The subject of this essay is the Libyans' response to the colonial regime's attempt at 'fascistisation' of the people through education, which reached full development between 1931 and 1940. The fascistisation of Arabs was part of a greater plan to create an 'imperial community' lead by Italy. Education was concerned with raising the social body underlying the Italian Fourth Shore. The educational project included general measures for the Arab population as a whole, which are analysed in the first part of this essay; and specific policies for the education of an elite, which are the subject of the second part. This study aims at establishing whether education, with regards to the set goals and the adopted tools, succeeded in having an impact on the social structure to generate a new class of fascist Libyans.

Introduction

Beginning in 1931, after the manu militari 'pacification' of Libya, the Italian government embarked on an extensive reorganisation of its North-African colony, based on the exportation of personnel, institutions and policies essential to the creation of the fascist state in Italy.¹ The creation, in 1938, of the four provinces of Tripoli, Misrata, Derna and Benghazi, was aimed at institutionalising an extension of Italy's borders in Libya.² The establishment of a 'Fourth Shore' of Italy was based on a social engineering programme in which Italians and Libyans, the rulers and the ruled, should play a specific

¹ This topic certainly deserves further in-depth historiographical examination. For a general picture see François Dumasy: Le fascisme est-il un "article d'exportation"? Idéologie et enjeux sociaux du Parti National Fasciste en Libye pendant la colonisation italienne, in: Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine 3 (2008), 85-115. For an analysis of some aspects of the fascist state in Libya see Roberta Pergher: A tale of two borders: settlement and National transformation in Libya and South Tyrol under Fascism, PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan 2007.

² Royal decree 70/1939 of 9th January 1939: Aggregazione delle province libiche al territorio del Regno d'Italia e concessione ai libici musulmani di una cittadinanza speciale con statuto personale e successorio musulmano.
role in terms of racial hierarchy. The fascistisation of Arabs was part of a greater plan to create an ‘imperial community’ lead by Italy; within this political organisation the role of Libyans was that of loyal servants and earnest propagandists for fascist Italy.

The ‘regeneration’ process of Libyans was exploited to benefit Italy’s colonial and foreign policies. The creation of a large class of Libyans loyal to the regime was considered a necessary condition for the stability of the ‘Fourth Shore’ and for the long-term survival of the Empire. Libya, a Muslim colony, also became the ideal showcase for fascist Islamic politics and the policies aimed at encouraging Muslims from North Africa and the Near East to take an anti-British and anti-French stance.

The leading man behind the creation of fascist Libya was Italo Balbo who was Governor-General between 1934 and 1940. As an integral part of the project, Balbo argued in no uncertain terms for the fascistisation of the Libyan Muslims. “There will be no rulers and ruled in Libya; instead we shall have Catholic Italians and Muslim Italians, united in the common fold as constructive elements in a great and mighty organisation, the fascist Empire” Balbo stated in 1938. The intention of the project was not to assimilate them, as Balbo’s words may seem to suggest, but rather to integrate them firmly into the fascist imperial system. However, it is also evident that Balbo’s perspective anticipated a greater advancement for the Libyan-Arabs than the regime envisaged for its colonial subjects: “The work done by the fascist government to the benefit of Arabs is therefore of such a political and moral significance as to change the social structure of the population” to the extent that it created “a spiritual correlation between the conquering power and its Muslim subjects”. The concession of full citizenship to Muslims advocated by the Governor should have sanctioned this progress in the racial hierarchy. This advancement was opposed by a number of representatives of the Grand Council and the duce himself. In 1938, the creation of a "special citizenship" was approved in place of full citizenship, which...
granted the right to apply for some civil and military offices in the colonies and the right to be registered to the Associazione musulmana del Littorio (Muslim Association of the Lictor).\(^{10}\)

The fascistisation of Arabs, in broad terms, was supposed to occur through their progressive integration into a new socio-economic reality. To support this aim, a set of economic, social and political measures were put in place.\(^{11}\) In particular, the 'political' strategy that encouraged fascistisation consisted of a series of steps: the first step was education, the second was 'special citizenship' and the third and final step was the Muslim Association of the Lictor.\(^{12}\) This Association, which was designed to become the Libyan fascist party, was created as an organ of the Libyan national fascist party – to which it reported directly- with the aim of raising the moral and civil standards of the native Muslims who joined it.\(^{13}\)

