

The Libyan monarchy from the independence until the nationalist revolution, 1951–1969

PÉTER SZILÁGYI



I. Subject choice, the aim of the research and methodology

During the 42 years reign by Muammar Gaddafi, Libya has become an increasingly dominating force in the region as well as in the political scene worldwide. Sufficient enough to mention the far-reaching political repercussions of the Lockerbie bombing or the quite recent change in the government's leadership, known as the "Arab Spring" which supplied the public with everlasting memory and led to the power shifting of the region afterwards.

Notwithstanding the above factors, the Hungarian and, perhaps, the international historical researches failed to pay adequate attention to the antecedent of the early formation of the country, including the characteristics of the institutional foundation of the government and the ensuing years leading up to the revolution in 1969. Examining the facts closer and comparing Libya's history with the North African, Middle Eastern Arab and other Muslim nation's history proves the unique case of Libya from various aspects.

Its history is special for not receiving favorable attention by the international scientific researching. In omission is the considerable French research apparatus which expertise focus at the past of the Francophone Maghreb and the mandate territories, or the Anglo-Saxon scholarly elite which specializes in the historical background and the mandate territories of the previously known British colonies, such as Egypt, and without overlooking the Spanish-Portuguese speaking historians whose expertise relate to the studies of the Latin-American's history by the Iberian Peninsula. It's duly noted that Hungary's scientific researching never included the history of the country.

In our dissertation, we would like to provide answers for: a) the cause of the collapsing of the monarchy in a relatively short period of time of its formation following World War II, b) in spite of the given financial stability, based on the oil, why there was a lack of the establishment of an Arabic welfare state, c) why the three provinces were not able to integrate and develop a national identity, d) why the legitimacy of the king was so feeble, e) why such an anti-western mentality developed in the 1960s, f) what key role Nasser, the Egyptian President with his proclaimed Arabian nationalism played in the collapse of the monarchy.

The dissertation will offer an exclusive introduction of the relation history has not explored so far. The Doctoral School of History of the University of Sze-

ged reveals notable tradition in the research of the bilateral influential inter-relationship between Hungary and the Mediterranean region. There has been a doctoral dissertation published regarding the tendencies of the Hungarian-Arab relation in addition to the aspect of the Hungarian-Yemen and the Hungarian-Ethiopian connections. In relevance to Hungary, the developments in Libya belong to the same category. We offer an insight into the background and progression of the establishing of the Hungarian-Libyan diplomatic relations, including the methods and tendencies of the collaboration, the judging of the events in the Arabic state by our nation and based on these elements the future perspective developed by the end of the 1960s.

In the dissertation we introduce the period of the country that was relatively less explored in Hungary, and was peripheral topic in the international publications as well.

By the chronological nature of our assignment based on the novelty of the objective, we strived to reflect on the introduction of the pre-monarchy era by paying special attention to the Italian colonial period and the rivalry of the great powers following World War II. In addition, we show diligence towards gaining an access to a more extensive familiarity with the incidence of the central subjects, firstly regarding the foreign policy of Libya and the crude oil and the mentality of the Arab nationalism. We dedicated a special chapter to the Hungarian-Libyan relationship fittingly so to the reformed political views in the 1960s, and it gives an insight into the mystery of the Hungarian foreign policy's practical point of view.

II. The sources of the dissertation

Our main focus during the preparation of the dissertation leaned towards the discovering and processing of the primary and secondary Hungarian and foreign tongue sources, which appeared relevant and available.

The secret files along with the administrative documents of the Foreign Ministry were provided by the National Archives of Hungary to the begin the research, while the National Archive in London provided immeasurable assistance by allowing us an access to diplomatic documents from the colonial and monarchy era.

Searching for the secondary source became a true challenge and labor intense. Practically, the objective related data does not exist in our nation's literature, while noticeable deficiency was met upon the available foreign articles referring to the colonial and monarchy times at the National Archives in London. The available books published in foreign languages were provided by the National Széchenyi Library, the Library of the Parliament and the Library of the Central European University.

During our research abroad, we were able to select material relating to this particular region from institutions, such as the University of London, The School of Orientalism and African studies (SOAS), the Institut de recherches et d'études sur le monde arabe et musulman (IREMAM) in Aix-en-Provence and the Universität Wien, Institut für Afrikawissenschaften and the Institut für Orientalis-

tik. Besides the sources above the catalogues of the British Library in London, of the L-Università ta' Malta and of the Università de Cagliari provided great resources as well.

