

POLITICAL LOYALTY AND THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT  
IN PRECOLONIAL LIBYA

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The Tripoli which the Ottomans reoccupied in 1835 was the capital of an almost empty land. In 1843, it is estimated, its total population was no more than 518,000<sup>1</sup>, in a huge area stretching from Tunisia to Egypt and southwards from the Mediterranean into the Fezzan. Those, at least, were its theoretical boundaries. In fact the Ottomans had great difficulty in establishing any sort of control, not only over the really remote areas of the southern desert, but also over regions much closer to their centres of power - such as the Jabal Nafusa and Banī Walīd regions near Tripoli and the Jabal al-Akhdar east of Benghazi. These were amongst the most populous regions of the *wilayat* - although populous is a relative term - but they were difficult to control, and attempts at complete domination were often out of proportion in their costs to any financial benefit that could be gained. Life in these districts was, like the rest of Libya, based on agriculture and that, in the nineteenth century was precarious in the extreme. There were no permanent rivers, so everything depended on rainfall. If the rain did not come on time or in the correct quantities, the crops failed and famine resulted. Famines occurred with monotonous regularity, and the people of rural areas were not surprisingly unwilling to commit themselves to paying huge taxes to the central authorities. Thus on both sides - ruler and ruled - there was a need for a solution which allowed for a recognition of the sovereignty of the central authorities and a large measure of local autonomy.

This situation was not unique to the *wilayat* of Tripoli, of course. In the case of Morocco the divisions between the centre and the periphery,

## Political Loyalty and Central Government.

and the Sultan's loose control over the latter have received considerable attention. Here it has been convincingly shown that the Government was not so much powerless in the peripheral areas as unwilling to commit itself to large-scale expenditure on administration when local political entities could provide taxation, guarantee local order and maintain the Sultan's sovereignty without anything more usually being necessary. This was particularly true of regions like the Rif, where the local entities were based upon tribal methods of organisation<sup>2</sup>, but it was also the case with powerful local strongmen, who were frequently co-opted into the state's administration. The most famous Moroccan case in the latter category is that of Ahmad al-Raisuli<sup>3</sup>, who achieved so much power in Northern Morocco at the beginning of the twentieth century that he was confirmed into official positions there by every claimant to the Moroccan throne, successful or otherwise<sup>4</sup>.

The comparison with Morocco is not an idle one, for similar strategies were adopted not only by the Ottomans in Tripoli, but by their predecessors as rulers there, the Qaramanli family. There was, however, one important difference. Morocco was an independent state ruled by a Sultan who claimed to be a Caliph, while Tripoli, like Tunis and Algiers before the French occupation, was no more than a *wilayat* of the Ottoman Empire. But like Tunis and Algiers it was, until 1835, very largely autonomous, and so another level existed in scale of political loyalties.

### THE TITLE OF SOVEREIGNTY

It is certainly true that the North African *wilayats* of the Ottoman Empire had considerable autonomy of the authorities in Istanbul at the beginning of the nineteenth century. They could, and did, declare war on each other, carried out independent diplomatic relations with the European powers, and had their own rulers with their own armies. In the eyes of the Ottoman Empire, the Pashas were no more than officials of the Porte. In their own eyes, and that of the local people they represented the supreme power - and this was particularly true of the dynastic systems of Tunis (Husaynids) and Tripoli (Qaramanlis). This supreme power was symbolised in the use of the title of *amir al-mu'minin*

## Political Loyalty and Central Government.

(commander of the faithful).

*Amīr al-mu'minīn* as a title has been largely taken to have been the prerogative of the Caliph, the ruler who claimed the allegiance of all Muslims<sup>5</sup>. Theoretically, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, such a claim was made only by the Sultan of Morocco and the Sultan of Turkey. In fact the title was used much more widely. The Algerian leader of resistance to the French, <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Qādir, used the title on official papers, but in one way that is not surprising since he specifically rejected the authority of the Sultan<sup>6</sup>; on the other hand he hardly claimed to lead all Muslims. Yet, if <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Qādir represented a challenge to the existing order, both political and religious, the Husaynids and the Qaramanlis were part of that order. Yet they used the title too - a fact which has caused some controversy among historians. The eighteenth century historian of Tripoli, ibn Ghalbun, repeatedly refers to the Pasha Ahmad Qaramanli (1711-1745) as "*amīr al-mu'minīn*", a habit which the Egyptian editor of the manuscript has explained by saying that as ibn Ghalbun was a high court official, the title was form of flattery<sup>7</sup>. The Turk, Aziz samih, however suggests that the Qaramanlis used the title out of self aggrandizement, a view which a modern historian of the period discounts by saying that he has found no record of the Qaramanlis using the title<sup>8</sup>. There is, therefore, some dispute over the title.

