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INTRODUCTION: HISTORICAL INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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Introduction

Disciplinary International Relations (IR) grew in part out of the discipline of History. Even so, the subfield of Historical International Relations (HIR) is a relatively new one. A mere decade ago, a handbook such as this one would have seemed unthinkable. Sure, there were books about History *and* IR (Elman and Elman, 1997) and more on the way (Bukovansky et al., forthcoming), people discussed the "problem of history" in IR (Armitage, 2004; Vaughan-Williams, 2005) and it was asked what history could be in IR (Hobson and Lawson, 2008). These takes nevertheless all supposed either the existence of a divide to be bridged or a continuum where the enterprises of History and IR were commensurable. The emergence and institutionalisation of a distinct subfield over the last decade has radically changed that landscape. Writing in 2020, it is obvious that a burgeoning subfield of HIR not only exists within the discipline, but that it has come to age and is thriving. As the ensuing chapters vividly demonstrate, so much material is being produced that a stock-taking exercise is both possible and necessary. This handbook attempts just such a stocktaking.

Taking stock implies casting the nets far and wide. What follows is thus not an overview of the subjects we have decided upon as the most important in or for HIR, it is more like an inductively generated catalogue of current and past HIR. This is also not a handbook about the history of IR, as it offers no complete or coherent historical account. Rather, it seeks to give a comprehensive overview of the historical work undertaken by IR scholars over the past three decades, initially as part of different traditions or theoretical enterprises and, later, more or less consciously as belonging to the subdiscipline of IR which we now call HIR. Over the last decade, we have spent countless hours as programme chairs for conferences, members of awards committees and as supervisors and lecturers. This forms the basis for the selection of subjects below – these are the subjects which animate scholars doing HIR at the current stage. While we hope that many see the texts as concrete inspiration, we also fully expect others to be inspired by omissions.

In this introduction, we start by presenting the overall trajectory of historical work in the IR discipline, how it was central to the founding of scholarly IR but was somewhat marginalised during the Cold War, and how it has had a gradual resurgence since the 1980s, gaining steam around the turn of the century. We follow this up with a discussion of how the literature of the last decades transcended the earlier discussions about history and/in/for IR, leading up to what

we see as the distinctiveness of HIR and the justification for this handbook as an IR project rather than a multidisciplinary one. Finally, we lay out the broad contents of each of the ensuing sections of the book.

Historical International Relations

As detailed in recent IR historiography, the Anglo-American (or perhaps rather, Commonwealth-American) discipline of IR grew out of a number of different academic traditions, including colonial administration, international law, history and political science (Long and Schmidt, 2005; Bell, 2009; Ashworth, 2014; Vitalis, 2015; Rosenboim, 2017; Davis et al., 2020). It makes sense to claim that international history was one of the academic midwives in IR's long formative phase. During the first decades of disciplinary development, no particular justification for turning to history was needed. For a discipline which grew partly out of History, more or less explicitly theoretically informed historical narrative was the predominant form of scholarship. The gradual move towards behavioural social science, game theory and quantitative methods from the 1960s onwards implied a less explicit focus on historical analysis (Guilhot, 2011, 2017), but history remained as a quarry for data, a testing ground for theory and a site of investigation. Quantitative research obviously relied on the coding of historical data and involved making historiographical decisions (Fazal, 2011). Historical analysis could also be found on the margins of the American discipline, for instance in World-Systems Theory (Denemark, 2021 in this volume) and the English School (e.g. Dunne, 1998). History remained one of the unacknowledged partners of IR – unacknowledged, but still formative and a constant presence. The "scientific" approaches to international relations nevertheless implied that history could no longer serve as its own justification. Furthermore, even if scholars across the discipline were clearly engaging with historical data and history (albeit often relatively recent history), there was little explicit reflection about how and why one should engage history. As Christopher Thorne lamented, history was more often than not abused in IR (1983: 123).