III. The structuring of the dissertation

The period preceding the beginning of the Italo-Turkish war by invoking the history of the territories from the antiquity times through the first and second Arabic conquest, through the Sunni and Shiite dynasties all the way to the Christian European and Ottoman territorial expansion will be introduced. The highlighted territory experienced multiple changes of ownerships in the past especially affecting the strips by the coastline and by the gradually arriving conquerors penetrated deeper in the desert. The attacks typically originated by the ocean but the Muslim dynasties annexed the territories via the Egypt's region. The Ottomans held possession of the successfully conquered Palestine and Egypt from 1551-1912.

However, Tripolitania, Kirenaika and Fezzan were belonged to the Ottoman Empire until 1912, their dependence was only symbolical. Istanbul had recognized the opportunities of the Libyan territories only in the nineteenth century, during the "second Turkish period", and began reforms (*tanzimat*) without being able to benefit from its fruitful results.

The North African Italian colonization is introduced in the second chapter. Rome cherished the dream of becoming a great power immediately following the formation of the unified Italian State. Its idea of conquering colonies sprang from the desire of gaining economical power at first. Thousands of Italian citizens migrated to the North African region in the 1860's and 1870's, and this trend was followed by Italian banks and businesses. The emphasis of the monarchy was directed to Tunisia and Tunis at the beginning and until the Treaty of Bardo in 1881 along with the Battle of Adwa in 1896 afflicting enormous defeat to its ambitions.

After a year battle forcing the Ottoman Empire to its knees, it was able to enjoy an actual success. Due to the springing up resistance of the Arabs and Bedouins lasting until 1931 and coinciding with the capturing and the execution of Omar Mukhtar, the leader of the resistance movement against the monarchy, it could not claim victory despite of the context of the Istanbul and Rome agreement initiating the exclusive rights of the Italians in the Libyan territories.

The Italian Monarchy accomplished his goal of unifying the three provinces and formed the official Libya, as part of their first step following the pacification of territories based on the "mission of civilization", and it served as a colony of the Roman Empire by representing the theory of the "fourth part".

The new owners of the territory demonstrated great ambition towards boosting the agriculture and the industrial growth by relying on the support of the tens of thousands of Italians who were relocated from the Apennine Peninsula to North Africa. By the breaking out of World War II these ambitions diminished, as the territory became a battle zone. By January 1943, following the expeditious German-Italian success in North Africa, English troops marched in Kire-

naika while French troops arrived at Fezzan. This movement brought a *de facto* end to the Italian legal colonization in North Africa and *de jure* on 10 February 1947, as the peace agreement was signed.

The third chapter entails Libya's history after the French-English occupation in 1943. This period offers an insight into the rivalry of the great powers while searching for a way out and it concluded with the resolution of the United Nations as well as the declaration of independence.

All kinds of speculation surfaced following the end of World War II regarding the future of the colonies. The majority of the population claimed their independent status but the authenticity of it was rather controversial. The stately independence of Tripolitania, Kirenaika and Fezzan was part of the concept along with supporters of the Federation and Confederation. Following the conference of the three leading powers in Berlin, it became obvious that the Libyan population had the least influence on their country's future in lieu of the case of the colonial territories being presented to the Council of Foreign Ministers from September of 1945. Due to the contradicting interest and inability of compromising by the great powers and because of tactical reasons Great Britain decided to refer the case to the United Nations. Following the dismissal of the Bevin-Sforza Plan of General Assembly and the convincing local orientation of the organization's panel according to the suggestion of Great Britain, the Libyan territories gained their independent status contingent on the establishment of Libya prior to 1 January 1952.

Chapters 4–8 contain the research's results of the period indicated in the title of the dissertation. Parallel with the chronological introductory of the political-historical events, all of those answers that encouraged us to prepare the dissertation are found in these chapters.

The monarchy's short lived reign faced countless issues to solve. The majority of the population of the constitutional monarchy based on the format of covenant state was made up by nomads, some others conducting a half nomad lifestyle, farmers, agriculture oriented ones, uneducated craftsmen and illiterate people. The standard of living and the life expectancy reached a low mark. Schools were scarce in the nation, and there was no organized health care system at all.

The infrastructure of the recently established country was practically insufficient, the majority of the development, during the colonial era, demolished or suffered great damages subsequent to the war. There were no asphalt roads, streets lighting or sewer system at all. The telegraph and telephone systems' accessibility was limited, horse and camel were used as the main form of transportation.

