

Change and Continuity in Libyan Currency

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Introduction

Money is an everyday object, something we take for granted, and yet every image on money is innately political. One of the earliest policies put in place by the new Libyan government was to recall banknotes of the Gaddafi era and to replace outdated imagery where necessary. While the focus here is on money, it must be remembered that imagery of Gaddafi was systematically destroyed throughout the Libyan uprisings, whether in terms of the old Libyan flag, the Green Book, or many of the public portraits of the ousted leader. Recalling banknotes therefore should be viewed as part of a wider continuum of removing other political imagery of or associated with Gaddafi.

Before delving into the specifics, it is necessary to provide background into the different methods for selecting the imagery on money. Portraiture is perhaps the most significant manifestation of political propaganda on money; there are two basic models; contemporary and historical. The contemporary model shows the current leader, which is the basic model for UK currency. This model serves to give a clear indication of who is in control of a country at any given time, and can often portray the leader at his or her present age. This model is necessarily subject to changes in regime, particularly when the former leader was an unpopular one. This can prove itself to have practical problems; for a currency to be viable it needs to be easily recognisable. In a time of political instability it is especially important for currency to be stable. This is why at an ideological level it is easy to speak of the need to withdraw an outdated contemporary currency but more difficult to withdraw it altogether.

In contrast, the historical model shows a past leader, the favoured model for the USA. This is slightly more politically neutral than the more obvious contemporary model, and has the benefit that it can carry on between regimes regardless of public feeling. Often the two models are mixed, with some denominations being historical and other contemporary. As we shall see this was the case with Gaddafi, particularly later in his regime. Following on from the historical model, historical monuments often feature on money, as does other national heraldry. However, not all imagery on money need be as obviously political as has thus far been suggested; some numismatic imagery is simpler, and yet still reflects something specific to the nation. This too has the benefit that it can be carried between rulers.

Problems in Research

Researching Libyan currency presents a variety of challenges. Many sellers of coins and banknotes report import difficulties,¹ making the process of studying the items difficult from the start. The import and export of Tunisian currency is harshly restricted;² whether Libya has or had similar rules has been impossible to ascertain. In any case, simply acquiring notes is a difficult task in and of itself and it is important to keep in mind that the banknotes under discussion here may not represent a complete picture of Libyan currency.

While ancient coins and pre-modern banknotes are well-documented in a wide variety of catalogues, modern numismatics is an often poorly documented field. In terms of printed

¹ <http://www.joelscoins.com/africa.htm>

² [http://www.bct.gov.tn/bct/siteprod/francais/relations/paiements.jsp](http://www.bct.gov.tn/bct/siteprod/francais/rerelations/paiements.jsp)

publications, the *Standard Catalog of World Paper Money* attempts, in theory, to catalogue all paper money issued in all countries on a roughly yearly basis; unfortunately this source rarely lives up to its aims, with Libya sometimes omitted altogether. Also, where money is catalogued, the lists cannot be regarded as exhaustive in most editions. This publication is also riddled with technical mistakes, often with regard to dates.³ This is one reason it is best to remain tentative about assigning dates to any Libyan money.

Indeed, the first issue of Idris' banknotes are undated, and the only reason we are aware of their date is through records kept by the Libyan Currency Commission.⁴ Gaddafi's money presents further difficulties because of its use of the Islamic Calendar, and his renaming of months. A related issue is the language barrier; not all numismatists are competent in Arabic, and indeed many works on the subject do not attempt to translate the inscriptions on banknotes.⁵ Added together with the poor documentation of Libya's currency, it is best to regard all dates as approximate.

Online resources are plentiful, but are nonetheless a minefield in terms of issues of accuracy and scope. The online resource *The Banknote Book*⁶ purports to do much the same as the *Standard Catalog of World Paper Money*, and yet apart from a few mentions on the site's blog, Libya, North Africa, and much of the Middle East are ignored completely. Sites dedicated to selling banknotes to collectors are a vital source, especially with regard to their excellent pictures; however, these sites are naturally limited by what they happen to have for sale at any given moment. Moreover, such sites will sell items that are in demand, and it remains to be seen whether or not Gaddafi memorabilia proves itself to be sellable in the coming years. A further problem is that these sites will often have no information on what is depicted on all notes,⁷ and occasionally what information they do have is inaccurate.⁸

When it comes to getting an idea of what Libyan money may look like after Gaddafi, sources on the subject become even more problematic. It would seem that the most authoritative source on the subject would be the website of the Central Bank of Libya; however, the site is often unavailable, and frequently under construction.⁹ Likewise, online newspapers, particularly those with a good international reputation, are a valuable and authoritative resource, but so far none have reported anything concrete about the new Libyan notes. Various social networking sites e.g. , Facebook, Flickr and Twitter have begun to circulate an image of what is supposedly going to comprise the new Libyan currency;¹⁰ however, without confirmation from a more reliable source, it would be unwise to regard anything on these sites as fact.

