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History

The Libya story is one of history's grand epics. Ancient civilisations, the empires of the Middle Ages and great powers of our age have all fought over Libya. But it's a story that goes on, a work-in-progress that remains in the hands of Colonel Muammar Qaddafi, one of the most recognisable and enigmatic figures of modern times.

THE SAHARA ONCE WAS GREEN

Hundreds of millions of years ago, the Sahara was covered by expansive inland seas. Tens of millions of years ago, the Sahara was a desert larger than it is today. Tens of thousands of years ago, the Sahara again turned green. As Europe shivered under the Ice Age, the Sahara was home to lakes and forests and a pleasant Mediterranean climate.

Perhaps drawn by this idyllic climate, two distinct races appeared in North Africa between about 15,000 and 10,000 BC, the Oranian and then the Capsian. Their integration with indigenous peoples resulted in the spread of Neolithic (New Stone Age) culture and the introduction of farming techniques. The earliest evidence of lasting or semipermanent settlements in Libya dates from this period (8000 BC).

Rock paintings and carvings in the Jebel Acacus (p198) and at Wadi Methkandoush (p204), as well as in the Tassilin-Ajjer in Algeria) are the greatest source of knowledge about this time of abundant rainfall and vegetation, when rivers ran through grassy plateaus across which ranged a rich abundance of wildlife. The Sahara was the earth's idyll, its land of plenty, a fertile territory capable of sustaining all the life of the land for generations.

It is from these Neolithic peoples that the Berbers (the indigenous peoples of North Africa; see p47) are thought to be descended. Taking into consideration regional variations and the lack of hard evidence, they appear to have been predominantly nomadic pastoralists, although they continued to hunt and occasionally farm. By the time of contact with the first of the outside civilisations to arrive from the east, the Phoenicians, these local tribes were already well established.

African Rock Art (by David Coulson & Alec Campbell) is wonderfully illustrated and the text brings to life rock art and every aspect of its historical context.

Libyan Studies is a yearly journal published by the Society for Libyan Studies (www.britac.ac.uk/institutes/libya/) and there's no finer barometer of current research into Libya's ancient history.

PUNIC TRIPOLITANIA (1000–201 BC)

The Phoenician empire, with its origins and base in the Levantine ports of Tyre, Sidon and Byblos (all in modern-day Lebanon), were a seafaring people renowned for their trading activities, and they were the first of the great civilisations of antiquity to turn their sights on Libya. By the 12th century BC, Phoenician traders were active throughout the Mediterranean, arriving regularly on the Libyan coast by 1000 BC.

After around 700 BC, their need for permanent settlements to facilitate their trade in gold, silver, raw metals, ivory and even apes and peacocks saw them establish the colonies of Lebdah (Leptis Magna; p110), Oea (Tripoli; p73) and Sabratha (p100). Other ports were later built at Macomades-Euphranta (near modern Sirt) and Charax (Medinat Sultan). Each was a small but essential link in a chain of safe ports stretching from the Levant to Spain.

The strategic importance of the Libyan coast was not the only reason for Phoenician interest in Libya – the ports also provided a base for Phoenician merchants to trade with the Berber tribes of the interior, with whom they signed treaties of cooperation.

Historical Dictionary of Libya (by Ronald Bruce St John) is a comprehensive A-Z look at Libyan history from the Abbasid to the Zirid dynasties with detours into the ancient world en route.

Phoenician civilisation in North Africa came to be called 'Punic', a derivation of both the Latin Punicus and Greek Phoinix. The colonies were governed from the city of Carthage (in modern Tunisia), a city whose dominance of North Africa represented the pinnacle of Punic civilisation.

Carthage was founded in 814 BC. Long politically dependent on the mother culture in Tyre, Carthage eventually emerged as an independent, commercial empire. By 517 BC, the powerful city-state was the leading city of North Africa and by the 4th century BC, Carthage controlled the North African coast from Tripolitania to the Atlantic.

Ultimately, ongoing tension with the nascent Roman Empire weakened Carthage and spelled the death-knell for Carthaginian rule. In what was to become a recurring theme in Libyan history, the Carthaginian empire governed Tripolitania from afar. There were few material benefits for Libya's indigenous inhabitants, yet the province was not spared the devastation caused by the Punic Wars with Rome (264–241 BC, 218–201 BC and 149–146 BC). The wars reduced Carthage to a small, vulnerable African state. It was razed by the Romans in 146 BC, the site symbolically sprinkled with salt and damned forever. Tripolitania was left to fend for itself.

The Garamantes of Southern Libya (by Charles Daniels) dates from 1970 and is hard to find, but it's one of very few studies of the Garamantes empire.

MAKING THE DESERT BLOOM (900 BC–AD 500)

While the Phoenicians were establishing themselves along Libya's Mediterranean Coast, the Garamantes were emerging as Libya's first indigenous empire. They ruled southern Libya from their base in the Wadi al-Hayat from 900 BC, first from Zinchecra (p191) and later from Garama (p189) at the location of what is now modern Germa. At once warlike and a sophisticated, urban community that made the desert bloom, the Garamantes are thought to have partly descended from Neolithic peoples or migrated from the oases to the east, carrying with them a knowledge of cultivation.

Garamantes sent dates, precious stones, ostrich feathers, ivory and slaves to Leptis Magna in exchange for pottery, glass, clothes and other Mediterranean produce.

Archaeologists have found evidence to suggest that Garamantian cities were more than mere desert outposts. Rather, they were thriving urban centres with markets and forums for public entertainment and the Garamantes were one of the most advanced peoples of their time; many believe that the Garamantes and their forerunners may have been responsible for the rock art of southern Libya. The Garamantes' stock-in-trade was, however, control over the ancient trans-Saharan caravan routes, and the lucrative commodities of salt, slaves and gold all converged on Garama from Egypt and sub-Saharan Africa.

Most remarkably of all, the Garamantes empire thrived because of its agricultural prowess, even though the Garamantes lived far from recognised water sources. Herodotus spoke of the Garamantes as 'a very numerous tribe of people who spread soil over the salt to sow their seed in'. Archaeologists have discovered the remains of hundreds of underground channels, known as *foggara*, which enabled a boom in farming activity in the oases of the wadi. Ultimately, however, this tapping of underground water reserves, an approach adopted nearly 2500 years later by the modern Libyan state (see The Eighth Wonder of the World, p64), sowed the seeds of the Garamantian decline. As underground water supplies dried up as a result of overexploitation, by AD 500 the last of the Garamantes people had either died or abandoned Garama. Apart from Garama, the only lasting remnants of Garamantian civilisation in the Wadi al-Hayat are the royal tombs of Ahramat al-Hattia (p191) near Germa.

With their connections to a wider world, the Garamantes were responsible for introducing writing, horses, wheeled transport and, finally, camels to the Sahara.

GREEK CYRENAICA (631–96 BC)

Legend has it that the inhabitants of the Greek island of Thera (modern Santorini) were told by the oracle of Apollo at Delphi to migrate to North Africa. In 631 BC, they established the city of Cyrene (p141). Within 200 years, during the period of great Hellenic colonisation, the Greeks had established four more cities – Teuchira (Tocra; p133), Ptolemais (Tolmeita; p134), Eusperides (at Benghazi; p125) and Apollonia (the port for Cyrene; p147). These semi-autonomous city-states came to be known as the Pentapolis (Five Cities) that became so significant that by around 500 BC the Greeks divided the world into three parts – Asia, Europe and Libya.

The Histories (by Herodotus) provides evidence why the writer has become known as the 'Father of History' with engaging and highly readable 5th-century BC text laced with references to Libya.

In 331 BC, the armies of Alexander the Great made a triumphant entrance into Cyrenaica from Egypt, although the great man himself stopped at the border after the Cyrenaicans greeted him with promises of loyalty. Upon his death in 323 BC, Alexander's empire was divided among his Macedonian generals. Egypt, along with Cyrene, went to Ptolemy. Again, the cities of the Pentapolis retained a significant degree of autonomy, although Greek influence was limited to the coastal areas, with minimal penetration of the Berber hinterland.

Libya – The Lost Cities of the Roman Empire (by Robert Polidori et al) is the peerless (and magnificently photographed) resource on the history of the Roman and Greek occupation of Libya.

Despite political turmoil throughout the years of the Pentapolis, Cyrene, in particular, flourished. In the economic sphere, the fertile slopes of the Jebel al-Akhdar provided Greece with valuable grain, wine, wool, livestock and a herb from the silphium plant (see p144), which was unique to Cyrenaica. Cyrene also became one of the Greek world's premier intellectual and artistic centres, producing and exporting some of the finest scholars of the age. The city was famed for its medical school, its learned academics and for being home to some of the finest examples of Hellenistic architecture anywhere in the world. The Cyrenians also developed a school of philosophy with a doctrine of moral cheerfulness that defined happiness as the sum of human pleasures. (Such a philosophy was undoubtedly made easier by the temperate and altogether pleasant climate.) For more details on Cyrene's history, turn to p141.

The halcyon days of Greek rule could not last forever. With Greek influence on the wane, the last Greek ruler, Ptolemy Apion, finally bequeathed Cyrenaica to Rome which formally annexed the territory in 96 BC.

ROMAN LIBYA (46 BC–AD 431)

After the final defeat of Carthage in the Punic Wars (see p29), the Romans assigned Tripolitania to their ally, the Berber king of Numidia. In 46 BC, Julius Caesar deposed the final Numidian king, Juba I, who had sided with Pompey, a general in the Roman army and rival of Caesar in the Civil Wars of Rome. Tripolitania was thereafter incorporated into the new province of Africa Nova (later called Africa Proconsularis).

Defeating the Numidians was one thing but the Garamantes (opposite) of southern Libya proved more resilient. Roman expeditions against the Garamantian cities in 20–19 BC and again in AD 69–70 were sent packing. Thereafter, the Romans and Garamantes signed a military and commercial treaty and became firm trading partners.

In AD 68–69, the territories belonging to Leptis Magna were devastated by Garamantian raiders who united with Oea (Tripoli) in its war with Leptis; the elites of Leptis Magna cowered behind the city walls.

Elsewhere, Rome had completed the pacification of Sirtica (along the southern coast of the Gulf of Sirt) by the end of the 1st century AD, and Tripolitania and Cyrenaica were united under one administration for the first time.

The era that followed was one of Libya's finest. The Pax Romana saw Tripolitania and Cyrenaica become prosperous Roman provinces, part of a cosmopolitan state with a common language, legal system and

identity. Many of the towns along the coast enjoyed the full range of urban amenities for which Roman cities were famous – a forum, markets, amphitheatres and baths – and traders flocked to the Libyan coast from throughout the empire. Tripolitania was a major source of olive oil for Roman merchants and also operated as an entrepôt for gold and slaves brought to the coast by Berbers and the Garamantians. Cyrenaica was equally prized, as it had been under Greek rule, as a source of wine, silphium and horses.

The Lost Cities of the Roman Empire (Robert Polidori et al) is a magnificent, comprehensive and beautifully photographed coffee-table book covering Libya's Greek and Roman sites. Currently out of print, but worth tracking down.

A Libyan even became emperor of the Roman Empire – it was under the tutelage of Septimius Severus (r AD 193–211), who was known as 'the grim African' (see p112), that Leptis Magna was transformed into an important cultural and commercial centre second only to Rome.

Despite the relative peace that accompanied Roman rule, the region was not immune to the political instability beyond its borders. In AD 115, a Jewish revolt among settlers from Palestine began and was not quelled until AD 118, after Jewish insurgents had laid waste to Cyrene and destroyed much of Cyrenaica.

The thinly populated territory of Libya enabled the Romans to maintain control with little more than a locally recruited legion of 5500 men.

In 300 the Roman emperor Diocletian separated Cyrenaica from the province of Crete, dividing the region into Upper and Lower Libya – the first time the name 'Libya' was used as an administrative designation. (The name 'Libya' was first used by the ancient Greeks to refer to all of North Africa, except Egypt, and comes from the ancient Egyptians who referred to all Berbers living west of the Nile as 'Lebu'.) By the 4th century AD, however, Rome was in decline and the fate of the Libyan colonies was sealed by a massive earthquake in 365 (see p143). Sabratha, Leptis Magna, Cyrene and many other Roman cities were destroyed and Roman Africa never recovered.

VANDALS & BYZANTINES

In 429 a rebellious Roman official invited the Vandals, a Germanic tribe, to Libya in an attempt to gain leverage with the authorities in Rome. The Vandals, with as many as 80,000 settlers in tow, quickly set about conquering Tripolitania, a feat they achieved in 431 under their leader Genseric (Gaeseric). Faced with little choice, the Romans recognised the Vandal ascendancy as long as Libya's civil administration remained, nominally at least, in Roman hands. In 455 the Vandals sacked Rome. The last vestiges of Roman prosperity in Libya quickly evaporated and the Vandals, more adept at pillage and overseas conquests than in administering their colonies, fortified themselves in armed camps. The outlying areas fell once again under the rule of tribal chieftains.

A Travellers' History of North Africa (by Barnaby Rogerson) is history made accessible with a region-wide focus and an ideal companion to your Libyan visit.

In 533 the Byzantine army general Flavius Belisarius captured Libya for the emperor Justinian. With Byzantine control limited to coastal cities such as Sabratha, Cyrene and Apollonia, Berber rebellions in the hinterland reduced the remainder of Libya to anarchy and the potential prosperity of the provinces was squandered. Byzantine rule was deeply unpopular, not least because taxes were increased dramatically in order to pay for the colony's military upkeep while the cities were left to decay.

ISLAMIC LIBYA

With tenuous Byzantine control over Libya restricted to a few poorly defended coastal strongholds, the Arab horsemen under the command of Amr ibn al-As first crossed into Cyrenaica in 642 and encountered little resistance. By 643 Tripoli had also succumbed. It was not until 663, when Uqba bin Nafi invaded the Fezzan, however, that Berber

resistance in Libya was overcome. By 712 the entire region from Andalucía to the Levant came under the purview of the Umayyad caliph of Damascus.

Despite the rapid success enjoyed by the forces of Islam, the social character of Libya remained overwhelmingly Berber. While largely accepting the arrival of the new religion, the Berber tribes resisted the Arabisation of the region. Although Arab rule flourished in coastal areas, the enmity between the Berbers (who saw their rulers as arrogant and brutal) and the Arabs (who scorned the Berbers as barbarians) ensured that rebellions plagued much of Libya's hinterland.

In 750 the Abbasid dynasty overthrew the Umayyad caliph and shifted the capital to Baghdad, with emirs retaining nominal control over the Libyan coast on behalf of the far-distant caliph. In 800 Caliph Harun ar-Rashid appointed Ibrahim ibn al-Aghlabid as his governor. The Aghlabid dynasty effectively became independent of the Baghdad caliphs, who nevertheless retained ultimate spiritual authority.

The Aghlabid emirs are considered some of the most enlightened Islamic rulers of Libya. They took their custodianship of Libya seriously: repairing Roman irrigation systems, restoring order and bringing a measure of prosperity to the region.

In the last decade of the 9th century, the Ismailis (a branch of Shiism) launched an assault on the strongholds of the Sunni Aghlabids. The movement's spiritual leader, Grandmaster Ubaidalla Said of Syria, was installed as the imam of much of North Africa, including Tripolitania. The Berbers of Libya, always happy to thumb their noses at the orthodox Sunni aristocracy, accepted the imam as the Mahdi (Promised One).

The Shiite Fatimid dynasty conquered Egypt in 972 and set up the caliphate in Cairo. The difficulty of maintaining control over Libya plagued the Fatimids, as it had almost every authority before them. At the beginning of the 11th century, Bulukkin ibn Ziri was installed as the Fatimid governor but he quickly returned Libya to orthodox Sunnism and swore allegiance to the Abbasid caliphs of Baghdad.

The Fatimid anger at what they considered an act of gross betrayal would profoundly alter the fabric of Libyan society. Two tribes from the Arabian Peninsula – the Bani Hilal and the Bani Salim (or Bani Sulaim) – were co-opted into migrating to the Maghreb. The Bani Salim settled in Libya, particularly in Cyrenaica, while the Bani Hilal (who numbered as many as 200,000 families) spread across North Africa (see also Tribes in Libya, p45). The destruction of Cyrene and Tripoli by this unstoppable mass migration was symptomatic of arguably the most effective conquest Libya had seen. The Berber tribespeople were displaced from their traditional lands, their farmland converted to pasture and the new settlers finally cemented the cultural and linguistic Arabisation of the region.

In 1158 the supporters of the Almohad dynasty arrived in Tripolitania from Morocco and established its authority. An Almohad viceroy, Muhammad bin Abu Hafs, ruled Libya from 1207 to 1221 and established the Hafsid dynasty, which outlived the Almohads. The Hafsids ruled Tripolitania for nearly 300 years. There was significant trade with the city-states of Europe and the Hafsid rulers encouraged art, literature and architecture.

