

BOOK REVIEWS

SORBY, Karol: *Blízky východ v medzinárodnej politike (1918 – 1945)*. (The Middle East in International Politics). Bratislava, EKONÓM Publishing House 2009. 186 pp. ISBN 978-80-2735-4.

At the start of the twenty-first century, we still live in a world that has not yet fully overcome the consequences of the fall of those once-mighty empires back in 1917 and 1918. The Balkan wars in the 1990s, the Gulf War in 1991, the invasion to Iraq in 2003, the endless Israeli-Palestinian dispute, can all be directly traced back to the gradual decline of the Ottoman Empire. This decline stretched from the year of Napoleon's successful attack on Egypt in 1798, to the defeat of the Turks in 1918. The ethnic problems that the peacemakers could not solve after the First World War did not end with the Allied victory in the Second, therefore we still live in a world created early in the twentieth century by Wilson, Lloyd George, Clemenceau, Orlando, and others.

Karol Sorby's previous monograph "The Arab East, 1945 – 1958" published in Bratislava in 2005, dealt in brief with the period between the two world wars in its introductory chapter. Already at that time many specialists felt, that the interwar period would need a new more detailed treatment. Karol Sorby, senior research fellow and director of the Institute of Oriental Studies at the Slovak Academy of Sciences, who also teaches at the Faculty of International Relations of the University of Economics in Bratislava, responded to this challenge and within the space provided by the Faculty prepared and published a new monograph "The Middle East in International Politics, 1918 – 1945". The author in this work substantially extended his previous introductory chapter by incorporating results of his recent research of history of the Arab East in the given period which were published in English and in Slovak in a number of scientific journals. Using a relatively limited space, he succeeded in bringing fresh facts to the researched subject. From the methodological point of view the author looks upon the development of the Arab society in the interwar period not only as a consequence of great powers' policy but also as a consequence of aspirations of the local political elites and inhabitants to gain a genuine independence.

The author divided his monograph into eight chapters. Following the introduction, where he analyses the defeat and fall of the Ottoman Empire, in the first chapter he deals with the matter of formation of the contemporary Arab East at the Peace conference in Paris in 1919 where the victorious powers divided the "Ottoman heritage". The voluntary retreat of the United States into isolation relieved Great Britain and France from the necessity to take into consideration the liberal principles of President Wilson which should give the peoples freed from the Ottoman supremacy the

right of self-determination. In that way most of the Arabs found themselves in a colonial dependency in form of "mandate administration".

In the second chapter the author analyses the foundations of British Middle Eastern policy. He points to the significance of the Cairo conference of 1921, where Winston Churchill, the British Secretary of State for the Colonies, laid concrete measures for application of practical policy towards the Arabs in the following period. The unequal treaties played the decisive role in this process, which helped the British to avoid the control from the League of Nations. Therefore monarchies had to be created in the regions under a mandate. While in Egypt the monarchy already existed, new ones were created in Iraq and in Transjordan.

In the third chapter the author deals with the French rule in the Levant where the French did not observe formal procedures like the British. In the summer of 1920 after a short military campaign they crushed the Syrian Arab Kingdom and turned Syria and Lebanon into colonies ruled by a French high commissioner. They cut parts of Syria and connected them to the former Mount Lebanon creating the so-called Great Lebanon in its contemporary boundaries. In connection with this subject, the author makes interesting insights into the regional development and gives an analysis of the Franco-British rivalry during the Second World War that accelerated the gaining of independence of Syria and Lebanon.

In the fourth chapter the author treats the British mandate in Palestine. In sanctioning the Balfour declaration in November 1917, where the British promised to use their best endeavours in establishing a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine, they clearly showed that the mandate system would not be applied without a bias. It was this peculiar circumstance which gave the Zionists the most favourable means of using the British government as an instrument through which they imposed their will on the Arabs and took the place of Arabs of Palestine as owners of the territories which now form the State of Israel.

The fifth chapter is dedicated to the formation of the statehood of Iraq which came to existence at the end of 1918. It was the result of the post-war settlement established on the stipulations of the Sykes-Picot Agreement of May 1916. With deep insight but in a plain and understandable way the author clarifies the complex situation in which an ethnically and religiously varying composition of population of the three former Ottoman provinces (Mosul, Baghdad and Basra) found itself. The author also pointed to the international circumstances that forestalled the establishment of an independent Kurdish state. Noteworthy are also the difficult road of the Iraqi society to a formally independent statehood and the role of the army in influencing the destiny of the monarchy.

The sixth chapter deals with the situation in the Arab peninsula. The nineteen-twenties were marked by the decline and fall of the Kingdom of Hejaz and the rise of the Saudi dynasty. The Saudi Emir (later King) Abdalaziz ibn Abdarrahan (1881–1953), who was better known in the West as Ibn Saud and who created the great Kingdom of Saudi Arabia played a decisive role in this process. On the background of political and social development of the country, the author did not forget to bring up the issue of oil search and oil production as a strategic raw material.

The seventh chapter highlights in detail the political development in Egypt and the

Sudan, two countries which likewise became objects of British imperial policy. The author follows the emancipation movement of the Egyptian society and explains the mutual relations of the so-called "the triangle of forces" which was formed by the British, the Egyptian King and the Wafd. He notices the rise of the first radical Islamic movement, the Muslim Brotherhood and its place in the Egyptian society. During the Second World War Egypt was an important centre for the British war effort and the war years became for the overwhelming majority of Egyptians a period of immense suffering. The development in the Sudan which was in the nineteenth century a part of Egypt and since 1899 an Anglo-Egyptian Condominium, was marked with ousting of the Egyptians from the country and transformation of the Sudan in a directly managed British colony.

In the eighth chapter the author gives an analysis of the Arabs' efforts to unite. During the Second World War the British government understood that there are strong tendencies to establish some form of Arab unity, so it supported the idea of creating a regional organization which would unite all the independent Arab states. The result of Arab endeavours and British content was the establishment of the League of Arab States in Cairo on 22 March 1945.

The very deep and close knowledge of the subject is a result of many years of study, research and personal experience of the author during his long periods of stay in the Middle East through research programmes and in the highest diplomatic position. As well as being a master of detail, the author is also able to change focus on key periods and key events. It is important to appreciate the precise and very reliable scientific transcription of Arab proper names. Considering the great number of personalities listed in the monograph, it would be beneficial to attach an index. In his work the author uses a wide heuristic base: the list of used sources and literature points to an extraordinary understanding of all issues related to the subject and both for the scholars and students would be a reliable guide for further study. The Sorby's monograph under review is an excellent historical work surpassing the standard level of works treating the same subject. It will undoubtedly find its place in the wider scientific research of the Near Eastern history in the twentieth century.

Eduard Gombár

WANNER, Jan: *Krvavý zrod moderného Turecka. Ankara medzi Londýnem a Moskvou.* (The Bloody Birth of Modern Turkey. Ankara between London and Moscow). Prague, Libri Publishing House 2009, 291 pp. ISBN 978-80-7277-387-9.

This ambitious book by the renowned Czech historian and an authority in the modern history of the Middle East, Professor Jan Wanner, describes the historical events during the last stage of the Ottoman Empire until the emergence of a new Turkey. In six chapters the author examines how the political development of Turkish society and institutions is seen from the international diplomatic perspective. These chapters are entitled: 1. Warfare in a Vicious Circle; 2. Problems How to End the War; 3. Old and New Diplomacy; 4. The Acid Test; 5. The Victory; and 6. The Settlement.

It is necessary to point to the fact, that the people interested in beginnings of the