

DZIEKAN, Marek M.: *Irak. Religia i polityka*. (Iraq. Religion and Politics). Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa, 2005. 274 p. (In Polish). ISBN 83-7151-695-9.

The notable Polish Arabist Professor Marek Dziekan, Head of the Department of the Near East and Africa at the University of Łódź in Poland who co-operates also with the Department of Arab and Islamic studies at the Warsaw University and with the University in Toruń is the author of more than 200 scientific and popular works and translations from Arabic, English, Russian and German.

The book under revision is introduced with a short survey of the Iraqi history and divided into three parts. In the first part named "Religion" the author treats the question of Shi'ī Islam in Iraq. During the period between the Second World War and the end of the twentieth century a series of important developments affected the urban Shi'ī population as a whole. In the first place, large scale migration to the towns continued, and it was accompanied by the burgeoning of slum areas on the outskirts of Baghdad and other larger cities. Furthermore, especially in their new and extremely deprived urban setting, many Shi'ī Muslims were attracted to the egalitarian values and principles of the Iraqi Communist Party, which was at the forefront of the national struggle and large numbers joined its ranks. Over this same period a decline took place in the social status and economic standing of all but the most prominent Shi'ī *mujtahids*. The author makes the reader familiar with three outstanding representatives of this religious community, namely Muḥammad Bāqir aṣ-Ṣadr, Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ḥakīm and 'Alī Ḥusaynī as-Sīstānī.

The second part is divided into three chapters. The first about Ṣaddām Ḥusayn deals with that cruel Iraqi President who ruled his country as a dictator. The author rightly shows him as the product of a poor childhood which produced bitter experiences that he never forgot or overcame (pp. 138-139). Ṣaddām Ḥusayn who performed a lack of psychological or sociological restraints, possibly imported, has modelled himself after other great dictators and merged them with tribal instincts. Because of regional and international factors which had nothing to do with the fate of the people of Iraq, Ṣaddām Ḥusayn was supported and eventually opposed and destroyed by the West (p. 144). In the second chapter the author treats the problem of the Iraqi-Iranian border as a geographical, historical and cultural phenomenon. He makes a lengthy excursion into the formation of that frontier until the last quarter of the twentieth century when Ṣaddām Ḥusayn and the Shah of Iran in June 1975 signed the Algiers Agreement which effectively terminated hostilities in Kurdistan and paved the way for a swift and permanent demarcation of the disputed frontier between the two countries (p. 183). In this chapter the author also deals with the Kurdish problem in the Middle East. In the third chapter Professor Dirking gives an insight into the problem of setting up a new constitution for Iraq after Ṣaddām Ḥusayn (pp. 198-226).

The third part contains seven interviews given by the author to different Polish media after the Bush administration launched an all-out war against the Iraqi regime in March 2003. In his comments the author gives a balanced and thoroughly professional standpoint to this very complex situation that after more than five years does not bring much optimism.

On the whole it may be said that with this book Professor Marek Dziekan as a first

hand observer and scholar has made a very successful contribution to the historiography of Iraq. It fills an important gap in the general literature on Iraq, since it goes beyond the narrow focus on politics that characterizes many works. The reader finishes this substantial book with a firm grasp of the main tendencies of the historical development. The impressive part of it is its comprehensiveness and eminent readability. The author has put together a fascinating account of continuity and change and succeeded on every score.

Karol Sorby

OLIVERIUS, Jaroslav and ONDRÁŠ, František: *Moderní spisovná arabština*. I. díl. (Al-Lughā al-ʿarabīya al-fuṣḥā), (Modern Literary Arabic). Vol. I. Prague: SET OUT Publishing House 2007, 287 p. (In Czech). ISBN 80-86277-51-8.

This is the first part of a long awaited textbook for university students by two eminent specialists in the field of teaching literary Arabic in the Institute of the Near East and Africa at the Faculty of Philosophy in the Charles' University in Prague. The book is the result of many years' teaching and is backed by first hand experience. The book is intended for teaching in classes because the authors admit that using it in a "teach-yourself" way would be extremely difficult. The published edition uses the Arabic letters of the "traditional Arabic" font which is very comfortable and easy to read and which is of great help for beginners.

The textbook begins with an introduction containing detailed explaining of the phonological system of Arabic and the genesis and development of Arabic script. Then there is also a thorough presentation of the Arabic vowels and consonants. The book offers eighteen graded lessons each of them containing grammatical, textual and drilling sections. The book centres on imparting the grammatical and lexical basics to enable the learner step by step to understand written and spoken text, to hold a conversation with an Arabic speaker independently and, moreover, to translate and write Arabic texts. A variety of highly different texts (reports, commentaries, interviews, dialogues, tales etc.) together with appropriate exercises have been included in the book in addition to the description of grammar in the respective lessons.

When conceiving the texts, particular attention was paid to impart and consolidate those patterns which occur over and over again in spoken and written Modern literary Arabic and to provide the learner with a guide to master different communicative situations. The grammar comprises all substantial phenomena of Modern literary Arabic which are necessary for a good command of Arabic as a spoken and written language. This is a book for beginners which covers all grammatical and syntactic phenomena necessary for a correct and active command of Arabic.

The book aims at imparting Modern literary Arabic because it is impossible to cope with the numerous Arabic dialects without these foundations. The main texts of each lesson are not vocalized in order to accustom the student from the beginning to the standard Arabic writing which (except the Koran) is not-vocalized. The exercises on the