Libya

Nothing would please me more, but who else would pump the oil that we need? God damn America... (Muammar Gaddafi 1973)



Around 900 BC the Phoenicians came from Lebanon and descended on Libya where they founded three commercial cities. Out of an arid North African coastline the cities of Sabratha, Leptis and Oea (Tripoli) arose, later to become thriving and important towns. When in 146 BC the Romans conquered Carthage, Phoenician influence came to an end in Libya too.

The Romans were to rule Libya for many centuries and left behind a priceless heritage of monuments and archaeological treasures which today make this country one of the finest and richest in this respect. After the Roman occupation came the Vandals.

1983 -1990 Libya Tour Slideshow



History



The Vandals were an East Germanic tribe who in 439 established a kingdom which included the Roman Africa province, besides the islands of Sicily, Corsica, Sardinia, Malta and the Balearics.

Their kingdom collapsed in the Vandalic War of 533–4, in which the Byzantine Army defeated the Vandals.

The Byzantine Empire were to be defeated in 642 by the Arabs who mainly came with the intention of spreading the Islamic religion.

The Arabs where shortly defeated by a Berber princess 'Cahinia Dahia' who led her Berber armies against the Arabs and succeeded for five years when she was finally killed and her army destroyed passing Libya back to the Arabs once again.

The Arabs were kicked out of Tripoli by the Spaniards, and the Spaniards got there asses kicked by the Knights , the Knights were then beaten in 1551 by the Turks.

The Turks ruled until 1911 when the Ottoman Empire, weakened by continues wars on the Baltic states, Russia and Genoa they decided to give in to Italy and gave Libya up. Italy remained until 1970 but where kicked around the place continuously by the Libyans, the English and the Americans.

After the second World War, Libya was divided by England, France and Italy and Prince Idris was put in charge as a puppet ruler tightly held on a string while the three countries sucked the life out of the Libyans.

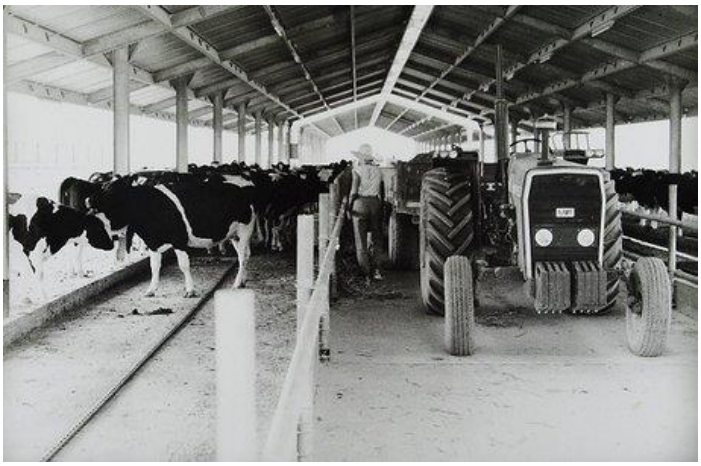
On the first of September 1969 colonel Mu'Ammar el Qathafi and the Free Unitary Officers rose to topple the regime of King Idris and the British, French and Italians left the country. Qathafi united the Berber tribes and gave them land and jobs, build universities and hospitals all over the country and intended to make Libya less dependent on oil.

One way to break the dependency was to start agriculture projects and turn desserts into fertile oases with a self-sufficient and self-supporting nation as its goal.

That's when the HVA (Handels Vereniging Amsterdam) came into the picture and the reason why I spend so many years in that beautiful country as a child.



HVA Libya



Trade Association Amsterdam (HVA: Handels Vereeniging Amsterdam) was founded in 1873. Initially it imported goods for agricultural enterprises and financed the shipping of products from these companies.

From 1889 onwards, they focused on the processing of uncultivated land and the cultivation of sugar cane, coffee, cassava and sisal.

It was once one of the largest colonial companies in the world with 36 companies in 1928 in the Dutch East Indies and employed 170,000 workers.

The company survived the economic crisis of the thirties, but the Japanese occupation of the Dutch East Indies marked the end for the company in Indonesia. In 1951 the company started in Ethiopia under the name HVA Ethiopia and established large sugar plantations.

They created a world of their own with irrigation works, road, factories, houses, schools and a hospital. The managers were convinced that they owed their success to their

experiences in Indonesia. Its success turned sour when Ethiopia nationalised its company in 1975.

Since then HVA International has diversified its activities into other crops and sub-sectors such as dairy and poultry production, providing its services to a wide range of projects for private clients, government and parastatal organisations or funded by international development agencies.

