Itinerario (2026), 1–16
doi:10.1017/S0165115325100338

Universiteit Leiden
The Netherlands

ARTICLE

Building the Nation in the Monarchical Era: History, Historiography, and Historians in Libya's Independence Process (1940s – 1950s)

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Notes for transliteration: For Arabic book titles, the system adopted by the AUC Libraries, where they were consulted, was used. For names, reference was made to the most adopted form in academic literature. The IJMES transliteration system was used for the other transliterations. Translations are by the author.

Abstract

Compared to most other cases of independence, the creation of Libya is generally regarded as a conservative outcome. Rather than being founded on a nationalist impulse, the United Kingdom of Libya derived its legitimacy from Islam, specifically following the path of the Sanūsiyya—one of the key symbols of anti-colonial resistance—whose religious leader became the first king of the new state. As a primarily religious movement, however, the Sanūsiyya's influence was unevenly distributed across the country. Consequently, when Idris al-Sanūsī ascended the throne, his political legitimacy was not universally acknowledged. Within this context, both history and historiography played a strategic role in the construction and contestation of political legitimacy. This paper aims to analyse historiographical narratives produced during the 1940s and 1950s, viewing independence as a process that transcends the moment of its formal proclamation. The objective is twofold: first, to investigate the construction of a "Sanūsī epistemological sovereignty" through historical revision and the promotion of a pro-monarchist historiography; and second, to examine its role in legitimising the new state and in fostering a shared sense of identity and nationhood.

Keywords: Libya; Independence; History; Historiography; Decolonisation

Introduction

After gaining independence in 1951, instead of constituting itself on nationalism, Libya found its legitimacy in Islam, according to the path of the Sanūsiyya,[1] a Sufi religious *ṭarīqa*[2] founded near Mecca in 1837. During the monarchical period (1951–1969), the new kingdom gained political legitimacy through the emphasis on a past of resistance, personified in the figure of the new first king, Idris al-Sanūsi – *shaykh*[3] of the *ṭarīqa* – and, more generally, of the Sanūsiyya itself. Institutional legitimacy was given to these elements through

[1] Antonio Maria Morone, "Idrīs' Libya and the Role of Islam: International Confrontation and Social Transformation," *Oriente Moderno*, 97 (2017), 111-32.

[2] *Ṭarīqa*, pl. *ṭuruq*, the spiritual ṣufī path, brotherhood

[3] *Shaykh*, pl. *Shuyūkh,* spiritual master, leader of a *ṭarīqa*.

various political choices, including the adoption of a pro-Sanūsiyya corpus of historiography, created from the 1940s onwards. After 1949[4] it became the basis for the affirmation of what can be called a "Sanūsi epistemological sovereignty," which was later dismantled by the Al-Qadhāfi regime, following the 1969 revolution. Although the 1969 regime attempted to erase all memory of the Monarchy,[5] some examples of this "Sanūsi epistemological sovereignty" have survived via personalities close to the "Libyan issue," representing a fundamental primary source for the period.[6] This is the case with two authors whose writings will form the basis of this article. The first example is the work of Muḥammad Fu'ad Shūkri (1904–1963), an Egyptian scholar who published the volume *Al-Sanūsīyah. Dīn wa-dawlah* [Sanūsiyya. Religion and State] in 1948.[7] In 1957, he published the two-volume book *Mīlād dawlat Lībyā al-Ḥaḍīthah : wathā'iq taḥrīrihā wa-istiqlālihā* [The Birth of the Modern State of Libya: Documents of its Liberation and Independence].[8] Born in Egypt, Shūkri obtained his PhD at the University of Liverpool in 1935. He had contact with Idris al-Sanūsi in 1943 as a member of the Egyptian Ministry of Education, while al-Sanūsi was in exile in Egypt due to the Italian colonial occupation. Beginning in 1947, he dealt with the Libyan Monarchy on several occasions.[9] The second author is Muhammad al-Tayyib al-Ashhab (date unknown–1958), press attaché at the Libyan Embassy in Cairo. Al-Ashhab was in direct contact with the Libyan royal family;[10] indeed, some of his publications were funded by the Sanūsi. For this reason, he could take advantage of several documents made available by the royal family itself. According to historian Baldinetti, Al-Ashhab's works came to retrospectively represent "the official 'national' history" of the monarchical period.[11]

Focusing on three publications by these two authors and on archival documents, this contribution critically analyses the historiographic narratives used and produced by monarchical Libya to legitimise itself, as well as the categories, ideas, images, and symbols contained therein. The aim is threefold: first, to demonstrate how history became a clear example of "epistemological sovereignty," showing, as Andersen and Mihatsch highlighted, the deep interconnection between institutional and epistemological transformations.[12] Furthermore, it will explore an interpretation of Libya's history and historiography as not-so-fully decolonised, focusing on the "conservative" outcome of the decolonisation process, the relationship with the colonial power, and the continuity with the past. Finally, the article investigates whether and how historiographic production became a tool for becoming independent and constructing a "legitimate" memory and sense of nationhood.

[4] Year of the creation of the Emirate of Cyrenaica.

[5] Francesca Di Pasquale, "La Memoria senza archivio. Processi identitari e fonti archivistiche in Libia (1952-2011)," *Afriche e Orienti*, 1 (2017), 35-47; Anna Baldinetti, "Camminare su un terreno minato: sessant'anni di scrittura e riscrittura della storia nazionale in Libia, 1951-2011," *Contemporanea* 1 (2016), 135-39.

[6] Anna Baldinetti, "Shifting Perceptions of Shared History in Post-Independence Libya," in *Libya in Transition: Human Mobility, International Conflict and State Building*, ed. Antonio Maria Morone, *Afriche e Orienti*, 3 (2018), 27.

[7] Muḥammad Fu'ad Shūkri, *Al-Sanūsīyah. Dīn wa-dawlah* (al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1948). In 2005, an edition was printed in Oxford by the Centre for Libyan Studies.

[8] Muḥammad Fu'ad Shūkri, *Mīlād dawlat Lībyā al-Ḥaḍīthah: wathā'iq taḥrīrihā wa-istiqlālihā* (al-Qāhirah: Maṭaḅ'at al-I'timād, 1957).

[9] Baldinetti, "Shifting," 39. According to Baldinetti, he became interested and involved in the "Libyan Issue" and participated in drafting the memorandum sent by Egypt to the Libyan Council of Foreign Ministers with demands for Libya. Anna Baldinetti, *The Origins of the Libyan Nation: Colonial Legacy, Exile and the Emergence of a New Nation-state* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010).