The situation changed in the 1980s. Within the discipline, a gradual intellectual opening up changed the terms of discussion for historically-oriented IR. The many and broad challenges against the perceived "neo-neo" consensus involved history in two distinct ways. First, as one of many different alternative approaches, historical analysis benefited from the general opening up of the discipline. Second, and more importantly, history served as one of the central spanners in the works of mainstream theorising. This was obvious in the work of thinkers as diverse as Walker, Cox, Ruggie and Kratochwil, all engaging with history to demonstrate the shortcomings of the allegedly "scientific" approaches (Cox, 1981; Ruggie, 1986, 1998; Kratochwil, 1986; Walker, 1993; see the discussion in Leira and de Carvalho, 2016). These two different openings towards history have had slightly different implications for HIR. On the one hand, studies engaging history started emerging in all corners of the discipline, some of them with a fairly traditional view of history and concerned with getting the facts straight and using them to build, modify or test theories. On the other hand, historical arguments were being engaged more thoroughly in the parts of the discipline at the time lumped together as "critical": poststructuralism, constructivism, historical sociology and so forth. It has been a guiding principle of the editors of this volume, that both of these approaches fit within the broader project of HIR.

Looking at external factors, the turn to history seems obviously related to the relatively rapidly changing conditions of world affairs since 1989. Whereas decades of Cold War and the perceived centrality of the Euro-Atlantic area enabled relatively ahistorical conceptions of an unchanging system, the breakdown of bipolarity, the multiplication of actors and the emergence of new powers in the global south led to a return to history. Faced with an uncertain future, an increasing

number of scholars have looked to the past for guidance, patterns and ideas. This tendency has been clear, despite theoretical and methodological differences. Some look to the past to find recurring patterns, others to bring forth unacknowledged legacies, and yet others to denaturalise taken-for-granted concepts and ideas or to understand how we come to find ourselves in our current predicament (Bartelson, 1995; Reus-Smit, 1999; Jahn, 2000; Inayatullah and Blaney, 2004).

By the turn of the century, enough historically-oriented scholarship was coming forward for observers to comment on a possible "historical" or "historiographical" turn in the discipline (Bell, 2001). The interest and investment in historically-oriented scholarship has continued to grow since this diagnosis was first put forward, and with the growing diversity and globalisation of the discipline, the scope of HIR was broadened significantly by scholars from outside of the traditional "core" of IR (Towns, 2009; Shilliam, 2011; Vitalis, 2015; Nişancıoğlu, 2020; Manchanda, 2020; Çapan, 2020). More and more scholars are self-consciously describing their work as historical, grounding it in HIR and engaging in ever more sophisticated theoretical and empirical historical analyses. After initial explorations and excavations in many directions, it is now possible to see some cohesion emerging and to take stock of the developments.

Writing Historical IR

Thinking of HIR of course immediately brings up debates about the relations between History and IR. As noted previously, this has always been a close relation: not only were history and historians crucial in the birth of the IR discipline, but most IR work includes an (implicit) historical dimension (Hobson and Lawson, 2008). And yet, at the same time, the relation between IR and History has been extensively and explicitly debated, and these debates have both drawn on and informed the way in which work in HIR has been carried out (Suganami, 2008; Yetiv, 2011; Leira, 2015; Kratochwil, 2016).

For many years, this engagement was based on the assumption of a stark division between IR and History: where IR scholars focused on theory and concepts, on nomothetic knowledge, historians were concerned with the particular, the contingent and the ideographic. In terms of the production of historical knowledge, this led to an (implicit) inferiority complex of IR that asked how it could learn from history. In this view, the writing of historians, based on primary sources, paying minute attention to detail and historical context, mastering ancient languages and a multitude of texts, was just superior to that of theory-minded IR scholars. To be sure, what history can learn from IR was also correspondingly asked, leading to a counter-dismissal of history as pretty much an auxiliary science for IR scholars to mobilise in their pursuit of more noble, theoretical aims (Yetiv, 2011). This division of labour, and the privileging of historical writing by historians, is epitomised in Elman and Elman's claim that "all international relations theories need historical facts against which they can be measured" (1997: 7).

