

BUCKOVA, Martina et al. *Reflexia mytologických motívov v duchovnej a materiálnej kultúre národov Ázie, Afriky a Oceánie* [Reflections on Mythological Motifs in the Spiritual and Material Culture of Nations of Asia, Africa and Oceania]. Bratislava: Ústav orientalistiky SAV, Igor Iliť – RádioPrint, 2019. 272 pp. ISBN 978-80-89867-04-2

Myths are the first attempts to explain the laws of nature and to answer questions about the origins of the world. Mythological beings and creatures are part of humanity's cultural heritage. This book introduces the myths of the ancient Middle East and the Far East, such as Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, China, Japan, Oceania and the Caucasus. Slovak studies of religion focused on Oceania have had a long and glorious tradition since the first books of Viktor Krupa. This book follows in the footsteps of this tradition by presenting myths and legends of different cultures.

The region of the Middle East is the subject of several studies. Lukáš Pecha in *Politití bohové a božskí politici. Náboženská politika ve staroveké Mesopotamii* [Political Gods and Divine Politics. Religion and Politics in Ancient Mesopotamia] (pp. 3 – 24) writes about the relations between the deities and their relations to politics, which used to be very close: some rulers were considered as the descendants of the gods or they were deified during their lives. He explains the role of the Mesopotamian pantheon and its influence on the political system. Veronika Dubcová in *Egyptské hrošie božstvá a ich vzťah k božstvám a mytologickým postavám starovekého Orientu a východného Stredomoria* [Egyptian Hippopotamus Deities and their Relationship to the Deities and Mythological Figures of the Ancient Orient and Eastern Mediterranean] (pp. 178 – 215), explains the role of mythological hippopotamus deities, which were popular in the pharaonic period of Egypt. The author compares them to similar deities and demons in nearby countries and regions of the Middle East, but also to those in the Minoan and Mycenaean cultures. She examines their forms and their functions in different countries. In the study *Džinovia v arabskej a islámskej mytológii a teológii* [The Role of Jinn in Arabic and Islamic Mythology and Theology] (pp. 216 – 242) by Alžbeta Szomolaiová, the author examines the existence of jinn in religious texts, such as Koran and pre-islamic literature, myths, legends, fictions, and poetry, from ancient times up to the 19th century. She explains the belief in jinn as a feature of popular belief in Arabic regions, which is difficult to understand from the rational Western point of view.

The Far East, in particular China and Japan, is presented by the studies of Daniela Zhang Cziráková, Ľubica Obuchová, Ivan V. R. Rumánek and Zuzana Kubovčáková. Zhang Cziráková in *Drak ako symbol čínskej národnej identity, jeho symbolika a zobrazovanie v čínskom umení, úvod do problematiky* [The Dragon as a Symbol of Chinese National Identity, its Symbolism and its Depiction in Chinese Art: An Introduction to the Topic] (pp. 25 – 59) introduces the role of the dragon in Chinese culture, its symbolism and the position of the dragon in China. The author explains the positive role of the dragon as a deity in ancient history, its status as a symbol of the emperor. She describes its image in Beijing's historic monuments, as well as its role as a symbol of the identity of the Chinese nation in recent history. The study *Čínsky vesmírny program a mytologické názvoslovie* [The Chinese Space Programme and its Mythological Names] by Ľubica Obuchová (pp. 78 – 111) is concerned with the

Chinese space programme, which during the 1990s started to use the names of mythological heroes, creatures and myths connected to space, notably the moon, but also other legends, for example, the legendary first Chinese astronaut from the Ming dynasty. She explains the connections between the space programme and propaganda in the early decades and introduces us to a new shift towards mythology in the names of space ships and rockets. Ivan R. V. Rumánek in his study *Relevant Borei a jeho vítanie ako návštevníka marebito v ranom kabuki manuskriptov Okuni Sóši* [The Return of a Spirit and its Welcome as a Visitor in the Early Kabuki Manuscripts of Okuni Soshi] (pp. 60 – 77), presents the phenomenon of the spirit of a dead person (*borei*) and visitor (*marebito*) in four Japanese dramas by Okuni Soshi in its historical background. He analyzes and translates the parts of dramas where the *borei* appears. Zuzana Kubovčáková in her study *Zvieratá v japonských mýtoch a legendách* [Animals in Japanese Myths and Legends] (pp.112 – 143) presents the myths in ancient Japanese chronicles, especially legends about deities, demons and animals, such as snakes and birds. Some legends are of Shinto origin; some have their roots in Buddhism.