[10] According to Bin Ḥalīm's (Prime Minister from 1954 to 1957) memoirs, al-Ashhab was a man of considerable duplicity who, on more than one occasion, acted against his government and, at times, even against the King. See Muṣṭafá Aḥmad Bin Ḥalīm, *Libya's Hidden Pages of History: A Memoir* (Nicolia, Cyprus: Rimal Publications, 2014).

[11] Baldinetti, "Shifting," 27, 39.

[12] See the introduction to this special issue.

When analysing the history of independent Libya, it can be underlined that it has frequently been subject to a process of memory removal and rewriting. This discourse applies both to the monarchical period and to the Al-Qadhāfi regime (1969-2011).

In a 2012 paper, historians Dumasy and Di Pasquale identified the recourse to history as one of the most important elements of post-1969 political legitimisation.[13] The epistemological sovereignty of the regime was based on an "official version of history," which rejected the monarchical past and legitimised itself through a "national historical recitation" and the construction of *ad hoc* "scientific institutions."[14] Similarly, other authors have studied the role of history, its institutions, and memory in the period 1969-2011.[15] More generally, it can be said that the attempt to write a "national memory" through history has been – and continues to be – a common process throughout the history of post-independence Libya.[16]

Looking specifically at the 1951-1969 phase, a similar path, identified by Baldinetti in 2018,[17] can be traced, shedding light on a historical period that, to date, remains little explored. Moreover, the focus on the Libyan transition to independence allows for a reflection on a series of circumstances characterising the independence processes, namely the relationship of rupture and/or continuity with the colonial past, the transformation, challenges, and changes of knowledge production and history writing in "becoming independent," as well as the presence of "hybrid 'postcolonial' figures."[18]

Pro-Monarchic Historiography as a Source of Legitimation

Both the Sanūsi historiography and the "epistemological sovereignty" imposed by the Monarchy after 1951 have the Sanūsiyya, the events, and actors associated with it as a reference in terms of political legitimacy. Numerous historians have studied the *ṭarīqa*, its characteristics, and its relationship with the territory, the societies it encountered, and the political institutions.[19] Oscillating between phases of collaboration with the European powers and phases of resistance to them throughout the Nineteenth century,[20] the Sanūsiyya played a crucial role in the history of contemporary Libya, with its religious nature being the basis for its political influence.

As anticipated, at the time of the transition to independence, the legitimacy of the new state was based on a specific past. Disregarding the result, i.e. independence, the Kingdom of Libya was perceived by most as a restoration, to the detriment of nationalism:[21] a conservative outcome for a not-so-fully decolonised state, given its ties with a

[13] François Dumasy, Francesca Di Pasquale, "Être historien dans la Libye de Kadhafi. Stratégies professionnelles et pratiques mémorielles autour du Libyan Studies Center," *Politique Africaine* 1:25 (2012), 127-46.

[14] Dumasy, Di Pasquale, "Être historien," 127.

[15] See for example: Eileen Ryan, "War, Resistance, and Memory in Libya's Oral History Project," *The Journal of North African Studies*, (2023), 1-26; Baldinetti, "Camminare"; Di Pasquale, "La Memoria"; Dumasy, Di Pasquale, "Être historien."

[16] Baldinetti, "Shifting," 26.

[17] Baldinetti, "Shifting."

[18] See the introduction to this special issue.

[19] See: Jean-Louis Triaud, *Tchad 1900-1902. Une guerre franco-libyenne oubliée? Une confrérie musulmane, la Sanūsiyya, face à la France* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1987); Jean-Louis Triaud, *La légende noire de la Sanūsiyya. Une confrérie musulmane saharienne sous le regard français (1840-1930)* (Paris, Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1995); Majid Khadduri, *Modern Libya: A Study in Political Development* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1963).

[20] Eileen Ryan, *Religion as Resistance: Negotiating Authority in Italian Libya* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 7.

[21] Antonio Maria Morone, "La Libia di Idris. Il ruolo dell'Islam nella costruzione dello Stato," in *Statualità e periferie nel Maghreb contemporaneo*, ed. Daniela Melfa (Ariccia: Aracne Editore, 2018), 56.

controversial past[22] and its alliance with Great Britain, which in the 1940s was still functioning as a colonial power. In that context, history and historiography were used to play a strategic role in constructing the political legitimacy of the new Kingdom. The latter sought to exploit the Sanūsi past of resistance to colonialism as a unifying and "national" touchstone. However, because the Sanūsiyya was a religious reality, its influence was not homogeneously extended and shared, nor was the authority of its *shaykh* – then King – Idris al-Sanūsi.[23] Thus, the attempt by the Monarchy to make the "glories of the Sanūsiyya" the epistemological corpus underpinning the state did not have the desired result; it failed to become either a unifying factor, to build a shared memory, or to provide support for the Monarchy. This, together with the implementation of patronising politics that exacerbated regionalism and imbalances,[24] left room for the circulation of other ideals and widespread social criticism, establishing the foundations for the revolution in 1969.[25]

As anticipated, despite the historical revision implemented after 1969, some examples of the Sanūsi historiographical version survived and can be analysed. This is the case with Shūkri's works *Al-Sanūsīyah: Dīn wa-dawlah,* and *Mīlād dawlat Lībyā al-Ḥaḍīthah: wathā'iq taḥrīrihā wa-istiqlālihā*, and al-Ashhab's *Barqah al-'Arabīyah: ams wa-al-yawm* [Cyrenaica: Yesterday and Today].[26]

An extensive work, including the reproduction of official documents of the time, *al-Sanūsiyya: Dīn wa dawla* reconstructs the history of the *ṭarīqa* from its foundation until Libya's liberation from Italian colonialism. Specifically, the volume offers an interesting insight into the colonial resistance, portraying the Sanūsiyya and Idris al-Sanūsi as crucial players. Looking, for example, at the period between 1922, when Idris al-Sanūsi left Cyrenaica, and 1931, the year of the capture and execution of Sanūsi 'Umar al-Mukhtār, leader of the resistance, we read how "the Emir [Idris] continued to provide the *mujāhidīn*" remaining in Cyrenaica "with all the assistance that his Highness could find a way to deliver. [...] His greatest concern during this difficult period was to work on enlightening public opinion."[27] The introduction, in which the author's motivations for reconstructing the history of the Sanūsiyya are explained, also presents the oral sources consulted. These include, in addition to Idris himself, individuals linked to him, such as Muhammad al-Rida al-Sanūsi,[28] Muhammad Safi al-Dīn,[29] and Ibrahim al-Shalhi.[30] The introduction also contains references to the resistance against colonial occupation, to Idris' role as a political leader, and to the

[22] Di Pasquale, "La memoria," 37.

