

cluding rites. In each block, the authors step by step record the actions of the priests and add a precise timetable of a relevant act. They bring a short description of each step and introduce numbers of photographs regarding their description.

The core of the book consists of 140 photographs in Parts I – IV (I. Priests, Utensils and Preparations, II. Preliminary Rites, III. Main Rites, IV. Concluding Rites). The photographs in great detail prove each moment and step in the sacrifice. Under each photograph there is a text describing and explaining a relevant act. Some texts include references to relevant Vedic texts. Attention is also paid to deviations from these texts and to practices borrowed from some other tradition. Occasionally mantras and formulas recited by the brahman are introduced, sometimes in Sanskrit with an English translation (e.g. p. 73, 80), but in other cases only in the English version (e.g. p. 74, 81, 112, 114) or the Sanskrit version (e.g. p. 119, 137). It should be uniform.

The description of individual acts during the ritual includes the Sanskrit terminology. It is used also in the comments on photographs, for instance in denomination of sacrificial fires or of utensils used during the ritual. The understanding of Sanskrit terms is enabled by photographs in Part I where also photographs, names and functions of the participating priests are included. A plan of the fire places and the position of individual participants in the ritual enables the reader to better understand the sacrificial place.

The book is completed by a Foreword by C. G. Kashikar, a Bibliography including texts and translations and several secondary sources, and an Index.

The authors have prepared an interesting book which fulfills well defined objectives: to record a fire ritual, which has become almost obsolete in contemporary India, to enable people who have no opportunity to observe such an ritual to better understand its performance and individual steps and also to contribute to deeper knowledge of Vedic religion. A large number of photographs (140) minutely proving the text can be considered a main specificity and contribution of the book.

Anna Ráková

MALEČKOVÁ, Jitka: *Úrodná půda: Žena ve službách národa* (Fertile Soil: Women Serve the Nation). ISV nakladatelství, Praha, 2002, 242 pp.

Only recently have academic scientists started to pay a greater attention to the gender issue in connection with nation forming and identity building. The case of the Turkish gender issue in the late Ottoman Empire represents no exception, even though it offers an extremely interesting field for scientific research.

The Fertile soil joins the up to date and so far not well-examined theme and offers a unique view of the place ascribed to women in the discussions of male intellectuals during the process of identity building and nation formation in the late Ottoman Empire and six other countries namely Russia, Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Italy and Greece marked as “margins of Europe”. These six countries faced problems similar to those of the Ottoman Empire and on this ground they represent a comparative context in this book, which strives to provide an answer to the question of how women were included in or excluded from the newly created image of national society.

To understand this process Malečková created a nontraditional comparative context and adopted an analytical method for the study of the Ottoman history, nation and gen-

der, which required analysis of a large amount of books and articles about women and the "women question", essays on the state of the nation, political tractates and national programmes, synthesis of national histories, novels, dramas and poetry.

To be systematically argued and presented the book is divided into five chapters. The first chapter gives an overview of the history of the Ottoman Empire with focus on the reforms of the 19th century, the birth of the intellectuals and their interest in the women question. The second part of the first chapter shows how the marginalization of the societies representing the comparative context in this book emerged in the post-Enlightenment Europe and develops the phenomenon of "the other" often used by state to define itself against other states.

In case of the Ottoman Empire and countries at the margins of Europe the other states were represented by Western Europe. On the other hand Western Europe considered these countries to be its other and defined itself against them. This phenomenon was also used by men to define themselves against women (at that time often considered biologically less developed). The last part of the chapter gives a short overview of discussions about women in Western Europe, which Ottoman and other intellectuals at margins of Europe referred to in their own discussions.

While the first chapter represents a fact-finding overview the four core chapters of the book discuss four aspects of the discourses on women. Chapter two, *Mirror of the Present*, explains why the place of women in the Ottoman society was of such importance in the discussions of men. In the first part of the chapter the question is partially answered by showing the image of women in the discourses as the symbol and cause of the backwardness of the Ottoman Empire. This image was shared by all parts of the intellectual spectrum with Ottomanists, Turkists and Islamists differing only in the way to solve the problem. The second part follows the discourses similar to those of Ottoman intellectuals in the countries at the margins of Europe. In the last part the discussions are compared and the chapter concludes with an assertion that even though the intellectuals might have not agreed on the cause of the current place of women or on the same approach to the solution of this problem, all of them considered the unsatisfactory position of woman in society to be the cause and symbol of backwardness, political oppression or the lack of national independence.

Chapter three, *Dream of the future*, represents the second aspect of discourses on women. The intellectuals seeing women as the cause of backwardness of the society started to meditate how to solve the joyless situation of women (and society). Out of these discussions new images of women and their roles began to emerge. The first two parts of this chapter show the conceptions of the ideal woman and her tasks in the Ottoman Empire and at the margins of Europe respectively. The third part as well as the whole chapter can be summed up into the conclusion, which Malečková wrote, borrowing the expression "fertile soil" from the Ottoman intellectual Semseddin Sami and "flexible sprout" from V. Jaroslavský, to show, what the discussions in the above-mentioned countries had in common.

All the intellectuals, Malečková explains, dreamt of women, "whose minds would be mouldable as the soil and flexible as the sprout and who could be filled by suitable thoughts and be disposed towards the right ideals. Women would devolve these thoughts and ideals on the next generations on which the future of society depends. These thoughts and ideals could include any of the needs of the society, for example, nationalism, modernization of society and keeping of the tradition." From examples of discourses we can see that, as Malečková concludes, "the intervention of a male agent was always necessary, to sow the right seeds into the soil and bend the sprout in a desirable way."