HVA International's position in the dairy and poultry industry has been firmly established by the development, construction and management of two large-scale fully integrated poultry and dairy projects at Tawergha and Ghot Sultan in Libya between 1982 and 1991.



Each of the two fully integrated, largely self supporting projects, included the design, engineering, training of staff and running the full dairy production chain from cultivating fast amounts of dessert land into vertile grounds, building the feedmill and dairy processing factory, dairy farming and setting up and managing milk collection schemes for a large amount (thousands) of dairy cows. The poultry grandparent farms with hatchery included, parent farms, a broiler hatchery, ten broiler farms and a processing plant with a capacity of 3,000 broilers per hour.

Along with the establishment of the administrative organisation, training of staff, development of adequate manuals and forms etc., comprehensive computerised MIS were introduced. The systems cover financial administration and budget control, stores inventory management and herd and poultry production management.
Under difficult climatic conditions (summer temperatures reaching to over 45°C) these projects achieved excellent results, producing a range of quality poultry and dairy products, in quantities well above the pre-guaranteed targets.

Life in Tawergha

Living in the compound of the HVA poultry and dairy project in Tawergha was very different from our life in Holland in many ways. There were on average 30 employees who brought their families with them and some 80 to 120 'bachelors'. All together a small village, a world of our own, with all facilities like a social building for meetings and parties, a restaurant, swimming pool and tennis courts, a small camp shop and a school.