[23] See: Anderson "Legitimacy, Identity and Writing;" Baldinetti, *The Origins*; Baldinetti, "Shifting;" Khadduri, *Modern Libya* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1963); Salaheddin Hasan Sury, "A New System for a New State: The Libyan Experiment in Statehood, 1951-1969," in *Modern and Contemporary Libya: Sources and Historiographies*, ed. Anna Baldinetti (Roma: Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente, 2003), 179-194; Dirk Vandewalle, *A History of Modern Libya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2012).

[24] Salaheddin Hasan Sury, "The Genesis of the Political Leadership of Libya 1952-1969: Historical Origins and Development of its Component Elements," (PhD diss., The George Washington University, 1973); Sury, "A New System."

[25] Vandewalle, *A History,* 74.

[26] Muhammad al-Tayyib al-Ashhab, *Barqah al-'Arabīyah: ams wa-al-yawm* (al-Qāhirah: Maṭba'at al-Hawarī, 1947).

[27] Shūkri, *Al-Sanūsīyah,* 551-52 (vol. 2005).

[28] Idris al-Sanūsi's brother.

[29] Idris al-Sanūsi's cousin, brother of Aḥmad al-Sharīf who became *shaykh* of the Sanusiyya at the death of Muhammad al-Mahdi (1902), because al-Mahdi's son, Idris, was still too young. During the monarchical period, al-Din became one of the supporters of a change at the top and carried out propaganda of hostility towards the King, claiming the throne for the "Shariffian branch" of the family.

[30] Head of the Royal Household and personal advisor to Idris al-Sanūsi. According to Bin Ḥalīm, the Shalhi family enjoyed considerable influence over Idris, to the extent of shaping the monarch's political – and even familial – decisions, especially after the assassination of Ibrahim al-Shalhi by one of Aḥmad al-Sharīf's grandsons. See: Bin Ḥalīm, *Libya's* .

strategic alliance with Great Britain. Alongside these elements is the recourse to *jihād* and a religious justification of resistance, as well as the appeal to the unity of the country.[31] When considering the history of Libya, the use of terms such as *jihād*, resistance, and the anti-colonial struggle is particularly understandable. It leads back to the period between 1911 and 1931, when Islamic resistance and solidarity became one of the driving forces during the Italo-Ottoman war (1911-1912) or during WWI.

Adopting a long-term perspective and examining the history of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica – first – and the Libyan colony – later – the call for unity and the emphasis on the Sanūsi "resolving" role highlight a partial reconstruction of both the past and the Libyan complexity. However, they also reflect the ongoing debate concerning the future of the three provinces, hoping for a national and unitary perspective as a political solution.

The desire for a unitary perspective is even more evident in *Mīlād dawlat Lībyā al-Ḥadīthah: wathā'iq taḥrīrihā wa-istiqlālihā*, published in 1957 when Shūkri was a professor of Modern History at Cairo University. The book reconstructs the country's liberation and independence and outlines the history of independent Libya, "forged by his relationship with the Sanūsi."[32] The first volume is devoted to post-WWII events, and the second backdates the events to analyse the early years of the twentieth century, identifying this period of history as central to the situation during the 1940s. Again, these examples demonstrate how the past was used to validate the ongoing situation, reinforce Idris's political legitimacy, and consolidate common historical knowledge within the Kingdom.

Looking at al-Ashhab's 1947 volume about Cyrenaica, the author's birthplace, *Barqah al-'Arabīyah: ams wa-al-yawm*, the link with the Sanūsiyya is evident from the start. To support and legitimise his words, the author utilises an excerpt of a message received by Idris in 1944:

> [W]e have heard that you want to write a book [...] and spread the facts, as I had heard previously during my visit to the homeland, and we are very grateful for such sentiments and ask God to grant you success and correct your steps, except that the historian must investigate the facts and not write everything he hears, but rather write what is worthy of its authenticity.[33]

The author then cites his sources, such as Safi al-Dīn al-Sanūsi and Ibrahim b. Aḥmad al-Sharīf al-Sanūsi,[34] primarily related to the *ṭarīqa*, and focuses explicitly on the resistance and its leaders as "the most important historical references that allowed me to narrate some [...] of the war events and the various national information."[35]

An analysis of these writings reveals the emphasis on the Sanūsiyya's central role in the resistance and the struggle for liberation from the European occupier. This depiction of history was used from 1949 onwards to legitimise Idris' political power and to foster the creation of a common sense of identity and nationhood in an extremely fragmented context.[36]

Some key points and critical issues that deserve further consideration arise from this historiography and will form the background to the following pages. First is the Monarchy's

[31] Shūkri, *Al-Sanūsīyah*, 27 (vol. 1948).
[32] Baldinetti, "Shifting," 27.
[33] Al-Ashhab, *Barqah*, 19.
[34] Son of Aḥmad al-Sharīf al-Sanūsi.
[35] Al-Ashhab, *Barqah*, 20.
[36] It is worth noting that there was no shortage of opposition even in the historiographical field. For example, Tahir al-Fazi, who came from Tripolitania, was forced into exile in Egypt because of his position. His publications were banned, effectively erasing the opposition from the historiographical corpus. Baldinetti, *The Origins*, 19-20.

attempt to justify the present through a reformulation or rewriting of the past and, consequently, the profound connection between the institutional transformation – from colony to independent state – and the epistemological one. Moreover, the establishment of epistemological sovereignty by the Kingdom responded to the need to construct a legitimate and unifying memory. From this dual consideration, several critical issues emerge, which characterised the historiographical production under examination and the history of early independent Libya, as concrete evidence of the above connection. Firstly, it is necessary to consider the sources used and their shortcomings. Both authors rely on the use of oral sources, providing a pro-partisan picture of the landscape. Equally biased is the position and motivation of the authors, who are ideologically close to the Sanūsiyya and its *shaykh*. At the same time, the authors' connection to Egypt – and consequently to Great Britain – must be considered, which leads one to wonder what the interest and appropriateness of such a historical version was. Certainly, it is difficult to answer this question. Nevertheless, it testifies to an undeniable intertwining of positions and planning.

A further element to be considered for critical analysis is the recourse, in some cases, to sources of European production from the beginning of the century until the end of the 1940s. These add another level of "criticality" and complexity as they were produced in a colonial context and with colonial gain.

