

Georges Rémond's Reports on the 1911 – 1912 Turco-Italian War in Libya

*Syed Tanvir Wasti**

The end of the 19th century as well as the beginning of the 20th century was a period of several decades in which most countries inhabited by Muslims were under direct or indirect colonial rule.¹ The Ottoman Empire with its Turkish heartlands had survived as the only independent Islamic state; Iran and Afghanistan were partly independent. Though not powerless, the Ottoman Empire was left behind by the Industrial Revolution in Europe, and slid into a slow decline in the 18th century. Under the guise of the Eastern Question,² using all kinds of opportunities and pretexts, the powers of Europe began to anticipate and work towards the break-up and division of the Ottoman territories. France, under Napoleon Bonaparte, invaded Ottoman Egypt in 1798 but, because of the deteriorating European situation, had to withdraw a year later. In 1830, France took over the administration of Algeria, over which the Turks exercised political sovereignty. The next few decades were relatively quiet, because the increasing military might of an aggressive Russia posed a threat not only to Ottoman Turkey but also to Great Britain and France and their vast overseas territories. Thus, Great Britain, France and Turkey all combined their forces to defeat Russia in the Crimean War, which lasted between 1853 and 1856.

Unfortunately for Ottoman Turkey, the next Russo-Turkish war, in 1877, was also very costly in terms of loss of life, and vast areas of the empire were laid waste. However, the Turks fought very bravely on both the Eastern and Western fronts of the war, and the heroic defence of Plevna³ by Marshal Ghazi Osman Pasha for several months in 1877 against vastly superior Russian forces entered the military textbooks of many nations. Subsequently, the major military powers of Europe⁴ assembled at a Congress in Berlin in 1878 under the leadership of Bismarck to sign

* Professor Emeritus, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey

the Treaty of Berlin whereby, among other arrangements, the independence of Serbia from the Turks was declared, and the administration of the Ottoman island of Cyprus was temporarily given over to the British government.⁵ During the next 30 years, Tunisia was taken over by the French, the administration of Egypt was assumed by the British and, as a result of the Albanian revolt of 1911 along with the Balkan wars of 1912-1913, most of the hitherto Ottoman territories in Europe slipped from Turkish control.

But that was by no means all. In the quest for acquiring large overseas territories as colonies, Italy wished to follow its European neighbours. It wanted to acquire the large African territory of Tripoli⁶ by military force with intent to colonize it. Without much warning, in October 1911, Italy sent a large naval force to Libya, which attacked and seized the capital, Tripoli, and a populated slice of the Libyan coast. Penetration into the vast Libyan Desert would have to wait. The Ottomans were in no military position to retaliate against the Italian invasion, but centuries of pride prevented them from giving up without a fight. In the words of Armstrong⁷ writing about one of the military heroes, one who would go on to far greater heights:

Mustafa Kemal⁸ pushed politics aside. There was man's work to be done. He must get to North Africa to fight the Italians.

Except by the long land route through Syria and Egypt, Turkey was cut off from North Africa. The Italians had control of the sea and had closed the Dardanelles. The Turkish Navy consisted of two battleships and some cruisers. Their boilers were rusty; their crews had disappeared, and they lay stuck in the mud up the Golden Horn. It was impossible to send troops. Officers who wished to go must get to Africa as best they could. Every young officer was planning to go. Enver⁹ had gone at once. Fethi,¹⁰ who was military attaché in Paris, had made a run for it in a French fishing smack from Marseilles and landed in Tunis.

Many books have been published in several languages over the last hundred years dealing with the Turco-Italian war. However, contemporary accounts are fewer, especially those dealing with the Turkish and Arab defenders of Libya. Apart from the letters numbering over a hundred written by Enver Pasha¹¹ from Libya and sent to his lady friend Maria Sarre [née Humann], there are also brief memoirs written by other Ottoman officers who took part in the defence of Libya. However, an important contemporary source is the collection of periodical reports sent by Georges Rémond, a war correspondent for the French Magazine *L'Illustration*. Rémond began his trip across North Africa around 17 January 1912 entering Libya from the Tunisian border post of Dehibat.¹² He travelled eastwards and passed through places such as Gharian, Azizieh, Khoms, Misurata,¹³ Benghazi and Derna for a journey, mainly on horseback, totalling 2500 kilometres. After visiting many Turco-Arab camps *en route*, Rémond crossed the Libyan border into Egypt at the port of Solloum on 22 May 1912. His reports were first published in book form in Paris a year later.¹⁴ This comprehensive book also contains 32 pages of rare photographs of people and places in Libya. Like any foreigner travelling in an unknown and unfamiliar environment, Rémond met ordinary people, but also several interesting people of all backgrounds, classes, professions and moral persuasions. In the present article, only a brief overview of Rémond's experiences in Libya will be given, concentrating on his meetings with well-known Turkish military officers of the time, who had arrived from all over the Ottoman Empire, to defend the last Ottoman territory in Africa along with the local Senussi chieftains and volunteers.