Meanwhile, in the Fezzan in the 13th century, King Danama of Kanem (near Lake Chad) annexed territories as far north as the Al-Jufra oases. His Toubou viceroy founded the autonomous Bani Nasr dynasty, which ruled the Fezzan until the 14th century. They were followed by the theocratic kingdoms of Kharijite sectarians, including the Bani Khattab in the Fezzan. In the early 16th century the Libyan Sahara fell under the sway of Muhammad al-Fazi from Morocco who, late in the 15th century, founded the Awlad Muhammad dynasty in Murzuq.

OTTOMAN RULE

By the start of the 15th century, the Libyan coast had little central authority and its harbours were havens for unchecked bands of pirates. Hapsburg Spain and the Knights of St John of Malta occupied Tripoli briefly in the early 16th century, before yielding to Khair ad-Din, a pirate king known more evocatively as Barbarossa, or Red Beard. It was then that the coast became renowned as the Barbary Coast.

When the Ottomans arrived to occupy Tripoli in 1551, they saw little reason to reign in the pirates, preferring instead to profit from the booty. The French, Dutch and British navies all bombarded Tripoli to warn off further robbery on the high seas, but the Turks saw the pirates as a second column in their battle for naval supremacy and turned a blind eye to the anarchy beyond the port.

Under the Ottomans the Maghreb was divided into three provinces, or regencies: Algiers, Tripoli and Tunis. After 1565 administrative authority in Tripoli was vested in a pasha appointed by the sultan in Constantinople. The sultan provided the pasha with a corps of janissaries (professional soldiers committed to a life of military service). This corps was in turn divided into a number of companies under the command of a junior officer with the title of bey. The janissaries quickly became the dominant force in Ottoman Libya. As self-governing military guilds answerable only to their own laws and protected by a divan (a council of senior officers who advised the pasha), the janissaries soon reduced the pasha to a largely ceremonial role. The sultan, whose forces were stretched to the limits in this vast empire, was in no position to argue.

In 1711 Ahmed Karamanli, an Ottoman cavalry officer and son of a Turkish officer and Libyan woman, seized power and founded a dynasty that would last 124 years. Again, while the Ottomans wielded ultimate authority from afar, power was vested in a local leader acting well beyond his original brief.

One of the primary preoccupations of the Karamanli dynasty was to bring Fezzan (and hence trans-Saharan trade routes) under its control. The sultans of the Awlad Muhammad based in Murzuq resisted

The Barbary Corsairs (by S Lane-Poole) is filled with the skulduggery and picaresque adventures of the pirates that raided with impunity from Tripoli.

Fazzan Under the Rule of the Awlad Muhammad (by Habib Wada'a El-Hesnawi) recounts the ebbs, flows and ultimate fall of the Awlad Muhammad and is especially good on the last days of the dynasty.

Journal of Frederick Hornemann's Travels from Cairo to Mourzouk 1797-8 (by Frederick Hornemann) is one of the earliest accounts of Fezzan through European eyes in the dying days of the Awlad Muhammad dynasty.

A STORY OF BETRAYAL

For 350 years, from the last decades of the 15th century until 1813, Fezzan was ruled by the sultans of the Awlad Muhammad tribe, but their rule was almost cut short by the Machiavellian machinations-gone-wrong of one of the sultans' wives.

In 1577 Khudah, the wife of Sultan al-Muntasir, became outraged at her husband over his perceived favouritism of his other wife. She sent a delegation to Tripoli and promised the Ottoman rulers – who had long-coveted the Fezzan – riches, and Al-Muntasir's kingdom, if they helped depose her husband. With an Ottoman detachment on its way to Sebha, Al-Muntasir arrived at Sebha's Qasr Lahmar (Red Palace) to find that Khudah had closed the gates. He besieged the palace, but the sultan died after three days, reportedly 'of chagrin'.

Faced with this sudden turn of good fortune, Khudah decided to rule Fezzan on her own. In order to deter the advancing Ottomans, Khudah dressed the stones surrounding Sebha in military uniforms. Stopped in their tracks by this seemingly formidable army, they demanded that Khudah honour her promise. She refused and when the Turks realised that the only army confronting them was an army of stones they stormed the palace, tortured Khudah and burned her alive as she was handing over her treasures. As they marched on Murzuq, Al-Muntasir's son and heir-apparent fled south. He was not to return until a decade later when a revolt swept through Fezzan and massacred the isolated Ottoman garrisons.

ROUND ONE TO LIBYA

In 1801 Yusuf Karamanli tried to coerce the newly independent United States of America into paying an annual tribute (glorified protection money) of US$250,000, just as it demanded of other, longer-established seafaring powers. When the USA offered just US$18,000 in return, the insulted Karamanli ordered the sacking of the US consulate in Tripoli. The Americans interpreted this as an act of war and, not for the last time, dispatched a warship, the USS *Philadelphia*, to the Libyan coast. The ship was overrun and the crew taken prisoner in Derna (p150). Only when US forces – assisted by Arab horsemen, Greek mercenaries and dissident members of Yusuf's own family – captured the town was the confrontation (1801–05) resolved. The Americans paid US$68,000 and Karamanli emerged as something of a local hero.

the Ottoman army, while in 1810 the Ottomans dispatched troops to Ghadames to regain control. Soon after, in 1813, the Ottomans seized on a refusal by the sultans to pay tribute to Tripoli and overthrew the last sultan of the Awlad Muhammad's 350-year rule. They thereafter re-annexed the Fezzan.

The Karamanli dynasty was, however, entering troubled times, with England and France calling in the considerable debts incurred by the Karamanli regime. Tripoli's economy collapsed and Yusuf Karamanli – who had fought and won a civil war against his father and brother in 1795 and always made a point of defying his Ottoman overlords – tried to make up the financial shortfall by increasing taxes.

Rebellions broke out across Libya and the countryside soon descended into civil war. Yusuf finally succumbed to the pressure and abdicated in 1835 in favour of his son Ali. When Ali asked the Ottoman sultan Mohammed II for assistance in repelling a European takeover of Tripoli, the Ottomans took the opportunity to rein in their troublesome offspring and brought the rule of the Karamanli dynasty to a close. With full Ottoman authority restored, the Turks once again relegated Libya to the status of a neglected outpost of the empire.

Narrative of a Ten-Years Residence at Tripoli in Africa (by Richard Tully) is filled with sharp detail and engaging commentary on the pleasures and intrigues of 1780s Tripoli during the Karamanli dynasty.

THE RISE OF THE SANUSIS

Less than a decade after the hated Ottoman authority was resumed, the indigenous Sanusi Movement, led by Islamic cleric Sayyid Mohammed Ali al-Sanusi, called on the tribes of the Cyrenaican countryside to resist Ottoman rule. The Grand Sanusi (see p36) established his headquarters in the oasis town of Al-Jaghbub (p154) while his *ikhwan* (followers) set up *zawiyas* (religious colleges or monasteries) across North Africa and brought some stability to regions not known for their submission to central authority. In line with the express instruction of the Grand Sanusi, their gains were made largely without coercion.

The highpoint of the Sanusi influence was to come in the 1880s under the Grand Sanusi's son, Mohammed al-Mahdi, who was a skilled administrator and a charismatic orator. With 146 lodges spanning the length and breadth of the Sahara, Mohammed al-Mahdi moved the Sanusi capital to Al-Kufra (p132). Harsh Ottoman rule only fuelled the appeal of the Sanusi Movement's call to repel foreign occupation. Mohammed al-Mahdi succeeded where so many had failed before him: securing the enduring loyalty of the Berber tribes of Cyrenaica.

While the Sanusis were winning hearts and minds, the last 75 years of Ottoman rule in Libya saw 33 Ottoman governors pass through Tripoli – not one of them distinguished themselves enough to be remembered by history.

London-based Darf Publishers (www.darfpublishers.co.uk) should be your first stop when trying to track down hard-to-find travellers' accounts of Libya and other studies of Libyan history that other publishers won't touch.

THE GRAND SANUSI

Sayyid Mohammed Ali al-Sanusi was born in 1787 in what is now Algeria. A descendant of the Prophet Mohammed and a Sufi, he studied in Morocco and then at Cairo's prestigious Al-Azhar University. This pious scholar was forceful in his criticism of the Egyptian ulema (religious authorities) for what he saw as their timid compliance with the Ottoman authorities and their spiritual conservatism. He also argued that all learned Muslims had the right to disregard the four classical schools of Islamic law and Quranic interpretation, and themselves engage in *ijtihad* (individual interpretation of sacred texts and traditions). Not surprisingly, this upstart from a North African backwater was denounced by the religious scholars of Cairo as a heretic and they issued a fatwa against him.

Al-Sanusi removed himself to Mecca, where he found greater support for his radical ideas. There he was influenced by the Wahhabi movement, which called for a return to the purity of Islam. In Mecca he founded his first *zawiya* (a religious college or monastery), before returning to North Africa. He settled in Cyrenaica (near Al-Bayda) in 1843 where he found fertile ground among a people known for their dislike of authority.

ITALY'S FOURTH SHORE

With Ottoman control tenuous at best, the Italian government saw an opportunity to join, albeit belatedly, the Europe-wide scramble for African colonies. On 3 October 1911 the Italians attacked Tripoli, claiming somewhat disingenuously to be liberating Libya from Ottoman rule. The Libyan population was unimpressed and refused to accept yet another occupying force. A major revolt against the Italians followed, with battles near Tripoli, Misrata, Benghazi and Derna.

The Ottoman sultan had more-important concerns and ceded Libya to the Italians by signing the 1912 Treaty of Lausanne. Tripolitania was largely under Italian control by 1914, but both Cyrenaica and the Fezzan were home to rebellions led by the Sanusis. As one historian observed, 'All Cyrenaica was hard hostile rock beneath the shallowest covering of local collaboration. The Italians found themselves not fighting an army but a people.'

Omar al-Mukhtar – The Italian Reconquest of Libya (by Enzo Santarelli) is a nuanced portrait of Libya's most famous rebel leader, casting searing light on the brutality of Italian colonial rule.

The Italian government failed to heed the unrest of a people tired of foreign occupation. In 1921 the government appointed Governor Giuseppe Volpi. The following year Mussolini announced the Riconquista of 'Libya' (a name not used as an administrative entity since Roman times). Marshal Pietro Badoglio, who commanded the Italian army under Volpi, waged a punitive 'pacification' campaign. Badoglio was succeeded in the field by Marshal Rodolfo Graziani after Mussolini became impatient with the frequent setbacks opposing the rebels. Graziani only accepted the commission from Mussolini on the condition that he was allowed to crush Libyan resistance unencumbered by the inconvenient restraints imposed by Italian and international law. Mussolini agreed immediately and Graziani intensified the oppression. It was around this time that Omar al-Mukhtar, a Sanusi sheikh, became the leader of the uprising.

After a short-lived truce collapsed in 1929, Italy's Libya policy plumbed new depths of brutality. A barbed-wire fence, still visible today on the road from Tobruk to Al-Jaghbub (see Graziani's Fence, p155) was built from the Mediterranean to the oasis of Al-Jaghbub to sever supply lines critical to the resistance's survival. Soon afterwards the colonial administration began the wholesale deportation of the people of the Jebel al-Akhdar to deny the rebels the succour of the local population. The forced migration of more than 100,000 people ended in concentration

THE LION OF THE DESERT

Omar al-Mukhtar was born in Cyrenaica in 1858. His education through the Sanusi school system invested him with a passionate faith in Islam and a belief that it was the obligation of every Libyan to resist all forms of foreign domination. He distinguished himself in the first campaign against the Italians (1911–17) and with Italian rule being increasingly marked by terror, he again took up arms. In addition to a number of unlikely successes against the better-resourced Italian army from his stronghold of Wadi al-Kuf (p137), Al-Mukhtar's greatest achievement was to unite Libya's disparate tribes into an effective fighting force. For almost 10 years, he and his fighters held out, frustrating the Italians at every turn. In 1931 Al-Mukhtar was still fighting at the age of 73, which earned him the sobriquet of 'Lion of the Desert'. When supplies for the resistance movement ran out later that year, Al-Mukhtar was captured by the Italian army and on 16 September 1931 he was hanged in Suluq in front of his followers; for more information see The Capture, Trial & Execution of Omar al-Mukhtar, p138. A likeness of Al-Mukhtar appears on the 10LD banknote.

camps in Suluq (south of Benghazi; p131) and Al-'Aghela (west of Ajdabiya; p123) where tens of thousands died in squalid conditions. It's estimated that at least 80,000 Libyans died either directly in military campaigns or through starvation and disease, including a staggering half of the Cyrenaican population. Thousands more were exiled to remote Italian islands and never returned. Up to 95% of the local livestock was also killed. It was all part of the Italian policy to win 'even if the entire population of Cyrenaica has to perish'. After Omar al-Mukhtar's capture, the rebellion petered out. The wholesale massacring of civilians fleeing Al-Kufra was the final outrage of a ruthless occupation.

Lion of the Desert (1981), starring Anthony Quinn and John Gielgud, brings the legend of Omar al-Mukhtar to life and is notable for being one of few famous movies actually filmed in Libya.

By 1934 Italian control extended into the Fezzan, and in 1937 Mussolini cynically declared himself the 'Protector of Islam', in the process filling the mosques with compliant Sunni clerics. In 1938–39 Mussolini sought to fully colonise Libya, introducing 30,000 Italian settlers, which brought their numbers to more than 100,000 (proportionally more than French settlers in neighbouring Algeria). These settlers were shipped primarily to Sahel al-Jefara (Jefara Plain) in Tripolitania (40,000) and the Jebel al-Akhdar in Cyrenaica (the remaining 60,000). In order to accommodate the new arrivals, the Fascist government appropriated 225,000 hectares of prime agricultural land from locals without compensation. For a sobering overview of the devastation wrought on Libya during the colonial period, visit the Libyan Studies Centre (p87) in Tripoli.

Desert Encounter (by Knud Holmboe) is one of the few firsthand accounts of the Italian occupation of Libya in the early 1930s and is wonderfully told. For an excerpt from this book, see p54.

Although the policy of resettling Italians in Libya was portrayed as essential to Italy's population crisis – many of the settlers were landless peasants from the desperately poor Mezzogiorno of Italy's south – the sheer cost of the exercise suggested that the colonisation was primarily driven by ideology. Indeed, Mussolini is reported to have said that resettling Italy's rural poor in Libya cost more than it would have to put them up in Rome's exclusive Grand Hotel.

By the time that Italian three decades of colonial rule in Libya ended during WWII, one quarter of Libya's population had died as a result of the occupation. Libya was one of the poorest countries on earth and, in the words of the historian Mansour O El-Kikhia, 'What the Italians left behind was a country with a decimated population; a below-subsistence level, stagnating economy; and a political vacuum almost impossible to fill. That the country's population survived was indeed a miracle.'

In July 1999 the Italian government offered a formal apology to Libya.

THINGS THEY SAID ABOUT…NEWLY INDEPENDENT LIBYA

Libya combines within the borders of one country virtually all the obstacles of development that can be found anywhere: geographic, economic, political, sociological, technological. If Libya can be brought to a stage of sustained growth, there is hope for every country in the world.

Benjamin Higgins, UN economist sent to Libya in 1952

WWII & THE ROAD TO INDEPENDENCE

Just when the Italians had beaten the Libyan resistance into submission, WWII again turned Libya into a theatre for somebody else's war. From 1940 until late 1942 the Italians and Germans, led by Lieutenant-General Erwin Rommel, waged a devastating war for the territory between Benghazi and El-Alamein (Egypt), with much of the fighting centred on Tobruk (p151); for more information on the defence of Tobruk by Allied forces, see The Rats of Tobruk, p153). In October 1942 General Montgomery's army broke through the German defences at El-Alamein. In November the Allied forces retook Cyrenaica; by January 1943 Tripoli was in British hands and by February the last German and Italian soldiers were driven from Libya.

Tobruk (by Peter Fitzsimmons) is the definitive account of the battles for the northeastern Libyan city with harrowing details and characters that bring to life the legend of the Rats of Tobruk.

The British administered Tripolitania and Cyrenaica from 1943. The initial military presence became a caretaker administration while the victorious powers decided what to do with Libya. In the meantime the French were, with British acquiescence, occupying the Fezzan, with their headquarters at Sebha. Ghat was attached to the French military region of Algeria, while Ghadames was subject to French control in southern Tunisia.