And yet, most reflexive engagement about history and IR since then has sought to challenge this "eternal divide" (Lawson, 2012) and instead brings both disciplines closer together. The epistemological debates in IR provided an important context for this, for the original position implied that there is a somehow complete historical record that can best be accessed by historians and from which IR scholars can consequently draw. In challenging this position, IR scholars have pointed to the problems of assuming historical objectivity, to the presence of a variety of substantive assumptions about the nature of history, to different forms of historical consciousness already present in IR and to the status of History as a social science (Vaughan-Williams, 2005; Reus-Smit, 2008; Lawson, 2012; Glencross, 2015). Ultimately, in doing so, they have tried to overcome the perceived gulf that divided History and IR in the self-image of the discipline, seeking to put both disciplines closer together along a continuum or even negating substantive difference.

In setting up this handbook, we build on this reflexive tradition as a way of thinking about HIR. And yet, we do not seek to position ourselves in the ongoing epistemological debates about the status of historical truth or the notion of historical knowledge, particularly because doing so would not do justice to the genuinely open spirit that has so far characterised this field of study. At the same time, while we sympathise with arguments that use the reflexive tradition in order to attempt to overcome the "eternal divide", this volume makes evident that the different disciplines and activities cannot easily be collapsed unto each other. HIR scholars seek to answer different puzzles, ask different questions, about different peoples and processes: ultimately, HIR writes different histories, and these are the ones that are reflected in this volume.

This means that HIR increasingly starts from the fact that historians have no privileged epistemological position from which to write history. Certainly, there is a longer tradition, reflection and experience of what the craft of writing histories involve, reflected in more extensive methodological writings, approaches and training at graduate levels that IR scholars can definitely benefit from. Ultimately, however, the writing of history relies on the linking into a narrative of a variety of pieces of past traces – sources – on the basis of a present-asked question (Thies, 2002 gives a handy how-to guide for HIR). And as the chapters in this volume emphasise, not only is there no impediment for IR scholars to write their own histories, but doing so may seem increasingly necessary. For historians engage with historical topics, select and interpret sources, and write histories in the context of conversations that, while may at some level resonate with IR concerns, are still disciplinary-specific. As kindred spirits in another discipline, HIR scholars engage with these bodies of knowledge, but relying on them in order to solve our puzzles may leave us in a state of constant short-sightedness. This is thus neither a handbook of the history of international relations nor a handbook about all historical writing and research of relevance for IR. Rather, the chapters in this handbook take stock of the historical research that is being conducted in IR, by IR scholars, in answer to IR questions.

Organisation of the volume

Handbooks come in many different shapes and forms. Some consist of topical essays, others of what amounts to annotated bibliographies. Likewise, some come with strict editorial guidelines, with overall topics to be covered in each and every chapter, while others leave the structure of each chapter to the individual authors. We have tried to steer a middle course. In recognition of the wide variety of subjects covered, we have chosen not to enforce some overarching processes or issues for all to address. We have furthermore encouraged authors to use their own voices and explore their subjects in the ways they see most fit. The point has not been to bring forth consensus views or greatest hits, but to provide a high-quality set of curated essays on the current state of HIR. However, to ensure coherence and usefulness for our readers, we have tasked all authors with undertaking two core tasks: engaging with the current state of HIR knowledge in the specific field and pointing to openings and opportunities where the field may (or should!) go in the future. The chapters in this volume in this sense constitute both an exercise in mapping the field and one in setting (possible) agendas for HIR.

As in any exercise in mapping, it is important to reflect on the selectivities at play in the composition of "the field". When two of us edited the four-volume set on HIR (Leira and de Carvalho, 2015) five years ago, it became clear to what extent HIR, unlike the fantasy of Cormac McCarthy, has, unfortunately, largely been a country for (Western-based) old men. On the one hand, for reasons we suspect are closely related to the sociology and political economy of the IR discipline, where tenure and contracts are often related to doing policy-relevant research, HIR scholarship is predominantly produced by PhD students and tenured professors. And the latter

group has traditionally been dominated by Western, old (or at least middle-aged) men. On the other hand, as some excellent recent scholarship has shown, the contributions of women and minority groups have systematically been obscured (Anievas et al., 2015; Owens, 2018). However, times are changing and we have made every effort to have the selection of contributors to this handbook reflect that change. Younger scholars are proving it possible to build careers on historical research, and groups that were traditionally under-represented in HIR scholarship – women as well as academics from outside of the Western core of the IR discipline in particular – are increasingly taking part, making their mark on and becoming central in HIR conversations. Although we have not always managed, we have attempted our utmost to have this reflected in the contributors as well as the topics covered.

