



*Scandinavia and the Great Powers in the First World War* by Michael Jonas.

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In *Scandinavia and the Great Powers in the First World War*, author Michael Jonas (Univ. of Helsinki and Helmut-Schmidt-Univ., Hamburg) has made a contribution to early twentieth-century Scandinavian political history, a somewhat obscure, but increasingly popular field of study. The volume's main English-language predecessor is Patrick Salmon's *Scandinavia and the Great Powers 1890-1940*,<sup>1</sup> which Jonas cites several times. Salmon devotes just one 51-page chapter to Scandinavia in the First World War. One might expect that a 231-page book-length study would explore in greater depth such topics as Scandinavian neutrality as it was perceived and maintained; the belligerents' attempts to conscript Scandinavian neutrals into their economic warfare efforts; the effect of wartime challenges on Scandinavian domestic politics; and the attitude of the Scandinavian countries toward the emergence of new nation states—most significantly, Finland—in their immediate vicinity.

While Jonas's book does touch on all of these subjects to some degree, he does not, like Salmon, offer a comprehensive narrative study of the relations between the three Scandinavian kingdoms and the belligerent Great Powers. Instead, his short volume—nearly half of it taken up by notes, bibliography, and an index—presents

individual, though strongly linked, essays [that] ... probe into particular themes, problems, and developments in the region's relationships to the great powers with greater depth than an overarching narrative would be able to do so. In various ways, these explorations as well deal with what might be termed as lost causes of Nordic history, aspects of Scandinavian and Finnish history as well as the history of the First World War that were publicly "unremembered" or, in particular cases, swallowed by the predominant historiographical tides of the century in between. (2-3)

The book's introduction (nominally chapter 1) lays out its overarching themes, summarizes its chapters, and outlines its supposed "core problem": the difference between Great Powers and small states, and the nature of neutrality (9). Jonas's approach is to relativize the pertinent notions and reveal the fuzzy boundaries between Great Powers and small states on one hand, and neutrals and belligerents on the other.

I begin with a couple of general remarks. First, as he himself admits (6), Jonas only sporadically considers the economic side of the Scandinavian experience of the Great War, a central topic for Salmon. Instead, he stresses the cultural side of political and diplomatic history. This includes, for example, images of the self and the others, culturally determined perceptions of (unequal) power relations, the significance of propaganda and ideology, and, notably, various suppressed or "forgotten" historical phenomena.

Second, Jonas writes, the book "does not encompass the whole region" (4). Instead, it is most concerned with Sweden, followed in order of priority, by Finland and Denmark, with Norway

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1. New York: Cambridge U Pr, 1997.

only substantially entering the discussion in chapters 2 and 3. The chapters themselves fall into two broad categories: six are general overviews and two are specific case studies.

The overviews begin in chapter 2, “Comparing Neutralities.” Here, Jonas introduces the different wartime circumstances and neutrality policies of the three Scandinavian kingdoms, as well as the belligerents’ often critical attitudes towards them—with an emphasis on Entente suspicions regarding Sweden’s German-friendliness. This chapter,<sup>2</sup> makes a useful undergraduate reading assignment to illustrate the morally/politically controversial aspects of neutrality in World War I.

The brief overview in chapter 4, “Activism and Politics,” concentrates on the pro-German/pro-war movement in Sweden. Largely derivative of the works of Wilhelm M. Carlgren<sup>3</sup> and Inger Schuberth,<sup>4</sup> it usefully clarifies for Anglophone readers an elusive subject, even today little-known to serious historians of modern Scandinavia.

Chapters 6, “State, Empire, and Revolution,” and 7, “Arguing (over) Territory and Sovereignty,” concern the achievement of Finland’s independence from Russia in the light of Finnish-Russian relations in the preceding decades, and the varying (mostly Swedish and Finnish) attitudes towards the tricky question of the Åland islands during the end stage of the war and its aftermath. Again, these are helpful introductions to their subjects, especially the Åland settlement, which, Jonas rightly points out, has at times been misconstrued as the only arbitration success story of the interwar League of Nations.

The two case studies in chapter 3, “Royal Diplomacy,” feature close readings of the meeting of the three Scandinavian kings who issued a joint neutrality declaration in the Swedish town of Malmö in December 1914. Jonas highlights the staged, performative aspects of the royal ceremony, suggesting that the symbolic value of the event (not least for the following decades of inter-Nordic cooperation) was in fact greater than its limited political consequences would lead us to believe. The tone and scope of the discussions here diverge from those of the book’s other chapters, though there are commonalities with the description of Nicholas II’s 1915 visit to Helsinki in the chapter about Finland.

Finally (for the purposes of this review), the reader is treated in chapter 5, “Intellectuals and War in Scandinavia and Beyond,” to a case study of the wartime views and activities of Danish literary critic Georg Brandes. I perhaps would not agree that Brandes is a “forgotten” figure (68); if that were true, the same charge could be brought against almost any Scandinavian intellectual of the period, not least the pro-German Swede Sven Hedin, who is mentioned several times in the book. Moreover, Jonas uses several other studies of Brandes’s wartime thought.

More generally, I do not entirely accept the conceit that the topics under discussion have been undeservedly forgotten or “swallowed by the predominant historiographical tides” (3). In fact, they have been the subject of a large and increasing body of scholarship, much of it cited in Jonas’s own copious notes.

There are a few inconsistencies between Jonas’s individual arguments: for example, is it fair to treat the Russian Empire’s disintegration as unpredictable in hindsight, but the Finnish Civil War as something one could see coming (90, 190)? Sometimes, the picture is more complex than it ap-

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2. First published as “Neutral Allies, Immoral Pariahs? Scandinavian Neutrality, International Law and the Great Power Politics in the First World War” in *Small Nations and Colonial Peripheries at War*, ed. Gearóid Barry et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2016) 92–106.

3. *Neutralität oder Allianz: Deutschlands Beziehungen zu Schweden in den Anfangsjahren des ersten Weltkrieges* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1962).

4. *Schweden und das Deutsche Reich im Ersten Weltkrieg: die Aktivistebewegung 1914–1918* (Bonn: Röhrscheid, 1981).

pears. For instance, the Åland question fractured the Swedish activist movement itself rather than just estranging Swedish activists from their Finnish counterparts (119). Finally, the discontinuous structure of the book precludes a more balanced view of the attitudes of neutral intellectuals; and, too, one misses some comparison with conservative thinkers (like Harald Hjärne in Sweden, for one) who were then probably still in the majority.

No conclusion follows the chapters, but the author provides a preliminary summary in his introduction. The book is written clearly<sup>5</sup> and students of Scandinavia in the First World War will certainly find it most instructive. I hope that Michael Jonas will continue his work on the subjects of this book and look forward to his future publications.

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5. There are a few typos: read "early on" for "early one" (95), "1875" for "1975" (98), "affected" for "effected" (29), and "Uusimaa" for "Uusima" (101).