The country was hardly a lucrative prospect for potential occupiers: Libya was impoverished and had become renowned for its fierce resistance to colonial rule. The Libyan countryside and infrastructure had been devastated – it was estimated that at the end of WWII there were 11 million unexploded mines on or under Libyan soil – and prevailing infrastructure and education levels presented a damning indictment of Italy's colonial neglect.

A Yank in Libya (1942) is a classic movie about the intrigues of the European powers in Libya as they vie for the loyalty of the local Berber tribes.

The Four Powers Commission, comprising France, the UK, USSR and USA, was set up to decide Libya's fate. After the customary squabbling and distrust among the Great Powers, it emerged that Sayyid Idris al-Sanusi (the grandson of the Grand Sanusi) had received promises of independence from the British in return for Sanusi support during WWII. Among Libyans (who found themselves finally being listened to) the notion of independence quickly gathered momentum. Libyan nationalists raced against the clock to prevent France from detaching the Fezzan (with less than 60,000 people) from the provinces of Cyrenaica (300,000) and Tripolitania (750,000). The UN General Assembly approved the formation of an independent state in November 1949. On 24 December 1951 the independent United Kingdom of Libya, with the Sanusi King Idris as its monarch, was finally, and unanimously, proclaimed by the National Assembly.

THE DISCOVERY OF OIL

Libya in the 1950s seemed overwhelmed by the task at hand of building state institutions and rebuilding its shattered economy. For a time its only export was scrap-metal leftover from WWII. The monarchy quickly outlawed political parties and turned to Britain and the USA for assistance. In 1953 the Libyan government signed a treaty allowing Britain to maintain military bases on Libyan soil in return for annual aid, while a similar agreement was signed with the Americans the following year. In return, by the end of 1959, Libya had by some estimates become the largest per capita recipient of US aid in the world.

In June 1959 an oilfield was discovered at Zelten in Cyrenaica. By early 1960, 35 wells had been sunk nationwide, international oil companies clamoured to obtain exploration rights in Libya and the country had begun its transformation from economic backwater into one of the world's fastest-growing economies. In the decade that followed, average annual incomes rose from US$25 to US$2000 and major infrastructure projects – 2000km of roads, universities, hospitals, schools and housing – finally began to take shape. Libya's cities grew, often alarmingly as Libya's rural poor migrated to the cities. Tripoli's population doubled to 300,000 in just seven years.

From independence until the mid-1960s, Libya was one of the only countries in the world to have two capitals (Tripoli and Benghazi).

For all of Libya's growing prosperity, the increasingly incompetent monarchical government began to show signs that it was becoming isolated from its people. Most importantly for many Libyans, the presence of British troops and the US Wheelus Air Base in Tripoli (then the largest in the world outside the USA, now Metiga Airport), at a time when the charismatic and anti-imperialist Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser was at the height of his popularity across the Arab world, was a growing cause for concern.

After the crushing defeat suffered by Arab armies in the Six Day War in June 1967 against Israel, there was widespread unrest in Libya, especially in Tripoli and Benghazi. After attacks on Western embassies and Libya's Jewish population, Libyans soon turned their anger towards their own government, which was accused of being half-hearted in its commitment to the Arab cause. The government and monarchy were caught unawares by this paradigmatic shift in the political landscape and their inability to respond effectively saw their popularity spiral downwards. Their days were numbered.

HERE COMES THE COLONEL

On 1 September 1969 an obscure group of military officers seized power in Libya. Their planning was exemplary; they waited until all senior military figures were in the country and King Idris was in Turkey receiving medical treatment, thereby denying the government a figurehead around which to rally. They reportedly even postponed their coup by a day to avoid a clash with a concert by the popular Egyptian singer Umm Kolthum. There was little opposition to the coup and very few deaths. It was not until almost a week later that a 27-year-old colonel by the name of Muammar Qaddafi emerged at the head of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) and as the country's charismatic new leader.

Libya – A Modern History (by John Wright; 1982) is too dated to cover much of Qaddafi's rule, but his coverage of the Libyan rise to power is excellent.

The revolutionary ripples of the coup soon began to transform almost every corner of Libyan society. Riding on a wave of anti-imperialist anger, the new leader made his first priorities the closing of British and American military bases, the expansion of the Libyan armed forces, the exile or arrest of senior officers with connections to the monarchy and the closure of all newspapers, churches and political parties. In the mosques, Sanusi clerics were replaced by compliant religious scholars. Banks were nationalised and foreign oil companies were threatened with nationalisation. All assets in Libya belonging to Italians and non-resident Jews were expropriated and close to 30,000 Italian settlers were deported. The rounding-up of political opponents saw Libya gain the unenviable prize of having the highest prison population in the world per capita.

THE GREEN BOOK

Not content with leading the revolution, Colonel Muammar Qaddafi decided to become its philosopher king. In the mid-1970s he retreated into the desert for a period of reflection and writing, only to emerge clutching what he called the 'Third Universal Theory', spelled out in *The Green Book*. Between its covers was the blueprint for Qaddafi's vision of 'peoples' power', or what would later be called a Jamahiriya (see below for more details). Neither capitalist nor communist, the colonel's radical homespun philosophy modestly claimed that 'the problem of democracy in the world is finally solved.'

The Green Book, with its strong underpinning of nationalism and religion, dismantled at a stroke the Libyan state and replaced it with a system of popular democracy based on committees open to every adult Libyan. This 21,000-word tome offers guidance not only in the economic and political spheres, but also in the areas of sport, men and women, and the home and family. Sayings from *The Green Book* can be seen everywhere in Libya, such as: 'Partners not wage-workers', 'Committees everywhere' and the one that we've never quite worked out, 'In need freedom is latent'.

The Green Book has been translated into 84 languages (including Hebrew). Reports in the 1980s from London told of bookshops giving the books away after mass deliveries by the Libyan People's Bureau and you can still pick up your copy (5LD) in Fergiani's Bookshop (p74) in Tripoli.

For many young Libyans, however, Nasser's words upon visiting Benghazi in June 1970 were music to their ears: 'In leaving you, I say to you: My brother Muammar Qaddafi is the representative of Arab nationalism, of the Arab revolution, and of Arab unity.'

Also on the plus side, the RCC injected massive new funds into agriculture and long-overdue development programmes – the RCC spent 20 times more on development than its predecessor – and there was an accompanying rise in the standard of living of ordinary Libyans. Indeed, for all the faults and eccentricities of Libya's leader, spending on social programmes – and a commitment to gender equality (see p55) – would become enduring hallmarks of Colonel Qaddafi's Libya.

REVOLUTIONARY LIBYA

Many of the economic pronouncements contained in Colonel Qaddafi's *The Green Book* may later have fallen by the wayside – the 1977 self-sufficiency drive where every Libyan was ordered to raise chickens at home was not Libya's finest hour – but his political reforms endure. In 1976 the General People's Congress was created with the express aim of political participation by all Libyans rather than a representative system (which *The Green Book* called a 'falsification of democracy'). His dream of 'committees everywhere' quickly became a reality. A year later he renamed the country the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya (SPLAJ); formalised on 2 March 1977. 'Jamahiriya' has no direct translation but is generally taken to mean 'a state of the masses'.

A History of Modern Libya (by Dirk Vandewalle) is the most up-to-date history of 20th-century Libya and beyond; it's also authoritative, readable and filled with fascinating detail.

The revolution's secular reforms also involved walking a fine line between its revolutionary programme and placating conservative Islamic critics of the regime's liberal social policies, and assassination and coup attempts have been regular features of the Libyan political landscape from the mid-1970s. Colonel Qaddafi declared war on the militant Islamic opposition long before it became fashionable – Qaddafi would later become in the 1990s the first leader to issue an arrest warrant for Osama bin Laden.

As the *jamahiriya's* political and social revolution began to take hold, Revolutionary Committees fanned out across the country targeting real and imagined opponents. Officially set up as conduits for raising political consciousness, they quickly evolved into the sometimes self-appointed, always zealous guardians of the revolution and enforcers of revolutionary orthodoxy. Despite occupying no formal position within the Libyan government they wielded considerable power. By 1979, 100,000 Libyans had fled the country. Some were pursued by the revolutionary committees who carried out at least a dozen assassinations against Libyan exiles in Europe. Even Colonel Qaddafi would later criticise the excesses of the revolutionary committees and, in May 1988, acknowledged that 'they deviated, harmed, tortured' and 'the true revolutionary does not practise repression.'

Libya's Qaddafi – The Politics of Contradiction (by Mansour O El-Kikhia; 1997) was written before Libya's recent rehabilitation, but remains one of the better measured but strongly voiced critiques of the Libyan leader.

Libyans now refer to the period from 1978 to 1988 as the dark decade. Political repression and sudden, unpredictable shifts in government policy became a daily fact of life for many Libyans, as did critical shortages arising from experimental economic policies (all private businesses were closed down). In a country where salaries had not risen in decades, Libya soon became the most expensive country to live in the world (for further details, see Economy, p46).

AT WAR WITH THE WORLD

Libya's descent into international isolation began in 1981 when the USA severed diplomatic relations with Tripoli over Libya's alleged support for international terrorism. In 1984 revolutionary committees took over the Libyan People's Bureau in London. In April, with Libyan exiles protesting outside, a shot was fired from inside the embassy killing WPC Yvonne Fletcher. After a 10-day siege by the British authorities, the diplomats were allowed to return to Libya, but the British government followed the US lead and broke off diplomatic ties with Libya. Libya's status as a pariah state was confirmed.

In 1986 the USA blamed Libya for terrorist attacks on Rome and Vienna airports in December 1985, in which 20 people were killed; the assailants were reportedly travelling on Libyan passports and were praised by Colonel Qaddafi. The US Sixth Fleet began conducting military exercises off the Libyan coast with a number of skirmishes resulting and then-US President Ronald Reagan labelled the Libyan leader 'the most dangerous man in the world'. The spiral into conflict became inevitable.

Asked about democracy in 2004, Colonel Qaddafi replied 'Elections? What for? We have surpassed that stage you are presently in. All the people are in power now. Do you want them to regress and let somebody replace them?'

On 5 April a bomb went off in a Berlin nightclub frequented by US soldiers, killing two and injuring more than 200. Convinced of Libyan involvement, the USA, using aircraft based in the UK and aircraft carriers in the Mediterranean, fired missiles into Tripoli and Benghazi on 15 April. The targets were officially the Aziziyah barracks (Colonel Qaddafi's residence in Tripoli) and military installations, but residential areas were also hit. Up to 100 people were killed in Tripoli and around 30 in Benghazi. Two of Qaddafi's sons were injured and his adopted daughter, Hanna, was killed. The defiant Libyan leader renamed his country the Great SPLAJ.

Libya was also under siege on other fronts, with a debilitating war with neighbouring Chad. A 1935 protocol between France and Italy granted 111,370 sq km of modern Chadian territory, including the uranium-rich Aouzou Strip, to the Libyans, although all other treaties granted the area to Chad. Libya's support for armed opposition movements inside Chad also didn't help. The conflict saw in 1980 the Libyan army briefly occupy the Chadian capital, N'Djaména, before French intervention drove it north again. It was not until 1987 that the Libyan army was finally driven back across the border. At the end of the 1980s the Libyan government was under considerable pressure and took steps towards greater openness by releasing the majority of its political prisoners.

LOCKERBIE – CONSPIRACY OR JUSTICE?

The 2001 verdict in the Lockerbie trial – which was held in The Hague before Scottish judges who acquitted Ali Amin Khalifa Fhimah but found Abdel Basset Ali Ahmed al-Megrahi guilty – should have been the end of the matter. And in some ways it was – Al-Megrahi remains in a Scottish jail serving a 27-year sentence and Libya has paid compensation to the victims. But questions remain.

Professor Robert Black, the Scottish legal expert who devised the unusual trial, confessed to being 'absolutely astounded' at the outcome, which he claimed was based on a 'very weak, circumstantial case', which couldn't convict anyone, 'even a Libyan'. Even some of the grieving families of the victims expressed doubts over the verdict.

Syria was the original suspect. But when Syria supported the Allies in the Gulf War against Iraq, suspicion suddenly shifted to Libya. One of the most credible theories was that the bombing had been ordered by Iran in retaliation for the shooting down of an Iran Air airbus by a US warship in the Persian Gulf on 3 July 1988. The story goes that the bombing was carried out by members of the Palestinian Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC) who have sheltered in Syria since the bombing. Immediately after the crash US investigators also secreted away an unidentified body, which crash investigators were never allowed to see.

At the time of writing, the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission was considering new evidence in the case in order to decide whether an appeal can be lodged.

For the full text of the Lockerbie verdict and the unsuccessful 2002 appeal, go to www.scotcourts.gov.uk/library/lockerbie/index.asp.

But in November 1991 the US and UK governments accused two Libyans – Abdel Basset Ali Ahmed al-Megrahi and Ali Amin Khalifa Fhimah – of having carried out the 1988 bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over the Scottish town of Lockerbie that killed 270 people. Libya was also suspected of involvement in the 1989 bombing of a French UTA airliner over the Sahara in which 171 people were killed.

In January 1992 the UN Security Council ordered that the two men be extradited and the International Court of Justice rebuffed Libyan attempts to stop the move. The USA and UK rejected a Libyan offer to hand over the suspects for trial in a neutral country. UN sanctions came into effect on 15 April 1992, six years to the day after the US air strikes on Tripoli and Benghazi. Libya disappeared from view.

The seven years of economic sanctions are reported to have cost Libya US$30 billion in lost revenues and production, while the Libyan government claims that 21,000 Libyans died after the air embargo prevented them from leaving the country for medical treatment. Internal opposition to the colonel's rule simmered beneath the surface throughout the mid-1990s, especially in Cyrenaica. All the while, ordinary Libyans suffered and the world rebuffed repeated Libyan offers to hand over the Lockerbie suspects for trial in The Hague, an offer the UN would later accept.

A History of Modern Libya (by Dirk Vandewalle) is the most detailed, dispassionate and up-to-date history of modern Libya; it can be a little dry at times but it's unrivalled for its coverage of Libya's last 100 years.

THE NEW LIBYA

In 1997, with international support for the embargo waning, cracks began to appear in the façade of international unity. South African President Nelson Mandela flew into Libya in defiance of the ban and a number of African leaders followed suit. In early 1999 a deal was brokered, with the international community accepting the procedural proposals that Libya had effectively been making since 1992. The bombing suspects were then handed over and UN sanctions were immediately suspended, although unilateral US sanctions remained in place.

Western businessmen and European leaders made a beeline for Tripoli, keen to re-establish diplomatic and economic ties. In March

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THE FATHER OF AFRICAN UNITY

A recurring theme throughout Colonel Qaddafi's rule has been his desire for unity with other states, all to no avail. Among those who have rebuffed his advances are Egypt and Syria (1969 and 1971), Egypt (1972), Tunisia (1974), Syria (1980), Chad (1981), Morocco (1984), Algeria (1986) and Sudan (1991).

By the late 1990s, the colonel, angered by the Arab states' unwillingness to support Libya during the seven years of UN sanctions, turned his attention to Africa. It worked. In 1999 the Libyan leader hosted the Conference of African Heads of State at a cost of some US$30 million. At the summit, Qaddafi unveiled his plans for a United States of Africa. In February 2001, 41 nations signed the Constitutive Act of African Union and 13 ratified it, thereby replacing the ineffectual Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and paving the way for a future Africa-wide federation similar to the European Union. Not surprisingly, Colonel Qaddafi has been revelling in the accolades ever since. It is the acclaim for which he has been searching for much of his life.

2001 a French court finally shelved all attempts to pursue Libya over the 1989 UTA bombing. Libya, for its part, expelled Abu Nidal, one of the most shadowy figures in the terrorist world from Libya.

The key Libyan negotiator with the UK when Libya gave up its WMDs was Musa Kousa who was expelled from Libya in the 1980s for threatening to kill Libyan dissidents in the UK.

Keen to build on Libya's renewed ties with the West, and himself no friend of Islamic fundamentalism, Colonel Qaddafi was quick to condemn the attacks on New York and Washington on 11 September 2001. He later described the American invasion of Afghanistan as a justified act of self-defence and the Taliban as 'godless promoters of political Islam'. He even began to quietly support a two-state solution between Israel and the Palestinian Territories. But it was behind the scenes that the most dramatic change was being quietly negotiated between Libya, the USA and UK.

On 19 December 2003 Colonel Qaddafi stunned the world by announcing that Libya would give up its nuclear, chemical and biological weapons programmes and open its sites to international inspections. When asked why, Colonel Qaddafi replied that 'the programme started at the very beginning of the revolution. The world was different then.' Sounding very much the international statesman, Colonel Qaddafi also said, 'there is never permanent animosity or permanent friendship. We all made mistakes, both sides. The most important thing is to rectify the mistakes.'