Traditions

IR is a discipline which has construed itself around a number of alleged theoretical traditions and debates. As Luke Ashworth demonstrates in his chapter, this is not necessarily a precise (or useful, for that matter) way of slicing and dicing the discipline. Nevertheless, since a majority of IR scholars still see themselves as rooted in (or fighting against) such traditions, we have laid out the first section of the book according to a logic of different ways of thinking IR historically within established traditions. The different chapters in this section demonstrate the wide variety of approaches to HIR and underscore our point that HIR is now being conducted in all corners of the discipline.

Before the specific traditions are presented, we nevertheless need a more solid grounding. In the first chapter of this section (MacKay and LaRoche), we get an introduction to philosophies and theories of history, and an admonition to the subfield to engage in a more explicit and critical engagement with the underlying ideas of what drives history. Moving on from this, the section first presents traditions which have put history at the centre of their investigation: the English School (Navari and Green) with its emphasis on the expansion of international society (which has inspired and provoked scholars of many theoretical stripes), World-Systems Theory (Denemark) with its focus on macro history and global systemic patterns and Historical Sociology (Go, Lawson and de Carvalho) which has moved from an interest in the emergence of the modern state system to a broader interest in global political phenomena.

The second part of the section introduces the historical work being done within the frameworks of the more generally oriented traditions of the discipline. Here we find the usual suspects, liberalism (Jahn) bridging classical liberal ideas and the more recent liberal internationalism; realism (Larson) with its oscillation between ahistoricism and structural explanations applied to history; constructivism (Bruneau) with its insistence on the historical specificity of the current international system combined with an interest in the variation between systems; poststructuralism (Nøhr) with its genealogical method and its focus on core concepts of IR/ir and International Political Theory (Rosenboim and Hartnett) with its exploration of the intersection of thought and practice.

In sum, this first section of the book illustrates how historical work can be found in all the major traditions of IR thought and how it is conducted in a multitude of ways. Despite the wide variation, these chapters also point to a number of similar topics for further exploration. There is wide agreement on the need for research to transcend singular levels of analysis and to focus instead on the interplay between levels. Likewise, writers from different traditions agree on the need to look beyond Europe, to include non-canonical writers and topics, as well as gender and race in the analyses and to explore core concepts more diligently. A common thread uniting these concerns is the desire to explore the 19th century in more depth, as a pivotal moment where many of the above-mentioned topics were established, changed or marginalised (cf. Buzan and

Lawson, 2015). As the chapters demonstrate, there are important overlaps between traditions, and a clear tendency for writers allegedly belonging to one tradition, carrying out work which could just as well be grouped within another one. This could suggest that we might be better served by thinking about our discipline in ways not guided by "traditions". The next section presents just such a take.

Thinking International Relations historically

The preceding chapters take as their starting point the continued importance of distinct intellectual traditions in the study of IR, as a way of anchoring analysis or as a starting point for pointing out glaring omissions. In his chapter, Luke Ashworth questions if a focus on traditions is the most fruitful way of thinking about disciplinary developments. While not rejecting existing narratives outright, Ashworth recognises that the narratives we tell about ourselves as a discipline are central to opening up and closing down different lines of investigation. His re-centring of disciplinary history around a set of broad central topics can thus be read as a call for opening up HIR to concerns beyond the established traditions.