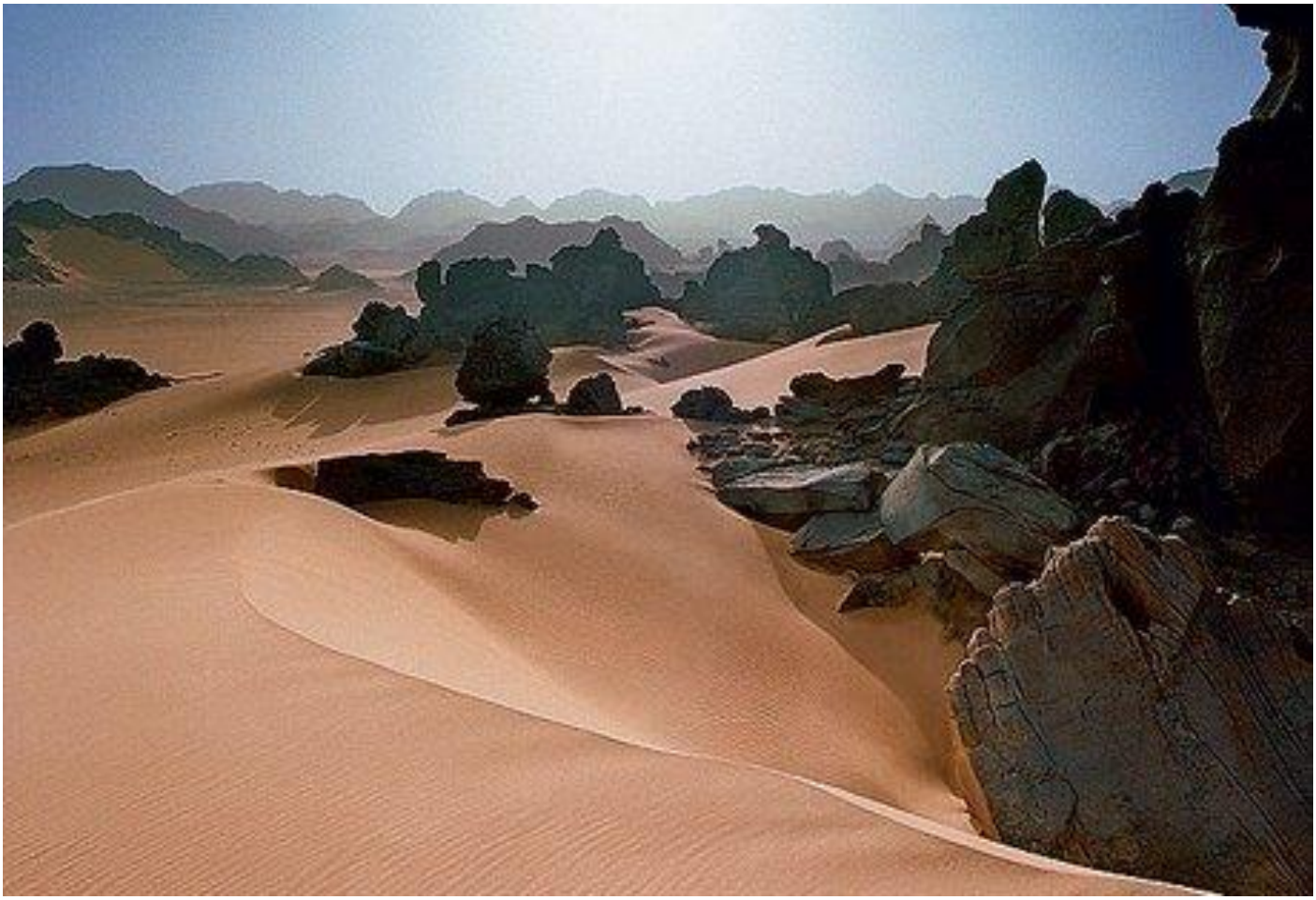


The compound was surrounded by a high fence and in later years there would be a guard at the gate. But we used to joke that we just had to keep the wild dogs out, we were never in need of much protection because the people of Taworgha were very friendly and glad to have us there.



We were invited in their homes and lives on many occasions, we shared meals, were taken to religious events, parties, horse races and attended their weddings. We even let our children stay at their homes and families for sleepovers, just by themselves. The worst criminal event that ever happened to us was the theft of a bike by one of the young Libyan boys, which was handed back to us the next day.

The climate was of course one of the best Libyan assets and so was living in the dessert, which provided all sorts of interesting new stuff and animals to be found. Weekend was just one day, on Fridays, which were mostly spent at the seaside. To get to the most beautiful shore, with white sandy beaches and fabulous rocks, a great salt lake some seventy kilometers wide had to be crossed by car. This could only be done in the hot season because the plains had to dry out. It was always exciting in late spring to see who would be first to get to the other side of the dark mud with the thin layer of crusty salt. Many drivers could not resist trying to drive next to the tracks and without exception they got stuck there. Sometimes they had to leave the vehicle behind or have it dugout with heavy machinery later in the year.



At the combined Dutch-English elementary school in the campsite several year-groups with just a hand full of kids shared one classroom, and all the children played with each other. The freedom of the dessert was fabulous: a huge sandpit to play and to explore with All Terrain Bikes with a couple of wild dogs, snakes or scorpions for extra fun and excitement. A great deal of the after school hours were spent at the swimming pool or roaming around in the compound on the back of a donkey.

Once a week we would go shopping for everything we needed in Misrata the city next door almost 50 kilometers to the north of Tawergha. In the early years we did sometimes encounter unpleasant treatment on the market place there. This was caused by the animosities between Misrata and Tawergha as we discovered later on.

Deep rooted discrimination of the black inhabitants of the Tawergha oasis was the cause of many rough remarks made by the Misrata tradesmen. They were convinced that Gaddafi had made a huge mistake by developing such a wonderful project in that godforsaken place with black 'dogs'. They told us specifically that these slaves were bad people, and bad Muslims as well, who did not deserve the wealth of good jobs and the development of their region.

In our eyes the men from Misrata were not much paler than the Tawerghans and we used to smile about it, not knowing how these racist and jealous remarks would work out in such horrible disaster.

(written by Olga Roffel)