This historiography, despite its limitations, is crucial for discussing the epistemological foundations on which the Kingdom of Libya found legitimacy and, at the same time, the perception of present and future expectations of the authors. It is evident how the concepts of "epistemological sovereignty" and "futurity" are intrinsically linked to historical contiguity and, therefore, to a context of incomplete decolonisation. The following pages will be devoted to discussing this complexity, focusing on the elements of continuity and rupture with the past, and on the recurrence of symbolic and political notions such as the ideas of "nation" and "unity."

A Conservative Decolonisation and a Partially Decolonised History

To better discuss the idea of a partially decolonised history, it is first appropriate to dwell briefly on the independence process in the three former Italian colonies of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan. Both processes disregard a rigid opposition to the past, instead pointing out the persistence of logics of continuity alongside the dynamics of rupture. The case of independent Libya neatly highlights this dichotomy: while 1951 marked the transition to a new condition, the new kingdom remained tied to past dynamics, testifying to a permanence of elements that were not completely decolonised. What was most evident among these factors was the political relationship with Great Britain.

The peculiarities of the Libyan case and its process of independence have been emphasised by the historian Morone, who highlighted how the independence of the Kingdom of Libya did not result so much from the end of the Italian colonial system, but rather from the competition between renewed colonial partition plans – British, French, and Italian – which, in turn, intersected with a dual axis of opposition: "between colonisers and nationalists, but also, perhaps more importantly, between conservative and progressive forces."[37] In this sense, the (re-)affirmation of political power by Idris al-Sanūsi and the Sanūsiyya in 1949 and, subsequently, in 1951, would have represented a conservative shift, rather than a progressive one, ensuring not only the victory of conservative forces over nationalist

[37] Antonio Maria Morone, "Nuovi e vecchi intemediari libici tra ingerenze esterne e spinte nazionaliste," in *La fine del colonialismo italiano. Politica, società e memorie*, ed. Antonio Maria Morone (Milano: Le Monnier Università, Mondadori Education: 2018), 32.

ones, but also a renewal of colonial power: namely, a new form of influence and political collaboration, to be understood as a continuity with the past.[38]

The decision to speak of "conservative decolonisation," therefore, derives from this reading and interpretation of the independence process and its outcome: in other words, conservative decolonisation would result both in the outcome of this process – namely, the victory of the conservative option over the progressive and nationalist one – and in the persistence of constraints, legacies, and ties with the former colonial powers.

This perspective must necessarily be considered when analysing the history – and historiography – produced during decolonisation and independence, since the intersection mentioned above, and its conservative outcome also reverberated in the production of historical memory. It is appropriate to look at them bearing in mind that the underlying epistemological framework needs to be understood as partially decolonised. As already mentioned, at the time of independence in 1951, the Monarchy drew its source of legitimacy from the past, effectively making the pro-Sanūsiyya historiographical corpus produced in the 1940s the basis for its epistemological sovereignty. If the recourse to the past ultimately combined the history of Libya with that of the Sanūsiyya and, to some extent, Cyrenaica, it is also true that the failure to decolonise history also depended on an alignment with the British historiographic version.

In this regard, Lisa Anderson has referred to the imposition of a "British-Sanūsi interpretation" of history.[39] After the liberation of the three provinces from Italy during WWII, a (proto)process of rewriting history was "supported" by an "outside" narrative through the work of the British anthropologist Evans-Pritchard. Published in 1949 and tracing the history of the Sanūsiyya from its foundation to 1942, *The Sanūsī of Cyrenaica*[40] is "an illuminating example of scholarship in the service of imperialism," within which the role of the *ṭarīqa* in the resistance against Italian colonialism and its profitable alliance with the British is claimed to be "exaggerated," deliberately neglecting and distorting the roles played by other elements of resistance.[41] The anthropologist resorts to a series of elements to explain the history and success of the Sanūsiyya, which derived from an explicitly "Western" and Eurocentric reading of the *ṭarīqa*. Such categories reflect a generalisation of the Sanūsiyya, identifying it with a "national movement"[42] destined to fulfil a political vocation. Therefore, Evans-Pritchard's work insists on the political aspect as the key to legitimisation. At the same time, the flattening of regional heterogeneity through the application of the label "national" to an essentially and primarily religious reality emerges.[43]

As Anderson highlights, *The Sanūsī of Cyrenaica* was published a few years before the proclamation of independent Libya. Unsurprisingly, the 1949 volume was released alongside the establishment of the Emirate of Cyrenaica with British endorsement. Britain's *de facto* move provided political legitimacy for Idris al-Sanūsi over Cyrenaica and further certified the strict connection between the Crown and the province. Therefore, in addition to legitimising the political position of the Sanūsiyya and its *shaykh* entrusting them with a central role in the liberation from colonial rule, the 1949 volume effectively sanctioned the "primacy" of Great Britain over the Emirate.

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[38] Ibid., 31-59.

[39] Lisa Anderson "Legitimacy, Identity and Writing of History in Libya," in *Power and Representation: State Formation and Intellectual Paradigms in Arab Oil-Producing Countries*, ed. E. Davis et. al (Miami: University of Florida Presses, 1990), 82.

[40] Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanūsi of Cyrenaica* (London: Oxford University Press, 1949).

[41] Anderson, "Legitimacy," 82.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanūsi*, 229.

Why does Anderson speak of a British-Sanūsi interpretation? Beyond the role played by Great Britain in the political backing of Idris al-Sanūsi, it is interesting to identify a coincidence, in terms of content and argumentation, between Evans-Pritchard's work and the historiographic version that would later be adopted by the Monarchy. Above all, they have two elements in common: a marked emphasis on the role of the Sanūsiyya and its *shaykh*; and an approximation of social and political heterogeneity in terms of claims for the future at both the regional and national levels.

An emblematic example is the reconstruction of the events that followed the Alexandria and Cairo meetings in 1939 and 1940 by analysing Evans-Pritchard's volume and Shūkri's first book, published in 1949 and 1948 respectively. The importance of 1939 and 1940 lies in the unifying value given to them.

