

DISCUSSIONI

Imperi e mandati: alle origini di una sfera pubblica internazionale (a cura di Giorgio Del Zanna e Marco Mariano)

Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians. The League of Nation and the Crisis of Empire*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2015, 571 pp., \$ 34,95

ne discutono

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Il libro di Susan Pedersen – studiosa di storia internazionale alla Columbia University – ricostruisce il ruolo svolto dalla Commissione permanente per i mandati della Società delle Nazioni. Tale organismo, fondato alla fine del 1921, assegnava alle «nazioni avanzate» il compito di amministrare le popolazioni delle ex colonie tedesche e giapponesi e dei territori ex ottomani, ritenuti non ancora in grado di autogovernarsi, favorendone lo sviluppo verso una piena indipendenza. Si trattò di un compromesso tra i sostenitori del tradizionale imperialismo e quanti volevano porre sotto il controllo internazionale tutte le colonie. Il libro, tuttavia, non analizza quello che fu l'effettivo governo su questi territori e il rapporto tra governanti e governati, ma si concentra piuttosto sui processi politico-culturali innescati dalla Commissione, in particolare su come il sistema dei mandati favorì un reale processo di internazionalizzazione, spostando i meccanismi di legittimazione e decisionali dal singolo Stato a un soggetto fondato su un'inedita collaborazione tra diversi Stati. Tale passaggio – secondo la tesi centrale del volume – rappresentò una svolta nella politica internazionale e costituì la vera novità della Società delle Nazioni. Essa fu il primo grande esperimento di governo internazionale, realizzato attraverso tre organismi distinti: l'Assemblea, il Consiglio e la Segreteria. L'Assemblea, con tutti i limiti, fu la prima forma di «parlamento mondiale» che spinse i governanti a muoversi in una prospettiva internazionalista; il Consiglio, dominato politicamente dalle grandi potenze, cercava di orientare a proprio favore l'agenda dettata dall'Assemblea; nella dialettica complessiva, perciò, fu la Segreteria ad avere la responsabilità di portare avanti le decisioni assunte,

attraverso un apparato burocratico e strutture con un profilo realmente internazionale. Cruciale era il ruolo del segretario generale chiamato a governare tale dialettica senza, però, poterla controllare. Si pone, in questo senso, la questione se la Società delle Nazioni sia stata un organismo nelle mani delle potenze vincitrici fautrici dei trattati di pace del 1919 o abbia rappresentato, invece, il primo passo verso una gestione internazionale della politica mondiale.

Per l'a. fu soprattutto la sezione della Società delle Nazioni demandata di occuparsi dei mandati quella che, più di ogni altra istituzione societaria, fu segnata dal processo di internazionalizzazione. Viene così ricostruita la parabola attraverso cui la Società delle Nazioni cercò di modificare il vecchio ordine imperiale. Fino alla fine degli anni '20 si agì soprattutto per mitigare la rivalità anglo-francese, poi con l'ingresso della Germania nella Società, il dibattito si incentrò sui temi della sovranità e dell'indipendenza, fase culminata con l'emancipazione dell'Iraq dal regime mandatario. A partire poi dal 1935, con l'ascesa della Germania nazista, la guerra italiana all'Etiopia e la politica repressiva della Gran Bretagna in Palestina, il sistema dei mandati entrò in crisi. Alla vigilia della guerra mondiale, nessuno ormai sembrava più volerlo sostenere. Con la sua fine, però, non tutto andò perduto, ma tale esperienza rappresentò la premessa per il multilateralismo internazionale sorto dopo il 1945.

The Guardians è tra i risultati più importanti di una stagione di studi che negli ultimi vent'anni ha riscoperto la Società delle Nazioni alla luce sia della trasformazione del quadro internazionale dell'ultimo decennio del secolo scorso, sia degli sviluppi metodologici in atto nella ricerca storica e nelle scienze sociali.

Da un lato la fine della guerra fredda, il crollo dell'impero sovietico, le guerre in ex Jugoslavia e nella regione dei Grandi Laghi in Africa centrale hanno ridisegnato la mappa europea e mondiale e riportato drammaticamente alla ribalta molti dei nodi – sicurezza collettiva, sovranità, diritti delle minoranze, *nation building* – con cui l'organizzazione con sede a Ginevra si misurò per prima negli anni tra le due guerre mondiali. Dall'altro gli studi storici hanno preso nuove strade e si sono dotati di nuovi strumenti grazie in particolare al *cultural turn*, con la sua attenzione alla dimensione discorsiva dei processi storici, e alla svolta «neo-istituzionalista» che ha sottolineato la capacità delle organizzazioni internazionali di ritagliarsi spazi di relativa autonomia rispetto agli Stati membri.

Ne è scaturito un ritorno di interesse per la Società delle Nazioni che ne sta profondamente rileggendo il ruolo sia in merito alla transizione dagli Imperi alla decolonizzazione, sia nel quadro più ampio dei tentativi di «governare il mondo» e disciplinare le sue tensioni internazionali e dinamiche transnazionali. Se in precedenza la storiografia si era concentrata sulle cause del fallimento dell'organizzazione in tema di sicurezza collettiva, e quindi sulla sua inadeguatezza strutturale a far fronte a quel lato oscuro dell'interdipendenza contemporanea che aveva spinto Woodrow Wilson a volere e quasi imporre la sua istituzione, da qualche tempo l'attenzione degli storici si concentra su altri due grandi campi di intervento della Società: *nation building*, con particolare riferimento alla costituzione e stabilizzazione di nuovi Stati sovrani in Europa

centro-orientale e ai mandati nelle ex-colonie tedesche e ottomane, e regolamentazione di fenomeni tipicamente transnazionali (immigrazione, salute e malattie infettive, traffici illegali). Dallo studio di questi ambiti dell'attività della Società sta emergendo un bilancio decisamente meno fallimentare: a Ginevra si attivò un «campo di forze» (p. 5) grazie al quale in primo luogo funzionari, esperti, diplomatici e lobbisti contribuirono a produrre azioni di regolamentazione e monitoraggio che non erano la pura trasposizione dei desideri delle maggiori potenze e, in secondo luogo, si creò un forum di discussione in cui la semplice formulazione e discussione di norme, poste al vaglio di una ristretta ma attenta opinione pubblica transnazionale, condizionava l'operato dell'organizzazione e dei suoi Stati membri e legittimava le istanze di crescente internazionalizzazione dei processi decisionali.

In particolare, *The Guardians* è parte di una crescente produzione riguardante il ruolo svolto da specifiche agenzie della Società delle Nazioni nella difficile, parziale e spesso contraddittoria transizione da un ordine imperiale a un sistema ispirato al principio della sovranità nazionale. Se al di fuori dell'Europa le aspirazioni all'autodeterminazione si diffusero rapidamente e furono altrettanto rapidamente frustrate, come mostra l'importante lavoro di Erez Manela sul «momento wilsoniano», nelle regioni centro-orientali del vecchio continente la nascita di nuovi Stati nazionali dopo la prima guerra mondiale trasformò 25 milioni di europei in membri di minoranze etniche i cui diritti in tema di lingua, religione e accesso all'istruzione vennero tutelati da appositi trattati. A una apposita sezione del Segretariato della Società venne affidato il monitoraggio dell'applicazione di queste norme a difesa delle minoranze che, cadute nel dimenticatoio dopo il 1945 con l'affermazione dei diritti umani su base individuale, sono tornate all'attenzione pubblica e storiografica con le guerre balcaniche degli anni '90.