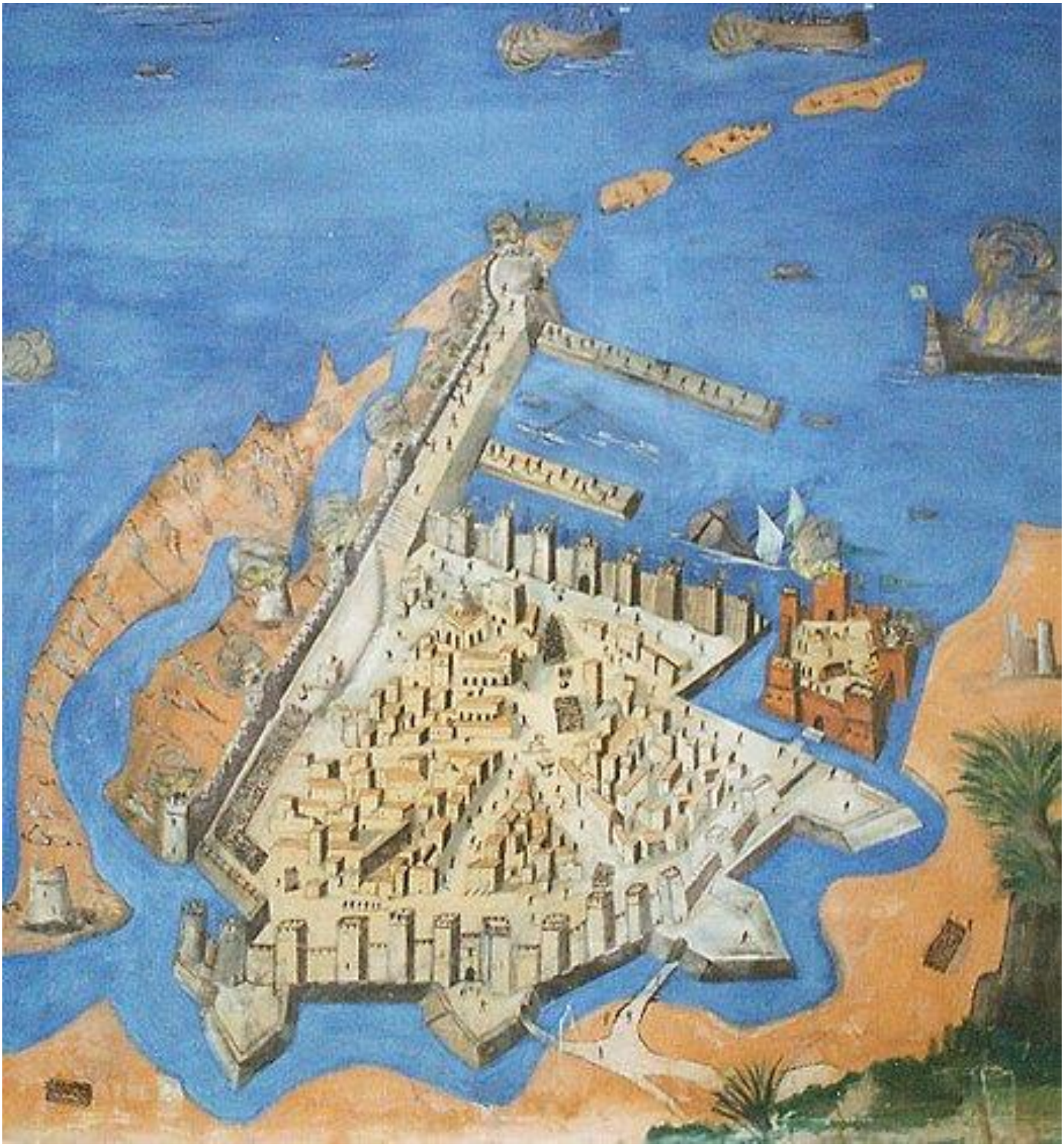
Tripoli

The old city of Tripoli (Oea), a city which knew its fair share of invaders and was handed down from one conqueror to the other, finally passing into the hands of the Turks who ruled it from 1551 onwards until the day of the Italian occupation.



The largest part of the old city build on ancient architecture has been turned into what is commonly known in Arab countries as a suq (market) where trinkets from Asia are sold side by side elaborate Libyan works in leather and copper or hand woven colourful carpets.

There seems to be no end to what one can buy in the Old City; cotton drapes from Egypt in fantastic designs and patterns, imitation jewellery from Tunisia and Cairo; superbly hand manufactured silverware in the classic Arabian style or gold trinkets, legendary Arabian pouf's and sheepskin rugs and fashionable clothes from all the four corners of the globe. Bargaining for goods is expected and not participating in this game will leave a petty impression of one's shrewdness.