Colonel Qaddafi told Italian TV in 2004,'It was Mr Bush who promised to reward Libya if we got rid of this programme. We know that with this withdrawal, we contributed by 50% to his electoral campaign.'

Accusations of Libyan involvement in an alleged plot to assassinate then-Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, and the international outcry over the trial of five Bulgarian nurses and a Palestinian doctor accused of deliberately infecting children with HIV in a Benghazi hospital (see p221 for more information), have ensured that Libya's road to rehabilitation remains a rocky one. In February 2005 Colonel Qaddafi warned that Libya had been disappointed by the response to its bridge-building: 'Libya and the whole world expected a positive response – not just words although they were nice words – from America and Europe. They promised but we haven't seen anything yet.'

When asked in 2004 if he would one day succeed his father as leader of Libya, Seif al-Islam al-Qaddafi replied: 'This is not a permanent job, the leader, and when it disappears, it disappears. It is not inherited.'

But plans to overhaul Libya's creaking economy are underway, if progressing slowly and Shukri Ghanem's brief stint as prime minister (he was later moved to run the oil ministry) served as confirmation that a new generation of reform-minded technocrats was starting to seize the reins from the revolutionary old guard. Libya's ranking among international oil executives as the most exciting investment opportunity of the moment also bodes well for Libya's economic health.

When the US government in 2006 quietly removed Libya from its list of states sponsoring terrorism, Libya's rehabilitation was, it seems, complete.

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The Culture

THE NATIONAL PSYCHE

In some ways, Libyans are everything that Colonel Qaddafi isn't – reserved, famed for their tolerance, and discreet. They are self-sufficient and wonderful improvisers, characteristics forged during the long years of sanctions. They are open to outsiders, as devoid of hostility to the West as they are hospitable. This latter trait is summed up by the Libyan saying: 'if you have a good heart, one spoon can feed 100 people.' Libyans are also deeply attached to their land, proud of it and even loathe to leave it – Libya is unlike other countries in North Africa where most people dream of a better life in Europe – especially at such an exciting time in their history. Libyans never forget where they came from, whether it be their home village or the dark years of isolation. Family is everything for the ordinary Libyan and they love nothing better to take to the road for a barbecue by the beach with extended family or to spend days celebrating the latest family event. Surprisingly knowledgeable about the world, they remain refreshingly untouched by it. You'll often hear Libyans say, 'we are a simple people', which is true only to the extent that the old ways of decency and generosity survive. But above all, for the first time in decades, Libyans are optimistic, convinced that the future is theirs.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

As one traveller wrote to us, 'We found the people the most friendly we have yet encountered in North Africa! Totally untouched by the cynicism that mass tourism brings.' This is indeed true, but how long it remains that way depends a lot on how travellers behave while in Libya.

Just because Libyans live their life through an intricate web of social codes and taboos doesn't mean that they'll expect you to do the same. But if you hear a Libyan saying *'kull bilaad wa azaaha'* (every country has its own customs), chances are that they're not celebrating the world's diversity, but very politely suggesting that you're in danger of offending local sensibilities. Listen to them. Take their advice. Ask your guide if you're not sure. And remember a few simple rules:

- Dress for both men and women should be modest, particularly when swimming, when you should avoid ostentatious displays of flesh (see p229 for more information on how to dress). Remember that this is not Saudi Arabia, but nor is it Tunisia.
- Public displays of affection are usually tolerated, but can cause discomfort.
- Libya's human-rights situation has improved in recent decades, but many Libyans are still understandably reticent about participating in political discussions; so only initiate such conversations with people you know well and never do so in public.
- Always try to remember not to receive or pass items (especially food) with your left hand (although the taboos are less strict in Libya than other Arab countries).
- Bargaining or haggling is also not the done thing in most places and trying to do so with any aggression will earn you few friends (see p225 for more details).
- Where possible, don't refuse offers of food or drink (see also Dos & Don'ts, p70).
- Male travellers should never ask a Libyan man about female members of his family, unless you have already established a friendship.
- If you're invited to someone's home, taking a small gift from your country to present to the hosts will win you friends for life.

For advice on travelling in an environmentally responsible manner in desert regions, see Environmentally Piste-off, p214 and Responsible Desert Travel, p213.

TRIBES IN LIBYA

In traditional Libyan culture in prerevolutionary times, the tribes of Libya operated both as communities of support and de facto ministates. Each tribe's existence was inextricably tied to a homeland of farms, grazing land and wells over which the tribe exercised effective ownership. These strong ties to the land were the cause of intertribal disputes, with the identity of each tribe defined on the basis of both lineage and geography.

In Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, most tribes trace their origins to the Bani Hilal and Bani Salim (or Bani Sulaim). Tribes which trace their lineage to the Bani Salim are known as *saadi* (dominant tribes). In Cyrenaica, where tribal loyalties remain the strongest, the two main *saadi* are the Gerbana and the Harabi. Other tribes that fall outside this designation are known as Marabatin – most of these claim mixed Arab and Berber descent.

When the revolutionary government took power in September 1969, pan-Arab nationalism became the ruling ideology, and, officially at least, tribal loyalties came under suspicion, being seen as obstacles to modernisation and the forging of national identity.

LIFESTYLE

Libya is one of the few countries in the region to have held fast to its traditions and although Libyans are a thoroughly modern people, their allegiances and primary sources of succour remain as they have for centuries.

In precolonial times, Libyan social organisation was layered with concentric circles of loyalty and community solidarity. The primary units of allegiance and belonging were the extended family, clan or tribe. These family-based units were the centre of most people's lives, including their social and economic activity, education and, in times of trouble, protection.

Life for the ordinary Libyan still revolves around the family, a bond that took on added significance during the years of international isolation when Libyan society turned inwards in search of company and support. Grafted onto the immediate family are the same multiple layers of identity, among them extended family, tribe and village, with an overarching national component of which every Libyan is proud. The nuclear family was traditionally large with numerous children, although some, mainly urban, Libyans now opt for a more manageable Western-style number of offspring.

The typical traditional Libyan household consisted of a husband and wife, their single sons, married sons and unmarried daughters. Upon the death of the father, each son was expected to establish his own household.

Perhaps more than any other Arab country, the role of women also has many layers, with far-reaching laws safeguarding equality in this deeply traditional society. Libyan women nominally have equal status with men, from marriage and divorce laws to rights of equal pay in the workplace (for more information, see Women in Libya, p55). Social safety nets, such as free medical care and education, are also provided by the state to all Libyans. The reality is somewhat different from the theory, with men still the predominant players of public life and few women reaching the summit of any industry. Traditional elements also remain – when guests arrive at someone's home, the men and women eat separately and the majority of women wear traditional headscarves.

Libyan schoolchildren attend six years of primary school (starting at age six), followed by six years of secondary school, which includes some instruction in English. University education is free for all Libyan citizens.

Although Italian culture never really penetrated Libyan social life to the extent of other European colonies in Africa, the arrival of the Italians did prompt some moves among the elites of Tripoli and Benghazi to mimic European-style dress and customs. This tendency remains in public life to a certain extent, but Libyans have proved adept at holding

A WEDDING IN TOUNEEN *Anthony Ham*

One of the singular advantages of travelling on your own in Libya is that your entry into Libyan society is so much easier. I've lost count of the number of meals I've eaten in private Libyan homes and, in November 2006, after watching a performance of traditional Ghadames dancing laid on for tourists, I was fortunate enough to be invited to a wedding celebration in the nearby village of Touneen (p176).

Although the lights in the distance illuminating the night suggested that the women of the village were themselves enjoying a celebration (the ceremony was not to take place until the following day), ours was an all-male affair. First we wove our way through the crowds in a large tent or marquee and greeted the groom with *'mabrouk'* (congratulations or happy wishes) while he sat looking somewhat overwhelmed by all the attention. We then joined the rest of the assembled gathering lounging on cushions, while tea and sweets were served amid the agreeable hum of voices and passing well-wishers.

After a time we adjourned to one of Touneen's covered squares where even more people sat and watched (or talked loudly) while children dressed in traditional costume danced to the accompaniment of local musicians. The children yielded to men dressed as women with their faces covered – tradition dictates that the veils of these dancing men can only be removed once the elders of the village have left the scene – swayed to the sound of the *gheeta* (an instrument similar to the clarinet; see p56) and drums. Through it all, a wild-eyed man, the life of this delightfully chaste and alcohol-free party, acted as a spur whenever energy levels flagged. Soon enough, the groom, looking decidedly more happy than he had an hour or so before, entered and took his seat at the centre of proceedings flanked by his two *wazir* (attendants). He, too, would soon be dancing and the party would last long into the night.

on to traditional ways at home while adopting foreign customs as the dictates of modern public life demand.

Men generally marry later than women (often not until they are 30 years old, which is attributable in part to the high cost of staging weddings), and arranged marriages still frequently take place between the children of male cousins, although an increasing number of Libyans are choosing their partners from beyond traditional kinship circles.

In addition to the compulsory two years of military service (university students receive exemptions), all Libyan men aged 18 to 55 must, in theory, complete one month's military service every year.

ECONOMY

From one of the poorest countries in the world at independence to the richest country in Africa in just 50 years, Libya's economic journey as an independent state has been remarkable. But Libya's potential is such that these figures are seen as a disappointment. The Libyan economy was, until recently, effectively stagnant for almost three decades, a fact as attributable to decades of idiosyncratic (and, it must be said, disastrous) economic policies as to the sanctions that crippled the Libyan economy. To give a sense of what might have been, Libyans remember how the Crown Prince of Dubai visited Libya in the early 1970s and marvelled at what he saw, openly hoping that Dubai may one day reach Libya's level. The rest, as they say, is history.

To help understand the depths to which Libya sank, the statistics speak for themselves. From 1983 to 1988 real GDP fell by over 40%. At the height of the UN sanctions the economy shrank by 7% in 1993, and then by the same figure the following year. The seven years of UN sanctions are estimated to have cost the Libyan economy US$30 billion.

With such an appalling legacy of economic mismanagement and misfortune, it's a testament to the resilience and ingenuity of the Libyan people that the UN should in 2005 place Libya above Brazil, Turkey and Russia across a range of quality-of-life indicators. And that there is much

to look forward to is patently clear. Since 2004, the Libyan government has embraced, publicly at least, the need for economic reform, even giving it a revolutionary semantic twist – the new rush towards private ownership is, it seems, really an 'extension of popular ownership'. A team of eminent international economists has been drafted in to help facilitate the massive task of restructuring the economy. International oil and natural gas executives consistently rank Libya as the most exciting exploration opportunity in the world, especially given that Libya's high-quality light crude oil is much sought-after and just 25% of the country has been prospected.

Libya's per capita income grew from US$25 a year at independence in 1951 to US$2216 in 1969 and US$10,000 a decade later. The figure now stands at approximately US$11,800.

But it's just as well that more oil is being found. Back in 1984, one analyst said 'Libya is more likely to collapse economically after the cessation of oil reserves than any other oil-endowed state in the Arab world.' The same remains true today and with oil accounting for 95% of Libyan exports, the task of diversifying is an urgent one. Libya's unemployment rate stands (by what is a conservative estimate) at 30% and 50% of Libyan workers (almost 900,000) are still employed by the government. In other words, the possibilities for economic success are almost as great as the work that needs to be done.

POPULATION

With its vast territory inhabited by less than three people per square kilometre, Libya's population density is one of the lowest in the world. Over 86% of people live in urban centres (some put the figure closer to 90%), in stark contrast to Libya's pre-oil days, when less than 25% lived in cities. Libya also has an overwhelmingly youthful population, with almost one third under 15 years of age.

Libya's demographic mix is remarkably homogenous – 97% are of Arab or Berber origin (below), with many claiming mixed Arab and Berber ancestry due to intermarrying between the two communities. Some figures list the Berber community at 5% of the total population. Such uniformity dates back to the 11th century when the large-scale migration of the Bani Hilal and Bani Salim (see p32) ensured that the country became linguistically and culturally 'Arabised'. For this reason, the inhabitants of Cyrenaica have a reputation for being the most purely Arab society outside the Arabian Peninsula.

Libya and the XXI Century, by none other than Seif al-Islam al-Qaddafi, is the man-of-the-moment's one-time university thesis and is fascinating for its insights into a post-Muammar world. It's available from Fergiani's Bookshop (p74) in Tripoli.

Other small but significant groups include the Tuareg (p48) and Toubou (p49), the seminomadic inhabitants of the Sahara.

Berbers

Many Berbers claim to be the descendants of Libya's original inhabitants (descended from the Neolithic peoples who arrived in the area up to 17,000 years ago) and some historians believe this to be true. Other historians claim that the Berbers are descended from the remnants of the great Garamantian empire, which flourished in the Fezzan from around 900 BC to AD 500 (see p30). Otherwise, little is known about their origins. When Arab tribes swept across Libya in the 7th and 11th centuries, many Berbers retreated into the mountain and desert redoubts that they continue to occupy.

Historical Dictionary of the Berbers (by Hsain Ilahiane; 2006) is the most comprehensive study of the history and culture of the Berber people of North Africa, with a range of alphabetical entries and maps.

The name 'Berber' has been attributed to a collection of communities by outsiders, although, rarely until recently, by the Berbers themselves. The name is thought to derive from the Latin word 'barbari', the word used in Roman times to classify non-Latin speakers along the North African coast. The related name of Barbary was used to describe the region.

These days the key touchstones of Berber identity are language and culture. 'Berber' is used as a loose term for native speakers of the various

Berber dialects, most of which go by the name of Tamazight. In fact, many Berbers do not even use a word that unites them as a community, preferring instead to define themselves according to their tribe. These days, apart from some centres in Cyrenaica (especially Awjila; see p131), most Berbers are bilingual, speaking their native language and Arabic.

Imazighen in Libya (www.libyamazigh.org) is one of few resources on the Berber people of Libya and includes a history of the Berber people and an explanation of the Tamazight language.

Within the Berber community, loyalty is primarily to the family or tribe. Households are organised into nuclear family groups, while dwellings within a village or town are usually clustered in groups of related families. The majority are located in Tripolitania (primarily in the Jebel Nafusa, the Sahel al-Jefara and a few enclaves such as Zuara along the coast).

In keeping with their centuries-long resistance to foreign domination and to the imposition of religious orthodoxy, the majority of Berbers belong to the Kharijite sect (see p51). True to their religious beliefs, Berber communities have long prided themselves on their egalitarianism. The traditional Berber economy consists of farming and pastoralism, meaning that most people live sedentary lifestyles, while a small minority follow seminomadic patterns, taking flocks to seasonal pasturelands.

It is also worth noting that Berber leaders played a significant role in the battle for Libyan independence.

Tuareg

The Tuareg are a nomadic, camel-owning people who traditionally roamed across the Sahara from Mauritania to western Sudan. They are the bearers of a proud desert culture whose members stretch across international boundaries into Algeria, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso and Mauritania. In Libya, this once-nomadic people are concentrated in the southwestern desert, particularly the oases around Ghadames, and Ghat and in the Jebel Acacus.

Art of Being Tuareg – Sahara Nomads in a Modern World (2006) is a stunning pictorial study of Tuareg life, with informative essays on Tuareg culture, including poetry, music and the role of women.

Their origins are not fully understood, although it is widely believed that the Tuareg were once Berbers. There is also some evidence to suggest that many of those who would become Tuareg began as Berbers in the oasis of Awjila (p131), in Cyrenaica, although Tuareg stories of their origin also suggest that many came from the region around Ghadames (p164). Such theories are supported by the marked similarities between many words in the Tuareg Tamashek and Berber Tamazight languages.

When the Arab armies of Islam forced many Berbers to retreat into the desert in the 7th century, and again when waves of Arab migration swept across the region in the 11th century (see p32), those who would become Tuareg fled deep into the desert where they have remained ever since. Until the early 20th century the Tuareg made a fiercely independent living by raiding sedentary settlements, participating in long-distance trade and exacting protection money from traders passing across their lands.

The Tuareg traditionally followed a rigid status system with nobles, blacksmiths and slaves all occupying strictly delineated hierarchical positions, although the importance of caste identity has diminished in recent years.

The veils *(taguelmoust)* that are the symbols of a Tuareg's identity – the use of indigo fabric, which stained the skin, has led them to be called the 'Blue People of the Sahara' – are both a source of protection against desert winds and sand, and a social requirement; it is considered improper for a Tuareg man to show his face to a man of higher status. Tuareg men traditionally rarely removed their shawl to expose the lower half of their faces in company and, when drinking tea, passed the glass under their *taguelmoust* so as not to reveal the mouth. Traditionally, Tuareg women were not veiled and enjoyed a considerable degree of independence.