Analogamente sono oggetto di un numero crescente di studi le agenzie della Società delle Nazioni istituite per fronteggiare le crisi umanitarie e le questioni economiche e sociali lasciate in eredità dalla prima guerra totale. Si trattava di un campo d'azione relativamente minore nelle intenzioni dei suoi fondatori, eppure significativo sia per i risultati conseguiti in alcuni ambiti (rifugiati, prostituzione, droga) sia perché qui più che altrove prese forma un modello di *governance* internazionale dalle implicazioni rilevanti per i decenni successivi. Su questo terreno «tecnico», infatti, si ebbe il coinvolgimento pure degli Stati Uniti e di paesi come Germania, Giappone e Unione Sovietica, anche quando non erano Stati membri. Più globale, questo livello dell'attività dell'organizzazione era anche meno frenato dalle direttive degli Stati e più aperto alla partecipazione di volontari, esperti e organizzazioni filantropiche. È qui che l'attività della Società ha maggiormente influenzato gli sviluppi del secondo dopoguerra: Oms, Unesco e Unhcr sono nate sulla base delle analoghe agenzie create a Ginevra tra le due guerre.

Il sistema dei mandati, magistralmente esplorato da Susan Pedersen, con il suo forte sapore eurocentrico e paternalistico sembrerebbe essere più datato, lontano dal presente. Tuttavia *The Guardians* offre uno sguardo globale sull'evoluzione di nozioni e pratiche della sovranità e sulle dinamiche istituzionali e discorsive all'interno delle organizzazioni

internazionali che è di grande interesse, oltre che per gli storici, per tutti gli osservatori dell'attuale fase di trasformazione degli assetti globali.

Mustafa Aksakal

It is both edifying and disturbing to read Susan Pedersen's *The Guardians*. Pedersen takes her readers straight into the heart of the League of Nations, inside the rooms and minds of the Permanent Mandate Commission in Geneva. Her account removes the fig leaves intended to cover up what was happening de facto – the expansion of British and French empire while flying the League's flag. In one of her many scintillating insights Pedersen characterizes the League as an «effort at global stabilization» after the mayhem and bloodshed of global war. It was an attempt, in other words, to settle the tensions in regions where imperial rivalry had long caused instability. Nowhere was this more true than in the Ottoman Middle East, a key region of this unsettled «international frontier», in the words of one League official (p. 405). But precisely because British and French empire had been already so prevalent from Istanbul to Cairo to the Gulf throughout the nineteenth century, dividing the Ottoman empire into mandates also meant that this was the continuation of British and French imperial grand strategy. Many of the behind-closed-doors deliberations that Pedersen brings to life so vividly echo aspects of nineteenth century great power deal-making.

Pedersen lays bare the extent to which the League apparatus served to distribute the spoils of territories conquered from the German and Ottoman empires in World War I. In theory the League was internationalizing these territories, placing them into the collective custodianship of the League's member states, with varying time horizons for each territory for eventual independence under the principle of self-determination. Mandate economies were to be kept accessible through an «open door» to all member states. In practice, however, the British vision for the League owed much to its desire to continue its imperial practice of «indirect rule», as Fredrick Lugard, the dominant British member of the Permanent Commission (and the former colonial official and governor-general of Nigeria) spelled out in his *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*. The French government, for its part, much preferred to rule the new territories under its administration simply as colonies, at least initially.

While the Commission scrutinized, criticized, and censured massacres and other colonial practices from South West Africa to Iraq, it did not, perhaps could not, prevent them. While it condemned forced labor and the bombardment of civilians, it did not «impugn colonial rule itself» (p. 124). It is true that the international supervision of these territories meant that individual governments charged with the administration of the mandated territories could not simply do as they pleased. They had to play by the rules set in Geneva, and there was an international, public accounting whenever it looked like those rules were being broken. This changed little for the people living in

the mandated territories, however, because the League had no success in setting up the types of benevolent administrations it claimed it was doing. If the parental language of guardianship was patronizing, it at least intimated a relationship of nourishment and fostering development. But the guardians, as Pedersen so compellingly demonstrates, hardly ever viewed this as their role.

Moving back and forth between debates, reports, and arguments in Geneva, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the routine and frequently brutal repression of rights of the territories' inhabitants, Pedersen's account is chilling and raises broader questions about international intervention, for **the nineteenth** and **twentieth century** as much as for the present.

All of the mandates in the Middle East were classified as «A Mandates», and all «A Mandates» were located in the Middle East (French Syria including Lebanon, British Iraq, and British Palestine including Transjordan). As «A Mandates» the former Arab lands of the Ottoman empire were described in Article 22 of the League's Covenant as having «reached a stage of development where their existence as independent nations can be provisionally recognized subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory until such time as they are able to stand alone». But the mandatory powers did much more than provide «administrative advice and assistance». The inhabitants of these mandates, moreover, made abundantly clear that they believed they were «able to stand alone» already and that they needed no help from the European imperial powers in this regard.

Referring to the inhabitants of the former Ottoman territories, Article 22 of the Covenant stipulated that «The wishes of these communities must be a principal consideration in the selection of the **Mandatory**». One wonders why the founders of the League bothered to include this provision, and what exactly was the process for ascertaining these «wishes»? After all, already in July 1919 the General Syrian Congress had passed a number of resolutions, stating emphatically and explicitly that under no circumstances would the people of Syria accept France as the League-appointed mandatory power. The Congress made its views for Syria's future clear, but the League ignored them, and France imposed its rule eventually at the barrel of the gun, as did Britain in Iraq and Palestine, and New Zealand in Western Samoa.

In 1932 Iraq became the first mandate to be ushered into «independence». Pedersen is very clear that this «independence» was highly compromised. Having secured Mosul and its oilfields for Iraq, London wished to transform Iraq into a client state and to thereby have more complete control over Iraqi oil. The other powers in the League, however, called London on this scheme, and they relented only after a long delay and only after they, too, had been assured a cut of Iraq's precious resource. (France did not appreciate the precedent set by Iraqi independence, as this increased the pressure for France to follow suit in **Syria**.) Egypt, though never a mandate, had been similarly turned into a client state after World War I, and British control of the Suez Canal had been retained successfully. Germany's entry into the League in 1928, moreover, changed the dynamic

in the Commission. Germany embraced the principles of the League; it became an ardent advocate of self-determination and independence, a self-interested strategy intended to knock the mandated territories out of the grip of British and French control. As a result, among Arab political leaders in search of sovereignty, Germany (and Nazi Germany after 1933), appeared as an enormously powerful potential partner.

Petitions by the Palestine Arab Congress pointed out to the Commission in Geneva that their new regime of the mandate allowed for less representative government than had prevailed under the Ottomans. In Palestine it appeared impossible to the League to deliver on the demands of representative government, because representative government would put political control into the hands of the Arab majority. That Arab majority, in turn, opposed the partition of Palestine in the name of creating a «national home for the Jewish people». While Britain divided Arabs from Jews in Palestine – and Assyrian Christians and Kurds from Arabs in Iraq – France divided Syria into several sectarian statelets. French divide-and-rule favored France's longtime Christian clients. Thus Britain and France in the Middle East did not only fail make things better but they made conditions worse by planting the seeds of confrontation among the various communities of the region that would, tragically, long outlive the existence of the League itself.

Mario Del Pero

Long discharged as an ineffectual organization, unable to fulfill its main task of preserving peace after the carnage of World War I, the League of Nations has made in the last two decades a remarkable comeback, becoming one of the hottest subjects in XX century international historiography. Multiple aspects of the League's history have been subjected to scrutiny and in-depth dissection: its function as a sort of *grand théâtre* where the main powers competed among themselves for the support of world opinion; its efforts to protect and guarantee minority rights via an ambitious interpretation of what international law was and, even more, could be; the activism of its many commissions on realms – from public health to intellectual rights – that would drive long-lasting processes of global integration; its role in creating, shaping and legitimizing new, influential transnational elites and technocracies.

Susan Pedersen joins this rich conversation with a remarkable study of a key, and yet often overlooked, task of the League: that of supervising the mandate system set up after the war to manage the spoils of the defeated empires in Africa, the Middle East and the Pacific. Pedersen's masterful account reveals how mandates offer an ideal subject to connect the micro and the macro: to do global history by looking at a Geneva-based (and often driven) discussion, in a *tour de force* that leads the reader through the political and imperial intricacies of the mandate system from the Bondelswarts in South West Africa to the Mau movement in Western Samoa, from Damascus to Mount Hagen in New Guinea.

