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Introduction by Erez Manela

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Introduction by Erez Manela, Harvard University

In recent years, few scholars have done more than Susan Pedersen to take us, as she once put it, “back to the League of Nations.”¹ Now, with *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire*, she presents an extensively researched, elegantly written, and boldly argued case for the significance of the League’s Mandate system in the international history of the interwar years. The book, populated with a cast of memorably drawn characters, tells the story of the League’s Permanent Mandate Commission (PMC), the body intended to oversee the governance of territories taken from the defeated German and Ottoman empires in the Middle East, Africa, and the Pacific, from its inception in the Peace Conference of 1919 to its effective dissolution in 1939. *The Guardians* tells a rich and important story, a fact reflected in the diversity of responses it engendered from the participants of this roundtable.

For Veronique Dimier, this is the story of the success, however limited, of the PMC in carrying out its supervisory mission despite its weakness vis-à-vis the mandatory powers. The commission, after all, could only discuss the reports submitted by those powers themselves; it had no authority to conduct its own inspections on the ground, to sanction the mandatory powers, or even to receive petitions directly from the inhabitants of the mandate territories. Even so, Dimier notes that the commission managed to carve out a measure of independence, insisting that the powers respect inhabitants’ right of petition and giving mandate populations voice in the international arena.

For Elizabeth Thompson, on the other hand, the PMC was an unmitigated disaster as it helped suppress complaints from native populations and endorsed colonial violence in the mandate territories. Noting that Pedersen’s focus on the “view from Geneva” elides colonial-nationalist perspectives, she doubts the contention that “the League helped make the end of empire imaginable” and points out that colonial nationalists could imagine a world without empire long before the PMC. In the end, “airing dirty laundry without then washing it proved to be a detriment to the League’s internationalism and to the future of human rights in the Middle East,” and the PMC’s failure helped turn anticolonial nationalists away from liberal internationalism and toward other, seemingly more promising paths to dignity and equality, including—in the Middle East in particular—alternatives centered on Islam.

Meredith Terretta highlights Pedersen’s contention that the work of the PMC represented the high point of an “internationalist age,” an era when transnational networks of experts, jurists, officials, and lobbyists engaged in tense, sometimes antagonistic collaborations. For Terretta, the book’s main contribution lies in demonstrating the role of League internationalism in shaping the transition from a world of empires to one of nation-states, not least by insisting on the principle that mandatory powers had no political sovereignty over the territories under their rule. Terretta admires Pedersen’s extensive research and the deft pen portraits of League officials but also, like Thompson, notes that the book’s focus on Geneva downplays the perspectives of colonial populations as well as the role of competing internationalisms, most notably the communist variety that developed contemporaneously with the League version.

Trygve Thronveit is concerned less with Pedersen’s account of what the PMC did than with her account of how and for what purpose it came into being. Her view that the PMC, and the League more generally, was

¹ Susan Pedersen, “Back to the League of Nations,” *The American Historical Review* 112:4 (October 2007): 1091-1117.

primarily a British creation designed to serve British imperial interests underestimates, he argues, the role that President Woodrow Wilson played in shaping it and so fails to reckon fully with the radical nature of his vision. Throntveit disputes the claim that “the mandates system functioned as it was intended to function” when it promoted the interests of empire, arguing instead that the pressure of “world opinion” that the PMC channeled was precisely what Wilson thought would help shift international norms away from unaccountable colonial rule and toward self-determination. For Throntveit, the failure therefore lay not with Wilson’s original conception but with the refusal of the U.S. Senate to endorse it, a refusal that left the League a hollow shell and allowed it to become a tool of reaction rather than reform.

Readers of this roundtable who have not yet read the book may wish to begin with Andrew Webster’s contribution, which provides the most comprehensive *tour d’horizon* of the work. Webster locates *The Guardians* within the recent outpouring of scholarship on the League and then proceeds to lay out the book’s central themes and offer a detailed outline of its structure. He notes that Pedersen’s case-study approach to the mandate territories sometimes obscures “the simultaneity of discussions regarding multiple Mandates which existed at each PMC session” and the ways in which “that overlap influenced specific decisions,” and he also wishes for a more robust treatment of the post-1945 transition from the PMC to the United Nations Trusteeship Council. In the end, however, he finds the book “an engaging and genuinely accessible work of scholarship” whose arguments will “frame all scholarly discussion of the mandates system, and much on the League of Nations as a whole, for some time to come.” On this, all the contributors to this roundtable seem to agree.

Participants:

Susan Pedersen received her Ph.D. in History from Harvard more years ago than she cares to remember. She is Gouverneur Morris Professor of British History at Columbia University, where she teaches British, European and international history, and moral and political thought. Her earlier publications include *Family, Dependence and the Origins of the Welfare State: Britain and France, 1914-1945* (1993); *After the Victorians: Private Conscience and Public Duty in Modern Britain* (edited with Peter Mandler, 1994); *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience* (2004); and *Settler Colonialism in the Twentieth Century* (edited with Caroline Elkins, 2005); she also reviews regularly for the *London Review of Books*. Her next book will be about British women in high politics and in the suffrage movement, as seen through the women of the Balfour family.

Erez Manela is Professor of History at Harvard University, where he teaches international history and the history of the United States in the world. He is the author of *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) and co-editor, most recently, of *Empires at War, 1911-1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), which has been translated into seven languages.

Veronique Dimier is a political scientist teaching at the Université Libre de Bruxelles. She currently holds the price and Gutenberg Chair at Strasbourg University. She has a Ph.D. from the Institut d’Etudes Politiques of Grenoble and spent several years at Oxford University (St Antony’s College), as Deakin, Lavoisier and Marie Curie Fellow. In 2006, she received a Fulbright fellowship (New York University). She recently was a Braudel fellow at the European University Institute in Firenze. She has published numerous articles on colonial government, the mandate system, colonial citizenship. More specifically: *Le gouvernement des colonies: regards croisés franco-britanniques* (2004), which deals with the institutionnalisation of a science of colonial

government in France and Britain and the effect of the mandate system on colonial government in both countries. The last ten years she has been working on the second career of colonial officials and their role in the European (EEC/EU) institution dealing with development assistance: *The Invention of a European Development Aid Bureaucracy: Recycling Empire* (New York: Palgrave, 2014). She is now working on businesses, decolonization and development.

Currently a member of the School of Historical Studies at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, **Meredith Terretta** earned her Ph.D. in history at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She teaches history at the University of Ottawa and is currently researching legal and political activism and rights claims in Africa, notably in the continent's protectorates, mandate and trust territories from the interwar to the early independence period. She has recently coedited *African Asylum at a Crossroads: Activism, Expert Testimony, and Refugee Rights* (Ohio University Press, 2015). Her most recent single-authored book is *Nation of Outlaws, State of Violence: Nationalism, Grassfields Tradition, and State-Building in Cameroon* (Ohio University Press, New African Histories Series, 2014). Her articles appear in such journals as *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps*, *Politique africaine*, *The Journal of World History*, *Human Rights Quarterly* and *The Journal of African History*. She is currently writing a book, *Voices in Trust: Activism, United Nations Trusteeship and Independent Africa*, on the intersection between human rights activism and the rule of law in Africa's United Nations Trust Territories from the postwar period to the early 1970s.

Elizabeth F. Thompson is professor of history at the University of Virginia and a 2015-2016 Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, DC, where she is writing a book on Syria after World War I tentatively titled "After Lawrence: Woodrow Wilson and the Brief Promise of Arab Liberalism."

Trygve Throntveit is an independent scholar and fundraiser for the University of Minnesota Foundation in Minneapolis, MN. He received his Ph.D. in history from Harvard University in 2008. He is the author of numerous articles and book chapters on the history of American social thought, politics, and diplomacy. His books include *William James and the Quest for an Ethical Republic* (New York: Palgrave, 2014) and *Power without Victory: Woodrow Wilson and the American Internationalist Experiment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, forthcoming).

Andrew Webster is Senior Lecturer in Modern History at Murdoch University, Perth. He is the author of numerous articles on the history of the League of Nations and international disarmament during the interwar period, including in *Contemporary European History*, *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, and *French History*. He is currently writing a manuscript on the history of international disarmament from 1899 to 1945.

Review by Veronique Dimier, Université Libre de Bruxelles and Strasbourg University,
SAGE

The main contribution and originality of Susan Pedersen's book is to show how an international institution like the League of Nations Permanent Mandates Commission came to have a life of its own, independently of its stakeholders. Set up in November 1920, after former German and Turkish colonial territories were granted as mandates to France, Britain, Belgium, South Africa, Australia and Japan, it was to ensure 'the well-being and development' of 'those people not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world' (Article 22 of the covenant of the League of Nations'). Composed of 9 members selected for an indefinite period of time and chosen for their competence, with a majority of them coming from non-mandate powers, the Commission was expected to be an independent body whose aim was to supervise the implementation of these principles by the mandatory powers. As such it had at least one annual session in Geneva where it was to analyse the reports sent by the mandatory powers, a task it performs till 1939 and the beginning of the Second World War. The task of the Commission was limited as it did not have the right to investigate on the spot, to receive petitions directly and to sanction the mandatory powers. Of particular interest in this book is precisely the importance Pedersen grants to the leaders who built this institution (Lord Lugard, Marquis Alberto Theodoli, William Rappard, among others) despite the very limits it encountered. She shows convincingly how the Commission tried and, to some extent, succeeded in escaping the grasp of its main stakeholders (mainly mandatory and colonial powers), in extending its power well beyond the expectations of the states which originated it. This seems to confirm the neo-institutionalists' hypotheses that the political organs of international organizations are not without resources: as a result, they are not simply passive tools of the Member States. Over time, the argument holds, these organizations will seek to use grants of authority for their own purposes, especially to increase their autonomy. They will seek to expand the gaps in Member States' control and they will use any accumulated political resources to resist efforts to curtail their authority'¹

This is clear in the way Theodoli dealt with petitions received through the mandatory powers (85): his activism in receiving, reading and accepting a number of petitions was a great source of annoyance for the mandatory powers. As Pedersen notes, "the vast majority of communications, memoranda, memorials and appeals that crossed Theodoli's desk (including a great many that certainly did call the mandate into question), were thus ruled 'receivable', sent to the mandatory power for comment, and put through a procedure that would make the petitioner's grievance more widely known." (85). Members of the Commission, to assert their autonomy, also did their utmost to force mandatory powers to respect the right of petition. In the same way, some members strove to have their own visit of inspection on the ground and a more precise questionnaire (211-212). The tendency and attempts of the Commission to increase its power and independence is also clear in chapter 7, which examines the success of the Commission's members in opposing attempts by South Africa and Great Britain to annex or amalgamate mandate territories with

¹ P. Pierson, "The Path to European Union: A Historical Institutional Analysis," *Comparative Political Studies*, (29)2, 1996: 123-64. For a debate on this point, see also M. N. Barnett and M. Finnemore, *Rules for the World: International Organizations in World Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); P.J. Dimaggio and W. Powell, (eds.) *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); E.B. Haas, *When Knowledge is Power: Three Models of Change in International Organizations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

colonial ones. Of course, these attempts had limits: the autonomy of the Mandates Commission as an international institution was always challenged by its stakeholders.