In fact the Qaramanlis did use the title *amīr al-mu'minīn*. It appears, for example in a letter from Yusuf Qaramanli to King George III of Britain concerning trade links between Tripoli and Britain, which begins "*min 'abdih amīr al-mu'minīn wa-nāsir al-dīn...Yusuf Bāshā Qaramanlī*"<sup>9</sup>. Even more significantly, ibn Ghalbun does not confine his use of the title to the Qaramanlis, referring for example to the Sultan of Morocco as "*amīr al mu'minīn bi-araḍ al-Maghrib, mawlānā al-sayyid Isma'īl*" (the commander of the faithful in the land of Morocco, our Lord Isma'īl<sup>10</sup>). Moreover, the title was not only used in Tripoli in this way, but also in other parts of North Africa, such as Tunis, where it was applied to the Husaynid Beys. A letter from a *qadī* to Ahmad Bey in 1838 began "*īla hadrat mawlānā amīr al-mu'minīn...sīdī Ahmad Bāshā Bāy*"<sup>11</sup>, and one of the most lawless and rebellious tribes of the Tripolitan-Tunisian border wrote to the Bey referring to him as

## Political Loyalty and Central Government.

"*amīr al-mu'minīn*" in 1856<sup>12</sup>.

Clearly, then the title was much more frequently used than is often realised. However not every North African leader used it - the Deys of Algeria did not, nor did the Pashas of Tripoli after the Ottomans took over in 1835. It seems that what its use indicated was not a claim to leadership of the whole Islamic world, but the existence of what was effectively total power locally, with the suggestion of permanence - that is that the power should remain in one person's hands and that of his family. It certainly indicated local autonomy on the basis of the *wilayat*, but as such it was only the first stage in a sliding scale of claims to autonomy within the *wilayats* and was reflected in relationship between provincial rulers and local strong men.

### CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AND LOCAL CENTRES OF POWER

At a slightly lower level of power, provincial strong men demanded their own local autonomy. That this was true even before the Ottoman reoccupation of Tripoli can be seen in the relationship between the Qaramanli Pashas and the local rulers in the Fezzan. The importance of this region lay in its position, astride the main trade routes from Tripoli to Bornu and West Africa brought gold and slaves to the coast. Since the sixteenth century the Fezzan was ruled by the *Awlad Muhammad* 'Sultans', who were gradually incorporated into the Qaramanli state (1710-1730)<sup>13</sup>. Thereafter, although the level of control exercised by the Tripoli Pashas varied, the nominal authority of the Qaramanlis was always maintained. In 1742, for instance, the Pasha sent an army to Murzuq to escort the ruler back to Tripoli, bringing with him a huge tribute in gold<sup>14</sup>. The actual title of the ruler in Murzuq was carefully differentiated. On local documents he used a seal describing himself as the 'Sultan of the Fezzan'; but in communications with the Pasha in Tripoli, he used another seal, with the title of 'shaykh of the Fezzan'<sup>15</sup>. When Yusuf Pasha seized control in 1795 he tried to impose a more detailed control, and first of all appointed an official to visit Murzuq every year to collect the taxes due from the Sultan/Shaykh<sup>16</sup>, and then, in 1811, removed the Sultans and imposed direct rule through one of his officers<sup>17</sup>. The later

## Political Loyalty and Central Government.

development was part of Yusuf's plans to expand further southwards into Bornu and Kanem, and as a result the Fezzan was no longer a peripheral region but one in the forefront of his plans, and the political organisation had to be changed. Until then, however, the strategy of the Pashas had been to allow local autonomy to the region, on condition that taxes were paid, and the sovereignty of Tripoli acknowledged.

