

Karen Gram-Skjoldager, Haakon Andreas Ikonomou, Torsten Kahlert (ed.), Organizing the 20th-Century World. International Organizations and the Emergence of International Public Administration, 1920-1960s, London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney (Bloomsbury Academic) 2020, 336 p., 10 fig. (Histories of Internationalism), ISBN 978-1-3501-3457-7, USD 115,00.

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The editors of this volume aim to contribute to the developing literature on the transnational history of international organizations and internationalism as pioneered in the work of Patricia Clavin, Martin Geyer, and Johannes Paulmann, among others. In particular, the volume is intended to go beyond early studies in this area through its specific focus on the early history of international public administrations, building on the recent work in this domain of many of the contributors to the volume.

The geographical focus of this collection is largely on activities in Europe and the United States, and the work of international organizations in that region in the early to mid-20th century. Given their emphasis on »European administrative models and practices« in what they term the »*Sattelzeit* of international public administration« with »no precedents to build on« (p. 4–6), the editors both underplay earlier developments in public international unions prior to the First World War (although these are considered by some of the contributors) and assume a rather Eurocentric account of the origins of contemporary patterns of international governance that have become increasingly challenged in recent work.

The volume is divided into four thematic sections each containing three chapters, on (i) the people who populated international civil administrations, (ii) learning processes across institutions, (iii) legitimization and public relations, and (iv) leadership and management. Each section provides diverse coverage of each topic, although the chapters largely read as self-standing contributions to the literature rather than sub-contributions guided by a common framework.

The first set of chapters on personnel provides a well-curated overview of this aspect of the work of early-20th-century international administrations. The section commences with a chapter by Bob Reinalda which offers a helpful introduction to those who worked for international secretariats from the 19th century through to the early work of the United Nations and



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its specialized agencies based on his IO BIO project¹. The third chapter, by Torsten Kahlert, is also wide-ranging and provides an impressive array of descriptive statistics on the personnel of the League of Nations, which bring into sharp focus the domination of the institution by male officials from dominant Western European states. Haakon Ikonomou's second chapter, on the other hand, considers how the case study of Thanassis Aghnides in the League of Nations Secretariat can be used to shed light on the intertwining of »personal, institutional and transnational processes« in the work of an international organization (p. 36). The combination of in-depth case analysis in this chapter with the surveys and statistics in the other two chapters works very well in this section of the volume to provide a wide-ranging understanding of the topic.

The subsequent section of the volume on education offers a less cohesive set of chapters, but each one provides interesting material on their respective area of consideration. Maren Elfert and Christian Ydesen offer a comparative analysis of US educational influence on the OEEC and UNESCO, highlighting the more sustainable impact of the US on the former given its narrower focus and tighter structure. Katja Seidel's chapter, by contrast, focuses on the different approaches that leading officials in the ECSC and EEC developed from their career experiences, while Amy Sayward offers a study of nutritional epistemic communities and considers the mixed results of their efforts to influence the League of Nations and the Food and Agriculture Organization.

The studies of legitimacy and relations with the wider public in the third section are limited to different aspects of the work of the League of Nations, but consider a helpful range of features, with Emil Eiby Seidenfaden considering the League's Information Section, Anne-Isabelle Richard exploring the private League of Nations Societies and their International Federation, and Michael Jonas evaluating German officials in the League. The chapters on the Information Section and the Federation of League Societies both highlight the elitism of these institutions, while Jonas emphasizes the diversity of approaches among German League officials in the Stresemann era.

The final section on leadership commences with chapters by Ellen Ravndal and Linda Risso providing case studies of secretaries-general of the United Nations and NATO respectively, both highlighting the significance of early leaders in these organizations in establishing the scope of opportunities for their successors. The concluding chapter by two of the editors (Gram-Skjoldager and Ikonomou) offers a synopsis of the development of the international civil servant figure, and provides a helpful and concise survey of the administrative principles on which the secretariats of the League and the United Nations were established.

¹ IO BIO, Biographical Dictionary of Secretaries-General of International Organizations, edited by Bob Reinalda, Kent J. Kille and Jaci Eisenberg, www.ru.nl/fm/iobio, accessed 16/08/2022.



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Although this volume aims to shed light on the emergence of international public administration in multiple aspects, one approach dominates the studies in this volume: the biographies of individual international civil servants. There is less extensive coverage of bureaucratic structures and processes, although these do come up in many of the chapters. Overall, this volume provides a very welcome collection of studies on the early to mid-20th-century history of international public administration, but this remains a rich area for further research, especially in respect of organizational processes and developments beyond dominant states in the Atlantic world.

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