Pedersen largely highlights the resistance of the mandatory powers to what was considered to be the “activism” of the Permanent Mandates Commission (211). The mandatory powers, for example, opposed any attempts by the Commission to have direct links with petitioners, shut down any possibility for the Commission to send visits of inspection on the spot and to write a more precise questionnaire, one that would be, according to Chamberlain, “infinitely more detailed, infinitely more inquisitorial” (212). Criticisms as to the tendency of the Commission “to exceed its power” continued (211). The book also shows (chapter 5) how, in 1925, after the Syrian revolt and the bombing of Damascus, attempts by Lugard and other members of the Commission to inquire into French atrocities and into the conflict in progress were quickly dashed, how the Permanent Mandates Commission eventually came to cooperate with the mandatory powers instead of casting doubts on the “alleged mal-administration of backward people” (166). Even though the Commission was eager to present itself as impartial, in this case, where its own legitimacy and *raison d'être* were at stake, it finally stated that “its duty to cooperate with the mandatory power was as important as its duty to supervise” (160).

This chapter is also interesting on another aspect: while in my own work on the Permanent Mandates Commission², I show that the Commission became the perfect ground for French and British rivalry and competition, Pedersen reveals judiciously how both powers were able to cease their squabbles and collaborate when their status as colonial powers was seriously challenged. Last but not least, she shows how these limits to the Commission's autonomy and the contradictions in which the Commission found itself largely contributed to the demise of the system. Particularly interesting on this point is chapter 9 on Iraq: the decision of the UK to grant independence to Iraq, was a way for it to maintain its economic interests and influence while escaping the supervision of the Commission. In this case, the mandate system was questioned by the very powers that set it up when it became clear that they could lose control of the whole process. As pointed out by Pedersen, this demise was facilitated by the evolution of the international context and a change in personnel, with the departure of the main leaders of the organisation (Lugard especially). All in all, this book will be of interest not only to historians but also to specialists in international relations and political scientists working on international institutions.

² V. Dimier, (2004) *Le gouvernement des colonies: regards croisés franco-britanniques* (Presses Universitaires de Bruxelles, 2004); Dimier, « On Good Colonial Government: Lessons from the League of Nations, » *Global Society*, Vol 18, 2004, 279-299.

Review by Meredith Terretta, University of Ottawa

Susan Pedersen devotes much of her conclusion to spelling out the differences between the dynamically internationalist Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations, tasked with overseeing the mandated territories from the mid-1920s until the mid-1930s, and its more statist postwar successor, the United Nations Trusteeship Council that supervised the administration of the trust territories. Among other things, the Trusteeship Council privileged the ‘security’ interests of administering authorities over those of indigenous inhabitants, even as the latter became involved in the political processes of decolonization. The Trusteeship Council appeared much less independent than the Mandates Commission, particularly to those intimately familiar with the League for having served on it, studied it, or written legal opinions about its purpose in the world. Pedersen’s history of the Mandates Commission portrays the League’s dismantling in the late 1930s and the postwar formation of a statist UN as a harbinger for the end of empire. This was not because the UN, amplifying the Atlantic Charter, ushered in an age of political and economic rights in a new age of world governance in which colonialism had no place. Rather, the UN was a trans-war, not a post-war, formation that foretold not only the end of empire, but also the very end to internationalism that enabled empire’s demise. In place of a league of nations, Pedersen argues, came not a united nations, but the bilaterally negotiated state-building that would “safeguard geopolitical interests [of world powers] even after formal empire was gone (203).”

This book provides answers to more than one essential historical question of our time, nearly a century after the League’s optimistic formation. My primary focus is this one: How did the interests of states vanquish ‘the international’ that the world’s ‘guardians’—members, experts, officialdom, secretaries, jurists, and various lobbyists associated with the League of Nations—deliberately built; and, further, what was lost when the sort of internationalism on which they collaborated, at times tensely, even antagonistically, to construct ‘stopped working’ on the brink of the Second World War? As a historian of Africa researching the particular rights that UN Trusteeship status afforded to inhabitants of Africa’s trust territories in the age of decolonization, I frame the question more particularly than Pedersen intends: What, if anything, did *inhabitants* of Mandate/Trust territories lose ‘when internationalism stopped working?’ Pedersen answers as far as her chronological parameters, circa 1920-1939, will allow; but I find most compelling the historical nuggets she leaves to suggest that the answer may be found in the political, legal, and economic deformations of sovereignty in our present-day world. In the rise and demise of internationalism embodied in the League in the interwar period, Pedersen finds the historical roots of sovereignty’s present deformations.

Through a historical analysis of the “practices and proclivities” (406) of Mandate Commission members, the colonially-minded politicians and administrators they aided or opposed, experts on international law, and activists claiming rights, Zionist protections, and/or the vague promise of self-determination in Article 22 of the League of Nations Covenant, Pedersen parses the conflictual meanings of sovereignty and historicizes its redefinition. Although plenty of references to it pepper the rest of the text, her main arguments about sovereignty appear in Chapter 7, “The Struggle over Sovereignty,” and again in Chapters 8 and 9, the latter, a case study of the mandate territory Iraq’s transition to statehood. These chapters fit into Part III of the book, entitled “New Times, New Norms, 1927-1933” and coincide with German membership in the League, a period which Pedersen refers to as the League’s most “innovative” and “creative.”

In Chapters 7 and 8, Pedersen shows that, from about 1925 through 1930, through the cases of Ruanda-Urundi, Southwest Africa, and Tanganyika, the Permanent Mandates Commission upheld the principle that imperial powers were not sovereign in the territories they administered as League of Nations Mandates. But

rather than “deprive the mandatory powers of sovereignty” as the Mandates Commission prevented the integration of mandate territories — South West Africa, Ruanda-Urundi, and Tanganyika — into the adjacent Union of South Africa, Belgian Congo, and Kenya, the League created “spaces from which sovereignty was banished altogether (232).” Concurrently, the League’s commitment to development led to a “decoupling of legal sovereignty and economic control (203),” with the administering powers retaining possession of mandated territories’ ‘economic sovereignty’ even as the League curtailed their ‘legal sovereignty.’ Nowhere is this more starkly revealed than in the case of Ruanda-Urundi. Three years after the League forbade the Belgians to administer Ruanda-Urundi as part of Belgian Congo, a decimating famine swept underdeveloped northeastern Rwanda in 1928. The Belgians used the famine to justify coercive labor practices for cultivation, portage, and roadwork, despite the League’s restriction of forced labor in mandate territories.

The decoupling of sovereignties posed a conundrum for Britain, which set the standard for ‘good, civilizational governance’ characteristic of the League’s ‘Lugardian’ age in the 1920s. Eager to preserve its exclusive commercial privilege by making Iraq into a client state and thereby shutting the ‘open door’ that the League pledged to protect in mandate territories, Britain shepherded Iraq’s ‘emancipation’ through the Mandates Commission from 1921 to 1932. On 3 October 1932, Iraq was admitted to membership in the League of Nations, an event that marked “the first case in which the pre-eminent global institution changed the international standing of a territory—from ‘dependent’ to ‘independent’—without war and through member vote (263),” but at what cost? Pedersen explains that Britain secured international approval for Iraq’s transition from Mandate to member of the League by striking “two consequential bargains ... one over the extent of Iraq’s economic and military sovereignty (269),” over which the former administrator ensured its continued control, and “the second over its internal authority (269),” where “Iraq was free to run its internal administration much as it liked (283),” meaning, free to do away with the fragile protections that mandate status had afforded minorities, Kurds and Assyrians among them. Here, Pedersen sees a new definition of ‘independence’ emerging, one that had been, during mandate rule, evacuated of legal sovereignty even as its economic sovereignty was assigned to territorial administrators. The Mandates Commission thus became the bureaucratic, procedural body through which the League “helped make the end of empire imaginable, and normative statehood possible,” not by triumphantly conferring political sovereignty to formerly subjugated inhabitants of mandate territories, but rather by allowing internationalization to lay the groundwork for the possibility that territorial control was no longer “essential to the maintenance of global power (406).”

I now turn away from the empirically detailed case studies that serve as the backbone for Pedersen’s claims about sovereignty, empire, and its internationalist alternative as the historical roots of normative statehood to examine more closely the ways in which the League made the internationalist dynamic. Pedersen’s history is not a conventional diplomatic one. Her innovative approach to state and non-state actors through official and personal archives combines a collective biographical sketch of ‘the guardians’ with an analysis of their commitment to textualism and legalism. Personality and practice of League personnel resulted in serendipitous combinations and seemingly accidental convergences, and the mandates system itself emerged from these by the skin of its teeth. Through Pedersen’s precise and witty prose we learn how the inner workings of the League’s nascent bureaucratic structure engendered the dynamic of internationalization that set the course to our unevenly globalized world of disparate states.