The region of Polynesia is presented in the study *Mýtickí staviteľia v Polynézii. Analýza mýtov o 'trpasličích ľuďoch'* [Mythical Builders in Polynesia. An Analysis of Myths about “Dwarf People”] written by Martina Bucková (pp. 144 – 177). The author analyses the myths of “dwarf people” in the Polynesian islands, as they are mentioned in the Hawaiian islands. According to some legends, they are the ancestors of Polynesians. It is not sure if they are entirely mythological creatures, as there were some skeletons found in 2003. There are myths about their building skills. Sometimes there are mentions of love stories or marriages between them and other people living on the islands.

Apart from the typical legendary deities and creatures, some myths are quite unusual. In the Caucasian region there is a cult of some diseases, as described in the study *Kult kiahní a iných nákazlivých chorôb u kaukazských národov* [The Cult of Smallpox and Other Contagious Diseases in Caucasian Nations] by Beata Čierniková (pp. 243 – 254). The author presents the belief in the cult of contagious diseases, which developed between nations living in that area. Apart from vaccination and conventional healing methods, they were trying to please the deity of smallpox with music, flowers, and even theatre performances, avoiding showing fear and sorrow. Rituals as a part of everyday life are typical of Indian culture, too. Helena Hadvigová, in her study *Samsára – hinduistické prechodové rituály. Výklad základných pojmov a popis jednotlivých rituálov v životnom cycle hinduistu* [Samsara – Hinduist Transition Rituals. An Explanation of the Basic Concepts and a Description of the Individual Rituals in the Life Cycle of a Hindu] (pp. 255 – 268) introduces the individual rituals of *samsara*, which can be translated as a sacrament, the endless cycle of life and rebirth. She explains the different kinds of *samsara*, its cultural meaning, importance, and the changes in social status after every ritual. The author takes a closer look at the final one, a funeral.

The book is an exciting presentation of the beliefs, myths, legends and rituals in various places of the world. It gives the reader a precious opportunity to reach a deeper understanding of the cultural heritage of the regions concerned. It can be useful for students of religion as an overview of different myths, which can be compared to each

other, in the time horizon from ancient times to the present. It is possible to observe similarities and the differences between the regions. It presents a valuable opportunity to understand legends and mythological creatures, which can be very interesting for people doing cultural studies. Since it is written in Slovak, it is accessible both to the general public in Slovakia and in the Czech Republic, where there has been considerable interest in mythology since the time of Vojtech Zamarovský. I believe that students from other disciplines will also find much useful and exciting information in this book that will broaden their horizons.

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SORBY, Karol R. *Arabský východ po druhej svetovej vojne, I. diel (1945 – 1958)* [The Arab East after World War II (1945 – 1958)]. Bratislava: Ústav orientalistiky, Slovenská akadémia vied, 2020, 872 pp. ISBN 978-80-89607-88-4

The publications of the Slovak historian and Arabist Prof. PhDr. Karol Sorby, DrSc. have been dedicated to the modern and contemporary history of the Middle East since the late 1990s. In 1981 he successfully defended his PhD dissertation in the Historical Institute of Slovak Academy of Sciences, which he later published first in Slovak and then in an English-language version. Colleague Sorby already belonged to the prominent Slovak Arabists. Prof. Sorby had all the preconditions for successful publication results, in addition to an excellent knowledge of Arabic and other major languages, he spent several years in Arab countries, especially in Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. He spent five years in Iraq (1993 – 1997), where he served as Head of the Slovak diplomatic services. He took advantage of these visits to build 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 broad range of publications as a reviewer of his work, which includes extensive monographs, namely *Egyptská revolúcia 1952* [The Egyptian Revolution of 1952], 1998, *Egypt. The Period of Political Anarchy, 1801 – 1805*, 2003, *Suez 1956. Súmrak tradičného kolonializmu na Blízkom východe* [Suez 1956. The Twilight of Traditional Colonialism in the Middle East], 2003, *Arabský východ (1945 – 1958)* [The Arab East, 1945 – 1958], 2005, *Blízky východ v medzinárodnej politike (1918 – 1945)* [The Middle East in International Politics, 1918–1945], 2009, *Jun 1967. Šesť dní, ktoré zmenili Blízky východ*. [June 1967. Six Days that Changed the Middle East], 2010, *Blízky východ v medzinárodnej politike (1971 – 1990)* [The Middle East in International Politics, 1918–1945], 2011, *Arabský východ (1918 – 1945)* [The Arab East, 1918 – 1945], 2013, and *Arabský východ po druhej svetovej vojne, II. diel (1959 – 1970)* [The Arab East after World War II, 1959–1970], 2018. The monographs of