Church – or transnational social spaces, movements, values, languages and discourses, as these cannot be reduced to relations between individual countries of societies, but, rather, possess their own, internal logic? Would it really be possible and sensible to break down the decision of the European Commission into French, British, German and Spanish contributions and relations, or to explain the decisions of the Catholic Church through reference to the relations among particular national daughter-churches? Does not the concept of relations history thus also have clear limits here? Would it be best to choose a kind of hierarchy among transnationality, relations history, integration history and transfers?

The third requirement: this debate needs to cease its exclusivity. It should be communicated more strongly to neighbouring disciplines, and they should be brought into the dialogue. Above all, the debate should move beyond its Franco-German exclusivity and open up into the Anglo-Saxon, Spanish-speaking and East Asian space. To this end, translations of key texts in English, Spanish, Chinese or Japanese would be necessary. The debate, which to this point has been bound tightly to the European context, would gain a new pulse through dialogue with these non-European historians.

**Note**

1. This essay appeared first as 'Die Debatte über Vergleich und Transfer und was jetzt?', in Geschichte.transnational (Forum), http://geschichte-transnational.clioonline.net/forum/id=57&type=diskussionen, 8 February 2005.
as has sometimes been suggested in the German debate, that transnational
history is generally superior and preferable to national history.

... * * *

*Ge指纹chaftsgeschichte*, the History of Society, has been one of the most
successful paradigms in postwar German historiography. Its hallmark has
been the infusion of social science theories into a tradition of social history
that used to be basically descriptive. The original impetus behind *Ge指纹chaftsgeschichte* was not to demonstrate the usefulness of theory as such;
it was more than just scholarly *fart pour fart*. The project was a political
one: to develop a new interpretation of modern German history, carefully
grounded in the fullest possible evidence, deploying the whole panoply of
advanced research tools, and guided by a sense of tragic failure of German
history with its ‘special path’ and ultimate, though ever fragile, democratic
normality after 1945. Careful nurturing of these various elements allowed
the mature achievements of *Ge指纹chaftsgeschichte* to emerge: an enormous
output of monographs on all possible aspects on the history of the German
bourgeoisie or (a wider concept) Bürgertum, Jürgen Kocka’s multi-volume
history of labour and labour organization in nineteenth-century Germany,
and, the towering monument of the school, Hans-Ulrich Wehler’s *Deutsche
Ge指纹chaftsgeschichte*.2

The core group of *Ge指纹chaftsgeschichte* was surrounded by a larger
group of pupils, sympathizers, and kindred spirits. Some of them, but not
many, applied the basic approach of the History of Society to European
countries other than Germany, especially France, Italy, and Russia. This
is how far the school was prepared to go. Apart from an early interest of
both Wehler and Kocka in the history of the United States, *Ge指纹chaftsgeschichte* was hardly ever transplanted into non-European contexts. Some
of the reasons are obvious—*Ge指纹chaftsgeschichte*’s idea of society was
closely linked to mature industrialism and its antecedents. Agrarian societ-
ies only entered the picture when germs of modernity were already visible.
They were of interest only as belonging to the pre-history of modernity.
‘Traditional’ peasant societies as well as colonized societies all over the
world failed to provide the elementary features of that type of social com-
plexity that alone merited the attention of *Ge指纹chaftsgeschichte*. It has,
therefore, always been a project centred on modern Germany and, to a
lesser extent, Western and Eastern Europe. It ‘transnational history’ is also
meant to be trans-European history. *Ge指纹chaftsgeschichte* will have to re-
think its more or less unspoken assumptions.

However, it would be wrong to suppose that *Ge指纹chaftsgeschichte*
has remained static. Once the foundations had been laid in the 1970s, the
1980s, as a period of ‘extension’, consolidated the initial achievement. This

is how the leaders of *Ge指纹chaftsgeschichte* saw themselves, and Erweiter-
ung became a favourite motto of the time. Extension of the basic paradigm
was achieved by careful enlargement of *Ge指纹chaftsgeschichte*’s scope of
action. *Ge指纹chaftsgeschichte* grew and prospered less through coloniz-
ing the outer reaches of historical scholarship than by the intensification
of research and by the careful incorporation of adjacent thematic fields.
This was a wise strategy, which allowed the paradigm to be tested and
improved. From a position of unassailed self-confidence, *Ge指纹chaftsges-
chichte* chose its own mode of extension. Some challenges, especially from
*Alltagsgeschichte* or the history of material life and local experience, were
fended off in an imperious manner. Elsewhere, concessions were made and
new inspirations were welcomed and valued. Thus, a few new theorists were
allowed to join the incomparable Max Weber in the pantheon of *Ge纹
schafsgeschichte*’s thinkers of reference, first among them was Pierre Bour-
dieu (while Michel Foucault met with resolute refusal).3 ‘Agency’ was added
to ‘structure’; ‘culture’, even if defined quite conventionally and narrowly,
was taken on board; the method of comparison, famously pioneered by the
great Max Weber himself, was recommended as the best method possible
for absorbing new evidence and, at the same time, enhancing the power
and rigour of explicative models.