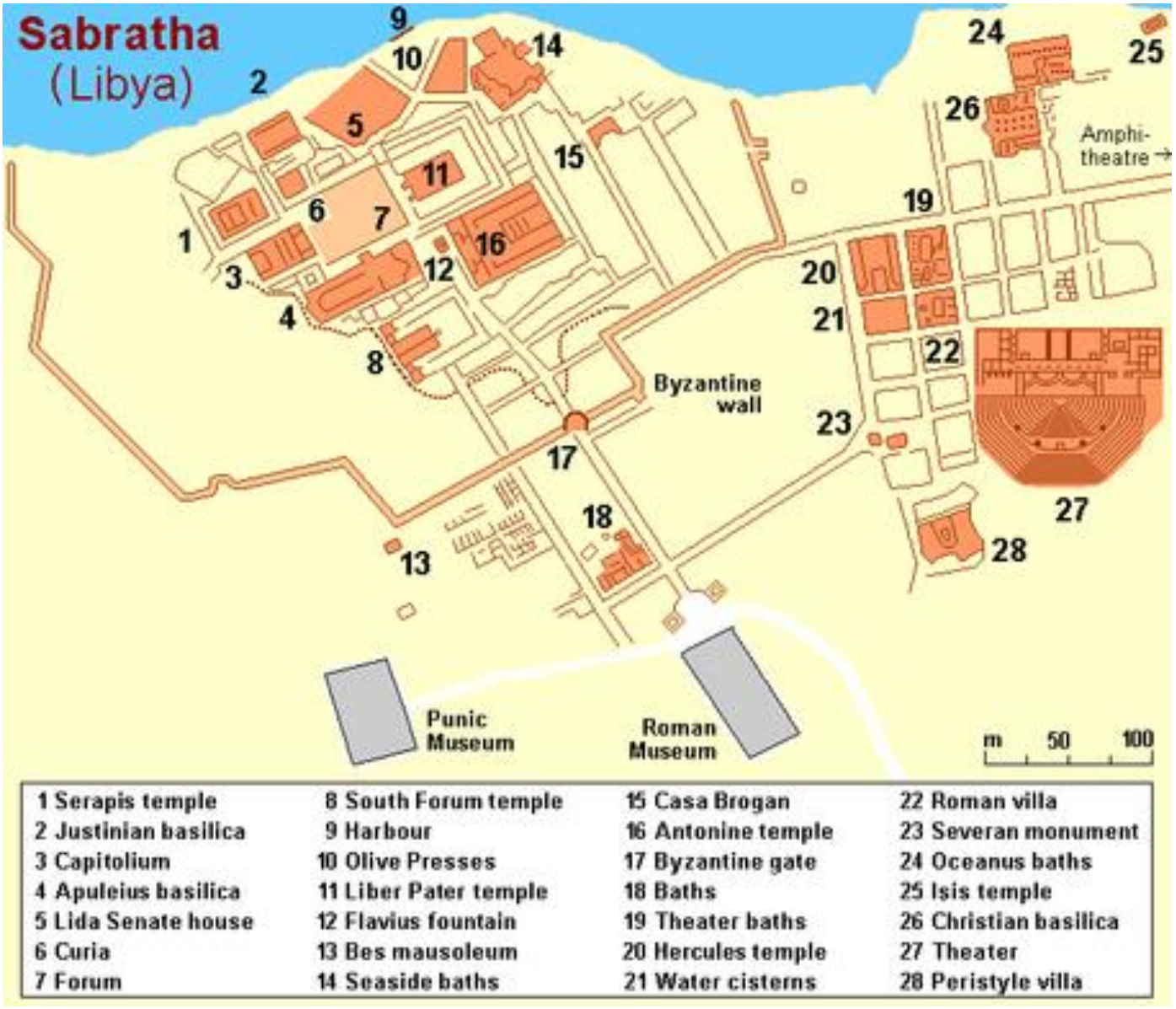


Sabratha

Sabratha had a modest natural harbour, later improved by the Romans, and together with Oea (Tripoli) it served as an outlet for the trans-Saharan caravan route through Ghadames. After a period of semi-independence following the fall of Carthage in 146 bc, it passed under Roman rule and thereafter enjoyed considerable prosperity.

Besides its magnificent late 3rd century theatre that retains its three-storey architectural backdrop, Sabratha has temples dedicated to Liber Pater, Serapis and Isis. There is a Christian basilica of the time of Justinian and also remnants of some of the mosaic floors that enriched elite dwellings of Roman North Africa.