³ Shafer, N. and Bruce, C.R. *Standard Catalog of World Paper Money (Volume two, ninth edition)* inverts the 1952 and 1955 issues of Libyan paper money

⁴ <http://www.pjsymes.com.au/articles/Libya-cc.htm>

⁵ I do not have any knowledge of the Arabic language. I wish to acknowledge Dania Akkad and Ribale Sleiman-Haidar for their useful advice on the Arabic inscriptions on the notes under discussion here.

⁶ http://www.banknotenews.com/banknote_book/banknote_book.php

⁷ <http://www.numismondo.net/pm/lby/> and <http://www.atnotes.com/catalog/banknotes/libya.html> have little to no information of what is depicted on notes.

⁸ <http://store.banknotes.com/product.php?productid=19759> this site describes the ¼ Dinar as depicting the Arch of Tiberius when in fact it shows the Arch of Trajan.

⁹ <http://cbl.gov.ly/eg/>

¹⁰ <http://twitpic.com/7kqaws>

The image is said to have been originally published on the Tawasul News Agency Site:

<https://www.facebook.com/tawasul.na> but no such image is found on the website of the Central Bank of Libya, nor has it been reported on any major news source.

More interpretative analyses of the imagery on banknotes prove themselves to be even more elusive, and much analysis has to be extrapolated from other sources. Scholarly works on Libyan history are sometimes valuable for this, but often serious discussions of money are omitted, or focus on the Libyan economy as a whole. Occasionally even scholarly works report incorrect information. When possible, it is always best to consult primary sources on the minting, creations and popular reception of money. These are naturally biased by the perspective of the person writing them and all too often these prove to be rare and often non-existent.¹¹

On a final note about the political imagery on money, not all countries produce banknotes that are as rich in political meaning as Libya's. Even within North Africa, and even within the context of the Arab Spring many banknotes present politically neutral imagery. Egyptian money has remained unchanged since the revolution; this is not surprising because it tends to depict imagery from Egypt's ancient past such as the Sphinx, the pyramids, and other ancient imagery.¹² This is uncontroversial and politically neutral, as well as universally appealing. Similarly, Tunisia prefers to illustrate figures from its ancient past including Hannibal and Dido.¹³ It is unlikely that these images will disappear due to their political neutrality. The relative political neutrality of other local banknotes may be one reason why the interpretation of Libya's money is often neglected.

A Brief History of Libyan Money: King Idris 1951-1969

For the sake of brevity, Libyan colonial money has been omitted. Suffice to say that the emergence of the newly free Libyan state necessitated a new currency to reflect the nation's autonomy. King Idris seems to have started with the contemporary portrait model, later moving on to a more historical approach. As early as 1952 Libyan paper money began to show a portrait of King Idris, as seen on Figure 1.¹⁴ This is not surprising; a portrait would have sent the clear message that he was in control of the newly formed Libyan state, effectively demonstrating a clean break with the recent colonial past. This need not be taken as evidence of Idris' autocracy; indeed, given the relative political instability of the time, establishing exactly who was in power may have proved to be a necessity.



Figure 1 www.islamicbanknotes.com/Notes/Libya/LI-1-5pd.htm

But who determined what imagery was to be placed on money? Symes argues that the image was determined exclusively by the presses that minted the notes, namely, Thomas De La Rue and

¹¹ As a primary source, *The Green Book* (translation found here: <http://www.mathaba.net/gci/theory/gb1.htm>) has proved to be difficult at best.

¹² <http://www.islamicbanknotes.com/>

¹³ [http://www.bct.gov.tn/bct/siteprod/francais/relations/paiements.jsp](http://www.bct.gov.tn/bct/siteprod/francais/rerelations/paiements.jsp)

¹⁴ Vandewalle, D. *A History of Modern Libya* (Cambridge, 2011) p. 47 gives an illustration of the difficulties in researching Libyan currency when he argues, "King Idris was a pious, deeply religious, and self-effacing man. He refused, for example, to have his picture on the national currency..." This is blatantly untrue, and Vandewalle cites no sources for his argument.

Bradbury Wilkinson, both British money presses.¹⁵ Symes argues that Idris' portrait was discarded in 1955 after the first issue due to the Islamic ban on the depiction of living things, citing Idris' various religious affiliations as evidence.¹⁶ On this basis, he goes on to argue that Idris did not make the decision to have his portrait on his banknotes, and that this was decided at the various meeting of the Libyan Currency Commission, with virtually no input from the king himself.¹⁷

This view is clearly incorrect: Higgins, a member of the Libyan Currency Commission and therefore a primary source, tells us that Idris posed for a variety of photographs, on the clear understanding that his likeness would appear on his money. He was then presented with the notes just before they were to be circulated.¹⁸ Idris' opinion was far from favourable. As Higgins tells us, "He explained his objections to the notes. First, the portrait was not the one he had chosen, and was most unflattering. Second, we stupid Westerners had forgotten that Arabs read from right to left, we had put the olive tree on the right, and Idris on the left, which made it seem that the olive tree was more important than the King."¹⁹ Eventually Idris had to be convinced that the notes had to be released for circulation to avert certain economic disaster, despite his objections.²⁰ It is clear from this that Idris was involved from a very early stage in the development of the designs for Libyan currency, and that he was obviously unhappy at the considerable licence that the presses seem to have taken when designing the final versions of the notes. While it is too cynical to say that Idris had no involvement in the design of money, his role in the end product was certainly limited, much to his personal dissatisfaction.