ENCOUNTERS WITH THE TUAREG

Although many travellers will find Tuareg guides or drivers to be their entry point into the Tuareg world, there are a handful of Tuareg families who still live a traditional life across southwestern Libya. Apart from the Tuareg who continue to play an important role in the life of Ghadames, there were, at last count, 13 Tuareg families still living in the Jebel Acacus. Most live in semipermanent shelters, although it's not uncommon to find young Tuareg girls or boys herding their goats in remote wadis or old Tuareg men similarly far from home.

If you do encounter the Tuareg in this manner, there are a few things to remember. The most important is that these families live in the Acacus because they choose to pursue a traditional lifestyle, not for the benefit of tourists. An increasingly exploitative relationship threatens that choice and Tuareg families are in danger of becoming a tourist sideshow as foreigners seek to meet an 'authentic' Tuareg family. It's a difficulty faced by indigenous peoples the world over and the most important things to remember are to treat them with the utmost respect and discretion. If you meet an elderly Tuareg man, address him as 'Sheikh' or 'Haj' as a mark of respect. The Tuareg are also a mine of information about the region and its history and spending time talking with them is far more important than sneaking a photo.

Although one old Tuareg man told us that he had never left the Acacus, there are already signs that the Tuareg have learned the ways of the world. Many Tuareg will only allow their photos to be taken if you pay money or buy something from them, while one old Tuareg man said that he allowed photos to be taken by those with a digital camera so that he could then see himself! To avoid it becoming a one-way encounter, consider making a small contribution to fuel or firewood stocks, or purchasing one of the small items they offer for sale.

Some Tuareg openly wonder whether this will be the last generation of their people who live a traditional life. As one old man told us, there were, until quite recently, many more families living in the region, but they moved to the cities after the patriarch of the family died. He suspected that his children were waiting for him to die before they, too, would abandon their ancestral home.

The name 'Tuareg' is a designation given to the community by outsiders and it's only recently that the Tuareg have called themselves by this name. The name is thought to be an adaptation of the Arabic word *tawarek*, which means 'abandoned by God'. The Tuareg themselves have always, until recently, preferred to be known as *Kel Tamashek* (speakers of the Tamashek language), *Kel Taguelmoust* (People of the Veil) or *Imashaghen* (the 'noble and the free').

The majority of Tuareg in Libya (said to number up to 50,000) have close relationships with their fellow Tuareg across the border in Algeria and Niger. In recent times, however, most have had to abandon their traditional way of life, primarily because of drought, and many have moved southwards to settle near cities.

The Tuareg (by Jeremy Keenan) is considered one of the best and most readable anthropological studies of the Algerian Tuareg with whom Libya's Tuareg people share many characteristics.

Toubou

Southeast Libya is home to another nomadic community – the Toubou, a Muslim people who were strongly influenced by the Sanusi Movement during the 19th century. Numbering as few as 2600 in Libya, this community has links with a larger population of Toubou across the border in Chad. Although they display considerable cultural and linguistic similarities, many Toubou speak related but mutually incomprehensible dialects of Tebu, which fosters a high level of independence for each community. Their basic social unit is the nuclear family, with each community divided into patrilineal clans.

Hugh Clapperton described the Toubou as 'few in number but extraordinarily diffuse, lacking political or social coherence – the principle

of freedom raised almost to the level of anarchy.' If the Toubous have a definable home, it is the Tibesti (p206), which Clapperton again described as 'less a homeland than a centre of attraction'. They are viewed by other Libyans as a tough and solitary people and are concentrated around Murzuq. Their economy is a blend of pastoralism, farming and date cultivation.

SPORT

Football (soccer) is the number-one (and only significant) sport in Libya and although Italian football is followed with great passion here, Libyan football itself has distinguished itself more with grand gestures than any great success. The most obvious case of this is Colonel Qaddafi's son, Al-Sa'adi al-Qaddafi, who signed for Italian Serie A club Perugia amid much fanfare in 2003 and later largely disappeared from view.

The Green Book describes sport as 'like praying, eating and the feeling of warmth and coolness'. Elsewhere, the colonel denounces spectator sports in which people watch rather than participate and instead prefers 'mass games', such as communal tug-of-war.

Libya has also been a regular bidder for the right to host the African Nations Cup and even the World Cup with little success to date. Such bids did, however, lead to the highpoint of Libya's football history in 1982 when it hosted the African Nations Cup and made it through to the final stages, finally losing to Ghana on penalties.

Games (admission 3LD) take place in winter and you should check local newspapers or ask your tour company to find out the exact times and locations of matches. The country's two major stadiums are in: Tripoli, at the Sports City (Al-Medina ar-Riyaddiyat), about 5km southwest of the parliament building; and Benghazi, on the eastern side of the harbours.

MULTICULTURALISM

Despite the apparent Arab-Berber homogeneity of Libyan society, the presence of large numbers (possibly hundreds of thousands) of undocumented migrants from sub-Saharan Africa adds a certain multicultural face to modern Libya. Although their presence sits uneasily with many Libyans, an Africa without borders has, until recently, been a cornerstone of Colonel Qaddafi's policy of a United States of Africa (see p43 for more information). Many immigrants see Libya as a staging post en route to Europe and end up working in menial jobs, marking time until they find the means to board a boat to Italy or Malta (a seat in such a boat can cost as much as €1000).

After decades of turning a blind eye to widespread illegal immigration from sub-Saharan Africa, Libya claimed in 2004 to have deported 40,000 illegal migrants in a single year.

Libya's open-door policy has, however, been complicated in recent years by Libya's warming relationship with Europe and growing resentment among Libyans who point to their own high rates of unemployment. Since 2004 Libya has stepped up cooperation with European navy patrols. If you travel along the coastal highway close to Zuara after dark, expect more checkpoints than usual as police search for illegal immigrants.

Not all Black Africans in Libya are recent immigrants. The *harathin* (ploughers and cultivators) have lived in the oases of the Sahara for centuries and are thought to once have been the servants of Tuareg nobles.

MEDIA

As *The Green Book* says, 'Democracy means popular rule not popular expression' and Libya's authorities keep a strict hold over locally produced media. All newspapers, radio stations and TV channels are government-owned and most content either serves as an official mouthpiece or otherwise acquiesces the government line.

The government's power to control the flow of information to Libyans has, however, been compromised by the near-universal availability of satellite TV channels beamed into Libya from across the world. The Libyan government did attempt, for a time, to make satellite dishes illegal, but the sea-change was irreversible as the forest of satellite dishes atop the rooftops of every Libyan town attests. Libyans do keep an eye on local media as it's the medium of choice for many government announcements, but most Libyans keep their televisions permanently tuned to 24-hour Gulf-based news or Lebanese music channels.

RELIGION

More than 95% of Libya's population is Sunni Muslim. The country has small communities of Kharijites (an offshoot of orthodox Islam) and Christians (Roman Catholics, Coptic Orthodox and Anglicans), who number around 50,000.

The Last Jews of Libya (http://geoimages.berkeley.edu/libyajew/) is devoted to the history of Libya's Jewish community and has an online museum covering food and other cultural traditions.

Foundations of Islam

Islam shares its roots with the great monotheistic faiths that sprang from the unforgiving and harsh soil of the Middle East – Judaism and Christianity – but is considerably younger than both. Muslims believe in the angels who brought God's messages to humans, in the prophets who received these messages, in the books in which the prophets expressed these revelations and in the last day of judgement. The Quran (the holy book of Islam) mentions 28 prophets, 21 of whom are also mentioned in the Bible; Adam, Noah, Abraham, David, Jacob, Joseph, Job, Moses and Jesus are given particular honour, although the divinity of Jesus is strictly denied.

For Muslims, Islam is the apogee of the monotheistic faiths, from which it derives so much. Muslims traditionally attribute a place of great respect to Christians and Jews as Ahl al-Kitab (People of the Book), and it is usually considered to be preferable to be a Christian or Jew than an atheist. However, the more strident will claim Christianity was a new and improved version of the teachings of the Torah and that Islam was the next logical step and therefore 'superior'.

THE JEWS OF LIBYA

Libya was home to a thriving Jewish community from the 3rd century BC until the early 1970s, although from the beginning their position was frequently uncertain. Under the Romans their prosperity was dependent upon their continued submission to Roman rule. After Jewish revolts in AD 73 and AD 115 in Cyrenaica, the Roman response was brutal, with the leaders murdered and many wealthy Jews put to the sword (see p31).

Because of their status as Ahl al-Kitab (People of the Book; see above), the Jews of Libya coexisted peacefully with Muslims after the arrival of Islam in the 7th century. The community lived in relative security under successive Islamic dynasties until the 20th century when the rise of fascism in Europe and the creation of the State of Israel threatened their continued presence.

When the Italians first arrived in Libya in 1911, there were about 21,000 Jews in Libya, with the overwhelming majority living in Tripoli. Despite persecution by the Italian authorities, Jews made up more than one-quarter of Tripoli's population, according to some reports. When the Germans occupied the Jewish quarter of Benghazi in 1942, Jewish businesses were destroyed and many Jews were forcibly marched across the desert with great loss of life.

When the State of Israel was declared in 1948, as many as 30,000 of Libya's 35,000 Jews fled the country as recriminations rippled across the region, with more following after the 1967 Six Day War. Keen to showcase his pan-Arab credentials and his empathy for the Palestinians, Colonel Qaddafi cancelled all debts owed to Jews and sequestered Jewish property rights. In 1974 it was estimated that there were less than 100 Jews left in Libya and officially there are no Jews left in Libya today.

Monuments to the heritage of Libyan Jews are few and those that remain are in a derelict state. Two examples worth seeking out are former synagogues in Tripoli (p89) and Yefren (p159).

Mohammed, born into one of the trading families of the Arabian city of Mecca (in present-day Saudi Arabia) in 570, began to receive the revelations in 610 from the Archangel Gabriel and after a time began imparting the content of Allah's message to the Meccans. The revelations continued for the rest of Mohammed's life and they were written down in the Quran (from the Arabic word for 'recitation') in a series of suras (verses or chapters). To this day, not one dot of the Quran has been changed, making it, Muslims claim, the direct word of Allah. The essence of it was a call to submit to God's will ('islam' means submission).

Covering Islam (by Edward Said; 1981) is a searing study of how stereotypes have shaped Western views of Islam, Muslims and the Middle East. Although the examples used are dated, the book remains as relevant today as when it was written.

By Mohammed's time, religions such as Christianity and Judaism had become complicated by factions, sects and bureaucracies, to which Islam offered a simpler alternative. The new religion did away with hierarchical orders and complex rituals, and instead offered believers a direct relationship with God based only on their submission to God. (See also The Five Pillars of Islam, opposite, for more information.)

Not all Meccans were terribly taken with the idea. Mohammed gathered quite a following in his campaign against Meccan idolaters and his movement especially appealed to the poorer levels of society. The powerful families became increasingly outraged and, by 622, had made life sufficiently unpleasant for Mohammed and his followers to convince them of the need to flee to Medina, an oasis town some 300km to the north and now Islam's second-most holy city. This migration – the Hejira – marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar, year 1 AH (AD 622).

In Medina, Mohammed continued to preach and increase his supporter base. Soon he and his followers began to clash with the Meccans, possibly over trade routes. By 630 they had gained a sufficient following to return and take Mecca. In the two years until Mohammed's death, many of the surrounding tribes swore allegiance to him and the new faith.

Upon Mohammed's death in 632, the Arab tribes spread quickly across the Middle East with missionary zeal, quickly conquering what makes up modern-day Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Israel and the Palestinian Territories and, by 710, Andalucía in Spain was under Muslim rule.

Islam in Libya

Libya was conquered for Islam in 643. The initial conquests, which included the taking of Libya, were carried out under the caliphs, or Companions of Mohammed, of whom there were four. They in turn were followed by the Umayyad dynasty (661–750) in Damascus and then the Abbasid line (750–1258) in the newly built city of Baghdad (in modern Iraq). Given that these centres of Islamic power were so geographically removed from Libya, the religion of Islam may have taken a hold, but the political and administrative control which accompanied Islamic rule elsewhere was much more tenuous in Libya.

The Cambridge Illustrated History of the Islamic World (by Ira M Lapidus and Francis Robinson) is comprehensive, beautifully illustrated and contains references to Libya and the Kharijites.

The leading strands of Islamic thought nonetheless brought transformations to Libyan life, many of which survive to this day. The orthodox Sunnis divided into four schools *(madhab)* of Islamic law, each lending more or less importance to various aspects of religious doctrine. In Libya, the Maliki rite of Sunni Islam came to predominate and still does. Founded by Malik ibn As, an Islamic judge who lived in Medina from 715 to 795, it is based on the practice that prevailed in Medina in the 8th century. The generally tolerant Maliki school of Islamic thought preaches the primacy of the Quran (as opposed to later teachings). In this sense, orthodox Islam in modern Libya bears strong similarities to the teachings of the Sanusi sect, which ruled Libya for a number of centuries (see p35).

Libya also has a small population of Kharijites, a sect whose name literally means 'seceders' or 'those who emerge from impropriety'. Their doctrine that any Muslim could become caliph (they believed that only the first two caliphs were legitimate), which questioned the Arab monopoly over Muslim legitimacy, naturally appealed to the Berbers when Islam arrived in Libya.

THE FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM

To live a devout life and as an expression of their submission to Allah, a Muslim is expected to adhere to the Five Pillars of Islam.

Profession of Faith (Shahada)

This is the basic tenet of Islam: 'There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his prophet' *(La illaha illa Allah Mohammed rasul Allah)*. It is commonly heard as part of the call to prayer and at other events such as births and deaths.

Prayer (Sala)

Ideally, devout Muslims will pray five times a day when the muezzins call upon the faithful, usually at sunrise, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and night. Although Muslims can pray anywhere (only the noon prayer on Friday should be conducted in the mosque), a strong sense of community makes joining together in a mosque preferable to elsewhere. The act of praying consists of a series of predefined ablutions and then movements of the body and recitals of prayers and passages of the Quran, all designed to express the believer's absolute humility and God's sovereignty.

Alms-giving (Zakat)

Alms-giving to the poor was, from the start, an essential part of Islamic social teaching and was later developed in some parts of the Muslim world into various forms of tax to redistribute funds to the needy. The moral obligation towards one's poorer neighbours continues to be emphasised at a personal level, and it is not unusual to find exhortations to give alms posted-up outside some mosques. Traditionally Muslims are expected to give one-fortieth of their annual income as alms to the poor.

Fasting (Sawm)

Ramadan, the ninth month of the Muslim calendar, commemorates the revelation of the Quran to Mohammed. In a demonstration of a renewal of faith, Muslims are asked to abstain from sex and from letting anything pass their lips from sunrise to sunset every day of the month (this includes smoking). For the dates when Ramadan commences over the coming years, see Islamic Holidays, p220.

Pilgrimage (Haj)

The pinnacle of a devout Muslim's life is the pilgrimage to the holy sites in and around Mecca. Every Muslim capable of affording it should perform the Haj to Mecca at least once in their lifetime. The reward is considerable – the forgiving of all past sins. Ideally, the pilgrim should go to Mecca in the last month of the lunar year and the returned pilgrim can be addressed as Haji, a term of great respect. In simpler villages at least, it is not uncommon to see the word Al-Haj and simple scenes painted on the walls of houses showing that its inhabitants have made the pilgrimage, while in Ghadames, the doors of homes are adorned with colourful leather studs to signify that the owner has made the pilgrimage (see p171).

THE MOSQUE

Embodying the Islamic faith, and representing its most predominant architectural feature, is the mosque (masjed or *jama'a*). The building was developed in the very early days of Islam and takes its form from the simple, private houses where believers would customarily gather for worship.

The house belonging to the Prophet Mohammed is said to have provided the prototype for the plan of the mosque. The original setting was an enclosed, oblong courtyard with huts (housing Mohammed's wives) along one wall and a rough portico providing shade. This plan developed with the courtyard becoming the *sahn*, the portico the arcaded *riwaqs* and the *haram* the prayer hall. The prayer hall is typically divided into a series of aisles; the centre aisle is wider than the rest and leads to a vaulted niche (mihrab) in the wall – the mihrab indicates the direction of Mecca, which Muslims must face when they pray.

Islam does not have priests as such. The closest equivalent is the mosque's imam, a man schooled in Islam and Islamic law. He often doubles as the muezzin, who calls the faithful to prayer from the tower of the minaret – except these days recorded cassettes and loudspeakers do away with the need for him to climb up there. At the main Friday noon prayers, the imam gives a *khutba* (sermon) from the *minbar* (a wooden pulpit that stands beside the often-beautiful mihrab); the Gurgi Mosque (p85) in Tripoli is a particularly fine example. (In older, grander mosques, these *minbars* are often beautifully decorated.)