The towering figure of veteran British colonial administrator Sir Frederick D. Lugard excepted, the Permanent Mandates Commission ‘guardians’ — who served to bring consensus, peace, and order to the “conflict zone where empires clashed and territory changed hands (405),” — that is, to the fifteen mandated

territories taken from Germany in the First World War — were rather secondary, forgettable figures in their respective national and colonial histories. Yet Pedersen offers a close-up view of the Mandates Commission members as a way of situating the Commission vis-à-vis the League Secretariat and Council, the colonial and foreign ministries of administering powers, and the political activists and lobbies engaging the mandates system to various ends. Pedersen brings the guardians to life as she reveals the small, intricate dynamics that laid very broad strokes of the internationalism that gradually became so immutable as to have ‘stopped working’ in the case of Palestine (Ch. 12) as the League fell apart in the late 1930s. Her attention to persona leads one to ask: Had *these* men (and woman) not been the members of the Commission, might the story have ended differently? For instance, the “pedantic” and “socially inept” Dutch member of the Commission, D. F. W. Van Rees was the one to write the memoranda that pushed the body to “establish the principle that mandatory powers were ‘not sovereign’ in the mandated territories (206).” Lugard’s seniority, not to mention his veteran experience in diverse colonial settings allowed his paternalistic racial thinking to trump the muted suggestions of his much younger predecessor on the Mandates Commission, William Ormsby-Gore, that white prejudices prevented civilized governance in Mandate territories. And so civilizational paternalism, a transparent veneer for racism, prevailed as a League standard. To the consternation of the French, Portuguese and Belgian members Italian member and president of the Commission, Alberto Theodoli, delighted in championing the petitioning process that allowed the hitherto voiceless inhabitants of the territories to be heard, albeit in a much regulated way, on the world stage in Geneva. Yet, although in 1923 Theodoli penned the “strongest condemnation of white settler colonialism ... that ever appeared in a Commission report (125),” in 1935 he defended Italy’s conquest of Abyssinia.

More than the sum of these vignettes, Pedersen milks far-flung archival records in no fewer than ten countries to uncover just what underlay the League’s civilizational and internationalist rhetoric. The practice beneath the talk—the bureaucratic structure built from scratch, the document review, the leaks and the back-channeling that accompanied periodic sessions—conflicted with the “aims, claims, and interests of the powers and peoples with which it was involved” to produce “meanings and outcomes no one had intended (406).” In other words, the League of Nations, and, in particular, its Mandates Commission, went further than most anyone in 1920 ever supposed it would, towards regulating the ‘international frontier’ of the interwar era. In part, Pedersen explains, this was due to a common devotion to textualism that enabled Commission members, civil servants, and functionaries thrust into the seat of ‘expert’ on a world stage to elaborate a “distinct and separate status for mandates under international law ... as determinations were made on one sticky question after another,” (206) thereby assuring their own utility and gradually acquiring the sort of authority that made international consent a prerequisite for any changes to the mandate system.

Europeans, of course, were not the only actors preoccupied by the international frontier the mandate territories comprised. Other actors appear in Pedersen’s pages, including: the American political scientist and statesman, Ralph Bunche, who would become a primary architect of the UN’s Trusteeship system; Olaf Nelson, the prosperous merchant of Western Samoa whom the British viewed, rightly or wrongly, as the ringleader of the Samoan civil disobedience movement known at the time as the Mau movement; and Michael Leahy, an intrepid and rapacious adventurer who explored Mandated New Guinea’s highlands. These activists, admittedly far flung and of varying stripes, at times formed their own arguably coherent internationalist networks. Yet, outside of Zionists, and to a lesser extent, pan-Arabists, anti-imperial activists do not collectively figure in Pedersen’s book. From chapter to chapter, I wondered about alternative internationalisms with an interwar genesis, and whether some of the figures that Pedersen portrays might have intersected with transregional circuits of mobilization that made much of new precedents in international law issuing from the League. Humanitarian activists are represented only in the Anti-Slavery Society, but what of

the legalist civic republicans and freemasons of the French *Ligue des Droits de l'Homme* who plagued the League in their support of petitioners from territories under French administration? The word 'communism' is absent from the book although the Third Communist International turned its focus to colonial territories in the summer of 1920, precisely as the League and its mandates system began to congeal in Geneva. By 1922, the French government had adopted anticommunism as a cornerstone of burgeoning anti-revolutionary policy across metropole and empire. Petitioners to the League thus figured in the crosshairs of French administrators, as did black internationalists. By pioneering an internationalist approach to interwar imperial history through the lens of the League, Pedersen's work asks for similar work to be undertaken from other historical vantage points. Having done so much, her work reveals how much is still to be done.

Review by Elizabeth F. Thompson, University of Virginia

Susan Pedersen's story is a dispassionate and devastating autopsy of an institution deformed by a congenital disease. Pedersen reveals how the League of Nations' mandate system routinely violated its mission to guide advanced states in tutoring new nations in self-government. Tutelage was rendered unlikely at the outset, as these states used brutal force to occupy—and put down revolts in—Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Western Samoa, and Southwest Africa.

Subsequent chapters describe nightmarish measures to sustain mandatory rule over the next two decades: South Africa's 1922 air bombing of family camps in South West Africa (118); French troops' parading of rebel corpses through Damascus streets in 1925 (146); New Zealand's 1929 massacre of eleven Samoans in a peaceful demonstration (187); Belgium's resort to massive, unpaid forced labor to build roads in response to a 1929 famine in Rwanda, (252); France's 1938 transfer of Syria's valuable port of Alexandretta to Turkey, against the non-Turkish majority's wishes, forcing 40,000 Arabs and Armenians to flee (352); and Britain's destruction of Jaffa's old city and methodical dynamiting of peasant houses in the 1936-39 Palestinian revolt (373-375).

More chilling, still, is to read how agents of the League of Nations endorsed this violence. From its birth, Pedersen argues, the mandate system functioned through the collusion of colonial empires to contain their rivalries and repress challenges to imperialism unleashed by World War I and the 1919 Paris Peace Conference. The Permanent Mandates Commission (PMC), an oversight body, was staffed with veterans of European colonial endeavors who regarded former subjects of the Ottoman and German empires as backward peoples who, like children, were in need of the rod of discipline.

Pedersen's account is so effective because she fully inhabits the minds of these European elites. Her prose captures their confident legalism and pretense to civilization, then juxtaposes these with the carnage they authorized. For scholars of the mandated territories like myself, it is no surprise that these so-called 'trusts of civilization' were ruled no more humanely than regular colonies. But this is no mere story of how the wolves ran the chicken coop.

Pedersen's study of the PMC's records reveals an unexpected health benefit: bureaucrats at the League of Nations' headquarters in Geneva rescued the mandate system from the jaws of brute colonialism to place it under public scrutiny and at times, legal restraint. The hero of her tale is William Rappard, the Swiss director of the Mandates Section. A Wilsonian at heart, Rappard wanted to hold the Great Powers accountable in a democratizing world (52). He struggled against the near-hegemonic power of racist colonialism to air the dirty laundry of mandates and to establish precedents for international regulation. "Bureaucracy, more than idealism, tamed the demons of power," Pedersen wrote (46).

By insisting on a paper trail and by holding meetings, bureaucrats like Rappard fostered an unprecedented public conversation. The talk generated at Geneva fostered a community of observers and activists who would lay the foundations for the United Nations and the internationalist world of Non-Government Organizations that monitor human rights violations today. At the core of the mandate system, Pedersen concludes, was "the play of geopolitical interest and the force of international scrutiny and 'talk'" (406).

There is much to engage with in Pedersen's rich and nuanced argument. I confine myself here to comments I can offer as a specialist on the modern Middle East, which is the focus of five of the book's twelve chapters.

First, Pedersen throws valuable light on what has long remained a black box for scholars of the interwar Middle East. Residents of the mandates of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Transjordan, and Palestine sent hundreds – even thousands—of petitions to Geneva between 1920 and 1939. Their persistence and their passionate advocacy of Wilsonian ideals is striking. As Pedersen shows, members of the Arab elite like Shakib Arslan, the Lebanese-Druze prince who lobbied the League in Geneva, adapted well to the new system and proved as legalistic as the PMC. However, almost all of their petitions were ignored or rejected as inadmissible. The star of Arabs' hopes for justice under international law proved to be a black hole of disappointment.

Second, Arabs able to access the foreign press no doubt appreciated the new level of international scrutiny enabled by the League. On 18 February 1926, under the headline “France Defends Policy in Syria,” the *New York Times* wrote, “The cross-examination of a great colonial power in regard to its treatment of a weaker nationality took place here today for what is believed to be the first time in history.”¹ The article details how the PMC subjected the architect of France’s violent occupation of Syria, Robert de Caix, to a grueling interrogation on French ‘misadministration,’ in the wake of the Great Syrian Revolt.

Yet, despite press coverage, public condemnation of French war crimes, and hundreds of Syrian petitions demanding independence under Article 22 of the League covenant, the PMC voted to uphold French rule. Pedersen uncovered correspondence demonstrating how Commissioners caved so much to French pressure that they did not even require reforms.

Pedersen’s book confirms what Arabs of the era suspected: the machinery established in 1919 to guarantee rights to small nations and the rule of international law actually worked to subvert both. Here, as in other chapters, she shows that, at the PMC, geopolitical interest trumped public scrutiny.

The extent of damage done to the future of politics and the reign of law in the Arab world has not yet been fully calculated. Some historians have suggested that, like a cancerous cell, colonial violence replicated itself on every level of culture, society, politics, eroding the vigorous culture of liberal tolerance and respect for law that had once prevailed.²

Given its focus on the institution in Geneva, *The Guardians* cannot and should not be expected to pursue these effects, but the book’s greatest promise, in my view, is that it may inspire a new round of scholarship placing local history in dialogue with international institutions based in Europe. Pedersen presents her book as the first “comprehensive history of the mandate system” (10) but it should not therefore be regarded as the definitive history. *The Guardians* opens the door to research that may overturn not only our understanding of global politics after the 1919 Wilsonian moment but also reinvent the discipline of international history itself.

¹ “France Defends Policy in Syria,” *The New York Times*, 18 February 1926.

² Daniel Neep, *Occupying Syria under the French Mandate* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Michael Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt and the Rise of Arab Nationalism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005); Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Disorder after 1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Priya Satia, *Spies in Arabia: The Great War and Cultural Foundations of Britain’s Covert Empire in the Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

I hazard here two hypotheses about what a future synthesis of center-periphery in the mandate system might look like.

First, future research might widen and reshape the mandate system. From the standpoint of Geneva, Pedersen argues that the system began as a vehicle for imperial collusion, but that by the 1930s, “the League helped make the end of empire imaginable” (11, 406). Imaginable to colonial officials, perhaps, but many outside of the halls of colonial and foreign ministries had long before then imagined a world without empire. I am struck that much of the work of the PMC involved rationalizing how to dismiss petitions and critics. The boundaries of the mandate system were apparently quite unstable, suggesting that policing them was a key dynamic. The inclusion of anti-imperial critics and the Africans and Asians living under mandates within Pedersen’s international society and within the mandate system would likely take this history into new directions and also suggest a new narrative arc.

