terra promessa,'" Unità 8 June 1912: 103 in Come siamo andati in Libia e altri scritti dal 1900 al 1915 (Milan, 1963) pp. 183-187.

Italian War, which was published in England in 1912. He wished to persuade the English public of the justice of Italy's occupation of Libya and to counter the negative publicity the Italian Army received from the foreign press regarding Italian atrocities against the native Arab population.

In his preface, Irace makes the official case that it was Turkey that provoked the war with Italy. In general, the Turks' biggest provocation was their opposition to Italian economic penetration of Libya. He then cites specific incidents that were part of this provocation. He makes no mention of the various diplomatic agreements that Italy made with the great powers to secure their acceptance of Italy's desire to establish a sphere of influence over Libya.

Among these other Turkish provocations, most of which are documented by other sources as well, were acts of "piracy" by the Turks. On June 5, 1909, the Turkish gunboat Nurahad stopped the Italian liner Selina and seized all the gold and other specie on board. A few weeks later, the Genova was stopped and its crew was harassed. On December 12, 1910, another Turkish gunboat boarded an Italian steamship running mail between Assab and Massawa. Soon after, another ship carrying goods from Massawa to Eritrea was stopped and "subjected to harassment and financial loss."⁸

Irace also cites specific obstacles the Turks put up to Italian economic and business interests. In Tripoli, the governor, Ibrahim Pasha, prohibited citizens from doing business with the Banco di Roma and he outlawed the sale of land to Italians.⁹

⁸ Tullio Irace, With the Italians in Tripoli (London: John Murray, 1912), pp. xi-xv.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. xv-xvi.

Finally, he mentions the harassment of Italian citizens. A priest, Father Giustiniano, and an Italian journalist, Gastone Terreni, were murdered. Another journalist named Arbib was beaten by Turkish authorities.¹⁰ Irace also mentions the kidnapping of an Italian girl and insults made to the personnel at the Italian Consulate by the Turks.

All these grievances, Irace complained, received no redress from the newly-installed Young Turk government. With no hope of justice from the Turks, the Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Marquis di San Giuliano, was compelled to send an ultimatum to the Turkish government on September 11, 1911, listing Italian grievances.¹¹ When no adequate reply was made by the Turks, Italy declared war on September 28, 1911.¹²

The Turco-Italian War: 1911-12

In reality, Italian aggression towards Turkey was prompted more by the resolution of the Moroccan question between France and Germany than it was by the largely petty grievances Italy had with Turkey. After years of diplomacy aimed at establishing Italian hegemony over Libya, Italy decided it was time to settle its status in Libya once and for all. The Italians felt they needed a sphere of influence in Libya to maintain Italy's interests in the Mediterranean. So citing the Young Turks' resistance to a peaceful Italian

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. xvi-xvii.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. xi-xiii.

¹² Bissolati, p. 220.

penetration, the Italian Government gave the Porte an ultimatum and began mobilizing militarily in the likely event that the Porte refused Italian demands.¹³

On short notice, the Italian military gathered the necessary shipping to transport an expedition consisting of:

34,000 men
6300 horses and mules
1050 wagons
72 artillery pieces.¹⁴

This initial expedition was soon to be followed up by an additional force of:

55,000 men
8,300 animals
1500 wagons
154 artillery pieces.¹⁵

The preparations began in September 1911. Newspaper reports at this time estimated that the Turkish garrison in Libya numbered 30,000 men.¹⁶ According to reports released by the Italian Foreign Ministry after the war, however, the Turkish force consisted only of 5000 troops in Tripolitania and 2000 troops in Cirenaica. These soldiers manned a number of old coastal forts that were poorly armed and equipped. A great unknown was the indigenous Arab population which the Italians naively assumed would

¹³ The Italo-Turkish War (1911-12), translated and compiled from the reports of the Italian General Staff, by First Lieutenant Renato Tittoni, U.S.M.C., July 1913 (Kansas City, Missouri: Franklin Hudson Publishing Company, 1914), p. 11.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁶ "War At Hand Over Tripoli," New York Times, 25 Sept. 1911, p. 1.

not fight for the Turks. The Italians also faced climatic conditions unfavorable to landings at that time of year.¹⁷

A comparison of Italian and Turkish forces showed that the Italians had an overwhelming naval advantage. The Italian Navy had eight modern pre-Dreadnought battleships in service and four Dreadnoughts close to completion as well as some older battleships. They also had four cruisers, thirty-three destroyers, seventy-seven torpedo boats, and twenty-two submarines. Most of these were of modern design.¹⁸ By contrast, the Turkish fleet was much smaller and mostly obsolete. They had only three nineteenth-century battleships, two modern cruisers, some torpedo boats, and twelve gunboats.¹⁹

On the ground, the Turks had a standing army of 375,000 men compared to the 225,000 better-equipped Italians. Further, with the Italian Navy controlling the sea, the Turks had no way of sending large numbers of reinforcements to their Libyan garrison, which was greatly outnumbered by the invading Italian expedition. And since Libya was surrounded by the colonies of other European powers which had promised not to interfere with Italian interests in Libya, the Turks could not send troops by land routes either.²⁰

By September 26, the New York Times reported signs of nervousness in Europe. The Turks were said to be seeking the "good offices" of other European powers to try to

¹⁷ Tittoni, p. 21.

¹⁸ Fred T. Jane, ed., Jane's Fighting Ships 1914 (New York: Arco Publishing Co., Inc., 1969 reprint), pp. 286-314.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 409-18.

²⁰ "Turkey's Army the Larger," New York Times, 25 Sept. 1911, p. 2.

prevent war. The Germans, fearing turmoil in the Balkans, also tried to negotiate peace.²¹ Though they wanted peace, France and England were reported as unlikely to intervene.²²

The war finally began on September 29, 1911 at 2:30 p.m. Italian troops landed at Tripoli and Bengasi. A Turkish torpedo boat was sunk in Prevasa harbor. The Turkish cabinet fell on September 29 as well as a result of these hostilities.²³ By October 5, Tripoli was under Italian control.²⁴ By October 9, Tobruk had been taken.²⁵

Germany continued trying to mediate between Turkey and Italy by offering in October 1911 a peace proposal that would have given Turkey nominal sovereignty over Libya while Italy was given actual control of the colony. The Italian government rejected such an arrangement and, instead, issued a decree on November 5, 1911 declaring total Italian sovereignty over Libya. This extreme position eliminated any chance of a quick compromise.²⁶

The initial Italian strategy was to take the coastal strong points. The Italians believed that this alone would put enough pressure on the Turks to settle.²⁷ This plan soon

²¹ "Italian Ships Sail; Turkey Seeks Peace," New York Times, 26 Sept. 1911, p. 4.

²² "London Hopes For Peace," New York Times, 26 Sept. 1911, p. 4.

²³ "Italy Begins War on Turkey; Wins First Naval Battle," New York Times, 30 Sept. 1911, p. 1.

²⁴ "Italian Flag Over Tripoli; King Plans New Roman Empire," New York Times, 6 Oct. 1911, p. 1.

²⁵ "Italians Take Tobruk," New York Times, 9 Oct. 1911, p. 2.

²⁶ Bissolati, p. 220.

²⁷ Tittoni, p. 22.

proved inadequate and the war soon became a more drawn-out affair. Renato Tittoni, a First Lieutenant in the United States Marine Corps in 1913, compiled and translated reports from the Italian General Staff on the war and released the translations in a book entitled The Italo-Turkish War (1911-12). He saw the conflict as having gone through three phases:

- (1) The First Occupation - October 1911
- (2) The Establishment of Bases - October 1911 to March 1912
- (3) The Intensification of the war in Libya and the Aegean - April 1912 till the end of hostilities.²⁸

The first phase began with the successful occupation of Tripoli by 1700 Italian sailors who were later replaced by the Army on October 11. Tobruch was occupied on October 4; Derna on October 18; Bengasi on October 20; and Homs on October 21. The Turks did succeed in inflaming the Arab population against the Italians and they were able to put up far more potent resistance in unsuccessful battles at Henn-Sciara Sciat on October 23 and at Henni Bu Meliana on October 26. Despite all these Italian victories, Turkish and Arab resistance continued and the Italians were faced with a much longer and more expensive conflict than initially expected.²⁹

The next phase of the war for the Italians was the establishment of bases in strategic areas to secure captured territory and to cut supply lines to the Turks and Arabs. Up to that time, supplies had been reaching them through Libya's borders with Tunisia and Egypt. Battles fought to secure these ends were fought at Hamidiè on November 6, 1911, at Renni-Messri on November 26, 1911, and at Ain Zara on December 4, 1911. Though

²⁸ Ibid., p. 23.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 25-29.

largely successful, the Italians faced an increasingly fierce battle against an enemy that knew the terrain and made good use of it. Partially rectifying this problem was the use of aircraft by the Italians -- the first time airplanes had been used by any nation for military purposes. It gave them the ability to effectively reconnoiter large areas in a short time. Italian aircraft spotted enemy supplies and concentrations at the oases of Sahel and Tagiura. In response, the Italians occupied these oases December 10-13, 1911.³⁰

On a diplomatic level, the Italians tried to split Arab opposition by cultivating friendly ties with Arab tribes that were favorably disposed toward the Italians. The Italians occupied Gargaresh on January 18-20, 1912 to defend such friendly natives. On January 28, 1912, the Turks and the Arabs counterattacked at Ain Zara. This attack was broken with the help of Italian airplanes which, for the first time in aviation history, dropped bombs on the enemy from the air.³¹

The Battle of Suani el Rani or "Due Palmi" (two palms), fought on March 12, 1912, was the fiercest battle yet. Over one thousand Arabs were killed in an operation where the Italians had to coordinate infantry, cavalry, artillery, naval bombardment, and aircraft simultaneously. In many respects, this battle hinted at the military tactics that were to become common in World War I, World War II, and later twentieth-century wars.³²

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 30-34.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 37-38.

³² Ibid., pp. 44-48.

By April 1912, the Italians found that victory was still not close at hand though they generally won the pitched battles they fought with the Turks and the Arabs. More and more, the Turks and the Arabs resorted to guerrilla warfare which denied the Italians effective control of the countryside. At this point, the Italians began intensifying the war elsewhere in hopes of bringing it to a speedier conclusion.

To cut off war supplies coming from Tunis, the Italians landed at Macabez on April 10 in an operation that lasted till April 14. They had wanted to land at Zuara, which was more strategically located, but were prevented from doing so by unfavorable weather.³³

Of far greater importance and much more risky was the Italian effort to spread the conflict to Turkish territory beyond Libya. Using their much superior navy, the Italians began occupying Turkish islands in the Aegean to undermine the Turkish war effort and also to have bargaining chips for any future negotiations. On April 28, 1912, Stampalia was taken. On May 3, a campaign to conquer Rhodes began. On May 12, the Italians landed at Scarpanto, Casoe, Episcopi, Nayros, Calymnus, Leros, and Patmos. Later, Cos, Symi, and Cerlchi of the Southern Sporades were taken.³⁴

While allowing the seizure of the various islands, the other major European powers made it clear that landing in Ottoman territories outside Libya would not be tolerated. Therefore, to humiliate the Turks within these limitations, Italian ships bombarded Ottoman ports such as Hodeida³⁵ and Beirut.³⁶

³³ Ibid., p. 52.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 62-67.

³⁵ "Italians Shell Hodeida," New York Times, 6 Feb. 1912, p. 3.

The obsession with interdicting "contraband" led the Italian Navy to the interception of European ships suspected of carrying supplies to Turkey. In January 1912, Italian ships stopped the S.S. Carthage and seized a French plane that the Italians believed was being smuggled to the Turks to break the Italian monopoly on aircraft in the war. The British steamer Africa was stopped by an Italian cruiser.³⁷ The French ship Manouba was stopped and twenty-seven Turkish members of the Red Crescent, whom the Italians took to be military personnel, were taken prisoner.³⁸ These, and other similar incidents, angered the involved nations and risked bringing unwanted European intervention down upon the Italians in favor of the Turks.

Though many of these actions threatened to irk the other European powers to the point of intervention, they did help foment unrest in Ottoman territory in the Balkans and this eventually forced the Turks to the negotiating table.

By the Fall of 1912, while the war continued, serious negotiations occurred in Switzerland. On October 18, 1912, at 3:30 p.m., the Treaty of Ouchy was signed by both belligerents in Lausanne, Switzerland.³⁹ By the terms of the treaty, Italy received both Libya and the Dodecanese. Turkey was allowed to retain its religious authority over Libya and Italy also paid a large sum of money to the Turks to help them pay off their national debt.⁴⁰

³⁶ "Italian Warships Bombard Beirut," New York Times, 25 Feb. 1912, p. 1.

³⁷ "Italy and Turkey Discuss Peace," New York Times, 17 Jan. 1912, p. 3.

³⁸ "Ambushed Moslems Waylay Italians," New York Times, 20 Jan. 1912, p. 3.

³⁹ "Treaty With Italy Signed," New York Times, 19 Oct. 1912, p. 1.

That Turkey's position in the Balkans had seriously deteriorated as a result of the war with Italy was aptly shown when Turkey found herself fighting Serbia, Greece, and Bulgaria in the First Balkan War not even a week after signing the Treaty of Ouchy.⁴¹

Military Firsts in the Turco-Italian War

Though a relatively poor nation compared with the other major European powers, Italy had the distinction of introducing an impressive number of modern innovations to combat. Many elements and technologies that have come to define twentieth-century warfare were introduced in this war.

The Italians were the first to use dirigibles known as "Drachen" in combat. These were used largely for the purpose of spotting for land and sea-based artillery and for reconnaissance.⁴² They were also the first to introduce airplanes to modern warfare with the first reconnaissance flight on October 23, 1911 over Tripoli.⁴³ On November 1, 1911, an Italian pilot dropped four bombs on a Turkish camp - the first military bombing raid.⁴⁴ This tactic generally did little damage because of the smallness of the bombs and the difficulty of aiming them. However, they did hurt enemy morale.⁴⁵ The Italians even used

⁴⁰ Denis Mack Smith, Italy: A Modern History, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1969), p. 279.

⁴¹ "Balkan Armies Invade Turkey," New York Times, 19 Oct. 1912, p. 1.

⁴² Tittoni, pp. 96-99.

⁴³ "Air Reconnaissance of Turks' Position: First in the History of Warfare Made by an Italian Officer From Tripoli," New York Times, 24 Oct. 1911, p. 4.

⁴⁴ "Airman Drops Bomb On Turkish Troops," New York Times, 2 Nov. 1911, p. 1.

airplanes for propaganda purposes as happened when an Italian plane dropped leaflets on Arab rebels to tell them of an Italian naval victory over the Turks.⁴⁶

The Italians were also the first to adopt large-scale use of what Tittoni called "auto-trucks" to transport men and supplies. Over 300 trucks were used in Libya with 160 in Tripoli alone.⁴⁷ Also regarding land warfare, the Italian Army in Libya was the first to deploy armored cars in combat.⁴⁸

All these new weapons were to see much wider use in World War I only a few years later.