In "Alexandria, 23 October 1939," Shūkri reports the number of fifty-one Tripolitanian and Cyrenaic exponents of the anti-colonial resistance, from whose meeting emerged contextually the recognition of Idris as Emir by the Cyrenaic leaders, a confirmation of what had already been asserted in 1922 by the Tripolitanian leaders,[44] and finally the authorisation of both sides for Idris al-Sanūsi to represent them as Emir of all Libya. The document signed in Alexandria states:

> Praise be to God, prayers and peace upon God's messenger, the leaders and *shaykh* of the exiled Tripolitanian and Cyrenaic communities gathered [...] in Alexandria and consulted about their condition of dependence; and made a decision regarding the election of their representative in all matters and expressed their opinions, and with that, they placed their trust in His Highness Emir al-Sayyid Muhammad Idris Al-Mahdi al-Sanūsi who represents them [...] as they see him as the best old example to follow.[45]

On the same events, Evans-Pritchard writes:

> In October 1939, when Italy's participation [to the WWII] seems imminent, the Cyrenaican and Tripolitanian *Shaikhs* [sic] met at Alexandria and informed the British Ambassador in Cairo that they recognized Sayyid Idris as the Amir and that he could speak on their behalf.[46]

Shūkri continues:

> Accordingly, His Highness [...] met with General Wilson. [...] This wise decision had an echo in the circles of the old *mujāhidīn* outside Egypt, especially in Damascus [...]. All the leaders, chiefs of the tribes, and senior *mujāhidīn*, without exception, agreed and pledged allegiance, obedience, and loyalty to His Highness [...] and they pinned their hopes on him for their situation and future.[47]

And the British anthropologist:

> At the second meeting of this *Shaikhs* [sic] in Cairo on 9 August 1940 [...] it was decided to form a Libyan force to co-operate with the British army in the Western Desert. [...]

[44] In 1922, in Sirte, Idris was identified and recognised as the leader of the "United Emirate of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica." After accepting this mandate, he would leave Cyrenaica and take refuge in Egypt. Shūkri, *Al-Sanūsīyah.*

[45] Shūkri, *Al-Sanūsīyah,* 557-58 (vol. 2005)

[46] Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanūsi*, 226-27.

[47] Shūkri, *Al-Sanūsīyah,* 558 (vol. 2005).

> The force [...] performed useful ancillary duties to which Mr. Eden paid a tribute [...] on 8 January 1942, when he declared that His Majesty's Government was determined that the Sanūsi should not come again under Italian domination. [...] The little Sanūsi army fought under its own flag and the Arab commissions in it were in the name of the Amir."[48]

Shūkri himself reports in more detail on the efforts of the Arab Libyan Force in the wartime context. In both accounts, the natural consequence of the Sanūsi effort during WWII takes on a nodal significance. The two authors also dwell on Idris al-Sanūsi's first visit to Cyrenaica (1943-1944) after twenty years of exile: a visit welcomed, according to Evans-Pritchard, "with wild enthusiasm by the whole country;"[49] "Celebrations," as Shūkri put it, "that offered an opportunity for the Libyan people [...] to show the intensity of their adherence to the emirate of Idris."[50] Reading al-Ashhab's account, which in turn recounts the importance of 1939 and 1940, Idris' visit takes on an even greater symbolic role, as:

> All of that [the reference here is to the defeat of Italy and the liberation of Libya], was the result of the meeting of 9 August, in which the national flag was raised and in which the army was formed to save the country with the help of the British and under the leadership of His Highness [...]. It was the day on which the country began to work anew and therefore it took it as a national holiday that it celebrates every year [...] It was celebrated for the first time in 1943 in all Libyan cities [...]. In 1944, the holiday was more joyful, delightful, magnificent, and majestic, as it was honoured by His Highness the Prince, who was in the country during his visit to it.[51]

The choice to analyse this passage lies in its historical relevance because it marked the definitive alliance between the Sanūsiyya of Idris al-Sanūsi and Great Britain, among the consequences of which, after the war was won, was the creation of the Emirate of Cyrenaica in 1949 and the identification of Idris as the future King of a united Libya. Certainly, the three authors replicate three different levels of interest and positioning, while maintaining a series of elements of continuity and proximity in the narrative that should be considered. However, for a full understanding, it is necessary to dwell briefly on the historical contingency to which these accounts refer, namely the 1940s. The three volumes under analysis were published between 1947 and 1949, in a peculiar phase for the history of the future independent Libya, marked by a competition of multiple interests. Internationally, there was still no talk of complete independence and there were still strong colonial interests in Libyan territory. At the British level the desire to keep under control a strategic reality, especially that of Cyrenaica, in proximity to Egypt, was alive and well. It is also worth emphasising how the 1940s marked a period of change for Egypt itself, with Great Britain determined to maintain its control and the emergence of nationalist, anti-colonialist sentiments, movements, and social protests that would eventually lead the country to change in 1952. Egypt itself, and at the same time the Arab League founded in 1945, became actors committed to the Libyan cause, putting themselves forward as possible actors of protection and support, replacing the European powers, in the process of transition to Libyan independence. Finally, the Libyan level marked by the lack of a common ideology and planning, and the complex identification of a shared leadership along the independence process.[52]

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[48] Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanūsi*, 227.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Shūkri, *Al-Sanūsīyah,* 583 (vol. 2005).
[51] Al-Ashhab, *Barqah*, 535.
[52] See: Baldinetti, *The Origins*; Khadduri, *Modern Libya*.

The writings analysed reflect, therefore, a multiplicity of interests; while the words of Evans-Pritchard gave legitimacy to the British interest and, not by chance, it is precisely Great Britain that emerges as the principal actor, in the words of Shūkri and al-Ashhab, the position is the opposite, although the collaboration with Great Britain is described in different tones. In the former case, Shūkri repeatedly emphasises the importance of the British contribution, either by quoting the words of Idris, who is said to have recalled the commitment of a "friend of the Arabs, passionate about freedom for herself and others."[53] Al-Ashhab, on the other hand, insists on the protagonism of the Libyans, without whom Great Britain would certainly not have succeeded, identifying it as "general and was carried out by all the people, men, women, elders and children, Bedouins, and men of the cities."[54] Despite the difference in tone, however, there is a primarily positive perception of Great Britain which remained a colonial power to all intents and purposes. A further element of analysis is the flattening of Libyan complexity to only union and collaboration with Great Britain under Idris al-Sanūsi. This heterogeneity did not appear clearly, although mitigated in some cases, as in the quoted words of Evans-Pritchard – "Though some of the Tripolitanian notables refused to associate themselves with this offer"[55] – rather than in the way al-Ashhab refers to those who did not follow Idris' call, preferring to side with Italy: "Unquestionably, there are some opportunists who do not care about the matter in the way they appear, so they did their best to recognize Italy, but the people rejected them [...]. Such a minority exists in every nation and every people."[56] What emerges from the analysis of these volumes is a uniformity and unity, of intentions and projects, which did not correspond to reality.[57] One can understand why the Monarchy adopted this historiographical corpus to legitimise its political power.