Based on Higgins' account, it would seem that Idris removed his portrait from money for the simple reason that he did not like the portrait that was chosen. This however, does not necessarily negate the idea that he removed it for religious reasons. However, it is worth noting that many Islamic states, including Saudi Arabia²¹ and Iran²², make extensive use of contemporary portraits, and other images of living things. Religion is therefore not always manifested on money as much as one would perhaps expect. Therefore, without further evidence to the contrary, it is best to interpret the removal of Idris' portrait cautiously.

In any case, three years after the first portrait notes were commissioned, they were replaced with the historical model, all with imagery from the ancient past. Figure 2 depicts the Roman forum of

¹⁵ <http://www.pjsymes.com.au/articles/Libya-cc.htm>. De La Rue printed much of Gaddafi's money, and indeed a large percentage of the world's banknotes are printed by this company.

¹⁶ *ibid*

¹⁷ *ibid*.

For more details of the meeting of the short-lived Libyan Currency Commission see:

*Libyan Currency Commission *First Report of the Libyan Currency Commission* (for the year ended 31 March 1953), London.

*Libyan Currency Commission *Second Report of the Libyan Currency Commission* (for the year ended 31 March 1954), London.

*Libyan Currency Commission *Third Report of the Libyan Currency Commission* (for the year ended 31 March 1955), London.

*Libyan Currency Commission *Fourth Report of the Libyan Currency Commission* (for the year ended 31 March 1956), London.

¹⁸ Higgins, B.H. *All the Difference: a Development Economist's Quest*. (McGill-Queens 1992) p. 38

¹⁹ Higgins, B.H. *All the Difference: a Development Economist's Quest*. (McGill-Queens 1992) p. 39

²⁰ *ibid*

²¹ <http://www.islamicbanknotes.com/>

²² <http://www.islamicbanknotes.com/>

Cyrene.²³ It is worth remembering that Idris had been the Emir of Cyrenaica, and had fought for its independence in his early career.²⁴ It is also noteworthy that Benghazi, the centre for the Libyan Transitional Council, is also located in the region.²⁵ Within the context of the contemporary Italian occupation of Libya, the portrayal of a Roman forum may seem an odd choice, given the potential for its association with colonialism. However, it is important to remember that ancient Romans are not the same as modern Italians, and that furthermore, this well-preserved monument has a universal appeal due not only to its aesthetic value, but to its antiquity. Indeed, ancient monuments are an essential part of national identity regardless of who originally built them.²⁶ Therefore this banknote shows an item that is ideologically neutral, and yet still unmistakably Libyan. It is also a monument that was significant to Idris himself without the more obvious image of his portrait. Furthermore, Idris may well have felt more established in his rule at this point, and thus no longer needed to place his portrait on banknotes.



Figure 2 <http://coins.delcampe.com/page/item/id,157855693,var,FREE-SHIPPING-United-Kingdom-of-Libya-5-Piastres-Bank-Note-Law-4-24-10-1951-Idris,language,E.html>

Idris also placed the Arch of Trajan on his 10 piastre notes (Figure 3), which also includes a view of Magnis Lepta, one of the best preserved sites for Roman ruins in Libya. This arch is of particular significance for Libyan freedom, and continued to be portrayed under Gaddafi. As such it will be discussed fully in the next section.



Figure 3 <http://www.islamicbanknotes.com/Notes/Libya/LI-2-10pt.htm>

A final piece of Roman imagery to appear is the temple of Isis at Sabratha, as seen on Figure 4. This is significant for a variety of reasons. First of all, as mentioned before, ancient monuments of any kind are always a welcome addition to money, regardless of their religious origin, in this case, Egyptian. Secondly, the depiction of a temple to an Egyptian goddess demonstrates unity between Libya and the rest of north Africa by celebrating its shared ancient past. It is important to remember that the Egyptian pound had circulated widely in Libya prior to Idris,²⁷ and so a nod to Egyptian imagery may well have served to demonstrate a desire to continue in what had already proven to be economically viable, but with a distinctly Libyan flavour, a subtle example of change and continuity.

Sabratha itself was the place where the Roman author Apuleius, most famous for the *Metamorphoses*, or the *Golden Ass*, was tried and freed on a charge of witchcraft.²⁸ Although often identified as a Roman author due to his use of the Latin language, Apuleius was of Berber

²³ MacKendrick, P.L. *The North African Stones Speak*. (UCN, 2000) p. 121

²⁴ Vandewalle, Dirk *A history of modern Libya*. (Cambridge, 2006) p. 36

²⁵ Endgame in Tripoli". *The Economist*. 24 February 2011.

²⁶ The culture and religion of modern Egypt bears little relation to ancient Egyptian culture, and yet it is the ancient past that is most often celebrated on money.