This strategy continued to be applied elsewhere in the Tripoli *wilayat*, even after the Ottoman invasion of 1835. This was particularly true of Cyrenaica, a region which was very much the poor relation of Tripoli. The Ottomans quickly discovered that any attempt at detailed control would entail considerable effort and expense. For instance, soon after the arrival of the first Pasha in April 1836, a force of 160 men was despatched to the desert oasis of Aujila, due south of Benghazi, and did not reappear until four months later, bringing back some 5,000 thalers in taxes<sup>18</sup>. This was not a huge amount, but Aujila - the last oasis before Kufra on the caravan route to Waday - had great strategic importance, so the expense may have been worth while. However, to subdue the whole Jabal al-Akhdar region was a far bigger problem. Much of it lay under the control of a local strongman, Abu Bakr Bū Haddūth, who had seized the leadership of the powerful Bara<sup>c</sup>sa tribe. His initial relations with the Ottomans were not easy, because he refused all invitations to go to Benghazi to pay tribute. In 1839, when he did go, he was arrested and imprisoned against the payment of all the outstanding taxes from the Jabal al-Akhdar tribes. However, the Ottomans soon found that with Bū Haddūth in prison the security of the whole Jabal al-Akhdar region dissolved, and fighting broke out. He was quickly released on the understanding that he would collect the taxes and restore order. In return for his co-operation, Bū Haddūth was rewarded with the title of Bey of the Jabal al-Akhdar and allowed to build fortresses at Qaiqab and Qasr Magharba<sup>19</sup>. The arrangement was mutually acceptable because the Turks received taxes with little effort on their part, along with an assurance of order, while Bū Haddūth enjoyed a position of considerable power and wealth - in 1853 the annual tribute that he paid to the Ottoman authorities in Benghazi was £T48,000 although he collected at least twice as much from the local inhabitants<sup>20</sup>.

## Political Loyalty and Central Government.

One of the reasons why the Turks were willing to accept this sort of deal with Bu Haddūth was the opposition which they were encountering in Tripolitania and the Fezzan. By 1837 Ghuma b Khalīfa in Jabal Nafusa and °Abd al-Jalīl b. Ghīth b. Sayf al-Nasr in the Fezzan had fought the Turks to a standstill. The new Pasha, Hassan, attempted a policy similar to that adopted with Bu Haddūth. He offered °Abd al-Jalīl the official governorship of the Fezzan against the annual payment of 25,000 piastres, along with back-taxes. °Abd al-Jalīl refused the offer<sup>21</sup>.

One of the reasons for his refusal was clearly the demand for back taxes, but this was only part of the story, for °Abd al-Jalīl was a very powerful figure indeed - far more so than Bu Haddūth. His family, the Sayf al-Nasr was a part of one of the largest Arab Beduin tribes of the Sahara, the Awlad sulayman, and it had considerable power. There was a traditional marriage link between the Sayf al-Nasr and the Sultan of Morocco, according to which a younger sister was given to him in marriage<sup>22</sup>, and another of °Abd al-Jalīl's own sisters was married to the Sultan of Bornu<sup>23</sup>. Under the Qaramanlis this family, on several occasions, had attempted to win complete autonomous control of the area stretching from the Gulf of Sirte and the Bani Walid region to the southern borders of the Fezzan<sup>24</sup>. At the time of the Ottoman invasion, °Abd al-jalīl himself was engaged in just such an attempt while the two Qaramanli brothers, °Alī and Muhammad, were engaged in a civil war for control of the wilayat. He continued to fight the Turks when they ejected the Qaramanlis, as his forces grew and more tribes joined him he created a standing army - commanded by his brother Sayf al-Nasr - which was based at Bani Walid, although the centre of authority remained in Murzuq<sup>25</sup>.

In addition to the traditional power of his family, °Abd al-Jalīl also enjoyed the support of Hamer Warrington, the British Consul in Tripoli. Warrington had two reasons for backing °Abd al-Jalīl: firstly it could open the trade routes to Bornu and Central Africa to the advantage of the British and secondly °Abd al-Jalīl could be persuaded to help stop black slavery, an important British objective<sup>26</sup>. Warrington was convinced that °Abd al-Jalīl was significant enough a political figure to bargain with<sup>27</sup>.