A brief summary in English of Rémond's travels [less than 4 printed pages plus a page with a map showing the route taken on the journey] was published less than a month after the book first appeared in Paris.¹⁵ It is indicative of the continuing interest in Rémond's writings that a new edition of his book came out in 2014.¹⁶ In a review¹⁷ of this new edition, which was published just over a hundred years after the original, Bourkia¹⁸ summarizes the 13 chapters of the original book. She also discusses the new Foreword written by Odile Moreau, a specialist in the History of the Ottoman Empire at the Paul Valéry University in Montpellier, France. In her Foreword, Moreau traces the history of the last century in Libya, and says that the geographical situation of the provinces of Tripoli, Cyrenaica and the Fezzan, which make up Libya,

has always been coveted by foreign forces, of whom the Italians were willing to pursue their aims by waging war against the Ottomans. Moreau cites logistical details of this war, the strength of the Ottoman troops, the networks of resistance, the support provided by the Arab fraternity and the technological superiority of Italy. She also refers to the spirit of rebellion of the local Libyan populations who, even after the signing of the Ouchy Treaty and the departure of the Ottoman Turks, continued their fight against the Italians. According to Bourkia, Moreau emphasizes the importance of Georges Rémond's testimony, while pointing out that the war correspondent was not always impartial, because of his empathy for the Ottoman forces with whom he spent both night and day. However, Rémond's reports and accounts show that on the whole, he was a fair and unprejudiced observer of both people and events, and his book certainly deserves to be better known.

In the preface to the book, written in October 1912 after the completion of his Libyan trip, Rémond says:¹⁹

I have learnt that a people is never vanquished, no matter how powerful the forces which threaten it, until it submits by itself; that it finds in its religion the most effective means of resistance; that the strength and duration of this resistance has to be measured by the depth of its faith.

Rémond is not happy when he observes Germany assuming the mantle of 'Protector of Islam', striving in vain to take it over from France, which he considers a more natural country for this purpose, in view of the large Muslim populations over which it rules and with which it can cooperate. Towards the end of the preface, he goes on to worry presciently about the future, two years before the cataclysm of the First World War:

If the Italian expedition in Tripolitania led to the Balkan Wars, what tumult and disorder does it not enable us to forecast? A hundred years of the politics of nationalities and the rights of peoples have brought us to this point – where the slightest spark risks setting the whole world on fire.

In his travels from west to east, Rémond usually had a small entourage usually consisting of a Turkish officer or gendarme or a local going part of the way, plus a retinue of horses, camels and drivers. After a 12 hour camel ride from the Tunisian border across the desert to a place called Yfren, he was received by the commandant of the place, Yusuf Jemal.²⁰ He writes [the diary date is 27 January 1912]:

The commandant of the place, Yusuf Jemal, a man of perfect courtesy, who spoke excellent French, came to bid us welcome; he had rooms prepared for us where I could set up my camp bed and, something strongly necessary, after a 12 hour trip across a very rough countryside, offered us for supper a Turkish broth, smooth and flavoured, followed by mutton in sauce.

Rémond continues his travels in the company of a Turkish army captain named Sakib²¹ who, at one of the desert camping spots prepares a stew of red peppers which Rémond describes thus: 'a food that uproots the lips, the tongue, the throat, and the intestines, fiery when it enters as well as when it leaves the body'. When he mentions this to Sakib, the latter replies: 'The Arabic proverb says: A man who is tried and experienced is worth more than all doctors. Believe me, in this country, peppers are the safeguard and guaranty against all illnesses.' Rémond describes the friendly hospitality he receives at the camp of Azizieh in the desert some 50 km south of Tripoli from the Ottoman commander at Gharian, Fethi Bey.²² He narrates the encounter as follows:

Fethi Bey had been the Ottoman military attaché at the Turkish Embassy in Paris and, since the start of the Libyan war, was responsible both for the organization of the military effort against the invaders as well as the actual fighting. He received me like a friend. His hospitality is so cordial that even the thought does not occur that one might be abusing it. This welcome, I found everywhere, from my entry into Libya, from the Turkish officers.

At Azizieh, Rémond meets many people, including Ferhad Bey, a deputy from Tripoli, and Suleiman Baroni, a deputy from the Jebel area. Discussing the situation, Ferhad Bey mentions the following:

At the start of the war, when I came to Azizieh, I saw the white flag flying over the government mansion²³ of the small town. I summoned the notables of the town and talked to them. They said to me: 'What can we do against a large country, so superior to us in force? Didn't you yourself tell us, last year, when the question of military conscription was being discussed, that only one regular professional army could resist another? We do not have such an army, and look at the small number of Turkish soldiers! Is this how we are going to wage war against Italy?'

Their sluggishness made Ferhad Bey talk harshly to them; he declared that it was not the Turks who had betrayed them, but that the Libyans had, in a sense, sold themselves to the Italians. They replied: 'For this disgrace, we are ready to die in battle till the last man.' The Ottoman red flag with the white crescent and star was raised once again at the top of the mansion.

With a group of men they travel to the front line in the battle against the Italians. Surrounded by Arab and Berber chieftains, Ferhad Bey proclaims to Rémond:²⁴

'How many a little company hath overcome a mighty host by Allah's leave! Allah is with the steadfast.'²⁵See, that is what is written in our Book. Repeat this in Europe, and tell them that you have seen these thousands of volunteers ready to fight till their last drop of their blood for their country and their religion.

In an unfortunate occurrence at the Azizieh camp, Rémond has some money stolen from his purse one night in his tent. Several people are apprehended, some of whom are also assumed to be spying for Italy, but the money is not recovered. Finally, after a few days, it is time for

Rémond to leave the Azizieh camp and proceed further, towards Khoms. He writes:

As I was leaving Azizieh, both Ferhad Bey and Suleiman Baroni insisted on paying to me all the money that had been stolen from my tent, on the basis that they had not protected me sufficiently well, and it had been their responsibility to do so. I had all the difficulty in the world to persuade them that it was impossible for me to accept the money.