⁴⁵ Tittoni, p. 98.

⁴⁶ "France Wants Ship Freed," New York Times, 19 Jan. 1912, p. 3.

⁴⁷ Tittoni, pp. 108-9.

⁴⁸ Andy Lightbody and Joe Poyer, The Illustrated History of Tanks (Lincolnwood, Illinois: Publications International, Ltd., 1989), pp. 10-11.

Chapter Two: The Initial Surveys and Experiments in Libya - 1912 to 1921

The Medana Report: 1903

The first serious study made by the Italian Government of Libya's economic potential was conducted in 1903 by Augusto Medana, who was the Italian consul in Tripoli at the time. As mentioned earlier, this was the report on which Giuseppe Piazza based his propagandistic book, La nostra terra promessa. Medana's report was limited to Tripolitania. Though not an agricultural expert, he was able to give a reasonable estimate of the amount of arable land and the crops that could be grown there based on the weather, the yearly rainfall, and the availability of other sources of fresh water. His report described a land of limited potential, in sharp contrast to what was portrayed in the Piazza book. Thus, going into the Turco-Italian War, the Italian Government had few illusions about the land they were trying to acquire. However, they did allow Italian imperialists like Piazza to spread misleading propaganda among the Italian people to stir up enthusiasm for the war.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Augusto Medana, "Il vilayet di Tripoli nell'anno 1902," Italy. Ministero degli Affari Esteri. Ambasciate. Bolletino, No. 300a, pp. 1043-1196 as cited by Gaetano Salvemini, Come siamo andati in Libia e altri scritti dal 1900 al 1915 (Milan, 1963), pp. 183-87.

The Nitti Report: 1912

Francesco Nitti, the Italian Minister of Agriculture, led a commission that explored the oases around Tripoli, Zanzur, and Tagiura in early 1912, while the Turco-Italian War was still being fought. As a result, the area it covered was relatively small.

The commission took note of the limited amount of territory around the oases and the "terre dei giardini" or garden lands on which intensive irrigated farming could be done, most of which was already in use by the natives. It speculated that, to a limited degree, with the digging of more wells and the efficient utilization of water resources, these oases and garden lands could be extended to the surrounding lands like a "macchio d'olio," a "blot of oil." The commission felt that the water situation required serious study both in terms of using ground water and rain water. This was crucial because of the limited rainfall and the absence of permanent rivers.

In terms of the colonization potential, the commission felt that Libya, as it presently was, could not absorb large numbers. Only in the garden lands did they feel that a light infiltration of Italian farmers, particularly southerners, was possible.

To pave the way for future development and colonization, the commission made four specific recommendations. First, a study needed to be made of the property tax records of land in the zone to enable the Italian government to open its own land registration office in Libya. Second, the government should encourage the resumption of pre-war agricultural activities in the garden lands. Third, the government should establish an agricultural credit institution. And fourth, an agricultural technical office should be set up to

experiment with the agricultural possibilities of the land and advise prospective farmers accordingly.⁵⁰

A Pessimistic View of Potential Development

Gaetano Salvemini, the radical who had so articulately argued against the acquisition of Libya before the war, sought to remain part of the debate over what to do with Libya after the war. One of the articles he wrote was based on the observations of the Nitti Commission, though with a decidedly much more negative spin than the commission report itself, which was guardedly optimistic about Libya's potential.

Using the more current data gathered by this commission, he again focused on discrediting the notion that Libya was an agricultural paradise. He pointed out that while the province of Tripolitania was 16,000 square kilometers in size, only an area of 200 square kilometers was readily cultivable. He also tried to dispel unrealistic expectations held by people like Piazza who believed that Italy could expand this fertile area "like a patch of oil" by drilling for subterranean water.

Salvemini made three important observations regarding the limitations of drilling for water. First, the underground water was not inexhaustible. Old wells might dry up if used to irrigate large tracts of dry land. Second, the depth of the subterranean water varied and in some places, the water was so deep it might be impractical to get at. And third,

⁵⁰ Francesco Nitti, Ministero di Agricoltura, Industria e Commercio, Ricerche e studi agrologici sulla Libia. I. La Zona di Tripoli (Bergamo, 1912), pp. 503-504.

digging for wells and irrigating previously barren land could cost as much as 2500 lire per hectare. This cost would have been prohibitive to large-scale reclamation.

Salvemini also felt that, above all else, one should not develop colonies at the expense of the mother country. The crops that could be produced in Libya, for example, were the same as those already produced in southern Italy. Therefore, developing Libyan agriculture might actually hurt already hard-pressed farmers in southern Italy. He also felt that it was unfair to spend money in Libya on railroads and public works projects that were still lacking in many parts of Italy.⁵¹

The Bertolini Commission: 1913

After the war, two more comprehensive missions were conducted which sought to gain a more accurate idea of Tripolitania's economic potential and how to exploit it. The most influential of these technical missions was the Bertolini Commission, under the direction of Professor P. Bertolini, Minister of the Colonies.

This commission covered the coastal region of Tripolitania. Starting from Capo Arrár or the Grande Sirte and the western Gebel in the East, it went all the way to the Tunisian border. And from the coast, it went south down to the interior tablelands. The commission dealt with the geology of the region, the climate, and the availability of water. From careful study of these three subjects, as well as by studying the agricultural

⁵¹ Salvemini, "L'agricoltura nella zona di Tripoli," *Unità* 17 Jan 1913: 229 in Come siamo andati in Libia e altri scritti dal 1900 al 1915 (Milan, 1963), pp. 294-98.

practices of the natives, they could then categorize certain areas according to their suitability to the various types of cultivation.

Geologically, the fine red sand they found in many places, particularly near the coast, was considered good for cultivation. The farther south they went, the more unsuitable the soil. Similarly, rainfall on the central coast was greater than 420 millimeters annually. As they went inland, however, they found that annual rainfall gradually diminished until they reached the foot of the tablelands, where annual rainfall was actually greater than that in the land immediately to the north of it.

The combination of rainfall and climate served to produce three zones of vegetation. Near the coast was the Mediterranean zone, which was similar to Italy and other Mediterranean countries in terms of its weather, vegetation, and suitability to agriculture. This was, generally, the most favorable area for agriculture in Tripolitania. To the South of this zone was the transition or pre-desert zone. It was hotter and had less rainfall and was suitable only for dry farming. To the south of the interior tablelands was the desert zone, whose arid temperatures and almost total lack of rainfall made it unsuitable for agriculture.

The superficial hydrography, or availability of ground water, furthered this division of Libya into zones. In general, the hydrographic situation was poor. There were no permanent rivers, only temporary seasonal streams after significant rainfall. The only perennial streams of any importance were the great springs of Taurgha. The commission therefore felt that the collection of rain water in cisterns and reservoirs would be of the utmost importance. Underground water existed in most places but varied in terms of its

usability. As one would expect, it was closest to the surface near the coast, where its depth was anywhere from a few decimeters to 15 to 20 meters deep. Moving inland from the coast, the subterranean water got deeper and deeper until, at the high regions of the Gefara, the water was more than 80 meters from the surface. The possibility of drilling artesian wells was still being explored at this time.

The commission felt that with a more efficient utilization of water resources, including subterranean water, irrigated farming could extend to at least 30,000 hectares (about 74,000 acres) beyond the oases. Dry cultivation, using "rational" techniques, would be possible over a much larger territory.

Also an important factor in developing Libya was the Libyans themselves. Their agricultural techniques, proven effective over the centuries, were also worth noting. Further, they were also a convenient source of labor for Italian developers.

On the basis of the observations they made, the commissioners saw cultivable public land in Libya as being divided into three types of farm units: (1) small farms dedicated to irrigated farming; (2) large farms of 200-300 acres (80-120 acres) that would mix both dry farming and some irrigated farming. Most of the land would be dedicated to the cultivation of tree cultures and cereals; and (3) pastoral estates dedicated largely to the raising of sheep. The small farms would be settled by Italian colonist families but the other two types of farming units would utilize Libyan labor under Italian technical supervision and financed by Italian capital. It was hoped that such Italian-Libyan cooperation would promote stability in the new colony where the population was still largely hostile to the Italians.

Like the Nitti Commission, the Bertolini Commission also felt that experimentation was necessary to discover what farm techniques and what types of farms would best succeed given the climatic conditions and the scarcity of water in Libya. Some of this could be carried out by private enterprise but the commission also saw the need for a special government agricultural office to be set up to direct such experimentation.⁵²

Overall, the commission favored the use of private enterprise and capital rather than public money to develop Libya. Of the land that could be used, they wanted the government to rent lots to colonists while providing limited financial and technical aid. Though favoring a capitalistic approach, they were against land speculation. The commission greatly emphasized the need to study Ottoman land records to determine whether land was owned by the natives or not. They clearly felt that Libyan ownership should be respected and Italian settlement limited to lands that were not owned. They realized the importance of not seizing land owned by the natives for fear of starting an anti-colonial rebellion. Therefore, the commission felt that until this land issue was resolved, Libya would not yet be ready for mass colonization.⁵³

⁵² Commissione per lo studio agrológico della Tripolitania, La Tripolitania Settentrionale, Vol. 1 (Rome: Tipografia Nazionale di G. Bertero E C., 1913), pp. 425-31.

⁵³ Claudio Segrè, Fourth Shore: The Italian Colonization of Libya (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), pp. 43-44.

The Franchetti Mission: 1913

Another commission was led by Leopoldo Franchetti in February 1913. Franchetti was an expert on the southern Italian "mezzogiorno" and an influential imperialist. He had been the key planner in an earlier colonization scheme in the highlands of Eritrea which ultimately failed. With this considerable experience behind him, his expedition evaluated the Tripolitan Gebel, especially the land around Tarhuna, Msellata, and Garian - the areas known to be most favorable to colonization.⁵⁴

The findings of this mission left Franchetti very cautious about the agricultural potential of Libya. He concluded that the land, though usable, would be harder to settle than Eritrea was. Because of the very limited rainfall, he saw little possibility for irrigated farming. Instead, the Gebel would have to be used primarily for dry farming. Because dry farming required more land than irrigated farming, he believed that the average farm in the Gebel would have to be two to three times larger than the single-family farms of Italy. Before any major colonization effort could begin, Franchetti that government and private enterprise needed to conduct experiments on the land to find out what agricultural methods and what balance of resources would produce profitable farms. Only with the dissemination of such crucial information among prospective colonists could colonization as a whole work. Further, unlike Bertolini, Franchetti felt that any colonization effort would require state aid, particularly in the form of credit to the colonists.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 44-45.

⁵⁵ Società Italiana per lo Studio della Libia, La Missione Franchetti in Tripolitania (Il Gebel) (Florence-Milan: Fratelli Treves, Editori, 1914), pp. 47-52.

According to Franchetti, the first major task that lay before the Italians was determining ownership of the land. Colonization, Franchetti felt, had to be done on land owned by the state. Private land ownership by the Libyans had to be honored in order to avoid potential conflict with them. Unfortunately, the Italians found that Turkish records of land ownership, limited to begin with, had been largely destroyed, either intentionally or because of war damage.

Because of the lack of documentation, Franchetti felt that the presumption must be that all land not documented as being owned by the state was privately owned by the natives. Therefore, the Italian government needed to purchase land from the natives in order to be able to proceed with colonization. Unfortunately, native knowledge of the Italian desire to colonize as well as activities by speculators resulted in the natives' charging outrageous prices for land. To remedy this situation, the Franchetti Mission felt that Italian officials at Land Registry Office in Libya would have to become acquainted with native traditions and customs regarding land ownership. Further, Franchetti believed that Italians had leverage in terms of the public works that were benefiting the Libyans and also with regard to the use of modern machinery to dig wells and press olives which greatly impressed the Libyans. The Libyans, Franchetti argued, could not expect to receive the benefits of the modern age for free. Also, in the future, market forces would push land prices back down to more realistic levels.⁵⁶

Franchetti also believed that there were a number of other problems to be resolved and steps that needed to be taken before proceeding with colonization. The government had to build a modern infrastructure in Libya to support the colonization effort. Modern

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 41-43.

roads and railroads and other forms of communication and transportation were needed so that farmers could get their produce to market. In 1913, such infrastructure was lacking all over Libya. Also, the government needed to establish law and order in many parts of Libya where banditry was still common.

Another important prerequisite to colonization was the discovery of more sources of water. In a land where rain was minimal, the government had to go exploring for ground water to meet the personal needs of the colonists and also for irrigation.

Experimental camps were needed to develop strains of marketable plants suitable to the environmental conditions in the various regions in Libya. Going hand in hand with the experimental stations were model farms, where the most profitable and practical techniques for growing the strains developed by the experimental stations were developed. Franchetti felt that experimental stations and model farms should be placed in the various regions of Libya to determine what agricultural policy would work best in each.

A Forestry Office was also important. Particularly in a land consisting largely of desert, reforestation was necessary to prevent further erosion and expansion of the desert. Carefully planted trees could serve as windscreens and fix sand dunes to one spot.

Laboratories to develop agricultural chemicals and to deal with bacteriology and parasitology were also needed. These would allow the Italians to adapt to the special threats to agriculture that existed in Libya. Also needed were more Meteorological Observatories to follow the weather patterns.

As Italy's colonization program progressed, Organs for Advice and Propaganda would be needed to promote Italian colonialism within Italy and abroad as well. And as

Italians came to settle Libya, they would need practical agricultural instruction on how to best organize a farm in Libya, what to grow, and the techniques required by the terrain. Agriculture in Libya was so different from that in Italy that Franchetti felt special schools would be needed to prepare colonists to survive and prosper. Such instruction was also to be made available to the Libyans as well.⁵⁷

All three commissions shared a guarded optimism about Libya's agricultural potential. None of them articulated the unrealistic views of Piazza that Libya was a promised land where poor Italian peasant farmers could be turned loose to make their fortunes. To the contrary, all three agreed that Libya was not ready for mass colonization but would, instead, require considerable development of infrastructure and water management before large scale settlement would be possible. The commissions differed over whether the government or private capital should take the lead in development. Each commission made specific recommendations over how to proceed with the development of Libya. And before the Italian colonial experiment came to an end in Libya barely twenty years later, nearly all of these recommendations had been carried out or attempted at one time or another.

Other Views of Libyan Development

Among those who were pro-imperialist, opinions varied as to how to best develop the new colony. Ausonio Franzoni, then president of the Istituto Coloniale Italiano and an authority on emigration, favored government-directed mass colonization immediately.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 513-17.