The Turks, not surprisingly, saw, °Abd al-Jalīl

## Political Loyalty and Central Government.

as a threat to their authority. Hassan Pasha, having failed to incorporate him into the wilayat system, described him as a "perfect savage"<sup>28</sup>, and Ashqar <sup>c</sup>Alī Pasha, his successor referred to him as a "rebel"<sup>29</sup>. That was not how <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Jalīl saw himself, of course. Indeed he repeatedly affirmed his general loyalty to the Ottoman Empire, both in letters to Warrington (for example a reference to the "governor of our Lord (Mawlānā - i.e., the Sultan), *al-sayyid* Hassan"<sup>30</sup>) and to the Porte itself. In 1842, for instance, he wrote to the Sultan saying: "This comes for your information that we are always under you forever without change..." He then went on to justify his rebellion because the Pashas in Tripoli had brought with them misery and war. He was fighting them, not the Sultan, who was ignorant of the condition of his people. Now he should send someone to investigate the affairs of Tripoli, "...and this is your duty, as the Prophet says that every Shepherd ought to watch over his flock"<sup>31</sup>. This is more than a simple declaration of loyalty, which might have been written simply to curry favour, for it puts demands to the Sultan. In another document - a statement of his position and political demands - he repeats that the war was the fault of the Pashas particularly Ashqar <sup>c</sup>Alī. He refers to the war as *fitna*, a word which normally carries a sense of approbrium, with the implication that someone (in this case Ashqar <sup>c</sup>Alī) has broken up the social order. This statement also contains a declaration of <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Jalīl's objectives. He wants the Ottoman Sultan to give him the governorship of the port of Benghazi, in order to allow him to develop trade: "If the Sultan gave us it, he would not be the loser in any way at our hands", he says. In other words he is proposing the same arrangement as that given to Bu Hadduth, and offered to him in 1837 - but on a much bigger scale and with far more local autonomy<sup>32</sup>.

This conclusion is borne out by the curious way in which the statement is signed: "<sup>c</sup>Abd al-Jalīl *ṣaḥīb wilayat kursī Fazzan amanahu Allah*"<sup>33</sup>, a phrase which simultaneously combines the sense of a position subsidiary to the Sultan (*wilayat*) with the idea of permanent tenure (*kursī*, an unusual word in this context - perhaps derived from European usage?). Interestingly, Warrington translated the phrase as "Abd el-Gelil, sovereign of the Fezzan". Another significant phrase occurs in a letter from Ṣayf al-Naṣr, <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Jalīl's

## Political Loyalty and Central Government.

brother and military commander, in which he reported on fighting between <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Jalil and the Awlad Bu Sayf and other tribes of the western Fezzan. They had been beaten off, forced to make peace and asked for <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Jalil's pardon and "now they have entered under his favour" (*alan dakhalu taht <sup>c</sup>atfatih*)<sup>34</sup> a phrase which certainly implies that they recognised <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Jalil, as greater than they were, but falls short of a claim to sovereignty.

However, even if <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Jalil was not claiming full independence of the Porte, the autonomy he wanted was too great for the Turks to accept. In 1842, having been betrayed by a former ally, he and three of his children were murdered on the Pasha's orders<sup>35</sup>. In 1848 Ghuma, his sometime ally in the Jabal Nafusa, was also captured and was sent into exile in Trebizond, whence he escaped in 1853. The following year, he reached Tunis, and when he was refused permission to stay there, left for the Jabal Nafusa to again lead a revolt<sup>36</sup>. It was soon apparent that his aim was once again autonomy and in a letter to British Consul Wood, he assured him that the revolt was against the Pashas, not the Sultan<sup>37</sup>.

Ghuma had high hopes of Richard Wood, for although he had only just been appointed to Tunis, he had previously been Consul in Damascus where he had been a power in the land, acting as an intermediary between local people and the Porte, and supporting local autonomy<sup>38</sup>. Ghuma wrote to Wood in Tunis because as well as the parts of Tripoli which he controlled, he also had a large area on the Tunisian side of the border under his aegis. Wood was unable to help him, as the Bey would only accept his unconditional surrender<sup>39</sup>, a position which the new Pasha of Tripoli, Osman, shared. Osman, however, was prepared to allow Ghuma a certain measure of power in the Jabal, but on condition that he first laid down his arms and lived quietly in Tripoli for one year. This Ghuma was not prepared to do, and the war went on until he was killed in 1858<sup>40</sup>. Once again the political formula of allowing autonomy in exchange for recognition of the central authority had been tried. It had failed because the demands of both parties were too great; nevertheless, the principle remained the same - that the central authorities were prepared to allow strong-men limited local independence in exchange for peace, taxes and sovereignty. The possibility of such an agreement



## Political Loyalty and Central Government.

being reached was accepted by both sides, even if the details of how it worked were not. Thus political control was frequently based not on detailed administration, but on the mutual acceptance of a contract over power.

### CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AND THE AL-FISSAD

Such a contract was perfectly feasible between the central authorities and a single local leader. There were, however, peripheral regions where there was no one person with whom the government could come to such agreements. Typically, these regions were much more disordered. One such was the border area between Tripoli and Tunis, the scene of frequent raiding between tribes of both sides of the frontier, and on the caravans travelling along the coast. It was here that Ghuma set up his base on Tunisian soil, "not far from the impractical marches of Lake Tritonis (*sic*), a portion of the Tunisian territory over which the Bey exercises but a nominal jurisdiction"<sup>41</sup>.

This was an area largely peopled by nomadic Arab tribes - the Warraghma and Wardāna on the Western (Tunisian) side of the frontier, the Nuwa'il on the eastern (Tripoli), and the Si'an who straddled it. By and large the raiding activities of these tribes were uncontrolled by the authorities in Tripoli and Tunis, as a document in the Tunisian archives shows - it details the disruption in the area between 1256 and 1259 (1839/40-1843/44)<sup>42</sup>. The authorities were reduced to looking on, unable to do very much about the fighting - Ahmad Bey's description of the Warraghma as "*ahl al-fissad*" was a recognition that this was almost a permanent state of affairs<sup>43</sup>.

The question is raised as to the extent to which these tribes were subjects either of Tunis or Tripoli. In the view of the governments concerned, the matter was clear enough - the tribes may have been out of control, but Tunis and Tripoli had defined responsibilities for them. For instance in 1843 the Pasha of Tripoli complained to the Bey of Tunis about repeated raids by Tunisian tribes on Tripolitan territory. The culprits were the Warraghma and Wardāna who were "under your rule" (*taht hukmikum*). In his reply, the Bey admitted his responsibility, drawing a distinction between "the Arabs of our province, the Warraghma and Wardāna" and the "people of the province of

## Political Loyalty and Central Government.

Tripoli" (*ḥarabān ayālatinā al-wārdāna wa-warraghma ... ahl ayālat Tarābluṣ*<sup>44</sup>). The Tunisian authorities even attempted to do something about the situation; in 1844 the Prime Minister, Khaznadar, wrote to the Kāhiya of the al-<sup>c</sup>Arād region, who was theoretically responsible for the Warraghma and other tribes, ordering him to tell them to keep the peace "with all the people of the land of Tripoli" (*ma<sup>c</sup>a kafat ahl watan Tarābluṣ*) - once again the distinction between Tripolitan and Tunisian tribes was being made. The reaction of the tribes to this plea gives an indication of the views of the supposed subjects to the central government's claim to sovereignty. They rejected the appeal because "the people of al-<sup>c</sup>Arād (said) that the full weight of government (*al-hukm al-shadīd*) had never appeared in their land"<sup>45</sup>. The phrase "*al-hukm al-shadīd*" is significant, for it is not a refusal to acknowledge the theoretical sovereignty of the Bey, but a rejection of his detailed control. Indeed, on another occasion the *a<sup>c</sup>yan* of the Warraghma wrote to him, using the term *Amīr al-Mu'minīn* - a clear enough indication of their acceptance of Ahmad Bey's sovereignty<sup>46</sup>. The letter in question was written to ask the Bey's help - for Tunisian tribes were also on the receiving end of raiding. Under these circumstances the Bey's authority was welcome - and this was true even as late as 1871. In that year a Tunisian boat was captured by people from the Tripolitan town of Zāwia and its cargo was removed before they returned it to its home port of Zarzīs on the Tunisian side of the frontier. The villagers wanted to attack the people of Zāwia, but the local authorities persuaded them not to, on the grounds that the Ottomans were much more powerful than the governors of Tunis, and so they could not rely on Tunisian protection<sup>47</sup>. The assumption was that the Tunisians had a responsibility to their subjects, even though they were not strong enough to fulfil it.