Rémond proceeds through the desert where the weather [even at the end of February] is hot during the day; he is forced to give up wearing the fez cap, and changes to a voluminous Touareg type turban. They pass through huge dunes of sand that emerge through vast patches of flowers. At the Turco-Arab camp in Khoms he meets both Halil²⁶ Bey [later HalilKut Pasha] and Nuri Bey [later Nuri Killigil Pasha], who were the uncle and younger brother, respectively, of Enver Pasha. Nuri Bey was the organizer of the defence forces in Cyrenaica, while serving as deputy governor of Misurata. Halil Bey takes Rémond on a tour of the camp at Khoms. Slowly they progress towards the front lines, where the shells rain thicker than hail. Halil Bey says:

You observe that we are by no means distant from the front; the Arabs do not care at all about the exigencies of strategy; and neither do we, we hardly worry about it; we wish to be always under fire, always exposed to it. Besides, don't we have the protection of God for us? Look at that soldier – and that other one – they have been grievously wounded, this one twelve times, and well, after a few days, they will rush back to the battle.

Rémond continues touring the battle area with Halil Bey till it is nightfall, and time to return to the camp. Halil Bey says to him:

I did not really know the Arabs, but in a few months, I have become one of them. I have seen prodigious courage here. Nourished by a few dates, a little barley, these men come from their villages, leaving their homes and their

fields, always wishing to rush to the front, not just ready to do battle, but wild with the desire to vanquish or to die....

The next day, when Rémond was quitting the headquarters in Khoms, he said to Halil Bey: 'Au revoir, Commandant! till Paris or the Bosphorus in Istanbul'. 'No', said Halil Bey, 'Adieu; I prefer it. We are all here to sacrifice ourselves for the motherland; we are the *Fedâ'î*²⁷; and therefore I give no appointments for future meetings.'

Rémond next, in the company of Nuri Bey [the younger brother of Enver Pasha] and his men, goes to visit the ancient ruins of Leptis Magna not far from the Turkish posts at Khoms. From Leptis Magna, part of the invading Italian fleet could be seen anchored in the waters of the Mediterranean sea. They come across a group of volunteer Arabs camping in the historic ruins who, at their approach, stand at guard and clutch their swords. Nuri Bey goes up to them and asks: 'Are you from Taourgha, from Misurata and from Tarhona?' 'Yes', they shout, 'we are loyal warriors of the Sultan, ready to fight till death!' Some of them pick up handfuls of sand, kiss them and then blow them away while proclaiming: 'Our dust will be scattered thus, all our dust, before the Italians can become masters of this land!' Nuri Bey said to me, referring to one of these men: 'See, this fellow here was a robber or thief. When he heard that the Italians had disembarked, he searched out the camp of the commandant Halil Bey and said: 'You are the father of the warriors; will you pardon my past life and allow me to become one of your soldiers?' Halil Bey allowed him to atone for his past and this former robber then plunged into battle, always in the front row. Many other volunteers also came up to Rémond, showed their wounds, and one of them said: 'I want to give all my blood!' Nuri Bey continued: 'They have only one complaint – and that is, in battle, the bullets make holes in the beautiful woollen burnouses woven by their wives...'

Rémond writes:

We stayed a long time on the top of those ruins; from several separate locations, the strains of merry songs reached us. These were the volunteers occupying the most advanced positions, singing their war song, which was in rhythm with their steps. This was not the shrill melody of

the camps in the evening, the song of the man who falls asleep, flickering, transparent as the flame of a fire, sour as the note of little reed flutes. No, this song was ardent, sonorous, the song of a march towards an enemy whose heart was totally grey...

While Rémond was engrossed in listening to this song, Nuri Bey said to him: 'They go there with such passion that death is hardly a problem for them. Hit in the front, they are held immediately in the arms of the angel who will carry them to Paradise. And, certainly, they are not deceived; the sudden fulfillment of such a great desire must feel to them like the caress of Azrael's wings.'

According to Rémond:

We withdrew ourselves from there with regret. As we passed, the volunteers stood to attention and shouted: *Allah yunsures-Sultan!*²⁸

Rémond continues his journey via Zliten towards Misurata. Again he finds the local natives as well as the warriors friendly and helpful. As he prepares to leave Misurata for Sirte, the head of the municipality, Mahmoud Bey, personally brings him a large jug of milk and also a huge cheese given to him by the shepherds who graze their flocks on the prairies of Taourgha. Offering them to Rémond, Mahmoud Bey says:

This is a modest present, but it is a *mabrouk* [blessing], an omen for a good journey. May your road be white and smooth like this jug of milk!

At this stage, Rémond puts down his thoughts thus: 'For myself, I shall try to endeavour to reach Sirte and then proceed to Benghazi. My caravan is ready, thanks to the active assistance of the head of the municipality. I shall leave tomorrow, Insha Allah! This will be a tough journey, with no towns, no water, with nothing. If I can accomplish the whole journey from Dehibat to Solloum without too many hindrances, it will really be a big success, travelling across two vast territories, Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, in the thick of war, by paths and across regions deemed just about inaccessible.'