The government should provide generous subsidies to initiate enterprise and attract colonists to Libya. Ultimately, he felt private enterprise could assume a greater role. At present, however, the limited resources available in Libya would attract few entrepreneurs.⁵⁸

More specifically, Franzoni realistically expected that the Libyans would initially be hostile to Italian rule and the Italians would have to take further military action to secure their rule over the colony. In the meantime, in the early stages of colonization, Franzoni felt that 50,000 to 60,000 colonists could be settled in military colonization centers around Tripoli, Bengasi, and Homs. To further help stabilize the military situation, one third of these colonists should be eligible for military service should the need arise. Franzoni felt the Italians best suited to the colonization effort were those from Sicily and Puglia and those who had already settled in Tunisia and abroad.⁵⁹

Early Experiments in Agricultural Development

Large scale plans for the development of Libya were delayed for more than 10 years as Italy's attentions were drawn to more pressing international and domestic problems. Soon after the end of the war with Turkey, Italy found itself embroiled in World War I. After the world war, the Liberal Government fought for survival against the instability which followed the war. During this period of Italian weakness, the Libyans, particularly the Sanussi of Cirenaica, capitalized on this opportunity to rebel against Italian

⁵⁸ Segrè, Fourth Shore, pp. 42-43.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, footnote 33, p. 196.

occupation. By the end of World War I, the Italians were limited to occupying a few coastal cities and towns. The countryside was controlled by the Libyans.⁶⁰

Despite this instability, a number of small experiments in agricultural colonization were conducted during the early years of Italian occupation of Libya. By an act of Parliament, RD 2 March 1914 no. 169, the government leased or rented a limited amount of Libyan territory and provided financial aid to those who took the risk. A total of 1250 hectares (approximately 3089 acres) was divided up into 40 lots. There were two types of farms set up under this program. There were large farms of 50 to 60 hectares (approximately 124 to 148 acres) that utilized Libyan labor and small farms of three to thirty hectares (approximately 7.4 to 74 acres) which were run by individual Italian families. This program was run over a nine-month period and applied only to Italians who were already residents of Tripoli. No emigrants from metropolitan Italy were drawn in. This program was tried again from October 1920 to the end of 1921. Another 1250 hectares (about 3089 acres) was divided into 60 lots this time. The results of this modest program were very meager. By its end, only 1% of all Italians in Tripoli were farmers.

An even less successful program was tried in Cirenaica. Here, the government tried to have Italian soldiers grow their own food in both collective and individual efforts. Little was gained from this experience.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 45.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 46.

Chapter Three: Pacification and Development from Volpi to Graziani

Volpi Reconquers Tripolitania: 1921 to 1924

Italy had little time to savor her victory in Libya and even less time to decide how she would develop her new colony. Within two years after the end of the Turco-Italian War, World War I began in Europe, drawing Italy's attention away from her colonies, particularly after she entered the war in 1915. The Libyans, including the Senussi of Cirenaica, took this opportunity to resume fighting against the Italians. By 1918, Italian control was confined largely to four coastal towns. Otherwise Libya was now virtually independent.

In 1919, with World War I over but with the Liberal Government preoccupied with instability at home, the Italians reached an agreement with Mohammed Idris, leader of the Senussi in Cirenaica. By this agreement, the Libyans officially recognized Italian sovereignty over Libya. The Italians, in turn, permitted the Libyans to have a great deal of autonomy. Two parliaments were set up, one in Cirenaica and the other in Tripoli. The Libyan populace was recognized as having a "special Italian citizenship" and was not looked down upon as a "subject" population. The Libyan people were also allowed a greater degree of personal and political liberty than were the colonial subjects of most empires. As an added bonus, the Libyans also received subsidies from Rome.

Denis Mack Smith believes that the Italians, even under the Liberal regime, saw this agreement as only temporary. In the long run, it was seen as unfitting for an imperial power.⁶²

The turning point for the Italians came when in July 1921 Giuseppe Volpi was appointed governor of Tripolitania^U by Luigi Rossi, then Minister of the Colonies, during the waning days of the Liberal era.⁶³ He brought to the job his experience as both a successful businessman and a skilled diplomat. As a businessman, he had brought electric power to the region of Venetia. As a diplomat, he had a number of achievements to his credit. He had negotiated the Treaty of Ouchy, which ended the Turco-Italian War. He then served as a consul in Serbia in 1912. During the First World War, he presided over the Committee of Industrial Mobilization that mobilized Italy for the war. After the war, he was part of the Italian delegation at Versailles. This considerable background in both business and diplomacy was to prove useful in Libya.⁶⁴

⁶² Denis Mack Smith, Mussolini's Roman Empire (New York: The Viking Press), pp. 36-38.

⁶³ Giuseppe Volpi di Misurata, La Rinascita della Tripolitania (Milan: Mondadori, 1926), p. xix. Note: Though Volpi is cited as the author of this book in American library entries, he was actually only the editor of the book whose chapters were written by various authors. Volpi himself wrote only the introduction which is the only part of the book that I cite in this chapter.

†It should be noted at this point that though Libya was officially a single entity, administratively, it was divided into two effectively independent parts -- Tripolitania and Cirenaica -- as was the case under Libya's previous rulers. The Governor of the colony was in Tripoli and effectively controlled Tripolitania. The Vice-Governor was in Benghazi and was effectively the Governor of Cirenaica.

⁶⁴ Segrè, Fourth Shore, p. 47.

Upon arriving in Libya, Volpi quickly concluded that the situation was totally unacceptable. Italian occupation was limited largely to the coast and morale was very low. The Arabs, he felt, were "full of defiance and disrespect" and had too much power versus the mother country compared with the subject populations of other imperial empires.

He quickly asked Rome for permission to retake Misurata Marina. Beleaguered by the postwar turmoil in Italy, Rome refused permission. In September 1921, Volpi went to Rome himself to make his case personally. Rome again denied him permission to attack and told him only to continue studying the situation.⁶⁵

After waiting till the end of 1921 for government permission, Volpi finally decided on his own to attack Misurata Marina on January 26, 1922 using the limited resources at his disposal. With a force consisting largely of Eritreans, Volpi accompanied the expedition to observe the action himself. Only after returning to Tripoli could he report back to Rome the actions he had taken. When he did, Minister Girardini, who had no prior knowledge of the operation, gave his support. Volpi felt, however, that most members of the government would not support the action. Within a few days, in any case, this government fell. Ultimately, the government decided in favor of Volpi's action and sent him two more battalions of Eritreans.

When the Bonomi Ministry took over from the Facta Ministry, Minister of the Colonies Amendola was critical of Volpi's policies. Volpi ultimately had to go to Rome to explain his policies to the Commission on Foreign Affairs and the Colonies. In general, the commission and the rest of the government were supportive although he left with the feeling that he would be held responsible for whatever might happen. The greatest

⁶⁵ Volpi, pp. xx-xxi.

opposition came from the Social Democrats in Parliament whom he described as having "growled against my imperialistic adventures."

By the spring of 1922, operations in the Gefara were successfully concluded clearing the plain up to the slopes of the Garian, thus giving Tripoli more breathing room. Then Colonel Graziani successfully pursued a series of operations that culminated in the occupation of the Garian in the Fall of 1922, which coincided with Mussolini's ascension to power.⁶⁶

In his book, published in 1926, Volpi credits Mussolini with giving him full support for his policies in Tripolitania. He also heaps praise upon Luigi Federzoni, who became head of the Ministry of the Colonies with Mussolini's rise to power, for cooperating productively with him in the making of economic, political, and military policy in Tripolitania. As Governor of Tripolitania, he felt his years under the Fascists were the most productive.

By December 1923, Tarhana, Zliten, and Misurata had been occupied by Italian forces. On February 1924, Ghadames was taken. And by the end of 1924, the Sirtica was successfully occupied. At this point, the Italians had effective control over the most economically important parts of Tripolitania. It was at this point that Volpi resigned the governorship to take care of obligations in Italy. In resigning, he spoke of the need to further economic development to help pay for the forces of occupation, the "30,000 rifles and 30 cannons" that would be needed to guarantee the peace.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. xxi-xxiii.

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. xxiii-xxv.

As mentioned earlier, the Italian military force employed in these campaigns consisted largely of black levies from Eritrea and Ethiopia who were led by Italian officers and NCOs. Smith describes their tactics as efficient but brutal.⁶⁸ Great emphasis was made on making this force more mobile to effectively respond to the Libyans' guerrilla tactics. The black levies that largely manned his 30,000 man force were, themselves, skilled in guerrilla tactics thus making them more effective. In terms of the political aspects of fighting a war, Volpi used a "divide and conquer" strategy against hostile tribes to prevent the emergence of a more united opposition. To prevent the reemergence of opposition in areas he succeeded in occupying, Volpi tried to placate the local population by digging wells and building roads and doing other such things to more favorably dispose the Libyans toward the Italians.⁶⁹

The Expansion of the Public Domain Under Volpi

On the economic front, one of Volpi's major accomplishments was his massive increase of Libyan land put in the public domain for future colonial development projects. Before Volpi's assumption of the governorship of Tripolitania, the Liberal government had taken a very conservative, legalistic approach to appropriating land for Italian settlement. Though they had defeated the Turks and the Arabs who supported them, the Italians still recognized the legitimacy of Arab ownership of land.

⁶⁸ Smith, Mussolini's Roman Empire, pp. 37-38.

⁶⁹ Segrè, Fourth Shore, pp. 47-48.

This was greatly complicated by the differences between the way in which Europeans viewed land ownership and the view of the Arabs. Whereas in Europe land would generally be owned by individuals whose ownership would be backed up by government documentation, land in North Africa was more likely to be owned by families or tribes rather than by individuals. And "title" to a piece of land was based on custom rather than on official documentation. Further, in areas where the nomadic lifestyle was prominent, much land was left as uncultivated pasture and ownership was even harder to ascertain.⁷⁰

The Ottomans had made feeble attempts to formally document land ownership, but had not gotten very far by the time of the Italian conquest. After the Italians took over, the Italian Land Office was set up in 1913 with the mission of determining land ownership and accumulating unowned land into a public domain that could be used for future colonial settlements. They worked from the assumption that uncultivated land was privately owned and could not be placed into the public domain until proved otherwise. Consequently, after ten years of work, only 3600 hectares (approximately 8895 acres) of land was in the public domain.

All this changed when Volpi assumed power. To give the Land Office a free hand, he issued a decree, DG 18 July 1922, series A, no. 660, by which the land office would post notice of Italian claims on uncultivated not known to have an owner. If no natives stepped forward within two months to claim ownership, the land reverted to the public domain. If Libyan owners stepped forward, the land would still go into the public domain but compensation would be paid to the owners. This reversed the old assumption

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 48-49.

that such land was privately owned with a new one where uncultivated land was now assumed to be unowned and therefore could be put in the public domain. Further supporting this was another Volpi decree, RD 15 November 1923 no. 3204, by which all land that had lain fallow for more than three years would revert to the public domain. Also, with the resumption of hostilities with the Arabs, Volpi used the opportunity of war to seize uncultivated land known to belong to the rebellious tribes or those sympathetic to them, and put it in the public domain. He did this using decree DG 11 April 1923, series A, no. 320. By the end of his rule as governor, the amount of land in the public domain in Tripolitania grew from 3600 hectares (approximately 8895 acres) to 68,000 hectares (approximately 168,026 acres).⁷¹

The Agricultural Development of Libya

Volpi was the first to experiment with Libya's agricultural possibilities on a relatively large scale. In Misurata, he reclaimed much territory himself. He then encouraged others to do the same under what was called the "big concession" system. This was a capitalistic approach to colonial development that was financed by private money. In it, the government incorporated land under the public domain and then sold "perpetual grants" over large parcels of territory to interested investors.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 49.

Since only the well to-do could afford such grants, very few settlers were attracted to Libya. Instead, a plantation system developed in which the capitalists hired cheap native labor rather than more expensive Italian labor.

Though some land was reclaimed under this system, the Fascist government halted the program after two years because of the failure to attract large numbers of Italian settlers. The Fascists saw settlement as a higher priority than land reclamation. They wanted Libya developed more as an outlet for the growing Italian population.⁷² Minister Federzoni hoped to eventually settle up to 300,000 Italians in Libya.⁷³

At this point, the Libyan colonial government began granting smaller parcels to farmers willing to work land themselves. Later, under Volpi's successor, General DeBono, those who still had large concessions were required to settle a minimum number of Italians on their land.

These capitalistic policies were followed by three different colonial governments over a period of ten years. By 1933, the colonial government reported that 500,000 acres had been incorporated under the public domain in Tripolitania. Of this total, 250,000 acres were in the hands of only 378 settlers.⁷⁴

⁷² Moore, pp. 73-75.

⁷³ Smith, Mussolini's Roman Empire, p. 38.

⁷⁴ Moore, pp. 75-76.

The Completion of the Pacification Campaign After Volpi

While Volpi succeeded in retaking the most important parts of Tripolitania by 1924, the reconquest of Cirenaica proved to be much harder. Whereas differences and rivalries among the various tribes of Tripolitania allowed the Italians to employ an effective divide and conquer strategy, the Bedouin of Cirenaica were strongly united behind the spiritual and religious leadership of the Senussi.⁷⁵

The Senussi were a religious fraternity founded near Mecca in 1837. They were Orthodox Sunni Muslims who would probably be seen as fundamentalists today. During Ottoman rule, they strongly opposed any secularization of the state by Ottoman authorities. Against the Christian Italians, their opposition was much more fierce.⁷⁶

An important expert on the Senussi is Professor E.E. Evans-Pritchard, an Arabist who went to Cirenaica in 1942 as part of the British occupation forces during World War II. He used the opportunity to gain a thorough knowledge of the Senussi and their war with the Italians by interacting with the Bedouin tribes loyal to the Senussi. From his research, he wrote the book, The Sanusi of Cirenaica, which was published in 1949. It is the seminal work on the subject in English. Though he always tries to be truthful about his subject, he does get drawn into romanticizing the Bedouin while showing great indignation at the deeds of the Italians. He claims, however, that he is not anti-Italian but anti-imperialist. And while chronicling the misdeeds of the Italians, he also makes it clear that other colonial powers did no less when faced with anti-colonial rebellions.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ E.E. Evans-Pritchard, The Sanusi of Cyrenaica (Oxford: University Press, 1949), p.167.

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 1-28.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

While Volpi began his operations in Tripolitania in 1921 during the waning days of the Liberal government, Bongiovanni, the governor of Cirenaica did not begin operations to pacify his colony until March 1923.⁷⁸ This began what Evans-Pritchard refers to as the "Second Italo-Sanusi War." The "First" began with the Turco-Italian War and ended in 1917 with an agreement giving the Cirenaicans their own parliament and far more autonomy than the native populations of most colonies enjoyed.

As this new conflict commenced, the Italian forces, largely consisting of Eritreans, had all the advantages in terms of conventional warfare. With 20,000 troops, they had an overwhelming advantage in terms of manpower. The Italians also had plenty of land vehicles and aircraft which the Cirenaicans lacked entirely. Most importantly, Evans-Pritchard credits the Fascist forces with a greater will to win than the Liberal regime had. The Fascists realized that they could not achieve their ends in Cirenaica through negotiation. They had to decisively defeat the Bedouin on the battlefield in order to truly control Cirenaica.

