

SORBY, Karol Jr. *Iraq during the Reign of King Ghāzī (1933 – 1939)*. Studia orientalia monographica, Volume 9. Bratislava: Slovak Academic Press, 2020, 128 p. ISBN 978-80-89607-94-5

Publications by the Slovak historian and Arabist PhDr. Karol Sorby, Ph.D. Jr. have regularly appeared since the time when the author defended his Ph.D. dissertation in the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. I came into contact with his broad publication activity as a reviewer of his work, which includes extensive monographs, namely as editor of *Arabi, islām a výzvy modernej doby* [Arabs, Islam, and the Challenges of the Modern Age], 2007, *Arabský svet v premenách času* [The Arab World Through Time], 2009, co-author of *Blízky východ v medzinárodnej politike (1971 – 1990)* [The Middle East in International Politics, (1971 – 1990)] 2011, and as the author of *Iraqi Politics in the Shadow of the Military (1936 – 1941)*, 2014, and *Dejiny irackej monarchie (1918 – 1941)* [The History of the Iraqi Monarchy (1918 – 1941)], 2017. Dr. Sorby's monographs are of a high scholarly and professional standard, they constitute a methodical contribution, undoubtedly provide necessary and useful information to historians, politicians, and diplomats. Dr. Sorby consistently works with Arab sources and is a reliable source of accurate transcriptions of Arabic proper and geographical names and terms.

The subject of the peer-reviewed monograph *Iraq During the Reign of King Ghāzī (1933 – 1939)* is still highly topical. It covers the history of Iraq in the 1930s, when Europe experienced a crisis and the demise of the Versailles system of balance of power, associated with Hitler's rise to power in Germany, Italy's military-political activity in North and East Africa, and the efforts of the colonial powers, Britain and France, to strengthen their positions in the Middle East through alliance agreements. The beginnings of a political culture were emerging in Iraq at this time, which were to be typical of later developments. There was the first classic military coup in the Arab world, which for the next thirty or more years became a typical method of military officers for intervening in the political destinies of their countries. In addition, foreign policy issues first emerged then in Iraq, leading to conflicts with neighbouring countries. Initially, attention was focused on border issues with neighbouring Iran, especially in the area of the Shaṭṭ al-ʿArab river. The dispute was submitted to the League of Nations at the end of 1934, which recommended direct negotiations between the two states. King Ghāzī's involvement in neighbouring Kuwait, which he wanted to annex following the example of Hitler's annexation of Austria, raised British concerns. Kuwait used to be called the "Iraqi Sudetenland" in official propaganda.

From the outset, it is clear that the author is a highly erudite specialist, a historian who speaks Arabic and is able to work with the sources and the literature in this language. The author uses a rich heuristic base in this work: the list of sources used and literature consulted testifies to the extremely wide scope of the author and is a reliable guide for further research. The work not only with Arabic sources but also with the literature in Arabic should be especially appreciated. In the preface, the author criticizes the sources and the literature used. The consistent and highly reliable scientific transcription of Arabic personal names should also be appreciated. The genealogy of the

Hashemite dynasty and the composition of the Iraqi governments in the period under review, which are part of the appendix, serve as a helpful guide.

In the introduction, the author discusses the formation of the Iraqi state after the First World War and during the reign of King Fayṣal. The work is divided into six chapters. The author has succeeded in bringing to light new facts in the subject of his research even in a relatively limited space and on a familiar topic. The author is a master of detail and at the same time he knows how to focus on key periods and key events. The first, second and third chapters deal with the turbulent domestic political situation after the accession of King Ghāzī to the throne, from 1933 to 1939.

The fourth and fifth chapters are very useful ones, in which the author deals with the military coup of October 1936 under General Bakr Ṣidqī and traces subsequent political developments inspired by the wave of Iraqi nationalism until the assassination of Bakr Ṣidqī in August 1937 and the subsequent resignation of the Prime Minister Hikmat Sulaymān. In addition to activating leftist forces, domestic chaos in Iraq led to new political methods and forms of political culture. The initiative was seized by the Iraqi army, which in 1936 was the first to launch a period of military coups in the Arab world. Anti-British officers joined forces with the Ahālī reform group to seize power in the country. General Bakr Ṣidqī decided to march on Baghdad, following the example of Mussolini's march on Rome. The popular Minister of Defence, Jaʿfar al-ʿAskarī, set out on his own to meet the approaching troops. However, he was captured and shot dead. Prominent politicians such as Nūrī as-Saʿīd, Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī and Yāsīn al-Hāshimī were completely taken by surprise by the development and fled abroad. The new government was formed by Hikmat Sulaymān, who promised a range of measures from tax reform and industrial support to the distribution of state land to the peasants and the settlement of the Bedouins. However, the dictatorial rule of Hikmat Sulaymān soon lost all public sympathy. On 11 August 1937, General Bakr Ṣidqī was assassinated at Moṣul airport by a pro-British non-commissioned officer. The Moṣul garrison then declared an uprising against the government, and Hikmat Sulaymān resigned. The historical significance of the military coup was the removal of the government of moderate nationalists who maintained a balance between pan-Arabism and Iraqi patriotism, the military becoming a new factor in the country's political life, and the reformists gaining the opportunity to carry out their programme for the first time.

In the last chapter the author analyses the political development of the country in the period before the outbreak of World War II, when the reins of power were held by supporters of Great Britain. The military, represented by a group of "seven officers" united by Sunni descent, a pan-Arab vision of a future Iraq, and a belief in the need for a firm hand and discipline, remained a persistent factor in Iraqi politics. The first "troika" was pro-British, while the other four colonels, who formed the famous "golden square", were anti-British. Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī, and also King Ghāzī himself sympathized with the officer "four". In their anti-British attitudes, however, they objectively supported growing pro-German and pro-fascist tendencies. The situation in Iraq was also exacerbated by the presence of political emigrants from other Arab countries, especially Syria and Palestine. The central figure of the pro-fascist forces in Iraq was the grand mufti of Jerusalem, al-Ḥājj Amīn al-Ḥusaynī, who launched a hateful anti-British campaign.

The domestic political event that shook public opinion was the mysterious fatal accident of King Ghāzī on April 3, 1939, a monarch who enjoyed considerable popularity among the ordinary people. The king allegedly “died in a car accident”. On a straight road, with a shattered skull, he was found in the wreckage of a car that crashed into a telegraph pole. In response, the British consul, George Monk-Mason, was assassinated by an enraged mob in Mosul on the balcony of the consulate. The king was generally believed to have been “silenced” as a result of a conspiracy by Nūrī as-Sa‘īd and British secret agents. It was common knowledge that the King of Iraq was not well liked in London due to his pro-German sympathies. A statement by the British ambassador before the “fateful ride” saying that “the monarch must either be checked or deposed” became public knowledge. During the funeral procession, the crowd chanted, “You will pay for Ghāzī’s blood, Nūrī!”

The work *Iraq During the Reign of King Ġāzī (1933 – 1939)* meets all the requirements for a monograph of this nature. The monograph under review is an excellent historical work, which exceeds the current level of research on the subject of Arab countries and will undoubtedly be included in the broader scholarly research on the history of the Middle East in the 20th century.

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