


SERBIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS
INSTITUTE FOR BALKAN STUDIES

LIII



2022

BALCANICA

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ANNUAL OF THE INSTITUTE FOR BALKAN STUDIES

UDC 930.85(4-12)

BELGRADE 2022

ISSN 0350-7653
eISSN 2406-0801

LUCIANO MONZALI, FEDERICO IMPERATO, ROSARIO MILANO, GIUSEPPE SPAGNULO,
STORIA DELLE RELAZIONI INTERNAZIONALI (1919-2021),
Tra Stati Nazionali, Potenze Continentali e Organizzazioni Sovranazionali,
MILANO: MONDADORI, 2022.

*Reviewed by Bogdan Živković**

The Department of the History of International Relations at the University in Bari, headed by Prof. Luciano Monzali, has made itself known, in Italy and internationally, for its interest in various global topics. On one hand, the faculty of this department devoted a large part of their carriers to investigating Balkan history and Italian policies towards this region. On the other hand, they also dedicated substantial attention and research to Middle Eastern topics. Hence, one can safely say that this department is committed to researching various global topics. Thus, it is no wonder that, as a joint endeavour of several members of the department, Prof. Monzali and his colleagues have published a two-volume history of international relations. The first volume covers the period from 1942 to 1918 and the second one, which is being reviewed here, deals with the period from 1919 to 2021.

The 848-page volume, written in the classic methodological approach of diplomatic history, is structured into three parts, with numerous chapters in each. The first part covers the period from 1919 to 1947; the second part depicts global relations from 1948 to 1988; and the final part discusses the methodologically most challenging period, from 1989 to 2021. A volume so rich, not merely in its bulk but also in the variety of the content it offers, cannot be fully and comprehensively reviewed in a couple of pages. However, the intention of this review is to offer a brief analysis of the volume, focusing on certain predominant methodological aspects and aspirations of the authors.

While many issues, methodological and topical, can be underlined in reviewing this book, it seems that three aspects of the volume deserve to be particularly addressed:

firstly, the delicate balance between the global and national perspective in this volume; secondly, the question of agency; and thirdly, the broader public influence this book aims to achieve.

Regarding the first issue, it should be underlined that this volume is by no means strictly national in its outlook. On the contrary, the chapters of this book are global in their perspective, and the authors clearly tried to avoid espousing a Eurocentric perspective. The subchapters on the Middle East, the Far East, or Latin America (an area most often neglected in similar overviews of global history) strongly demonstrate the globality of the account offered by Professor Monzali and his colleagues. However, this volume navigates global history with a delicate sense of the national, be it the Italian place in the history of international relations or the heritage of Italian scholarship on this topic and its methodological principles (the authors clearly state that their methodology is indebted to the legacy of Mario Toscano and Pietro Pastorelli). Hence, this book is an example of the authors' belief that national identity and history can be best understood as a part of wider global processes.

The second question that needs to be particularly addressed is the one of agency. While this notion has become a scholarly buzzword, theoretically preached but rarely used in practice, the authors of this volume have offered a convincing and empirical demonstration of the importance of agency

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in history. While structural factors are present in the analyses, the authors successfully reaffirm the importance of individual actors in history. In this volume, we can see the agency of three different actors. Firstly, there are the individuals: the outstanding politicians, capable statesmen who managed to modify, if not the course of history in its entirety, at least in the way it unfolded. The depiction of Jean Monnet's role in European integrations is one of the best examples of the authors' methodological approach. Secondly, various social groups are also present in this volume as individual actors who influence history. On one hand, the authors underlined the ruling classes who guide the political processes but also dedicated space to the public opinion that limits the manoeuvring space of the ruling classes. And lastly, particularly in the chapters dedicated to the Cold War, the authors chose to underline the agency of small countries and middle powers. Their account is not a story of a world completely dominated by Washington and Moscow but of a world where small and medium-sized actors tried to undermine or at least limit the hegemony of the superpowers and have a say in their own destiny. The Italian perspective, one of a middle power, was apparently crucial here as an impetus to write a different kind of global history.

The third point that needs to be addressed is the broader reception a book like this aims to achieve. A comprehensive history of international relations like this one was, obviously, not written solely for historians. It is, in fact, an endeavour a historian undertakes when he or she wants to step outside of the ivory tower and spread historiographical knowledge to others. As the authors underlined, one of their main goals was to offer these volumes as textbooks for future diplomats, as the best instructive literature for young people who would entertain such a carrier. However, the list of potential readers is probably broader. These volumes will be read not only by (future)

diplomats, but also by students, scholars, politicians, activists and a broad range of the interested public. In order to have such broad appeal, the authors managed to significantly modify their style of writing, eschewing purely academic jargon and managing to be appealing and comprehensible to non-historians. However, at the same time, the authors took nothing away from the complexity of the topic.

Hence, in that regard, this volume is an undeniable success – not only in the aesthetic aspect of the writing but, more importantly, in the way it analyzes complex events and processes. The authors did not stifle the text with excessive information and instead gave sound, convincing and comprehensive explanations of why and how certain events unfolded. The two volumes produced by the professors at the University of Bari thus make an authoritative and appealing textbook on the history of international relations, which will have an impactful future in Italy.

ISSN 0350-7653



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