The system was not, for example, congenitally a club of colonial collusion. According to the papers of Woodrow Wilson and minutes of the Supreme Council in 1919, the American president vigorously upheld his promise that the war should not serve the extension of colonial empire. He fought repeatedly against delegates of the British Dominions and Japan who wished to annex portions of the German Empire. And he urged that ‘A’ mandates assigned to formerly Ottoman peoples grant them provisional sovereignty. He angered the British and French by insisting on sending a commission to poll Syrians on their political preferences.³

Likewise, another of the Big Four, French Premier Georges Clemenceau, was an anti-imperialist who fully controlled his colonial lobby as long as he remained in office, until January 1920. Further research might ask why it was that small colonial lobbies in London and Paris held sway against significant opposition. We know that by 1921-1922, the British and French parliaments drastically cut budgets for the Iraqi and Syrian mandates, having lost interest. We might profit by placing the PMC within a wider field of talk, and reconsider what factors turned it into a colonial club, after the departure of Wilson and Clemenceau from the scene. We might also reconsider whether self-rule was truly unimaginable in the 1920s, or whether the PMC only made it seem so.

Second, future research may also inquire as to whether the League’s greater importance is revealed in the mandates, not in Geneva, as Pedersen contends (5). From the local viewpoint, the international talk generated by the League was not so sanguine a side effect. In Syria, it served to highlight how it had been deliberately excluded from the family of nations endowed with rights. It may be that the bitterness this caused may set mandates apart from regular colonies, where the possibility of equality under international law had not been inscribed in founding charters.

³ *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Arthur S. Link, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986) vols. 54-58, especially meetings of January 30, March 20, May 21-22, 1919; see also David Hunter Miller, *My Diary of the Conference at Paris* (1924) v. 1, 97-100; l. 14, 42-52, 72-131; Jukka Nevakivi, *Britain, France, and the Arab Middle East* (London: Athlone Press, 1969), 129-42, 156-59; Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 210-26.

The consequences of betrayal were, as I have argued *Justice Interrupted*, turned Arabs and Turks away from international law, with grave consequences for the future.⁴ Shakib Arslan, the embittered Arab lobbyist, in the 1930s turned toward cooperation with Nazi Germany against the Allies' League. His close associate, Rashid Rida, also abandoned his liberalism after the PMC upheld the French mandate. An Islamic scholar, he told readers of his popular magazine, *The Lighthouse*, that Europe clearly intended justice under international law for Christians only. And he inspired the 1928 founding of the Muslim Brotherhood, which opted out of liberal universalism in favor of a separate, Islamic justice. From this schism grew the militant, anti-Western brand of Islamism that engulfs Syria and Iraq today.⁵

In the long-term, airing dirty laundry without then washing it proved to be a detriment to the League's internationalism and to the future of human rights in the Middle East. Turkish historians debate the deleterious impact of Allies' imperialist manipulation of the tribunals established to prosecute war crimes against Armenians. Liberals in Istanbul who inclined toward cooperation with the League were undercut when the Allies justified the parceling out of Anatolia amongst themselves by asserting the Turkish peoples' collective guilt. The evident bias of the tribunals played into the hands of nationalists who rejected international jurisdiction. Taner Akçam believes that moment spoiled the future of human rights in the Turkish Republic.⁶

Pedersen's book offers rewarding, if deeply pessimistic, lessons on the difficulty of legislating changes in mentality, of challenging military power with law, and in reforming institutions. Those lessons set an important agenda for the evolution of international history beyond the study of European institutions. A truly global history may inspire the international talk that Pedersen rightly argues is crucial to an impartial and international system of justice.

⁴ Elizabeth F. Thompson, *Justice Interrupted* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

⁵ "Rashid Rida and the 1920 Syrian Arab Constitution: The Last Stand of Arab Liberalism?" in Arsan and Schayegh, ed., *Routledge Handbook of the History of the Middle East Mandates* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 244-257.

⁶ Taner Akçam, *From Empire to Republic: Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide* (New York: Zed Books, 2004), 196; Erik Jan Zürcher, "Renewal and Silence: Postwar Unionist Rhetoric on the Armenian Genocide," in Suny, ed., *A Question of Genocide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) 306-316.

Review by Trygve Throntveit, Independent Scholar

For all its narrative sweep and analytical power, Susan Pedersen's *The Guardians* is essentially a study in irony. Her subject, the League of Nations mandates system, was the primary mechanism for colonial reform in an institution viewed by millions worldwide as civilization's response to the mass psychopathy of imperialism and its consequence, world war. And yet, the League's Permanent Mandates Commission (PMC) served from its first session to shore up the British and French empires against the anti-imperialist tide that the Great War unleashed. Pedersen's main characters, the PMC's commissioners in Geneva, were overwhelmingly influenced by British imperial ideology, which viewed the empire's existing colonies as sites of political tutelage opening culturally distinct pathways to civilization. And yet the British, straining to reconcile their mandated duties with indigenous demands and their own changing interests, were the leading innovators of alternative arrangements that served to make statehood normative, even while rendering sovereignty amorphous and often meaningless for post-colonial states. In a further irony, it was the territorially ravenous Germans who catalyzed that process by insisting that sovereignty over Mandates rested with the League (in which Germany was included after 1926) rather than the mandatory powers (from which Germany was excluded).

Finally, Pedersen argues, the PMC was from its beginnings dominated by a 'textualist' rather than political ethos, committed to holding mandatory powers accountable to the letter of their mandate texts rather than evolving local and global conditions. And yet, by publicizing both the policies of its member states and many of the resentments and claims of their legal wards, the PMC inadvertently undermined the colonial system of political tutelage it was intended to preserve. Though neither the PMC nor the mandatory powers were interested in "extending the right of self-determination" to their wards, Pedersen argues, the mandates system nonetheless became "the tool through which the imperial order would be transformed" (3-4).

Pedersen wraps these ironic narratives together into a remarkably coherent and readable origin story of our contemporary world—a world in which sovereignty is inviolably sacred in theory but fragmented and frequently irrelevant in practice.¹ There is no comparable treatment of the mandates system; the best works to date (which Pedersen has mastered and generously credited in her copious notes) have focused on individual Mandates, mandatory powers, or regions.² There are of course much broader works on the League, some more comprehensive than *The Guardians* in terms of the number of Mandates and events addressed.³ But

¹ On varying conceptions and practical limits of sovereignty in the era of globalization see Joseph A. Camilleri and Jim Falk, *The End of Sovereignty? The Politics of a Shrinking and Fragmenting World* (Aldershot, UK: Elgar, 1992); and Trudy Jacobsen, Charles Sampford, and Ramesh Thakur, eds., *Re-envisioning Sovereignty: The End of Westphalia?* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2008).

² The only exceptions were published in 1930, nine years before the system's effective collapse, and 1948, when the major focus was on the behavior of the mandatory powers and its implications for their equivalents under the UN trusteeship system: Quincy Wright, *Mandates under the League of Nations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930); H. Duncan Hall, *Mandates, Dependencies, and Trusteeship* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1948).

³ Still the most useful reference for the League's history, despite its rehabilitative purpose, is F. P. Walters, *A History of the League of Nations* (1952; London: Oxford University Press, 1960). F. S. Northedge, *The League of Nations: Its Life and Times* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1986), is also thorough and less apologetic. For contrasting imperialist and internationalist portrayals of the League see Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and*

these provide nothing approaching Pedersen's exhaustive treatment of the mandates system's most transformative episodes, nor her focused argument regarding their origins, consequences, and collective import. The depth and authority of her scholarship is rooted in her impressive (at times astonishing) grasp of the relevant sources, including a host of national and thematic historical literatures as well as primary materials, in multiple languages and on multiple continents. As a factual exposition, compelling interpretation, and multi-archival excavation of the mandates system's history, *The Guardians* is unsurpassed and likely to remain so for a long time.

Yet like any great work of history—and that is what Pedersen has produced—*The Guardians* makes interpretive claims that are important in part because they are open to challenge. One is her claim that the increased burden of “imperial governance” and promotion of “normative statehood” that the mandates system effected “was not what its architects and officials had intended” (13). This depends on the identity of the architects and officials in question and, in Pedersen's case, on collapsing the two roles. Pedersen traces the system's origins and early development to Britons intent on universalizing their nation's tradition—or rather ideology—of consultative, humane, tutelary empire. According to her, this was also the intention of President Woodrow Wilson and other Americans who pushed for international oversight of former German and Ottoman colonies during the Paris Peace Conference (18-19, 24-25, 168). But while chapters 4 and 5 clearly demonstrate the degree to which Britons infused the PMC with their distinct imperial ideology and practices, Pedersen's own claims and evidence suggest that Wilson's far more radical vision of justice through international deliberation was also consequential for the development of the mandates system, and indeed the international system generally.⁴

As Pedersen notes in her introduction, it was the power of public criticism, via the League Assembly, that forced the Council to convene the PMC in the first place (2). It was that same power that forced the mandatories to make promises that ultimately undermined their imperial practices and set the stage for decolonization after World War II (4-7, 9-10). This instantiation of Anglo-American political habits in international political machinery was Wilson's goal even before America entered the war.⁵ Most important, it was Wilson's insistence that the slaughter of the Great War could only be redeemed by a new order promoting the wellbeing and political autonomy of all the world's peoples that prevented the outright

the Ideological Origins of the United Nations (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); and Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013)—though Sluga, rightly, takes pains to demonstrate the ways that the League was a site in which internationalist and nationalist ends were negotiated and often reconciled by member states and non-government actors.

⁴ Among hundreds of books on Wilson's internationalist vision the best remains Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (1992; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995). I have argued for the centrality of deliberative discourse and the curtailment of national sovereignty to Wilson's vision in Trygve Throntveit, “The Fable of the Fourteen Points: Woodrow Wilson and National Self-Determination,” *Diplomatic History* 35 (June 2011): 445-481.

⁵ Knock, *To End All Wars*, 96-98.

annexation of conquered territories by the Allies⁶ and, later, encouraged European publics to hold their governments accountable for the fates of distant and alien populations.⁷

Another of Pedersen's important but challengeable arguments is that the PMC was a fundamentally legalist or "textualist" rather than political institution (64-66). The PMC's textualist ethos is amply demonstrated in chapter 2. Here Pedersen shows that early, consistent, and highly public reversion to Article 22 and the various mandate texts allowed PMC bulldogs such as the Swiss William Rappard to establish an effective role for the commission, despite minimal direct authority over the mandatory powers.