All the notables of Misurata accompany Rémond till the edge of the town, where much time is taken up in embraces, salutes, wishes and expressions of regret. He and his party make various stops as they cross into the desert, at small villages with names like Kasr Ahmed, Melfa, Bourtema, etc. 'Not a plant, not a bird, only the unending lines of telegraph poles are the companions in the desert.' On the date noted by Rémond as 14 March, they continue their travels by departing at 3.30 a.m., accompanied also by two gendarmes from Sirte. One is named Meftah, or the Key, which Rémond comments is a good name for a gendarme; he smokes and takes alcohol; the other, a Senussi, is named Ghannaoui [the 'Singer']. Before daybreak, Rémond hears Ghannaoui offering his prayers early to obey the injunction given in Surah At-Tur:²⁹

'And in the night-time also hymn His praise, and at the setting of the stars.'

It gets very hot during the day; the two gendarmes wrap their heads in their burnouses. Rémond occasionally gallops towards the sea and lets the water cool the hooves of his horse. During one of the breaks, he himself has a shower with sea water. After the whole day, Meftah finds a garden where all of them can rest which, according to Rémond, turns out to be little more than some burnt grass, a well of brackish water, two bushes, with an Arab family already occupying the area along with their donkey foal and a hen, which provides him with two eggs. The journey continues day after day in the direction of Sirte, with only Ghannaoui methodically offering his prayers five times a day. The party finally arrives in Sirte on 18 March. On the same day, Emir Ali [the son of Emir Abdel Kader³⁰] also arrives in Sirte with a large party of warriors, including his own son. The district governor³¹ Mohammed Bash Agha, who hails from a distinguished local family, hospitably welcomes all the arrivals. Amir Ali invites Rémond to dine at his table and speaks genially with him. His son is more reticent, but mentions that his father is tireless and may well go to Tripoli to join in the battle, saying: 'Il ne veut pas que le fils d'Abd el Kader aitété absent d'un seul champ de bataille.' [He does not wish for the son of Abd el Kader to be absent from a single battlefield].

Rémond plans to leave on 20 March with the caravans that brought Emir Ali and his party to Sirte from Benghazi. One of the caravan managers,

Sheikh El Mahdi, who was to accompany them to Benghazi, assured Rémond that no camel driver would undertake charge of his luggage, because he [Rémond] was not a Muslim, and moreover, he would be looted on the journey. The camel drivers, for their part, made unbelievable demands and, moreover, pretended to lead the caravan as they pleased, to stop or to rest where and when they liked, and thus to reach the next stop of Adjdabia at a time of their choosing. Rémond writes:

I must have spoken very loudly, saying that I did not accept pretensions of any kind, or especially any distrust of myself, and that I would not allow any lack of respect or obedience. Emir Ali and his son worked very keenly in my favour, as did the *kaymakam* Mohammed Bash Agha.

However, the pecuniary matters are finally resolved but, before Rémond and his party can set off towards Benghazi on 20 March, they have first to see off the Emir and his son who are heading towards Misurata and are seen off by a huge crowd carrying tambourines and drums and banners, including some Jews who sprinkle rose-water on all guests.

Rémond and his group continue towards the east and, for safety, follow a caravan of 40 camels and 30 men. However, after nightfall, they lose track of the caravan and waste much time wandering in the wilderness from one little settlement to another, till they find someone who mentions that he has seen the tent of a caravan near the seashore. He guides them to the spot, where they find the caravan. There is, however, a dispute because the caravan had decided on the way to choose a different route from the one it had given to Rémond's group. Rémond pens a small note: 'Faire aller d'accord tout ce monde est une entreprise diabolique, impossible.' [To attempt to make everyone agree is a diabolical enterprise, impossible].

On 23 March, at midday, Rémond's group stops at midday at the settlement known as Henioua. He describes subsequent events as follows:

Thirty or forty men, all fully armed, press under the little tent where we are, questioning our qualifications, our role, and the purpose of our journey. Through how many labels and incarnations have I already passed: journalist, bomb-

maker, in charge of the Turkish army's supplies, consul, the Sultan's representative with a secret mission, Director,³² Bey, Pasha, and I do not know what else. Finally, it turns out that I and my interpreter are considered to be prominent characters, fighting for Islam.

A great feast ensues: a sheep is slaughtered; a prodigious dish of rice is prepared with small lakes of sauce from camel butter dug in the middle, and each one makes rice balls or dumplings there. Rémond notes that the Arabs devour their food with incredible rapidity, and everything is swallowed up in five minutes. Before Rémond and his company leave, they are asked to grant a generous favour, to which Rémond agrees after much argument.³³

For almost a week, the party continues travelling eastward, not too far from the coastline, passing through various small settlements, till they cross into the Cyrenaica region of Libya and arrive at Adj-dabia on the late evening of 31 March. They are received by the *kaymakam* Huseyin Bey, an active and intelligent Director under whom the town has witnessed much development during his six years of service. Otherwise, Rémond notes:

There is not in the world a plain more bare, where the sun blazes down with greater rage, or where the wind blows from a more furious angle, an utterly flat and utterly desolate place.