Education was concerned with raising the social body underlying the Italian Fourth Shore. The educational project included general measures for the Arab population as a whole, which are analysed in the first part of this essay; and specific policies for the education of an elite, which are the subject of the second part. This study aims at establishing whether education, with regards to the set goals and the adopted tools, succeeded in having an impact on the social structure to generate a new class of fascist Libyans.

'Traditionalism' and militarisation

When Balbo arrived in Libya the country was badly impoverished both economically and culturally. The Libyans, who were fated to be indoctrinated with fascism, suffered a twenty year struggle with their coloniser, which only ended in 1931 after the Italians resorted to particularly fierce military measures. Later, during the Thirties, the plan for demographic colonisation was intensified; the organisation of 'space' for new settlers happened at the same rate with the formulation of policies aimed at the progressive confinement of Arabs.\(^{14}\) During fascism, and the increasingly repressive

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\(^{10}\) Partito Nazionale Fascista (Fascist National Party) Foglio d'ordini n. 218, 1st December 1938. On the Associazione Musulmana del Littorio (Muslim Association of the Lictor) see hereinafter.

\(^{11}\) Balbo: La politica (see FN 6).

\(^{12}\) Francesca Di Pasquale: La Scuola per l'Impero. Politiche educative per gli arabi di Libia in epoca fascista (1922-1940), PhD dissertation, University of Pisa (Italy) 2003, 71-72.

\(^{13}\) Partito Nazionale Fascista (Fascist National Party): Foglio di disposizioni n. 1288, 15\(^{th}\) March 1939.

\(^{14}\) According to Fuller, however, political theorization did not coincide with a concrete implementation of spatial segregation: Mia Fuller: Oases of ambiguity: on how Italians did not practice planned urban segregation in colonial Tripoli, in: Federico Cresti (ed.): La Libia tra Mediterraneo e mondo islamico. Atti del convegno di Catania,
measures enforced, the number of Libyans who chose exile increased. Among them were many representatives from the country’s intellectual elite.¹⁵

The fascist education policy essentially adopted two tools to achieve its fascistic aims: the establishment of a new curriculum and the Gioventù Araba del Littorio (Arab Lictor Youth). In 1928 the first fascist reform of ‘native’ education in Libya was approved, which sanctioned the separation between Italians and Arabs in education. The law established the foundation of three types of schools: elementary schools for boys, vocational training schools for girls, and vocational evening schools for boys.¹⁶ Educational choices available to Libyans were essentially limited to elementary and vocational education. The only higher education institution for Arabs, the Upper School of Islamic Studies, did not open until 1935 and, as I will discuss later, was accessible to a very limited number of Libyans.

The school curriculum provided for the teaching of Italian, Arabic, and some notions of general knowledge; it placed little emphasis on educational guidance and was essentially vocational. Italy and its empire were at the core of educational programmes, however these were conveniently purged from topics that might have conveyed legitimate national aspirations, such as the Italian Risorgimento and the wars of Italian independence. References to Arabs were always included in a rural context, so that pupils only perceived themselves as such.¹⁷ The explicit goal was to “remove a social danger”, the creation of a class of native pseudo-intellectuals who, benefiting from an European education, would be unhappy with a return to the countryside.¹⁸ In this respect education became a key tool for the preservation, or rather the creation, of a social and economic order instrumental to the project for