But as Pedersen herself notes (65), textualism and politics are not mutually exclusive, and in explaining the contest between Britain and the PMC over Palestine (chapter 12) she confusingly overdraws the distinction. Britain's effort to repudiate its responsibility to secure a "Jewish national home" in Palestine and limit Jewish immigration in order to appease the restless Arab majority was indeed, as Pedersen claims, a political challenge to a legal system founded in texts. But the PMC's use of those same texts to elevate "the obligation to support Jewish immigration above the obligation to foster representative institutions" was equally political in its inspiration and effects—the goal being to solve Europe's Jewish refugee crisis, and the effect being to create the demographic preconditions for an ethnic Jewish state (358). British policymakers naturally condemned what Pedersen, following their lead, describes as "a legalistic oversight apparatus that made flexible decision-making impossible" (391). But what really rankled was the PMC's political power to force unwanted decisions upon them.

These two problematic claims—regarding the mandates system's imperialist purpose and textualist practice—are important because of their implications for the League project as a whole. Building on them, Pedersen argues that the mandates system not only failed but was never even intended to do what millions expected it to do: namely, bring self-determination nearer for politically oppressed populations in the former German and Ottoman colonies and, by force of example, across the world. This is a roundabout way of saying that Wilsonianism failed. In Pedersen's mandates system we find Wilson's dream of a global founding text--structuring forums for the public management of political change and the promotion of consensual government--doomed from the start by its inherent paternalism and legalism.

A slightly wider lens, bringing both U.S. diplomatic history and European geopolitics into view, complicates this picture. For all his paternalism, it was Wilson, through his wartime rhetoric and his efforts at Paris, who did the most to prevent the outright annexation of the territories that became Mandates; Wilson who publicly insisted on the primacy of indigenous over imperial interests; and Wilson who imposed the requirement, however long the timeline, of eventual self-government.⁸ On the other hand, it was U.S. abstention from

⁶ *Ibid.*, 210-216.

⁷ A recent genealogy of Wilsonian ideals as elaborated and employed by critics of imperial policy in the years after World War I is Daniel Gorman, *The Emergence of International Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012). See also Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

⁸ Knock, *To End All Wars*, 210-216; Margaret MacMillan, *Paris, 1919: Six Months That Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2001), chapter 8; Zara Steiner, *The Lights that Failed: European International Relations, 1919-1933* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 43. The global expectations raised by Wilson's rhetoric and the resulting constraints imposed on Allied leaders at the Paris Peace Conference are examined in Erez Manela, *The*

League membership that eviscerated the League's collective security apparatus, made sanctions against powerful aggressors unworkable, and encouraged France and Britain to shore up and expand their territorial spheres of influence as insurance against another world war.⁹ Meanwhile, American economic nationalism hampered the economic reconstruction of Europe and exacerbated the global economic crisis of the 1930s, prompting a neo-imperialist quest for autarky by the world's major powers that further burdened their colonial subjects and hastened a war costing millions of their lives.¹⁰

In sum, there was indeed a gulf between the anticolonial hopes invested in the League by subjugated peoples and the imperialist agenda imposed upon it by European officials, a gulf widened by a striking mismatch between the text of the League Covenant and the political realities of the international system. For as nearly every meeting of the Council reveals, the League Covenant was structured to include U.S. participation, while the League itself was forced to endure U.S. obstruction.

It seems, therefore, too simple to claim that the mandates system functioned as it was intended to function when it promoted "imperial best practices" while "pushing self-determination off the table." To the extent that Wilson had anything to do with its origins, the mandates system was intended to promote (sometimes, granted, at painfully slow pace) increasing levels of political participation and eventual self-government for the populations of the mandated territories—perhaps through independent statehood, perhaps through extension of civil and political rights under an alternative regime. As Pedersen demonstrates, the PMC's dominant personalities worked from very early on to point the system in a different direction. And yet because of its Wilsonian roots, others found opportunities to put it to progressive uses. Invoking the principle of international accountability that Wilson had preached and the Covenant endorsed, the PMC cultivated a publicizing function that otherwise marginalized peoples found ways to coopt.

Through the petition process, for instance, claimants "mobilized movements and built up mass support" that "allowed them to speak in a multi-vocal, international arena" and, in many cases, "fundamentally altered what the mandatory power not only *could* but also *wanted* to do" (94). Meanwhile, adverting to the system's founding texts, Germany argued successfully that changes in the administration of mandated territories could not be made without international approval, because sovereignty did not reside with the mandatory power, but with League, and only in trust. This, Pedersen argues, was "the most significant achievement of the

Wilsonian Moment: Woodrow Wilson and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), Part I.

⁹ Walters, *History of the League of Nations*, 72-74, 137-138, 348-360. See also Denna Frank Fleming, *The United States and World Organization, 1920-1933* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938); Raymond J. Sontag, *A Broken World, 1919-1939* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), chapters 4-5; Ruth Henig, *The League of Nations* (London: Haus, 2012).

¹⁰ Zara Steiner, *Lights that Failed*, chapters 4, 12; Charles P. Kindleberger, *The World in Depression, 1929-1939* (1973; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Melvyn P. Leffler, *The Elusive Quest: America's Pursuit of European Security and French Stability, 1919-1933* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979); Frank Costigliola, *Awkward Dominion: American Political, Economic, and Cultural Relations with Europe, 1919-1933* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984). For a different perspective laying the blame on Britain's tariff and imperial preference policies, see Patricia Clavin, *The Failure of Economic Diplomacy: Britain, Germany, France, and the United States, 1931-1936* (New York: St. Martin's, 1995).

mandates system,” for it established that the mandatory power “could not deny sovereignty to its wards forever” (231).

Pedersen claims that the Covenant played no major role in this achievement (232), and that League oversight did not bring self-determination any nearer for the populations in question (261). But as she goes on to show, the international oversight of Mandates stipulated in the League Covenant helped push Britain to change Iraq’s status, despite fears among the majority of the PMC’s members that it was not yet ready for independence (chapter 9). True, the new Iraq remained in many ways dependent on and beholden to Britain. But it had nonetheless moved along the spectrum of independence in a positive direction, from official ward to recognized state.

None of this is to say that the mandates system or the League itself succeeded in democratizing world politics. They did not. It is rather to challenge prevailing assumptions regarding the reasons why. The League’s failure to create a more just and stable international order was not due to the essentially imperialistic or inflexibly legalistic character of the structure designed at Paris in 1919. It was due to the crippling of the actual League’s political capacities by a recalcitrant United States. The League might have developed in an imperialistic yet politically impotent direction even with United States participation, but we can never know. What we can know—though not from Pedersen’s book—is the extent to which U.S. absence encouraged that very development. That knowledge is important: it should check the prevailing tendency to judge President Woodrow Wilson’s original vision of deliberative, democratic international governance bereft of positive lessons.

But one book can convey only so many lessons, and it is hard to imagine Pedersen cramming any more into *The Guardians* than she already has. She has shown us how people shape the institutions that constrain them, even at the highest levels of national and international politics. She has shown us how rhetoric, slogans, and promises, however empty, establish norms that can inspire the powerless and constrain the powerful. She has shown us that national and international history, politics and culture, and the world of ideas and the world of material and structural forces are inextricably linked and mutually constitutive. Above, all, she has shown us our own world in a new light, tracing the contingent origins of several of its most challenging features. “We live,” Pedersen writes, “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” (13).

Review by Andrew Webster, Murdoch University

“We are in the midst of a great revival of scholarly interest in the League”, writes Susan Pedersen (424, note 7). Her well-known article in the *American Historical Review* in 2007 surveyed the surge of new historical research on the League of Nations; nearly ten years later the wave rolls on, still growing as it moves.¹ Several developments lie behind this outpouring: the end of the Cold War and its ingrained assumptions of bipolarity; a widening definition of security, incorporating elements of what is sometimes termed ‘human security;’ renewed attention to issues of sovereignty and global governance; and the cultural turn in recent work on international relations.

Histories of the League until the 1990s were almost universally, perhaps inevitably, bound and defined by a narrative of ‘failure.’ This stultified real understanding of what the League did—and caricatured what it did not do. Viewing the defunct organisation as a case study demonstrating the true dynamics of power in the post-1945 world, historians and political scientists alike dismissed it as useless: an artificial creation based upon trust, voluntary cooperation, and altruism that was unable to account for the natural imperatives of self-interest inherent in all states existing within a starkly competitive international system. Such a focus upon a state-centred order and the maintenance of peace, rejecting the possibilities for the provision of security or for international disarmament contained in the Covenant, formed the basis of the prevailing view of the League as a failure. This became so ingrained that many prominent studies of the roles and practices of international institutions made scant or no mention of it at all.

The wave of research since the 1990s, on the contrary, has demonstrated just how broad the extent of the League’s work was, and how great was its impact. The best contributions to this new scholarship have drawn upon the League archives directly—in contrast to earlier work which was almost entirely based on the papers of individual states—and tell a story in which the League was a functioning internationalist presence laying the foundations for modern regimes of global governance. Further, they embody the dramatic shift of attention in research away from the ‘traditional’ security sphere and towards a new focus on issues such as minority protections and human rights, international systems for combating disease or drug and sex trafficking, the promotion of intellectual cooperation and the role of global public opinion, the creation of new frameworks of international economics and finance, and, as in the book reviewed here, the relationship between Mandates and the persistence of empire.² In all of this, they are really returning to an awareness of

¹ Susan Pedersen, “Back to the League of Nations”, *American Historical Review*, 112, 4 (2007), 1091-1117. The body of recent published research on the League is already too extensive to summarise. A few examples are listed in the notes below; many more are captured in the notes to Pedersen’s book.

