

*the Missionaries: Church and State in Pre-Colonial Baganda* (pp. 52-65). Here Rowe shows how the clever manoeuvring of Kabaka Mutesa brought about the situation in which “each group of religious advocates – English Protestant, French Catholic, Zanzibari Muslim and Baganda traditionalist – became convinced in turn that the Kabaka really favoured their doctrines above the rest. For Mutesa,” concludes Rowe, “it was a brilliant performance in the art of diplomacy and equivocation” (p. 60). In him, we may add, long before the world was divided into Blocks during the Cold War, one can see a prototype of one well known brand of future African political leader.

One minor methodological observation to conclude with. Some of the authors apparently did not resist the temptation to bejewel pieces of their narration with amusing anecdotes drawn from primary sources which reveal how exciting, often quaint and funny (especially to a non-African observer) were the first frontier contacts and interactions between the actors from the two diverse civilizations during the times of “the discovery of Africa by the Europeans”. This kind of embellishments can always enliven the story yet, in a historical study, they are at the same time bearers of the risk of eclipsing ‘the prevalent, decisive and conclusive’ and thus altering ‘the true picture’. On the other hand, had all authors shown total restraint in this regard, the readers of this volume would remain deprived of such plums as the story about the missionary who alongside his holy undertakings managed to open a profitable store in the hinterland of the Cape Province and kept nervous the colonial traders and administrators by offering what was perceived by them as unfair competition (Beck, Chapter 7). Or the account about another missionary who in his desperate desire to win the goodwill of the Kabaka of Baganda in a race with competitors from other missions, achieved his goal only by proving to be a handyman capable of repairing and keeping in good shape all the king’s guns (Rowe, Chapter 5).

Here one should recognize that in the field of research such as African history it is often quite difficult to guard a clear dividing line between the scientific and the popular writing. Indeed, it should probably be left to the personality of each writer and reader to make their own choices since what we are talking about touches upon the ancient dilemma between the utility and pleasure of knowledge.

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SORBY, Karol: *Suez 1956. Twilight of the Traditional Colonialism in the Middle East*. Bratislava, Veda Publishing House 2003; 347 pp. (in Slovak).

Historical works treating themes of Eastern countries were always rare in Czech and Slovak scientific production and this claim is the more valid for the field of modern history. After nearly fifty years, the Suez Crisis of 1956 is still a fascinating turning point in both British and Middle Eastern history. It marked the end of the British Empire, led to the downfall of a Prime Minister, and threatened to destroy the Anglo-American “alliance”.

In his outstanding work Karol Sorby uncovers the full story of Suez. Using Egyptian, British, American and Israeli sources, he recreates the drama of diplomatic manoeuvring, Middle Eastern intrigues, elaborate conspiracies, and monumental blunders. *Suez 1956* is

a study not only of power politics but of powerful personalities, leading to the end of British dominance in the Middle East.

The Suez War of 1956 marked the end of the British Empire, with the government of Anthony Eden forced into a humiliating ceasefire as it tried to seize the Suez Canal and overthrow the Egyptian government. For almost five decades historians have tried to understand the causes of the war and the reasons for British failure. In this book the author combines key documents with a concise analysis of events. He introduces readers to the personalities involved, assessing their strengths and weaknesses. He considers the intrigue between Britain, France and Israel to attack Egypt, uncovering the secret role of secret services, and pointing to the "regional" influence of countries like Syria, Jordan and Iraq. Most importantly Dr. Sorby re-examines the Anglo-American alliance and its disintegration during the Suez crisis.

The years covered by this work are perhaps the most crucial in all the post war history of the Middle East, and Dr. Karol Sorby tackles them with immense zest, sweeping his readers from London, Paris and Washington via Cairo to the Middle East. The theme that binds all together is the policy-making of British and French politicians who in a desperate effort to turn back the course of history resorted to old colonial practices in collusion with Israel, *vis-à-vis* Egyptian determination to get rid of foreign paternalism and dependence.

