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Book Reviews -- Monographic Musings

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This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.
This publication’s raison d’être is immediately apparent from its title. Edited by Shirley V. Scott, an associate professor of international relations at the University of New South Wales, International Law and Politics: Key Documents is designed to be a collection of the most important treaties and agreements operating today in international law. And though obviously it can be used as a relevant companion piece to textbooks on international politics, it also stands quite easily on its own as a straightforward reference work in the field.

To Scott, the perusal of original text is critical to a true understanding of the complexities of modern international law. She states in her preface that “as with poetry or painting, no secondary account of an international law document can replace the original.” Thus, International Law and Politics is not simply a presentation of paraphrased accounts and brief excerpts of the key documents in international law but instead is a compilation of the complete texts of those documents—i.e., the primary sources we researchers so dearly love.

One major asset of the work is its breadth of coverage. The documents are grouped in eight subject areas which manage to encompass most of the core issues facing the modern world: foundations of international law, the use of force, arms control, international crime, human rights, humanitarian law, the environment, and the global commons. Within each subject leading the documents are arranged chronologically, and while this makes logical sense from an historical perspective it also helps one chart development and growth in different areas of international law. The book is geared towards contemporary world problems and as such it emphasizes documents, especially treaties, which are on a global rather than regional level and which are generally post-1945.

As the book is not meant to be a textbook, there are no expanded commentaries or discussions; however, each document is preceded by a short introduction that provides needed context to the reader. The introductions also list supplementary documents that may be useful to the researcher. There are other helpful features, including a complete index and a glossary of terms. But two standout reader aids are the list of acronyms, always helpful in the area of international law; and the chronology of treaties, which indicate the date the treaties were signed, the date they entered into force, the number of parties signed to the treaty, and the signing status of the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia.

Whether used to accompany textbooks and treatises or as a stand-alone reference work, this book would be a valuable addition to any academic library, law or otherwise.