² See for example: Patricia Clavin, *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920-1946* (Oxford University Press, 2013); Iris Borowy, *Coming to Terms with World Health: The League of Nations Health Organisation, 1921-1946* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2006); Carole Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others: The Great Powers, the Jews, and International Minority Protection, 1878-1938* (Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Susan Pedersen,

the League's role which was well understood by its contemporaries. As the eminent historian Sir Charles Webster concluded in 1933: "To a far greater degree than even the boldest thinkers contemplated in 1919 the League has reached out into almost every field of human effort. Conceived primarily as a compact to maintain the peace, it has been used as an active agency of international cooperation in a world in which the need for such a body is growing at an ever-increasing pace."³

With *The Guardians*, Susan Pedersen has produced an impressive, deeply researched and extremely engaging history of the mandates system, which was a key component among the League's founding tasks. As she writes, "every allied power wanted compensation for war losses and suffering; most thought annexation of their conquests no more than their due" (1). The imperial powers only reluctantly gave in to international sentiment, and especially American pressure, to accept in Article 22 of the Covenant that their rule of the African, Pacific, and Middle Eastern territories seized from Germany and the Ottoman empire during the First World War should be framed as conditional, not absolute. They were to be held only in "sacred trust" for the administered peoples who were "not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world," and exercised on behalf of the League and indeed "civilisation" as a whole (408). The League Secretariat thus included a Mandates Section, which was given the job of reviewing the imperial powers' administration, while the mandatory powers were required to submit annual reports on their administration to a permanent commission of eminent individuals appointed by the League Council. But nothing was specified about how long such mandatory control was to last, the conditions under which it might be considered to have been completed, or how the rulings of the League's officials were to be enforced upon the governing powers. The result, as was admitted from the start, was "at best a compromise between partisans of imperial annexation and those who wanted all colonies placed under international control" (2). Pedersen's story is an exploration of how this void of governance was steadily filled—how the League as an institution made itself central to the theory and practice of post-war imperialism.

As with several other spheres of the League's work that have been addressed in recent studies, Pedersen provides the first genuinely new history on the Mandates as a complete system since the 1940s.⁴ Her analysis of the workings of this system is really the identification of an interacting set of

"The Meaning of the Mandates System: An Argument," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 43, 4 (2006), 560-82. The core issues of 'hard security,' such as disarmament, still lack a central place in revised interpretations of the League's work.

³ C.K. Webster, *The League of Nations in Theory and Practice* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1933), 301. Webster was the holder of the newly established Stevenson Chair of International History at the London School of Economics.

⁴ The classic studies are Quincy Wright, *Mandates under the League of Nations* (University of Chicago Press, 1930), and H. Duncan Hall, *Mandates, Dependencies and Trusteeship* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1948). Also see the important articles by W. Roger Louis, collected in his *Ends of British Imperialism: The Scramble for Empire, Suez and Decolonisation* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006).

relationships: between theories of internationalism and of empire, between the League and its member states, between ruling powers and local populations, and between colonial administrators and international bureaucrats. The narrative thus bypasses entirely the tired story of the League as ‘failure.’ Indeed, it implicitly makes clear how absurdly simplistic it is to describe that complex and evolving phenomenon in such reductive terms. The point for Pedersen is rather to examine what the League created, what ideas it developed, what norms of international behaviour and interaction it established, and its relationship with the shifting language and forms of imperialism during the interwar decades. That she accomplishes this so adeptly is based in no small part upon the staggering breadth of her research, including archives in nine countries, the League’s own papers in Geneva, and published sources in English, French and German. Finally, it matters that Pedersen also writes beautifully, with an eye for the sharply-framed insight—for instance when she identifies “the influential, internationally minded Anglo-American scholars and writers whom the League founders always had in mind when they spoke of ‘public opinion’” (149).

The task of the Permanent Mandates Commission (PMC), supported by the Mandates Section of the Secretariat, was to oversee the victorious imperial powers’ administration of their mandatory acquisitions. It was in principle the subjection of imperial rule to international control. Even here, to say that the task was to exercise ‘oversight’ is a vast simplification: Article 22 empowered the PMC merely to advise the Council on “all matters relating to the observance of the mandates” (409). The early story is consistent with other aspects of the League’s work during its first years, in particular its small scale and uncertain beginnings as it sought to define its own purpose and methods. Only fierce criticism at the first and second League Assemblies, in 1920 and 1921, forced the Council at last to actually convene the permanent commission specified in the Covenant. During the decade which followed, that commission worked out its own role and philosophical approach through argument and practice, not based on fixed principles or abstract theory. What quickly became clear was that facilitating national self-determination was to be no part of its agenda. The main task was the rehabilitation of the imperial order.

One way to read Pedersen’s book is as a study of the evolving process of states, local populations, and the League in coming to grips for the first time with the meaning, duties, and practicalities of global governance. What was new about the mandates system above all was its creation of a “global web of talk” (120): an organised framework of public scrutiny and publicity. As she notes, “League oversight could not force the mandatory powers to govern mandated territories differently; instead, it obliged them to *say* they were governing them differently” (4, italics in original). It was the embodiment of the contemporary belief in the transformative power of public opinion, that transparency could and would overcome all obstacles. The great champion of the League, Lord Robert Cecil, insisted that “in a democratic age, everything depends upon public opinion”. He told the first League Assembly in 1920:

It is quite true that by far the most powerful weapon at the command of the League of Nations is not the economic or the military weapon or any other weapon of material force. By far the strongest weapon we have is the weapon of public opinion.⁵

This could operate on two levels: first, domestically—through the scrutiny of government foreign policy by electorates to monitor compliance with League ideals and the application of pressure via public expressions of approval or disapproval; second, internationally—through the scrutiny of national policies in the global public forum of the League to monitor compliance with international norms and expose those states guilty of infractions.

It was the role of publicity at the international level, through the scrutiny of states in the global forum of the League and its role as a discursive arena, which was vital to the functioning in practice of the mandates system. This poses the question of whether talking about new means of governing territories did in fact lead to action in governing differently, as Pedersen asserts. Certainly, that the talk in Geneva could shape the landscape within which states operated was believed at the time. An authority on British constitutional law opined in 1922 that “The true mode of securing the just carrying out of the [mandates] system lies in bringing to bear on any abuses the public opinion of the League, and especially of the country whose methods are pronounced faulty.”⁶ The mandatory powers found their mistakes and abuses the subject of publicity and controversy in Geneva. Some reacted by attempting to modify their own behaviour; others remained recalcitrant. The League of Nations Union in Britain certainly insisted that publicity worked. By 1927, the Permanent Mandates Commission was held up as a model of high-minded imperial administration: “Abuses in mandated territories are now almost non-existent. The commissioners’ is not an easy task, but they fulfil it nobly.”⁷

But was publicity enough? The not-infrequent imputation by critics has since been precisely this: that the League was nothing more than a ‘talk shop.’ Yet talking was really what the League did best. Time after time, when faced with difficulties, it did not descend into stalemate but rather functioned as a genuinely operative forum for transacting international negotiations. We should not scorn the contemporary importance and value of ‘talk’ and publicity. Most states had no wish to be held up before the eyes of the world as a transgressor, an aggressor, a back-slider, or colonial tyrant. True, when faced in the 1930s with revisionist states which had no interest in abiding by common norms of international behaviour, public opinion proved ineffective where supporters expected to use it most: collective security, maintaining peace and international conciliation. Yet it nevertheless

⁵ Quoted in E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939* (Reissued edition; Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 34-35.

⁶ Berriedale Keith, ‘Mandates’, *Journal of Comparative Legislation and International Law*, 4, 1 (February 1922), 80.

⁷ Quoted in Donald Birn, *The League of Nations Union, 1918-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 55.

powerfully influenced the management of functional questions and at the very least brought into focus issues that previously would have been dismissed as impossible to control.

This did not operate in a single consistent form across the life of the mandates system. The conditionality and marginality of the level of League control over the Mandates needs to be emphasised. The League created a regime of scrutiny, appointing international bureaucrats and commissioners to exercise oversight on Mandate governance. But what emerges from Pedersen's narrative is the extent to which the experience in every Mandate took on a life of its own. Hence Pedersen divides her examination into three main chunks, broadly chronological, each containing three chapters addressing how specific Mandates responded to the guiding principles of that period. One downside, unfortunately, is that the chosen structure tends to connect the examination of key themes to the specific case studies, and so compartmentalises the analysis. The discussion of overlapping events across multiple Mandates, or the periodic unifying moments at critical sessions of the PMC, is also sometimes dispersed across multiple chapters. While this assists with analytical clarity, it sacrifices the simultaneity of discussions regarding multiple Mandates which existed at each PMC session and how that overlap influenced specific decisions. The sweeping approach also means that, in places, the book perhaps skips too lightly over moments that deserve closer reading.

The first chunk covers 1923 to 1930 and three early crises, each linked to a different Mandate: South Africa and the violent suppression of the Bondelswarts in South West Africa in 1922, which “did more to crystallize the Commission's deals, define its practice, enhance its reputation, and make League oversight a reality, than any other conflict” (113); France and the revolt in Syria in 1925-26, the most serious rebellion to take place in a mandated territory; and New Zealand and Western Samoa from 1927 to mid-1930s, where a well-organised movement for self-determination sought to call upon the Wilsonian ideals of 1919 by declaring and seeking to demonstrate their capacity to rule themselves. All the mandatory powers may have been intended, in theory, to assist in that process; instead, throughout this first decade they sought to quash such changes—and the PMC assisted that work of containment. But it was no mere tool of the dominant British and French. Unlike other comparable bodies of independent international experts created by the League—such as the Temporary Mixed Commission on Armaments of 1921-24—the PMC had an independent standing and the ability at least to attempt to carve out its own role. Established by the terms of the Covenant itself, it possessed a legitimacy and indeed permanency that most other League bodies could never hope for. As such, it made itself central to the very *process* of governance, rather than being reduced to a mere generator of reports or suggestions for possible lines of progress.

Here we can locate one of the critical moments in the development of something that can be called a ‘system’ of international governance: when imperial rulers, confronted by colonial resistance, found themselves looking to Geneva for the international legitimacy to answer attacks upon their rule. Over Syria, the PMC “used the threat of a public inquiry to force the French to play the legitimization game” (159). France verbally proclaimed its commitment to League ideals and the commission's conception of Mandates; in return, the commission openly accepted the validity of French rule. This cost the PMC any credibility among Arab nationalists, but that was not the point. Rather, “the aim

was to enlist the great powers in a drama of public accountability that would legitimate this form of alien rule before a sometimes critical, newspaper-reading, *Western public*" (168, italics in original). Western Samoa may have seen the most protracted, well-organized, and impressive campaign for self-determination of any mandated territory. But the guiding purpose embedded within the PMC by the end of the 1920s was that claims to self-determination were inadmissible. "The Samoans were to be governed in their best interest; if it was necessary for them to be locked up or held down to take their medicine, New Zealand should hold them down" (181). Wellington, in turn, looked back to Geneva to legitimate and stabilise its rule of Samoa.

