

book is the first of its kind in Slovak and Czech historiography and will certainly be a great contribution to experts in the field of the historical development of the Middle East and students of international relations as well as the wider reading public.

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SORBY, Karol R., SORBY, Karol Jr. *Blízky východ v medzinárodnej politike (1971 – 1990)* [The Middle East in International Politics (1971 – 1990)]. Bratislava: EKONÓM Publishing House, 2011. 266 p. ISBN 978-80-225-3227-3. In Slovak.

In the present day, the Near and Middle East is again a very often mentioned part of the world. The year 2011 seems to be a new turning point in the history of the Arab and Islamic world: people in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and other countries lost their fear of the despotic regimes which oppressed them and kept them in abject poverty, and got onto the streets and squares to demand the removal of these corrupt regimes and the introduction of essential political and social changes.

In recent years we can observe in the Czech Republic as well as in Slovakia a slight increase in the number of scholarly works dealing with historical developments in Asia and Africa. It is encouraging that the Arab world, i.e. the Middle East and North Africa, are becoming the subject of more intensive scholarly attention. The Faculty of International Relations at the University of Economics in Bratislava is one of the educational establishments constantly broadening its range of study programmes in this domain.

This work sums up the results of the authors' research treating the above specified period of Arab history which has published in Slovak and English in several scholarly journals in the course of the last decade. The notable Slovak Arabist and historian in the book under revision takes into consideration all the crucial components of the 20-year development of this turbulent region and presents it in a balanced complex structure. In the respective chapters he deals with developments in Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. The monograph is properly completed with three chapters by his son, also an Arabist and historian, Karol Sorby Jr., who follows the situation in Iraq of Aḥmad Ḥasan al-Bakr and Ṣaddām Ḥusayn in the 1970s and explains the roots of the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s. He continues this narrative in the last chapter, where he tries to give a balanced picture of the origins and course of the Gulf Crisis in 1990 which ended in the First Gulf War.

The turning points in the development of nations, states or regions can always be a matter of feverish discussion between scholars. I am convinced that the year 1970 in the history of the Middle East was extremely important as it brought a radical change in political direction. Whereas the 1950s and 1960s were an era of revolutionary upheaval and forming of society on the lines of secular nationalism and "Arab" socialism, the beginning of the 1970s brought about a turning point. The decisive events leading to this change were the crushing defeat of the revolutionary Arab regimes in the Six-Day War of 1967 and the untimely death of Egyptian President Jamāl ʿAbd an-Nāṣir, the most distinctive personality of modern Arab history and a champion of Arab nationalism and Arab unity. The second turning point in the book is the crisis and the war in the Gulf in

1990, after which the “Pax Americana” began in the Middle East.

We can agree with the authors that with the passing of Jamāl ʿAbd an-Nāsir Egypt lost a man who had influenced in a decisive way the course of political events in the Middle East for more than fifteen years. He succeeded to a great extent in putting Egypt at the centre of three important circles – the Arab, Islamic and African – as he predicted in his booklet “The Philosophy of the Revolution”. The real heritage of the “nāṣirist” revolution which influenced even the farthest corners of the Arab homeland was not only the removal of social differences with the elimination of the feudal and *haute bourgeois* strata, agrarian reform, progress in the industrialization of the country and the building of the High Aswan Dam, but above all he gave the Egyptians a feeling of dignity and pride. His death changed the balance of power in the Arab world and in Egypt, where for fifteen years he ruled the country and made all major political decisions (pp. 14 – 15).

The clear conception of the work is manifested in the division of chapters and their well-balanced nature while preserving the main line of analysis. A consistent chronological approach supports the overall survey. Two analytical chapters have been added to the narrative: the first, named “Islam and the National State”, explains the relation between Islam and the nation state, which is extremely important for understanding differences between the Orient and Occident. The second chapter, “The Roots of Militant Islam in the Middle East”, provides for a better understanding of religious radicalism in the region. All chapters of the monograph emphasize the international political aspects of the development of individual Arab countries in the given period. The monograph is divided into eight chapters with an introduction and conclusion.

