

Growing Up with *Central European History*

Doris L. Bergen

Central European History (*CEH*) was the first scholarly journal I really got to know, and for more than thirty years, it has been important to me in all kinds of ways. I first encountered *CEH* as a Master's student at the University of Alberta, where my primary supervisor was the extraordinary Annelise Thimme, author of highly original works on Hans Delbrück, Gustav Stresemann, and the Deutschnationale Volkspartei.¹ The discipline of history was new to me, and although I had taken some interesting undergraduate classes on early modern and modern history at the Universities of Saskatchewan and Munich, I had no idea about historiography, professional networks, or academic publishing. I probably did not even understand what the term *Central Europe* meant.

Annelise Thimme was, of course, the opposite. The daughter of Friedrich Thimme, a trained historian, archivist, and head of the ambitious project, *Die grosse Politik der europäischen Kabinette 1871–1914*—a multivolume documentary edition sponsored by the German Foreign Office (Auswärtiges Amt), with the intention of proving that Germany was not to blame for the outbreak of war in 1914—she grew up surrounded by historians, intellectuals, and public figures.² Ludwig Dehio, Julie Braun-Vogelstein, Friedrich Meinecke, and Felix Gilbert were family friends; her own studies and research connected her to Gerhard Ritter, Fritz Fischer, Ricarda Huch, and, later, Hans Gatzke, Sally Marks, and many others. Born in Berlin in November 1918 and so seriously wounded by the Allied shelling of Göttingen in 1945 that she had to have a leg amputated, Annelise not only knew what Central Europe was—she embodied it.³

In my first semester at the University of Alberta, I was assigned as a research assistant to Dr. Thimme, as we called her. One of my first assignments was to come to her house and “make order” in the study. I felt a bit like the woman in the Rumpelstiltskin story, faced with a task that seemed impossible. But, with some guidance, certain categories emerged, and I began to sort through the piles of papers and set up files. One major category was the journal *Central European History*, which turned out to need its own drawer in one of those gray, metal filing cabinets. It was 1982, and Annelise would soon begin her term as president of what was then called the Conference Group for Central European History of the American Historical Association. She was the first woman to hold this office. In the

¹Annelise Thimme, *Hans Delbrück als Kritiker der wilhelminischen Epoch* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1955); idem, *Gustav Stresemann. Eine politische Biographie zur Geschichte der Weimarer Republik* (Hanover: O. Goedel, 1957); idem, *Flucht in den Mythos. Die Deutschnationale Volkspartei und die Niederlage von 1918* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969).

²Johannes Lepsius, Albrecht Mendelssohn Bartholdy, and Friedrich Thimme, eds., *Die grosse Politik der europäischen Kabinette 1871–1914*, 40 vols. (Berlin: Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft für Politik und Geschichte, 1922–1927).

³See Doris L. Bergen, “Professor Dr. Annelise Thimme, November 24, 1918–April 5, 2005,” *Central European History (CEH)* 39, no. 3 (2006): 482–90.

meantime, together with the editor, Douglas Unfug, and the other members of the editorial board, she was busy with the intellectual and practical demands of producing the journal. At that point, they were immersed in preparing the symposium “Who Voted for Hitler?” that appeared in 1984.⁴ Listening to Dr. Thimme, filing her correspondence, going to the library to find the books and articles she needed, and making photocopies of the most important pieces and passages constituted a crash course in the scholarly publishing side of a historian’s work. From watching her, I learned what a peer review is and how much research, effort, and thought went into doing a good job with one. I gained insight into how editors and editorial boards work, how they choose peer reviewers and decide what to publish, what it means to revise and resubmit. All those lessons were based on my experiences with *Central European History*.

The book reviews also made a big impression on me. I saw how avidly Annelise read them, and how meticulously she and another professor I worked for, the brilliant intellectual historian Ronald Hamowy, prepared to write them. I came to understand that reputations and even careers hinged on those reviews. Years later, the review section is still the first thing I turn to in *Central European History*, and, for that matter, in any journal. Of course, I also read the articles! All my professors at Alberta—Annelise, Ulrich Trumppener, and the Habsburgist Helen Liebel-Weckowicz—emphasized that it was vital to keep up with the field by reading journals. *Central European History*, *Journal of Modern History*, and *American Historical Review* are the three I remember; soon we added *German Studies Review* to the must-reads. Names that later became real people to me—as mentors, role models, innovators, and friends in the field: Gerhard Weinberg, Konrad Jarausch, Isabel Hull, Carole Fink, Michael Geyer, Ann Taylor Allen, Claudia Koonz, and many others—all first came to my attention through Annelise and *Central European History*.