Huseyin Bey takes Rémond to meet the notables of the place. In their black Egyptian robes, their beautiful transparent *haïks*,³⁴ their silk gowns with small stripes obtained from Cairo, they have this ease, this politeness, with graceful manners and a distinguished aristocratic air which, Rémond says, can often be found among the rich and well-to-do inhabitants of small towns and the country in France. 'Tomorrow' says Huseyin Bey, 'I shall show you our volunteers. Such horsemen and such soldiers!' That show turns out to be a 3 hour long rich spectacle in an open ground, with war drums, and the 'mujahidin' including regular Turkish soldiers ranged in rows, with clenched hands enclosing guns, swords and revolvers, while in the centre, veiled women in long blue robes, strike the percussion drums and sing traditional martial ballads. Before they return to the town, the

mufti addresses them in a stirring speech about the importance to them and the world of Islam of their warring mission.³⁵

Leaving Adjdabia on the evening of 1 April, Rémond was seen off for the distance of a kilometre by Huseyin Bey and Sidi Abdullah, the sheikh of the local Sufi order. Four days later, they arrive at the plain leading to Benghazi. He observes that 'the earth of the plain is red, thick, and would certainly be of magnificent fertility, provided that an intelligent government wished to develop it, by conducting some irrigation works; the water abounds there, others assure me, at not much depth below the surface.' During this part of the journey, however, Rémond's interpreter suffers a problem. Rémond writes as follows:

The next day [April 6] my interpreter is a little better. He tells me that he now remembers having fainted on his horse, but has no memory of his fall. No doubt, he must have been affected by sunstroke.

After a journey of 7 hours on that day, the party reaches the tents of the Commander Aziz Bey.³⁶ On the morning of 7 April, Rémond sees an Italian airplane flying over the tents dropping bombs. The day happens to coincide with the Christian festival of Easter, and Rémond, with grim humour, refers to the bombs as 'our Easter eggs'! Some deaths and injuries resulted from the Italian bombing. However, it was not just bombs that the Italian planes threw. Their fight extended to proclamations, circulars, letters and small books thrown by them into the enemy camp. Their extraordinary literature had borrowings from the Koran, from oriental poets, full of metaphors and subtlety, mystical, philosophical, aggressive, in turns ingratiating and menacing, full of compliments towards the Arabs and threats and accusations against the Turks; they also contained marvellous and astonishing promises of how Italy would make the place great again.

Rémond stays in the Benghazi area, entering into discussions with local warriors, and narrates recent events in the Libyan war from a daily diary by Aziz Bey. He praises the efforts of the Red Crescent Society, whose doctors come mainly from Egypt, and who selflessly help the living and the wounded.

After over a week in the Benghazi area, Rémond and party decide to travel further east starting on 16 April, with an escort of 4 gendarmes and 2 soldiers. Successively, they pass through Silina, Merdj and Bougragha, which are flanked by mountains that are of medium height [300 metres], but green and covered with pine trees. The gardens in the area have grapes, olives, almonds, figs and vegetables of all kinds. This region also contains impressive monuments that go back to ancient times, especially at Shahat, which is the site of the Greek and Roman city of Cyrène [founded around 631 B.C] that gives its name to Cyrenaica. On 21 April, the party camps near the Zaviya El Beida,³⁷ founded by the first Senussi chief Sidi Mohammed ben Ali in the 19th century. It rains during the next two days but, towards the end of 24 April after a travel of 7 hours during the day, Rémond and his party arrive near the Turco-Arab military camp of Ayn al Mansur opposite Derna, the headquarters of the Commander in chief, Enver Bey.³⁸

Rémond writes that the camp comprises two separate groups of tents, about 40 minutes distant from each other, separated by the deep gorge of the Wadi Derna. The more important group of camps is to the west, in an arid area of hills and gullies, containing the white tent of Enver Bey, the commander in chief of the Turco-Arab resistance against the Italians. From the very beginning, he is struck by the organization and activity at this camp, a dynamism very different from 'the confused, disorganized, motley swarms of people we are accustomed to see in Arab countries.' He takes part, on 27 April 1912, in the ceremonies to celebrate the anniversary of the accession of the Sultan³⁹ to the throne. Rémond provides a colourful description of the magnificent ceremonies, in which Enver Bey, along with Mustafa Kemal Bey,⁴⁰ the Commandant at Derna, receives numerous delegations including military officers, Senussi chieftains and Red Crescent teams, and accepts all formal salutes in the name of the Sultan. There is a march-past by the troops at the camp, as well as by religious leaders of the local community. Lastly, the children from the schools organized in the Ayn al Mansur camp by Enver Bey walk by and salute him.

Rémond is full of praise for the several schools for youngsters organized at the Ayn al Mansur complex under the orders of Enver Bey. Two hundred young student volunteers were being instructed in the west camp, and sixty in the eastern camp. In the morning, all were taught to read and write; in

the afternoon, they received military training with wooden guns. Occasionally, under supervision, they were allowed to use the real guns belonging to their fathers. These youngsters served on the battlefields as messengers for the officers, also to convey orders or gather intelligence. It was a wonderful sight to see them running between the lines. Rémond says:

Thus, in this strange war, little children [some barely 5 or 6 years old], women, and old folk – there was not one member of the Arab family absent from the field of battle.

In shirts and trousers, with white turbans, commanded by sergeants and corporals of their own age, these youngsters conducted themselves in excellent military fashion, reciting their salutes in Turkish.

In a section titled ‘Conversation with Enver Bey’, Rémond writes:

In the afternoon, Enver Bey invited me to attend the races, which take place between various tribes, at the outposts of the camp. While I talked to him and his officers, Mustafa Kemal, commander of Derna, along with Nuri Bey and the staff captain Reshid Bey,⁴¹ a large crowd of Arabs gathered around us. Apparently, all persons wanted to see whether anyone from their tribe would win. ‘It is rather curious’, said I to Enver Bey, ‘that the mission of a war correspondent is fulfilled by attending military though peaceful festivals, celebrating the Sultan's accession anniversary, photographing horse races, and making archaeological excursions to Leptis Magna, roaming in the desert of Sirte and near the Green Mountain.’