By contrast, the guerrillas generally had no more than 1000 men active at any one time. They did have modern rifles as well as some machine guns and artillery pieces. More importantly, they had the traditional advantages of most guerrilla armies. They were familiar with the terrain and knew how to live off it. They had the tacit support of much of the local population who kept them well supplied and among whom they could take refuge when necessary.⁷⁹ Further, though the rebels frequently suffered heavy losses at the hands of the Italians, the rebel bands were always able to replenish their ranks with volunteers from among the "sottomessi," that part of the Arab population particularly in the towns which, at least passively, accepted and submitted to Italian rule.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Biagio Pace, La Libia nella politica fascista (Messina and Milan, 1935), p. 12.

⁷⁹ Evans-Pritchard, pp. 157-59.

⁸⁰ Pace, p. 23.

And most importantly of all, they were strongly motivated to resist by both patriotism and religion, which were strongly intertwined with each other. Evans-Pritchard states that they wanted to "live by their own laws in their own land."⁸¹

At the heart of the resistance in Cirenaica was the Senussi family, which wielded political as well as religious power over the Libyans. While those at the top of the Senussi family were bookish scholars who had little in common with their Bedouin followers and were in exile in Egypt, a number of shaikhs and Brothers from the Senussi family accompanied the rebel clans serving as "standards" and motivators. The main military leader of the rebels, Sidi Omar el Muktar, was himself a shaikh.⁸²

The conflict from the beginning was a guerrilla war between the Italians and the most nomadic of the Bedouin tribes. Those Cirenaicans who lived in the cities and towns took no part in the conflict. The least nomadic of the Bedouin tribes, those with strong ties to the cities and towns, were largely passive toward the Italians though they were sympathetic towards the rebel cause. These two groups were referred to by the Italians as the "sottomessi" or "subdued ones." One of the distinctions that Evans-Pritchard makes between those Cirenaicans who submitted to Italian rule and those who resisted was that the "sottomessi" were those who had strong ties to the cities and the coast while the rebels were completely nomadic and were tied to the desert interior of the country.

Much of the war was a struggle between the Italians and the rebels for the loyalty and support of the "sottomessi." The rebels saw the "sottomessi" as a source of supply and sanctuary. The Italians wanted to apply a "divide and conquer" strategy to keep the two groups apart. They tried to build friendly relations with the "sottomessi" through propaganda and other means.

⁸¹ Evans-Pritchard, p. 166.

⁸² Ibid., pp. 156-68.

To keep the rebels and the "sottomessi" divided, the Italians had the choice of protecting the "sottomessi" with small, continuous patrols that would be vulnerable to attack or arming the "sottomessi" to protect themselves. The problem with this latter solution was that it could serve as a conduit for supplying the rebels with arms when the "sottomessi" involved were secretly sympathetic to the rebels. This is what ultimately happened when the Italians tried to form irregular militias of Cirenaicans. Further, they came to realize that few Cirenaicans were truly loyal to the Italians. Even the most passive were sympathetic to the rebel cause. For their part, the "sottomessi" were caught in an unenviable dilemma. Loyalty to either side meant reprisals from the other. If they collaborated with the rebels and the Italians found out, they were punished. If they refused the rebels, the rebels would punish them.⁸³

In every respect, the Italians found this conflict an irregular one. The opposition was formless and continuous. The guerrillas' numbers never decreased even after suffering severe losses. Replacements were always available from the various Bedouin tribes and even from the "sottomessi." They could strike almost anywhere and anytime and then disappear into the surroundings. Throughout the nearly ten-year war, a skirmish or larger engagement occurred every few days. Like other guerrilla warriors past and present, the Senussi wore no uniform; so when they were not fighting, they could fade into the civilian population and go unnoticed.⁸⁴ The Italians found, to their dismay, that victories against the guerrillas did not have the same cumulative effect that they would against a traditional army. Since the guerrillas were an irregular, decentralized mass, the defeat of one group did not cause the whole to crack. When the Italians captured a rebel stronghold or holy city, they found it did not have the same detrimental effect that taking an enemy capital would have in Europe.⁸⁵

⁸³ Ibid., pp. 159-63.

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 164-65.

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 174-75.

According to Evans-Pritchard, the Italians found they were fighting a people, not a traditional army. And "a people can only be defeated by total imprisonment or extermination."⁸⁶ Gradually, the Italians did adapt to fighting the guerrillas and much of what Evans-Pritchard states turned out to be true. On the ground, they moved in small, mobile groups much as the guerrillas did. This made them more vulnerable, but it was more effective than moving in large, unwieldy columns which always gave the rebels forewarning and allowed them to escape. They used their mechanized units to conduct surprise raids on rebel camps or Bedouin camps suspected of hiding and supporting the rebels. When the terrain was unfavorable to vehicles, especially during the rainy season, aircraft were used to bomb and strafe such positions. Such actions frequently led to indiscriminate killing of civilians as well as rebels.⁸⁷

Slowly, progress was made in securing Cirenaica. By 1927, Volpi's successors in Tripolitania succeeded in consolidating Italian control over the territory retaken by Volpi. Thereafter, the Italian forces in the two colonies which had previously acted independently fighting their own little wars could now consolidate their military operations against Libyan rebels particularly with regard to neighboring territories such as Sirte and Agheila. This was particularly crucial in fighting the Senussi since the main source of their power was the interior deserts which could not be touched until such territories were secured.⁸⁸ By 1929, the Italians controlled most of Cirenaica. The rebels, however, continued to fight on. Mussolini made matters more difficult for the Italian forces by demanding total victory without compromise or negotiation while at the same time trying to reduce the number of troops in Libya, which was a great draw on the Italian Treasury.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 171.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 175.

⁸⁸ Pace, p. 13.

⁸⁹ Smith, Mussolini's Roman Empire, pp. 36-38.

Over the years, Mussolini's impatience with the progress of the war in Cirenaica caused him to go through colonial governors relatively frequently, as compared with Tripolitania. At the start of the war, Lt. General Luigi Bongiovanni was Governor of Cirenaica. He remained in power until May 1924. He was replaced by Lieutenant General Ernesto Mombelli, who remained in power till November 1926. At that point, Mombelli was replaced by General Attilio Teruzzi who ruled for two years until December 1928. For the remainder of the war, Marshal Pietro Badoglio took charge not only as Governor of Cirenaica, but also of Tripolitania. He remained in charge until the end of 1933, after the war had been successfully won. His Vice-Governor from 1930 on was then-Lieutenant General Rodolfo Graziani, a man who would play an important and ruthless part in winning the war.⁹⁰

When Badoglio took over, he reported back to Mussolini that Italian efforts were hampered by corruption among Italian contractors and the military. He also reported that the Mafia was infiltrating the colonial police and the judiciary. Under these difficult circumstances, Mussolini began discussions with Idris, the leader of the Senussi who was now in Egypt, in 1929 and briefly considered a negotiated peace.⁹¹ A cease fire was called in June 1929 which lasted till November 1929.⁹² According to Smith, no serious negotiations were conducted, however, and with the end of the truce, the Italians resumed fighting, taking a harder line than ever.⁹³ The Italians, predictably, blamed the Senussi claiming that they did not negotiate in good faith and that they were the ones who broke the truce.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Istituto Fascista dell'Africa Italiana, Annuario Dell'Africa Italiana, (Rome, 1940) p. 13.

⁹¹ Smith, Mussolini's Roman Empire, pp. 39-40.

⁹² Pace, p. 20.

⁹³ Smith, Mussolini's Roman Empire, pp. 39-40.

⁹⁴ Pace, p. 20.

The Italians took a harder line than ever against the rebels. Graziani threatened, "no rebel will have any peace: neither he, nor his family, nor his vestments, nor his flocks. I will destroy everything, man and material. This is my first word and also my last."⁹⁵ The goal of the Italians now was to totally detach the native population from Omar el Muktar's rebels, who needed their support. To do this, it was necessary to disarm the Cirenaican population and to put a stop to any collaboration with the Senussi.

To this end, Graziani put forth the following code of conduct before the people of Cirenaica:

1. Whoever gives food, arms, munitions to the rebels or in some way helps them will be punished with death.
2. All weapons, without exception, must be turned over to the government which will protect the people, their livestock, and property.
3. There is but one government in Libya: the government of Italy. That which Omar el Muktar calls the "government of the night" will be destroyed and woe to anyone who takes count of it.
4. We combat the Senussi with our eyes open. One thing is the Muslim religion, toward which the Italian Government has always held the deepest respect, and another thing is the Senussi Fraternity, to which one must attribute today's misery in Cirenaica to its sectarian actions.
5. The payment of the tithe to the Senussi is considered an act of connivance with the rebels. Those who pay it will be punished with death. Only the government has the right to collect contributions.

Graziani had this code of conduct published in the local Arab newspaper in Cirenaica called Berid Barca and distributed among the many Arab camps in Cirenaica.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 21.

⁹⁶ Rodolfo Graziani, Pace Romana in Libya (Milan: A. Mondadori, 1937), pp. 266-68.

Despite this and earlier crackdowns, collaboration by Libyan civilians with the Senussi continued. Graziani attributed this to rebel threats and intimidation against anyone who did not collaborate.

On June 25, 1930 the decision was finally made to remove the nomadic population from the Gebel and concentrate them in the western part of Cirenaica around Sirtica. These camps were surrounded by barbed wire. Food for the people was rationed. Pastures for the livestock were very limited. Anyone wanting to go outside the camp had to get special permission.

Special care was taken to separate the people from their leaders. Relatives of the rebels were specially concentrated at el Agheila. Though he frequently stated that most bedouins were coerced into collaborating with the rebels, Graziani tacitly acknowledged the sympathy most Arabs had for the Senussi when he said: "the leaders and populations, stubborn and deaf to every voice of persuasion and admonition, thus received the treatment they deserved."

This harsh policy, which even Graziani described as "radical," lasted nine months and displaced all the nomads of Cirenaica. Though he never gives any statistics on the numbers of Libyans who perished in the camps nor the percentage of livestock lost, the defensive posture he sometimes takes with regard to this action seems to imply that he knew these losses to be considerable.⁹⁷

Italian sources estimate that approximately 53,500 Bedouin were interned into five of what the Italians referred to as "concentration camps." This, of course, was ten years before the term attained an infinitely more negative meaning as part of the Nazi "Final Solution" policy of World War II. The Italian camps, though certainly not desirable places to live, were more akin to the internment camps where the American Government confined Japanese-Americans during the Second World War. Four of these camps were

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 70-72.

large, ranging in size from 8900 to 20,000 internees. The fifth camp at Agheila was much smaller with only 1800 internees. This was the most confining of the five camps because it was here that those most sympathetic to the rebels were kept.

In these camps, water was provided via wells. Daily rations of grain were given to each internee. Some pasture was available for the animals owned by the tribes. Schooling for children and medical services were also available. Those willing to work on civil projects such as the building of roads were paid seven lira per day (approximately 62 cents per day based on the May 27, 1934 exchange rate of 8.9 cents to the lira).⁹⁸ As part of the Italian policy of trying to make the Bedouin give up their nomadic ways in favor of a sedentary, rural existence, the head of each interned family was allowed to farm a 250 square meter plot of land under Italian supervision.⁹⁹

A much more dour picture is painted by Evans-Pritchard who estimates that 80,000 Bedouin men, women, and children and 600,000 animals were confined in the five internment camps. Conditions were harsh and many died from hunger and disease. Evans-Pritchard sadly and rather sentimentally states "Bedouin die in a cage."¹⁰⁰ One estimate has as many as 20,000 people dying in these camps. As to their herds, which had already been decimated by the war, these were nearly wiped out because of the lack of grazing area around the camps. Despite the severity of these actions, even the few pro-imperialist Liberals left in the rubber-stamp Italian parliament approved of this policy.

Other severe actions included the closing of Senussi shrines and the seizure 500,000 acres of Senussi property. Smith claims that a possible reign of terror followed in which hundreds or thousands of Libyans were executed as part of reprisals against communities that supported the rebels.¹⁰¹ The land that was confiscated was

⁹⁸ New York Times, May 27, 1934, Section 2, p. 13.

⁹⁹ Pace, pp. 85-91.

¹⁰⁰ Evans-Pritchard, p. 189.

incorporated into the public domain and was to play an important part in the settlement programs that were to come under Balbo.¹⁰²

As the years passed, the war moved deeper and deeper into the desert where the Senussi had been strongest. The desert below the 29° parallel had been largely unexplored by the Italians because of Senussi control. Now they were able to conduct an operation against the oases of the interior which culminated with the occupation of Cufra in the middle of 1929.¹⁰³

With the majority of Bedouin isolated in the camps and the oases of the interior in Italian hands, the only source of supply the rebels had left was from those Bedouin exiled in Egypt. To cut off such external rebel support, in 1931, Graziani built a barbed wire fence 280 kilometers long extending from El Ramla to the Gulf of Sollum. It was 1.6 meters high and 10 meters deep.¹⁰⁴

All these actions eventually had the desired effect -- the rebellion was crushed. Deprived of even minimal support from their brethren within Cirenaica or those exiled in Egypt, the rebels could no longer operate. Omar was finally captured by the Italians on September 14, 1931¹⁰⁵ and was publicly executed in front of 20,000 Libyans who were forced to watch.¹⁰⁶

What was left of the rebellion soon evaporated without Omar. Amnesty was offered to surrendering rebels first by the vice-governor of Cirenaica and later by Graziani.

¹⁰¹ Smith, Mussolini's Roman Empire, pp. 39-40.

¹⁰² Pace, p. 29.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹⁰⁶ Smith, Mussolini's Roman Empire, pp. 39-40.

Some rebels sadly submitted at long last. Others fled to Egypt and still others died trying to flee. On January 24, 1932, Marshal Badoglio victoriously proclaimed: "I declare that the rebellion in Cirenaica is completely and definitively broken."¹⁰⁷

By the end of the rebellion, Smith estimates that the Bedouin population had decreased from approximately 200,000 to approximately 100,000. Though Mussolini had found the war to be expensive, he had received little pressure on the homefront because the use of black troops meant few Italian casualties.¹⁰⁸

In his book, Pace Romana in Libia, or "Roman Peace in Libya," Graziani attempted to defend the hard-line policy he followed in Libya. He denied that Fascists were anti-Arab and were trying to eliminate Arabs in order to make room for Italian colonists. He pointed to Tripolitania, where rebellion was put down with less severe methods. He also insisted that the Fascists greatly respected the Islamic religion and were at odds only with the pervasive influence of the Senussi, who were forever antagonistic to Italian interests.¹⁰⁹

At one point, he introspectively asks, given a civilian populace that was sympathetic and supportive of the rebels no matter what the government did, what else could he have done in this situation?

His belief was that the only alternative to the policy he followed was to give his troops a free hand in dealing with civilians sympathetic to the rebels. Had this policy been followed, Graziani reasoned that the nomadic population would have completely disappeared from Cirenaica either through death or exile in Egypt. Using this reasoning, he was able to conclude that he had done the most humane thing possible and saved the Bedouin population from complete destruction.

¹⁰⁷ Pace, pp. 33-34.

¹⁰⁸ Smith, Mussolini's Roman Empire, pp. 39-40.

¹⁰⁹ Graziani, pp. 266-67.