²⁷ <http://www.pjsymes.com.au/articles/Libya-cc.htm>

²⁸ Ward, P. *Apuleius on Trial at Sabratha* (Oxford, 1968)

and Greek extraction.²⁹ His association with Isis is well-documented, as is his trial.³⁰ In this context the depiction of the temple of Isis may be seen in terms of its association with a national historical figure virtually synonymous with the city of Sabratha. We do not have any reliable portraits of Apuleius from his lifetime, and in any case it is unlikely that a portrait of him would have the wide appeal of the temple.

The image of the temple of Sabratha brings about the question about exactly what the images meant to whom. While it is not a matter of debate that the imagery on money is for political propaganda, the question remains as to how different people would react to different images. This is impossible to know for certain unless a variety of sources were to become available. However, it is not likely that an uneducated Libyan would have appreciated the nuanced references to the Roman author Apuleius.³¹ This reference would probably have been known to Idris himself, and it is likely that at least some of the members of the Libyan Currency Commission were educated in the field of Classics. The association of the site with Apuleius was key in many travel recent travel books for Libya as a unique selling point for the archaeological site.³² However, while the more obscure, scholarly meaning of the site may well have gone unnoticed by the majority of the Libyan population, the temple at Sabratha would have been universally appealing due to its antiquity and to its status as a national treasure.

The extensive use of Roman and Egyptian imagery also demonstrates further that Idris does not seem to have had a policy of putting any kind of religious message on his money, particularly when we consider that the temple of Sabratha is by all accounts a pagan device. He does not seem to have placed any imagery of mosques or anything Islamic at all. His preference appears to have been to emphasise imagery particular to Libya, whether it was in the form of his portrait, or in terms of his references to ancient monuments and ancient historical figures.



Figure 4 <http://www.islamicbanknotes.com/Notes/Libya/LI-2-Q.htm>

However, King Idris also issued far more politically neutral coinage such as this note, Figure 5, which depicts the Libyan coat of arms, as well as the olive and palm trees that appear on many of his monetary issues. The olive tree is a universal symbol of peace,³³ and is typical of the Mediterranean as well as North Africa. It is also symbolic of wealth, particularly at a time when Libya had not yet fully established itself as a petroleum producing country.



²⁹ *ibid*

³⁰ Apuleius, *Apologia*, *passim*.

³¹ <http://www.dailynews.lk/2011/10/22/fea02.asp> Free education in Libya was an innovation of Gaddafi. Literacy rates were an estimated ten percent under Idris, rising to ninety percent by the end of Gaddafi's regime. In this context, it is likely that the literary reference in the Sabratha notes remained unnoticed by the majority of the population.

³² Azema, J. *Libya Handbook: The Travel Guide*. (Bath, 2000) p. 94

³³ Lucia Impelluso *Nature and its symbols*.(Getty Publications, 2004) p. 43

Figure 5 Source <http://www.banknotes.com/ly27.htm>

But what is Idris' legacy on Libyan currency? As we shall see, Gaddafi continued in the use of some of the designs used on Idris' money, while discarding others. It is best not to speculate on what will appear on future banknotes; however, Libya has reinstated the flag that was in use during Idris' reign. Furthermore, images of Idris featured on many posters and placards during the Libyan uprisings.³⁴ So it is just possible that we may see the return of Idris' portrait.

Gaddafi

Every effort has been made to find out what Gaddafi himself had to say about the imagery on his money, whether in literal terms, or in terms of extrapolating information from his thoughts on other matters. Information from Gaddafi himself has proved itself to be piecemeal at best, and impossible to interpret at worst. *The Green Book* is a primary source, at least in theory, which has been consulted in an attempt to find what Gaddafi may have had to say for himself about his monetary policies. Unfortunately, the work does not seem to offer any insight on the subject whether in terms of ideological or concrete issues surrounding the printing or design of money. Likewise it has been impossible to extrapolate anything from his thoughts on economics. I have also consulted this work for information of the buildings, monuments and historical figures that he depicted on his banknotes and have also found little insight on these. Some vague information on his pro-African ideology is available, but little that sheds light on his money. Otherwise, the Green Book is difficult to follow due to its occasionally bizarre and happenstance logic, which has been criticised widely. However, some of Gaddafi's speeches and interviews have been slightly more useful on these matters.

The rise of Gaddafi brought about a complete change in Libyan currency from the Libyan pound to the Libyan dinar. This was largely due to Gaddafi's early pan-Arab sentiments,³⁵ and to his nationalisation of British Petroleum.³⁶ It also seems to have been the final rejection of colonialism; the name of the currency was an Arabic-language one, not a foreign one. While Gaddafi retained some of the old imagery, much of it disappeared as well. After all, it would hardly have been practical for Gaddafi to depict on his money the king that he had just overthrown. Removing Idris' image also had the effect of clearly demonstrating that Idris was no longer in control.

Omar Mukhtar

Despite his reputation as a dictator, Gaddafi does not seem to have placed his image on banknotes immediately, preferring instead to replace Idris' contemporary model with the historical model. Gaddafi's icon of choice was Omar Mukhtar, the key figure in the Libyan resistance movement from 1911 to 1931. Ideologically, the image of Mukhtar may well have proved to be universally appealing; at the early stages of Gaddafi's rule an image of the new leader may well have proved potentially controversial. Furthermore, Gaddafi continually emphasised that he occupied no official position in the rule of Libya, however much one might disagree, and may not have initially placed his portrait on money because of this.³⁷

Gaddafi's personal affinities with Mukhtar have been well documented; he wore a badge bearing Mukhtar's portrait as an Italian prisoner in chains during his 2009 visit to Italy, as seen on Figure 6.

³⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:A_Benghazi_citizen_holding_King_Idris%27s_photo.JPG

³⁵ The term dinar is common throughout the Middle East, with Tunisia being the nearest example.

³⁶ <http://www.sadeqinstitute.org/2011/11/time-is-money/> This article gives more detail on issues surrounding the assimilation of the Libyan pound to the British one.

³⁷ Badran, T. "Exerpts from Libyan Leader Muammar al-Qaddafi's Televised Address." 22, February 2011. p. The Council on Foreign Relations (2011) *The New Arab Revolt: What happened, What it Means and What Happens Next* (2011)

Gaddafi described the execution of Mukhtar as follows: “This hanging is like the crucifixion of Christ for Christians. For us, this image is a bit like the cross that some of you wear.”³⁸ In one of his last speeches, Gaddafi referred to Mukhtar as the “sheikh of all martyrs.”³⁹ Gaddafi’s grandfather had also fought in the Libyan resistance movements starting in 1911, the same year that Mukhtar’s rebellions began. So Gaddafi’s personal affinity towards Mukhtar certainly influenced his decision to use his likeness on money.



Figure 6 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Omar_Mokhtar_arrested_by_Italian_Fascists.jpg

However, the image of Mukhtar may also have been part of Gaddafi’s larger pro-Libyan vision; in this context the use of an historical figure may have been part of a wider policy of pushing a pro-Libyan agenda, rather than simply a pro-Gaddafi agenda. In any case the image of Mukhtar became a central facet of Libyan political and monetary culture; in fact, banknotes were often referred to as “Mukhtar” or similar. This is reminiscent of the occasional tendency for Americans to refer to money as “dead presidents.”

This 10 Dinar note from 1972 depicts Mukhtar, both as a portrait, and as a watermark (Figure 7). The reverse shows Libyan horse riders, which also seem to appear on all Libyan coins. Arabic is used on the obverse, while English is retained on the reverse. At this early point in Gaddafi’s reign, in the interests of creating a viable currency, it was perhaps unwise to completely replace English on a currency that had made use of bilingual inscriptions for so long.



Figure 7 <http://www.banknotes.com/ly37.htm>

This note from 2009 (Figure 8) also depicts Mukhtar, interestingly enough on the right side of the note, which immediately brings to mind King Idris’ objections to the layout of his early banknotes. It would seem that by this point Gaddafi had rectified the mistakes of previous printers. Moreover English inscriptions are completely removed in favour of Arabic, with one inscription reading *Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya*. The reverse is also highly decorated, this time with a view of Fort Elena. This was an Italian built fortress, symbolic of Libyan oppression, and it is therefore fitting that it would appear on banknotes celebrating Mukhtar. However, Fort Elena is also significant to Gaddafi because it was the place where he gave an early speech announcing the “dawn of the era of the masses.”⁴⁰ Thus on the same banknotes we are given an image of oppression in the form of Mukhtar and Fort Elena, but also a sense of triumph in terms of what Gaddafi saw as Libyan freedom.

³⁸ <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/11/world/europe/11italy.html>

³⁹ Badran, T. “Exerpts from Libyan Leader Muammar al-Qaddafi’s Televised Address.” 22, February 2011. p. The Council on Foreign Relations (2011) *The New Arab Revolt: What happened, What it Means and What Happens Next* (2011)

⁴⁰ Vanderwalle, Dirk J. (1998). *Libya Since Independence: oil and state-building*. London



Figure 8 <http://www.banknotes.com/ly74.htm>

But why was this particular portrait of Mukhtar used, as opposed to the more famous picture of his arrest?⁴¹ From a numismatic perspective, profile portraits are very common on money; this dates back to the first portrait coinage, where a frontal portrait would have proved too prone to damage and wear. Idris' portrait was either profile or three-quarters, and so this depiction may simply reflect what had become Libyan tradition. From an artistic point of view, a frontal portrait can occasionally appear intimidating. However, I believe that this image may well have been based on Mukhtar's mugshot, as seen on Figure 9. This would emphasise Mukhtar's martyrdom at the hands of Italian colonialism, but perhaps in a less obvious manner than the well-publicised picture of his arrest.



Figure 9 <http://lnmf.free.fr/omar.htm>

The image of Mukhtar seems to have survived the revolution, as seen on Figure 10. However, the inscription seems to have been removed from this new issue due to its obvious association with Gaddafi, and English is once again in use. The use of the portrait of Omar Muhktar is a clear demonstration of change and continuity. In order to conduct day to day business, money is a necessity and in the context of political turmoil it is prudent to retain at least some imagery from the previous regime if only to provide a sense of economic stability. However, Mukhtar took on a different meaning during the revolution, with his image used on various posters, placards, and similar during the Libyan uprisings. Thus the image of Mukhtar is an enduring symbol of Libyan freedom, and an essential part of Libyan culture, and therefore unlikely to disappear despite its associations with Gaddafi.