Before entering the prayer hall and participating in the communal worship, Muslims must perform a ritual washing of their hands, forearms, face and neck. For this purpose, mosques have traditionally had a large ablutions fountain at the centre of the courtyard, often carved from marble and worn by centuries of use. These days, modern mosques just have rows of taps.

The mosque also serves as a kind of community centre, and often you'll find groups of children or adults receiving lessons (usually in the Quran), people in quiet prayer and others simply dozing – mosques provide wonderfully tranquil havens from the chaos of the street.

Visiting Mosques

With few exceptions, non-Muslims are welcome to visit Libyan mosques at any time other than during noon prayers on Friday. You must dress modestly. For men that means no shorts; for women that means no shorts, tight pants, shirts that aren't done up, or anything else that might be considered immodest. Shoes have to be removed. In Libya, women visitors are generally as free to enter mosques as men and often no headscarf is required. For information on visiting mosques in Tripoli's medina, see p85.

Most Libyans today have an unshakeable belief in Islam, which they keep largely to themselves. Friday prayers at mosques are well-attended and your drivers or guides will often pull over to the side of the road to pray, but there's a discretion about the way most practise their faith that leaves the sense that it's a private matter between them and Allah. (See also The Mosque, above.)

Islam: A Short History (by Karen Armstrong; 2006) is an accessible and sympathetic biography of the world's fastest-growing religion without the sensationalism.

The holy fasting month of Ramadan (see The Five Pillars of Islam, p53) is an exception as it is (and always has been) universally and very publicly observed. The occasion of breaking the fast at the conclusion of Ramadan (when the moon is sighted) is a time of great celebration. In the 1930s the Danish traveller Knud Holmboe described the scene in Tripoli:

> 'It ought to be tonight,' said a young Arab who stood next to me, as he scanned the sky eagerly. Hour after hour passed, and it was beginning to look as if Ramadan would have to be continued over the next day when suddenly the cry went up: 'El Ahmar, el Ahmar!' (The moon, the moon!) The festival began. The long month of fasting was over. All night they danced and ate to their heart's content in the Medina.
>
> *Knud Holmboe,* Desert Encounter

WOMEN IN LIBYA

Libya remains a deeply traditional society where public life remains dominated by men and the private realm is the domain of women. It is also true, however, that Libya has made more advances in women's rights than perhaps any other Arab country.

Women at Arms – Is Ghadafi a Feminist? (by Maria Graeff-Wassink) answers the question you never thought to ask with a look at the Libyan government's policies towards women. It's available from Fergiani's Bookshop (p74) in Tripoli.

One of the more radical social changes introduced after the coup was in the role of Libyan women in society. In spite of the reforms of the 1960s, which gave women the vote, the role of women remained restricted to the private domain in what was still a deeply patriarchal society. As in many traditional societies, the honour of the family or tribe was vested in women – any perceived public dishonour, whether real or imagined, was avenged, with women having to pay the price for restoring honour.

Three months after coming to power, the revolutionary government granted women equal status with men under the law. In practice, one of the most significant reforms was in the laws governing marriage. The minimum age for marriage was set at 16 for women and 18 for men. Marriage by proxy was outlawed. In 1972 a law was passed decreeing that a woman could not be married against her will. Were a father to prohibit the wedding of a woman under 21 to a man of her choice, she had the right to petition the court. Divorce rights for women were also strengthened and women have since been granted the right to own and dispose of property independently of any male relatives. The principle of equal pay for equal work and qualifications has also been sanctioned under the law.

The Shadows of Ghadames (by Joelle Stolz; 2006) is a coming-of-age novel for young teenagers about a 12-year-old Ghadamsi girl confronting her path into adulthood in the sometimes intimate, sometimes claustrophobic Ghadames world.

In addition to the legal changes, government policies since the early 1970s have encouraged women to seek employment or membership in what were long considered bastions of exclusively male activity. In the early 1980s Qaddafi founded what became known as the 'Nuns of the Revolution', a special police force attached to revolutionary committees and whose membership was drawn from female conscripts who attended military academies (see also Colonel Qaddafi's Female Bodyguards, below). Other fields of employment were also opened up to women and an increasing number of girls attended secondary schools.

In spite of these changes, restrictions upon women remained, with the government often unwilling to jeopardise the support of powerful traditional constituencies by granting women more rights. Despite an early plan by Colonel Qaddafi to outlaw polygamy, the practise of marrying more than one wife remains legal, although rare, in Libya.

Araboo (www.araboo.com/dir/libyan-women) has a range of links to Libyan women's issues, including everything from online chat forums to recipes and fashion.

Laws promoting gender equality have also not translated into the workforce with very few women rising to senior positions in business or government. In 2006 one Libyan woman interviewed by the BBC said that if Libyan women don't wear a headscarf 'people look at you as if you're doing something horribly wrong.' Libyan women also talk of having to choose between working outside the home and getting married as the two are not seen as compatible by many Libyan men.

COLONEL QADDAFI'S FEMALE BODYGUARDS

One of the most enduring images of Colonel Muammar Qaddafi's rule has been his phalanx of formidable female bodyguards dressed, not surprisingly, all in green (although recently they have switched to blue). Western reporters, keen for any opportunity to trivialise the eccentricities of Libya under Qaddafi, referred to them as the 'Amazon Women'. Libyans know them as the 'Revolutionary Nuns'. Whether or not they were intended for show, they represented a bold step for the Libyan leader, placing his personal security in the hands of women in a region where a combination of machismo and Islamic conservatism would normally preclude such a step.

ARTS

Literature

Libya has a strong literary tradition that has always been highly politicised, which may explain why very little has been translated into English or other languages. At first it was associated with resistance against the Italian occupation (Suleiman al-Baruni, Al-Usta Omar, Ahmed Qunaba and Alfagi Hassan) and later with the 1960s preoccupation with imperialism and the massive social change that Libya was experiencing (Khalifa Takbali and Yusuf al-Sharif).

Libyan Stories – Twelve Short Stories from Libya (edited by Ahmed Ibrahim al-Fagih) is outstanding, and is one of very few such collections available in English, with an excellent introduction to some of Libya's best-known writers.

The 1969 revolution brought about a sea change in Libyan writing. After literature had spent decades on the margins, the government-sponsored Union of Libyan Writers was founded by Ahmed Ibrahim al-Fagih and new publishing houses were established. A new relationship with the state transpired, moving writers from a position of rebellion to the chief advocates of the revolution, and the work of those who succeeded typically blurs the line between fiction and propaganda. With government sanction, writers became seen as among the primary intellectuals of Libyan society, with Mohammed az-Zawi of particular significance.

Libya's best-known writer throughout the Arab world is Ibrahim al-Kouni who was born in Ghadames and later served as chief of the Libyan People's Bureau in Warsaw. His works reveal a fascination with the desert and his evocation of the allure and fear of the Sahara will resonate with many travellers. Perhaps his most famous short story is *The Drumming Sands*, a tale of death in the desert near Ubari that is filled with a strong element of creeping menace. Of his novels, the only ones currently available in English are *The Bleeding of the Stone* (2002), a stirring ecological desert fable, and *Anubis: A Desert Novel,* a magical realist tale of the last days of Tuareg isolation in Wadi Methkandoush. Both novels are available in Fergiani's Bookshop (p73) in Tripoli.

Ismailia Eclipse: Poems (by Khaled Mattawa) is an important contribution to the Libyan literary landscape by the Benghazi-born poet, who left Libya at age 15 and now writes from exile.

A younger generation of Libyan writers has emerged in recent years, although none has yet made an appearance in English translation. Of the novelists, Khalifa Hussein Mustapha has come to prominence, while poetry is increasingly the preserve of voices such as Gillani Trebshan and Idris at-Tayeb. Libya's literary heritage is clearly dominated by men, but the voice of women is slowly coming to the fore in the short stories of Lutfiah Gabayli and the poetry of Mariam Salama and Khadija Bsikri. Bsikri's published collections of poetry include *Woman for all Possibilities* and *I Put My Hand on My Heart*. One of her poems, *Ghat*, transforms the faces of past invaders of Libya into those of Amazonian Libyan women.

Music

TRADITIONAL MUSIC

Traditional Libyan music is often performed in conjunction with ritualistic dances (p60) and has always played an important role in traditional celebrations, such as weddings and local festivals. Important musical instruments include the clarinet-like *gheeta* (in the northwest, especially Ghadames, and the south), the *nay* (a soft, emotion-laden flute) and the *zukra* (similar to bagpipes), in the south and west. In the east, the *zukra* is smaller and without the attached bag.

Musiques du Sahara (by Touareg de Fewet) is one of the few internationally available Libyan CDs and its mesmerising drums and repetition are as pure and raw as the Sahara itself.

One of the most famous music forms in Libya is the *mriskaawi,* which came from Murzuq and forms the basis for the lyrics of many Libyan songs. It has since been modernised and is played on the accordion at a party on the Wednesday night before a wedding, especially in northern Libya. During celebrations on the wedding night (Thursday), music known as *malouf* is played. Carried to Libya from Moors fleeing Andalucía in the 15th century, *malouf* involves a large group of seated revellers singing, reciting poetry of a religious nature or about love; groups capable of performing *malouf* are highly sought-after.

MUAMMAR MIA

Confirmation that Colonel Muammar Qaddafi had become one of the cultural icons of the 20th century came in 2006 when a London theatre staged 'Gaddafi – The Opera'.

Set to the tune of the Asian Dub Foundation and staged by the English National Opera, this part-musical, part-operatic spectacular was perhaps the most unlikely performance ever staged by a leading European opera house. The performance included a rather raffish-looking colonel singing a duet with former US president Ronald Reagan at the UN General Assembly, or singing the praises of women's liberation while his legendary female bodyguards danced around him in fishnets and feather boas. The opera was an ambitious attempt to trace the story of 20th-century Libya and its most charismatic figure. At one point a reflective colonel says with his customary love of catch-phrases, 'Only in the desert is there true union between me and myself'.

Traditionalists in the audience were reportedly not amused at the colonel's storming of the barricades of high culture. The reaction of the man himself is not on record. A spokesperson for the producers told reporters on the eve of the show that 'He's aware of it, and interested, but he hasn't asked to see the text'.

Another form of traditional music is *'alaam,* which is often performed by two people. The first person makes a short heartfelt statement to which the other makes a similarly meaningful reply, and so it continues.

The Rough Guide to World Music – Africa & the Middle East (2006) is one of very few sources to discuss Libyan music at length with an overview of Libya's musical history and major performers.

TUAREG MUSIC

Although Libya's Tuareg have made few contributions to the phenomenon of desert blues music that has become a cause célèbre for world-music fans in 2005 and beyond, Libya does have a claim to fame in this regard. The celebrated Tuareg group Tinariwen hail from the remote Kidal region of northeastern Mali, but they spent much of the 1980s and 1990s in exile as famine and then rebellion raged in their homeland. Part of that exile was spent in military training camps funded by the Libyan government. It was there that the band members learned to play the guitar and much international success has followed.

MODERN MUSIC

The Libyan pop-music industry is generally drowned out by the noise of its Egyptian cousin across the border. You are far more likely to hear Libyans listening to music from elsewhere in the Maghreb (Tunisia,

LIBYA'S POP IDOL

Big Brother may not have taken off in the Arab world, but *Superstar* – think *Pop Idol* or the *Eurovision Song Contest* beamed out of Beirut – certainly has. This 21-week epic culminates with the final in August and is shown on the Lebanese satellite TV channel Future TV. Voted for by a region-wide TV audience, *Superstar* has rapidly become compulsory viewing across the region and especially in Libya. Undaunted by Muslim clerics' condemnation of the show as an un-Islamic pandering to Western culture, contestants quickly become national celebrities in their home countries – it's safe to say that when Ayman al-Aathar of Libya surprisingly won the 2004 competition, Tripoli had never seen anything like it with rock-star-like adulation showered upon the winner upon his return to the country. He was even granted an audience with Colonel Muammar Qaddafi who was not, incidentally, a fan of such frivolities. The flipside was, of course, that someone had to lose and when the Palestinian finalist failed to defeat Al-Aathar, there were street demonstrations in the Palestinian Territories.

Algeria or Morocco) or the late Egyptian diva Umm Kolthum than you are to come across home-grown talent. In fact, so popular is the music of Umm Kolthum that some reports suggest that the coup in 1969 was delayed by a day so as not to interrupt an Umm Kolthum concert in Benghazi.

Libyana (www.libyana.org) is an accessible site with a small range of links to the works of Libyan painters, poets (with English translations) and an online Libyan musical jukebox (in Arabic).

Libya's best-known singer of long standing is Mohammed Hassan, who has become something of a Libyan institution and is a native of Al-Khoms. His music carries all the heartfelt passion of Arab music elsewhere, but it's the subject matter, rather than the style, which marks him out as distinctively Libyan. His better-known songs include the love song *Laysh buta marsolik anni* (literally, 'Why is your messenger late?'), *Salaam aleik* (a cry of lament for a distant love) and *Adi meshan* (a rousing song lauding Colonel Qaddafi). Another male singer of note is Mohammed Sanini. Libya's best-loved female singer is Salmin al-Zarouq.

Architecture

Most of Libya's architecture has been shaped by the dictates of climate and geography. The ancient Berbers built structures that utilised the natural fortifications of the mountains they inhabited, while the peoples of the Sahara used building materials that protected them from the harsh desert climate. Libya also inherited a rich array of architectural gems left by the invading armies who occupied Libyan soil. The superb examples of Roman, Greek and Byzantine architecture are discussed at length throughout this book.

The most common building materials in Saharan architecture are animal dung, sun-dried clay and mud brick that contains straw and a high concentration of salt. Reinforcements (and doors) were usually made from the wood of palm trunks.

BERBER ARCHITECTURE

Stunning representations of indigenous Libyan architecture are the Berber *qasrs* (literally castles, but actually fortified granaries) of the Jebel Nafusa, see p160. There are other fine examples in Qasr al-Haj (p160), Kabaw (p162) and Nalut (p162), dating back as far as the 12th century.

The other highlights of Berber architecture are the underground houses *(dammous)* in Gharyan (p158), Yefren (p159), Zintan (p160) and elsewhere. Built to protect against fierce summers, cold winters and invading armies, a circular pit (up to three storeys deep and around 10m in diameter) was dug into the earth. The rooms were cut into the base of the walls around the sunken courtyard and they were reached via a tunnel that ran from the upper level (ie normal ground level) down through the earth to the base of the pit. The surprisingly spacious living quarters included living rooms, a kitchen, bedrooms and storage areas.

LIBYA'S TOP ARCHITECTURAL HIGHLIGHTS

Al-Kabir Mosque (Awjila; p132) An enchanted mud-brick world of beehive domes and innovative adaptations to the dictates of desert life.
Galleria De Bono (Tripoli; p87) The best of the dazzling white Italianate façades in downtown Tripoli.
Gurgi Mosque (Tripoli; p85) The pick of a very fine bunch in Tripoli's medina.
Masjed Jamal Abdel Nasser (Tripoli; p87) A towering temple of light and airy sandstone symmetry.
Mausoleum and Mosque of Sidi Abdusalam (Zliten; p118) Libya's most dazzling example of modern Islamic architecture.
Old City (Ghadames; p167) The best-preserved caravan town in the entire Sahara Desert.
Qasr al-Haj (p160) Fairytale Berber troglodyte *qasr* (fortified granary) with cave-like doors.
Medina (Ghat; p195) A crumbling mud-brick medina deep in the heart of the central Sahara.
Medina (Tripoli; p82) The Ottoman heart of Libya's cosmopolitan capital, with richly decorated mosques and whitewashed homes.
Underground houses (Gharyan; p158) A perfect Berber marriage of invention and necessity.

OUT WITH THE OLD

Soon after coming to power, Libya's revolutionary government decided that Libya was to be transformed into a modern nation. As part of this goal, entire communities were moved from Saharan oases into often custom-built accommodation, encouraged by free, modern housing with electricity, air-conditioning and integrated sewage systems. The most obvious examples are in Ghadames, Ghat, Murzuq and Gebraoun. Some of the aims of the programme were laudable and few could resist the lure of modern amenities. Officially the moves were to be voluntary, but reports of discontent among the communities of the Ubari Lakes suggest that not all went freely. Many would argue that the benefits of such a move outweigh the loss of traditional ways of life and that a romantic attachment to vernacular architecture is something only outsiders can benefit from. Yet, the characterless, modern houses to which the inhabitants moved and the subsequent rapid deterioration of the old towns suggest that a rich desert heritage is being lost.