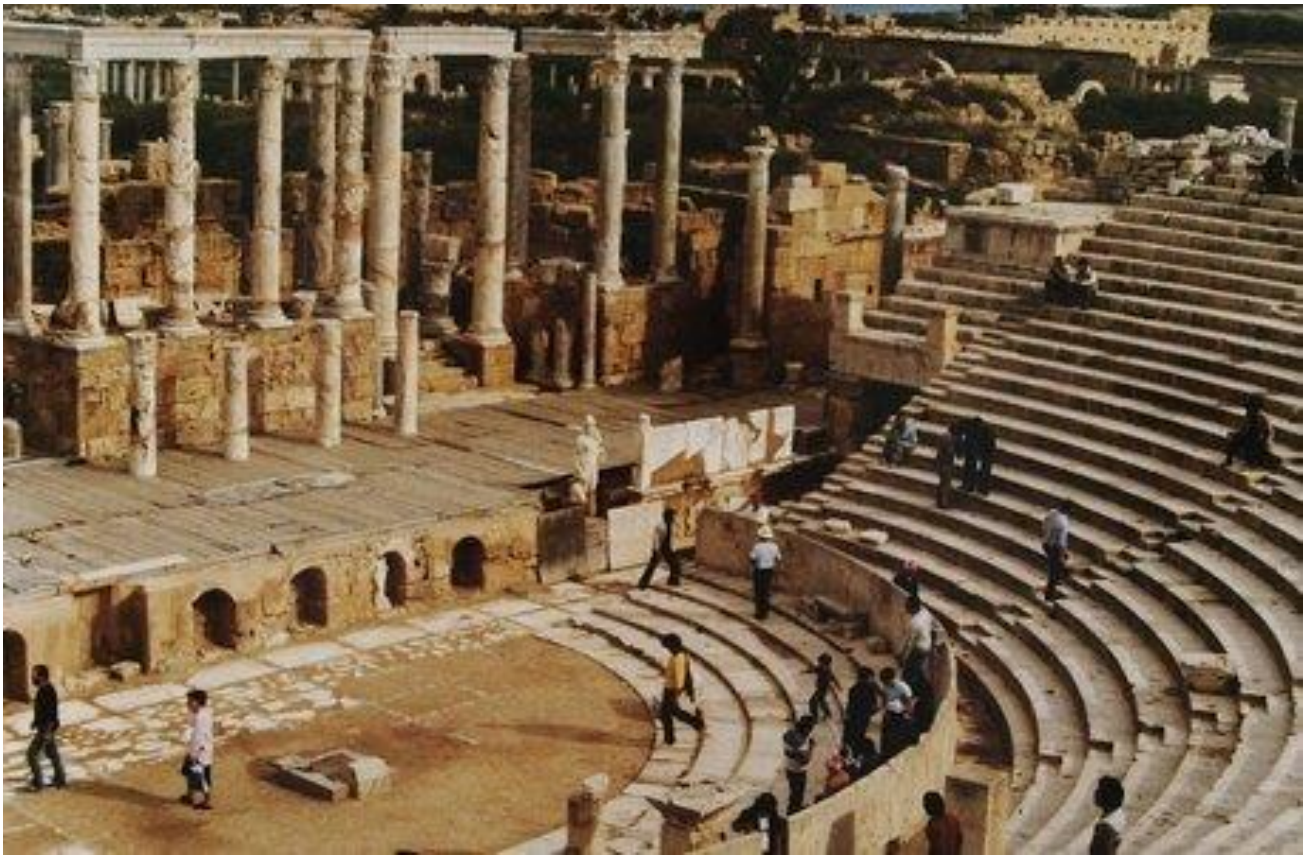




Leptis Magna

Leptis Magna was a prominent city of the Roman Empire. Its ruins are located in Khoms, Libya, 130 km east of Tripoli, on the coast where the Wadi Lebda meets the sea. The site is one of the most spectacular and unspoiled Roman ruins in the Mediterranean.

When we were kids we walked the site a few times and even being kids we knew Leptis Magna was special. The place is beautiful and exploring this place was great fun.





1 Marcus Aurelius Arch	9 Market	17 Church	25 Curia
2 West Gate	10 Chalcidicum	18 Colonnade	26 Old Basilica
3 Antonius Pius Arch	11 Tiberius Arch	19 Nymphaeum	27 Byzantine Gate
4 Schola and Baths	12 Trajan Arch	20 Roma & Augustus temple	28 Severan Basilica
5 Septimius Severus Arch	13 Palaestra	21 Hercules temple	29 Jupiter temple
6 Theater	14 Hadrianus Baths	22 Liber Pater temple	30 Light House
7 Via Trionfale	15 Serapaeum	23 Old Forum	31 Dorian temple
8 Baths	16 Severan Forum	24 Old Forum Church	32 Museum

Qaddafi

The material needs of people that are basic and personal start with food, housing, clothing and transport and must be regarded as private and sacred and their satisfaction should not depend on hire.



