The two editors have embarked upon an ambitious task to attempt to write a ‘Global History of International Law’ by deviating from the conventional Eurocentric understanding of international law ‘as a history of rules developed in the European state system since the 16th century which then were spread to other continents and eventually the entire globe’ and ‘as a progressive history that in the end would lead to a world governed by the ideals of the Enlightenment, and the American and French revolutions’ (pp. 1-2).

In so doing, they subdivided the 65 book chapters into six parts: Part I deals with the actors of international law, among them inter alia ‘Peoples and Nations’ (Jörg Fisch), ‘States’ (the late Antonio Cassese), ‘Minorities and Majorities’ (Janne Nijman), or ‘International Organizations’ (Anne Peters and Simone Peter). The second part deals with themes of international law, such as ‘Territory and Boundaries’ (Daniel-Erasmus Khan), ‘Peace and War’, or the protection of individuals (Robert Kolb). Part III, then, is the most far-reaching attempt to escape any charges of Eurocentrism as its sub-sections deal with ‘Africa and Arabia’, ‘Asia’, ‘The Americas and the Caribbean’, ‘Europe’, and some of the various encounters between Europe and the rest of the world, namely China (Chi-Hua Tāng), Japan (Kinji A kashi), India (Upendra B axi), and Russia (Lauri M ālksoo), as well as a chapter on indigenous peoples (Ken Coates). Part IV is titled ‘Interaction or Imposition’ and includes topics on ‘Diplomacy’ (Arthur Eyfringer), the acquisition of territory (Andrew Fitzmaurice), ‘Colonialism and Domination’ (Matthew Craven), ‘Slavery’ (Seymour Drescher and Paul Finkelman), and the notion of civilization (Liliana Obregón). Part V gives a theoretical background to understanding and writing on the history of international law and includes a chapter by Martti Koskenniemi titled the ‘[h]istory of International Law Histories’, one by Anthony Carty ‘Doctrine versus State Practice’, a chapter on the troublesome concept of periodization of international law history (Oliver Diggelmann), one specifically on Eurocentrism (Arnulf Becker Lorca), as well as one by Anthony Anghie on the identification of regions in international law. The book then concludes with a part on some of the ‘big names’ of the history of international law – and one cannot fail to notice that, despite the attempt to write a non-eurocentric history, it includes – with one exception, namely Muhammad
al-Shaybani (Mashood A. Baderin) – only well-known European scholars from Francisco de Vitoria (Annabel Brett) to Hersch Lauterpacht (Iain Scobbie).

Obviously, all of the chapters stand for themselves and the extensive 43 pages index is certainly of great help. The editors have given the respective authors a broad leeway in terms of structure and content of their chapters. At the same time, there are only a view overlaps which are nevertheless unproblematic given the different perspectives (for instance, the historic notion of humanitarian interventions in the Kolb’s chapter on the protection of the individual at pp. 331-332, as well as Ungern-Sternberg’s Chapter on religion and religion-based interventions at p. 310).

That being said, a few brief remarks on some of the chapters shall be made in the following. Jörg Fisch starts his well-written chapter on peoples and nations with the statement that...

[states have never been the only subjects of international law, but they have always been the most essential ones. While it seems uncontested that international law is first and above all law between states, ‘States’ law’ plays an insignificant role in the history of the concept of international law. (p. 27)]

Reading such blank statements, the attitude of great 19th century positivists like Lassa Oppenheim immediately come to mind, who, writing in 1905, characterised international law restrictively as ‘the body of customary and conventional rules which are considered legally binding by civilised States in their intercourse with each other’. Against this background, it would certainly have been interesting to find at least a few references on the standing of other entities than states in international law. Can it be described, after all, even be characterised as always having been primarily being essentially based on groups, i.e. peoples and nations?

Fisch then proceeds to a read-worthy discussion on one of the principal questions many of those interested into the topic of international law encounter early on, namely the complex terminology when it comes to the terms peoples, nations, states and the notion of ius gentium and how the two streams of, on the one hand, the law of the peoples or the law of nations on the other (pp. 28-30). Bearing in mind the above-quoted finding on the subjects of international law, it seems that none of the chapters addresses the post-WWII debate on the status of the individual on the international plane as e.g. famously exemplified by Brierly in his famous piece ‘The Basis of Obligation in International Law’.2

Somewhat relatedly, the evolution of human rights law as described in Kolb’s

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2 J. Brierly, The Basis of Obligation in International Law and Other Papers (1958) 1.