This policy, though judged to be excessively cruel by the Arab press and those elements of the foreign press hostile to Italy, was, according to Graziani, absolutely crucial to the ultimate defeat of Omar el Muktar. Graziani took solace in quoting the Romans and Machiavelli to justify his actions.¹¹⁰ Ironically, Evans-Pritchard seems to agree that such extreme measures were necessary to decisively defeat the rebels. Though the Italians were effectively employing the tactics necessary to win a guerrilla war and had already cleared most of Cirenaica, Evans-Pritchard seems to believe that the rebels might have been able to continue fighting much longer.¹¹¹

After the war, the Bedouin were put under strict control. Whenever possible, they were settled down or used as a cheap labor pool for Fascist construction projects. Those who continued in the traditional lifestyle could not return to many of the lands they roamed before because these were marked for settlement by Italians.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 272-73.

¹¹¹ Evans-Pritchard.

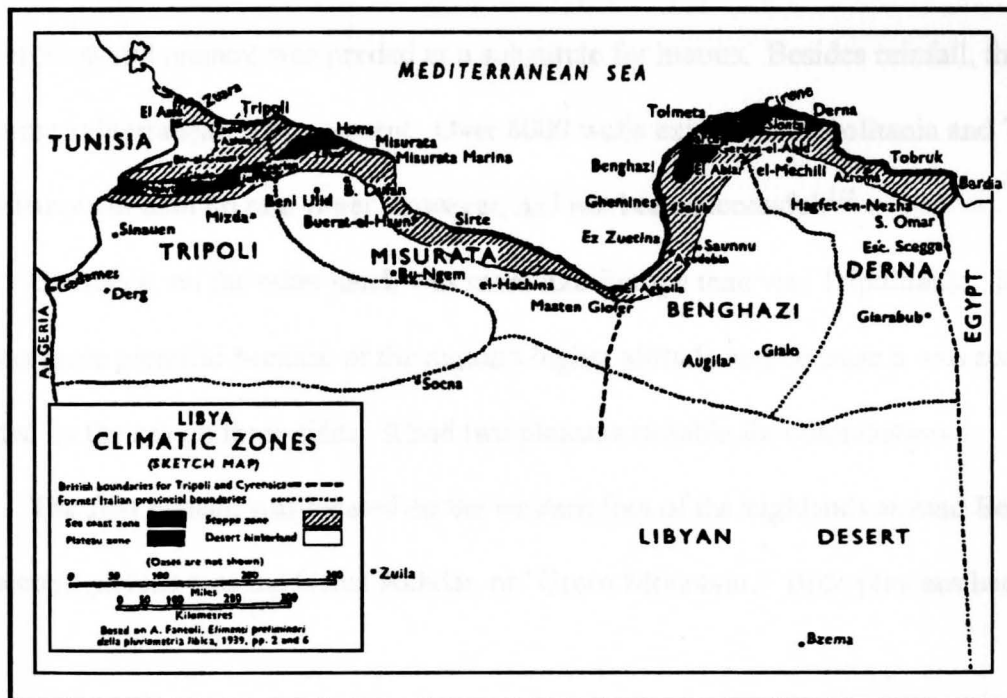
¹¹² Smith, Mussolini's Roman Empire, pp. 39-40.

Chapter Four: Italo Balbo and the "Fourth Shore"

The Geography of Libya

The Italians found the Libyan coast the most suitable for cultivation and colonization. The coastal areas had a Mediterranean climate with rainfall from October through April or May. The interior, on the other hand, was a vast expanse of desert that suffered from the continental climate which was more extreme during summer and winter and had very little rainfall.¹¹³

Table 4-1: Climatic Zones of Libya¹¹⁴



From C.L. Pan, "The Populations of Libya," *Population Studies* 3 (June 1949): 101.

¹¹³ Moore, pp. 58-62.

In Tripolitania, less than half the region has 7.8 inches or more of rain per year -- the minimum rainfall necessary for dry farming. The remaining territory was totally unsuitable for any kind of agriculture. And even in some of the areas that did have sufficient annual rainfall, that rainfall was concentrated in too short a period of the year to support any agricultural activity. The best areas were those around Tripoli and parts of the eastern Gebel.

These conditions limited the variety of crops that could be grown. Further, these conditions made Libya unsuitable for unassisted agricultural entrepreneurial activities. Therefore, extensive agricultural development would require both state assistance and the use of the latest scientific methods of farming. The sandy soil itself was good for growing. The greatest need was water. Further, ramparts needed to be built on to prevent wind erosion and manure was needed as a substitute for humus. Besides rainfall, there was some subterranean water present. Over 8000 wells existed in Tripolitania and Tagiura. Attempts to dam up rain water, however, had not been successful.¹¹⁵

Cirenaica, on the other hand, was more like Europe than was Tripolitania. Rainfall was more plentiful because of the region's higher altitude and because it was surrounded by the sea on three sides. It had two plateaus suitable for colonization.

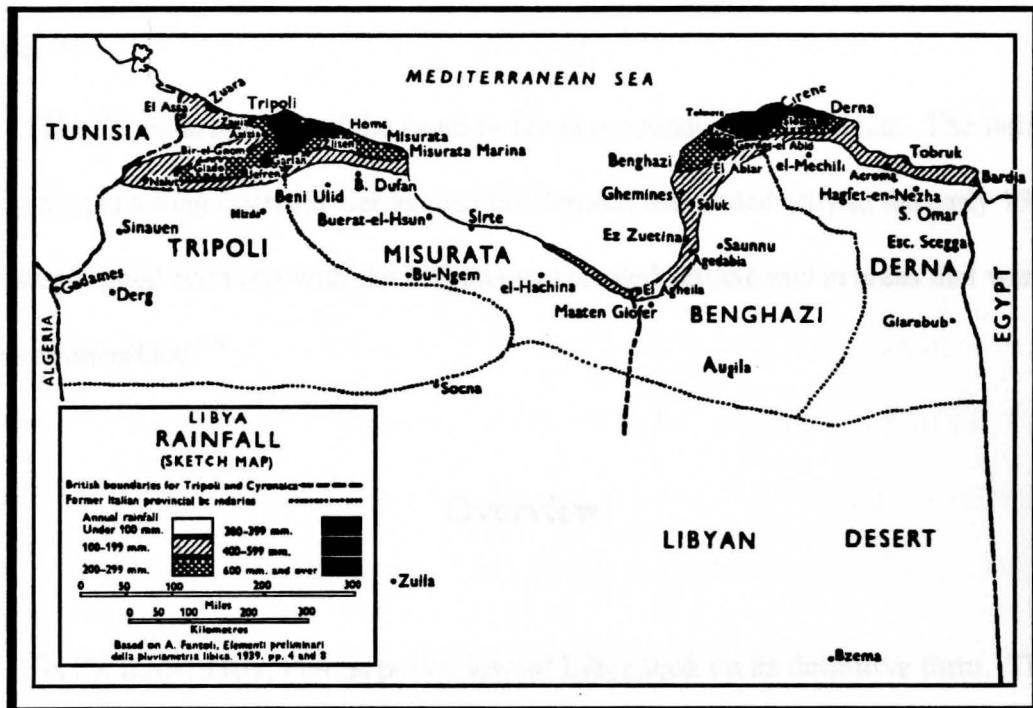
The first plateau was located on the western foot of the highlands around Bengasi. The second plateau was the Gebel Akhdar, or "Green Mountain." Both plateaus had a

¹¹⁴ Segrè, Fourth Shore, p. 37.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-66.

Mediterranean climate and received 400 mm (about 16 inches) of rainfall a year distributed over at least 40 days. This was much better than in drier Tripolitania.¹¹⁶

Table 4-2: Annual Rainfall in Libya¹¹⁷



From C.L. Pan, "The Populations of Libya," *Population Studies* 3 (June 1949): 101.

The soil here had more clay in it, however, and was much more difficult to work with than that in Tripolitania. During the summer, it had a tendency to crack. The best soil in Cirenaica was around the city of Cyrene. Though subterranean water was plentiful, much of it was too deep for irrigation. To deal with many of these problems the Italians were building an expensive aqueduct to draw water from deep springs.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 66-67.

¹¹⁷ Segrè, *Fourth Shore*, p. 37

In Cirenaica, therefore, the best region for colonization was the Green Mountain which is 100 miles long and about 20 miles wide. The lower plateau of the Green Mountain, which included the city of Barce, was the next most fertile. Near Bengasi, the presence of suitable wells made some areas reclaimable though the soil was somewhat shallow.¹¹⁸

The fertile areas around the oases in Libya remained in Arab hands. The Italians, having fought a long guerrilla war against the Senussi that ended only in the early 1930's, now sought good relations with the Libyans and created settlements in areas that were largely uninhabited.¹¹⁹

Overview

In the mid-1930's, Fascist policy toward Libya took on its definitive form. This policy was motivated by three major points. First, Libya was seen as an outlet for Italy's surplus population. In Italy, the Fascists encouraged Italians to have large families despite Italy's small size and the lack of economic opportunities for these people. The traditional outlets for Italian immigrants in North and South America were largely closed, and since the Fascists saw such emigration as injurious to Italy anyway, they tried to enforce the long-held but never utilized Italian imperialist policy of "demographic colonization" by which Italy's colonies were to serve as a major outlet for the Italian population. When

¹¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 68-69.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 70-71.

compared with British colonial experience, the Italians were not trying to emulate the "Raj" of the 19th and 20th centuries that emphasized a plantation-style colonial system where a few Europeans oversaw and profited from the toil and labor of a native population. Instead, the Italian program was much more similar to the British experience in the North American colonies where whole families settled on their own land which they themselves worked.

Second, Libya was seen as an element in fulfilling the Fascist economic policy of autarky. This was a policy by which the nation was to provide for as many of its own economic needs as possible. Local production was to be favored over imports even when the domestic alternative was significantly more expensive. Autarky was an ideal of many nations during the Depression because it was seen as a way of preserving a country's wealth and higher employment levels. Libya, it was felt, could become a major source of grain for Italy as it had been for the Romans more than one thousand years earlier. Autarky was particularly seen as necessary by the Italian government after the League of Nations imposed economic sanctions on Italy during the Ethiopian War.

And third, Libya was considered to be of great strategic importance because of its location between Egypt and Tunisia.

In the past, however, Libya had always been a drain on the coffers of the state. The costs of administering and garrisoning Libya vastly exceeded the economic returns from the colony. The Fascists felt that by developing Libya's agricultural potential and populating it with hard-working Italian peasants, they could eventually make Libya an economic as well as a strategic plus for Italy. Garrisoning Libya would become cheaper

because of the greater availability of locally grown food and the availability of Italian colonists to serve as reservists in the military.¹²⁰ Further, it was felt that such local reservists with their own stake in Libya would be much more motivated to defend the colony than troops with ties only to the mainland. Also, a large Italian population in an agriculturally productive land would lessen the effectiveness of any hostile blockade of Libya.¹²¹

The "Bonifica Integrale"

To understand the policy for agricultural development that was eventually adopted for Libya, one must first look at Mussolini's massive land reclamation campaign in Italy, which was known as the "bonifica integrale." This was a fourteen-year project started in 1928 that involved the draining of marshes and reforestation so as to reclaim between 10,000,000-20,000,000 acres (4,046,944-8,093,889 hectares) of previously worthless Italian land.

Land reform was also an important part of this program. Before 1928, 4% of Italy's landowners owned two thirds of the land. The remaining third was divided into small farms, many too small to provide for the needs of their owners. Most farmers owned no land at all but were sharecroppers. Mussolini broke up many of the larger estates into plots with the landless peasants as tenants who could later buy the land after they had

¹²⁰ Ibid., pp. 13-14. See also Italo Balbo, La colonizzazione in Libia (Firenze: Tipografia Mariano Ricci, 1939), pp. 12-14.

¹²¹ G. L. Steer, A Date in the Desert (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1939), p. 158.

saved enough money. Il Duce also tried to keep farming labor-intensive by stemming the use of machinery that put many out of work.

The Libyan project most clearly resembled the family settlement program for the land that was reclaimed after the draining of the Pontine Marshes. Similar projects had also been done in the Po Valley and in Istria.

The Pontine Marshes Project

The most famous part of this land reclamation program was the Pontine Marshes operation. In this operation, a total of 300 square miles of marshland was drained and in its place, five farm towns were set up. This land was drained by the digging of the Mussolini Canal and two smaller ones. The government then set up power and pumping stations, constructed roads, and erected public buildings. Then, the "Opera Nazionale per i Combattenti" (a veterans' organization, hereafter referred to as the ONC), an agency similar to the ones that were to operate in Libya, divided up the newly-reclaimed land into farms, furnished them, and subsidized the settlement of families for as long as necessary. The size of the individual farms was determined by the fertility of the land. Good soil was divided into farm plots of 25 acres (10 hectares) apiece. Poor soil was divided into farm plots of 40-50 acres (16-20 hectares).

The ONC spent 1000 lira (approximately \$52.60 based on the May 21, 1939 lira to dollar exchange rate)¹²² to set up each farm. In exchange, each benefiting farmer would

¹²² The lira to dollar exchange rate used here and subsequently comes from the New York Times, May 21, 1939, Section 6, p. 4.

pay back the ONC by turning over half his produce each year according to a crop-sharing system until the debt was paid off, at which point the farmer would own the farm entrusted to him. The farmer would also be supervised by the agency, which dictated that crop rotation and other modern agricultural methods be used to make the land as productive and profitable as possible.

By 1937, 120,000 acres (48,563 hectares) were reclaimed and divided into 2574 farms that supported a total population of 30,000. Wheat was the major crop grown, followed by potatoes and sugar beets. The land also supported a total of 20,000 head of cattle, 200 horses, and 5600 pigs. Each farm also averaged 65 head of poultry.¹²³

The Balbo Survey

The final phase of Italy's development of Libya began with the appointment of Air Marshal Italo Balbo as Governor General of Libya in 1933. It was he who developed the final plan to completely utilize the colony's resources through a policy of mass colonization. Libya was to be developed commercially, industrially, and, most importantly, agriculturally to meet the needs of the Italian Kingdom.

Almost immediately the old system of granting large land concessions to wealthy speculators was halted because it failed to attract large numbers of Italian peasant colonists. Instead, it threatened to result in the creation of "latifundia," or plantations, as was common in the colonies of other colonial powers. To draw large numbers of Italian

¹²³ Moore, pp. 84-86.

peasant farmers to a region that was more inhospitable than any part of Italy, a strong incentive was needed. That incentive was land ownership.

In Italy, despite the best efforts of the "bonifica integrale," most peasant farmers remained sharecroppers with little or no land of their own and very little chance of ever having their own farms. Balbo's plan offered some of these peasants the chance to work their own land for their own profit.¹²⁴

As mentioned earlier, this plan followed the examples of the "wheat campaign" and the "integral land reclamation" ("Bonifica Integrale" in Italian) programs in Italy that sought to maximize Italy's arable land and turn more of it over to the poor peasant farmers. It was realized, however, that even when completed, these projects would not provide enough land for the majority of poor Italian peasants. Some of the large land estates would have to be broken up, but even this would take time. The Fascists, therefore, looked to Italy's colonies as part of the solution to the land problem. Of these, Eritrea and Somaliland were considered unsuitable because of their distance from Italy, the lack of arable land, and because of hostilities along the Abyssinian border. This left only the unpromising Libyan "sandbox" with its proximity to Italy and its stable political situation as the best hope.