The main actor, and the principal documentary sources, of Pedersen's book is the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League (hereinafter Pmc): a tiny organism, endowed with the immense task of managing the mandate system, contributing to preserve and revise the imperial order while pressuring the mandatory governments to somehow respect the idea that their presence was functional to ignite processes that in a distant future should, at least in some cases, lead to self-determination. From its infant stages, the Pmc worked to uphold the very distinctiveness of the category of the mandated territories, which was ultimately founded on two, potentially contradictory and immensely complicated to apply, principles: «that the territories were to remain distinct entities in international law, and that the interests of its indigenous population were paramount» (p. 76). These territories were thus to be «governed in its inhabitants' interests but not by the inhabitants themselves» (p. 76).

To tell this complex, rich and often very troubling story, Pedersen has chosen to divide the book in four parts. The first examines the making of the League's institutional machinery in charge of supervising the new mandate system and guaranteeing the implementation of its basic principles (here, and throughout the book, Pedersen offers multiple, detailed and yet very entertaining biographical sketches of the many actors involved: in Geneva, in the various diplomacies of the mandatory powers and in the mandated territories themselves). Centered on the 1920s and aptly titled «Retreat from self-determination» (p. 107), the second part examines the heyday of the British dominated «Lugardian moment», after Sir Frederick Lugard – the former Governor General of Nigeria, author of the fundamental *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (1922) – who represented the United Kingdom in the Pmc from 1922 to 1936. *Lugardism* – Pedersen highlights – was based on the idea that the separation between mandatory (and colonial) powers and the natives was natural and necessary. Mandates were not, and ought not to be, «a tool for state-building» but a way «to uphold humane principles of colonial rule» (p. 109), by protecting «native populations from economic exploitation and settler violence», preserving «native's practices» and limiting «racial contact and cultural “hybridization”» (p. 140). This hierarchical discourse of civilization was constantly deployed and even the French, after some initial difficulty, proved capable of turning it to their advantage during the controversy provoked by their actions in Syria to which chapter five is dedicated. As Pedersen aptly summarizes it, «The programme that emerged was at once paternalistic and authoritarian, rhetorically progressive and politically retrograde – a programme perfectly tailored to the task of rehabilitating the imperial order at its moment of greatest disarray» (p. 111).

The Pmc played along becoming a quintessential Lugardian institution, accepting (and absorbing) the language of tutelage and obtaining, in return, a formal endorsement of the League's ideals and principles by the mandatory powers, and by Paris overall. Such an approach frequently legitimized and justified the deployment of violence against the insubordinate and immature inhabitants of the mandates, who needed tutoring into the basics of civilization. Inhabitants, however, who – as in the cases of Syria and Western

Samoa (an extraordinary case-study, the latter, which Pedersen discusses with clarity, elegance and originality) – had taken seriously Wilsonian rhetoric, wartime promises and the League's covenant, only to discover that in their quest for self-determination they were rapidly placed on the defensive.

The turning point, which altered the scene and opens Pedersen's third part, was the admission of Germany into the League in 1926. For Berlin, joining the League was somehow functional to overcome its pariah status and full exploit the open-door principles to penetrate new markets, find profitable opportunities of investment and, more broadly, reassert its position in some of its former colonies. Affirming and enforcing the open-door principles was just one part of Germany's strategy. The other was challenging the annexationist ambitions of some of the mandatory powers such as Belgium, Britain and South Africa, which hoped to tie more closely the mandated territories to their colonies. What ensued was a «struggle over sovereignty» (the title of chapter 7) or, more precisely, a struggle over where sovereignty really laid: in the mandatory powers, in the League, or in the gradually civilizing populations of the mandates themselves. The intense discussion that ensued lead to clarify that such sovereignty did not reside in the mandatory powers: «Establishing that mandatory powers were not sovereign in the mandated territories and forcing those powers to accept, however grudgingly, that norm» – Pedersen explains – «was the most significant achievement of the mandates system [...] for if the mandatory power was not sovereign, not only it could not annex or otherwise dispose of the territory, but it could also not deny sovereignty to its wards forever» (p. 231).

The fourth and last part of the book discusses the inexorable crumbling of those basic Lugardian foundations on which the mandate system had relied. The crisis had multiple drivers: ideological, geopolitical, discursive, institutional. Meanwhile, Japanese, Italian and German revisionism could not be appeased simply by open-door and deterritorialization, whereas civilizational and racist claims were less acceptable not just to colonial nationalists, anti-imperialists and Pan-Africanists, but also to a growing number of European liberal internationalists who had long accepted, and even supported, the mandate model. With the League losing prestige, legitimacy and, also, institutional efficacy and the «mainstay of the League system» (p. 357), Britain, defecting itself over Palestine, the experience of the mandate system came inexorably to an end. As Pedersen convincingly recaps: «internationalization, a strategy devised to reconcile imperial interests to changing political conditions and evolving norms, had run its course. Independence was about to become the only game in town» (p. 295).

Elegantly written and monumentally researched, *The Guardians* is a clear example of what global history in action can really achieve. Two are, in my view, its main merits in addition to the many histories – local and international, micro and macro, biographical and institutional – it discusses, reconstructs and narrates. The first is the recognition of what international institutions, and the people who ultimately make them, can do in altering the language used, redefining the basic legitimizing codes of

international relations and therefore changing their fundamental rules and practices. The mandate system represented a way to uphold a weaker and contested imperial order, by subjecting it to new forms of international control, which would make it more humane, efficient and therefore legitimate. The old language of civilizational duties and racial hierarchies was revised and adjusted to the new times. But it was also constantly exposed through an internationalization that found in the Pmc its basic medium: the stage where the fulfillment of this evolution was discussed, celebrated and, often, contested, particularly by the system's subjects who could use the petition process to have their voices «although muted, ventriloquized, and distorted [...] into the rooms in which their fates were determined» (p. 78). The second, major achievement, directly linked to the first, is the sophisticated analysis of how this «Geneva-based culture of international lobbying and debate» (p. 13) impacted on the actions, policies – one could say even basic 'philosophies' – of the many actors involved, beginning with the imperial and mandatory powers themselves, as the case of Britain clearly highlighted. The League and the Pmc offered a platform and a theatre to these actors: a «drama of public accountability», whose main audience was «a sometimes critical, newspaper-reading, *Western* public» (p. 168).

Assessing how this public reacted – or even defining who this public was – is however extremely complicated. On the one side, the notion of a world/international public is very ambiguous and even contested; an aspect on which Pedersen doesn't really dwell. On the other, lacking for the period polls or other basic, rough thermometers of public opinion, one is left wondering whether certain assertions on the weight and role of this world opinion are, and cannot be, but highly impressionistic. To this objection a second one must be added. Pedersen looks at the history of the mandates system through the institutional prism of the Pmc and its archives; she does a masterful job in integrating this archival and narrative Pmc-centrism with a rich account that adds many other layers: the various positions of the individual members of the committee; the evolution of international law and the prominent role played by important jurists; the discussions within various governments and their diplomacies (particularly Britain's); the actions on the ground in the many cases, and crises, the volume examines. A key argument made by Pedersen is, however, that the system and the Pmc gave somehow voice to the populations of the territories under mandate: to the subjects of the system set up after World War I. In many, almost all, cases this voice is studied and presented through the filter of the Pmc and its archives. Pedersen, to simplify, faces the obstacle, possibly insurmountable, on which so many attempts at global history collide: the huge archival asymmetries and imbalances that still exist, particularly when many diverse actors (and agencies) are examined and discussed.

These limits notwithstanding, *The Guardians* is a magisterial work of global history. Based on a prodigious research and beautifully written, it offers a compelling and comprehensive analysis of a key phase (and problem) in the making of the modern international order.