Enver Bey replied to him thus: ‘The most paradoxical result of this war has been the pacification of this country. See, this is the first time that so many tribes have come together side by side, without rushing to arms to massacre each other. The worst memories of past blood are forgotten today. This is a great wonder! You know what those hatreds were! In the old days, we do not know when, [say] a rider of this tribe had killed a horseman of that tribe; they avenged him. This vengeance called forth

another, and so on, it seemed, until ages had passed. I do not speak of brigandage, which possessed honor; an Arab might say: "I am a plunderer!" meaning that he was a good man, respectable, and counted for something in his clan!' Just when this conversation was taking place, Enver Bey pointed out to a rider who had won the last race, and said: 'This is Boudjerd of the Barasa clan, he formerly used to be the head of a group of brigands, and today he is one of our gentlest and best soldiers.'

Rémond reinforces the above by referring to the existing law and order in Libya. He writes that he himself had journeyed from the Tunisian border through the country accompanied by a couple of gendarmes and camel drivers without any dangerous incident. He had also noticed everywhere the presence of civil authorities, the gendarmerie, municipal workers, postal and telegraph services all functioning normally. Enver Bey continues:

The war has reconciled the tribes but, at the same time, it must also open up an era of efforts by the Turkish government to civilize this country; such efforts have been made easier by the cessation of internal quarrels and the submission of the local population to the authority of the Sultan. In place of the cities we have lost, and until, hopefully, they are reconquered, you will see everything organized in the camps to make real cities: streets are being laid out, roads have begun; the markets are regulated, bazaar stalls have been raised by the merchants, who, under my orders, are building a house each for themselves. Where tents stand today, there will be, in a few months' time, stone dwellings everywhere.

While Enver Bey mentions other items of progress planned and executed by the Ottomans in Libya, like schools, hospitals, telephone connections, etc., Rémond felicitates him, but also mentions that in France there are people who consider that a Turkish victory over the Italians will result in making the Turks become strong enemies of the French empire in Africa. Enver Bey answers:

I am a soldier, and have never been or wish to be anything other than a soldier. Questions of general politics are not

my affair; my responsibilities here are totally different. However, it appears to me that you, in these circumstances, might be able to give some personal testimony. As a single Christian, alone in the middle of a vast Muslim country, have you heard any talk of any war or conflict except against the Italians? Let me add this: we defend our country against a foreign invader; we have no hatred against anyone else, and we only ask Europe for its neutrality.

Rémond spends over two weeks in the Ayn al Mansur camp. During this period, the Red Crescent staff treated him for four days for a strong bout of fever caused by the excess of vermin [lice, fleas, etc.]. He gives thanks to the excellent care provided by the doctors at the Red Crescent dispensary, Nasser Ferid Bey and Kemal Bey, as a result of which he totally regained strength.

On 8 May, Rémond records the disappearance of Lieutenant John Smallwood, a young Englishman who had converted to Islam and taken the name Osman Efendi. He was fighting against the Italians, and Rémond says that he and a Libyan companion were definitely killed by the Italians when on a mission of reconnaissance. The Arabs sent to look for him reported that they had found pools of blood 50 metres from the Italian fortifications.⁴² Osman Efendi was utterly brave and took great risks. Rémond describes him as blond-haired, very thin, with tattoos on his body. That evening, the poet of the Barasa clan recited a song of praise for Osman Efendi and his Libyan companion in front of the whole army there.

Rémond leaves Derna on 11 May, arriving in Tobruk on the 15th. From then on, it is a daily trek of about 7 hours eastwards, until his arrival at the frontier post of Solloum, and his final goodbyes on 22 May.

The little gunboat raises anchor; the thread is broken. How will I write the last notes of my journey in this country? In the clear night, I watch the coast move away. It seems to me to belong to another world.

The Ottoman resistance in Libya came to an abrupt end in October 1912 because four Balkan states of Serbia, Greece, Bulgaria and Montenegro had combined to attack Ottoman Turkey in what history records as the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913. In order to fight a bigger war on the European front, all Ottoman Turkish officers had to rush back to Istanbul. A treaty with Italy was hastily signed on 18 October 1912 in Ouchy, Switzerland. The local tribes in Libya, however, continued their struggle against the Italians until 1930.

The Turco-Italian war in Libya at the end of the first decade of the 20th century generated much reaction in the Muslim populations of many countries, including the rest of the Arab world and India. It crystallized feelings of Pan Islamism that had been developing since the 19th century in areas where Muslims lived under foreign colonial rule. This is the war about which Allama Iqbal wrote his famous devotional poem⁴³ in which, circumventing the constraints of time and space, he presents the Holy Prophet with a chalice which he says contains something so valuable that even Heaven does not possess it: the blood of the martyrs of Tripoli.

ENDNOTES

My thanks are due to Handan Kılıç and Kevser Tutucu of Middle East Technical University Library for obtaining a scanned copy of Brémond's book from Istanbul.