⁶ Royal Decree 1698/1928 of 21st June 1928: Norme riflettenti l’istruzione primaria per i musulmani della Tripolitania e della Cirenaica. This education system established for the first time also specific rules with regards to the curriculum, along the lines mentioned above. Back in 1924 a reform of education in Libya passed, which, however, did not alter the education system that was already in place prior to fascism: Royal Decree 472/1924 of 31st January 1924, then turned into Law 473/1925 of 17th April 1925.
¹⁷ General criteria to be followed in the compilation of textbooks for schools of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, attached to the Ministry Decree 113/1922 of 20th August 1922 in Ministero delle colonie: Bollettino ufficiale, 11 (1922), 776-781. The first real adoption of textbooks compiled in accordance to these criteria only happened in the Thirties. See: Di Pasquale: La Scuola (see FN 12), 93-106; Laura Ricci: La lingua dell’impero. Comunicazione, letteratura e propaganda nell’età del colonialismo italiano, Rome 2005, 176-179.
¹⁸ Enrico De Leone: Politica indigena e scuola in: Rassegna Italiana 231 (1937), 5-6, quoted in Ricci: La lingua (see FN 18), 172.
It can be argued that the fascist school for Arabs was aimed at binding the Libyan society to the past; the proposed 'traditionalism' served to prevent the advancement of the Libyan society towards modernism. Arab modernisation was feared especially because of its potential influence on the development of nationalist movements based on the political trends that inspired North Africa and the Near East at that time. The Italian government in Libya prevented any form of contact between Libyan-Arabs and political groups, even with representatives of political movements inspired by Mussolini's regime, or arising from fascist propaganda.

In order to evaluate the influence of the fascist school on the Libyan youth it is necessary to consider the number of Libyans involved in the fascist educational policy. In the colonial time Arab attendance in Italian schools was always quite low. It must be noted, however, that the trend of the enrolment rate of Arabs in Italian schools correlated directly with the number of institutions that Italians made available to Libyans; in other words, when the number of schools available increased so did the number of people who enrolled. With the same intention of indoctrinating Libyans with fascism, Governor Balbo was committed to promoting Arab education, which during the colonial period, peaked under his governorship. At the end of the Thirties there were 70 Italian schools for Muslims, with a student population that oscillated between 15.000 and 16.000. However, despite the substantial increase compared to previous years, the percentage of educated Libyans barely reached 8-9% of the school age population.

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19 On the petrification of Libyan society during fascism, see Goglia: Sulle organizzazioni (see FN 9), 206-207 and George L. Steer: A date in the desert, London 1939, 165.

20 In October 1937, for example, Balbo didn't allow Palestinian Arabs to come to Tripoli. He asserted: "To bring to Tripoli a group of young people coming from a country – like Palestine – which is passing through a period of grave and continuous agitation motivated by a spirit of independence […] would undoubtedly be dangerous" Archivio storico diplomatico del Ministero affari esteri (hereafter ASMAE), Affari politici, Palestina, folder 15 quoted in Arielli: Fascist Italy (see FN 6), 99.

21 A.J. Steele Greig: History of education in Tripolitania, from the time of the Ottoman occupation to the Fifth year under British Military Occupation, Tripoli 1948, 55.

22 Greig: History (see FN 21), 55.

23 Data gathered following a comparison of Greig: History (see FN 21), 55 and Istituto centrale di statistica del Regno d'Italia: Le popolazioni della Libia, dell'Egeo e di Tientsin secondo il censimento e le rilevazioni del 1936-XIV, Rome 1939, table VII, 78-79. The census does not account for Libyan school-aged children. Unlike the Italian census, the Libyan's considered relevant only to gather data relating to people able to work and not to those who were not able to contribute to "the valorisation of colonies". To calculate the educated children ratio, it was therefore necessary to make an appraisal based on data gathered by Greig and the census.
Part of the historiography considers this data to show that the Arabs generally refused to join an education system created by Italy; Libyans opposed, in particular, an education system that was aimed at the Italianisation of pupils to the detriment of an Arab-Muslim education. By the same arguments, Libyans also defended their religion, by enacting a cultural resistance that could be seen in the Muslim students’ preference for traditional religious schools.\(^\text{24}\)

During the Thirties Balbo engaged in various actions that favoured the Libyan religious environment to demonstrate to the Arab world both the liberality of the fascist government and to encourage dialogue with the Libyan religious authorities.\(^\text{25}\) During the time of fascistisation, defence of the natives’ religion was pursued rigorously. Besides, as was observed, the fascist government had a specific interest in highlighting the difference between the colonisers and colonised religions, for it was another way to emphasise the difference between Italians and Libyans within the colony.\(^\text{26}\)