Upon taking charge, Balbo commissioned an extensive survey of the coastal region and the Steppes to compile as much useful data as possible on the potential agricultural uses, if any, of the land involved and to prospect for subterranean water to support agriculture. The best areas in terms of soil quality and availability of water were then

¹²⁴ Italian Library of Information, New York, The Italian Empire, Libya, 1940, pp. 54-55.

chosen for experimentation. Settlements were established in which specially chosen colonists farmed the land under the supervision and guidance of agricultural experts.

From 1933 to 1935, five major settlements were established -- Razza, Maddalena, Beda Littoria, Berta, and Luigi di Savoia. Each was set up as a model rural village with all the necessary public services -- schools, hospitals, postal and telegraph offices, etc. Each family of colonists within this community was given a fully-equipped farm with a farmhouse, the necessary farm tools, etc.¹²⁵

Before 1933, a total of 258,972 acres (104,804 hectares) of Libyan land had been granted to 378 concessionaires for agricultural development. By April 1936, 427,310 acres (172,930 hectares) were being farmed by 2683 families, most of whom had been settled as part of the Balbo survey. This success allowed Balbo to develop his ultimate plan for mass colonization which he completed in March 1937 and submitted to Mussolini and his ministers.¹²⁶

In the short term, this plan sought to settle 20,000 Italian colonists a year for a five year period. In the long run, it was felt that up to 500,000 Italians could be settled in Libya.¹²⁷

Balbo's plan was promptly accepted. And in support of it, the Grand Council of Fascism declared that, as of October 25, 1938, the provinces of Tripoli, Misurata, Bengasi, and Derna were now to be the 19th Region of the Kingdom of Italy. Italian colonists

¹²⁵ Ibid., pp. 55-59.

¹²⁶ Ibid., pp. 60-61.

¹²⁷ Steer, p. 157.

who moved to Libya would now retain all their rights as Italian citizens and be governed by the laws of Italy. Italy now had its "Quarta Sponda" or "Fourth Shore." The other three were metropolitan Italy's coasts along the Ligurian, Tyrrhenian, and Adriatic Seas.¹²⁸

The Colonial Government's Role: The Building of Infrastructure

To make Libya both attractive and practical for colonization, it was necessary for the Italian government to build up Libya's almost non-existent infrastructure. Whereas in lands rich in resources, one could expect settlers and speculators to come without such an infrastructure already in place, the Libyan situation was different. Here, the land was poor and a well-developed infrastructure was needed to make even meager profits possible in the first place.

Balbo prepared for the new demographic colonization plan by incorporating 1,250,000 acres (505,868 hectares) of land.¹²⁹ By May 31, 1938, he controlled a total of 737,216 hectares (1,796,950 acres) in the Libyan public domain. Of these, 246,455 hectares (608,990 hectares) were in Tripolitania and 491,861 hectares (1,215,388 acres) in Cirenaica.¹³⁰ He had up to 60,000,000 lire with which to compensate any Arabs who might be displaced. He had eight new villages built on this land. He extended seven existing villages and founded another five centers smaller than villages.¹³¹

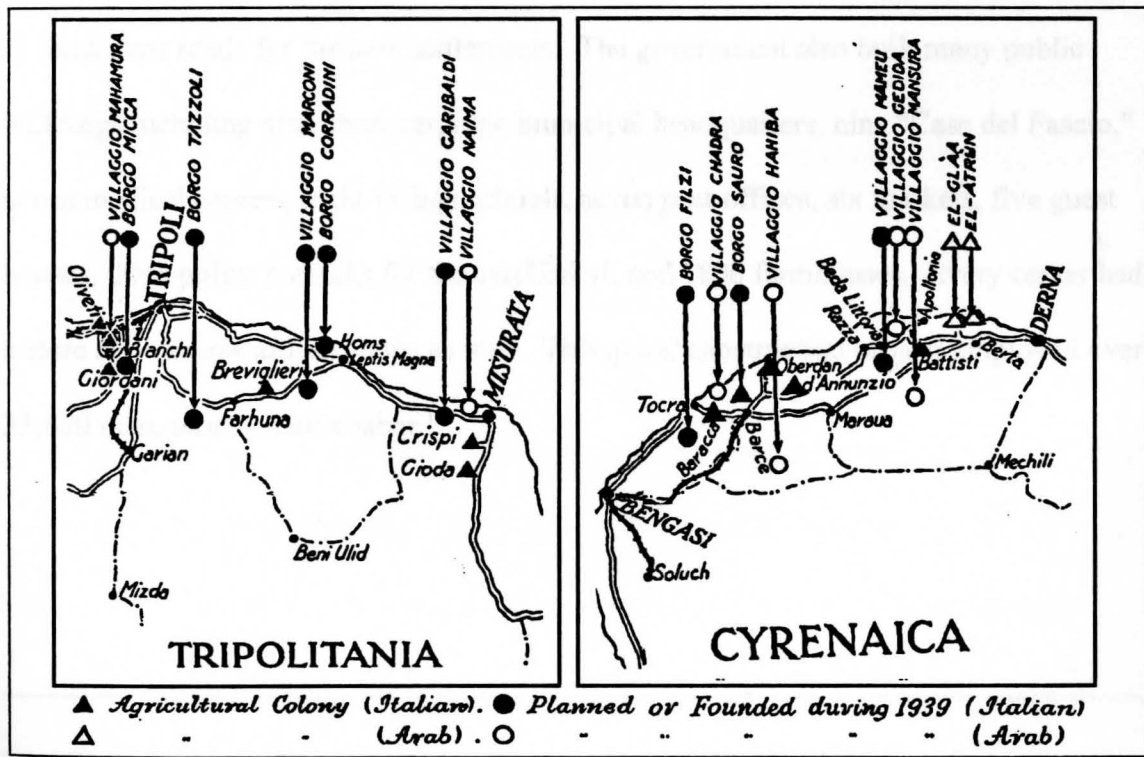
¹²⁸ Italian Library, *Italian Empire*, pp. 60-61.

¹²⁹ Moore, p. 88.

¹³⁰ Balbo, p. 16.

With an adequate amount of land at his disposal, he now had to make sure that sufficient water would be available to make this land cultivable. He had a thorough survey made of the water resources available to this land.¹³² West of Tripoli, a small supply of water was found at 45 to 80 feet. Each of the 317 semi-irrigated farms of Oliveti, Bianchi, and Giordani had its own well which tapped into this supply of water. To the east, in Cirenaica, a large deposit of water was found at 1300 feet. Two villages south of Misurata, Crispi, with a total of 318 families, and Gioda, with 100 families, were dependent on the sixteen wells dug to reach this water. The water from these wells was conveyed to seventy storage basins to irrigate 11,300 acres (4573 hectares).¹³³

Maps 4-3 & 4-4: Italian Agricultural Villages in Libya¹³⁴



¹³¹ Moore, p. 88.

¹³² Moore, p. 88.

¹³³ Ibid., pp. 88-91.

To service the greatest amount of land in Cirenaica, the Gebel aqueduct was being constructed for completion in 1939. It was to be 100 miles long and would cost a total of 700,000 lira (approximately \$36,820). It was to distribute water between Cyrene and Barce at the rate of 152,555 cubic feet or 4320 cubic meters daily.

For Tripolitania, another aqueduct of 50 miles in length would pump 38,000 cubic feet daily. It would provide 19 miles of primary canalization, 88 miles of secondary canalization, and 280 miles of tertiary canalization. Twenty-two miles of pipeline were used to convey water to the 250 miles of minor irrigation channels that served 317 individual semi-irrigated farms.¹³⁵

Aside from dealing with water problems, the government would build 155 miles of third class roads for the new settlements. The government also built many public buildings including nine churches, nine municipal headquarters, nine "Case del Fascio," seven medical centers, eight village schools, seven post offices, six markets, five guest houses, three police barracks for the carabinieri, and 1800 farmhouses. Every center had a store and various artisan shops as well. This grand construction project employed over 33,000 men, mostly native labor.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Steer, p. 155.

¹³⁵ Moore, pp. 88-91.

¹³⁶ Ibid., pp. 92-93.

The Building of the "Litoranea"

One of the most ambitious projects in the development of Libya aside the mass colonization campaign was the building of the "Litoranea," a coastal highway extending 1132 miles from the Tunisian border to the Egyptian border. This highway, along with improved air service, served to greatly improve communications within Libya and it helped to bind Tripolitania and Cirenaica more closely together as one colony. All the new villages for Italian colonists were located nearby this highway to facilitate transportation for people and produce.

The most important purpose for the Litoranea was its strategic military value. It greatly facilitated the rapid transportation of soldiers from one part of the colony to the other. It was no longer necessary to set up many isolated garrisons throughout Libya. The same job could be done by fewer troops, saving much money and reducing the expense of maintaining the colony.¹³⁷

The project began in 1935 when the Council of Ministers in Italy approved 1,030,000 lire. Balbo used this money to have 505 miles of road built. He used these roads to connect previously built roadways into a 1000-mile highway. To make this highway quickly and cost-effectively, Balbo divided the 505 miles of road work into sixteen sectors and chose thirteen different firms to complete one or more of these sectors.

Work on the Litoranea began in October 1935 at a cost of 1000 lira (approximately \$52.60) per kilometer of road. This project employed 13,000 men, less than 1000 of whom were Italian. Along this highway, 65 "case cantoniere" were

¹³⁷ Ibid., pp. 195-98.

constructed. These were the homes of two families of roadmen. Each roadman was responsible for keeping 17 miles free from sand and other debris. Besides a salary from the state, each roadman also had some land to farm as well. These "case cantoniere" were seen as potential nuclei for future settlements.¹³⁸

The Machinery of Agricultural Settlement

To improve this balance in favor of the small peasant farmer rather than the large plantation owners, several organizations were founded, some private and some public. The "Ente per la Colonizzazione di Cirenaica" (Corporation for the Colonization of Cirenaica) was founded by Luigi Razza in 1932 for the purpose of settling peasant families on farms in Cirenaica. In 1935, Balbo expanded this organization to include Tripolitania, renamed it the "Ente per la Colonizzazione della Libia" (Corporation for the Colonization of Libya, hereafter referred to as the "Ente").¹³⁹ This agency was financed by the State.¹⁴⁰

Another agency that became involved in the mass colonization was the "Istituto Nazionale Fascista della Previdenza Sociale" (National Fascist Institute for Social Insurance, hereafter called the "Institute"). Originally, this agency was involved with old age, sickness, unemployment, and maternity benefits. It became responsible for land reclamation and settlement as well in 1935.¹⁴¹ The Institute was funded by contributions to the National Insurance.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ Ibid., pp. 199-207.

¹³⁹ Segrè, *Fourth Shore*, p. 90.

¹⁴⁰ Moore, p. 84.

A third agency involved in this project was the "Azienda Tabacchi Italiani" (Italian Tobacco Agency, hereafter referred to as the ATI). It originally concentrated on the growth of tobacco but expanded beyond tobacco-growing in 1933.

In 1937, these agencies controlled a total of 147,000 acres (59,490 hectares), of which four-fifths were not yet under cultivation. The Ente controlled 132,000 (53,419 hectares) of these acres. The Institute had 11,000 to 12,000 acres (4451 to 4856 hectares) on which were settled 31 families. The ATI had 4000 acres (1619 hectares), all of which was under cultivation and which supported 430 families.¹⁴³

The reclamation process began with the government, which incorporated the reclaimable land, paying compensation to the native owners. The government would then give this land free to the Ente and the Institute. Further, the government would then lay roads, drill water wells, build aqueducts, churches, municipal centers, Fascist headquarters, and all other public works necessary to pave the way for the mass colonization.

With the proper infrastructure in place, the Ente and the Institute would take charge of development through government aid and continual supervision of colonial settlers. The Ente and the Institute would then study the land turned over to them and determine what type of farming was best suited to the land -- irrigated, semi-irrigated, or dry farming. This information would then determine what the size of individual holdings would be and the total number of farms that could be gotten out of a given area.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 80. See also Balbo p. 16.

¹⁴² Moore, p. 84.

¹⁴³ Ibid., pp. 80-81.

Once the land was divided up, the Ente and the Institute would build homes on the land, provide the homes with furniture, prepare the land for cultivation, provide the farm with all the necessary tools, seed, fodder, and livestock.¹⁴⁴

The Building of the Farms

The Libyan colonial government paid a total of 1,100,000 lire to prepare for the "ventimille" including 200,000 lire to compensate Arabs who lost their land. This also included the sum needed to build the aqueduct in Cirenaica. Future settlers were expected to be added to these new villages so that much of the expense would not need to be repeated for each new wave of settlers.

Each of the farms was built to uniform standards. Each farm had the same buildings, equipment, amount of seed, and livestock. As with the Pontine Marshes project, however, the size of the farm plot varied with quality of the soil and the availability of water. The Ente and the Institute, guided by these factors, sought to make the plots large enough so that large families could make a living off them.¹⁴⁵ In general, the size of the individual farm was inversely proportional to the amount of water available to it.¹⁴⁶

Besides making the farms large enough to be self-sufficient, the Ente and the Institute also made sure that the farms produced the kinds of crops that Italy imported, such

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 82-83. See also Balbo pp. 16-17.

¹⁴⁵ Moore, pp. 94-96.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 102.

as cereals and olives. Beyond this, each farm was allowed a garden for family needs. A portion of land was also permitted for the growing of fodder.¹⁴⁷

On the basis of the availability of water, there came to be three types of farm holdings. In the villages of Crispi and Gioda, which had an abundant supply of water, there were 400 "irrigated" farms with 37 acres (15 hectares) apiece. Of this acreage, 25 to 30 acres (10.1 to 12.1 hectares) were irrigated while 7 to 12 acres (2.8 to 4.9 hectares) were used for dry farming. Approximately 10 to 12 acres (4 to 4.9 hectares) went towards growing cereals. Another 6 to 9 acres (2.4 to 3.6 hectares) went towards truck farming -- the growth of one or more vegetable crops on a large scale for distant markets where the cultivation of said crops is limited by climate. About 2 1/2 acres (1 hectare) was dedicated to Spring and Summer crops. Another 5 acres (2 hectares) for industrial crops. And about one acre (.40 hectares) for medicinal plants. The acres set aside for dry farming were used to grow olives. These were the smallest farms.

