

Under the unproven claim that Iraq had nuclear weapons, an American and British invasion took place in March 2003 and an occupation of the country followed which lasted until December 2011. A useful addition to this part of the book is a chapter entitled “Czech-Iraqi Relations”. In his work Prof. Gombár discusses problems of internal development (modernization, secularization, nationalism and Islamization, among other things) in the periods under study alongside foreign political issues determining this development (the politics of the European powers and later on the superpowers of the USA and USSR) into a fluent and balanced text.

A good aid can be found in the “Supplements” part of the book containing the basic statistical information, a chronological overview of important events, a genealogy of the rulers and an overview of state leaders, a note on language, a list of maps and an index. The bibliography is described as a select one, yet it offers an extensive list of sources and literature, which is evident enough in the remarkably broad collection of authors, and is a reliable guide for those interested in similar works which are available to a greater or lesser degree. Even though the nature of a work such as this cannot answer every question that may arise, the book offers clear points of departure for further study. Despite its wide scope – an overview of Iraqi history over more than 5000 years – the book has been expertly and logically divided into 34 chapters. It is undoubtedly the result of a successful symbiosis of the teaching and scholarly work of both authors. Thanks to various periods spent in the Middle East, both authors present herein a highly reliable knowledge of history, life and customs in the field being presented. In this erudite and well-argued work, which is based upon a remarkably wide range of sources, the authors successfully lead readers through the tangle of complex historical events, allowing them to gain a reliable overview of the historical development of Iraq, which despite its geographical proximity to Europe is a place which readers know little about. With its high academic level and expert handling of the topic, this book is clearly one of the core texts of Czech historiography.

*Karol Sorby*

SORBY, Karol R. *Arabský východ, 1918 – 1945*. [The Arab East, 1918 – 1945] Bratislava: Slovak Academic Press, 2013. 468 p. ISBN 978-80-89607-15-0 In Slovak.

At the start of the 21st century, we 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 of Iraq in 2003 and the endless Israeli-Palestinian dispute, can all be directly traced back to the gradual decline of the Ottoman Empire. This decline stretched from 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 World War. In the 21st century we still live in a world that was created early in the 20th century by Woodrow Wilson, David Lloyd George, Georges

Clemenceau, Vittorio Orlando and others.

Karol Sorby's previous monograph "The Arab East, 1945 – 1958" published in Bratislava in 2005, dealt briefly with the period between the two world wars in its introductory chapter. Already at that time many specialists felt that the interwar period needed a new and more detailed treatment. Karol Sorby, a senior research fellow and former 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, has responded to this challenge and published a new monograph entitled "The Arab East, 1918 – 1945". In his work Sorby has substantially extended his previous introductory chapter by incorporating the results of his research into the history of the region in the given period, previously published in English and Slovak in a number of scholarly journals, and the results of his recent research within the VEGA 2/0141/12 grant project. Using relatively ample space, he has succeeded in bringing fresh facts to the researched subject. From the methodological point of view, Sorby looks upon the development of Arab society in the interwar period not only as a consequence of the great powers' policy but also as a consequence of the aspirations of the local political elites and inhabitants to gain genuine independence.

Sorby has divided his monograph into twelve chapters. Following the introduction, where he analyses the defeat and fall of the Ottoman Empire, he deals in the first chapter with the matter of the formation of the contemporary Arab East at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, where the victorious powers divided up the "Ottoman heritage". The voluntary retreat of the United States into isolation relieved Great Britain and France of the necessity to take into consideration the liberal principles of President Wilson, which would have given the peoples freed from Ottoman rule the right of self-determination. Thus most of the Arabs found themselves in a colonial dependency in the form of a "mandate administration".

In the second chapter, Sorby analyses the foundations of the British Middle Eastern policy. He points to the significance of the 1921 Cairo Conference, where Winston Churchill, then the British Secretary of State for the Colonies, laid out concrete measures for the application of a practical policy towards the Arabs in the following period. Unequal treaties played a decisive role in this process and helped the British to avoid being controlled by 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 Transjordan.

In the third and fourth chapters, Sorby deals with French rule in the Levant, where the French did not observe formal procedures like the British did. In the summer of 1920 they crushed the Syrian Arab Kingdom after a short military campaign and turned Syria and Lebanon into colonies ruled by a French high commissioner. They cut off 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, Sorby makes interesting insights into regional development and presents an analysis of the Franco-British rivalry during the Second World War that accelerated the gaining of independence for Syria and Lebanon.

In the fifth and sixth chapters Sorby discusses the British mandate in Palestine, including Transjordan. In sanctioning the Balfour Declaration in November 1917,

where the British promised to use their best endeavours to establish a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine, they clearly showed that the mandate system would not be applied without 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 the Arabs of Palestine as the owners of the territories which now form the State of Israel.

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

The eighth chapter deals with the situation in the Arabian Peninsula. The 1920s were marked by the decline and fall of the Kingdom of Hejaz and the rise of the Saudi dynasty. Saudi Emir (later King) Abdalaziz ibn Abdarraḥman (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. In discussing the background of the political and social development of the country, Sorby did not forget to bring up the issue of oil exploration and oil production as a strategic raw material.

The ninth and tenth chapters highlight in detail political developments in Egypt and the Sudan, two countries which also became objects of British imperial policy. Sorby follows the emancipation movement of Egyptian society and explains the mutual relations of “the triangle of forces” 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 Egyptian society. During the Second World War, Egypt was an important centre for the British war effort and the war years became a period of immense suffering for the overwhelming majority of Egyptians. The development of the Sudan, which in the 19th century was a part of Egypt and from 1899 an Anglo-Egyptian condominium, was marked with the ousting of the Egyptians from the country and the transformation of the Sudan into a directly-managed British colony.

In the eleventh chapter, Sorby underlines how the fall of France and the intervention of Italy in the summer of 1940 immediately enhanced the importance of the Middle Eastern theatre; from then on it remained the crucial theatre until the completion of the expulsion of the Axis forces from North Africa. Before the outbreak of the war, the Axis powers had not been slow to exploit the grievances of the Arab nationalists, especially when the problem of Palestine had raised them to an acute pitch from 1936 onwards. In addition to the war in the Western Desert, there were armed clashes in Iraq between British forces and Iraqi nationalists in May 1941; shortly afterwards the British defeated the Vichy establishment in Syria and Lebanon in the summer of 1941. In describing the background to the war effort, Sorby highlights the political developments in the Arab East.

In the twelfth chapter, Sorby gives an analysis of the Arabs' efforts to unite. During the Second World War, the British government understood that there were 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 consent was the establishment of the League of Arab States in Cairo on 22 March 1945.

The very deep and close knowledge of the subject presented in this book is the result of Sorby's many years of study, research and personal experiences during long periods in the Middle East through research programmes and in the highest diplomatic positions. As well as being a master of detail, Sorby is also able to change the focus on key periods and key events. It is important to appreciate the precise and very reliable scientific transcription of Arab proper names. However, considering the great number of personalities listed in the monograph, it would have been beneficial to include an index. In his work Sorby 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 is a reliable guide for further study for both scholars and students. Sorby's monograph is an excellent historical work surpassing the standard level of work treating the same subject. It will undoubtedly find its place within wider scientific research into Near Eastern history in the 20th century.

*Eduard Gombár*