The memories of the Libyans who attended Italian schools testify a broad understanding of Balbo’s policies that were favourable to Islam, and particularly for those implemented in schools. The criticism of colonial schools centres around the educational standards achieved by pupils, especially with regards to the teaching of Arabic.\(^\text{27}\) It is also true that, as even Italian officials noted, the Koranic schools and Madrasas that continued to operate during colonialism accomplished better educational achievements in comparison to Italian schools.\(^\text{28}\) It was the quality of education and not religion that steered a small but significant number of Libyans to send their children to Italian catholic schools during the time of colonialism. In colonial times Muslim pupil numbers in the Institutes of the Brothers of Christian Schools – the mission responsible for education in Libya\(^\text{29}\) – were circa 250, with an

\(^{26}\) Pergher: A Tale of two Borders (see FN 1), 135.
\(^{27}\) In March 2005, during my field research in Libya for my PhD, I had the opportunity to interview ten Libyans who attended Italian schools in the fascist times. The interviewed asked to be granted anonymity.
\(^{29}\) The Brothers of Christian Schools’ Mission arose from the experience of Jean-Baptiste De La Salle (1651-1719), a French priest. At the end of the 17th century he became involved with a group of men who were teaching
increase in numbers during the fascism years. However, the importance of this fact should not be valued in quantitative terms as the group was undoubtedly small. It was the social and economical background of pupils at the school of Brothers that made its education influential in the Libyan social structure. The registers of these institutions in Tripoli and Benghazi list not only gentry and wealthy traders’ children but also youngsters whose families were part of the most important Libyan religious institutions, such as the *Auqaf* administration and the *Sharia courts*. From the memories of some of these people emerges a picture: that their choice was in fact determined by the certainty of a good education provided by institutions that were not subjected to the same limitations and constraints of the Muslims’ curriculum. On the whole, compared to the ‘traditionalism’ of the Fascist schools for Muslims, the Schools of Brothers offered modern and high-level curricula.

All things considered, the fascist school emphasised the militarisation of Arab students. Attempts to militarise students had already been made during the liberal period. During the twenty years of fascism, the military recruitment of young Arabs intensified. Representatives of the National Fascist Party in Libya organised military training courses for Libyans starting in the early twenties to create battalion reserves of natives, and also with a broader view to militarise the Arab population. Subsequently, records show, that by the middle of the thirties Libyans were ready to join the army. The Arab Lictor Youth also strongly promoted militarisation to its members.

The Arab Lictor Youth was established in 1935, and targeted children aged between 12 and 18, who were divided into three categories: the ‘Aftal’, the ‘Sciubban’, and the ‘Pupils Sciubban’. Unlike other organisations responsible for the militarisation of Arabs created in the preceding years, Balbo

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30 Between 1925-1927 the highest number of Arab children enrolled in the Christian Brothers schools during the colonial thirty-year period was reached, with circa 40 students. Data gathered following a comparison of Annual Registers and Christian Brothoers School’s Register. Tripoli in: Archivio dell’Istituto S. Giuseppe, Milan (Istituto S. Giuseppe).


33 Goglia: Sulle organizzazioni (see FN 9), 177-184.

34 Archivio dell’Ufficio storico dello stato maggiore dell’Esercito, Diari storici, Comando militare della Libia Occidentale-Stato maggiore: Relazione semestrale (gennaio-giugno 1936), Tripoli 7th July 1936.

35 The word "Sciubban" comes from "Shabab", the Arabic word for youth. Governor Decree 8416/1935 of 7th August 1935.
succeeded in creating an organisation that also aimed to politically indoctrinate its members; indeed in regards to its structure and role the similarity to its corresponding Italian organisation – the Gioventù Italiana del Littorio (Italian Lictor Youth) – was remarkable. One year after its creation the Arab Lictor Youth had 5,318 children on its roll, of which 3,450 in Tripolitania and 1,578 in Cyrenaica. This amounted to nearly 33% of the Arab school-age population in Libya. In October 1939 the Arab Lictor Youth in Tripoli totalled 2,000 members. However, despite membership being voluntary according to its regulations, it appears that there was in fact automatic membership for all pupils whose teachers were devoted to fascism.