Thus it may be seen that there was a recognition of sovereignty in the peripheral areas, both those which had strong leaderships in the hands of powerful individuals, and those with a more diffused tribal organisation. This consisted in a clear acceptance on the part of both governors and ruled that there was a clear political connection with one of two centres - Tripoli or Tunis (in the border regions). Nevertheless, the typical form of this sovereignty allowed for a considerable amount of local autonomy,

## Political Loyalty and Central Government.

either negotiated - as with Bū Ḥaddūth - or the result of local refusal to accept the detailed control of the government. There was, however, another aspect to the question of sovereignty - the overall loyalty to the Ottoman Empire.

### THE PROBLEM OF RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN TWO WILAYATS OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE.

Theoretically both Tunis and Tripoli always formed part of the Ottoman Empire. For both the Husaynid Beys and the Qaramanli Pashas, the Porte sent off formal *firman* of appointment - even though this was only a recognition of their *de facto* authority. In theory, then, relationships between the two *wilayats* should be fraternal. In fact this was not the case, for there was a considerable element of political distrust between them - a reflection of their almost completely autonomous status. This was a situation which pre-dated both the Husaynid and Qaramanli dynasties, for there was a history of conflict between Tunis and Tripoli in the seventeenth century - for example the war in 1694 when the Tripolitan Pashas supported the Algerians in their invasion of Tunisia<sup>48</sup>. Under the Qaramanli Pashas, relations improved somewhat - although Tunis became the centre of Tripolitan political opposition based on the person of Mustafa Qaramanli in the 1770s and 1780s, which led to regular border conflict between the two states<sup>49</sup>. However, the Qaramanlis were temporarily overthrown by ʿAlī Burghūl in 1793 it was with Tunisian aid that they regained their throne. But Tunisian involvement in this was at least partially inspired by Burghūl's territorial ambitions over Tunisian territory as far as Hamammāt<sup>50</sup>.

These territorial ambitions over each other's territory were shared by both sides, and in 1833, during the civil war between the Qaramanli brothers ʿAlī and Muhammad, the Tunisians decided that the fluid political situation provided them with the opportunity of annexing Tripoli, just as they had attempted to take over in Oran after the French invasion of Algeria<sup>51</sup>. Even after this scheme had failed, and full Ottoman power was restored in Tripoli, tension between the two *wilayats* continued; in both 1840 and 1846 there were rumours of Ottoman expeditions from Tripoli against Tunis<sup>52</sup>. It is clear that both Tunis and Tripoli saw themselves as separate political

## Political Loyalty and Central Government.

entities.

This sense of political separateness did not prevent either side from acknowledging the authority of the Porte in a nominal sense. Tunisian attempts to annex Tripoli were at first backed by Istanbul, and the Bey got a *firman* supporting his project. The attempt failed, and the Porte attempted to solve the problem by appointing one of the Qaramanli brothers, <sup>c</sup>Ali, as Pasha and gave him the *firman*. However, the people of the Manshia, the garden district outside Tripoli, supported Muhammad Qaramanli and rejected the appointment although they wrote to the Porte stressing their loyalty to the Sultan<sup>53</sup>.

Such formal recognition of the authority of the Porte apart, relations between the *wilayats* remained those of two political entities, even after the Ottoman reoccupation of Tripoli. They appointed agents - who were effectively consuls - in each other's territory; the practice already existed under the Qaramanlis<sup>54</sup>, and continued under the Turks, when the Tunisian agency in Tripoli became the prerogative of one family for a time, and lasted right up until the occupation of Tunis by the French in 1881<sup>55</sup>. Similarly, the Tripolitan authorities appointed their agents in Tunis<sup>56</sup>, and even issued a form of passport to Tripolitans travelling to Tunis<sup>57</sup>.