Erez Manela

It is by now a cliché to note that international historians have, in recent years, gone back to the League of Nations, and that Susan Pedersen has led the charge. *The Guardians* is undoubtedly among the most important of the recent studies of the League, and it is no small feat that it succeeds in what is one of the most vexing challenges of writing histories of international organizations, that of crafting a lively narrative, one that is populated with memorable characters rather than mere functionaries and that carefully reconstructs the inner workings of institutions rather than simply inflicting readers with a succession of acronyms. Indeed, one of the great strengths of this book is how it breathes life into the minutes of the League's Permanent Mandates Commission (Pmc). At times, the reader feels as if transported to the ornate meeting rooms of interwar Geneva, peering over the shoulders of the distinguished members of the commission as they debated colonial petitions and sparred genteelly with the imperial administrators of the territories in the Middle East, Africa, and the Pacific that came under the commission's purview.

Students of international history should be grateful to Pedersen for this book. Beyond the story it tells and the arguments it puts forth (about which more below), there is useful material such as a list of principal players in the narrative, a veritable who's who of interwar internationalism, and some fascinating tables, such as one detailing the area and demographics of each mandate territory in 1921 and 1938, another listing the members of the Pmc throughout its life along with their years of service, and a third tabulating the petitions the Pmc considered by territory (more than 80 percent, it turns out, came from the Palestine and Syria mandates).

The book, a hefty tome, falls into four parts. The first, «Making the Mandate System», traces the establishment of the Pmc and outlines its structure and procedures. It notes that, though the mandates were part of the peace settlement, after the US withdrawal from the Versailles Treaty the remaining powers dragged their feet and the Pmc may have never materialized were it not for the work of a handful of committed British internationalists (the book credits, in particular, the League's first secretary general, Eric Drummond).

Even so, the Pmc as it came to be was but a pale reflection of its Wilsonian origin. Wilson had imagined mandates administered by «disinterested» powers (he thought Scandinavians might undertake this work, and there was talk early on about the United States itself serving in this capacity), the system in the end was dominated by the major imperial powers, Britain and France. It thus served, to a large degree, as an extension of empire rather than a check on it, an instrument to legitimate rather than limit imperial power. Early on, it was decided not only that the Pmc could not conduct on-ground inspections in mandate territories but even that it could not accept petitions directly from the inhabitants of these territories. Only the mandatory powers could forward petitions, and these would be discussed behind closed doors.

Given the influence of the major powers and the limits that placed on the Pmc's independence and authority, it is hardly surprising that the next section of the book is titled «Retreat from Self-Determination, 1923-1930». Here we learn that the mandate system in this era was shaped by what the book calls «Lugardism», after Frederick Lugard, the long-serving (1922-1936) British member of the Pmc. Lugard joined the commission after an illustrious career as an imperial administrator, capped by his service as the first governor-general of Nigeria from 1914 to 1919. Already in his mid-60s when he arrived in Geneva, Lugard saw in his posting there the promise of an active retirement – it is telling that the Pmc included a number of former colonial administrators – and he brought with him his idea that colonial rulers had in their territories a «dual mandate» to promote the «happiness and well-being of the inhabitants» while developing the region's «natural resources» (p. 108) for the benefit of humanity at large.

For Pedersen, Lugard's arrival augured the Pmc's «Lugardian moment» (p. 111), a time during which it was assumed that the mandate system would continue indefinitely and aim at insuring the benevolent development of the territories under its supervision rather than promote state-building that would lead to self-determination. This approach, exemplified in the Pmc's responses to the crisis that erupted in that period in mandate territories of Southwest Africa, Syria, and Western Samoa, «took civilizational and racial hierarchy for granted». It saw its mission as protecting the inhabitants of the mandates from exploitation and violence but also from «cultural hybridization» by bolstering the power of «traditional authorities» operating under colonial supervision (p. 140).

The mandate system thus construed, then, represented much more of an extension of prewar ideas of proper colonial governance than it did the rather mild challenge to the logic of colonialism that was embedded in Wilson's rhetoric of self-determination, let alone in Lenin's far more radical critique. But this is essentially how historians have long viewed the mandate system, as little more than a fig leaf for empire. So is this story simply an exquisitely detailed, well-crafted reiteration of what we already know about the League? *The Guardians* wants to convince readers otherwise, and it tries to do this in two ways. First, by arguing that the system as described above took a turn in a different direction in the late 1920s particularly after the German accession to the League in 1927; and second, more broadly, by asserting that the forum in Geneva mattered, almost despite itself, by generating public «talk» about the rights of colonial peoples and the duties of colonial powers.

The first argument, that the Pmc took a turn in a different direction in the late 1920s, is the focus of Part III of the book («New Times, New Norms, 1927-1933»). Here the central contention is that the entry of German, a revisionist power on colonial matters and beyond, pushed the League to go beyond Lugardian ideas to stress that mandate powers were not sovereign in the territories they controlled. In fact, the system's «most significant achievement», the book argues, was «establishing that mandatory powers were not sovereign in the mandated territories, and forcing those powers to accept, however grudgingly, that norm» (pp. 231-232). But it remains unclear how much this changed the actual practice

of colonial rule, especially since the Lugardian approach, particularly in Africa, already emphasized indirect rule through «traditional» authorities. Formal sovereignty, in other words, does not seem to have been a priority for colonial authorities.

In *The Guardians*, the British grant of independence to the mandate territory of Iraq in 1932 is set forth as a culmination of this shift in international norms away from colonial sovereignty. So annoyed was London at Geneva's meddling in Iraqi affairs that it sought to remove Iraq from its purview while preserving its interests there through its influence on the Hashemite monarch installed at the head of the new regime. This is presented as a central piece of evidence for the broader argument, stated in the introduction, that «the mandate system made imperial governance more burdensome and brought normative statehood nearer», leading «at least some within the European empires to question whether direct rule was so desirable anyway» (p. 13).

But what role did the Pmc, and the mandate system more generally, really play here? After all, informal empire had a long history in the Middle East (and elsewhere). London already made such arrangements with gulf Sheikdoms in the early nineteenth century, and it had exercised informal control over Egypt since the 1880s, granting that country formal (if truncated) independence in 1922, ten years before Iraq. In fact, Iraq's independence, rather than representing a reluctant concession to Geneva, had arguably been the plan all along. The infamous Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916 already envisioned this sort of rule, committing the two powers to «recognize and protect an independent Arab state or a confederation of Arab states [...] under the suzerainty of an Arab chief in much of the region. Even in the areas of greatest interest, which for the French comprised the coastal regions of present-day Syria and Lebanon and for the British, Mesopotamia from the gulf north to Baghdad, the agreement foresaw the establishment of such direct or indirect administration or control as [...] they may think fit to arrange with the Arab state or confederation of Arab states». For London, then, informal empire was the preferred arrangement for the region long before Geneva ever entered the picture. And as for the French, Geneva's oversight, as irritating as it no doubt was, apparently did little to persuade them to let go of Syria, let alone Lebanon.

What about the larger significance of the mandate system, even beyond the purported shift in norms that occurred after 1927? Pedersen is well aware of the still-common perception that the mandate system was at best an irrelevant talking shop and at worst a cover for colonial exploitation. In other words, the perennial «so what?» question looms even larger for histories of the League than it does elsewhere, and the book takes on this question head on, with bold assertions about the system's impact not only on the mandate territories themselves but on the transformation of international order more broadly.

So what was new with the mandates? Not the idea of the civilizing mission to which it subscribed nor the governance on the ground in the mandate territories, but rather «the apparatus and level of international diplomacy, publicity, and “talk” that the system brought into being» (p. 4). But was the publicity generated in Geneva, such as it was, really more effective than the much-publicized critiques of colonial abuses that proliferated

in the decades before the war? *The Guardians* argues that the «internationalization» of colonial rule wrought by the mandate system gave an outlet, however reluctant, for native voices. But these voices had other outlets in international society both before and after the war and, in any case, the Geneva-centered focus of the book does little to recover those voices in any detail. And the contention that the League «helped make the end of empire imaginable» (p. 406) begs the question, imaginable for whom? Surely a great many, not least but certainly not solely among the colonized populations, could imagine it before the League was ever established, while others – Winston Churchill comes to mind – refused to imagine it even after it had ceased to exist. The book notes early on that «we live in a world of formally independent states of very varying capacity, and if we look back to the mandates system, we can see this order emerging» (p. 13), and perhaps it makes the most sense to see the mandate system, and the League itself, more as a crucial lens into the wrenching transformation of international order in the interwar world rather than itself as an agent of that transformation.

