

SORBY, Karol Jr. *Dejiny irackej monarchie, (1918 – 1941)* [The History of the Iraqi Monarchy, 1918 – 1941]. Bratislava: Slovak Academic Press, 2017. 339 pp. ISBN 978-80-89607-54-9.

I first met the Slovak historian and Arabist Karol Sorby, Jr. when he obtained his doctor's degree at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Slovak Academy of Sciences where I was a member of the Board of examiners. Since then I have been watching his scientific advance and his interesting scientific activity. Up to the present he has published several books in Slovak: the monograph *The Arabs, Islam and the Challenge of Modern Times* (2007), then he edited a collection of scientific articles under the title *The Arab World in Transition* (2009), and he was co-author of the monograph *The Middle East in International Relations, 1971 – 1990* (2011). Then he published a monograph in Germany in English under the title *Iraqi Politics in the Shadow of the Military (1936 – 1941)* (Dresden 2014). He regularly publishes scientific articles and studies in English and Slovak on modern and contemporary history of the countries of the Fertile Crescent, in particular Iraq and Syria. This activity is praiseworthy, because in Slovakia so far only a few experts have dealt with scientific research of the Arab World, including the issue of Iraq. It should be emphasized too that these publications benefit the professional public in the Czech Republic as well.

In this framework is also included the reviewed comprehensive monograph *History of the Iraqi Monarchy, 1918 – 1941*, which was published by the Slovak Academic Press Publishing House in Bratislava. In this book the author closed the preparatory phase of his work presented in the form of scientific articles and shorter monographs. Now Dr. Sorby Jr. makes it possible for the wider public not only in Slovakia, but also in countries where Slovak is understandable and especially in the Czech Republic, to be acquainted with the results of his research.

The research of the Middle Eastern countries between the First and Second World Wars is still of value today. In the context of the unstable Versailles system of power balance, the Arab East was under the auspices of the victorious European allied powers, Great Britain, France and Italy, who showed an intense interest in this area since the "Eastern Question" (1774 – 1918/23). Iraq is a case in point of the application of British influence, first through the mandate of the League of Nations, and then through an unequal treaty of alliance. In Iraq, the effort to create pro-British political elites based on the Hāshimite dynasty from Mecca and army officers under the Ottoman rule originally associated in the Arab nationalist society al-cAhd (the Covenant), was very visible from the beginning. These relatively isolated elites had no solid background in Iraq, and therefore were extraordinarily dependent on the British. Against this development, diverse patriotic counter-elites from the ranks of Sunni and Shiite politicians, spiritual and tribal leaders, as well as members of the middle class were emerging. During this formative period, the basic contours of Iraqi political culture were also crystallized, including activities of army officers in the form of classical military coups that became characteristic of the Arab world in the aftermath of the Second World War. Despite this relatively known and accepted truth, the author has managed to bring new facts to light on the subject. The author is master of detail but in the same time can concentrate on key periods and key events. Deep, even intimate

knowledge of the theme is the result of a thorough study as well as of the author's personal experience based on his long-term stays in the Arab East, including Iraq. The book contains a consistent and very reliable scientific transcription of Arab personal names as well as names of Arab institutions and organizations.

Karol Sorby Jr. uses in his work a rich heuristic base: the list of sources and books gives evidence of the extremely wide-ranging scope of the author and would be a reliable guide to further research. In particular, it is necessary to appreciate not only the use of Arab sources but also the quantum of Arab books which includes 70 titles. In the preface, the author is preoccupied with criticism of the utilised sources and literature to date. In the following introduction, he analyses the course of the First World War in the Middle East, and especially on the territory of present-day Iraq, where the military activities of the British army were indicative of the future political development of the country. Then the author goes to the core of the subject under study, which is divided into two parts and a total of nine chapters, arranged chronologically.

The first part of the book deals with the period of the British mandate over Iraq. In the first chapter the author deals with the period after the end of the First World War, when the British occupation forces remained in Iraq. Anti-British resistance culminated in the Iraqi uprising in 1920, which forced the British to find a new strategy within the mandate system. In the second chapter, the author deals with the British Middle Eastern policy formulated at the Cairo conference in March 1921. The follow-up third chapter then analyses numerous British attempts to conclude a treaty of alliance that would replace the mandate system while preserving British hegemony. In the fourth chapter, the author focuses on creating structures of the young state composed of barely compatible areas inhabited by Shiite Arabs and Sunni Arabs and Kurds. The final, fifth chapter of the first part of the monograph deals with British and Iraqi diplomatic efforts, which were eventually crowned by the ending of the British mandate, the declaration of formal independence and Iraq's entry into the League of Nations.