Figure 10 <http://www.banknotenews.com/files/b7a4b2f0962d063fe9b4beae1705c636-2095.php>

Libyan National Imagery

Other Libyan imagery was used as well; for example, this note (Figure 11) depicts an oil refinery, surely symbolic of the nation's wealth. We have seen subtle depictions of Libyan wealth in the form of the olive trees on Idris' banknotes. However, there is a strong political aim of these notes, since they are reflective of Gaddafi's early policies of taking a greater share from western oil companies⁴². References to oil are also common on the banknotes of many oil producing nations.⁴³

⁴¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Omar_Mokhtar_arrested_by_Italian_Fascists.jpg

⁴² <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=yXBRAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=Aw8EAAAIAIBAJ&pg=7216,2358896&dq=gaddafi+oil+revenue+60+foreign+corporations&hl=en>

⁴³ www.islamicbanknotes.com/



Figure 11 <http://www.banknotes.com/LY43.JPG>

The obverse on Figure 12 depicts two camels; it is very common for nations to portray a national animal; Australia and New Zealand come to mind. The camel is a very popular image on Middle Eastern money; placing this image on money places Libyan currency within its wider regional context. However, I believe that Libya may be unique for its depiction of a mother camel and baby, making this note not only part of a larger continuum of Middle Eastern currency, but also unique to Libya. When I presented this note at the June 2012 BRISMES conference, my audience's response to this note was overwhelmingly positive in terms of this note's aesthetic value, and also in terms of its overall cheerful nature. Although this has the potential to be highly subjective, one does wonder whether or not a happy image such as this one was intended to deliver a message of peace and prosperity.

The reverse of these notes presents a monument of Al-Hani, the site of a significant battle during the Libyan uprisings of 1911.⁴⁴ Gaddafi also claimed that this was the burial site for his father.⁴⁵ Thus, this monument had personal significance to Gaddafi, but is also significant to the idea of Libyan freedom. This has its parallels with the image of Mukhtar.



Figure 12 <http://www.banknotes.com/LY60.JPG>

Like the Mukhtar notes, the design on these notes also seems to have outlasted the Revolution. However, all written references to Gaddafi have been removed, as has the falcon crest that previously appeared on the monument (Figure 13).⁴⁶ As before, English appears on the reverse. With regard to the camels, while their sentimental value is certain, one does wonder whether or not they will take on a new political significance, given that Saif Gaddafi was ultimately charged with selling camels without a licence.⁴⁷



Figure 13 <http://www.banknotenews.com/files/tag-libya.php>

Repetition of Idris' Imagery: the Arch of Trajan

⁴⁴ Boahen. A.A. *Africa Under Colonial Dominion 1880-1935* (Paris, 1990) p. 51

⁴⁵ Badran, T. "Exerpts from Libyan Leader Muammar al-Qaddafi's Televised Address." 22, February 2011. p. The Council on Foreign Relations (2011) *The New Arab Revolt: What happened, What it Means and What Happens Next* (2011)

⁴⁶ <http://www.banknotenews.com/files/tag-libya.php>

⁴⁷ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/libya/9189056/Saif-Gaddafi-only-charged-with-failure-to-licence-camels.html>

While Gaddafi did remove most of Idris' imagery from his money, he continued to mint banknotes bearing the image of the arch of Trajan. Many websites dedicated to selling Libyan banknotes wrongly describe the picture as the Arch of Tiberius.⁴⁸ This is blatantly incorrect. As can be seen on Figure 14, the Arch of Tiberius is in much poorer repair and lacks the column on its side that the Arch of Trajan has. There is also the simple matter that a comparison of Idris' banknotes and Figure 15 shows that they depict the same archaeological ruin.



Figure 7 Arch of Tiberius (left) and Arch of Trajan (right) http://www.livius.org/le-lh/lepcis_magna/arch_trajan.html

Nevertheless, one could easily argue as to why Gaddafi would place Arch of Tiberius on his money. The Arch of Tiberius was dedicated to the Roman emperor Tiberius who was the first Roman emperor to fully annex Magnis Lepta; additionally, the building of the arch was financed by funds that had been sequestered from native tribes during the Roman occupation.⁴⁹ So in a way the arch of Tiberius is the first symbol of Italian occupation of Libya. Gaddafi often presented Mukhtar in his guise not only as a freedom fighter, but also as a martyr. Therefore the arch of Tiberius could easily be seen as the first symbol of Libya's oppression by the west in general, but Italy in particular, even before there was such a thing as modern Libya or modern Italy.

By contrast, the Arch of Trajan is arguably a symbol of Libyan freedom. In 106 CE Trajan awarded the city of Leptis Magna the title of *colonia*, which allowed full citizenship to all free-born inhabitants, and magistrates, who had considerably less power than the previously instated consuls now oversaw the city.⁵⁰ The arch was built as a dedication to the emperor who had given the city of Leptis Magna its freedom. It is unsurprising that the first monument to Libyan freedom should have been utilised by Idris. But why did Gaddafi choose to retain this image and not for example, any of the other ancient monuments that Idris had used?