The perceived success achieved by the new organisation prompted Balbo to invite the Arab Lictor Youth to take part in the parade on 24th May in Rome, the day the regime simultaneously celebrated Italy’s entry into war in 1915, the X Fascist League and the IV Day of the Organizzazione nazionale Balilla (National Balilla Organisation). On the day, nearly a thousand Arab Lictor Youth members turned out. The young Libyans, accompanied by prominent Arabs and both Italian and Libyan soldiers, visited locations in town that symbolised the imperial ‘renaissance’ of the regime; among them the colonial museum, the Mussolini forum, and via Impero (Empire Road) – currently via dei Fori Imperiali (Imperial Forums Road).

This tour, along with the grand street celebrations organised in Tripoli and the symbolic apparatus of fascism – such as the Labaro, the uniforms and the hymns – were part of those tools used to arouse the Arabs’ sense of belonging to “the great powerful organisation”. Memories of this ‘scenography’ are still vivid for the Libyans who joined the Arab Lictor Youth. The political significance of this belonging is nevertheless shaded, if not absent. If there was political education, as it appears from some accounts, it still is uncertain whether its results matched the goals pursued by the fascist

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36 Data on Arab school children from Greig (see FN 22), 55. Data on Arab Lictor Youth members from Goglia: Sulle organizzazioni (see FN 9), 192.


38 The voluntary character of membership was established in the first article of the Charter of the organisation: see FN 35. Automatic membership of Arab pupils to the Arab Lictor Youth is shown in the personal files of Italian teachers who worked in Tripoli at that time. See, as examples, files of teachers Giovanni Buonomo and Francesco Titta in ASMAE, Archivio storico dell’ex Ministero Africa Italiana (hereafter ASMAI), Ispettorato scuole, folder 27, file 367 and ASMAE, Direzione generale degli italiani all’estero, Archivio scuole, folder 293, file Titta Francesco.

39 Goglia: Sulle organizzazioni (see FN 9), 193-196.

40 See FN 27.

41 Goglia: Sulle organizzazioni, (see FN 9) 189.
government.

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About twenty Libyans groomed by the regime took up employment within the fascist party organisations in Tripoli. This group of young Libyans aged between 15 and 30, should have been a shining example of fascist education in Libya: they had attended the Italian school, and most of them had also joined the Arab Lictor Youth. As a whole they can be portrayed as a class of workers lacking in any real interest in their jobs and uninclined to abide by the rules of the organisations they belonged to. Records of their working relationships show a large number of cases of 'conflict' between Libyan employees and the administrations of fascist institutions, as well as a number of Arabs' claims for social benefits from the fascist organisations. It is also evident that the degree of integration into National Fascist Party organisations in Libya was certainly very low, if it existed at all.42

'Traditionalism' and Islamic education

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It has been highlighted how the relationship between the regime in Libya and the Arab elite was beyond what is typical between an oppressor and the oppressed,43 this was also true with educational matters. We will see that the power of negotiation by some representatives of the Libyan notability was anything but insignificant. The general running and functioning of the Islamic secondary education in Libya clearly show this dialectic.

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The idea of creating an upper school of Islamic studies in Tripoli dated back to the beginning of the colonial period in Libya. The project as a whole was always supported by the religious authorities and the Libyan notability. The school was established in 1935 at the end of a twenty-year period of development.44 Mussolini's direct involvement in its creation shows the political importance that the regime assigned to this school. "These young people will be, tomorrow, the best propagandists of our work of civilisation and our Islamic politics in the whole Muslim East," as Gino Cerbella stated in 1938.45 Soon after its establishment, the Ministry of the Colonies spread the news across the whole of

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43 François Dumasy: Le fascisme (see FN 1), 86-87; Mia Fuller: Oases of ambiguity (see FN 14), 179.