SAHARAN ARCHITECTURE

The mud-brick dwellings of the Fezzan were well suited to the harsh demands of desert life. In Ghadames the ancient building methods are still sufficiently intact for some of the inhabitants to move from their new air-conditioned houses into the Old City (p167) during summer. Most of the medinas of the Sahara have been abandoned for modern housing (see Out With the Old, above) and are rapidly deteriorating. The decaying mud-brick structures can be quite evocative of the ancient caravan towns; the medina at Ghat (p195) is arguably the finest example.

Architecture and Tourism in Italian Colonial Libya (by Brian McLaren; 2006) may read at times like an academic dissertation but it's a fascinating insight into the way that Libya's colonial rulers tried to shape Libya's architectural history.

In smaller settlements, many traditional flat-roofed Fezzani houses have been neglected to the point of dereliction as a result of the relocation of their residents. Part of the problem lies in the fact that many are roofed with palm beams and fronds, which in the absence of regular maintenance are liable to collapse on the rare occasions when it rains.

ITALIAN ARCHITECTURE

One of the few legacies of Italian colonial occupation for which Libyans are grateful is the Italian Modernist architecture of the northern coast, especially in Tripoli. With a decidedly Mediterranean feel, many of the elegant whitewashed façades east of Tripoli's Green Sq (p87) and the Old Town Hall (p127) in Benghazi are splendid. Along the coast, particularly between Tripoli and Misrata and around Gharyan, you may also come across abandoned Italian churches and farmhouses.

ISLAMIC & OTTOMAN ARCHITECTURE

Most of Libya's mosques and madrassas date from the Ottoman era. They have typically narrow, pencil-thin minarets, sometimes octagonal in shape. The Ottoman mosques of the Tripoli medina, especially those of Ahmed Pasha Karamanli Mosque (p84), Draghut Mosque (p85) and Gurgi Mosque (p85), showcase Libya's finest collection of tile mosaics and woodcarvings. These mosques, built in the North African (Maghrebi) style, have superbly decorated small domes surrounding a larger dome above the prayer hall, which is often surrounded by closely packed pillars. There is also a strong Andalucían influence in many mosques evidenced by the use of elegant arches. (For more information on mosques see p54.)

Islam: Art & Architecture (edited by Markus Hattstein and Peter Delius) is a stunning reference work on the history of Islamic architecture with detailed sections on North Africa.

Modern Islamic architecture in Libya is not that much different from elsewhere in the Arab world, with extensive use of marble, sandstone, lavish tile work and cavernous prayer halls rising several stories high. The finest examples include the Mausoleum and Mosque of Sidi Abdusalam

(p118) in Zliten, the New Mosque (p169) in Ghadames and the Masjed Jamal Abdel Nasser (p87) in Tripoli.

The oldest surviving examples of Islamic architecture in Libya are generally to be found in its desert regions. The unusual Al-Kabir Mosque and tombs of the followers of the Prophet Mohammed in Awjila (p132) sport conical, pyramidal domes not found elsewhere. The vernacular-style mosques of the Fezzan usually do not have a courtyard, and above the prayer hall rises a squat, almost triangular minaret built in the Sudanic style, sometimes with protruding wooden struts. The best examples are in Murzuq (p205) and Ghat (p195).

Libya Net (www.libyanet.com) has wide-ranging links (many in Arabic) to Libyan musicians, writers, poets and painters music, painting and literature.

See also p82 for extensive descriptions of the Ottoman residential architecture of Tripoli's medina.

Painting & Sculpture

Libyan painters are little-known outside Libya. Some of the more famous painters working at the moment include Ali al-Abani (from Tarhuna), who specialises in landscapes; Ali Zwaik (from Az-Zawiya), whose paintings are more abstract; and Ramadan Abu Ras (from Sabratha), who moves between abstracts and landscapes. Other fine artists, whose work can be seen on the internet, include Mohammed Zwawi (cartoons), Afaf al-Somali (a female painter specialising in watercolours), Taher al-Maghrabi, Ali Gana (oil paintings) and Bashir Hammoda (abstracts).

ROCK ART

The rock art that adorns the walls of desert massifs in the south of Libya is one of the undoubted highlights of any visit to Libya. Some of it dates back 12,000 years.

African Rock Art (by David Coulson & Alec Campbell) represents the definitive guide (in coffee-table format) to Saharan rock art with extensive sections on Libya and marvellous photography.

The two main types of rock art in the Libyan Sahara are paintings and carvings (also known as petroglyphs). The paintings were usually made by a brush made of feathers or animal hair, a spatula made of stick or bone, or the fingers of the artist. To ensure accurate proportions, the artists are believed to have painted the images in outline and then coloured them in. Most of the paintings in the Jebel Acacus are red, which was achieved through the use of a wet pigment thought to have been derived from ground-and-burned stone; the colour came from soft rock containing oxidised iron (hematite or ochre). A liquid binder was then applied, most often egg-white or milk, although urine, animal fat and blood were also used. It is to these binding agents that we owe the remarkable longevity of the paintings.

Trust for African Rock Art (www.africanrockart.org) has a links section that takes you to groups around the world dedicated to studying and preserving Africa's and Libya's prehistoric rock art.

The carvings or petroglyphs are concentrated in the Msak Settafet, especially Wadi Methkandoush (p204), although there are some examples in the Acacus (p198). The engravings were achieved through a method known as 'pecking', which involved the use of a heavy, sharp stone. A second stone was sometimes used to bang the sharp stone like a pick. Like the paintings, the outline was usually completed first, often by scratching. Upon completion, some of the lines were ground smooth and, on occasion, the rock face was smoothed first as a form of preparation. After metal was introduced to the Sahara around 3200 years ago (1200 BC), a metal spike may have been used.

For more information on the various historical periods of rock art, see p200.

Dance

Libya has a diversity of traditional dance, all of which is strongly influenced by Berber and Tuareg folklore. There are no organised dance troupes other than those which perform at private Libyan parties or weddings, or at festivals. You're most likely to come across these performances at the festivals in Ghadames, Ghat, Kabaw or Zuara (see p219 for dates), but the most enjoyable are when a traveller is invited to a local wedding celebration. For more information about the music at Tripolitanian weddings, see p56.

Ghadames is the best place to see re-enactments of traditional dances – see p173 for details.

In 1798 the German explorer Frederick Hornemann wrote, 'The women of Fezzan generally have a great fondness for dancing and every amusement…They dance publicly in the open places of the town, not only in the day time, but even after sunset.'

If you do get invited to a wedding, dances to watch out for:

Az-Zlabin (Tripolitania) The groom circles a group of men and when one of them gives him money, the groom returns to the centre of the circle and publicly lauds the giver. Accompaniment is on the *zukra* (see p56).

Cuzca (Tripolitania) Dancers parade in circles of two lines, with each dancer holding a small piece of wood, which is tapped against those of other dancers in time to the music.

Kishk (Cyrenaica) This involves rhythmical, repetitive chants, which a group of men standing in a circle repeats after a designated leader. A woman, adorned with henna and a brocaded dress, dances around the circle in a series of increasingly small and mesmeric steps while the men, also in traditional costume, vie for her attention with large, open handclaps. She then chooses one to dance with her, a decision which is always greeted by great acclaim. Don't tell anyone, but we were there in Tobruk when Michael Palin was drawn into the circle and danced a mean *kishk* in 2001.

Majruda (Cyrenaica) Similar to the *kishk*, the *majruda* involves very small, fast, alternating handclaps.

In the oases of the south, most of the dances are either oasis or nomadic Tuareg in origin. One Tuareg dance that you may see in Ghat during its New Year festival (p197) involves seated women playing the *tende* (a drum made of skin stretched over a mortar) and singing ballads glorifying Tuareg figures, while men on their finest camels circle round the women.

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Environment

Libya is full of wild beasts; while beyond the wild beast region there is a tract which is wholly sand, very scant of water, and utterly and entirely a desert.

Herodotus, The Histories

THE LAND

Imagine Italy, Germany, France and Spain combined or two Egypts, but with the population of Denmark. Now imagine that territory as an ocean of sand and rock with small islands of fertility and towns. If you take these cognitive leaps, you have a pretty accurate picture of Libya.

Geographically speaking, Libya occupies one of the most extreme territories on earth. You like deserts? A mere 95% of Libya is covered by the Sahara of which 20% rises as sand dunes. You're a fan of the Mediterranean? Libya has an enviable 1770km of Mediterranean coastal frontage. Longing for a river or great stands of trees? Bad luck, because Libya has not a single permanent river and just 1% of Libya is forested. And if you were dreaming of that farm in Africa, look elsewhere because a pitiful 1% of Libyan territory can support any form of agriculture.

The highest temperature ever recorded on earth was at L'Aziziyah, 43km south of Tripoli, on 13 September 1922: 57.8°C.

Much of the country, which is the fourth-largest country in Africa (after Sudan, Algeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo), forms part of the great North African Plateau whose unrelenting plains stretch from the Atlantic Coast of Morocco and Mauritania to Egypt's Red Sea. Atop this plateau, Libya shares borders with six countries: Egypt, Sudan, Chad, Niger, Algeria and Tunisia.

Tripolitania (approximately 285,000 sq km) in the northwest of the country contains one of Libya's few pockets of fertility, the Sahel al-Jefara (Jefara Plain) along Tripoli's narrow strip of Mediterranean coast. The plain rises to the formerly volcanic hills of the Jebel Nafusa with an average elevation of 600m to 900m.

Geomorphology in Deserts (by Robert Cooke and Andrew Warren) may have been written in 1973, but it remains the definitive work on the Sahara's geography.

The hills give way to a series of east-west depressions that lead into the Fezzan (approximately 570,000 sq km) and into the Sahara. The most dominant features of the Libyan Sahara include *hamada* (plateaus of rock scoured by wind erosion), *sarir* (basins, formed by wadis, in which salt is deposited after evaporation), *idehan* (sand seas) and, in the south, basalt mountain ranges. Libya's highest point is Bikubiti (2285m), situated in the extreme south of the country, hard up against the border of Chad.

In Cyrenaica (about 905,000 sq km), the low-lying terrain of the Sahara is separated from Libya's northeastern coastline by the fertile Jebel al-Akhdar (Green Mountains), which drop steeply into the Mediterranean from a height of around 600m. In the far east, the terrain descends more gradually towards the Egyptian border.

CURIOSITIES OF THE LIBYAN DESERT

Al-Haruj al-Aswad (p185) An extinct volcano covering 45,000 sq km; its massive size derives from the fact that lava is believed to have flowed from the volcano like water, rather than shooting into the air.
Hamada al-Hamra (p177) An unrelenting void where people from the Jebel Nafusa go to search for truffles (really!).
Idehan Ubari (Ubari Sand Sea; p186) Every year six million tons of sand are added to this sand sea by the wind.
Waw al-Namus (p206) Another extinct volcano where the extent of the eruption is apparent in the black sand that extends from the crater's rim into the desert for miles around.

Note that in the foregoing description we have used Libyan administrative boundaries, whereas the chapters in this book annexe large swathes of Cyrenaica (p124) and we've attached to it a chapter called Fezzan & the Sahara (for more information, see p178) – it just made more sense that way.

WILDLIFE

Animals

The prehistoric rock-paintings of the southern Sahara suggest that elephants, giraffes and rhinoceros once roamed the region. Even 2500 years ago elephants, lions, horned asses and bears were reported in Cyrenaica. Not surprisingly, none remains and Libya has few surviving mammal species.

Species which survive include gazelle and the painfully shy waddan, which is a large goatlike deer whose agility is perfectly suited to its steep mountain domain. The fennec fox is a gloriously adapted, largely nocturnal species with fur-soled feet to protect against scorching sands, comically large ears and it spends most of the hot daylight hours underground. The largest rodent in the Libyan Sahara is the gundi, which can stop breathing for up to a minute to hide itself from prey.

Libyan Mammals (by Ernst Hufnagle) can be exceptionally hard to track down and is in need of an update, but it has the only comprehensive coverage of Libya's wildlife in English.

Although there are numerous species of snake – a photo of a python that gorged itself on a baby goat near Gharyan was doing the rounds when we were there, while cobras have been sighted at Leptis Magna – and wolves in the Jebel Nafusa, and foxes in the Jebel al-Akhdar, most of Libya's remaining mammals call the desert home.

Your best chances of seeing desert species are in areas where there are few tourists and a long way from human settlements. The signature species of the Libyan Sahara – the waddan, gazelle and fennec fox – are all present in Jebel Arkno (p208) and Jebel al-Uweinat (p209) in the far southeast of the country, Wadi Meggedet (p193) in the far southwest, as well as Al-Haruj al-Aswad (p185) and the wadis of the Msak Settafet behind Wadi Methkandoush (p204). Gazelle, waddan and fennec fox are also present in the Jebel Acacus (p198), but they keep well-hidden during the peak tourist months, emerging into the open during daylight hours only in summer.

If you're not likely to see such creatures in the Libyan wild, Tripoli Zoo (p90) has some species, while the small private zoo at Fezzan Park (p181) has quite a comprehensive collection of desert species.

Sahara: A Natural History (by Marq de Villiers and Sheila Hirtle) is a lively biography of the desert with sections on the Sahara's climate, wildlife and human inhabitants and much more.

Lizards, snakes (the striped sand snake, the horned viper and the Saharan sand snake) and scorpions are also quite common; you are extremely unlikely to encounter snakes in winter.

Libya is on the migratory route of many species of bird, although most sightings are restricted to the coast. Birds that you may come across include the Lanner falcon, desert sparrow, Egyptian vultures (in Cyrenaica), shrikes, larks, crows, turtle doves and bulbul. The Houbara bustard is a particular favourite of Libyan and foreign hunters and is now considered highly endangered. We've seen it in both the Hamada al-Hamra (see p177) and Al-Haruj al-Aswad (p185).

Further south you may come across the occasional migratory bird species blown into the desert, while the sociable moula moula bird, with a black body and striking white face and tail, is a constant companion in the south; the Tuareg call it the messenger bird or the deliverer of happiness.

Plants

Along the coast of Libya, the usual array of Mediterranean flora thrives, with large areas given over to the cultivation of olives and citrus fruit. You may also come across eucalyptus, bougainvillea and oleander. Inland, the only vegetation is largely confined to the oases, where the date palm reigns supreme, along with figs, tamarisk and oleander trees. Outside the oases, Acacia arabica (acacia) provides the only shade in the middle of the desert wilderness. Alfalfa grass and salt bushes often appear as if by miracle after rains.

Recent radiocarbon dating suggests that the water currently stored beneath the Sahara has been there for between 14,000 and 38,000 years, with smaller deposits from 7000 years ago.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

With 95% of Libyan territory covered by desert, water is not surprisingly the major environmental issue. Some say that the last regular rainfalls in Libya ceased 8000 years ago and underground water reserves have been Libya's only reliable water sources ever since. By the 1970s Libya was facing an unprecedented crisis and some analysts believe that Libya, which relied solely on wells and a few token desalination plants, may have become the first country in the world to run out of water. Colonel Qaddafi's solution was to tap the vast underground basins with sandstone shelves that lie beneath the Sahara, which have been filled with water since the time when the Sahara was a green and fertile land of abundant rains, and pipe it to Libya's thirsty coastal cities. For more information, including the controversies raging about the project, see The Eighth Wonder of the World, below.

By the time the Great Man-Made River is completed, over 4000km of prestressed concrete pipes, each up to 4m in diameter, will criss-cross the country with a daily capacity of 6 million cu metres.

Libya also depends completely on fossil fuels for its power needs, although it is estimated to be responsible for just 0.2% of world carbon emissions.

There's always talk of new tourist developments being powered by solar energy, something that already happens with some military checkpoints. Wind farms, built in conjunction with a German engineering company, are also planned in northeastern Libya. However, such fledgling measures don't yet even come close to redressing Libya's energy imbalance.

Another major environmental problem for Libya is rubbish – lots of it. The fields littered with black plastic bags on the outskirts of most towns can somewhat diminish Libya's aesthetic appeal for many visitors. Our vote for the worst outskirts of any Libyan town is for those surrounding Ajdabiya (p131).

For advice on minimising your impact upon the environment when travelling in the Libyan Sahara, see Camel Safaris & 4WD Expeditions (p214) and Responsible Desert Travel (p213).

THE EIGHTH WONDER OF THE WORLD

The Great Man-Made River (GMR; Al-Nahr Sinai), is one of the most ambitious development projects attempted anywhere in the world. Never one to hide his light under a bushel, Colonel Muammar Qaddafi described his pet project as the 'Eighth Wonder of the World'.

