

BOOK REVIEW

SORBY, Karol R. *Arabský východ po druhej svetovej vojne, 1945 – 1970* [The Arab East After World War II, 1945 – 1970], Vol. II, Bratislava: Slovak Academic Press, 2018, 842 pp. ISBN 978-80-89607-65-5

With the publications of the Slovak historian and Arabist Prof. PhDr. Karol Sorby, DrSc., dedicated to modern and contemporary history of the Middle East, we have met regularly since the late 1990s. I have known colleague Sorby since the beginning of the 1980s, when in 1981 he successfully defended his PhD dissertation in the Historical Institute of Slovak Academy of Sciences, a thesis which he later published first in Slovak and then in an English version. Colleague Sorby already belonged to the group of prominent Slovak Arabists. Prof. Sorby had all the qualifications for successful publication results: in addition to an excellent knowledge of the Arabic language and other important languages, he spent several years in Arab countries, especially in Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. He spent five years (1993 – 1997) in Iraq, where he served as Head of the Slovak diplomatic service. He took advantage of these visits to build up a large heuristic base for his extensive scientific activity and established himself not only as a leading expert in the contemporary history of the Middle East, but also in the history of international relations.

I came into contact with his main publication activity as a reviewer of his work, which includes extensive monographs, namely *The Egyptian Revolution of 1952* (1998), *Egypt. The Period of Political Anarchy, 1801 – 1805* (2003), *Suez 1956. The Twilight of Traditional Colonialism in the Near East* (2003), *The Arab East, 1945 – 1958* (2005), *The Near East in International Politics, 1918 – 1945* (2009), (2010) and *The Arab East, 1918 – 1945* (2013). Professor Sorby's monographs have a high scientific and professional quality; they constitute a methodical contribution and undoubtedly provide necessary and useful information to historians, politicians, diplomats and people from business circles. His work is also a huge repository of detailed information, containing not only factual accounts in the text, but also thorough bibliographies, biographies and maps. Professor Sorby, who consistently works with Arab sources, is a master of detail and a reliable source of accurate transcriptions of Arabic proper and geographic names and terms. Undoubtedly, he has already surpassed the dreamed-of goal of Arabists and historians in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, to supersede the classic work of the great Czech historian Karel Durman *The Middle East in World Politics, 1918 – 1959* published in 1966.

Professor Sorby's book is a very extensive synthesis of the Arab East after the Second World War. In this Volume II (1959 – 1970), the author makes use not only of his previous works, but in a way he is also continuing the above-mentioned monograph by Karel Durman. In this book the author completes a long period of preparation during which he presented the partial results of his research mainly in the form of scholarly

articles. This monograph makes available to experts and a wider public, not only in Slovakia but also in countries where Slovak is understood and especially in the Czech Republic, the results of the author's research activities. Karol R. Sorby uses a rich heuristic base in his work: The list of sources and secondary literature used testifies to the author's exceptionally wide scope and is a reliable guide to further research both for scholars and other interested persons. In particular, it is important to appreciate the work not only with Arab sources, but also with the rich secondary literature in Arabic. In the foreword and introduction, the author presents the objectives and structure of his work, outlines the main trends in the political development of the Middle East in the period studied, as well as the international context of this development. Research on the development of Arab countries of the Middle East in the period between the emergence of the United Arab Republic in February 1958 and the death of Egyptian President Jamāl 'Abd an-Nāṣir in September 1970 is still relevant to the present-day situation.

The author has divided the monograph into six major chapters, further broken down into subchapters. For his interpretation, he has preferred Professor Durman's time-tested method, which he already used in the first part of his synthesis devoted to the period 1945 – 1958. This method follows the development of the region as a whole in individual time periods, which are then broken down into the country's interpretation of the development. This allows a more synthetic view than in the case of a parallel interpretation of the development in specific Arab states over a longer time sequence.

The first chapter is focused on the period 1959 – 1960, when the region was dominated by the emergence of the United Arab Republic by uniting Egypt and Syria. This significantly influenced political development especially in Iraq, where there was a revolutionary military coup in July 1958. Subsequent developments led to a clash between adherents of independence and proponents of the connection of Iraq to the United Arab Republic, culminating in the Mosul rebellion. Lebanon, where a short civil war took place, sought new political and, in particular, economic stability. The Jordanian monarchy also found itself under the shadow of President 'Abd an-Nāṣir. The second chapter, covering the period 1961 – 1962, analyses the consequences of the breakup of the United Arab Republic for internal political development not only in Egypt itself, but also in the whole region, including the Arabian Peninsula, where a revolutionary military coup was conducted in Yemen and a national liberation struggle began in South Yemen. The period 1963 – 1964, analysed in the third chapter, when new Pan-Arab approaches were formed under the leadership of the Egyptian president, was also characterised by instability in individual states, epitomized by a series of both successful and abortive military coups. In the context of internal development, Egypt followed the socialist path, and in its foreign policy it used a new instrument in the form of summit conferences of Arab heads of state. It was notably here that the revival of the Palestinian question as the central issue of Arab policy took shape. The fourth chapter is devoted to this development in the years 1965 – 1966 and deals with the deepening of divisions between Arabs in a situation where a fatal armed conflict with Israel loomed on the horizon. However, turbulent internal political developments in Syria and Iraq, as well as the civil war in Yemen, weakened the united Arab approach to the solution of the urgent issues. The Six-Day War in June 1967 itself and its consequences are the topic of the fifth chapter. This part of the synthesis is seemingly relatively short, but it

should be emphasized that the author has covered this topic thoroughly in the above-mentioned monograph on June 1967. The consequences of the crushing defeat of the Arab armies are felt to this day. The last chapter includes the period 1968 – 1970, when efforts were made to solve the consequences of catastrophic defeat. A significant part of this chapter is devoted to the diplomatic struggle at the UN, which resulted in the adoption of a compromise Security Council resolution 242/1967. The aftermath of the six-day war was the Ba‘thist coup in Iraq in July 1968, the short Jordanian civil war known as the “Black September” of 1970, as well as Ḥāfīz al-Assad’s coming to power in Syria in November 1970. The tragic symbolic closure of this period was the sudden death of the Egyptian president Jamāl ‘Abd an-Nāṣir on 28 September 1970.

The second part of the book *The Arab East after World War II (1959 – 1970)* meets all requirements for a monograph of this nature. The author in his even-handed and well-researched work has used Arab sources to an extent unparalleled in Central European historiography. His balanced account is insightful, often fascinating, always judicious and readable. Professor Sorby’s book presents a qualitative and original enrichment of our historical literature, and in addition to that of specialists in the given areas, it will be certainly hold the interest of wider professional circles. The monograph under review is an excellent historical synthesis, which is greatly superior to the level of treatment of similar themes concerning modern Arab history.

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