If so, it is no doubt a useful lens, but like all lenses it obscures as well as reveals. Although *The Guardians* offers memorable accounts of developments on the ground in mandate territories, not only in the Middle East but also in the African and Pacific mandates it is, in the end, the view from Geneva. As such, it tells us how many petitions arrived at the League headquarters and how they were recorded and discussed (or not), but not much about what these petitions actually said and, especially, what they meant to the inhabitants of the mandate territories. Similarly, while the book notes that by the 1930s «anti-colonialism had become a global movement, backed by the Soviet Union, sustained by transnational networks, and buoyed by the prestige of an Indian nationalist effort whose leaders “civilization” and ethical stature could not be gainsaid», (p. 297) its Geneva-centered perspective can tell us little about how these developments came to be and what role they played – a role, one suspects, much larger than that of the Pmc – in transforming international society in the interwar years. This is not to criticize the author for not writing a different book but rather to note that historians must look beyond Geneva in order to understand more fully the transnational evolution and impact of anti-colonialism in this era; in fact, they have already begun to do so.

The Guardians ends on a rather wistful note, circling back to the post-World War II retirement of two of its main characters, William Rappard, the Swiss internationalist who played a central role in the Pmc throughout its existence, and the Belgian diplomat Pierre Orts, Rappard's longtime colleague and collaborator. Both, we learn, died in the spring of 1958, in a world very different from the one they had tried to shape in their two decades in Geneva. Though the book does not note this, their deaths occurred only a few months before the pro-British Iraqi monarchy, the one that had been granted independence twenty-six years earlier under their watch, was swept away in the bloody coup that saw the body of Nuri al-Sa'îd, the longtime Iraqi prime minister who had negotiated that 1932 agreement, hung, burned, and mutilated in the streets of Baghdad. Perhaps it is just as well that they did not live to see it.

Mira Siegelberg

There is a telling moment in Susan Pedersen's *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* when Carl Schmitt, the German legal theorist and Nazi lawyer, breaks into the narrative. It occurs at the conclusion of a particularly illuminating chapter on the transformation of the Kingdom of Iraq from a Mandate of the British Empire to independent statehood. There, Pedersen briefly summarizes Schmitt's on the spot characterization of the passage from the old imperial order governed by European powers into a new world of American hegemonic control. In his 1933 essay, *Forms of Modern Imperialism in International Law*, Schmitt argued that the League of Nations served as the burial ground for the repertoires and languages of European imperial rule. The new age of American dominance, he predicted, would be characterized by the principle of the sovereign equality of states, with American power dictating the legal vocabularies that all states would be forced to speak. What is particularly striking about this moment in the book is the forthrightness of Pedersen's challenge to anyone who has looked to Schmitt as a guide to liberal imperialism – a particularly popular move since the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. A close reading of the formation of the Iraqi state in 1932, she argues, reveals the limits of relying on Schmitt since he failed to account for the reorientation of British power and the role played by the League of Nations in its successful pivot. As she pointedly states, if scholars read this episode with the same rapt attention they paid to Schmitt's political theory, they would be in a better position to grasp the dynamics that shaped the transition from a global order based on empire to one based on the formal sovereignty of independent states. The contrast Pedersen sets up between Schmitt's analysis and her own reading of the evidence signals the book's broader commitment to empiricism and archival literacy. *The Guardians* brilliantly succeeds in showing how international history, shorn of prior theoretical assumptions about internationalism, imperial politics, or the nature of the political, authorizes a fresh-eyed appreciation of interwar international order and its ambivalent legacies. One question that remains is whether it is possible to assess the League and the world it helped create without recourse to the intellectual arguments that were part of its construction. In a section of the 1933 essay that Pedersen does not cite, Schmitt reiterated the core Weberian insight that political domination necessarily entails principles of justification. Not, Schmitt argued, because such principles serve to dupe the dominated, but because of the inevitably «intellectual character of all human activities». Against the Schmittian view, *The Guardians* implies that the intellectual content of political argument was only one part of a wider force field created by the establishment of the League of Nations and the internationalization of inter-state politics after World War I. Pedersen's epic study of the system of mandatory rule demonstrates why we cannot comprehend the birth of a particular normative vision of global order without understanding the institution that was not originally designed to achieve such an outcome. For a decade after the conclusion of the First World War the League of Nations stabilized imperial competition and held off national independence

movements. The members of the Permanent Mandates Commission hardly sought to usher in a new world of independent states yet they were part of the «uncontainable dynamic» of a system that veered toward this result anyway.

Diplomatic historians have often made use of the idea of an «international system» to describe or explain patterns of interaction or behavior among political units. «System» employed in this sense implies the set of conventions, practices and expectations that set the terms of interaction. For example, in *The Transformation of European Politics 1763-1848*, Paul Schroeder unearthed the regulative understandings and assumptions that governed and constrained European states. Until the Napoleonic Wars, European Great Powers relied implicitly on the «balance of power», and the premise that no single state would be allowed to seek imperial hegemony. This system, Schroeder argued, was generally unsuccessful in preventing the outbreak of war, whereas the one put into place by the European Great Powers after the Congress of Vienna established more explicit rules of the game better suited to the maintenance of territorial and jurisdictional order. Buried in Schroeder's footnotes are references to the English School of International Relations, a glimpse of his dialogue with the theorists of international society who posited that the absence of an overarching sovereign is not equivalent to anarchy. By contrast, the concept of «system» in *The Guardians* resists generalizations that could support broader conclusions about international order, though the hint of such an interpretive possibility lingers in parts of the book. For instance, in a chapter on the successful effort by jurists and the Mandates Commission to establish that sovereignty did not reside with the Mandatory powers, Pedersen reflects in general terms on how states become bound to international agreements. The book therefore nods to constructivist theories of international relations by suggesting that norms constrain state behavior in unexpected ways. International norms, we are also reminded, may include norms for bombing insurgent populations and enforcing coerced labor. Yet the central argument is that normative statehood emerged out of the contingent play of events, intentions, and institutional design. In the case of Iraq, the British advanced the project of statehood against the League's push for greater internationalization. When it came to the British Mandate in Palestine, the Mandates Commission nurtured the dream of a Zionist state against British interests, which had more to gain from limiting Jewish immigration. For the most part the members of the Commission were not proponents of self-determination but of benevolent empire so this conclusion also did not follow neatly from ideology or conviction. Germany's entrance into the League in 1926 meanwhile spurred greater internationalization, constraining other powers from annexation and establishing precedents for the legal distinctiveness of the Mandates under international law. The revelation that emerges from these episodes is the power of complexity itself – more in the spirit of the new approaches to the study of emergence and dynamic systems cropping up across the natural and social sciences. Pedersen portrays the Mandates System as a complex machine; savvy actors might succeed in pulling on its levers but could not lay claim to its overall function. The League exposed the fact that regimes of rule rest on claims to legitimacy and normativity. However, the

significance of this effect is not in the power of moralism to constrain politics but in the echo chamber effect that it produced. As Pedersen writes, «Bureaucracy, more than idealism, tamed power» (p. ???). There are hints in the story of the competing visions of world order that struggled for mastery in the interwar era – the Germans envisioned a world of formally equal sovereign states regulated through market competition, while the Italians favored agreements among the Great Powers carving up spheres of influence. However, the salient point for Pedersen is that the success of such visions did not depend on strength of will or persuasiveness. The layered form of interaction that the League introduced rendered justifications, norms, and interpretive claims elements of an underdetermined system. Even when the League successfully established that sovereignty over the mandatory territories did not reside in the hands of the Mandatory powers, this legal victory was just one of the system's moving parts. In a now classic article in the «American Historical Review» on the revived interest in the history of the League of Nations, Pedersen called the League «the world's first sustained and consequential experiment in internationalism». Yet *The Guardians* suggests that the history of the Mandates system also cannot help us to generate abstract insights about internationalism, international law, institutionalism, or expertise, and world history is not the stage on which theoretical insights about politics play out. In her conclusion, Pedersen hints at the ways that the procedures for recognizing new states developed in the Mandate era left an indelible imprint on the postwar world, decisively shaping what it would mean to become a state and the possibilities of genuine self-determination. However, the League of Nations transformed the history of global order because of the peculiar, and non-reproducible, conjunctures of the interwar era. It entombed the wordy legalism that was an essential part of the Mandates system and would never have the same kind of purchase again. As decolonization accelerated in the postwar era, the UN served as a platform for inter-state battle, and did not function, as at times the League had, as an independent site that could sustain the international as a distinctive estate in the arena of global politics.