Nevertheless, the extent of this separateness was changed by the Ottoman reoccupation of Tripoli in 1835. The Ottomans had restored the direct authority of the Porte in Tripoli and were not nearly so willing to acknowledge the political autonomy of Tunis, itself theoretically part of the Empire. This was reflected in a change in the status of Tunisians who were residing in Tripoli. Until 1851 they were considered as 'foreigners' holding extra-territorial rights. For example the owners of land in the Manshia gardens outside Tripoli were exempted from tithes, in exchange for irregular militia service at their own expense. However a good many of them were Tunisians who, the British Consul reported, "having been considered foreign subjects, have not been called upon to serve and have at the same time enjoyed the local privilege of exemption from taxation"<sup>58</sup>. In 1851, the Pasha decided that they should pay tax, but fixed the rate so high that it was greater than the total value of their property. The Tunisian agent presented a petition to the Pasha asking for the rate to be reduced to that paid by everyone

## Political Loyalty and Central Government.

else. He rejected this plea and "told him in severe tones that he (the Tunisian agent), being simply a subject of the Ottoman Empire, whatever might be the powers delegated to him by the Bey of Tunis, could have no right to address him on such a matter, that he did not recognise his mission, that the parties for whom he appeared must pay their assessment, and would not be allowed to sell their properties." When the British and French Consuls intervened to support the Tunisian agent, Mr Consul Herman reported that the Pasha reiterated that "in fact, although natives of Tunis, they were Ottoman subjects"<sup>59</sup>. The Tunisian residents had effectively lost status as a result of this ruling. However, like all the questions surrounding nationality and sovereignty, this one was decided not by a formal legal declaration, but as the result of political circumstances and administrative decisions. This was true of much of the practice surrounding questions of jurisdiction in North Africa in the first part of the nineteenth century - witness the way in which the Tripolitan authorities accepted the right of British consuls to act for Moroccans passing through on the *hājǰǰ*, even though the arrangement had been sanctioned by no treaty at all<sup>60</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

Because questions of sovereignty and political control in the *wilayat* of Tripoli were decided on the basis of political conditions rather than juridical concepts it is only possible to make empirical assertions about them. Nevertheless it seems reasonable to state that political loyalties in Tripoli in the first half on the nineteenth century functioned at a number of levels.

At the topmost level was a loyalty to the Ottoman Empire. This had always been accepted, even by the Qaramanli Pashas, and by their subjects, but it was always a remote, theoretical authority - the people of the Manshia found no difficulty in rejecting the Porte's appointment of 'Alī Pasha, while reiterating their loyalty to the Sultan.

The second level, that of the Pasha in Tripoli (or the Bey in Tunis) was the effective primary political unit. At every practical level loyalty to the central authority (or reaction against it) was orientated towards him, a fact symbolised by the Qaramanlis' adoption of the title

## Political Loyalty and Central Government.

of *amir al-mu'minin*. However, even this level of loyalty was diluted in the more peripheral areas.

Lack of money, and the huge distances involved in administering the peripheral areas led to the adoption of a typical North African solution to the problem: the creation of a third level of political loyalty, allowing a considerable amount of local autonomy to powerful local strong-men. Even where such figures did not exist, and tribal structures remained beyond any effective control, this locally autonomous level still recognised the authority of the second level. Furthermore the areas in which political entities were acting were well known and their limits were recognised both by the central authorities and the local people.

Finally, although these political stratagems did not always work, they were accepted as normal political solutions by both sides. When they did fail, as in the cases of <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Jalil and Ghuma, the quarrel was not over the principle of the strategy, but over the way in which it was to be put into effect, in fact over the amount of autonomy which was demanded as opposed to the amount which the central authorities were prepared to give.

This was the situation at the middle of the nineteenth century. However, things had already begun to change. The independence of the Pashas was overthrown in 1835, and by the 1850s the Ottoman authorities in Tripoli were no longer willing to accept either a very great autonomy, such as that which <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Jalil and Ghuma demanded, nor were willing to permit the recognition of the political separateness of Tunisian residents. The most important change was yet to come. In the 1870s a new crop, esparto grass, began to be exported from all the North African states. In both Tripoli and Tunis this grass grew wild, particularly in those districts most distinguished for their autonomy. As result of the direct incorporation of these peripheral districts into the European market, their political structures and relationships with the centre would be greatly changed.

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## Political Loyalty and Central Government.

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## Political Loyalty and Central Government.

### ABBREVIATIONS

- AGT - Archives Générales, Tunis, Dar al-Bay.
- BNF - Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.
- FO - Foreign Office Archives, Public Records Office, London.
- SDN - Archivi del Stato di Napoli, Naples.
- SPF - State Papers Foreign, Public Record Office, London.
- TAHP - Times Newspaper Archives, Papers of W.B. Harris.



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