The process in different countries of the Middle East where the permanent presence of international relations is secured by two important elements – oil and Israel – is beginning to unfold. Through the prism of these elements it is necessary to analyse the political and economic development of the region in the last two decades of the Cold War between the superpowers. In the background, regional, inter-Arab, religious and sectarian conflicts were also taking place. They were also substantially influenced by an irregular distribution of influence of social forces, when the acute problems of the time were meant to be solved by semi-feudal regimes which are still waiting for a bourgeoisie revolution with “revolutionary” regimes which were also totalitarian. The object of this work is the study of political and social developments and processes which took place in Arab-Muslim Near Eastern societies.

The discontinuities of the years from the early 1970s onward were strikingly evident in Egypt and Lebanon and in the effects that regional developments exercised on these two states. The new Egyptian president, Anwar as-Sādāt, endeavoured to break the diplomatic stalemate with Israel and to chart a new direction for the Egyptian economy with the “open door” policy. These steps represented a departure from his predecessor’s line, and marked a sharp and dramatic break from the goals of the 1952 Revolution (p. 168). In Lebanon the sectarian cooperation that characterized the country since independence collapsed in a wave of communal violence, and the state that had been the Arab world’s symbol of toleration and compromise was plunged into a bloody civil war that lasted for fifteen years (p. 116).

As for the Arabian Peninsula, the author pays attention to the royal family, especially to King Fayṣal. He argues that despite the overreaching presence and power of the royal family and its protectors, the institutionalization of power in Saudi Arabia remains very limited and that the regime fears a sudden uprising. He rightly shows that the enormous profits generated by the oil boom have created immense wealth for the ruling class and the state while widening the gap between them and the masses, who are becoming increasingly restless in this precarious situation. The client role of the Saudi state, dependent for survival on the USA, makes this unstable situation all the more volatile (p. 197).

Many events which we are witnessing today have their roots in the period analysed in this book. Arab politicians are often referring to these events; therefore we can hope that the reader could find enough material for the understanding of many developments. The authors in this work use a wide heuristic base – the list of used sources and literature points to an extraordinary understanding of all issues related to the subject and this can be a guarantee of an eloquent and undistorted interpretation of events. It is important to appreciate the precise and very reliable scientific transliteration of Arab proper names.

The book *The Middle East in International Politics, 1971 – 1990* provides a reliable guide for further study for both scholars and students. In this even-handed and well-researched work, Arab sources were utilized to a level which is not common in Central European historiography. This balanced account is insightful, often fascinating, always judicious and readable. The monograph under review is an excellent historical work surpassing the standard level of works covering the same subject. It will undoubtedly find its place in the wider scientific research of Near Eastern history in the twentieth century.

Eduard GOMBÁR

RUMÁNEK, Ivan R.V. *Japonská dráma nó – žánr vo vývoji* [Japanese Noh Drama – a Genre in Development]. Bratislava: VEDA, 2010. 459 p. ISBN 978-80-224-1148-6. In Slovak.

The monograph offers a new approach to the classical Japanese noh drama. Instead of just listing the facts which are generally well-known from dozens of other publications in various languages throughout the world, it treats noh from the point of view of the course of time. This methodology has enabled the author to postulate on the internal processes in this powerful theatrical tradition and unveil the external mechanisms of political and social powers which exerted an influence on noh's ongoing formation over the course of centuries. At the end, the monograph even provides a prospect: an attempt at formulating the possibilities of noh's further development into the future. In this new approach, the book is definitely a contribution to both Japanese and theatre studies. It is written with expertise but in a readable style and its only drawback is that it is written in Slovak, which limits the scope of concern to the Slovak and Czech readership.

The book starts with a quotation by Vlasta Hilská, the founding figure of Japanese studies in the former Czecho-Slovakia, saying that Japanese theatre is at such a stage of