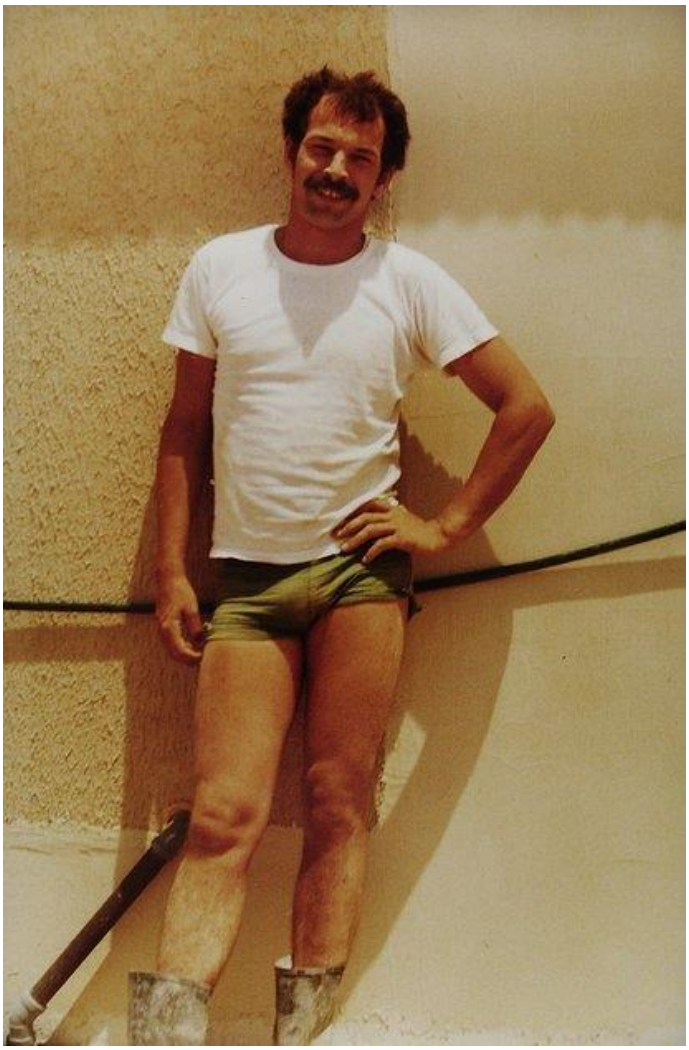
So why did 'we' dislike this guy Gadhafi so much?

He wrote a little green book speaking of our Western Democracy as 'contemporary dictatorship' and pointing out to the Russians their 'Communist' system didn't work and scalded the Americans by telling them their 'Capitalist' way made no sense which was more than enough to put warships in front of his shores.

Telling us he's got a better and more fair 'third solution' and shutting down oil production to maintain natural resources and then use a pro democratic slogan as "Power to the People" is just asking for it.

Who does this little annoying Arab man think he is? Throw a bomb on his head. Why? He's a terrorist. And by the way, we'll support any one out there who's willing to put a bullet in his head, support the dollar and turn the oil pumps on full throttle.

Although in my view he's done a lot of good things for Libya and Africa, had new ideas about democracy and was one of the only countries in active support agains racism and apartheid in South Africa (for example) he was a bit too arrogant, unstable and he acted too much like a dictator.



In 1990 his regime through my father in jail a couple of times after we went sight seeing at a Mig crash site near our home. I took some small items to impress my friends at school. The day I took my flight for my English boarding school, these guys emptied out all the luggage from the plane and then arrested my dad.

The End

The ending of our 1980-1990 Libya tour started with a MIG fighter pilot ejecting and crashing his jet next to the HVA international compound in Tawergha where we lived for the previous seven years. At the time of the crash I had two weeks left on the clock before the holidays being stuck in the Old Malthouse boarding school in Swanage, England.



The picture above is actually an American F15 which crashed in Ghot Sultan when NATO intervened during the 17th of February Revolution in Libya. Ghot Sultan was the second town in Libya where the HVA build their Dairy and Poultry project. What are the odds..?

Libyans in my opinion have a curious way of getting rid of broken cars or equipment and their solution to the lost MIG wasn't any different. A number of weeks after the accident the wreckage was still sitting out there in the middle of a stretch of desert within walking distance and most fascinating parts of the plane where already looted by fellow HVA compound inhabitants.

After nagging my father for weeks he took my little brother and me on a sightseeing tour of the crash site on one of the last days of my vacation and I was excited getting the opportunity to take a souvenir to show my friends back in England.

There wasn't much exciting stuff left and we chucked a couple of pieces into the back of the pickup truck before heading home. The item I packed into my suitcase was a small black cylinder with a bunch of wires sticking out and a couple of days later my parents dropped me of at the airport in Tripoli on my way back to England.

It wasn't uncommon those days having to wait for a delayed flight for hours but this time it took even longer than normal and I was stuck all day with angry Germans from the Krupp factory being fed up with waiting. They didn't shut up about it all day and during the flight and after arriving in Schiphol airport in the Netherlands and it sure

didn't improve their mood finding out that the Libyans had kept all the suitcases in Tripoli.

I was picked up by my grandparents as my flight to Gatwick wasn't scheduled for another couple of days. That evening I called my parents to tell them my suitcase was missing and my mother explained that someone had ratted us out and my father was arrested by Gaddafies secret service being accused of espionage.

During a three month period he was released and arrested a couple of times and questioned by different departments in the agency all over the country. Most of the time my mother wasn't told a single thing and to be safe my little brother was rushed out of Libya (taking our cat on his flight).