Ultimately, although moving towards independence, the British-Sanūsi interpretation appeared to be an incomplete or conservative version of decolonisation driven by logics in some ways in continuity with the colonial past. After all, such an interpretation emphasised the proximity to Great Britain. As De Gall points out in 1997, the categories, including that of "nation-state," to which the various post-independence actors and authors referred, reflected a purely European conception of national history and, in some way, were rooted in the colonial context itself.[58] This is true if one looks at the nationalism-oriented experiences of decolonisation, and thus of the rupture with the colonial past that emerged from confrontation. It is also true if one examines those experiences of decolonisation with a conservative character, such as Libya, which stood in a kind of continuity with the colonial experience itself: not a rupture, but rather a reaffirmation of the systems of power that had survived colonialism and, at certain moments, had brokered and collaborated with it.

Even pro-monarchist historiography suffers from limitations due to its partial nature. If the aim was to provide historical legitimacy to the process of independence and the new monarchical order, it is also true that the insistence on depicting the Sanūsiyya and Idris al-Sanūsi in a "providential" and "liberating" manner reflects a geographical, social, and political simplification of the Libyan context. This consideration encourages reflection on the affirmation of pro-monarchist historiography that sanctioned the imposition of an epistemological sovereignty that was not shared, unitary, or completely decolonised. Consequently, the historical adaptation that allowed the Monarchy to self-determine and

[53] Shūkri, *Al-Sanūsīyah.* 587 (vol. 2005).
[54] Al-Ashhab, *Barqah*, 535.
[55] Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanūsi*, 227.
[56] Al-Ashhab, *Barqah*, 526.
[57] Baldinetti, *The Origins*; Khadduri, *Modern Libya*.
[58] Michel Le Gall, "Forging the Nation-State: Some Issues in the Historiography of Modern Libya," in *The Maghrib in Question: Essays in History and Historiography*, ed. Michel Le Gall et al. (New York: University of Texas Press, 1997), 95-108.

self-legitimise remained a partial expression of the past that was unquestionably tied to political necessity.

In addition, we can consider the significance of the historiographical corpus in terms of "futurity," both in the sense of the authors' aspiration toward the future and their awareness of current events. In this sense, it is appropriate to ask to what extent this historiography reflects the position of its authors and their hopes or, rather, the attempt to justify and legitimise the present through an "adequate" historical reconstruction. In the second half of the 1940s, the idea that the Sanūsiyya and Idris al-Sanūsi represented the only hope for a united Libya became increasingly popular. Clearly, Shūkri reflected the Egyptian position, somewhere between the presence of Great Britain and the circulation of anti-colonial and nationalist ideals. Al-Ashhab's words, for his part, reflected his provenance and origin, and the hope for freedom for his people. As we shall see, although it is difficult to put forward a definitive answer, it is plausible that the reasons for pro-monarchist historiography lie in the intertwining of different motivations.

Building the Nation

An interesting way to begin this section is to use a quotation from Shūkri's volume, *Mīlād dawlat Lībyā*, to discuss the contents of pro-monarchist historiography and the language adopted in a broader sense. Page 74 includes the expression "*Raghba al-'ummat al-lībya*" [The will of the Libyan Community/Nation], which encompasses the concept of unity and collective aspiration.[59] The word *raghba*, followed by the particle *fī*, indicates the will to do something and, in the speech presented by the author, it expresses the will of the whole Libyan community to preserve the unity of the country without any division. This is an interesting element because it recalls the unity of three realities that, historically and before Italian colonialism, belonged to the Ottoman Empire, but were distinct autonomous regions with their history. It is equally interesting to note the use of the term '*umma*; this can be translated as both "nation" and "community," but in Qur'anic usage it designates the community of believers, in a broader sense, thus recalling a link with Islamic tradition. This point allows us to dwell on the first recurring factor of historical legitimacy, i.e., the recourse to Islam.

As discussed above, the Monarchy's source of political legitimacy was found in Sanūsi Islam and provided through a historiographical "deformation." the Sanūsiyya was a Sufi religious institution that acted primarily as a religious actor with political, economic, and social implications, during its lifetime until 1951. It must be considered that it was not the only religious institution that operated in the territory that would later constitute the Libyan colony and the Libyan state, nor was it the only driving force. When saying that the Monarchy used Sanūsi Islam to legitimise itself, it means that both religious affiliation and structure that belonged to the Sanūsiyya were applied to the state. As seen, to enter the political machinery of the state religious affiliation was used. Idris al-Sanūsi tried to legitimise himself as a political leader starting from his role as a *shaykh*. Or, as we will discuss later, the Monarchy reconstructed and reopened the *zawāyā*,[60] destroyed by Fascist Italy, to control the territory, insist on Islamic education, and celebrate events and personalities linked to the Sanūsi past.

Looking at history and historiography, the focus on the Sanūsiyya is evident in both al-Ashhab and al-Shūkri's works. In particular, the recollection of the past takes on a legitimising key, as the authors dwell on the preceding political potential and experience of the Sanūsiyya and its *shuyūkh*. For example, its possible political role in the Ottoman context

[59] Shūkri, *Mīlād dawlat Lībyā*, 74.

[60] *Zāwiya*, pl. *zawāyā*, sufi center.

(before 1911), recurring in the historiography, would seem to have a double legitimising function: on the one hand, the identification of an element of continuity between the three Ottoman provinces, which later became colonies and, subsequently, regions of the same state.[61] On the other hand, a quest for political validity for the future King. However, the appeal to the Islamic tradition is accompanied using Western-derived linguistic and political categories. In fact, what seems to emerge is an attempt to renew the past within a nation-state context.

In addition to the reference to the Islamic tradition, there are a series of recurring elements that form the background to the authors' attempts to provide historical legitimacy to the process of independence and nation-state formation. As mentioned previously these elements recall the Sanūsi tradition, discounting a certain level of flattening on it. The first element to be considered is the authors' desire to give historical justification to several concepts: the establishment of an Emirate of Cyrenaica with British support and under the leadership of Idris al-Sanūsi (Al-Ashhab); the process of independence and union of the three Libyan provinces into one Kingdom (Shūkri); and the political validity of Idris al-Sanūsi (both Al-Ashhab and Shūkri). In doing so, however, a lack of historical depth emerges, common to several events. For example, Shūkri's *Mīlād dawlat Lībyā* contains the following description:

> When this world war broke out, the desire of the Libyan *'umma* to preserve the unity of the country and not to divide it appeared clearly. For this reason, the leaders of the Tripolitanian and Cyrenaican people joined forces to fight the war against Italy alongside the British army as one compact bloc, and in the process of realising the freedom and independence of the nation.[62]

