

Preface

Regular readers will notice that this Fall 2021/Spring 2022 double issue of the *Bulletin* features a new cover design and layout. We are delighted to launch the German Historical Institute's new corporate design with this issue. We are also happy to share the good news that the GHI Washington and its Pacific Office in Berkeley received a positive evaluation from an external review commission and that, as a result, our parent organization, the Max Weber Foundation, has granted permanent status to the GHI's Pacific Office, which first opened in 2017.

This issue opens with the GHI's 2021 Annual Lecture, delivered by the intellectual historian Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen (University of Wisconsin-Madison) on "Asking the Impossible: The Hunger for the Unknowable in Twentieth-Century U.S. and European Thought." In this lecture Ratner-Rosenhagen examines how, beginning at the turn of the twentieth century, an increasing number of American and European intellectuals who once felt committed to making an inscrutable universe legible found themselves drawn to pondering the unknowable. By exploring their efforts to redeem the intellectual credibility of asking unanswerable questions – such as *Do human beings have free will? Do human beings have a soul? What is the good life?* – she also considers whether such questions are inescapable for living the examined life.

The next two articles present the research of the winners of the 2020 and 2021 Fritz Stern Dissertation Prize, which is awarded annually by the Friends of the GHI for the best dissertation in German history completed at a North American university. Due to the pandemic, the award of the 2020 prize was postponed, so that the 2020 and 2021 prizes were awarded together in May 2021.

Emma Thomas (University of New South Wales, Australia), recipient of the 2020 Stern Prize, was honored for her University of Michigan dissertation on New Guinean women and colonial indenture in German New Guinea, 1884-1914. Her article "'Contact' Embodied: German Colonialism, New Guinean Women, and the Everyday Exploitation of a Labor Force" examines women's sexual and economic exploitation in the German colony of New Guinea. Focusing on New Guinean women's experiences as recorded in colonial court documents and missionary texts, Thomas demonstrates how the sexual exploitation they experienced from male colonists was linked to the German colonial system of indentured labor.

Richard Calis (Trinity College, Cambridge) was awarded the 2021 Stern Prize for his Princeton University dissertation on Martin Crusius (1526-1607), a Tübingen Professor of Greek. His article "Cross-Cultural Contact in Sixteenth-Century Tübingen: Martin Crusius and his Greek Guests" uses the figure of Crusius to explore the nature and meaning of cross-cultural contact in the early modern period. By analyzing how Crusius used these encounters to develop his knowledge of Greek language and culture Calis also shows how the globalization of Christianity affected life in a small town.

Although this issue of the *Bulletin* is not a thematic issue, Thomas's and Calis's theme of cross-cultural contact is also prominent in the other articles featured in this issue. In May 2021 the film historian and cultural studies scholar Cathy S. Gelbin (University of Manchester) delivered a lecture on the golem tradition in the GHI's lecture series "'The spirits that I called': Artificial Life from the Enlightenment to the Present." Gelbin's article based on this lecture, "The Golem: From Enlightenment Monster to Artificial Intelligence," traces the origins and development of the golem story, which relates the creation of an artificial man through a ritual of words. Gelbin shows how the golem story, which was originally presented as a Jewish ritual for unlocking the secret

of divine creation, turned into a Christian signifier for negative Jewish stereotypes before being transformed into a metaphor for technological progress.

Negative cross-cultural stereotypes also play a central role in the next article, which is based on the keynote address at the June 2021 GHI conference “Mobilities, Exclusion, and Migrants’ Agency in the Pacific Realm in a Transregional and Diachronic Perspective,” which was delivered by historian Mae M. Ngai (Columbia History), whose 2021 book *The Chinese Question: The Gold Rushes and Global Politics* just won the prestigious Bancroft prize. Her article “The Chinese Question: The Gold Rushes and Global Politics, 1849-1910” examines how the western myth of the “coolie” laborer arose as a racist stereotype used to fuel anti-Chinese sentiment and how the United States, Australia, and South Africa came to answer the “Chinese Question” with laws excluding Chinese people from immigration and citizenship.

Migration and cross-border movement are also the subject of the final two articles, which report on current GHI research on the history of mobility and migration, which has joined the history of knowledge and digital history as one of Institute’s research foci. Andreas Greiner’s article “Aviation History and Global History: Towards a Research Agenda for the Interwar Period” presents the conceptual template of the research project that Greiner is pursuing as a research fellow at the GHI. Applying a global history approach to the study of aviation infrastructure, Greiner moves beyond national frameworks to provide a trans-imperial analysis that pays equal attention to global connections and disconnections, entanglements and disentanglements, in order to reveal the challenges that globalization faced in the interwar period.

The final feature article in this issue is an interview with GHI director Simone Lässig about the GHI’s new research focus “In Global Transit,” which has been developed through a

series of conferences on the long-neglected global dimension of the flight of Jews from Nazi Europe. Using the term “transit” to refer to phases in the lives of migrants in which they are on the move between different cultural, political, and geographical spaces, this research focus has now resulted in the formation of a Standing Working Group, whose research agenda is explained in the interview.

Although the GHI’s conference program continued to be curtailed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Institute organized a substantial number of virtual events over the past year. We are pleased that this issue’s “Conference Reports” section can report on a number of these virtual events, including a panel series on “Migration and Racism in the United States and Germany,” a conference on “Mobilities, Exclusion and Migrants’ Agency in the Pacific Realm,” the 26th Transatlantic Doctoral Seminar in German History, the 5th Bucerius Young Scholars Forum, and the First International Seminar in Historical Refugee Studies.

Please turn to our news section for recent GHI news. For up-to-date information on upcoming events, publications, fellowships, and calls for papers, please consult the GHI website (<http://www.ghi-dc.org>), Facebook page, and twitter account. As this issue goes to press, we are planning to resume in-person events. We look forward to welcoming you again in both Washington and Berkeley.

**Simone Lässig (Director) and
Richard F. Wetzell (Editor)**