

Laurence Badel (dir.), Histoire et relations internationales. Pierre Renouvin, Jean-Baptiste Duroselle et la naissance d'une discipline universitaire, Paris (Publications de la Sorbonne) 2020, 365 p. (Internationale, 103), ISBN 979-1-03510-558-7, EUR 35,00.

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This collection of papers presented at an international colloque in Paris in June 2017 explores the rise of a distinctively French school of the history of international relations. The analysis focuses on the 1920s and 1950s – formative decades in the school's development. Studies of its founding fathers, Pierre Renouvin and Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, form the centerpiece of the collection. Access to their personal papers provides valuable insights. »What one clerk said to another«, was how British historian G. M. Young described diplomatic history. Renouvin and Duroselle rescued a tired discipline from the doghouse – transforming a preoccupation with wars, treaties and ruling elites into a deeper and wider study of relations between peoples and the underlying causes of geopolitical and societal change. While most of the 2017 conference contributions concentrate on the reshaping of French teaching and research, several papers probe the school's influence on neighbouring countries.

Energized by the renewal of post-1945 France the revamped discipline helped secure the country a pole position in global culture. The flagship of the new approach was the multi-volume »History of International Relations« (1953–1958), a broad synopsis of the history of international affairs from the fall of the Roman Empire in the West to the end of World War II. Renouvin directed the enterprise and wrote four of the eight volumes – a formidable achievement.

Retrospectives can make change seem inevitable. In fact, the success of the new model was by no means assured. Given France's mixed response to post-World War I international politics, the initiative might easily have remained a footnote in French historiography. The birth of the field coincided with France's loss of the war documentation battle. Astonishingly, in four years (1922–1926) the Weimar Republic published forty volumes of »Die Große Politik der europäischen Kabinette« on the origins of the war of 1914. The French were not in the race. The first volume of the rival series »Documents diplomatiques français« appeared in 1929 – the last in 1959. Ironically, France made better progress translating »Die Große Politik«, so publicizing Weimar's propaganda offensive against war guilt. Sadly, interwar internationalism was too weak to counter war passions. The hopes of Renouvin and Élie Halévy that critical analysis of contemporary history would break the



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stranglehold of prejudice and ideology were disappointed, forcing Renouvin to concede in 1928 that the »war spirit« still dominated the study of war origins¹. France was slow to catch up with the think tanks that sprouted in London and New York – Chatham House (1920), Council on Foreign Relations (1921). Belatedly, in 1935, came the Centre d'études de politique étrangère and Renouvin's Institut d'histoire de relations internationales contemporaines (IHRIC).

The Renouvin-Duroselle alliance strengthened and institutionalized the discipline in the 1950s. For Duroselle, the history of international relations signified much more than the study of France's external relations. Instead of Francocentricism came engagement with other countries and cultures, for example, the vigorous promotion of North American studies. One of the first French historians to hold a visiting professorship in the United States, Duroselle taught at prestigious campuses, including Harvard and Notre Dame. The resulting contacts generated in 1964 the first colloquium on Franco-American history. In the same year Renouvin and Duroselle authored their »Introduction à l'histoire des relations internationales«, defending their choice of a historical rather than theoretical perspective. Wearing his learning lightly, Duroselle joked about the colloque engine he helped to build – complaining of having caught colloquitis.

Anglophone reception of the French school was slow and grudging. In a landmark review of the historiography of international relations Harvard historian Charles S. Maier treated the French initiative as the Cinderella of the discipline². Why the put-down? Simply, *embarras de richesse*. For one thing, the intellectual excitement of French critical theory à la Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault and Co. offered American academia a gourmet menu. For another, it was a case of giving a dog a bad name – reimagined diplomatic history lacked the sex appeal of Fernand Braudel and fellow Annalists.

Criticisms can certainly be made of the French school: a von Rankean insistence on the primacy of official documents, and the assumption that French ways were best. Though Renouvin did not consider state records all sufficient, they constituted the essential starting point. As a graduate student I proposed to write a doctoral thesis on France and World War II origins. Renouvin said it could not be done without access to government papers. The unconscionable delays in the opening of French state archives explain in part the reluctance of Renouvin and Duroselle to engage with World War II origins. The assumption of French cultural superiority influenced Anglophone perceptions. »When I first

¹ Pierre Renouvin, *The Immediate Origins of the War*, New Haven, CT 1928, p. 1.

² Charles S. Maier, *Marking Time: The Historiography of International Relations*, in: Michael G. Kammen (ed.), *The Past Before US: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States*, Ithaca, NY 1980, p. 355–387, 364.



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worked alongside US State Department and French historians in the early 1950s on the series Documents on German Foreign Policy», recalled a British historian, »the leading French scholars Renouvin and Baumont [...] would only with the utmost reluctance [...] accept that any work on France by a product of education systems other than their own was of any interest whatever«³. The emphasis in A. J. P. Taylor's »Origins of the Second World War« (1961) on the shared responsibility of London and Paris for the coming of war in Europe proved unwelcome. Taylor personally gave copies of »Origins« to Renouvin and Maurice Baumont – »neither of them acknowledged my gift or spoke to me again«⁴.

Books, especially conference proceedings, are hostages to fortune. »Histoire et relations internationales« is no exception. It would be invidious in a relatively short review to attempt to do justice to the nineteen contributors. Lawrence Badel's lengthy forty-seven-page introduction does call for comment, however. Overstocked with excessive direct quotation, it dwells too much on the 1920s. Badel underestimates the force of World War II as a driver of the new approach. The second conflict reconfigured global politics and opened a nuclear age, enthroning the new behemoths, the United States and the Soviet Union. The top-heavy writing unbalances the whole collection – the themes and arguments of contributors deserve closer scrutiny. A full assessment of the school should surely have included René Girault. Alas, despite the prolix introduction, there is no conclusion. As well as projecting a vision for the future of the field in today's world a conclusion could usefully have picked up on the highlights of the discussions that followed individual contributions.



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³ Anthony Adamthwaite, Britain, France and Europe, 1945–1975: the Elusive Alliance, London 2020, p. 47.

⁴ Ibid., p. 30.