The second chunk covers 1927 to 1933, the mandate system's "most innovative period" (202), when German entry into the League, Italian revisionism, intense great-power diplomacy, and deepening global political-economic uncertainty all combined to broaden the PMC's approach far beyond its previous focus on (in essence) legitimating Anglo-French geopolitical aims. It was a period which saw the PMC acting as a genuine arena for negotiation over new international norms. The irony was that this came about in large part because of German pressure. Its leaders sought (for reasons that can justly be called cynical) to turn the language of internationalism into a reality, not because of any belief in the ideals being voiced, but because it formed a useful, immediate political tool to advance Germany's return to a position of global influence and power. As the only great power on the League Council without an imperial position, its tactic was to insist upon the strongest interpretation of the limits to imperial sovereignty, in order to limit the gains made by the powers now in territorial control and minimise German disadvantage. It was an approach paralleled in other arenas of German diplomacy. With its acceptance into the League, Germany also became an integral participant in the international disarmament process also. Those debates in Geneva saw German delegates employ their status as the only 'officially disarmed' power, by virtue of the strictures contained in the Treaty of Versailles, in their claim to *Gleichberechtigung* (meaning variously 'equality of status' or 'equality of rights'). They continually harped back to the 'promises' to disarm made by the victorious powers in 1919: if the Allies did not fulfil their own obligations, then Germany should be free to rearm. Such claims were simply a political strategy aimed at winning concessions to cover their on-going illegal rearmament, but their propaganda value allowed them to position Germany as one of disarmament's chief supporters. For the PMC, the consequence identified by Pedersen was that Germany would "become the most vigilant guardian of the mandates system" and resistance to all efforts to turn them into de facto colonies (198).

The three chapters in this second chunk correspond to three areas where issues of formal and informal sovereignty were put at stake: the PMC's successful opposition during 1925-31 to moves by Belgium (in the Congo), South Africa (in South West Africa) and Britain (in Tanganyika) towards outright annexation of their mandates; the tightening of economic control, by Belgium in Rwanda during 1925-32; and the British efforts during 1929-32 to make Iraq an 'independent' member of the League. The key theme in all these cases was the challenge to preconceived assumptions of imperial control. Establishing an agreed norm that mandatory powers were not politically or legally sovereign in their mandated territories was, as Pedersen asserts, probably "the most significant achievement of the mandates system" as "imperial powers decided to submit to a

probably unenforceable norm”. Publicity was key to the outcome. In a formal and semi-public setting, watched by the newly-arrived Germans and an international press corps, “the mandatory powers were constrained to reiterate their own promises. They did not want to do this ... but with the question now an ‘international’ one, the imperial powers could not but submit” (231-232).

The third chunk covers 1933 to 1939, the period of the departure of Japan, Germany, and Italy from the League and so also in theory from the PMC (though the Japanese delegate retained his seat until late 1938.) The three chapters here cover: the legitimization crisis in Australia’s rule over New Guinea; the debate over a repartition and redesignation of mandates during 1936-38, in the face of Nazi colonial claims and the diplomacy of appeasement; and the British experience in Palestine from 1929 through the Arab revolt of 1936-39. As Pedersen notes, the practices and culture established over the previous dozen or so years proved durable. Yet its ability to impact state behaviour was now greatly constricted, not only with the revisionist powers but with those which remained. Once the key conversations about international norms of governance ceased to take place via Geneva, they also “no longer took the peace settlement, and especially did not take the mandates system, as their point of departure” (294). This made it easier to ignore the PMC when desired and to throw out former objections to treating the mandates themselves as colonies. This comes out most clearly perhaps in the movement for ‘colonial appeasement’, where there was a blatant return to the treatment of mandates as the basic material of empire, to be traded as necessary for the interests of the imperial power. “Not only desperate allied statesmen but equally British liberals and humanitarians, it became clear, could imagine handing Africans over to Nazis in order to preserve peace in Europe” (326).

We are accustomed by the traditional narrative of the League to see these years, including as they do the catastrophes in Manchuria and Ethiopia, as the climax of the League’s failure, with all that followed until its formal demise dismissed as an irrelevant twilight. Yet the extension of scholarly attention beyond collective security has also made clear the extent to which this standard chronology is flawed, for it overlooks the continuing work in spheres such as international economics and finance, health, labour standards and humanitarian norms—and with the mandates—which went on through the late 1930s and into the following decade. Looking at the larger arc of the League’s life across all its activities also reveals the problems with a scheme of periodisation attuned solely to the outbreak of war in 1939. One point emerging in recent work in international history is a recognition of the permeability of the formerly solid dividing line of 1945. In this regard the summary consideration given by Pedersen to post-1939 developments feels too hurried. She does discuss the formation of the United Nations and its Trusteeship Council, but in outline terms only. It feels somewhat churlish, as one cannot ask for all things, but it would have been intriguing to track at greater length some of the currents running from League to United Nations. The precedents, procedures, and indeed very people involved with the governance of mandates did not disappear with the end of the League itself. On the contrary, they explicitly informed what came next.

Pedersen’s approach throughout *The Guardians* seeks the greater importance and implications of what the mandates system did, and how it worked, rather than becoming tied down in close

description of each specific incident. In concluding it is worth emphasising that it is not a forensic and encyclopaedic chronological narrative of the mandate experience in its entirety. To do so would demand, in effect, the integration of comprehensive local histories of each of the Mandates themselves across the interwar years—probably too much to ask of any single study—and would inevitably make for a turgid tome. Quite the opposite, *The Guardians* wears its immense learning lightly. This is a book to be read and not simply consulted: written with verve, sympathy, and, in places, humour, it is an engaging and genuinely accessible work of scholarship. Its arguments will deservedly frame all scholarly discussion of the mandates system, and much on the League of Nations as a whole, for some time to come.

Author's Response by Susan Pedersen, Columbia University

One of the pleasures of writing *The Guardians* was the chance it afforded me to delve into fields not my own. The territories to which the League's oversight regime was applied were scattered across the Pacific, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East. I did my best to reconstruct the relationship between that regime and the different imperial and territorial administrations through archival research across the globe, but to understand what I was finding I had to rely on the work of historians in those different fields. As my debt to those historians grew, I couldn't help but hope that some would in turn find my work useful.

I am therefore extremely grateful to Tom Maddux and H-Diplo for organizing this roundtable and to the colleagues who engaged with the book. Their comments help clarify not only its findings but also what my approach can – and, equally importantly, cannot – deliver. For what may be disorienting about the book for historians in different regional fields, and certainly what made it hard to write, is that its subject is not any particular state or territory, nor even the bilateral relationship between metropole and colony. *The Guardians* is, rather, a history of a multilateral, complex, and unstable international regime – the oversight regime applied to the transferred German colonies and Ottoman territories by the League of Nations. The book seeks less to show how that oversight regime affected colonial rule in this or that specific territory (since those effects were not uniform and certainly not uniformly or even usually progressive) than how it affected norms, practices, and relations of sovereignty – or what we might call the international order as a whole.

Véronique Dimier notes that the League's Permanent Mandates Commission (PMC) – the body of so-called experts appointed to scrutinize mandatory administration – lies at the center of my story. She is quite right. She was in fact the first to treat the Commission (as I do) less as an actor than as an arena – in her case showing how British and French colonial officials used the Commission, and the publicity that surrounded it, to defend their own colonial ideals and practices and denigrate those of the other.¹ Following a similar approach, I sought to elucidate how other interests as well – revisionist powers, humanitarian lobbies, nationalist movements – entered and sought to influence that international arena towards their own ends. To put it much too briefly, the book shows how a League regime set up to reform and sanitize the imperial order, instead, precisely because of the degree of contestation and publicity it introduced, destabilized it.

Andrew Webster has so ably summarized the book's narrative and major claims that I do not feel the need to repeat them. It is worth explaining, however, how I chose the specific controversies I did. These choices were not random. As I wished to explore what difference internationalization by the League made for the imperial order, I necessarily concentrated on those conflicts (the Bondelswarts, Syrian, Samoan and Palestinian Arab revolts) or those questions (sovereignty, free trade, labour

¹ See Véronique Dimier, "L'internationalisation" du débat colonial: rivalités franco-britanniques autour de la Commission permanente des Mandats,' *Outre Mers : Revue d'Histoire*, 89 (2002), 333-60, and *Le gouvernement des colonies, regards croisés franco-britannique* (Brussels: Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2004).

control, the definition and meaning of the term civilization, German colonial claims) that made the most noise internationally. (Put bluntly, my selection principle was: If a tree falls in a mandated territory and Geneva hears it, I hear it.) Early in my research, I thus read through the minutes of the PMC, noting the specific controversies that absorbed it and totting up the amount of time spent on each of the specific territories. The narrative follows roughly the arc of their attention, although once I had chosen my subjects, I explored them not only through the Commission's self-justifying prose but also through archival sources and voices from the mandatory powers and the territories themselves.

What did that approach yield? It confirms, certainly (as Antony Anghie argued a decade ago²), that Geneva became a key site of imperial legitimation and contestation – while also showing how the porousness of that arena and the fluidity of the interests within it produced unintended results. We see how cannily the imperial powers used the regime to legitimate their rule, how assiduously nationalist groups adopted the new tools of petitioning and publicity to challenge them, and how the League's officials and experts sought to contain and negotiate those conflicts. That those officials considered imperial rule normal and legitimate is clear: in one case after another, the Commission espoused protection, not self-determination, justifying political repression and labour coercion on the grounds that populations under mandate were definitionally “not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world.” Yet, public exposure, geopolitical shifts, and the Commission's own changing composition could have unexpected effects too, with pressures from revisionist Germany and liberal humanitarians ultimately forcing the League Council to rule that the imperial powers were not sovereign in territories under mandate.

These arguments were often fought out in the mandated territories through protests, police actions, and prison terms; in Geneva, however, they were fought out with words. The mandates system was born of power but promulgated by text – by the Covenant and the detailed written agreements (mandates) hammered out between the League and each administering power. The existence of these documents meant that every claim or challenge had to be made textually: thus, Germany opposed administrative union in East Africa not by saying that it would prevent Tanganyika's return to Germany (although that was its real fear) but by claiming union a violation of the Covenant; Syrian and Palestinian patriots petitioned by pointing to Article 22's “provisional recognition” of Middle East populations' national rights. The Commission, too, took refuge in textualism, insisting it was a purely technical body impartially interpreting international law. This was nonsense. As I show in case after case, Commission members had strong views and often partisan agendas about the mandates regime: the point is simply that they were obliged to argue their case with reference to the regime's ruling texts. I am sorry Trygve Thrøntveit understood me to be arguing that the Commission, because textual, was therefore not political: to the contrary, the two aspects went hand

² Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

in hand. As I put it on page 65, “textualism became the language politics was forced to speak.” However clear I thought I had been on this point, obviously I was not clear enough.

