

Letter from the Editor

No matter what inscrutable socio-biological function they may serve, all anniversaries are constructs—a point worth recalling as Central Europe finds itself in the midst of a series of special anniversaries of major historical events. Last year the outbreak of World War I was commemorated for the hundredth time, and that of World War II for the seventy-fifth; it was also exactly a quarter century since the fall of the Berlin Wall. The present year marked the bicentennial of the Congress of Vienna, and the five-hundredth anniversary of Martin Luther's Ninety-Five Theses rolls around in 2017, as does the centennial of the Russian Revolution.

If there is one thing the innovative historiography of the past half century has taught us, it is that war and high politics are not the sole benchmark for large segments of humanity when it comes to their perceptions and experiences. Still, all these events were important caesura in myriad ways for millions of people, and it is thus appropriate that historians mark these major anniversaries—mainly associated with death, destruction, and defeat, both physical and metaphorical—by publishing new studies and new assessments. Whether any of these studies will have anything to say that drastically alters our understanding of past events is unclear, notwithstanding permanent professional pressures to produce something novel and original.

It turns out, in fact, as Annika Mombauer argues in her review essay of recent literature marking the centennial of the “great seminal catastrophe” of the twentieth century, that several of the many historians who have written about the July Crisis a century after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand do indeed have something novel to say—even if, in many respects, the questions have remained the same for a century: how and why did war come about in the summer of 1914; what were its causes; who was to blame? As Mombauer points out in **“Guilt or Responsibility? The Hundred-Year Debate on the Origins of World War I,”** the terms historians now use are nevertheless different: they are less inclined to speak nowadays of *blame* or of *war guilt* as such, but rather of *responsibility*, a subtle but significant semantic shift. And just as one had thought that everything that could possibly be said about the July Crisis had been said, Christopher Clark's *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* proved that assumption to be false—or, at the very least, its scholarly and popular reception did.

A media sensation and best-seller in Germany, Clark's theses prompted a new controversy in that country reminiscent, in tenor and tone, of the Fritz Fischer debate of the early 1960s about the origins of World War I. With its greater focus on alleged Serb responsibility, and its more charitable treatment of decision-makers in Berlin, what Clark's book may demonstrate more than anything else is the old adage that every generation discovers seemingly new facets of major historical events and brings new insights to old historical questions. At the same time, it reminds us of the ways more recent events may color our understanding of the past. One wonders, for instance, if Clark and others would have cast as critical an eye on Belgrade if not for Serb aggression in the 1990s.

One wonders similarly about the new, arguably more equitable treatment of Germany and the Germans. As both world wars inexorably fade from living memory, as Germany continues to prove itself a “normal” nation that poses little danger to its neighbors and the world, as other bogeymen emerge and other genocides erupt decade after decade, the moral debates about Germany's “unmasterable past” seem somehow less urgent. They appear to have run their course—and been, more or less, mastered. The approaching seventy-fifth anniversary of the end of World War II in 2020 might nevertheless be a good time to revisit that set of issues.

Hermann Rebel's article, "**Between *Heimat* and *Schubsystem*: Walking the Homeless to Death in Early Modern Austria,**" clearly gives the lie to any speculation about declining interest in the purported historical peculiarities of German-speaking Central Europe. As one of the anonymous readers for this journal astutely observed, it is a "compelling think piece" that identifies "eerie echoes" between vastly different historical epochs. Focusing on the treatment of alien "undesirables" in eighteenth-century Austria—more specifically, on their involuntary removal from one locale to another via forced marches—Rebel sees in such actions a foreshadowing, a "pre-figuration," of the death marches that took place two centuries later during the final phase of the Nazi Holocaust. Some readers may object that Rebel's novel claims fail to consider key contextual differences between the two events, or remain unconvinced by his implicit suggestion of some sort of causal connection or link—the murderous result of a certain *longue durée* mindset that somehow made twentieth-century bureaucrats willing executioners of exterminationist policies. But they will no doubt recognize how Rebel's provocative analysis of the rich archival material he has uncovered meaningfully contributes to our understanding of poverty, homelessness, exclusion, and expulsion during the early modern period.

In "**Hate Speech and Identity Politics in Germany, 1848–1914,**" Ann Goldberg offers a novel reinterpretation of the history of German hate-speech laws. Rejecting the idea that current legislation—with its emphasis on toleration and a respect for the rights of minorities—was a postwar reaction to the horrors of the Third Reich, she counterintuitively argues instead that its origins harken back to the aftermath of the 1848 revolutions, when counterrevolutionary forces adopted legislation prohibiting speech that could potentially incite violence. This found its way into the new Criminal Code of unified Germany as Art. 130, which was used by authorities during the *Kaiserreich* to persecute Catholics and especially those on the political left. An important turning point came in the 1890s, Goldberg argues, when the Central Association of German Citizens of Jewish Faith (*Centralverein*, or *CV*) used the law in a new way: to defend and protect German Jews against the increasingly virulent obloquy of antisemites. This marked a significant departure for the former, whose preferred strategy had long been to remain inconspicuous and avoid confronting anti-Jewish rabbleroxing head on. Just as important, Goldberg concludes, it was this new understanding of hate-speech jurisprudence that would later serve as a model for post-1945 hate-speech legislation in West—and subsequently reunified—Germany.

Like Goldberg's piece, Eric Kurlander's article, "**The Nazi Magicians' Controversy: Enlightenment, 'Border Science,' and Occultism in the Third Reich,**" has a strong revisionist bent—or, to be more accurate, a *post*-revisionist one. Responding to recent studies that have minimized the degree of interest in the supernatural on the part of leading Nazis, Kurlander argues that the latter, far from being hostile to the occult and its practitioners, were, like much of the population at large, much more open to, tolerant of, and interested in certain practices—at least those deemed to be somehow "serious" and "scientific." Kurlander's examination of clashes between professional magicians and their detractors reveals the fundamental ambivalence of Nazi leaders, as well as the absence of a clear policy line, toward the occult and occultists. This reassessment of the relationship between science and the supernatural under the Nazis has broader implications for our understanding of the mechanics of Adolf Hitler's regime and, more specifically, of the ways in which various factions and actors interacted and competed for influence during the Third Reich.

Friederike Brühöfener's article, "**Sex and the Soldier: The Discourse about the Moral Conduct of *Bundeswehr* Soldiers and Officers during the Adenauer Era,**" examines public debates about—as well as official efforts to influence and regulate—the social and sexual

behavior of young male army recruits in the newly created *Bundeswehr*. A study of evolving and multiple discourses about masculinity and “proper” sexual comportment—not about actual practices as such—Brühöfener’s piece sheds light on social, cultural, and sexual anxieties during the Adenauer era. At the same time, it touches on broader themes related to postwar reconstruction efforts: the changing relationship between civilian society and the military, as well as the development of normative ideals about masculinity, (hetero)sexuality, and the role of male breadwinners in the nuclear family. In so doing, and in looking at the desired sexual and moral nature of the German soldier as “citizen in uniform,” it helpfully extends the historiographical treatment of postwar rearmament from the political and military, in a narrow sense, to the social and cultural more broadly.

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