As a PhD student at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, historical journals took on a deeper cachet. Now my peers and I not only read the articles and reviews—we aspired to write them. *Central European History* had a particular place in our dreams—and our nightmares. Both of our awe-inspiring modern Germanists, Weinberg and Jarausch, had, like Thimme, chaired the Conference Group and served on the editorial board of *CEH*. Even more intimidating, it was in the pages of *Central European History* that, in 1984, the Abraham case, in the form of an acrimonious exchange between David Abraham and Gerald Feldman, appeared—or, more accurately, exploded—in agonizing detail.⁵ That fracas raised urgent questions for me and my cohort of graduate students: How important were footnotes? How good did your German need to be? Were the notes I took in the archive reliable? How were standards in our field imposed and maintained, and by whom? What role did politics play? These questions persist, even as technology has altered the everyday practice of research.

In the early 1990s, when my friends and I began to attend professional conferences, we soon noticed the formidable Kenneth Barkin, who took over as editor of *Central European History* in 1991. He was a tireless scout for talent, sitting through papers and entire panels on obscure subjects if he had a sense that something worthy of publication might emerge. Barkin always

⁴“Symposium: Who Voted for Hitler?,” with contributions by Richard F. Hamilton, Ernst-August Roloff, Thomas Childers, William Sheridan Allen, Dietrich Orlow, and the Editors, *CEH* 17, no. 1 (1984): 3–86.

⁵“Debate: David Abraham’s *The Collapse of the Weimar Republic*,” with contributions by David Abraham, Gerald Feldman, and Douglas A. Unfug (Editor), *CEH* 17, no. 2/3 (1984): 159–293. Also see the remarks by James Van Horn Melton about the Abraham case in his memorial to Douglas A. Unfug in this commemorative issue.

looked serious, even slightly disapproving, and he exuded professional and editorial gravitas. So it was all the more exciting when he showed up at a session that Dagmar Herzog, Helmut Walser Smith, and I had organized at an annual conference of the German Studies association in the early 1990s, on Christianity and antisemitism in modern Germany. Barkin invited us to submit our papers to the journal and also solicited an article from our commentator, Jonathan Sperber, as well as an introduction from our moderator, James Harris. The resulting 1994 symposium, “Christian Religion and Anti-Semitism in Modern German History,” included my first peer-reviewed article.⁶ I was proud and delighted to have my work appear in a journal I had admired for so long and many of whose readers I now felt I knew.

Some years later, after receiving tenure at the University of Notre Dame, I was asked to consider putting in a bid to become editor of *CEH*. It was a flattering and tempting suggestion. We had a dynamic group of Europeanists at Notre Dame, including the Habsburg specialist Robert Wegs, the historian of Poland Laura Crago, the early modernist Howard Louthan, and others: James McAdams and Daniel Mattern at the Nanovic Institute, Robert Norton in the German Department, and Russian historians Gary Hamburg and Semion Lyandres. With the help of my colleagues “to the East,” and during that heady period following the collapse of Communism and the opening of archives and vistas that had been closed when I started graduate school, I dreamed about helping develop the full dimensions of “Central Europe” in the journal. But it did not turn out that way: we were not able to secure a promise of adequate institutional support; Bob Wegs was diagnosed with cancer; and several of the key players left Notre Dame.⁷

The journal found outstanding people to take charge, others who had the same idea I did: to look outward from Germany, and not only to the East, but to the world. Kenneth Ledford and Catherine Epstein brought breadth, depth, and intellectual energy to the category “Central European,” and Andrew Port, Julia Torrie, and a stellar editorial board continue to open new possibilities by showcasing methodological and thematic innovations in the field. The 2015 special issue on “Photography and Twentieth-Century German History,” guest-edited by Elizabeth Harvey and Maiken Umbach, was a highlight for me, and there have been many others.⁸ Meanwhile, the sad stream of tributes to the people who, like Annelise Thimme, had shaped the field as I first encountered it in the 1980s—most recently, Peter Gay, Fritz Stern, and Carl Schorske—reminds me of how much time has passed. And yet, looking back at the early years of the journal as I write these reflections, I am struck by how fresh and relevant much of the old scholarship remains. I feel lucky to be a part of our dynamic field and look forward to continuing to learn from all the new research and publications. Congratulations, everyone, and happy birthday to *CEH*!

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

⁶Doris L. Bergen, “Catholics, Protestants, and Christian Antisemitism in Nazi Germany,” *CEH* 27, no. 3 (1994): 329–48. That piece tied together with another article that came out the same year: Doris L. Bergen, “The Nazi Concept of ‘Volksdeutsche’ and the Exacerbation of Anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 29, no. 4 (1994): 569–82.

⁷See Doris L. Bergen, “James Robert Wegs, 1937–2010: In Memoriam,” *Austrian History Yearbook* 42 (2011): 211–16.

⁸In addition to the introduction by Harvey and Umbach, the issue includes articles by Josie McLellan, Leora Auslander, Andrea Löw, and Ulrich Prehn. See “Photography and Twentieth-Century German History,” *CEH* 48, no. 3 (2015): 285–423.