The financial and economic situation of the country showed visible signs of instability. Due to the lack of incoming funds, for years it relied on the support of one of the specialized institutions of the United Nations, besides being supported by financial, technical and human resources (experts, engineers, advisors) of Great Britain and the United States of America.

However, the political structure of the country appeared meeting the standards of the era, there were some conflicts between the views of the colonial parliaments and the united parliament. Tripolitania and Fezzan felt displeased

because of the king's obvious orientation toward Kirenaika and because of the fact that he still was the leader of the Senussi order, which represented the popular Muslim movement in Libya.

By examining the last years of the monarchy, a slight improvement was noticeable in the standard of living thanks to the introduction of modern technology; the majority of the society became urbanized and making their living in the agricultural field, breeding animals and craftsmanship. The sign of improvement could be noted in the increased number of workers in the service and industrial sectors.

A government subsidized education system was developed, which included elementary, secondary school, higher education and a systematically organized free health care system got established also and it played key role in reducing the spreading of the trachoma which was considered a wildly popular illness.

The building of homes, water and sprinkle system, electric and telephone lines, schools and hospitals were constructed by the widespread infrastructural developments in the 1960s. Transportation to European, African and Asian destinations was made available by the international airport of Tripoli and Benghazi.

A sufficient budget was achieved resulting by the crude oil export which brought the financial dearth to an end. The country managed to lend financial resources to the neighboring Arab and African nations. The renting fee collected from the military base along with taxation obligated prominent American and European service oriented businesses settling in, due to the favorable conjuncture of the crude oil industry.

The country's entire infrastructure, including the political and governmental sphere experienced major shifting. The constitution and the unified infrastructure got modified and fell under a centralized leadership. The colonial parliaments disappeared and ten administrative districts were established as a replacement for the three colonies. A new capital was developed in Beida to unify the country and to decrease the persistent conflict between Tripoli and Benghazi. The parliament sessions were held in Beida already in the second half of 1960. The king and his supportive political elite aimed at the dissension of the colonies, to deepen the integration and enforce the Libyan national identity by liquidating the tribal and clan concept through the visible positive signs of the centralized system.

To an outsider, it might have appeared that the country headed in the right direction during the monarchy era. By taking a closer look at the era, we can conclude that there were serious internal issues behind the evident economic growth. The unsold political and social conflicts lead to the victory of a 27 year-old soldier supported by the Free Officers Movement against the monarchy on 1 September 1969, and set up a new advanced nationalist government system.

IV. The new scientific findings of the dissertation

"As we will never discover about the past in its full glory, our dissertation cannot be perfectly accurate." Making the thoughts of Balázs Szélinger, a former PhD aspirant our own, we truly believe that we succeeded in producing a powerful scientific study which does not only offer an insight into the first eigh-

teen years of the newly established state, but it offers a never before disclosed correlation to the reader, such as the conditions of the agreement signed between the United States of America and Great Britain or the demeanor of Great Britain during the Suez Canal War in 1956.

Introduction of the crude oil industry underlines the changes in the country's political and economic sphere. The reader gains valuable information about the foreign policy of the Nasser era, as well as becoming familiar with the efforts of the Egyptian leader in relevance to Libya, his relationship with the king and cabinet members.

The dissertation served novelty on relation history, and it is fitting to the history of studies of the Doctoral School of History of University of Szeged.

V. Future research opportunities

We took upon ourselves in our doctorate study to place Libya, which is considered as an "unknown area" under the scope and gained a comprehensive look at the historical monarchy. The completion of our dissertation concludes our study but keeps the world wide open for future challenges of the era.

It would be worthwhile to gain a deeper knowledge about the copious periods of the Idris period, which made the country land in the arms of the Arab nationalism. The cold war compelled the USA and Britain to hasten their diplomatic actions in the Mediterranean along with igniting the military bases' establishment and examine the monarchy's future auspicious Arab relations. Studying the influence of the beginning and developing of the crude oil industry from the aspect of the economy, society and of the world trade market would require a distinct attention.

By superseding the period of 1951-1969, we could learn substantial information about the era if we widen our spectrum by examining the ambitions of the great power prior to 1951, going further and precede the period of the Italian colonies. To our estimation, the studying of the era following 1969 and keeping the events of 2011 close to our mind could become less troublesome and more objective. Simultaneously with the above confirmed, we can notice a never before seen improvement in the Hungarian-Libyan relations and studying the Gaddafi era could gain higher grounds by the abolished monarchy.