In the villages of Bianchi, Oliveti, and Giordani, which had a lesser supply of water, there were "semi-irrigated" farms that varied in size from 62 to 74 acres (25 to 30 hectares). Of this acreage, only 12 to 13 acres (4.9 to 5.3 hectares) were used for irrigated farming. The other 50 to 60 acres (20.2 to 24.3 hectares) were used for dry farming. Half of the irrigated land went for wheat; the other half went for tobacco plants or citrus fruits. Of the non-irrigated soil, about 32 1/2 acres (13.1 hectares) was planted with olive trees. About 7 1/2 acres (3 hectares) were dedicated to almond trees. To make the most

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 94-101.

efficient use of the land, grape vines were grown between olive trees on about 7 1/2 acres (3 hectares) of land.¹⁴⁸

The third type of farm holding, which had to rely exclusively on rainwater, came in two subtypes. One of these was found in villages like Breviglieri, located southeast of Tripoli. Here there were 230 "dry" farms in a hilly area. Though there was some variation in size, these were by far the largest farms averaging 124 acres (50.2 hectares) each. Fifty acres (20.2 hectares) was devoted solely to olive trees. Another 12 1/2 acres (5.1 hectares) combined olive trees with grape vines. About 12 1/2 acres (5.1 hectares) were given over to almond trees. About 36 1/2 acres (14.8 hectares) was devoted to plowed crops such as sorghum and alfalfa grass. And no more than 2 1/2 acres (1 hectare) were devoted to growing fruit trees. There was little, if any irrigation.

This land stood to benefit a great deal when the aqueduct was to come on line. At that point, more irrigation could be done and a greater variety of crops could be grown. Once the water supply was put on a par with farms in other areas, these large farms would be reduced in size and the excess acreage would be divided into other farms.

The second type of dry farm was found in Cirenaica. Here, the situation was different from that in Tripolitania. Villages such as Baracca, Oberdan, D'Annunzio, and Battisti had soil that was red and rich -- of higher quality than that around Tripoli. Unfortunately, there were few wells, so this area also had to rely mostly on rain. The aqueduct promised to improve this situation dramatically. In the meantime, holdings were large, about 74 to 75 acres (29.9 to 30.4 hectares) each. Most of this, about 46 acres (18.6

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 102-104 and Italian Library, *Italian Empire*, pp. 68-69. See also Balbo, p. 18.

hectares) per farm, was used for the growing of grain. Approximately 17 1/2 acres (7.1 hectares) were planted with olive trees. Another 5 acres (2 hectares) for almond trees. About two to three acres (around 1 hectare) was set aside for grape vines. And only 1 acre (.40 hectares) was dedicated to fruit trees such as melons and figs.¹⁴⁹

Beyond reclaiming land for farming, the government also engaged in reforestation efforts to prevent the expansion of desert. Trees were planted around Tripoli to provide wind protection and bind the sand.¹⁵⁰

Peasant Repayment for Farms

With every furnished farm, the peasant family was also given what was called an "estate book." This book recorded all payments made by the farmer over a 20, 25, or 30 year period. The repayment process was to go through stages. At the end of the third stage, the farmer was to be full owner of his farm.

The first stage was the wage-earning stage. Each farmer, upon arriving on his farm, was made an employee of the state and paid 6 lire 10 soldi monthly. This was to last about a year until the first harvests came in and the farm started to make money.

At this point, the second stage, profit-sharing, began. This was similar to crop-sharing in Italy. The farmer would turn his crops over to the state which would then sell them. Half of the profits from the sale would go to the farmer and the other half would

¹⁴⁹ Moore, pp. 107-10 and Italian Library, Italian Empire, p. 69. See also Balbo, p. 18.

¹⁵⁰ Moore, pp. 106-07.

go towards paying back the state. This period of "metayage" was expected to last five years but it could go on longer or shorter depending upon the financial state of the individual farmer.

At the end of the second stage, the farmer moved into the mortgage repayment stage. By the end of this stage, the farmer would have succeeded in paying back 70% of the government's cost for constructing the farm, the cost of seed provided by the Institute or the Ente during the period of metayage, and the cost of any loans. The mortgage interest rate on top of this was only 2%. The remaining 30% of the government's cost of constructing the farm was a gift to the farmer. The cost of each farm ranged from 1350 lire to 1850 lire.

At the start of this third stage, the farmer started out as the official holder of his land. During the first three years of this stage, he was expected to pay only his interest. After nine years, he would become full owner of the land he farmed.

Even after the peasant became the owner of his land, he still had to obey the Ente or the Institute and produce the crops they compelled him to cultivate using the modern methods they taught him.¹⁵¹

The Selection of the "Ventimille"

The colonists who were to work and eventually own these farms were chosen with great care by commissions consisting of doctors, agricultural experts, and Fascist Party officials. They made their choices based on the following criteria:

¹⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 132-41.

- (1) The colonists had to be genuine peasants. No middle-class types allowed.
- (2) Colonists had to come in large families with at least eight total members and at least five old enough to work in the field. No hired labor was allowed. The average family size of the group chosen was greater than eleven members.
- (3) All family members had to pass three medical tests.
 - (i) All had to be in generally good health and have good physiques.
 - (ii) All had to be free of tuberculosis.
 - (iii) All had to be free of trachoma, a common eye disease in Libya.
- (4) The families had to be politically sound. Fascists were given preference. No anti-Fascists or ex-criminals allowed.
- (5) The agricultural experts checked out each family's record as farmers.
- (6) The family members should be able to read and write.¹⁵²

The 1800 families chosen for the "ventimille," the initial wave of the mass migration plan, were drawn mostly from densely populated areas in the Veneto region. Some 1200 families were from districts between Ferrara and the River Piave. Less than 400 families came from the Italian South. This was somewhat ironic given that part of the initial reasoning for the acquisition of colonies was to relieve the poverty of the Italian South, particularly Sicily.¹⁵³

In October 1938, these first 1800 families, a total of about 20,000 people (hence the term "ventimille"), were loaded onto sixteen ships bound for Libya. Martin Moore, a correspondent for the English Daily Telegraph, observed first hand this initial wave of the mass migration of Italian peasants to Libya when he traveled with the "ventimille" (the "twenty thousand") in 1938.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Ibid., pp. 20-23.

¹⁵³ Ibid., pp. 24-29.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 17.

The whole process was orchestrated with much pageantry which Moore described as having the air of a "gold rush." He was also impressed by the great speed, the "Fascist tempo," with which the project was completed.¹⁵⁵

On October 27, 1938 -- the anniversary of Mussolini's March on Rome -- 1430 of these chosen families left from Genoa.¹⁵⁶ They traveled aboard eight steamships and the luxurious cruise ship Vulcania and were escorted by two destroyers. The next day, they were joined by six ships from Naples carrying 240 families from the South. A final transport with 130 families left from Syracuse and completed the convoy. Mussolini reviewed this flotilla from the cruiser Trieste.¹⁵⁷

Balbo's Policies toward the Natives

In developing Libya for Italian settlement, Balbo displaced few sedentary Libyans. The biggest disputes came when he tried to develop as farmland land that had been used as grazing fields by nomadic and semi-nomadic Libyans, particularly in Cirenaica.¹⁵⁸

To facilitate peaceful coexistence between Libyans and Italians, Balbo sought to alter the living patterns of non-sedentary Libyans. He wanted those who were semi-nomadic to adopt sedentary lifestyles and he wanted those who were fully nomadic to

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 18-19.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 38-39.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 49-53.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 172.

adopt at least semi-nomadic if not fully sedentary ways. Only by doing this could the maximum amount of Libyan territory to be developed as farmland.¹⁵⁹

In Libya, as in the colonies of other European countries, all or most institutions -- schools, hospitals, the army, Fascist organizations -- were organized according to a system of segregation similar to "apartheid" in South Africa. Arabs were not to compete with Italians. For the most part, they were to make up a peasant class complementary to the Italian settlers. Those Arabs with higher ambitions could attain only the lowest positions in the professions and in the colonial administration.¹⁶⁰

Unlike the United States during this period, there was no official segregation concerning the right to use public facilities or shop at private stores. Libyans could travel first class or shop at any store provided they had the means. Since most Libyans were poor, however, such places were effectively segregated as well. Thus, unofficial segregation picked up where official segregation left off.¹⁶¹

Within these limitations, however, Balbo did make a genuine effort to build good will between the Libyans and the Italians and raise the living standards of the Libyans. He saw this as absolutely necessary to maintain the peace that was necessary to develop Libya.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 171. See also Balbo pp. 21-22.

¹⁶⁰ George Kirk, Survey of International Affairs 1939-1946: The Middle East in the War, London: Oxford University Press, 1952, p. 380.

¹⁶¹ Steer, p. 163.

¹⁶² Moore, pp. 167-69.

Balbo was fortunate to arrive in Libya after the fighting had ended, so the Libyans had no special ill will toward him as they most certainly had for Graziani or Badoglio. He quickly went about trying to gain the goodwill of the Libyan people. One particularly famous exploit toward this end occurred during a Libyan drought in 1936. He had 300,000 head of Arab cattle transported by ship from Tripoli, where conditions were particularly bad, to Cirenaica. When the drought was over, he had the Libyan herdsmen walk their flocks back to Tripoli, making sure that adequate water and food were available along the way, so that a greater number of Libyans could see his benevolence.¹⁶³

Other more practical forms of aid included helping Libyans dig wells. He had Italian agricultural experts provide Libyan farmers with seed and counseling. He also set a minimum "fair wage" for Libyans who did most of the physical labor necessary to pave the way for Italian colonists such as the building of roads and farms.

Balbo and his predecessors had long sought to avoid religious animosity between Catholic Italians and Muslim Libyans. The Libyan colonial government pledged to protect the Islamic faith and even built mosques for the Libyans. When dealing with Arab problems, the Libyan government always consulted with Arab leaders.¹⁶⁴

Balbo also sought to improve the education of Libyans which had been extremely poor even by the standards of the Arab world. Bilingual schools for Arab boys were set up in most villages. In 1935, the College of Islamic Culture was set up in Tripoli to train Arab civil servants, teachers, and future muftis. This college also served the purpose of

¹⁶³ Ibid., pp. 172-73.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 174-78.

preventing Libyans from going abroad for their education to places where they might be exposed to anti-Italian ideas.¹⁶⁵

With regard to Arab females, Balbo consulted with Arab leaders and sought their approval for female schools. A limited number of Arab women had been trained as nurses to provide the Arab population with modern health care. These nurses assisted Italian doctors with the mobile health service that went out to care for the Arab population. Special emphasis was placed on the treatment of trachoma. As a result of peace and the provision of some modern health services, the Arab population in Libya was beginning to increase again in the late 1930's for the first time since the Italians took over Libya.¹⁶⁶

To gradually win over Arabs to Fascism, Balbo founded the "Gioventù Araba del Litorio," a Fascist organization for young boys modeled after similar youth organizations in Italy. Though all real decisions in Libya were made by Italians, Balbo did welcome input from Arabs favorably disposed toward fascism.¹⁶⁷

The most interesting of Balbo's plans for the Arabs and certainly the most ambitious was his farm settlement program for dispossessed Arabs. This program was similar to what was being done for Italian farmers though on a smaller scale. This program was put into effect by the law of April 3, 1937. The approach of this program differed from that for the Italian settlers in that it was to conform to native Libyan customs and their

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 179-81.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 181-84.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 185-86.

"limited ability" as farmers. The Libyans, it was held, knew "nothing about irrigation, use of modern farm implements," or the different crops it was possible to grow on the land.

At the time the "ventimille" had arrived in Libya, there were already two Arab villages developed along this model in Cirenaica -- El Glàa and El Atrùn. The Arab farmers in these villages had holdings of three to twelve acres (1.2 to 4.9 hectares) -- much smaller than those given to Italians. Two thirds of this land was used to grow date palms, citrus and other fruits. One third of the land was irrigated and used to grow cereals, fodder, and vegetables. Four other similar villages were planned.¹⁶⁸

For those Arabs who were already established as farmers and set in their ways, grants and subsidies were provided to do with as they pleased. And as to the Arabs who refused any type of sedentary lifestyle, Balbo had two pastoral sites set up for them and he also had Italian agricultural experts help improve their stocks. Such pastoral herding was reserved for the Arabs since it was not labor-intensive enough to employ many Italian colonists.¹⁶⁹

Though Balbo was supported by Mussolini in most of his policies toward Libya, there was one area where they parted company -- the issue of Italian citizenship for Libyans. Since the Organic Administrative Law for Libya of 1934, native Libyans were legally regarded as "Italo-Libyan citizens." This was a form of second class citizenship that allowed the Libyans to participate in the administration of the colony with the previously-mentioned limitations. It did allow them some autonomy in governing themselves. There

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 187-90. See also Balbo pp. 22-23.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 190-94.

were Sciaraitica Courts for Libyan Muslims and Rabbinical Courts for Libyan Jews to deal with tribal and religious matters.¹⁷⁰ In addition to wanting the four coastal provinces of Libya -- Tripoli, Bengasi, Derna, and Misurata -- formally annexed to Italy, Balbo also wanted to grant full Italian citizenship to all Libyans. He formally requested this in October 1938. He felt that this was needed to reward the many Libyan soldiers who had served loyally in the Ethiopian campaign. He also felt that granting such citizenship would help avert the rise of Libyan nationalism.¹⁷¹

Though Fascist Italy was never to reach the extremes of racist thought and action that Nazi Germany did, racism did come to play a role in Fascist policies particularly in the late 1930's as German influence was rising. Throughout the empire, interracial marriages or cohabitation of any kind were strictly forbidden. The Fascists wanted to "prevent the birth of racially mixed children who might pollute the Italian race." They felt that brown and black-skinned people were irreversibly inferior to whites.¹⁷² Given such racist sentiments, it is no surprise that what was ultimately granted fell far short of the full citizenship Balbo desired.

The Fascist Grand Council agreed to incorporate the four coastal provinces of Libya as the 19th region of Italy. As to citizenship, however, they made available to Libyans who met certain requirements a "special Italian citizenship."¹⁷³ This was a form of

¹⁷⁰ Italian Library, Italian Empire, pp. 33-34.

¹⁷¹ Segrè, Balbo, pp. 328-29.

¹⁷² Luigi Preti, "Fascist Imperialism and Racism," The Ax Within: Italian Fascism in Action, ed. Roland Sarti (New York: Franklin Watts, 1974), 190-91.

¹⁷³ Ibid., pp. 195-96.

second-class citizenship that gave Libyans special rights within Libya. Such citizens could serve as mayors of Arab communities, pursue careers in the military or the government so long as they did not serve over any Italians, and they could join Fascist organizations for Arabs. They could accept this citizenship without losing their status as Moslems as previous conditions for citizenship required. Still, this limited citizenship clearly illustrated the subordinate status of Libyans in the colony and it also went out of its way to prevent any influx of Arabs to the Italian mainland.¹⁷⁴

G. L. Steer, a British journalist who visited Libya and Tunisia just before World War Two, wrote the book A Date in the Desert to chronicle his journey and observations. He noted that the Libyan Arabs, though poorer and less educated than the Arabs of Tunisia, were still much wealthier now than they had ever been. And despite the recent war against the Italians, Steer felt they neither loved nor hated the Italians. If war came, they would fight for those who paid them best. Rather prophetically, he felt that only a decisive defeat of the Italians would reignite the spirit of rebellion in the Libyans.¹⁷⁵

Ultimately, this proved to be true. When war came, the Italians started the African campaign with a force that was one-third Libyan. The stunning defeat of the Italian force in Egypt and the subsequent retreat to Tripolitania, until Rommel's forces arrived, led to a massive uprising in Cirenaica in which Italian colonists in Cirenaica suffered greatly at the hands of Senussi sympathizers out for vengeance. Overall, when offered

¹⁷⁴ Segrè, Balbo, pp. 329-30.