Opening up can also mean rethinking, as demonstrated by our two chapters discussing acknowledged core concerns of the discipline, war (Bartelson) and capitalism (Anievas and Gogu). These chapters demonstrate convincingly how even the traditional core of the discipline benefits from being historicised. Following that, we have a set of chapters dealing with core cross-cutting topics which for a long time have been forgotten, neglected and marginalised: gender (Towns), Eurocentrism/civilisation (Bowden) and race (Yao and Dellatolla). These topics have had a resurgence in general IR over the last decades, and these chapters vividly demonstrate how important they are to HIR as well. The call for opening up is then brought more explicitly to disciplinary developments and historical trajectories beyond the geographical core of the discipline, in Latin America and the Caribbean (Fonseca), as well as in Asia (Hui). The final two chapters bring to the table two relatively recent ways of thinking IR historically, through political theology (Bain) and the concept of time itself (Hom). Theology and time tie the end of this section back to the very beginning, to philosophies and theories of history, demonstrating the need for HIR scholars to engage more explicitly with what we believe the driving forces and key concepts of history to be.

Unsurprisingly, the different ways of thinking IR historically share some common concerns and areas for further investigation. Most of these tie in with broader trends in the discipline. First, there is a focus on relationships between different cores and peripheries, in the discipline as well as in its object of study (Tickner and Wæver, 2009; Çapan et al., 2021). Second, many of the chapters relate closely to the work on hierarchy (as opposed to anarchy) in IR in general (Zarakol, 2017). Third, across modes of thinking, there is a growing interest in the many-faceted global and interconnected ways of discussing the organisation of order and violence (Barkawi, 2017; Phillips and Sharman, 2020). Finally, several of these prisms implicitly or explicitly force us to reconsider the core concepts of IR scholarship and IR practice (Berenskoetter, 2016; Leira, 2019). Taken together, these chapters urge HIR to think traditional phenomena anew and to keep engaging forgotten, marginalised and new phenomena, spaces and places.

Actors, processes and institutions

The third section of the book is broader, and self-consciously less "coherent". In line with our overall inductive project, our aim here is to showcase the breadth of the HIR project through key themes. Thus, the chapters in this section do not share a common topical focus, rather they

explore the processes, actors, practices and institutions that constitute the core objects of study of many HIR scholars. Even so, we do find that the chapters cluster around some common themes.

A first theme that emerges is the centrality within HIR – just like in the discipline more broadly – of histories of the state system. Indeed, the historical exploration of the modern international, its core actors and its practices remains an important focus of the field. This is unsurprising. For one, some of the early historically minded traditions in IR, such as the English School, started from a problematisation of, and inquiry into the rise of the modern international and a comparative focus on state systems (Wight, 1977; Watson, 1992; Buzan and Little, 2000). Furthermore, the state, however understood, is also at the centre of the IR disciplinary imaginary, and, more broadly, of the imaginary of the social sciences as such (Bartelson, 2001). Many of the chapters in this section thus deal with state practices, institutions and processes, such as sovereignty or diplomacy. From these, it emerges that a good amount of HIR research is concerned with tracing the history of the practices that constitute the state, and with it, the modern international. Thus, for example, the initial chapter by de Carvalho unpacks debates about the history and emergence of sovereignty as the articulation of the political authority of the state, followed by a chapter on state formation (de Carvalho and Leira), while the subsequent chapters by Heiskanen and Spanu are concerned with the histories of how the subjects of the state have been thought.

The contribution of HIR scholarship to the understanding of the state, however, goes beyond these. As Devetak notes in his chapter on Reason of State, there are a number of concepts that are frequently used, yet their meaning is taken for granted. Many of the chapters in this section demonstrate the crucial role of HIR scholarship in unpacking the meaning and the historicity of these concepts, from reason of state to the nation to borders and territoriality. In doing so, HIR scholars are able to provide fertile grounds for novel conceptualisation. Andersen and Wohlforth's inquiry into the histories of the balance of power, for example, reveals not its universality, but rather the fundamental politics behind the concept itself. Ultimately, thus, HIR not only makes us aware of the history of international relations, but also of the historicity of the discipline and its thinking.