Once again, a call for unity emerges, i.e., a desire for a united and compact bloc capable of achieving independence. Equally, although dealing primarily with the history of *Barqa,*[63] al-Ashhab also picks up on the alliance with Britain, giving it a unifying value; the author emphasises that, at the time of the agreement, Idris was able to gather around him any Libyan in exile who could wield a weapon of defence.[64] Support from exile would later translate into a unanimous "common spirit for liberation," whereby all "participated with the prince and his people who were with him in the diaspora [...] to prove that this nation led by his Highness the Prince is one of the noblest and ancient nations and that it stands to implement everything he indicates."[65]

From a historical perspective, both reconstructions testify to a lack of complexity, dismissing the multiplicity of experiences and positions by accentuating the single Sanūsiyya alternative. If, indeed, the Sanūsiyya played a relevant role in the context of the Second World War via its alliance with the Allies, it is also true that the adherence to and support for this alliance was not universal, both for those in exile and those within Libya itself. Different experiences characterised the political positioning of social and political groups within the three regions of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan, as well as in exile.[66] It would certainly be reductive – and erroneous – to trace such a kaleidoscopic fragmentation back to a single unifying element; however, the authors' reconstruction allows us to explore the significance of history, namely as an instrument of legitimisation within the context of decolonisation and independence.

[61] Le Gall, "Forging."
[62] Shūkri, *Mīlād dawlat Lībyā,* 74.
[63] Arabic name for Cyrenaica.
[64] Al-Ashhab, *Barqah*, 517.
[65] Al-Ashhab, *Barqah*, 518-20.
[66] See Khadduri, *Modern Libya*; Baldinetti, *The Origins*.

A further common element evident within the excerpts considered so far is the mystification of the figure of Idris al-Sanūsi as an indiscriminately recognised political leader; the sole motivation for his alliance with Great Britain is considered to be "freeing Libya from the grip of the usurping colonialist."[67] Even in Al-Ashhab's reconstruction, which only marginally concerns Tripolitania,[68] the entry into the war on the side of the Allies and the establishment of the Sanūsi army have a "patriotic" character and reflect a univocal struggle for independence, a platform "on which the country began to function again."[69]

Nonetheless, like the alliance with Great Britain, Idris al-Sanūsi was not universally accepted, either in religious terms as *shaykh* of the *ṭarīqa* al-Sanūsiyya or in political terms. As previous mentioned, in the 1940s, the internal situation in the three provinces reflected a competition of interests and ideals, as well as a lack of a "national movement" unifying the three regions ideologically and politically.[70] Each party, faction, and association[71] represented a multitude of points of view regarding the future of the country. Although Idris and the Sanūsiyya assumed well-defined roles to national and regional political agendas, consensus on these roles was not unanimous.

For his part, Idris al-Sanūsi never expressed his position in a clear-cut manner, testifying to a "hybrid personality" in some way positioned somewhere between the past and the present.[72] His lack of clarity reflected a position precariously balanced between collaboration with the British, representation of the Libyan people, and mediation between the two sides. An emblematic example concerns the *shaykh*'s opinion on the future of Libya oscillating between two opposites: unity for the three regions and the independence of Cyrenaica alone. The speech he made in 1944 during his visit to *Barqa* takes on a pivotal and symbolic role in the historiography analysed and highlights many of the elements discussed already, for instance, the need for freedom, the need for an alliance with Great Britain, the use of the ideas of nation, unity, and independence, and the rights of the country:

> To take its place among nations like other Arab peoples [...]. For this noble goal we have worked, and on these honourable goals we have participated, to this sacred goal we strive. [...] I ask God [...] to grant me success in what you have clothed me with [...] my life is to serve you and my dear nation in realising its aspirations.[73]

It is worth emphasising that, at the end of his speech, Idris used the term *waṭan* [homeland], thus giving it a precise political meaning in a "modern" context.[74] The same term is repeated in Shūkri in more than one passage, testifying to the circulation and adoption of categories derived from contact with the European nation-state model. This is the case

[67] Shūkri, *Al-Sanūsīyah*, 2.

[68] The author admits the partiality of his account: "I have tried, as God almighty knows, to make my writing general about our country, Libya. I have not been able at present, to cover the first part of Libya, which is Tripoli, except for complementary things." Al-Ashhab, *Barqah*, 18.

[69] Al-Ashhab, *Barqah,* 535.

[70] Karim Mezran, *Negotiation and Construction of National Identities* (Leiden, Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2007), 82.

[71] 'Abd al-Salām 'Umar 'Arqūb, *Dirāsāt fī tārīkh Lībiya al-mu'āṣir: 1939-1952* [Studies on the Contemporary History of Libya: 1939-1952] (al-Qāhirah: al-'Ifrīqiyya al-Dawliyya lil-Nashr wa-l-Ṭab' wa-l-Tawzī', 2015), 67-94; Benjamin Rivlin, "Unity and Nationalism in Libya," *Middle East Journal*, 3:1 (1949), 31-44; Baldinetti, *The Origins,* 116-130; Mezran, *Negotiation;* Khadduri, *Modern Libya*.

[72] On this matter, see: Bin Ḥalīm, *Libya's,* chapter 5 "The Political Inclination of King Idris."

[73] Shūkri, *Al-Sanūsiyya*, 586-89; Shūkri, *Mīlād dawlat Lībyā*, 336.

[74] In 1991 Bernard Lewis wrote: "The use of the word *watan* (Turkish *vatan*) in a political sense, equivalent to the French patrie, the English country, or the German Vaterland, dates from the late eighteenth century, and is clearly due to European influence and example." Bernard Lewis, "Watan," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 26:3/4 (1991), 526.

even though there is no reference to the recipients of the message, principals, and object of the *shaykh*'s commitment, nor any provincial distinction. On more than one occasion, moreover, Idris al-Sanūsi is said to have emphasised that his political commitment did not depend on any personal aspiration, but rather on a mandate from "his People."

A final consideration of the content of pro-monarchist historiography begins with Shūkri's transcription of his three memoranda written in February 1946 and November 1947, in which he explores "the [Libyans'] historical right to unity and independence, and [argues] that the Libyans have experience and know-how that make them able to govern themselves."[75] Again, the use of specific categories (*'umma* and *waṭan*), as well as the reiteration of independence and unity aspirations on a national level, is evident.[76]

In general, the visit in 1944, the date of 9 August 1940 and, before that, the meeting in Alexandria in 1939 and the preceding one in 1922, as well as the resistance against the Italian occupation that began in 1911, are all essential and significant within the volumes considered. Indeed, through an oriented and partial reading, they contribute to a legitimisation of the Sanūsi Monarchy's position and an independent Libya under the leadership of Idris. The legitimising value of history, in a chronological sense, is accompanied by the evocation of symbols (the Sanūsi army or the Sanūsi flag, among others), vocabulary (the use of *'umma* and/or *waṭan*), and personalities that would have taken on a specific value within the new state structure.

