This Bulletin’s opening article presents the seventh Gerald D. Feldman Memorial Lecture, delivered last spring by Dorothee Wierling (University of Hamburg) on the topic “German History as Global History: The Case of Coffee in the Twentieth Century.” In this article, Professor Wierling examines coffee not as a commodity but as a mediator of social relations among the actors along the commodity chain. Taking the Hamburg merchants engaged in the overseas coffee trade as her starting point, Wierling investigates the role of travel as part of these merchants’ introduction into the professional world of global economic activities and analyzes the “internationalization” strategies of these trading families.

The next three articles form part of a thematic forum on the history of knowledge, one of the German Historical Institute’s new focal points of research. This section opens with Simone Lässig’s article “The History of Knowledge and the Expansion of the Historical Research Agenda,” which provides a survey of the intellectual and disciplinary origins of the history of knowledge; probes its relationship to the rise of global and transnational history; examines the methods that the history of knowledge deploys to study the subject of knowledge; analyzes how using knowledge as a category of historical analysis can benefit historical research; and offers a preview of the GHI’s research program in the history of knowledge.

The other two articles in this special forum each present specific research projects in the history of knowledge. In her article, “Old and New Orders of Knowledge in Modern Jewish History,” GHI Research Fellow Kerstin von der Krone presents the research she is pursuing as part of the GHI-affiliated German-Israeli research project “Innovation through Tradition? Jewish Educational Media and Cultural Transformation in the Face of Modernity.” Her article examines how, against a background of profound social change during the Sattelzeit (c. 1750–1850), Jewish education and ideas of learning in German-speaking Europe underwent fundamental conceptual and structural transformations. In particular, she analyzes the ways in which changes in the institutions of learning and teaching methods, the integration of new subject matter, and the engagement with non-religious thought gave rise to a differentiation and pluralization of the religious knowledge order. In doing so, von der Krone sheds new
light on how the transmission of religious knowledge was inextricably connected with attempts to redefine Judaism in the modern era.

The forum’s third article, “Data, Diplomacy, and Liberalism: August Ferdinand Lueder’s Critique of German Descriptive Statistics,” by Anna Echterhölter, GHI Fellow in the History of Knowledge (2015-2016), examines a neglected but revealing episode in the nineteenth-century history of statistics. Echterhölter’s article focuses on the early-nineteenth-century German statistician August Lueder, who started his career as a proponent and practitioner of “descriptive statistics” but then turned into the field’s sharpest critic. By contrasting Lueder’s descriptive statistics with two competing strands of statistics — mathematized social statistics and political arithmetic — and by offering a close reading and analysis of Lueder’s critique of statistics, Echterhölter illuminates the development of statistics from a new angle and offers a paradigmatic “history of knowledge in transition.”

The reports on GHI-sponsored conferences that took place in the first half of 2016 reflect the diversity of the topics examined at our conferences and seminars, ranging from German history to American history to transnational history, from the early modern era to the late twentieth century, from art history to political history to economic history, from the theme of diversity in German history to Willy Brandt’s relationship to the Americas, from the nineteenth-century history of women’s rights to historical perspectives on the current refugee crisis, from the history of risk to an examination of the current state of the historical discipline.

In the “GHI News” section we are pleased to announce the launch of the new digital project “German History Intersections” and the exciting news that the Institute will be opening a “GHI West” branch office at the University of California at Berkeley next year. In this section you will also find an obituary for the distinguished historian Fritz Stern, who had a long association with the GHI. The events calendar gives you a preview of our upcoming activities. We have recently increased our presence on social media, so in addition to our website — http://www.ghi-dc.org — please also check out our Facebook page and our Twitter feed @GHIWashington for up-to-date information on upcoming events, new publications, fellowship announcements, job postings, and calls for papers.

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