44 On the events surrounding the school before its opening see Baldinetti: Italian Colonial Rule (see FN 25), 105. The text of the Decree, published on the Gazzetta ufficiale 76, 30 luglio 1935, n. 176, 3844 is stored in copy in ASMAE, Archivio storico dell'ex Ministero dell'Africa italiana hereafter ASMAI, Africa III, folder 36, file "Scuole Mussulmane – "Madrasa" Scuola superiore islamica".

the Arab world. The Libyan school of Islamic studies was to meet two requirements: training of the Arab employees and teachers in order to make up the shortfall in qualified and reliable Muslim staff and putting an end to the stream of students who went to study in Tunis and Cairo.

The school syllabus provided a three-year preparatory course, a four-year intermediate course, and a three-year advanced course. The last two years of the intermediate course were divided into two sections: one for training elementary school teachers and the other for training Arab officials. The advanced course subjects consisted of: "religious sciences, theory of the origins of Islamic law (usul al-fiqh), Islamic law (fiqh) and practice of judicial procedures, koranic exegesis (tafsir), economic traditions (hadith), critique of parsonage traditions (mustalah al-hadith), oratory (literature and literary history, logic, including the adab al bath, or the art of debate)". Students who were awarded the advanced diploma gained the title of 'alim, which allowed them to work in the Sharia courts and to compete for the positions of qadi or mufti. Due to a lack of suitably qualified teachers in Libya, the colonial government tried to find candidates amongst the students of al-Azhar in Cairo. The first rector appointed for the school was Ahmed el Fessateui, previously granted the title of Grand Official and eminent representative of the Tripolitan elite.

The intentions of the colonisers were that the Tripolitan school produced students destined to become "disciplined subjects affiliated with our Party and Regime’s organisations, serving our idea and our Country". The result was a school that, rather than replicating the prestigious universities of Tunis and Cairo as Libyans hoped, came close to a 'reformed' Islamic school. The colonial Superior Council, which was consulted on the school system, specifically recommended that there should be "the most vigilant care to prevent the proposed centre of Islamic studies becoming an instrument and a fomite, even if concealed, for political aspirations or programmes of nationalist character". To address this concern teachers were forbidden from joining political parties or "teaching or otherwise explaining

47 Balbo: La politica (see FN 6), 15.
48 Article 9 of Institutive Decree. See FN 44.
49 Educated in al-Azhar as 'alim, el-Fessateui during his stay in Cairo entered in contact with Egyptian nationalist groups. In 1910, upon his return in Tripolitania, he founded a newspaper and, after the colonial occupation, was part of a group of eminent people involved in mediation with Italy. Baldinetti: Italian Colonial Rule (see FN 25), 106-107.
50 Cerbella: Fascismo (see FN 45), 37.
political, journalistic, or professional work that was judged by the Authority as being incompatible with the duties of a Madrasa teacher". Along the same lines, there was a policy formulated by the Ministry of the Colonies to train Italian teachers at the School for Oriental Studies of Naples. In its first year, the Libyan school was opened to a mere 30 students, effectively restricting access to secondary education to an inner circle.

It has been maintained that "the colonial regime in Libya did not consider, or rather deliberately discarded, the issue of modernisation of the local elite, at least until the time of Balbo". In my opinion this assessment may also be true with regards to the Thirties. The decision to establish an upper school of Islamic studies should also be seen as an integral part of a broader design aimed at emphasizing the 'traditional' character of Libyan society.

The orientation of the school generally ran counter to Libyan attempts at stepping into 'modernity' prior to Italian colonialism. Between the end of the Nineteenth and the beginning of the Twentieth century, the country went through a time of great cultural fervour as a result of the blending of Arab-Islamic tradition with a drive for modernisation. Libya, then made up of the two Ottoman vilayet of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, was an active protagonist of cultural modernisation and its relevant social repercussions, which in the final years of the Ottoman Empire saw the rise of a young middle class involved in the great political debate. The general process of institutional and economic regeneration that took place in the two provinces at the time was the outcome of both the reforms promoted by the central Empire and the requirements of peripheral North Africa. On the eve of the Italian occupation, the state school system together with the foreign private schools had allowed a substantial number of Libyans to be educated through modern curricula, and therefore to enter into contact with the main political and economic trends of the time. The important consequences of these years continued to

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53 ASMAE, ASMAI, Africa III, folder 36 file, "Le scuole della Libia".