¹⁷⁵ Steer, pp. 166-67.

the possibility of independence by the British, most Libyans quickly turned on their colonial masters.

There are, however, a number of indications that the Italian efforts were not entirely ineffective. During the Ethiopian Campaign, native Libyan troops served the Italians loyally. The Libyan historian Mohamed Ben Massaud Fushaika, who wrote A Short History of Libya during the rule of the Senussi dynasty in postwar Libya, is surprisingly positive about Italian efforts to develop Libya. He credits the Italians for digging wells, developing agriculture, and modernizing everything in general. He even goes so far as to state "...under the governorship of Marshal Balbo, Libya reached the highest standard of living it had ever known."¹⁷⁶

Foreign Opinion Regarding Balbo and His Development Plans

Many foreign observers and journalists who came to see firsthand Italy's colonization program in Libya went away impressed. Such favorable impressions were to a large degree inspired by Balbo. Though a devout Fascist, his charm won over many from democratic nations who might otherwise look less favorably upon any Fascist undertaking.

Martin Moore, from England, saw Balbo as an energetic, charismatic leader who carefully planned everything.¹⁷⁷ He writes:

¹⁷⁶ Professor Mohamed Ben Massaud Fushaika, A Short History of Libya (Tripoli: The Government Printing Press, 1962), pp. 58-60.

¹⁷⁷ Moore, pp. 152-61.

The outstanding characteristics of Balbo's personality are his personal charm and his gay enthusiasm for whatever happens to be engaging his attention. Prejudice against the régime cannot long remain unqualified by liking for the man. Liking for the man quickly begets admiration for his achievements.¹⁷⁸

G. L. Steer, another British journalist, visited Libya in 1939 as the coming of World War II became more imminent. Despite his appreciation for this fact and the likelihood that Italy would join forces with Germany should war break out, he too, was greatly impressed and charmed by Balbo. He prophetically wrote: "...I believe that short of a world war, it [the colonization effort] will succeed. For it is carried through with the determination of the State and the personal enthusiasm of Marshal Balbo."¹⁷⁹ Overall, in comparing Libya to Tunisia, he felt that the Italians had done far more in terms of developing their colony's resources to the fullest than the French had in Tunisia. He did credit the French with offering greater equality to their Arabs than the Italians did.¹⁸⁰

Overall, Moore had a favorable view of Italy's development of Libya. He saw the acquisition of Libya as having been motivated by legitimate strategic reasons. He felt that the present programs being implemented in Libya were an outgrowth of Italy's near loss of Libya during World War I. This war showed that a large Italian population was necessary for Italy to retain Libya during wartime when there was always the threat that the colony might be cut off from the mother country for significant periods of time. It was also important to develop Libya's resources to make her self-sustaining under dire circumstances and to make her less of a burden on Italy during peacetime.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 164-65.

¹⁷⁹ Steer, p. 157.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. pp. 239-47.

¹⁸¹ Moore, pp. 210-12.

He did not see the policy of demographic colonization as being realistic. Italy's annual growth rate during the late 1930's was over 400,000 per year. The most optimistic colonization forecasts saw the Italian population in Libya growing to no more than 500,000 within 25 years.

In terms of the colony's contributions to Italy's economic autarky policy, Moore was impressed by the farms in Libya and felt they could make a reasonable contribution to the country. He felt that the corn and olive oil which Italy had to import could eventually be supplied by Libya.¹⁸²

Overall, Moore felt that Italy's colonization and development programs would work so long as sufficient funds were forthcoming.¹⁸³ He thought the Italian experience was, in many respects, a good example for overcrowded countries like Britain which might need to engage in such settlement programs in their colonies.¹⁸⁴

Final Results of the Balbo Program

As the program finally appeared to be taking hold and beginning to bear fruit, World War II intervened and Mussolini's disastrous decision to join the conflict put an end to Italy's "Fourth Shore." Of the five waves of settlement planned, the first went on as planned and settled approximately 20,000 colonists. The second wave of colonists,

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 213.

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 216.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 224-26.

which came in 1939, was reduced to only 10,000 new colonists.¹⁸⁵ This was probably the result of the expectation of war and the resulting change in priorities that war brought with it. The remaining waves never occurred because of the war and Italy's loss of her colony.

One can only speculate what the ultimate outcome of this program would have been had it been allowed to proceed. Some material for such speculation is found in Table 4-1 which shows the Libyan balance of trade before the start of the program through its initial (and ultimately final) stages. In 1934, the ratio was more than 7-1. By 1937, this had decreased to about 5-1 before going up again in 1938.

Table 4-1: Libyan Imports and Exports: 1934-1938¹⁸⁶

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>IMPORTS</u>	<u>EXPORTS</u>	<u>RATIO</u>
1934	285,988	39,158	7.3-1
1935	343,168 (398,086)*	61,171 (59,713)	5.6-1 (6.7-1)
1936	622,975	107,859	5.8-1
1937	623,524	121,652	5.1-1
1938	882,058	108,962	8-1

*For the year 1935, there was a discrepancy between export and import totals shown on tables that enumerated the quantities of different products making up exports and imports versus the tables enumerating how many of Libya's imports and exports came or went to various countries.

¹⁸⁵ Segrè, Fourth Shore, p. 111.

¹⁸⁶ Figures for 1934-36 derived from Istituto fascista dell'africa italiana, Annuario dell'Africa italiana: 1938-39 (Roma: Società An. Tipografica Castaldi, 1939), pp. 254-78 and figures for 1937-38 derived from Italian Library of Information, The Italian Empire, Libya, 1939, p. 83.

In general, exports were going up at a faster rate than were imports. Also, one must remember that much of the enormous cost of imports came from the need to build a modern infrastructure from the ground up in a land that had a rudimentary and primitive infrastructure at best. Once the enormous expenditure was made, however, the cost of maintaining it would be far less than the cost of building it.¹⁸⁷

Further, looking at the export side of the equation, one must remember that the newly-planted olive crop was a large part of the investment and this would not become profitable until the olive trees began to bear fruit. Because olive trees take a long time to mature, the plan was oriented more towards long-term than short-term profit. Also, one has to consider that ultimately, Libya's vast oil wealth would have been discovered and this would have changed things considerably.

It is difficult to assess the success of Balbo's program for it was only in its early stage of implementation when Italy blundered into World War II and irretrievably lost in a few short years the land that had taken so long to subdue and so much money and effort to develop. One area where considerable success can be measured is in Balbo's efforts to greatly expand the Italian population in the colony. (See Table 4-2) In April 1931, when both the guerrilla war in Cirenaica and Volpi's big-concession development policy came to an end, the total Italian population stood at only 46,987, though this was a considerable improvement over the early post-World War I years when Volpi took over. By April 1936, at the end of Balbo's experimentation period, the population was already up to 66,525 -- an almost 50% increase in five years. From 1936 to the end of 1939, with the program finally put into full effect, the Italian population grew by more than 50,000 to

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

119,134, nearly double the population of 1936 and 150% greater than the population of 1931. With 30,000 of these having been peasant farmers who were part of the mass migration program, the 20,000-plus who came in addition were probably part of a ripple effect of the agricultural program. This "ripple" probably drew to Libya people such as

Table 4-2: Growth of Italian Population in Libya from 1931 to 1940

Province\Date	April 21, 1931 ¹	April 21, 1936 ²	December 31, 1939 ³	1940 ^{4*}
Tripoli	27,795	40,790	64,232	90,000
Misurata	1,903	2,391	11,600	
Bengasi	14,507	17,551	31,053	60,000-70,000
Derna	2,782	5,555	12,024	
Libyan Sahara	NA	238	225	
Total	46,987	66,525	119,134	150,000-160,000

¹ Istituto Centrale Di Statistica Del Regno D'Italia, Annuario Statistico Italiano 1939 - XVII, 4th series, Vol. VI (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico Dello Stato, 1939), p. 16.

² Ibid.

³ Annuario Generale della Libia, (Tripoli: Pubblicazione Ufficiale dei Consigli ed Uffici dell'Economia Corporativa della Libia, 1940), p. 17.

⁴ George Kirk, Survey of International Affairs 1939-1946: The Middle East in the War, London: Oxford University Press, 1952, p. 330.

*Note: In the source this data was taken from, the Italian population in Libya was specified only in terms of Tripolitania and Cirenaica, not according to the four provinces. It is this data on the population of Tripolitania and Cirenaica that is placed in the blocks for Tripoli and Bengasi respectively.

businessmen, artisans, and others who saw opportunities for themselves by providing for the goods and services the settlers would need and which were not readily available in a backward land such as Libya. A final count of the Italian population before the war in 1940 showed that it may have reached as high as 150,000 to 160,000. In a relatively short span of time, the Italians had achieved in their colony a European-to-native ratio as high as what the French had achieved over a much longer period of time in Algeria.

Had the war been avoided and the mass colonization program been allowed to continue uninterrupted during the 1940s, the Italian population might have grown to a point where the official incorporation of Libya as part of Italy would have become real and permanent. Already in 1940, the European-to-native ratio in Libya matched that of Algeria. Had the Balbo plan been carried out in its entirety, the Italian population in Libya would have exceeded 25% of the colony's overall population. The more the Italians invested in Libya in terms of money and manpower, the more permanent the Italian settlement would have become just as the British settlement of North America became when the number of white settlers began to exceed and later eclipse that of the native population. Italian population growth in Libya would have made the colony more resistant to the anti-colonial liberation movements that swept the colonies of other European nations during the 1950s and 1960s. Indeed, this resistance would have been even greater had the Italians discovered Libya's great oil deposits. Such a discovery and its exploitation could have greatly hastened Italy's development as an industrial power.

Whether this would have happened is open to conjecture because of the harsh climatic conditions in Libya. These conditions made the establishment of even marginally

profitable farms a careful balancing act requiring the most efficient use of the limited sources available. Further, the success of these farms was greatly dependent on the future profitability of the olive tree orchards which the Italians planted. Since these do not bear fruit until the trees are 20 years old, the Italian program was one that was clearly aimed at the long term rather than the short term.

Conclusion

From a conventional perspective, Italian colonialism and imperialism did not live up to the standards of the day. Parker T. Moon, a historian of modern imperialism during the early part of the 20th century, gave four modern reasons for nations to engage in imperialism. First, colonies were seen as a captive market for the mother country's manufactured goods. Throughout its colonial experience, Italy was in the early to middle stages of industrialization. It had little to sell beyond what was needed for the home market. Further, Italy, one of the poorest of the colonial powers, had colonies with the poorest native populations compared to those of the other colonial powers. The Libyans, for example, were much poorer than the Tunisians, Algerians, or even Egyptians. This poverty, combined with small native populations in Libya and the other colonies, made Italian colonies poor markets for Italian goods.

Second, the revolution in the areas of communication and transportation, i.e. steamships, railways, and telegraphs made colonial products more profitable and enlarged the scale of trade. Again, as a poor nation, Italy could ill afford developing such elaborate communication and transportation systems when these were not yet available in all parts of Italy yet. Only in the last decade of Fascist rule were significant developments made in this area. Given the meager resources provided by Italy's colonies, it is questionable whether these projects would ultimately have made Italian colonialism profitable.

The third reason Moon gave for imperialism was the demand of industrial nations for tropical and subtropical products. This referred not only to crops grown in the

colonies but also to the raw materials such as gold, coal, iron, etc. England got such raw materials from its South African colony while it grew cotton in the colonies of India and Egypt.¹⁸⁸ The one plentiful resource that Libya had and continues to have, oil, was never discovered by the Italians during their rule although some preliminary exploration had been done under the direction of Professor Ardito Desio, a geographer. With support from AGIP, the Italian Government Petroleum Agency, he correctly determined that major oil deposits would be found in the Sirtica and led a prospecting team there in 1940, prior to Italy's entry into the Second World War. Though traces of oil were found, the drilling equipment then used by the Italians was incapable of reaching the deep deposits of Libyan oil.¹⁸⁹ In the long run, though, it is hard to believe that the Italians would not have ultimately discovered the oil deposits had their rule continued beyond World War II. As for the crops grown in Libya, these were the same as those already found in Italy and further, despite the use of the most modern farm methods, Libyan soil was less productive than Italian soil.

The fourth reason Moon gave for 20th-century imperialism was the need of industrial nations to find some place to profitably invest surplus capital. The point had already been reached where there was little to invest in at home. Ultimately, the colonial power would move into the colony to protect the investments it had made there.¹⁹⁰ Again, as a

¹⁸⁸ Parker T. Moon, Imperialism and World Politics (N.Y. & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1973), pp. 27-32.

¹⁸⁹ John Wright, Libya (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1969), pp. 244-45.

¹⁹⁰ Moon, pp. 27-32.

poor country, Italy had no surplus capital but instead, had to invest money that was sorely needed to develop Italian industry and agriculture at home. As for Italian capitalists, the colonies Italy had were not naturally inviting and the government had to provide subsidies of one kind or another to draw the capitalists as with the "big concession" system in Libya.

Jules Ferry, the great French imperialist, saw three motivations for modern imperialism. In common with Moon, he saw colonies as providing markets for the mother country's surplus manufactures. Ferry saw this as an important hedge against the trade protectionism of economic competitors.

Ferry was also a proponent of the "white man's burden" justification of imperialism. He felt that "superior races...have the duty of civilizing inferior races" and also must bring justice and order to chaotic Africa. Looking beyond the pernicious element of racism that was part of the "civilizing mission," it can be said that as colonizers and imperialists, the Italians put more into their colonies than they got out of them. The Italians did build some modern infrastructure in areas where there had been none and was in the process of bringing other benefits of modernization to the colonies and their native populations when the Second World War erupted. In return, the Italians drew very little profit from their resource-poor colonies. Had the agricultural scheme established in Libya worked in the long run, some modest gains might have been realized and the living standards of the families selected to settle the colonies would have improved. As for the native populations, they too would have benefited to some degree under these schemes albeit they would have done so as second-class citizens of the Empire.

Absent from the Italian Empire was the "plundering" aspect of so many other empires. This, however, had more to do with the lack of much to plunder than with any inherent virtue of Italian Imperialists.

Ferry's third point was that naval and marine powers needed coaling stations to support their strategic interests.¹⁹⁰ Given the geopolitics of the time, even detractors of Italian policy such as Evans-Pritchard saw the strategic value of Libya and the East African colonies to Italy. In hindsight, the investments Italy made in its armed forces, particularly its navy, and in its colonies appear to have been totally unnecessary and wasteful given the urgent needs of Italy itself. In terms of the thinking of the time, however, the Italian Empire did, at least, make strategic sense, particularly for a nation that wished to advance its status among the world's major powers.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 42-43.

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