Idris' use of the forum at Cyrenaica had been significant to him personally, and consequently was not useful to Gaddafi. Indeed the repetition of such a personal icon may well have created a sense of confusion as to who was really in control of Libya. The question then turns to the other ancient monument that Idris depicted, the temple of Isis at Sabratha. The answer, I think, lies with the fact that Gaddafi placed the image of a mosque on the reverse of this banknote. This is the first clear manifestation of Islam on Libyan money and in this context it would hardly have been prudent to retain the image of a pagan temple. The Arch of Trajan has the all the desired effects of placing an ancient monument of money such as universal appeal, but it does not contradict the contemporary religious elements also contained.

⁴⁸ <http://www.banknotebank.com/note/932528>

⁴⁹ http://www.livius.org/le-lh/lepcis_magna/arch_tiberius.html

⁵⁰ http://www.livius.org/le-lh/lepcis_magna/arch_trajan.html



Figure 15 <http://www.banknotes.com/LY47.JPG>

Portraiture

As early as 1989, Gaddafi seems to have begun placing his own portrait on his money. It has thus far been impossible to confirm the earliest issue of these notes; however, if 1989 is in fact the first year they were issued, then this would mark the 20th anniversary of his rule. As always, it is best to remain cautious about the dating of Libyan money.

The initial question that arises is whether or not a self-portrait should be taken as a sign of his increasing autocracy. While Gaddafi's motivations are difficult to establish, in one of his later speeches he described himself thus: "Muammar Gaddafi is history, resistance, liberation, glory and revolution. This is recognition from the greatest power in the world, that Muammar Gaddafi is not a president, or an average person..."⁵¹ It seems that Gaddafi was concerned with, amongst other things, his place in history, and may well have seen himself as an historical figure rather than a something as mundane as a head of state. This is further evidenced in his repeated allusions to his lack of official title. Thus it is just possible to interpret Gaddafi's placement of his own likeness on his money as a sign of his longevity and as a symbol of Libya.



Figure 8 <http://www.banknotes.com/LY59.JPG>

But what are we to make of the portrait itself? The way he is presented in this portrait (Figure 16) is in many ways at odds with the image of Gaddafi to which we have become accustomed, to wit the ornate suits and military uniforms. It is difficult to even conceive an adequate description of the veil or headdress he is wearing, let alone to provide any sort of interpretation. Given that the reverse of the note depicts a mosque, it is tempting to assign a religious meaning to his appearance, but in the absence of any concrete information, it is best to remain cautious. Equally tempting and equally difficult to prove is the idea that this image is reflective of Gaddafi's early pan-Arab sympathies.

However, from a visual and aesthetic point of view, this portrait bears a more than passing resemblance to the famous picture of Mukhtar at his arrest. Granted the head covering on the Gaddafi portrait is far more elaborate, and he is obviously not chained. Gaddafi's affinity to Mukhtar was well established, and as such it is not a step too far to suggest that he may have

⁵¹ Badran, T. "Exerpts from Libyan Leader Muammar al-Qaddafi's Televised Address." 22, February 2011. p. The Council on Foreign Relations (2011) *The New Arab Revolt: What happened, What it Means and What Happens Next* (2011)

wanted to portray himself as Mukhtar. This would give the banknotes a distinctly Libyan flavour rather than a more generally Middle Eastern bent.

Libyan popular culture corroborates the idea that this portrait of Gaddafi was intended to replicate Mukhtar. During the Libyan uprisings, it was, and probably still is possible, to purchase novelty stickers that bear the image of Mukhtar, as seen on Figure 17. They are clearly based on the one dinar note, as can be seen here. These items were widely sold and distributed, and have been used as bumper stickers, placed on posters and more.⁵² While it cannot be stressed enough that these novelty notes are indeed fake, the fact that Gaddafi's portrait was replaced with Mukhtar's suggests strongly that the resemblance between the two was something that many Libyans noticed and appreciated. Given the popularity of these fake notes/stickers, it does not seem likely that this image will make its way onto real money.



Figure 9 <http://revolutionology.wordpress.com/2011/04/14/the-aural-environment/> The top note is real, while the bottom is fake

Gaddafi changed his image over time, as evidenced by this note from 2008 (Figure 18), perhaps printed in anticipation of the 40th anniversary of his rule. He is clearly older in this portrait, and has adopted an image that is slightly more familiar than the first portrait. The simplest explanation for this change in imagery is that it indeed reflected reality; also, a changing ruler portrait also demonstrates longevity. However his dress is distinctly more African in nature, reflective of the pan-African ideologies of his later years.



Figure 18 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Libyan_Dinar_50_Dinars_Note.JPG

Also related to Gaddafi's African policies is this note from 2002 (Figure 19), which portrays the Meeting of African Leaders from the 9th of September 1999. Yasser Arafat is also shown here, despite not being an African leader, reflective of Gaddafi's extensive pro-Palastinian policies. Gaddafi himself is front and centre in the group, and is wearing white, African inspired robes in contrast to the western attire favoured by most other members of the group. This is perhaps unsurprising since it was Gaddafi who hosted this meeting, and this gesture should not be taken as evidence of Libyan supremacy. This group portrait portrays Gaddafi as a leader of Africa, rather than the Middle East.