By and large, such cautious attempts to keep up-to-date met with suc-
cess and led to the revitalization of the project of *Ge指纹chaftsgeschichte*.
In its mature form, it was much more than traditional social history. It in-
cluded material production, social stratification, political power, and the
institutions (much less the practices) of cultural expression. Yet anthropolo-
gists tell us that ‘boundary maintenance’ requires not just inclusion, but
also exclusion; in other words, it requires drawing a line. Therefore, a few
hoary antagonisms were left intact and were even confirmed: the history of
international relations, apart from a brief flirtation with the study of impe-
rialism, was flatly rejected; contemporary history with a strong narrative
flavour was left to others; and the history of ideas, even in as novel a shape
as ‘intellectual history’ or ‘history of discourse’, continued to be looked
at with a considerable amount of suspicion, and seen as a vestige of old-
fashioned *Historismus* in the tradition of Friedrich Meinecke.

Yet another kind of extension that was avoided was the enlargement
of the spatial or horizontal sphere of reference. A careful critic of *Ge纹
schafsgeschichte*’s house journal, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, has dubbed
the whole tendency a ‘nation-centred social history.’ This has been quite
amazing from the point of view of the outside observer. A scholarly project
that strongly opposed all forms of German (and any other) ‘nationalism’,
that lost no opportunity to quote the great universalist thinker Max Weber,
and that paid its respects to modern universalists such as Eric Hobsbawm,
Barrington Moore, Charles Tilly or Wolfgang Reinhard, felt surprisingly comfortable with its own provincialism.

In order to overcome such limits of vision, nothing seems to be easier than simply to add new geographic and cultural spaces. However, Hans-Ulrich Wehler has admitted that the guiding concepts of *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* are difficult to transplant into a seemingly familiar context such as the North American one. It would be even more difficult to apply terminologies of Weberian sociology and modernization theory to non-Western social configurations. The indigenous self-description of such societies usually offers a rich repertoire of concepts, and the science of anthropology or ethnology provides additional instruments of study. At the same time, it would be wrong to deny the pertinence of European concepts to the rest of the world. Simple dichotomies of the West and the 'rest' should be a thing of the past. *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* might easily avoid a responsibility to extend its scope by playing the well-known game of 'othering the Other.' Yet, anthropology is of limited use for understanding the literate traditions of Asia, and holistic concepts of societal otherness such as the 'oriental mode of production' (Karl Marx) or 'oriental society' (John Stuart Mill) are no longer considered adequate for describing the complex hierarchies of traditional Asian societies, let alone their processes of modernization.

An obvious way out seems to lie in the development, in Max Weber's footsteps, of an integrated social science that develops flexible concepts for dealing with social phenomena across cultural boundaries, rather than to leave the 'Others' to special academic disciplines whose results can, from the point of view of 'normal' historians, safely be disregarded. Ultimately, one should aim at a kind of analytical two-way traffic. Just as ethnology and anthropology have been extremely helpful in enriching our understanding of Western societies, so the tools of Western social and historical science ought to be, perhaps in a modified way, applied to non-European societies.

Such two-way traffic implies a heightened awareness of the history of European expansion and of the cultural interactions between Europeans and non-Europeans—subjects not normally within the purview of German historians. The history of German colonialism begins no earlier than 1884, and this brief episode was over by the end of the First World War. This had the historiographical consequence of the continuous insensitivity of German historians toward the global dimension of European history. Yet, a brief look at countries such as Great Britain, the Netherlands, and Portugal, and even France and Russia, should reveal that, throughout the post-Columbian period, expansion has been a fundamental mode of existence for many parts of Europe. It is not Eurocentric conceit to say that overseas expansion and empire building are defining features of Europe's history. In many European countries, social processes transcended the boundaries of nation states. The spatial frame for solving social problems often extended the limits of the nation state. This may have been less so in Germany than elsewhere, although Germany could not escape the effects of earlier waves of globalization, and even became an active player in global games from the beginning of the Kaisersreich onward. The best way to study those entanglements would be to take account of the most recent advances in migration history—a field strangely neglected by *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* proper.

It has been suggested that border-transgressing relations and activities should generally come under the heading of a history of 'transfers.' The study of such transfers has already become a vibrant field of historical research.

The crucial question is the reach of such an approach. A radical solution would be to abandon national history altogether in favour of a history of exchanges, networks, and hybridities. Suggestions of this kind are not entirely new. As early as 1967, the Swiss historian Herbert Lüthy pointed out that, up to the present, all history has been a history of colonisations and overlapping stratifications. More than twenty years later, the sociologist Friedrich Tenbruck challenged the masters of *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* by juxtaposing the History of Society and the History of the World. Although the school of *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* rarely dodged a challenge, Tenbruck's critique went unanswered and unheeded.