The Guardians beckons nevertheless toward broader critical reflection on the possibilities of global order. By emphasizing systemic consequences over ideology, Pedersen's approach suggests that what the members of the Mandates commission believed, and what they set out to accomplish, is not the last word on the experiment in international oversight and governance. Despite the incredible ambition of the project the conclusion is circumspect, venturing some analysis of the wider implications of the story but stopping far short of where others might tread. One of the notable achievements of the book, however, is that it clears the ground for a critical assessment of the melancholy order of the present day. *The Guardians* seeks to transcend the «binaries frameworks of imperial history» (p. ???) – a phrase Pedersen invokes at the outset of the work – by showing how complexity itself shaped the mechanics of international order. It suggests that gaining this understanding authorizes the potential discovery of useful resources in the League's institutional dynamics that are not reducible to ideology or imperial interest – though that is everywhere in the background of the story. It is less

clear, however, whether the world of hidden hierarchies left in the wake of the League can be understood and evaluated without a deeper understanding of the arguments and justifications that lay the conceptual groundwork for the world of states – not because such ideas were necessarily determinative, but because we will also need to capture the conceptual resources contained in the ideas and practices that informed earlier iterations of global order. To take an example from the postwar era: the records of the International Law Commission from the 1950s and 1960s indicate that the memory of the legalism of the Mandates era left an indelible mark. Newly independent states, concerned with how to achieve substantive independence, did not view the United Nations as a neutral site for the adjudication of disputes. Instead, representatives of postcolonial states favored a deformalized approach to international law because arguing about principles required fewer resources and institutional influence than formal legalism. In other words, the recognition that formal sovereignty was not the same as genuine self-determination, and that legalism disadvantaged less powerful states, generated novel approaches to international law. In order to evaluate normative statehood we will also need to understand how actors conceptualized this form of political order in the first place.

Jakob Vogel

Traditionally, the interwar period has been a blind spot in the periodization of European imperialism. Caught between the pre-1914 era, which was highlighted as the time of the construction of new colonial empires and thus as the beginning of the ultimate stage of European imperial domination over the world, and the post-1945 «era of decolonization», when European power rapidly shrank amidst **Cold war** tensions, the interwar period was generally seen as a time of transition in which European colonial powers were mainly occupied with internal stabilization and the «mise en valeur», the economic valorization of their colonies. The only notable change was, according to this interpretation, the end of the German colonial empire imposed by the treaty of Versailles of 1919. As the German colonies were absorbed by other European colonial powers, namely Great Britain and France, through the mandatory system supervised by the League of Nations, this new fact was not perceived as a major change in the colonial policies of European powers or a new beginning in the historical evolution of the European colonial system. This interpretation is still very much present in general overviews about the evolution of the European empires in the **19th and 20th century**.¹

1. Osterhammel not only speaks of «the development of a colonial export economy» as the major characteristic of the interwar period but also of a «new push of colonization» that took place through the mandatory government that France and Great Britain took over in the Middle East (Jürgen Osterhammel, *Kolonialismus. Geschichte – Formen – Folgen*, p. 41ff). See also Cooper. BISOGNA Indicare bene il volume di riferimento.

However, recent studies have challenged this classical interpretation of the historical evolution of the European colonial system after 1918. A major contribution to this debate is certainly Susan Pedersen's book about the **mandatory system** established by the victorious powers of the First World War under the auspices of the League of Nations in order to assure an international regulation for the government of the former colonies seized from both Germany and the Ottoman Empire. Although the mandatory system, according to Pedersen, cannot be seen as a complete change of the colonial power system, it nevertheless introduced a new element in the international order that, in the long run, forced European powers to legitimize more and more their practices of colonial governance at the international level. By providing an in-depth look at the League's debates and the activity of its Mandates commission during the 1920s and 30s, Pedersen's important study offers numerous interesting new details about the lingering evolution of the governing practices of the colonial empires in different regions of the globe. The book is at its best when it deals with the discussions among the different protagonists inside and around the Mandates commission, their early resistance to a sharper critique of the colonial system, its gradual evolution during the 1930s, and finally when it discusses the role of petitions as openers of a forum for local actors in the colonies.

Despite these important insights, the book curiously fails to give the reader a clear picture of the mandate system itself and its real challenges to the European colonial system. While the author explains the origins of the mandatory system that were shaped by key concepts and ideas coming out of the discussions at the end of the First World War about the future of the British colonial sphere, she underestimates the effects of these new international regulations on other colonies, like India or the French protectorates in Morocco and Tunisia. By narrowing the book's perspective to the concrete works of the commission in the different territories, Pedersen's narrative certainly gains with liveliness and clarity about the constellation of actors around the League of Nations' mandates regime. Nevertheless the general context remains sometimes a bit gloomy for the reader, who might have benefited from a comparative perspective on the evolution of other European colonies.

This tendency becomes particularly striking with regard to the fact that the mandate system actually challenged the traditional dichotomy of «metropolitan» Europe vs. the non-European colonial world by introducing a «colonial» rule by non-European powers – a most important blow to the «classical» vision about Europe's «colonizing» mission. In the first chapters of her book Pedersen shows how the rules of the mandatory system in 1918/1919 drew their inspiration directly upon the evolution of the British colonial empire, especially on the decisions made by the Imperial War Conferences of 1917 and 1918 that further developed the constitutional framework of the British Empire toward the British Commonwealth of Nations. These ideas were put forward in the discussions by two crucial actors with a South African background, General Jan Christiaan Smuts and former Governor of the Cape Colony and Colonial Secretary of Lloyd George, Lord Alfred Milner. Both were members of the British war government and shared, as Pedersen shows, the

idea that the new political framework of international mandates that the victorious powers wanted to establish on the former German and Ottoman Empire should be a mechanism for universalizing norms and practices derived from the British colonial sphere.

But the influence of the British colonial world onto the mandatory system went even further: Milner personally pressed for the decision to attribute the former German colonies in the South-West of Africa and in the southern Pacific, all territories considered as «C» mandates, not to European colonial powers but to the three former British colonies that had become increasingly independent in the years before and during the First World war and acquired the status of a «dominion»: South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. From my point of view this decision actually had a much bigger impact on the international colonial system than Pedersen seems to be aware of: it promoted the former British dominions to the status of new colonial powers in their own right! By doing so, the Versailles settlement reinforced the double identity of these dominions as independent national states and «adult» nations that were seen as capable of leading non-European populations on the path of political development. Although this evolution had started before 1918 in the context of the British Commonwealth, the fact that all three dominions were now considered to be at the same level as the «old» European colonial powers and accepted within the club of nation-states exercising governance over mandatory territories (with Japan as the sole other exception) made this quite a spectacular change in the international system. The mandatory system installed by the League of Nations thus meant not only the extension of the ideas and practices of the British Commonwealth concerning the political future of the colonial world, it also installed – influenced by actors who came from the periphery – the recently defined political status of the dominions in the international sphere and thus decentered the former European colonial world more and more towards the non-European sphere.