Second, the chapters in this section also demonstrate the importance of HIR within the so-called Imperial turn. Indeed, a large amount of current HIR work seeks to problematise traditional state-centric analytics by bringing to the fore the history (and present) of empires. As Martin Bayly writes, this move jointly responds to broader societal reflections about the American empire after the end of the Cold War, and to the turn to history itself within the discipline. For a historical account of international relations immediately encounters the centrality of empire (Keene, 2002; Barkawi and Laffey, 2002; Ravndal, 2020). The chapters in this section, however, evidence that this turn goes beyond recovering histories of empire, or even developing conceptualisations of empire. Instead, it seeks to provide a fundamentally different narrative about the emergence of the modern international by showing the global entanglements between states, empires and dynamics such as capitalism. Thus, the turn to empire cuts across the studies of a variety of practices and actors, from international law, to international organisations to insurance. With these broader shifts, as the chapters by Svensson and Kwon demonstrate, empire also becomes central in thinking about the post–1945 Cold War world.

And yet, despite the vitality of this imperial turn, much remains to be done. As Caraccioli notes, what IR means by "empires" remains suspiciously focused on the 19th-century Anglosphere. Other empires – French, German and beyond – are much less studied, raising questions not only about the resulting historical narratives, but also about the conceptual selectivities that may come from it (for exceptions, see, e.g. dos Reis, 2021). Beyond this, an important area for further development emerges from the joint discussion of both state practices and the turn to empire: the simultaneous centrality and the absence of the state. While there were important early takes

on both state formation from a historical-sociological tradition (Tilly, 1990; Spruyt, 1994; Hobson, 1998), and inquiry into the state as a category of thought (Bartelson, 2001), the last two decades seem to have a relative dearth of studies that put the history of the state itself as centre (for a certain exception, see Buzan and Lawson, 2015). HIR scholars seem to either be favouring the disaggregation of the state into various practices, a focus on alternative forms of organisation such as empire, or a broader conceptual take through notions such as polity (Ferguson and Mansbach, 1996).

Finally, a third theme that emerges from the chapters in this section concerns the analytics that HIR scholars use in their research. Indeed, as has been noted elsewhere, historically minded IR scholars have been comparatively late to take stock of historiographical developments, such as the turn to social history, and thus depart from their traditional high-politics focus (Keene, 2008; Vergerio, 2018). And yet, the chapters in this section show a progressive turn towards pluralising both the types of questions that are asked and the types of sources that are used. As Leira notes in his chapter, whereas traditional diplomatic history formed the basis for much HIR work, new diplomatic histories that open up questions of gender and social practice have now become the norm in historiography and are progressively trickling into IR. This is not an isolated occurrence, but as the chapters by Vergerio, Ravndal, Goettlich and Branch exemplify, the study of a variety of state and imperial practices and institutions has been fundamentally transformed by new sets of questions and focus on different actors.

Altogether, then, these chapters offer not only an overview of key topics making up the HIR "canon" if we may call it such but also showcase a breadth of methods, approaches and ontological concerns. In our mind, this has been a key feature of the HIR project since its inception, namely the opening up of spaces for thinking differently, and offering alternative accounts which sit less comfortably with the IR orthodoxy. The fact that many of these accounts could now be counted as part of the IR "mainstream" itself is a testimony to the effectiveness of the HIR project in productively challenging mainstream (ahistorical) takes on international politics.

Situating Historical IR

While the previous section focuses on a variety of processes and actors that constitute the objects of study in HIR, this section critically reflects about the situatedness of these objects of study. In so doing, it engages the ways in which this situatedness affects the histories written by IR scholars and the core conceptual categories of the discipline. The section's approach to situatedness is thus both temporal and spatial. The first chapters on Rome, Greece and the Middle Ages place the focus on the pre-modern "international", broadly understood. In doing so, they show not only the ways in which the modern IR imaginary relies on particular constructions of these spaces, but also the opportunity for novel theorisation. The latter chapters focus on spaces, Europe, Asia, Latin America, Africa the Middle East, and examine the ways in which these spaces are written into our histories, but also, as Zarakol's chapter demonstrates, what they can tell us about our concepts.