It is also significant that the obverse of this note contains a blank map of Africa, with only Libya distinguished, marked out in green. This emphasises that this is a Libyan banknote, but with Libya as a part of Africa. Moreover this is also reflective of Libya as an African, rather than a

⁵²<http://revolutionology.wordpress.com/2011/04/14/the-aural-environment/>

Middle Eastern country, echoing Gaddafi's pan-African ideologies. Gaddafi's tendency to wear badges shaped like a map of Africa also comes to mind.⁵³ The reverse of this note also contains a map of Gaddafi's Great Man Made River Project, emphasising Libya's achievements.⁵⁴ This is also reminiscent of Gaddafi's earlier tendency to place images of oil refineries on banknotes, since the project ensured Libya's wealth by making the country self-sufficient in terms of its water supplies.



Figure 10 <http://www.banknotes.com/ly67.htm>

So we can see that Gaddafi changed his image on money over time. His early banknote portrait is cryptic on its own; its resemblance to Mukhtar is likely, which indicates a desire to show himself as distinctly Libyan. However, especially when compared to his later African image, the head covering on his earlier portrait definitely takes on a more Middle Eastern cast. He then moved on to portray himself in an African fashion, not just individually, but as a leader among many.

Gaddafi's numismatic portraits provide insight into his early Libyan, Arab and later African sympathies. However, nowhere on his money is he portrayed wearing any kind of military uniform, for which he was famous, and which was one fashion item that outlasted both of these ideologies. Despite his flamboyance, Gaddafi retained the title of colonel, and his portraits on money may reflect the extent to which Gaddafi, at least in theory wanted to deemphasise his military connections. An overly militarised image on money may also have signalled war and conflict rather than peace and prosperity. Gaddafi's reign was far from conflict free, and in this context presenting himself in a warlike fashion on money may have proved economically unwise, since it would have been a constant reminder of war, which has connotations of instability, economic or otherwise. Money is a symbol of prosperity; Gaddafi repeatedly showed images of Libya's wealth and achievements, and as such de-emphasising his role as a military leader may be seen in this context.

After the Arab Spring

With the ousting of Gaddafi, notes containing his image quickly became outdated, to say the least. Unfortunately, getting rid of the Gaddafi currency was not an easy task. Shortly after Gaddafi's death, 280 million Libyan dinars were shipped in from Britain in order to pay government workers' salaries.⁵⁵ These still bore the image of Gaddafi, but the practical concerns outweighed any ideological value. However, within a few months, it became more prudent to remove the image of the newly outdated notes.

The Central Bank of Libya has already withdrawn the 50 dinar notes containing Gaddafi's image; the bank announced this in January 2012, with a deadline of 15, March 2012⁵⁶. The ideological reasons for this are obvious; 'Central bank media manager Issam Buajila stated, "The one- and twenty-dinar notes will be phased out because these images remind the Libyans of the time of the

⁵³ http://www.meskelsquare.com/archives/2007/01/the_presidentia.htmlv

⁵⁴ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/4814988.stm>

⁵⁵ <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2011/09/01/uk-libya-britain-cash-idUKTRE77U4OR20110901>

⁵⁶ http://english.nuqudy.com/North_Africa/Libya_to_Replace_Ga-578

dictatorship.”⁵⁷ Indeed, banknotes are only one example of Gaddafi imagery that has been withdrawn or outright destroyed. However, withdrawing money from circulation is not a simple process; generally, the larger the note, the easier it is to withdraw. Smaller notes are needed for everyday business whereas larger notes are quickly spent, and can also be exchanged for smaller notes, and so it remains to be seen how and when these will be replaced.

But what will replace Gaddafi’s image? For the moment, the old Mukhtar and other varied notes remain ideologically neutral, and therefore are likely to remain in circulation for some time yet. The continued use of old banknotes may well be not only due to the practical problems with withdrawing all currency, but also due to a desire not to introduce too much change too quickly. To remain economically viable, the images on money need to remain recognisable, especially in a time of instability. Moreover in a time of instability, the question of whether new notes may be counterfeit is a pressing one.

The Libyan government announced a competition for the design of new banknotes, although no definite results seem to have been printed as of yet.⁵⁸ This is yet more proof of the extent to which the imagery on money has political significance. It is also reflective of a desire to introduce democracy. The following may or may not depict the new designs for Libya’s banknotes; as of the date of writing I have been unable to verify the authenticity of these via the Central Bank of Libya. However, they depict historical monuments and seem to be devoid of any hint of present or past leaders. However, absent confirmation, from the Central Bank of Libya, it is best not to speculate. Whether these designs will be used or not, numismatic imagery in Libya is clearly about to undergo changes as well as continuing in older imagery.

Figure 20 <http://twitpic.com/7kqaws>

⁵⁷ http://english.nuqudy.com/North_Africa/Libya_to_Replace_Ga-578

⁵⁸ <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2011/09/01/uk-libya-britain-cash-idUKTRE77U4OR20110901>