For almost forty years, those writing about the Suez crisis have shared the disappointment over the apparent contradiction between Dulles's words and US policy. To solve the dilemma, some have adopted Eden's description of Dulles as a hypocrite who betrayed Britain for a misguided vision of American political and religious leadership of the world. Others, however, have portrayed the Eden as a sick, even irrational, man, who destroyed Britain's diplomatic, economic and moral position in the Middle East and the UN as well as the Anglo-American "alliance". The biographies and memoirs of British and US participants have generally reflected the positions of their governments. The most notable exception to this was "No End of a Lesson" by Anthony Nutting, who resigned as Minister of State in the Foreign Office during Suez, but his account was coloured by his personal disagreement with Eden. French participants were more explicit about their "alliance" with Israel and eventual British involvement, but they knew little about the relationship between London and Washington. Later on authors of books that emerged in several countries tried to expand and correct previous accounts, but they still could not get access to unpublished memoranda.

The release of unpublished documents of the British government in 1987 offered some hope of new explanations of developments during Suez but the answers were not found. Eden had ordered the destruction of all information about the secret Sèvres meetings between Britain, France and Israel so nothing of value remained. But we must not forget that the Suez crisis did not suddenly arise when Jamal Abd al-Nasir nationalized the Suez Canal Company in July 1956. It was the product of decades of tension between Britain and Egypt and, in a wider sense, London's desperate struggle to maintain its Middle Eastern position. Likewise, the Anglo-American relationship in the region was never a matter-of-fact "alliance". US interests might lead Washington to support British policies, either publicly or privately, but at times, notably when the Eisenhower Administration came to power in 1953, the US acted independently of Britain. Co-operation from 1954 to 1956 was based upon a tenuous convergence of aims, for example, the mutual desire for an Arab-Israeli settlement.

Examining Suez in the light of these long-term considerations and the new evidence, a complex explanation of the relationship between Britain and the US begins to emerge.

Eden's decision to act with France and Israel, without consulting the US, was motivated in part by the desire to protect Britain's political and military influence in Iraq and Jordan, the cornerstones of her Middle East position. The Eisenhower administration, as Dulles told Lloyd, desired the removal of Jamal Abd al-Nasir as much as Britain did, but the military assault upon Egypt endangered US relations with Arab states and undermined covert operations, planned since March 1956 by London and Washington against the Egyptian leader.

Then, as now, British and US policies were not shaped by a single person, acting from a single motive, in a single office. They were the products of officials in numerous agencies, who acted upon assumptions formed by various influences. The task is to move from this simple conclusion to the complex reconstruction of Anglo-American relations in the Middle East in 1956. In the Suez crisis, there were no "heroes" or "villains", only men trapped by perceptions of their country's long-term interests, by the strengths and weaknesses of their policy-making systems, and by pressure from the officials of other countries.

The abiding mystery concerns the logic of British policies. France and Israel had obvious motives for confronting the Egyptian regime and sought British support. But in the British attitude there is ambiguity. First there was the successful 1954 agreement with Egypt on evacuation, the well-meant but abortive Anglo-American "Plan Alpha" for an Arab-Israeli settlement (p. 63), and the aid offer for the Aswan Dam pressed by Eden on a reluctant US administration to pre-empt the Soviets (pp. 107 – 110). After March 1956 Washington and London had shifted to "containing" the Egyptian leader and supporting the Baghdad Pact. The new material shows, however, that Eden was already set on intervention and from the moment of the nationalization of the canal in July the policy aim was defined as the overthrow of the Egyptian President, public denials notwithstanding.

It remains unclear what exactly – apart from sickness – brought Eden to his paranoiac view of Jamal Abd al-Nasir as a latter-day Mussolini (p. 207). For one who witnessed Selwyn Lloyd's reaction in Cairo to Jamal Abd al-Nasir's quip about the dismissal of General Glubb and to the stoning of Lloyd's party in Bahrain the same evening (p. 154), that episode – relayed to Eden as proof of Jamal Abd al-Nasir's malignity – is a key factor. The author also emphasizes the influence of Nuri as-Said, who advised Eden to "hit Nasser hard and quickly" (p. 212). French politicians, too, succumbed to the Mussolini-Hitler analogy, reliving their Resistance past (p. 216). On both sides of the Channel, the press joined in the hysteria, and the only voices unheard were those of professional advisors. Transatlantic cross-purpose over the canal negotiations are described in detail: while Dulles played for time, the British and the French worked for a *casus belli*. As to Eisenhower's stance the author clearly shows that Eden was deceived only by his own wishful thinking into expecting the US to acquiesce in the Suez attack.

Dr. Sorby in his even-handed and well-researched work exploited Arab sources to an extent unparalleled in Central European historiography. His balanced account is insightful, often fascinating, always judicious and readable.

Jan Wanner