Two core important themes emerge from these engagements as necessitating further attention. First, there is an imbalance in the areas that receive attention, and thus a consequent need to pluralise the sites – temporal and spatial – that are studied in HIR. HIR engagement with Oceania, pre-Columbian America or pre-modern Africa is still largely lacking (with some exceptions, such as Ferguson and Mansbach, 1996; Warner, 2001; or Rae, 2017). And yet, what this list already highlights is that when thinking about sites of inquiry, time and space should not be understood as two separate dimensions. What emerges from many of the chapters in this section is that presumably temporal locations – such as "the Middle Ages" – are entangled with particular

spatialities (Costa Lopez, 2016), and conversely, that apparently spatial terms – Europe being the classic example – also entail their own specific temporalities.

Ultimately, this means that the matter of pluralising the objects of study – temporally and spatially – cannot be solved by simply adding more, but also points to a need for a fundamental rethinking of the core categories that HIR uses to define its objects. As Herborth and Nitzschner argue, even if Europe draws most of the scholarly attention, its conceptual function remains taken for granted, and it is only a rethinking of it that can allow us to move past core thinking categories like Eurocentrism. More broadly, as Lewis and Wigen (1997) have pointed out in the context of critical geography, things as apparently obvious and material as the existence of separate continents are themselves the result of long, political processes of construction. Thus, the chapters in this section undertake the first step in thinking through some of the core spatial and temporal categories of HIR, but much work still remains to be done.

Approaches

As the various disciplinary traditions, topics of study and areas show, HIR is far from being a monolithic field or approach. While all HIR shares – at least at a basic level – a common concern with historicity, this translates into a highly heterogeneous field that deploys a wide variety of perspectives and methodological sensibilities. Moreover, as HIR consolidates into a distinctive field, with its own conversations, scholars are increasingly being more reflexive, specific and innovative about their approach to knowledge production. The essays in this section showcase not only this variety, but also the increasingly sophisticated ways in which HIR scholars conduct and reflect about their research, often in dialogue with a variety of perspectives from cognate disciplines.

HIR scholars are taking up the task of writing their own narratives based on primary sources. This reflects not only a distinctive ethos towards HIR research, we think, but also the development of a thriving set of research questions that while still connected to History, are properly IR. And yet, as Jeppe Mulich's chapter notes, there are still very important selectivities at play: much research is still focused on similar sources to those in diplomatic history – governmental and diplomatic records, for example – and there have been limited openings to other types of sources, from social to literary or artistic. Still, the increasing variety of sources reflects not only aim for more comprehensiveness, but also the extent to which a number of new approaches are being integrated and developed within HIR. For, as has been noted, IR, history and a number of other social sciences have evolved closely together throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, experiencing parallel shifts and turns.

Capan, dos Reis and Grasten, for example, reflect on the turns in historiography towards global, connected and entangled histories, and the ways in which IR may both benefit from engaging with them, but also adapt them so that they are most suitable to its concerns. Similarly, Kustermans unpacks the challenges in thinking historically through the recent sociology-inspired practice turn in IR, while Wallenius looks not only at the engagement with historical approaches to the study of international thought such as the Cambridge School, but also how IR efforts to improve on these methods are increasingly drawing from a variety of other areas, such as sociology or literary studies. Finally, Subotic and Steele examine the different ways in which IR scholars have engaged with the wider field of memory studies. For, as their chapter emphasises, HIR not only reflects on the past but also opens up the study of the ways in which the past is nowadays remembered and the politics involved in it.

Following from that, the different approaches also bring up the extent to which there are fundamentally different notions of historicity at play in much of HIR writing, and the ways in which this relates to how we understand the goal of HIR work itself. As Kustermans writes,

much of HIR sees itself as militating against the ahistoricism of the so-called mainstream, and thus emphasising historicity and contingency. And yet, this may have led to a lack of reflection about how to conduct the type transhistorical analysis that may transcend a sometimes naive fetishising of contingency, and yet remain historically aware (Fasolt, 2014). For Kustermans, a sociologically informed Durkheimian tradition offers one such opportunity. With a similar sentiment, if coming from a very different methodological perspective, Griffiths and Butcher's chapter on quantitative approaches also seeks to set itself apart with what is sometimes the focus on contingency of some historical works. Quantitative approaches in this view not only bring to the fore the distinct challenges of conceptualisation – of studying the past with present-day concepts – but also open the door to undertaking interesting new cross-historical comparisons, an area that is certainly in need of development.