- 1 South Asia was part of the British Empire, as was a large part of Africa. The French, Germans, Belgians and Dutch controlled the rest of Africa, and what is now called Indonesia was under Dutch rule. The Russians had also occupied by conquest vast territories inhabited by the Muslims in Central Asia.
- 2 'The near eastern question may be defined as the problem of filling up the vacuum created by the gradual disappearance of the Turkish empire from Europe'. Refer to William Miller, *The Ottoman Empire and Its Successors 1801-1927*, (London: Frank Cass, 1966), p.1. It needs to be noted that the first edition of the book was in 1913.
- 3 Plevna is a town in present day Bulgaria; it is called Plevne in Turkish and Pleven in Bulgarian.
- 4 These included Germany and Prussia, Great Britain, France, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire. Delegates from several other European countries attended some of the deliberations as observers.
- 5 For information regarding the important personalities at this Congress, see Syed Tanvir Wasti, 'Three Ottoman Pashas at the Congress of Berlin, 1878', *Middle Eastern Studies*, London, Vol. 52, No. 6, November 2016, pp. 938 – 952.
- 6 The Ottomans had conquered the large area in North Africa in 1551 and named it Trablusgarp Eyaleti [Western Tripoli state] because of the presence of a city called

Trablus Şam in Syria. After administrative reorganization in 1835, Libya was composed of three parts: Trablusgarp [Tripolitania], Fizan [Fezzan] and Bingazi [Cyrenaica]. The name of the capital city, Trablus [Tripoli] was occasionally used for the country itself.

- 7 H.C. Armstrong, *Grey Wolf* [Mustafa Kemal, subtitled An Intimate Study of a Dictator], (London: Arthur Barker, 1935), p. 49.
- 8 Mustafa Kemal [famous later as Kemal Atatürk] (1881 – 1938) was born in Thessaloniki [modern-day Greece] and graduated from the War Academy in Istanbul in 1905. He served with distinction in the Turkish Army, and was appointed Military Attaché in Sofia, Bulgaria in 1913. His historic defence against the Allied forces wishing to conquer the Dardanelles in 1915 during the First World War by land and sea brought him great fame. He resigned his military position in 1919 and left Istanbul to organize the successful National Resistance against the invading forces of the Allies. Under his leadership, the country regained full freedom and became a Republic in 1923, with Mustafa Kemal as its first President.
- 9 Ismail Enver (1881 – 1922) was born in Istanbul. He graduated from the War Academy with the rank of Captain in 1903 and saw military action in several parts of the Balkans. He was one of the first members of the Committee of Union and Progress [CUP] that was a strong political force in Ottoman Turkey in the last decades of the Empire. Apart from his mother tongue, he was fully proficient in both French and German. In 1908, he was sent to Berlin as the Ottoman Military Attaché but, at the start of the Turco-Italian war, he left for Libya where he helped to organize the Turco-Arab resistance along with colleagues such as Mustafa Kemal and Fethi Okyar. When the CUP acquired political power in Turkey before the First World War, Enver [now Pasha] became the Minister of War, and married an Ottoman princess. With Turkey's defeat in the war in 1918, Enver Pasha, along with other leading CUP figures like Talat and Cemal Pashas left Turkey. Enver Pasha went to Germany and later to Russia where he tried to organize military resistance to the Soviet army in Central Asia. He was killed in a battle in Tajikistan in 1922. His remains were brought back to Turkey in 1996.
- 10 Ali Fethi [Okyar] (1880 – 1943) was born in the Balkans and graduated in 1904 from the War Academy in Istanbul. He joined the Committee of Union and Progress [CUP] and, in 1908, was sent to Paris as the Turkish Military Attaché. In 1911 he was elected to the Ottoman Parliament and in 1913 was posted to Sofia as the Ottoman Ambassador to Bulgaria. After the Ottoman defeat in World War I, he was exiled by the British along with many high-ranking politicians to Malta in 1919. After his release in 1921, he joined the Turkish resistance under Mustafa Kemal Pasha. With the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, he served as Interior Minister and Prime Minister for some time. He was later appointed Turkish Ambassador to Great Britain and, during the Second World War, returned to Turkey to work for 2 years as Minister of Justice.
- 11 The texts of all these letters, in the original French and in Turkish translation, may be found in M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *Kendi Mektuplarında Enver Paşa* [Enver Pasha in his own letters], (Istanbul: Der Yayınları, 1989), 286 pp.

-
- 12 As the sketches and maps in the book are the work of Tristan Pol, also a correspondent for *L' Illustration*, it appears that Tristan Pol was with Georges Rémond for a good portion of the journey across Libya. Thus, on p. 95 of the book, Rémond writes, at the time of leaving Misurata: 'Tristan me quitteici, retournant à Homs.' [Tristan leaves me here, as he returns to Khoms].
- 13 Also written as Misrata or Mesrata.
- 14 Georges Rémond (1877 – 1965), *Aux Camps Turco-Arabes* [At the Turco-Arab Camps], (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1913), 212 pp., with the subtitle *Notes de Route et de Guerre en Tripolitaine et en Cyrénaïque* [Journey and War Notes in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica]. This book will henceforth be referred to as *Aux Camps*.
- 15 Anon., 'A Recent Journey in Tripoli and Cyrenaica', *The Geographical Journal* (London: The Royal Geographical Society), Vol. 40, No. 5, November 1912, pp. 532 – 537. This short summary gives next to no information on the Turco-Italian war or of contacts with Ottoman Turkish military officers.
- 16 Georges Rémond, *Aux Camps Turco-Arabes* [At the Turco-Arab Camps], (Paris: Editions Turquoise, Collection Altérités, 2014), 288 pp., with a preface by Odile Moreau.
- 17 The review is available [in French] at the following address: www.hesperis-tamuda.com/2018fascicule1/21.pdf
- 18 Selma Bourkia, a doctoral candidate at the Mohammed V University in Rabat, Morocco.
- 19 In the original French:
J'avaisapprisqu'unpeuplen'est point vaincu, quellesquesoient les forces qui le menacent, tantqu'il ne s'yrésigne pas lui-même; qu'iltrouvaitdanssa religion son plus efficacemoyen de résistance, et que la force et la durée de celle-ci devaientêtremesurées à la profondeur de safoi.
- 20 Rémond uses the French spelling for all proper and common names in his text, and the spelling has therefore been simplified in the present article. He renders the commandant's name as Youssouf Djemal.
- 21 This name [given in Rémond's French spelling] is rendered in Turkish as Sakap, in Urdu as Saqib and in Arabic as Thaqib.
- 22 The Fethi Bey of Endnote No. 10.
- 23 Rémond uses the Turkish word *konak* for mansion.
- 24 *Aux Camps*, pp. 54 – 55.
- 25 Rémond gives the Quranic verse in French, but it tallies with the end of Verse 249 of Surah Al-Baqarah. The translation in English given here is from Pickthall.
- 26 Rémond transcribes the officer's name as Khalil; however, the Turks pronounce the consonant "kh" as 'h'.
- 27 Fedâ'î, in Turkish and also Persian and Urdu, means one who in devotion to a noble cause is willing to sacrifice his life for it.
- 28 'May Allah grant victory to the Sultan!'
- 29 As before, Rémond gives the text of the Quranic verse in French, but it tallies with Verse 49 of Surah At-Tur. The translation in English given here is from Pickthall.
- 30 Emir Abdel Kader (1808 – 1883), was a famous Algerian religious and military leader. He led a struggle in the mid-19th century against the French colonial occupation of Algeria.