Highlighting this evolution does not imply neglecting the fact that the dominions still perceived themselves as something like an extension of Europe or as ambassadors of European civilizational standards in the territories that they controlled through the mandatory system. As former colonies of European settlement, they represented in some ways the older European colonial visions in a new, now independent form. This vision was already very much evident in how Jan Smuts presented his vision of the League of Nations and of a mandatory system in his book *The League of Nations. A Practical Suggestion* published at the end of 1918.² This 71 pages book shows how Smuts understood its mission: as a «great step forward in the government of man» after «the immeasurable sacrifices of the war» that would completely alter the established imperial order of the pre-1914 era.³ In his opinion, «the League will have to occupy the great position which

2. Jan Christiaan Smuts, *The League of Nations. A Practical Suggestion*, London-Toronto-New York, Hodder and Stoughton, 1918.

3. *Ibid.*, p. VI.

has been rendered vacant by the destruction of so many of the old European Empires and the passing away of the old European order». Indeed, Smuts presented the project of the League of Nations as a kind of revolution of the old imperial order which should take the same direction as the evolution of the British Empire:

In a rudimentary way all such composite Empires [of the pre-1914 era] were leagues of nations, keeping the peace among the constituent nations, but unfortunately doing so not on the basis of freedom but of repression. [...] These empires have all broken down, and to-day the British Commonwealth of Nations remains the only embryo league of nations because it is based on the true principles of national freedom and political decentralization.⁴

Smuts presented the evolution of the British Empire as a model for the new League of Nations that should come out of the World War: a form of government where «the ultimate authority of common action is a conference of the principal constituent States» and where the «minor constituents» (e.g. the colonies) should be, according to their respective status, «administered or looked after by the individual principal constituent States referred to».⁵

In this respect the mandate system of the League of Nations marked not only the international recognition of what has been called «Anglo-Imperialism» but really a new step in the history of European colonialism with former colonies now taking over themselves the role of more or less «colonial» powers. This radical change of status, of course, was made accessible only to the three former British settler colonies, but it paved the way for others that could build on the possible evolution of what had been presented for a long time by European imperialists as the immovable principle of the continent's domination of the world. Activists in India and other parts of the world now could bet on the possibility of change, although within the League and its territories the colonial state still continued to fight against the signs of a new era. From the perspective of European colonial history, the mandate system thus was much more than a small step in the long history of decolonization; it was a major turning point that reshaped the relations between Europe and the world much more than European imperialist were willing to acknowledge while debating the practical questions of colonial rule within the Mandate Commission.

Susan Pedersen

One of the benefits of writing a book that crosses some usual disciplinary lines is the chance it affords to see what other fields make of it. I've unexpectedly found historians of international law to be particularly insightful readers of this work. They grasp its intellectual payoff much more easily and readily than I – struggling with too many actors,

4. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

too much drama, and much too much information – did myself. This is surely because they, rather like economic historians, are concerned with systems – with relations of law or trade that bind actors of varying capacity and power across national lines. I do not naturally think this way. As anyone who has read my comparative first book knows, although I am interested in systemic logics, in the past I have taken the nation-state and not the international order as my unit of analysis. There are traces of that orientation still in *The Guardians*, but after some time tracking how states and empires operated in the Geneva world, I knew I needed to reverse the optic – to try to comprehend how an arena constituted through interactions among a range of actors (states but also non-states) could have a logic and influence of its own. It took me longer than it ought to have done to understand this, but I am a jobbing historian, not a social theorist. Thus, while the influences Siegelberg finds in the book (to constructivist international relations theory and even to Schmitt) are indeed there, its argument and method were developed not through such reading but through my effort to make sense of the various political claims, strategies and outcomes I was tracking.

Mira Siegelberg is, then, right on the mark to stress that the book attributes a kind of agency to the mandates system itself, and equally right to stress that I conceive of that system as a «complex machine» – or, perhaps, a complex organism, fluid and shifting. In the book, I try to specify some of the causes and components of those shifts, detailing how liberal internationalist activism, Anglo-French competition, pressure from below, the entrance and then exit of Germany, the world economic collapse, and the crisis of imperial legitimacy unleashed by the Italo-Ethiopian war, at different points and to different degrees affected its normative orientation and capacity. But she is also surely right to hint, however gently, that the level of complexity and indeterminacy I insist on can be a bit frustrating, and to wish I were willing to make stronger claims about the connections between the League system and the postwar order. I am not sure I can do that. I don't work on the postwar period and have something of a horror of historians holding forth about subjects they know little about. I do want to confirm, though, as she detects, that I do not see the League as a way station on the road to the United Nations, or as a less-complete version of the form of internationalism the UN embodies. To the contrary, for a host of reasons – because of the level of contestation over sovereignty and territory in the interwar years, because the League's own membership fluctuated with those battles, and because its officialdom rather than its member states held the driving reins – the League was at once more unfettered and more internationalist (which does not mean less imperialist) than the United Nations. While it is easy to imagine a future in which corporations or even kleptocrats of one sort or another might take over some functions hitherto carried out by states, it is hard to envisage so many consequential human questions being turned over to an institution quite as open as the League ever again.

If Siegelberg focused most directly on the book's effort to capture and analyze the logic of the mandates system *qua* system, though, other commentators to a degree did

so as well, a response that runs against historians' usual tendency to review from their expert silos (historians of Africa concentrating on the chapters on Africa, historians of the Middle East concentrating on the chapters on the Middle East). I'm grateful for that intellectual generosity. Together with the fact that both Manela and Del Pero provide able summaries of the book's narrative structure and main themes, it allows me to dispense with the usual work of reiterating arguments or making narrow specialist points and instead to engage with the more serious questions raised about that systemic approach. These include, first, whether I describe that system accurately, and, second, whether it can bear the explanatory weight I give it.

I will turn to those below, but I think it might be helpful if I first clarify some of the historiographical stakes and criticisms underlying my approach. I deliberately did not lay these out in the text. As a few readers have noted, I tried hard to bring to life the people – bureaucrats, nationalists, academics, governors – caught up in the mandates system and to paint vividly the various milieus and locales in which they operated. I did so because this history is important but also dramatic and engaging, and I wanted to do my very best to render the narrative gripping and at times even moving. I thus avoided long historiographical interventions and methodological discussions, which I find boring and suspect most readers do as well. But some views on historiography and method undergird the book, and bear mention here.

The book is written to a degree in conversation with, but also as a critique of, two common approaches to or claims about the mandates system – approaches and claims to which Anglo-American historians, I think, are especially prone. The first is to read the character of the mandates system off of the (verbose and self-aggrandizing) writings of its first Anglo-American promoters, especially Woodrow Wilson, Jan Christiaan Smuts, and Alfred Milner. Historians have found Smuts' oft-cited pamphlet, *The League of Nations: A Practical Suggestion*, particularly irresistible in this regard. Now, I readily concede that Smuts helped establish imperial management as an international aim and had particularly malignant views about how such management would work – but there is a reason, surely, why he never set foot in Geneva or attended a single League Council or Assembly meeting, and a reason why the Mandates Commission was at loggerheads with South Africa through the whole of the League's life. This is because, while Smuts proposed an inter-imperial collaboration to govern the ex-Ottoman Middle East alone, with all African and Pacific territories to be annexed by their conquerors, and then did his best to further South Africa's own annexationist aims, the system was established along different lines. To figure out what those lines were, including why the Mandates Commission emerged as an oversight body and not (as Smuts hoped and Milner actually tried) as a steering committee of sitting Colonial Secretaries, one has to track the process of its construction after Wilson withdrew, Smuts was sidelined, and Milner gave up – which is what chapter 2 of my book does. My hope is that that account might give pause to those who would read institutional logics off of programmatic statements.