The project is breathtaking, both in its conception and the scale of its ambition. The early stages extracted water from the Tazerbo and Sarir Basins (which have a storage capacity of 10,000 cu km) and piped it to Benghazi and Sirt, while the Murzuq Basin (over 450,000 sq km in size, with a storage capacity of 4800 cu km) now supplies the Sahel al-Jefara of Tripolitania and Tripoli with 2.5 million cu metres a day. Tripoli received its first supplies of GMR water in September 1996amid much fanfare. Later stages bring the massive Al-Kufra Basin (capacity of 20,000 cu km) into play, extending coverage to Tobruk, while other underground basins near Ghadames and Al-Jaghbub are also slated for exploitation.

Depending on your perspective, the GMR is either visionary or grossly irresponsible. No-one yet knows the environmental side-effects on water tables in agricultural areas or the oases of the Sahara. There are also concerns that the amount of money spent on the first stage of the project alone could have been used to fund five desalination plants. Neighbouring Sudan and Egypt have weighed in, concerned over the threat to their own underground water supplies. And it's possible that the underground water supplies may be exhausted in 50 years, an event eerily reminiscent of the time when the Garamantes empire, having exhausted their water supplies, came to an end (p30).

For all the criticism, Libyans are almost universally supportive of the GMR; as one told us, 'We had no other choice'.

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TRAVEL WIDELY, TREAD LIGHTLY, GIVE SUSTAINABLY – THE LONELY PLANET FOUNDATION

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Our nonprofit partners are linked by a grass-roots approach to the areas of health, education or sustainable tourism. Many – such as Louis Sarno who works with BaAka (Pygmy) children in the forested areas of Central African Republic – choose to focus on women and children as one of the most effective ways to support the whole community. Louis is determined to give options to children who are discriminated against by the majority Bantu population.

Sometimes foundation assistance is as simple as restoring a local ruin, such as the Minaret of Jam in Afghanistan; this incredible monument now draws intrepid tourists to the area and its restoration has greatly improved options for local people.

Just as travel is often about learning to see with new eyes, so many of the groups we work with aim to change the way people see themselves and the future for their children and communities.

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Food & Drink

As you contemplate your thirteenth plate of chicken *(djeaj)* with couscous or rice with chicken, contemplate this: Libya has some of the best food you'll never eat.

In Libya you'll eat well and you'll rarely leave a restaurant hungry. Libyan restaurants are getting better all the time and most are excellent, sometimes filled with character and with friendly service guaranteed to make you feel at home. Servings are also generous. It's just that there's little on offer that will live long in the memory, as Libyan restaurant food bears only a passing resemblance to what Libyans themselves eat. Libyan home-cooking is varied, tasty and deserves international recognition as one of the more interesting cuisines of North Africa. But such recognition will never come until more than a handful of people in the Libyan restaurant business understand that sampling creative local cuisine is one of the joys of travel.

Libyan Cuisine and Recipes (http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/dr_ibrahim_ighneiwa/food.htm) has little commentary but its 59 recipes (in English) are easy to follow and range from couscous or rice to pastries.

STAPLES & SPECIALITIES

Eating Libyan-style usually involves a banquet that begins with soup (the standard Libyan soup is a spiced minestrone broth with lamb and pasta) and then moves on to a simple salad of tomato, onion and lettuce. Bread *(khobz)* is often somewhere in the vicinity as an accompaniment, although it's more often Western-style, rather than flat, Arab-style bread. Up until this point, Libyan restaurants are true to their Libyan roots.

Libyan restaurants catering to tourists, however, usually skip the enticing range of entrées that accompany the salad – dips such as hummus (chickpea) or *baba ghanooj* (eggplant), stuffed peppers, rice-filled vine leaves, deep-fried cauliflower, to name just a few – and head straight for the main dish.

The main course usually revolves around rice (in Cyrenaica) or couscous (in Tripolitania and Fezzan), served with a sauce containing chicken, meat or fish and a few token vegetables. For a little variety, there may be macaroni-based dishes inspired by the Italians; the subtly different Libyan version goes by a number of names, including *mbakbaké*. *Tajeen,* a lightly spiced lamb dish with a tomato and paprika-based sauce, would be an unimaginable treat. Throw in a soft drink and tea or coffee and you've had yourself a fine, if unexciting meal…again.

Al-Bab (www.al-bab.com/arab/food.htm) has extensive links to the food of the Arab world with three recipe-dominated sites for Libya.

While it's true that Libyans do eat a lot of rice or couscous, they eat so much more. A small handful of restaurants do serve local specialities (see Libya's Top Five, p69), but few of them seem to be on most tourists' itineraries – something to definitely talk to your tour company about. The best local specialities, in addition to *osban* (see Travel Your Tastebuds, opposite) that can be tracked down:

algarra Lamb or seafood cooked in a high-temperature oven in a pottery amphora with mint, basil, tomato and green peppers; the amphora is brought to your table and then broken open with a hammer. You can find it at Athar Restaurant (p93) in Tripoli's medina.

bourdim Meat slow-cooked in a sand pit; try this at Mat'am al-Najar (p109) or Mat'am al-Khayma (p109), both near Al-Khoms.

fitaat Lentils, mutton and buckwheat pancakes cooked together in a tasty sauce in a low oven and eaten with the hands from a communal bowl. *Fittat* is served in some of the old houses of Ghadames (see p174).

rishda This delicately spiced vermicelli-style noodles with chickpeas, tomatoes and caramelised onions can be tried at Mat'am al-Bourai (p93) in Tripoli.

TRAVEL YOUR TASTEBUDS

as-sida – flour, boiled with salt, and eaten with olive oil and date juice or jam; it's often reserved for special occasions (see p68)

bseesa – bread made from seeds crushed to a flour-like consistency and mixed with oil and eaten for breakfast or with tea (western Libya)

osban – a sheep's stomach cleaned out and filled with rice, herbs, liver, kidney and other meats, and steamed or boiled in a sauce; eat this at Mat'am al-Bourai (p93) in Tripoli's medina

zumeita – dish of heated barley in water and oil

We dare you…

Libyan's eat most parts of the sheep as should be clear if you've eaten *osban*, but that extends even to the sheep's head. You'll find *osban* on a few restaurant menus, such as at Haj Hmad Restaurant (p94) in Tripoli, and in some roadside stalls, especially in Cyrenaica. Please note, the piles of food wrapped in aluminium foil aren't baked potatoes.

Two dishes among the many that you might eat if you're lucky enough to eat at home with a Libyan family, but which you're unlikely to ever find on a restaurant menu:

bazin Unleavened bread made from barley and flour but without sugar and cooked into a dough-like consistency. A staple of Tripolitanian families, it's eaten with the hands from a communal bowl with plenty of sauce. It's often followed by fish – a speciality of Zuara. Libyans dream of this dish and having eaten it twice, we're already dreaming of our next one.

matruda Thick, oven-baked bread chopped into small pieces and then, while still warm, added to milk, dates and finally honey and a home-made butter called *samel*. A delicacy of the Jebel al-Akhdar, we ate this around a campfire on a beach near Al-Bayda and can guarantee that it's a delicious way to warm the heart in winter.

Libya has used the water from the Great Man-Made River (see p64) to irrigate vast agricultural projects in desert areas, such as Al-Kufra. Many of these projects are now viable, but at the beginning this extremely expensive undertaking meant Libyan wheat cost 20 times the world market price.

One final food worthy of special mention is Tuareg bread, *taajeelah* (also known as sand or desert bread in English or *khobzet al-milla* in Arabic), which is a travellers' favourite during desert expeditions. The bread is prepared from flour, water and a little salt. After the fire has been burning for some time, it's cleared away; the dough is laid on the hot sand, covered, then cooked beneath the sand for 15 minutes, uncovered, turned over, covered again and cooked for a further 15 minutes. It makes a meal on its own but is at its best when still warm, accompanied by a stew or sauce and then eaten in the middle of nowhere under a canopy of stars. *Don't,* under any circumstances, let the cook wash it 'for the tourists' – soggy Tuareg bread is as unappealing as it sounds and a little bit of sand ('desert spice' as the Tuareg like to say) never hurt anyone.

And any discussion of Libyan cuisine wouldn't be complete without paying homage to the Libyan love of sweets *(helawiyat)*. Patisseries line the main streets of most towns and while there's not much that's discernibly local in inspiration, pastries dripping with sugar, almonds and/or honey are enough to make most Libyan eyes light up.

In 390 BC Cyrene saved Greece from famine with a massive export of grain. The Roman cities of Sabratha and Leptis Magna once supplied Rome with olive oil and in the 1st century AD Leptis paid an annual tax of up to three million litres of olive oil.

DRINKS

There's not a lot of choice when it comes to beverages. Soft drink and, to a lesser extent, bottled water are available in even the smallest towns. One drink that breaks the monotony in some Tripoli restaurants is the *masabiyah jamaica,* a cocktail of 7-Up, Mirinda and Coke. Libyan tea is very strong and is sometimes served with mint *(shay na'ana)* or peanuts. Coffee-drinkers can choose between instant *(nescafé)* or the thick Arab coffee *(qahwa)*, in which you could stand your spoon without fear of it falling.

Alcohol is illegal in Libya, although in trusted company you may be offered *bokha,* a potent home-brew that could start your car; it's also known as 'Libyan tequila'. The most widely available nonalcoholic beer is Becks (1LD to 2LD), but you'll also find Crown, a malty brew from Morocco.

CELEBRATIONS

Weddings usually take place in summer because guest lists often run into the hundreds (and last for days) and outdoor areas are often the only spaces capable of accommodating the crowds. Some Libyans lament the fact that weddings these days last only for three days, rather than the original seven! Food, music (p56) and traditional dances (p60) are the centrepieces of any Libyan wedding celebration with vast quantities of food consumed. The contents of such a wedding banquet depend on where the wedding is being held with almost as many varieties as there are regions of Libya. Grilled meats, sweet pastries and gallons of tea are among the regular features. For a first-hand account of wedding celebrations, see A Wedding in Touneen, p46.

Weddings in Tripolitania (by Abdelkafi) provides an interesting overview of how wedding traditions differ throughout Tripolitania, from the coast to the Jebel Nafusa; it's available from Fergiani's Bookshop (p74) in Tripoli or at www.darfpublishers.co.uk.

Other celebrations revolve around important dates in the Islamic calendar (see p220). In addition to music, large public gatherings and often fireworks, at such times many Libyans hold a special meal of *as-sida* (p67) to commemorate the Prophet Mohammed's Birthday. This dish is also eaten in Tripolitania to celebrate the birth of a child.

Libyans also regard the weekly Friday holiday as a reason to celebrate. Roads and roadsides are crammed with large family groups heading out into the countryside or to the beach for a picnic. They're usually well-equipped expeditions, and end up with a barbecue of grilled meats, fish or seafood.

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

In Tripoli and Benghazi, the range of restaurants is seemingly endless. Tripoli in particular has everything from small, cheap restaurants offering hamburgers, pizza slices or *shwarma* (meat sliced off a spit and stuffed in a pocket of pita-type bread with chopped tomatoes) to higher-quality sit-down restaurants where you'll be served three-course banquet-style meals. The latter is where you'll spend most of your time while in Libya. One thing you won't find a lot of is restaurants serving international flavours, which is why you'll be thankful for the Turkish restaurants of Benghazi where the cheese bread is divine. Apart from anything else, these Turkish restaurants just add a little variety to your standard Libyan tourist meal.

Libya is the 9th-largest producer of dates in the world, and Tripoli hosted the first-ever International Date Conference in 1959. Some of the most popular Libyan varieties come from Houn in the Al-Jufra oasis, including *halima* and *magmagat ayoub,* or from Zliten *(tarbuni)*.

Once you get beyond Tripoli and Benghazi, you'll be lucky to find a tourist-standard restaurant or good hotel restaurant. Sebha, Ghadames, Leptis Magna, Sirt, Tobruk, Derna and Nalut all have at least one good restaurant, while elsewhere Germa and Yefren each promise a hotel that serves good food. Otherwise, it will be chicken and rice or couscous all the way, in whatever cheap roadside restaurant you can find.

All hotels include breakfast as part of the room price. Breakfast here generally consists of a buffet with various types of bread or pastry, olives, orange juice, coffee or tea and sometimes cereal.

Coffeehouses are a Libyan institution that serve an important (if predominantly male) social purpose as well as providing a substitute for any other form of evening entertainment. Most Libyan villages, towns and cities have at least one coffeehouse, usually with outdoor tables, where men or, on Friday nights, families gather to drink tea or coffee, smoke the nargileh, catch up on the latest news and otherwise pass the time.

LIBYA'S TOP FIVE

Traditional Houses (Ghadames; p175) Sit amid the splendour of a traditional Ghadames house and eat *fitaat* (p66) from the communal bowl.
Mat'am Obaya (Tripoli; p93) Delicious home-cooking with stuffed calamari, octopus salad and fish couscous like none you've ever eaten.
Fish market (Tripoli; p95) Choose the freshest fish and seafood and wait while they cook it for you; it's always packed with locals at night.
Mat'am al-Bourai (Tripoli; p93) One of the few Tripoli restaurants catering primarily to locals; the décor's basic but the *rishda* (p66) and *osban* (p67) are just like Mama used to make.
Al-Khoms region (Mat'am al-Najar, p109, or Mat'am al-Khayma, p109) Enjoy as much *bourdim* (p66) as you can handle at these roadside restaurants, which are favourites of Libyan travellers.

Quick Eats

In addition to the sit-down meals that are the traveller's staple, there are also cheap restaurants in every town that can make chicken *shwarma*, pizza, hamburger or sandwiches; if you don't like liver, ask for *bidoon kibdeh* (without liver). Often you'll be asked if you want *harisa* – it's a spicy tomato paste. In Cyrenaica, *ta'amiyya* (the Egyptian variety of felafel) is also possible. One 'Libyan' variation of fast food is 'Kentucky' (spelled in as many ways as there are restaurants) – fried chicken, often served with French fries – which is found in almost every town in Libya. Generally hygiene standards are reasonable and street food such as this is perfectly safe to eat. That said, the situation seems to be more patchy in the east, especially in Ajdabiya and Al-Kufra.

Food in the Ancient World (by Shaun Hill and John Wilkins) is for those who always wondered what the ancient Romans or Greeks ate atop the mosaics in the pleasure domes of Leptis Magna or Cyrene.

VEGETARIANS & VEGANS

Like in most Middle Eastern and North African countries, vegetarianism is something of an alien concept for Libyans. Vegetarians should always specify their requirements as soon as they arrive in the restaurant (ask for *bidoon laham,* without meat) and tour companies should also be told in advance (to help with planning). Although most restaurants are obliging and keen to make sure you don't leave hungry, many won't be able to offer more than bread, salad, French fries, plain rice and perhaps an omelette. Many soups are precooked and include meat as a matter of course; often no substitute is available.

EATING WITH KIDS

When Libyans eat out they usually do so as a family; as such waiters are uniformly accepting of children and will usually go out of their way to make them feel welcome (offerings of fried potato chips being a tried-and-true method), although don't expect high chairs. A handful of restaurants in Tripoli and elsewhere have a special children's menu (eg main meals and a drink cost usually 6LD to 8LD). Otherwise Libyan food is rarely spicy and is generally child-friendly.

For general advice on travelling with children, see p215.

Major crops grown in Libya include olives, dates, wheat, barley, citrus fruits, vegetables, peanuts and soybeans. The major agricultural areas are the Sahel al-Jefara (Jefara Plain; Tripolitania) and the Jebel al-Akhdar (Cyrenaica). Libya imports 75% of its food needs.

HABITS & CUSTOMS

In most restaurants, etiquette is identical to what you'd find back home. Eating a meal in a private home or with Libyan friends is, apart from being a great way to cement new-found friendships, quite different.

When at home, Libyans usually spread out a plastic tablecloth atop a carpet on the floor and eat together with their hands from a communal bowl. Prior to eating, the host will usually bring a jug of water, soap and

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DOS & DON'TS

- Never take or pass food using your left hand, which is traditionally used for ablutions. In practice, Libyans are forgiving of tourists who forget this rule, but you should always try to use the right hand.
- If you arrive at a private gathering while people are eating, it is customary to sit apart and wait until everyone has finished before shaking hands.
- If drinking tea with the Tuareg, it is traditionally considered polite to accept the first three rounds of tea which are offered.

a small plastic receptacle and will then proceed to pour so that each guest can wash their hands. At home, Libyan families eat together, but when guests arrive, men and women usually eat separately; Western women are generally considered honorary men and in such circumstances the traditional rules of segregation probably don't apply. As the meal commences, many say *'bismillah'* (a form of asking Allah to bless the meal). During the meal, the best morsels of meat will be gently pushed in the direction of an honoured guest. When sated, Libyans will say *'al-hamdu lillah'* (thanks be to God) whereupon other diners will encourage the person to eat more; if the person truly has finished, someone will say *'Saha, Saha'*, meaning 'good health'.

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