These insights are, I hope, enough to vindicate the system-centered approach I adopted. There are, however, things such an approach cannot do. It cannot, for one, do justice to each mandated territory’s unique history or its peoples’ two-decade engagement with the League. I can thus only echo Elizabeth Thompson’s hope that the book might spur historians of the Middle East, Africa and the Pacific to investigate more systematically local populations’ roles within, and responses to, the international system and processes I describe. Too little such work has been done. Most Middle East historians, for example, use the term “mandate” as a descriptor for a particular period (“the mandate period”) rather than to indicate a particular internationalized form of rule³ – and yet, as my book shows, local people and movements were often aware of the new triangulation of authority, appealing to Geneva against their imperial rulers, over and over and over. Political movements arose from those mobilizations – although, as Thompson suggests, when persistent appeals went unanswered, so too did the politics of despair. We see the symbiotic relationship between failed appeals and political violence in the Middle East in particular.

Nor can this approach adequately treat interwar internationalisms not oriented towards Geneva (whether communist, fascist, religious, or anticolonial) or track fully how local populations engaged those networks or constructed alternative internationalisms of their own. Humanitarian and revisionist lobbies figure more centrally in the book than the international Communist mobilization Meredith Terretta mentions because they were more influential or disruptive for the mandates regime specifically – however differently their influence might be weighed elsewhere or retrospectively.⁴ Pan-Arab, pan-African, Zionist, Garveyite and other diasporic mobilizations are recovered because their various efforts to engage Geneva and variable successes show up the character (including the racial assumptions) of the regime, not because the book can do justice to those movements in their own right.⁵ I am glad, then, that Terretta’s new project on African petitions and

³ Note, however, the classic collection edited by Nadine Méouchy and Peter Sluglett, *British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspective* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), and the recent collection edited by Cyrus Shayege and Andrew Arsan, *The Routledge Handbook of the History of the Middle East Mandates* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

⁴ For those varied internationalisms, see especially Gena Sluga, Patricia Clavin and Sunil Amrith, eds., *Internationalism: A Twentieth-Century History* (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming). The Geneva-directed work of the Anti-Slavery Society is adequately covered in the book, but I should have attended more to the lobbying efforts of the Bureau international de défense des indigènes discussed in Emmanuelle Sibeud, “Entre geste impérial et cause internationale: défendre la cause des indigènes à Genève dans les années 1920,” *monde(s)*, 6 (nov. 1914), 23-43.

⁵ Petitions to the League are now receiving much-needed attention. I treat these in *Guardians*, ch. 3; and for just a sampling of that literature, see Balakrishnan Rajagopal, *International law from below: development, social movements, and Third World resistance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), ch. 3; Hussein D. Alkhazragi, “Un petit prince à la SDN: La lutte du roi Hussein du Hedjaz pour l’indépendance des provinces arabes de l’Empire Ottoman,” *Relations internationales* 146 (2011-2012), 7-23; Natasha Wheatley, “Mandatory Interpretation: Legal Hermeneutics and the New International Order in Arab and Jewish Petitions to the League of Nations,” *Past & Present* 227 (2015), 205-48; Simon Jackson, “Diaspora Politics and Developmental Empire: the Syro-Lebanese at the League of

legal appeals sent to the League and the United Nations, Ananda Burra's work on anticolonial mobilization and thought over the transition between the two bodies, and the burgeoning literature on anticolonial networks will provide a richer account of those alternative internationalisms.⁶ I could not do that work: I had to adhere to my optic and method to make the project manageable at all – especially since it is a study of the mandates regime and not of anticolonial activism per se. But I am glad someone else will do it.

Trygve Throntveit, by contrast, wishes I had paid more attention to the role of the United States, both when present and when absent. He argues that President Woodrow Wilson was responsible for the mandates regime's initial progressivism and thus that the United States' absence from the League can be held largely responsible for its limitations. Had the United States remained, he implies, the system could have promoted self-determination all round. I can understand the appeal of this research agenda for historians of U.S. foreign relations, since it nicely shifts agency and attention away from League bureaucrats, nationalist petitioners, and revisionist claimants and back to American internationalists and politicians, but I am content not to have gone in this direction. This is not only because the field of U.S. diplomatic history will surely continue to churn out work on Wilson without me; nor is it just because I wanted to investigate the system as it actually existed rather than as it might have been – especially since the counterfactual of U.S. presence in Geneva requires assuming not only that the U.S. joined the League but also that (in defiance of everything we know about the sclerotic and partisan nature of American politics) it remained there and actually upheld Wilsonian ideals. But the real reason I didn't make the argument Throntveit advances is simply that I did not find much evidence for it and do not find it persuasive. Since I did not spell out those views in the book, let me do so briefly here.

Certainly it is the case that had the U.S. joined, remained within the League, and been willing to play a leading role in upholding its collective security provisions (all very large assumptions), the League would have been a more powerful institution. Anglo-American dominance would have been assured; capacity to force agreements would have increased; the cost of dissent or exit would have been much greater. But Throntveit's claim is not simply that the presence of the United States

Nations," *Arab Studies Journal*, 21:1 (2013), 166-190; Friedhelm Hoffmann, *Die Syro-Palästinensische Delegation am Völkerbund und Šakīb Arslān in Genf, 1921–1936/46* (Berlin: Lit, 2007); Tilman Dederig, 'Petitioning Geneva: Transnational Aspects of Protest and Resistance in South West Africa/Namibia after the First World War,' *Journal of Southern African Studies* 35:4 (December 2009), 785-801.

⁶ On interwar anticolonialism, see especially, Jonathan Derrick, *Africa's 'Agitators': Militant Anti-Colonialism in Africa and the West, 1918-1939* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Minkah Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917-1939* (Durham: North Carolina University Press, 2014); Leslie James, *George Padmore and Decolonization from Below: Pan-Africanism, the Cold War, and the End of Empire* (London: Palgrave, 2014); Susan Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich: Race and Political Culture in 1930s Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); and Penny von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997). Ananda Burra (Doctoral Candidate in History and Law, University of Michigan) is completing a study of anticolonialists' interactions with the mandates and trusteeship system, and Meredith Terretta is well into a major study of anticolonial "cause lawyering" in Africa.

would have made the League more powerful and effective; it is that it would have made the League more progressive on imperial questions, turning the specific regime I discuss – the mandates regime – into an engine for national self-determination. I cannot find much evidence to support that claim. Yes, Wilson expressed disapproval of the European empires' territorial claims. Yet, when what we can only call American imperial interests were threatened at the Peace Conference, he rallied to their defense – insisting on deference to the Monroe Doctrine, for example, and declining to support the Japanese effort to include a racial equality clause. Moreover, on the national claims of non-European peoples in particular, Wilson was hardly a progressive voice. A few in his entourage were sympathetic to Arab nationalism, but it was British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, not Wilson, who stated (if for his own instrumental reasons) that Africans had the capacity and the right to be consulted about their rulers; by contrast Wilson's Colonial advisor George Louis Beer, who was slated to become the Director of the Mandates Section, thought Africans had no capacity for governing themselves and were definitely best kept under European – ideally British – rule. The two convinced Wilsonians who shaped the mandates regime from within the Secretariat (former Harvard instructor William Rappard and the American internationalist Huntington Gilchrist) likewise not only did little to advance the political claims of mandated populations but crafted the Commission's arguments against them, Gilchrist authoring its justifications of French and New Zealand repression of national movements in Syria and Samoa, and Rappard categorically opposing any further moves towards independence in the Middle East in the 1930s. As Robert Vitalis has most brilliantly shown, it's important not to gloss over the importance of race here.⁷ Like so many white Europeans and Americans, Wilson, Beer, Rappard, and Gilchrist conscientiously believed in self-determination for civilized men but almost unthinkingly equated civilization and whiteness – and the mandates system, it is worth remembering, was applied mostly to populations who were not white. Just why Wilson would have led the charge for self-determination for these non-whites, when he could not face having African-American students on the Princeton campus or African-American employees in the Federal Post Office, eludes me.

My defense of this choice to investigate the mandates regime as it developed, rather than to speculate about how it might have looked had the Senate confirmed the Treaty and subsequent U.S. Presidents stayed on board, does not mean that I feel I captured well all the relations and interests that shaped it. In particular, I wish I could have properly investigated Turkey's role. To understand why I think this important, we need to note what no commentator save Webster really noticed, but what is (I think) the book's single most important finding – which is the extent to which politics around Germany and German revisionism drove the process of territorial “internationalization”. The decision not to return Germany's colonies turned Germany, against its will, into the first postcolonial great power; German resentment against those losses forced the League (following Germany's entry) to articulate a defense of international sovereignty; Germany's exit in 1933 and its claim to colonial restitution helped destroy that international regime altogether. But Germany was only one ex-sovereign; the Ottoman Empire was the other. True, Turkey was a “new state” and not

⁷ Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015).

just a successor state – and yet, Turkey did not abdicate all claims to those ex-Ottoman lands, working hard to persuade the League to award it Mosul in 1925 and successfully reclaiming Hatay (or Alexandretta) in 1938. I mentioned these efforts, but I did not have the linguistic ability to properly investigate Turkey's relations with the League – or, for that matter, to trace the way the European powers' long history with the Ottoman Empire shaped the mandates regime. We are fortunate, then, to have Aimee Genell's recent dissertation which shows (among other things) how the British based their ideas about the mandates system not only on Lugardian ideals but also on their policies towards Ottoman Egypt, and Andrew Arsan's study of Ottoman precedents for League petitions⁸; I'm also pleased to see scholars tackling the timely subject of Turkey's continued engagement with those former Ottoman lands.

I thank Tom Maddux and H-Diplo again for this round-table on my book, and look forward to further amplifications, amendments and refutations of its findings.

⁸ Aimee Genell, *Empire by Law: Ottoman Sovereignty and the British Occupation of Egypt, 1882-1923* (Diss., Columbia, 2013), and Andrew Arsan, "'This is the Age of Associations': committees, petitions, and the roots of interwar Middle Eastern internationalism," *Journal of Global History* 7 (2012), 166-188.