54 Records on Libyans who were refused enrolment due to the small number of available places in Libyan Historical Archive in Tripoli Castle:Colonialismo italiano, Istruzione, folder 2, file. 12. To October 2008 the Historical Archive was moved in the Centre for the National Archive and Tripoli Historical Studies, where documents reorganisation work was still in progress until February 2011.


be felt during Italian colonialism. In the years of the so-called "politics of collaboration" between the colonial government and the Arab notability, the Libyans proposed a system that merged the Arab-Islamic culture and the modernisation drive, just as it had happened in the Ottoman time.\(^{57}\)

At the time of its opening, the Upper School of Islamic Studies of Tripoli was not met favourably by the Muslim elite. Limited access to the school and the mediocrity of education provided were the main reasons for this opposition.\(^{58}\) It is particularly relevant to stress that the educational policy of the colonial regime did not in fact change the educational choices of the Libyan elite. As previously suggested, it was the fascist government's intention that the establishment of the School of Islamic Studies should have put a halt to the 'emigration' of Libyan students to Tunisia and Egypt. Since the beginning of colonialism in Libya, Italy had in fact funded a number of Libyan students to study abroad. Historiography still has to delve deeper into this subject, however, what has emerged so far is that this funding was for a long time a feature of the Italian educational policy for the Arabs of Libya. Amongst the students who benefited from this funding, many went to study at the Madrasa Zaituna in Tunis and Al-Azhar in Cairo. On many occasions colonial officials pointed out the inappropriateness of encouraging studies abroad, stressing the danger of Libyans coming into contact with nationalist movements in those countries.\(^{59}\)

Following the opening of the Tripolitan school, young people who had the opportunity to study at the Islamic universities in Zaituna and al-Azhar still continued to do so. The establishment of the school in Tripoli had no impact on the historic trend of the Libyan cultural elite; on the contrary, when the Tripolitan school was active the number of students abroad increased. What is surprising is that the fascist government's financial assistance for studies abroad continued even after the opening of the Upper school in Tripoli; the very institution that was expected to stop this trend. In 1937 there were 125 Libyan students in al-Azhar - all funded by Italy – 80\% of whom came from Tripolitania.\(^{60}\)

\(^{26}\) On the Reform of Arts and Crafts of Tripoli see Di Pasquale: La Scuola (see FN 32), 412. Notable Libyans Mohamed Chechia and Mahmud Scoetuan took part in the Reform of Education of the years 1919-1922. Specifically: ASMAE, ASMAI, Africa III, "Fondo Volpi", folder 36, file 3 "Progetto di ordinamento scolastico per i cittadini musulmani della Cirenaica".

\(^{27}\) Baldinetti: Italian Colonial Rule (see FN 26), 105-108.

\(^{28}\) Contini: L'istruzione (see FN 29), 161.

\(^{57}\) List of Libyan students in al-Azhar, forwarded from the Egyptian delegation to the Libyan government on 12th March 1937, in Libyan Historical Archive in Tripoli Castle (see FN 54), Colonialismo italiano, Istruzione, folder 4, file 8.
This affair shows fascist colonial policy inconsistencies in Libya, just as colonial politics goals clashed with foreign policy, and in particular with the regime's Islamic policy. Most of the Libyan elite was well aware of this contradiction, and some took advantage of it. El-Anesi - administration councillor of religious endowments (AUQAF) and member of the Board of Directors at the Tripolitan school - made a concerted effort at highlighting the negative consequences that cuts in funding of Libyans studying at al-Azhar carried for the fascist regime in the Muslim world. In this case foreign policy arguments prevailed and the government ultimately decided that while boosting the Tripolitan school, it would still uphold its funding policy. An authoritative member of the Libyan religious elite, El-Anesi emerges as a particularly influential figure who influenced the Italian government's choices in important matters of Islamic colonial policy during Mussolini's regime.