-
- 31 Rémond uses the Turkish title '*kaymakam*' [spelled *kaïmakam* in French].
- 32 The word used is Moudhir [Director], which is Mudir in Arabic and Müdür in Turkish.
- 33 Apparently Rémond's horse was both beautiful and of good pedigree, and the villagers wanted Rémond to lend it for breeding with a mare to improve the local equine stock.
- 34 A *haik* [sometimes written as 'hayek'] is a small [usually transparent] veil of silk or wool often worn by both men and women, covering the lower half of the face.
- 35 Rémond points out that, unlike the rest of Cyrenaica, the inhabitants of Adjdabia, recognize Sheikh Zafir as their spiritual leader. Sheikh Muhammed Zafir b. Muhammed Hasan was born in Misurata in 1829. He completed his religious education and became a leading figure in the Shadhili Sufi order. He came over to Istanbul after the age of 40. Subsequently he was one of the advisors of the Ottoman sultan Abdül hamid [reigned between 1876 and 1909]. Sheikh Zafir died in Istanbul in 1903 and is buried there in a mausoleum built on the orders of the Sultan.
- 36 Aziz Bey [better known as Aziz Ali Al-Misri] (1879 – 1965) had the rank of Major in the Ottoman Army when he went to Libya. During the Italian invasion and occupation (1911-1912) of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, he took a leading part in organizing the resistance in Benghazi with Suleiman al-Askari as his deputy. He encouraged the synthesis of regular combat tactics with tribal guerrilla methods. Later on, he fell out with Enver Pasha and had to leave the Committee of Union and Progress. Although initially arrested, he was allowed to leave for Egypt. He then served as a general in the armies of Sharif Huseyin of Mecca in the British sponsored Arab revolt against the Turks, before finally settling in Egypt.
- 37 The meaning of the Arabic name is 'the white dervish lodge'.
- 38 During his time in Libya, Enver had the title of Bey. He was awarded the title of Pasha in 1914, and subsequently became famous as Enver Pasha.
- 39 The Ottoman Sultan at the time was Sultan Mehmed Reshad [Mehmed V].
- 40 Rémond inadvertently refers to Mustafa Kemal Bey as Mustafa Kamel Bey.
- 41 Staff Captain Reshid Bey is mentioned among the Ottoman officers volunteering for the Libyan war in Orhan Koloğlu, *Trablusgarp Savaşı (1911-12) ve Türk Subayları* [The Western Tripoli War (1911-12) and Turkish Army Officers], (Ankara: Basın Yayın Genel Müdürlüğü, 1979), 107 pp.
- 42 For further information on John Smallwood [full name John Warren Stuart Smallwood], a journalist by profession, see Syed TanvirWasti, 'Amir Shakib Arslan and the CUP Triumvirate', *Middle Eastern Studies*, London, Vol. 44, No. 6, November 2008, Endnote No. 35. A more detailed account is provided in Charles Stephenson, *A Box of Sand: The Italo-Ottoman War 1911 – 1912*, (Ticehurst: Tattered Flag Press, 2014), Appendix B, titled: The Curious Case of Osman Mahdi, pp. 238 – 242.
- 43 The English translation of this Urdu poem titled 'Huzoor-e Risalat Maabmein' is found in V. G. Kiernan, *Poems from Iqbal*, (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 40, rendered as Before the Prophet's Throne.

Abstract

Many books have published in several languages over the last hundred years dealing with the Turco-Italian war. Contemporary accounts are fewer, especially those dealing with the Turkish and Arab defender of Libya. There are also brief memoirs written by other Ottoman officer who took part in the defence of Libya. An important contemporary source is the collection of periodical reports sent by Georges Remond, a war correspondent for the French Magazine *L' Illustration*. This article aim at presenting Remond's experiences in Libya concerning on his meetings with well-known Turkish military officers of the time who had arrived from all over the Ottoman Empire to defend the last Ottoman territory in Africa along with the local Senussi chieftains and volunteers.

Keywords: Correspondence of Georges Remond, French magazine *L' Illustration*, Turco-Italian war.