And yet, what the essays in this section and in the previous ones taken together point to is not only different ways of doing history or the variety of topics, but rather the central role and potential of HIR to destabilise and reconstitute the core categories of IR as a discipline. The two concluding chapters of the section tackle precisely this: Kessler's engagement with conceptual history brings to the fore not only that the history of concepts rests of a variety of different assumptions about the relation between social and semantic orders but also, as a result, the need to engage with the historicity and assumptions of our own concepts. The concluding chapter by Guillaume builds on this, by looking at how we order history through particular conceptual divisions, that is, particular periods. As HIR scholarship has long demonstrated (Osiander, 2001; de Carvalho et al., 2011) IR rests on a number of problematic breaks and periodisations in the narratives it tells about itself, and one of the crucial contributions of HIR is not only to debunk these myths but also, with it, to provide the tools for novel conceptualisation. Ultimately, as Guillaume argues, it is this combination of fresh theoretical reflection with careful historical engagement that will enable HIR to become a prominent conversation partner not only within IR but also, more broadly, with other humanities and social sciences.

Concluding remarks

Brilliant scholars in our past, even in the past of HIR, have asked "What is history?". Based on the essays in this volume, we find ourselves reflecting on the somewhat less ambitious question, "What is Historical IR?". Our first reaction would be to point out the extreme variation. To start with temporal scope, in this collection, we have chapters referring to events in the 14th-century BCE as well as chapters discussing 21st-century CE politics of history. Geographically, most of the globe is covered in works of HIR, although the existing studies of the polar regions have yet to be integrated with the broader discipline. When it comes to thematic and theoretical scope, our sense is that the proof is still very much in the pudding. And this is where all of the different traditions, ways of thinking, topics, actors and places tie in with the various approaches. As long as research concerned with history, however understood, is competently and transparently conducted, with methods fitting the questions raised and with the same questions emerging from or speaking directly to the field of IR, we would be inclined to consider it as HIR; for a spirit of openness is, if anything, one of this field.

By way of conclusion, let us go back in time to the early institutionalisation of the subfield of HIR. At the time of establishment (ca. 2012), the convenors were a slightly disjointed group of scholars interested in IR past, missing both a label and an institutional home. The establishment of the Historical International Relations Section (HIST) at the International Studies Association (ISA) created a profound change in the community, allowing diverse scholars to find a common home and providing aspiring scholars with hope for the future. This institutionalisation,

combined with the growth in scope and depth described earlier, made it possible for a community of scholars to grow stronger. We have sought to capture the work of this community within these pages.

Looking back at this project, what we find most striking is the sheer breadth of research undertaken within HIR, and the extent to which scholars within the subfield still speak to each other. We sincerely believe that the founding principle of the HIST section has mattered here. The section was founded on a big-tent principle, where there would be no exclusion based on method, outlook or scope. This openness has been a way for a relatively diverse group of scholars to stick together peacefully, and we believe that scholars engaged in HIR ought to work hard to avoid sectarian tendencies and doctrinal statements on methodology and substance. Looking at where we stand today, we believe that it is the broad-tent approach to approaching the past that has allowed for the formation and integration of a (rather diverse, to be honest) group of scholars under a common enterprise. Keeping this together will require more openness in the future, as new voices are bound to challenge the existing boundaries. In our view, a commitment to methodological and theoretical pluralism is the foundation of a project which has been wildly successful over the last two decades, and it should continue to guide the subfield in the future.

Editing a handbook is a fantastic learning experience. Even though we thought we knew the field of HIR fairly well, reading the wonderful chapters in this collection has demonstrated beyond any doubt that there is still a lot more to explore. We are proud to have been able to collect this work and look forward to see it inspiring new generations of HIST scholars.

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