Conclusions

The fascist political indoctrination project ultimately failed to work on the majority of Libyan school-aged children. With regard to the country's elite, the fascist educational project did not succeed in replacing the referential cultural and educational system employed by the Libyan notability. Enrico Endrich, a National Fascist Party inspector in Libya, wrote: "The privilege of wearing the black shirt was not fully appreciated by every Muslim member of Muslim Association of the Lictor; many of whom showed themselves, in their moral, civil and political behaviour, to be incapable of being inspired by the sense of duty involved in belonging to a party organisation". From this quotation one can infer that in 1940, following Balbo's death, the fascist hierarchy in Libya had to concede that their policies had not succeeded in influencing the 'indigenous' population in any way.

During World War II, the Libyan fascist party officials proposed taking advantage of national visions of striving towards a future military victory to revive the fascistisation of Muslims. Their proposal involved the fascist party, and the Arab Lictor Youth in particular, playing a major role. The latter should have become the conscription system for the Muslim Association of the Lictor, which had a very low number of members on its registers. This proposal, however, was not accepted in Rome, due

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61 Letter of el-Anesi of 10th June 1937. The Italian government reply in: letter of the Prefect Bengasi Mischi to the Vice-Governor of Libya Lidia Bruni of 18th June 1937. Both letters were stored in the repository on Italian Colonialism, Public Works, Libyan Historical Archive in Tripoli Castle (see FN 54) and were provided by dott. François Dumasy, whom we want to thank here. Unfortunately, the number of the folder and file where this was stored is not available.

62 Anonymous Report (although, this is probably from Enrico Endrich, Inspector of the National Fascist Party) with no date (presumably dated 1941), in ACS (see FN 37) folder 1764.

63 Rodogno: Il nuovo ordine (see FN 4), 67.
to the Colonial Government’s opposition to the Fascist Party’s project.\footnote{On this topic, see bundle in ACS (see FN 37), folder 1764 and Dumasy: Le fascisme (see FN 1), 113-114.}

The failure of the Libyan Muslims’ fascistisation can be ascribed in the first instance to the brevity of the fascist political experiment. The five-year period during which the fascist government committed to this project was, in fairness, too short a time to create a mass of consent among Arabs as the regime had hoped.

\footnote{On this topic, see bundle in ACS (see FN 37), folder 1764 and Dumasy: Le fascisme (see FN 1), 113-114.}

In my opinion there is however another aspect that should be considered. As George Lowerth Steer wrote “the regimes makes great efforts to strengthen the traditionalist element in the native community. [...] All these measures are calculated to petrify the Arab community in the past”.\footnote{Steer: A date (see FN 19), 165.} As we have seen, the fascist project was clearly aimed more at strengthening traditionalism to benefit the colonial power’s self-interest than the modernisation of Arab society. On the contrary, the social groups that fostered the rise of movements inspired by the regime in the Near East, allegedly regarded adherence to fascism as a choice of ‘modernity’.\footnote{Keith David Watenpaugh: Being modern in the Middle East: revolution, nationalism and the Arab middle class, Woodstock 2006, 256.} Besides, it was Balbo himself who argued that the Libyans’ integration into the fascist system would have lead to their progressive modernisation.\footnote{Balbo: La politica (see FN 6), 20-21.} Nevertheless the fear to break the colonial order, the "perfect tranquility" of the 'pacified' Libya stopped any political measure toward modernisation.

Author:
Francesca Di Pasquale is an independent scholar and archivist. In 2007 she completed her PhD at the Faculty of Political Sciences of the University of Pisa. Her doctoral research examines the Fascist Educational Politics for Arabs in Libya. After her PhD she carried on the research on the Libyan history also in cooperation with the former “Libyan Studies Centre” (Tripoli-Libya). In 2009 she completed her post-graduate course on archives at the Sapienza University, Rome. From 2008 to 2011 she was tasked with leading a scientific project aimed at the recovery and enhancement of the Libyan Historical Archive at the “Centre of National Archives and Historical Studies” (Tripoli-Libya).

fdipasquale@libero.it