This episode went on during my semester at school and exactly at the end of this period the passports were returned to my parents and they were given 24 hours to leave the country which gave them just enough time to pick up their son in England on his last school day.



Nearly 25 years later, Tawergha has become a daily part of my life again after Febr 17th revolutionairy rebels from Misrata ethnically cleansed, tortured and murdered the inhabitants from Tawergha. Curious how this Libyan story went from exciting to pure horror? Check out the Tawergha Foundation Website

Tawergha Genocide

The main town of the Tawergha region, Tawergha itself (aka Tawargha, Tawurgha. Arabic: تاورغاء), was a town of an estimated 31,250 people and lies about 30-40 miles south of Misrata/Misurata, along the western coast of the Gulf of Sirte.

Tawergha was famous for its palm trees which at one point were considered the true wealth in the city. The city also produced significant amount of date fruits, including the Bersiel date, which is used as a component in ropes and other commodities.

In pre-colonial times, the work on the plantation was done by tens of thousands of black-skinned slaves, making Tawergha the only town in coastal Libya with a black majority. In the colonial period, these people were nominally emancipated from slavery, but their economic status remained very low. In the Gaddafi period they were treated a lot better, receiving full education and development.

The town has been emptied of its entire population during the combined NATO forces and Misrata militia attacks : its people having either been killed, inprisoned or fled, amidst reports the remaining population in the area are being picked off as they try to find water and food.



Human Rights Investigations has been following the situation of the Tawergha closely and here we draw the information together and find, based on the reports of witnesses, journalists, human rights workers, and the United Nations the situation of the Tawergha is not just one of ethnic cleansing but, according to the legal definition, genocide.

We can see NATO played an important role in the ethnic cleansing of this town, an ethnic cleansing of which they had been forewarned and in which they decided, nonetheless, to participate.



NATO's war in Libya was proclaimed as a humanitarian intervention—bombing in the name of "saving lives." Attempts at diplomacy were stifled. Peace talks were subverted. Libya was barred from representing itself at the UN, where shadowy NGOs and "human rights" groups held full sway in propagating exaggerations, outright falsehoods, and racial fear mongering that served to sanction atrocities and ethnic cleansing in the name of democracy. The rush to war was far speedier than Bush's invasion of Iraq.



The war on Libya was not about human rights, nor entirely about oil, but about a larger process of militarizing U.S. relations with Africa. The development of the Pentagon's Africa Command, or AFRICOM, was in fierce competition with Pan-Africanist initiatives such as those spearheaded by Muammar Gaddafi.

Far from the success NATO boasts about or the "high watermark" proclaimed by proponents of the "Responsibility to Protect," this war has left the once prosperous, independent and defiant Libya in ruin, dependency and prolonged civil strife. To this day the Tawergha genocide survivors are locked up in prison camps where they are tortured and mistreated according to this Amnesty International Report (2013).



The people in Tawergha have been ill treated for centuries because of their skin colour and only after Gaddafi came to govern, their lives became a little bit less hard. Twenty five years ago the people of Misrata told us repeatedly that they were very proud of the HVA project but that it was a shame it was possitioned in Tawergha because 'those blacks' were no good and didn't deserve the jobs.

The majority of the population in Tawergha were ordinary farmers, small business owners and goat herders or worked at the HVA project and had nothing to do with the pro Ghaddafi militairy.

NATO has assisted the racist Misrata militias and the facts indicate crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing and genocide have taken place. The google map entries below show the total destruction of the HVA compound, the dairy and poultry farm and feedmill caused by NATO bombing and Misrata militia raids. Around 100 000 dairy cows used to be kept in Libya but most animals were killed during the NATO bombardments.

There is no excuse for the ethnic cleansing and genocide on 40.000 civilians and the destruction of a major part of the Libyan dairy and poultry industry and the guilty parties should be brought to justice as soon as possible.











Nagging questions I have about this story about ethnic cleansing and genocide in Tawergha are:



If NATO came in to action in Libya to protect the people from harm, why did they assist in the murder of thousands of innocent people or why didn't they stop it from happening all these years?

Why didn't the main stream media report about the ethnic cleansing and genocide in Tawergha while all the official reports from Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, United Nations, the Dutch government and youtube video's couldn't have been any clearer?

But the most important question of all is how can the Libyans in both cities forgive, forget and live their lives in peace after this?

Truth finding and justice must come first before anything else.

As Libya emerges from the shadows of dictatorship, it must decide whether to embrace retribution or reconciliation.