The second part of the book deals with the period of formal independence, from 1932 to the revolt of the "Golden Square" in the spring of 1941. The beginning of this unstable period was marked by the sudden death in September 1933 of the universally acknowledged King Fayṣal I. The new period under the reign of the young King Ghāzī analysed in chapter six was marked by a protest movement against the ruling elite of the previous period. The seventh chapter is devoted to the military coup of October 1936, led by General Bakr Ṣidqī, followed by 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 Ḥikmat Sulaymān. The chaos in Iraq's internal policy led, apart from the activation of left-wing forces, to new political methods and forms of political culture. The initiative was taken over by the Iraqi army officers, who in 1936 initiated a period of military coups in the Arab world. Officers who hated the British tutelage became close to the Ahālī reform group in order to seize power in the country. General Bakr Ṣidqī decided to march on Baghdad following the pattern of Mussolini's march on Rome. The popular Defence Minister Jaḥfar al-cAskarī decided to meet the general and stop the advancing troops. Upon reaching the revolting troops, he was driven into the desert, shot dead and buried on the spot.

The leading politicians Nūrī as-Sacīd, Rashīd cĀlī al-Kaylānī and Yāsīn al-Hāshimī were completely surprised and fled from the country. Hikmat Sulaymān formed a new government that promised a number of measures, ranging from tax reform and industry support to the distribution of state-owned land to the peasants and settling of the Bedouins. However, the dictatorial regime of Hikmat Sulaymān soon lost all sympathy of the public. In August 1937 when Bakr Šidqī stopped at Mosul airfield on his way to Turkey, he was shot by an Iraqi non-commissioned officer. The Mosul garrison instantly revolted against the government and soon afterwards Hikmat Sulaymān resigned. The historical significance of the 1936 military coup was that a) it removed the government of moderate nationalists who maintained the balance between pan-Arabism and Iraqi patriotism; b) the army became a new factor in the country's political life; and c) the reformists were for the first time offered an opportunity to carry out their programme.

In the eighth chapter, the author analyzes the political development of the country before the outbreak of war, when power was still held by the adherents of Great Britain. A continuing factor in Iraqi politics remained the army represented by a group of "seven officers" connected with the Sunnis, a pan-Arab vision of the future of Iraq and the need for a government of firm hand and discipline. Three of them had pro-British inclination, while the remaining four colonels, known as the "Golden Square" were anti-British. Rashīd cĀlī al-Kaylānī and King Ghāzī also sympathized with the four colonels, who being anti-British supported germanophile and pro-Nazi tendencies. The domestic political event that shook public opinion was the mysterious death of King Ghāzī who was very popular among the common people. The political situation in Iraq was stirred also by the presence of political emigrants from other Arab countries, especially from Syria and Palestine. The central figure of the pro-German elements in Iraq became the Great Muftī of Jerusalem, al-ḥājj Amīn al-Ḥusaynī, who has launched a spiteful anti-British campaign. He was joined by Iraqi pan-Arabs headed by Rashīd cĀlī al-Kaylānī and the Colonels of the "Golden Square".

The last chapter includes the period after the outbreak of World War II. The author deals in detail with events that led to the activation of nationalist forces and the well-known uprising of the "Golden Square" at the beginning of April 1941, violently suppressed by British forces in May 1941. The advance of General Erwin Rommel in the Western Desert and the German campaign in the Balkans inspired Hitler's sympathizers in Iraq to action. In the night from first to second April 1941, a coup occurred in Baghdad, known as the "Kaylānī's uprising", the "Thirty Days War" or the "Kaylānī's Revolution". After this successful coup the officers instated a "Government of National Defence" under chairmanship of Rashīd cĀlī al-Kaylānī. The Regent cAbd al-Ilāh and pro-British politicians, headed by Nūrī as-Sacīd, fled to Transjordan. Because Iraq was for Great Britain of immense strategic importance the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill decided to take action against the insurgents vigorous measures.

British paratroopers were dropped at the Air Force Base ash-Shucayba near Baṣra and afterwards followed the disembarkment of expeditionary forces. The rebellion was crushed on 30 May 1941 and it allowed the British to maintain its presence in Iraq for many years to come. The pan-Arabs described the period after defeat as "the Second

British Occupation". The author at the end of the chapter reflects on the historical significance of the uprising, and points to the fact that the officers who successfully accomplished the military coup on 14 July 1958 regarded themselves executors of the unfulfilled task of 1941 and freed their country from the British presence.

The book is furnished with very useful appendices containing the basic statistical data, chronological survey of important events, survey of dynasties, rulers, governors and prime ministers during different historical periods, maps and reliable register. The reader finishes this comprehensive book with a firm grasp of the main tendencies of the historical development. The History of the Iraqi Monarchy, 1918 – 1941 is an excellent stimulus for students of Islamic history and a significant contribution to the history of the Middle East for Czech and Slovak readers. The author has put together a fascinating account of continuity and change and gives a sound basis for further reading. The book is a qualitative enrichment of our historical literature, and furthermore, specialists in this area will certainly attract wider professional circles as well.

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