Yet, British liberal internationalists, humanitarians and colonial officials (Ormsby-Gore rather than Milner, J.H. Harris rather than Smuts) were indeed especially influential in setting the character of that regime, and the former British colonial governor Frederick Lugard critical in shaping its early practice. It is, then, understandable that historians have also tended to see the system principally as a British imperial project and to study British aims and actions in order to understand how this global order worked. One of the aims of my book is to challenge that practice, which rests on assumptions I think no less hubristic and Anglocentric when held by academics today than when held by Lugard or Smuts a century ago. Working with French and German and not purely English-language sources, and seeing the system from Berlin, Brussels, Canberra and Windhoek and not simply from London, we can specify more precisely when it worked to promote British imperial interests and when (as with Palestine by the 1930s) it did not. In that sense, this book was written as an appeal to my colleagues in British history to pause and give these other histories their due rather than assume that the British system and the global order are one and the same. That assumption nicely elevates our own field and expertise, but that doesn't mean it is accurate.

So how might one begin to capture the structure or logic of a system that was not simply an emanation of a single empire, however expansive? Let me explain the method I adopted. A few years into my research, awash in evidence of many states and organizations competing agendas at the League, I realized I needed to find some way of assessing their variable capacity as well as to gauge how international officials and structures affected outcomes in turn. I thus spent a month or so counting (yes, counting) the number of pages devoted to each territory in each meeting of the Mandates Commission, then plotting that record of interest by subject, territory, mandatory state, and time. On the basis of that data, I could see when the risings in Syria and Samoa absorbed the Commission's attention, how it turned to questions of sovereignty in the wake of Germany's entrance, how magnetically first Iraq and then Palestine drew its attention after 1929. A second set of data – the statistics on the source and fate of petitions assembled by Anique van Ginneken (a Dutch scholar whose painstaking work some decades ago greatly facilitated my own) – gave some measure of outside pressures of various kinds. Those two sets of data, together, allowed me to see what one might call the skeleton of the system and provided a narrative arc. But to put flesh on those bones, and limit the distortions to which any account based on the League's own records would inevitably be prone, I then researched those highly «internationalized» issues and events (the Bondelswarts rising, the Rwandan famine, the meaning of sovereignty, the emancipation of Iraq, etc.) not only from the standpoint and archives of Geneva but equally of the administering state (in its imperial and local guises) and, so far as possible, the peoples or groups under or objecting to that rule. This painstaking and triangulated research strategy was not – Manela's comment notwithstanding – Geneva-centered. The institution I studied was indeed Geneva-centered, but the research strategy was multi-local, designed to elucidate that institution's global «throw».

Let me now turn to the question, raised by several commentators, of whether the book based on this research strategy appropriately captured the nature of that League system. I won't discuss at length Jacob Vogel's claim, supported with the *de rigueur* citation of Smuts' pamphlet, that I missed that the mandates system was primarily a reflection of British imperial interests; as I stated above, I believe this misses much of its significance. Vogel also claims, however, that the system's real innovation was that it «promoted the former British dominions to the status of new colonial powers [...] on the same level as the “old” European colonial powers». Now, I do agree that the history of the «C» mandates (those ruled by the dominions and Japan) is especially interesting, but not because their creation suddenly rendered these mandatory powers empires, much less imperial equals. After all, these states were imperial already: Japan had an extensive empire, and both Australia and New Zealand insisted that their governance of Papua and the Cook Islands made them especially suitable mandate-holders. South Africa, true, became an imperial overlord through its South West Africa mandate, but not because it desired that status: it intended straightforwardly to annex the territory and govern it under precisely the same race-based system it applied throughout the rest of its domain.

If the acquisition of mandates was supposed to elevate the status of the dominions, neither the League nor the European imperial powers appear to have gotten the message. Alone among the mandatory powers (and unlike Japan), the British dominions were not given membership on the Mandates Commission; both South Africa and Australia were also singled out throughout the League's life for sharp criticism. It is precisely because so many of the scandals and conflicts the Pmc dealt with took place in these territories that they absorb three of the seven single-case chapters in the book. The dominions get plenty of attention, but that attention shows not that they were thereby turned into equal imperial partners but rather that their inclusion made imperial governance if anything more contentious and unstable.

I am more sympathetic to the suggestions, made by Del Pero and Manela, and implied by Aksakal, that the book could do more to capture local actors' engagements and investments, and to define the nature of the system's «publicness» and clarify whose interests that «publicness» tended to promote. The first especially is a critique I expected and accept. This book seeks to anatomize processes of imperial stabilization and legitimation; it thus zeroes in on moments (as during the Syrian revolt) when anti-colonial critique caught fire and seriously imperilled imperial authority. For the most part, however, the mandates regime's publicity apparatus worked to persuade Western publics – not understandably unpersuadable mandatory subjects – of its benevolence and legitimacy; the system's «publicness» was thus always sharply circumscribed by location and race. (It's worth noting here that petitions sent from *outside* the mandated territory did not in fact need to be transmitted through the mandatory power but could go straight to Geneva – a revealing detail about how external observers' views were cultivated and valued above the opinions of populations themselves under mandatory rule). Because of focus and simply time, I could not adequately attend to the ways the League's textual

and political forms nonetheless galvanized nationalist or civic claims and movements (the subject of an excellent recent «Past and Present» article by Natasha Wheatley) or the way those anti-imperial networks in turn reached across national lines to challenge the imperial order's racial and civilizational assumptions. Fortunately, this is a vibrant area of research, with new work published or planned by Michael Goebel, Leslie James, Marc Matera, Maia Ramnath, Jonathan Derrick, Minkah Makalani, Meredith Terretta and others. I am happy to serve as a catalyst to, even a foil for, more such work.

A final question concerns whether the mandate system can bear the explanatory weight placed upon it – whether, that is, the League's attempt to «internationalize» imperialism did in fact measurably contribute to the delegitimation of empire in the twentieth century. Manela especially casts doubt on that argument, pointing out, first, that the British preference for clientelist arrangements long pre-dated Britain's sponsorship of Iraqi «independence», and, second, that the mandates regime was, at most, only one of a host of challenges to empire in that century. This first critique is, I think, misguided. Yes, as I discuss in the book, Britain had a long and well-documented history of ruling through various «native» authorities and of promoting client states; this is exactly why British colonial officials thought Wilsonian ideals easily reconciled with their own preferences and practices. They expected those client states, however, to let Britain manage their international relations; as Milner famously explained to Lloyd George, what «self-determination» would mean for these clients was that «independent native rulers should have no foreign treaties except with us». But the «emancipation» of Iraq challenged that definition, for it brought Iraq into the League – thereby establishing the League, and not the British, as the arbiter of «self-determination» and underscoring the norm that member states were to represent and conduct diplomacy themselves. Recognition by the United Nations, and not capacity or imperial sponsorship, is today the marker of independence.

That said, Manela is surely right to point out that whether the international processes I trace in *The Guardians* played a major or minor role in the transformation of the imperial order remains an open question. I would also say, however, that it is really not my job to answer that question. I believe in the value of systemic analysis and strong argument; I also believe in the process of revision and critique generated by scholarly review and comment. This book tried to understand the mandates system whole, a systemic approach deliberately adopted in order to overcome a limitation of even the best other studies, such as Michael Callahan's two-volume study of the African «B» mandates, which have generalized about the system based on only one class of mandated territories or on territories only in one region. Persuaded through that systemic research of the significance of the regime to the course of international history between the wars, I tried to sketch its components as clearly as I could and demonstrate in one instance after another its significance. To truly address whether that system and those processes in the end contributed more or less to the destabilization of empire than, say, the Indian nationalist movement, or transnational anti-colonialism, or the Second World War, or **Cold War** rivalries, would require a research design quite different from that I undertook.

It's apparent that Manela feels such research will show that the mandates system actually amounted to not-very-much after all. I doubt that (and warrant that populations in the Middle East today doubt it too), but I'm happy to leave the question open. One of the great things about being a historian is that the work of revision and refutation is open to all comers. We don't write for all time – just provisionally, until a more persuasive and better-documented account appears.