Indeed, the Sanūsi tradition and its history assumed a substantial symbolic value in domestic and foreign policy choices after 1951, demonstrating a concrete and effective translation of the epistemological framework underpinning the Kingdom. All the recurrent elements (the past, Islam, events, symbols, lexicon) were then replicated within Libya.[77] This is the case for the "pilgrimages" made by Idris throughout the traditional Sanūsiyya network, as well as the reconstruction of typical *ṭarīqa* and *zawāyā* structures, the commemoration of 9 August, the creation and deeds of the Sanūsi army,[78] and the focus on the educational level. Following this line, in November 1952, an institute of Islamic Studies "named after Mohamed Ali es Senussi, ancestor of the present rule,"[79] was inaugurated in al-Baida. The link with the Sanūsiyya here is clear; the institute was established on the site where, in 1843, the first *zāwiya* of the *ṭarīqa* was erected.[80]

These political choices certainly responded to a clear strategy of the monarchy, attempting to increase its grip and legitimacy in a national-state context marked, in the 50s, by deep political and social challenges. Very soon, the Kingdom began to be plagued by discontent and dissatisfaction, especially among the youth,[81] as by the spread of Arab nationalism, particularly after 1954. In some ways, the monarchy's strategy was to counterbalance the spread of Nasserism after 1954 by focusing on the "resolving" or "saving" role that the Sanūsiyya had played in the past.

In summary, the monarchic strategy was to give a unifying value to a religious structure that had played a pivotal role in the past and to find a "national" character (or barycentre) in Islam.[82] It is worth noting, however, that this attempt was ultimately unsuccessful. In the

[75] Shūkri, *Mīlād dawlat Lībyā*, 71.

[76] Shūkri, *Mīlād dawlat Lībyā*, 71-4.

[77] Sury, *The Genesis*, 113.

[78] Archivio Storico Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri e delle Relazioni Internazionali, Direzione Generale Affari Politici, Italia ex-possedimenti (1951-1960) (hereafter ASDMAE, Dir. Gen, A.P.), b. 1023, f. "Esercito Libico", Rome, 23 September 1954, *Organizzazione dell'esercito libico*.

[79] ASDMAE, Dir. Gen, A.P., b. 820, f. 6/15, Benghazi, 2 Decembre 1952, *Inaugurazione dell'Istituto religioso "Mohamed Alì es Senussi."*

[80] Ibid.

[81] Sury, *The Genesis*.

[82] Morone, "Idrīs' Libya."

eyes of most the process of decolonisation was incomplete, conservative, and the Kingdom too bound to past dynamics.

It is clear, therefore, that there was a correspondence between the recurring elements at the historiographical level and the policies applied by the Monarchy. While, in the first case, the authors' reconstruction provided historical depth to a process of independence and state-building, in the second case, the policies adopted by the Monarchy retraced their legitimacy in history, showcasing a political use of the latter in a unifying perspective.

Finally, revisiting the concept of "conservative decolonisation," it is pertinent to briefly focus on its direct implications within the context of the independent Libya that has been analysed thus far, as well as in relation to the attempt at nation-building. Undoubtedly, the conservative outcome of the independence process had repercussions on multiple levels. From a historiographical perspective, "conservative decolonisation" manifested in a partial and Sanūsi re-writing of the national history. Politically, the conservative aspect was reflected in the adoption of a bureaucratic administrative apparatus based on religious legitimacy and ties. Socially, it emerged in the attempt to consolidate a cohesive national identity through the use of elements, commemorations, and symbols that did not represent a break with the past but rather maintained a degree of continuity with it. Nonetheless, the link the new independent institution maintained with the colonial past and European powers was decisive in defining its conservative character. In fact, the creation of the Kingdom of Libya did not signify a definitive rupture with the past, as the new state was perceived – and in fact constituted – within a framework of continuity, albeit altered in form, from its inception. As Morone wrote, by 1949, "Idris's political role was significantly strengthened at the expense of the nationalists [...] while England thus secured a leading role in its relationship with what would soon become the new ruling class of the country."[83] The conservative nature of the decolonisation process, therefore, emerged due to this relationship and reverberated within the new state context on historiographical – with the imposition of a "British-Sanūsi interpretation of history" – political, and social levels, hindering and complicating the construction of a shared sense of national identity. It is no coincidence that the end of the monarchical experience would also stem from open criticism of the conservative nature of the Kingdom of Libya, voiced by the nationalist and youthful faction, which called for, among other things, a definitive break with the legacy of the past.

Conclusion

The process that led to the establishment of independent Libya and its formal decolonisation was particularly complex and characterised by the convergence of multiple interests and actors. The lack of a shared sense of nationalism or unifying ideology between the three provinces meant that the holders of political power sought to draw legitimacy through historical revision and historiographical rewriting.

"Becoming independent" in the case of monarchical Libya did not mean overcoming the colonial legacy; rather, it constituted an attempt to reformulate the past and build a legitimate memory by drawing on a religious symbology, although not a shared one. This is particularly evident in the historiography analysed which flattens the historical complexity by focusing solely on the Sanūsi experience, finding in it a possible aggregating and unifying factor. Nonetheless, it suffers from a certain level of partiality towards the colonial past, replicating a "Sanūsi-British" view of history and implementing a process of memory revision whereby the experiences of collaboration and intermediation with the colonial power itself are removed. The Monarchy's attempt to legitimise the new state through the Sanūsiyya and Islam was restricted due to the limitations of regionalism and the existing

[83] Morone, "Nuovi e vecchi," 43.

ties with Western powers. Likewise, the desire to make *ṭarīqa* the "barycentre" of the new state produced the opposite effect.

The close link between historiography and history, here understood as a dual and reciprocal interrelationship and interdependence, is clear. There is a continuity and linearity of elements, categories, and ideals between the pre-independence writings, the actual period of independence and Kingdom-building, and historiography written in the 1950s. Equally, the correlation between a process of institutional change and epistemological change/adaptation becomes evident, which, in the case of Libya's transition to independence, testifies to a hybrid path of reconstruction and rewriting of history and historiography.

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Cite this article: Marchi, Carlotta, "Building the Nation in the Monarchical Era: History, Historiography, and Historians in Libya's Independence Process (1940s – 1950s)," *Itinerario* (2026): 1–16, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115325100338