Chapter four, *Myths of the Past*, analyses the aspect of the discourses on women concerning the relationship between women and history. The first part describes how the Ottoman historiography changed throughout the 19th century from the history of the Ottoman Empire to the history of the Turks and how a myth of the “golden age”, in which women had an important place, started to appear in the discourses of both the Islamists and Turkists/Westernists. Islamists were stressing the period of the birth of Islam as the golden age, because according to them this was the time when the place of women in society was ideal. Turkist/Westernist intellectuals were stressing the pre-Islam period when Turkish women were considered equal to men and were most emancipated.

The second part shows how women were incorporated into the newly constructed national history at the margins of Europe. While in two countries the history was interpreted as the development from barbarism to progress emphasizing the poor conditions of women in the early ages, in four other countries the conception prevailed of a golden age emphasizing equality or virtues of women in the early ages. The last part provides an answer to the question what the reasons were for the connection of women with the birth of the nation and what these images served.

In Chapter Five, *The image of the Other*, contradictions in discourses on women are discussed. It describes the view on women at the margins of Europe in terms of the conception of “the other”. It analyses how women were considered to be “the other” in the societies, which themselves represented “the other” in Western European societies and in those which defined themselves against Western Europe. The first part deals with the image of women in the Ottoman Empire representing either the obstruction to the progress or the threat to tradition. The second part shows how the intellectuals at the margins of Europe understood emancipation. For some of them it meant equality, for some of them it meant difference.

The last part joins the results from the above-mentioned discussions together. On the ground of these results we can see that most of the intellectuals responded with their visions to the needs of the society and had no concrete conception of what the place of women in the society should be. The contradictions can be traced within the works of one author. Even the advocates of female emancipation often criticized women for their laziness, passivity, uneducation or small interest in the national issues and at the same time they often criticized women with an excessive emancipation and imitating the Western lifestyle, they used to emphasize their biological difference and the tasks of women resulting from it or to label excessively educated and active women as monsters.

*The Fertile Soil* is a very well argued and balanced case study and for specialists as well as for laymen there is much to be learned. The book is intended for everyone who would like to get acquainted with the birth of the gender issue not only in the Ottoman Empire, but also in our own and other countries at the margins of Europe. It analyses discourses on women in the period of nation formation in the Ottoman Empire and at the margins of Europe and reveals the attitudes of men towards the place of women in different periods of identity building.

The Slovak reader can familiarize himself or herself with the attitudes towards the place of women of intellectuals such as Štúr, Hurban, Homola or Vajanský and compare their opinions with the views of other intellectuals from the margins of Europe, which makes this book unique not only in our country. Moreover this book offers excellent materials which give us an opportunity to realize that even though the attitude towards women has dramatically changed since the 19th century some conceptions created in

that period have survived and as Malečková claims “we still live surrounded by a number of myths, which we inherited from the period of national ideology formation”.

Miroslava Darnadyová

SORBY, Karol R.: *Suez 1956. Súmrak tradičného kolonializmu na Blízkom východe (Suez 1956. The Dawn of Traditional Colonialism in the Near East)*. Bratislava, VEDA Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied 2003. 347 pp. ISBN 80-224-0782-8.

In this monograph the author presents a succession of analyses of relevant sources that move forward our recent knowledge of the Suez Crisis, one of the milestones of top importance not merely in the history of modern Egypt, but also, in a much wider sense, in the history of Western colonialism. The Napoleonic invasion of Egypt, more than two centuries ago, set in motion processes between East and West, processes marked by confrontation much more than by cooperation, which still dominate global political perspectives with constantly varying scenes, names of winners and losers. The Suez Crisis, when choosing the term out of the set of competitive names, like Kadesh Operation, Suez Campaign or Suez War, differs from the never-ending routine clashes in the troubled area of the Near or rather Middle East at least in one significant point. The difference lies in the reversal of respective positions occupied by the invaders and the invaded with respect to the outcome of the conflict: the invaders, usually victorious, suffered here a humiliating defeat, while the invaded emerged from the crisis as victors and winners of the world's sympathy and moral support.

The roots of the crisis extend back to the fall of the Egyptian monarchy in 1952 and the new style of policies adopted by the republican government. The anti-Egyptian alliance between two European powers, the United Kingdom and France, and Israel, stimulated by their economic and trading interests in the Suez Canal, was a direct response to the nationalization of the Suez Canal by the Egyptian president Gamāl Abdannāšir (Gamal Abdul Nasser of the Western media) on July 26, 1956.

Sorby's narrative of the crisis sheds new light on a number of ambiguously interpreted facts and, in some cases, like the Western policies towards financing the High Dam and Egypt's turn to the Soviet Union, the purchase of weapons from the East, etc., etc., the author reexamines the critical relationship between causes (or what is presented as such) and their consequences, real or imaginary.

The monograph consists of six chronologically arranged chapters:

- (1) The Near East in the context of World Politics, 1945 – 1954;
- (2) Egypt between the withdrawal agreement and the purchase of weapons from the East, 11/1954 – 9/1955;
- (3) Weapons and the High Dam, 10/1955 – 2/1956;
- (4) The road to nationalization of the Suez Canal, 3/1956 – 7/1956;
- (5) The nationalization of the Suez Canal, 7/1956 – 9/1956;
- (6) The useless search for a peaceful settlement, 9/1956 – 10/1956.

The book offers a well-documented comprehensive picture of the Suez Crisis, its evolution, climax and its unexpected outcome and aftermath: the United Kingdom and France lost most of their influence in the Middle East; the Suez Crisis overtly signals the dissolution of the British colonial and imperial power.