Tenbruck's article, nothing less than an intervention by one of Germany's leading sociologists, vastly contradicted the incremental model of slowly extending the scope of *Gesellschaftsgeschichte*. Tenbruck did not deny the relevance of the nation state as a unit of analysis, but he suggested that the most fruitful point of view for the historian to take was not inside the nation and the nation state; rather, it should be located at a higher level. External relations should not be secondary features of 'structures,' whose principal dynamics were to be considered as internal and endogenous. Friedrich Tenbruck, completely untouched by 'postcolonial studies,' suggested studying movements and transfers, migration and long-distance trade, along with conquests and the expansion of religions. Up to a point, this was Tenbruck's message—the 'structures' so beloved to *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* were crystallizations emerging from such a fluid reality. Published in 1989, these were prophetic proposals. Jürgen Kocka later arrived at similar, though less radical, conclusions, demanding 'the definition of problems within a global horizon.' He went on to propose that historians should study 'the connections between local phenomena and global contexts.' The crux of the matter—radicalizing Kocka's point—is that one does not generally have to scale the ladder from the local to the global level. Instead, a historical analysis should begin from both ends at the same time. Joachim Radkau's global environmental history, written at the University of Biele-
fold under the shadow of Gesellschaftsgeschichte, but in explicit distance from it, is a good example for this kind of 'polycentric' analysis.13

How do we get from here to a history of society? Basically, there are two possible ways for those who are not prepared to drop the concept of society altogether and replace it with a loose collection of discourses and practices, identities and lifestyles. First, the permeability of bounded national and regional societies ought to be acknowledged. Not all social life is quintessentially entangled, but some kind of entanglement, even if quite limited in a particular case, is to be expected everywhere in modern history. This augments, rather than invalidates, a national perspective on modern history. Second, the methodology of comparison, as explained in other chapters in this book, can and should be used to determine whether there has been a distinctly European or, perhaps, 'Western' model of civilization and social organization. As long as this question is considered of any importance, comparison is indispensable. Even those who go far to avoid any kind of 'essentialism' cannot deny the existence of certain European peculiarities, which, of course, have been evolving over time and have been strongly influenced by the impact of economic and cultural globalization. For good reasons, historians are somewhat reluctant to engage in this kind of macro-comparison of entire national societies or even 'civilizations'. They prefer partial and topical comparisons to the very grand generalizations favoured by historical sociologists.14 Still, the question of a typology of basic social forms in the world keeps lurking in the background and cannot be avoided. It should be discussed without any European triumphalism and sense of self-congratulation. In societal terms as well as in many others, non-Western societies are not just deficient losers of historical competition, lacking the essential aspects of Western modernity. This cannot be emphasized too strongly, given the limited interest of German historians in non-occidental history.

Comparison is one of the methods used by practitioners of 'transnational history'. A growing number of authors seem to know what 'transnational history' is, but upon closer inspection, few of them care to offer a definition. What does the adjective 'transnational' really mean? The concept was first used in the social sciences, but even there its specific content has often been left unclear. 'Transnational' obviously is different from 'supranational', a word that refers to the political development of (Western) Europe since about 1950: the emergence, unprecedented in history, of a separate sphere of political and administrative action distinct from, and, in a growing number of fields, superior to the sovereignty of the individual nation states.16 On the other hand, 'transnational' should be distinguished from 'international', a term first used in 1780 by Jeremy Bentham. Originally, it referred to the relations between state actors within a plural system of militarized great powers.17 Current usage is much wider than that—'International Relations' also includes economic and cultural contacts and exchanges of the most varied kind. This is reflected in the vast body of literature in International Relations theory—a field of theoretical construction and reflection almost unknown to the great majority of historians. The additional connotation of cosmopolitanism, already present in Bentham's use of the word, has gained importance in recent decades. Since the establishment, in 1864, of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the world knows what today is called International Nongovernmental Organizations. Just one year later, the First International, as a transnational organization of militant European socialists, came into being. When historians speak today of 'internationalization', they do not mean horizontal relations between states, but the impact of higher levels on national societies. They use the term 'internationalism' to describe the rise of collective identities transcending the nation state, and, at the same time, they study the processes of internationalizing cultural, political, and economic practices that went hand in hand with the formation of national states during the nineteenth century.18 In respect to traffic, trade, and migration, such a process transgressed the boundaries of the European continent at an early point in time. In cultural terms, it mainly assumed the form of Westernization, and in the twentieth century, more specifically of Americanization. When Jürgen Kocka expects an imminent 'internationalization of the historical social sciences; he seems to indicate that these sciences will deal with transnational phenomena and, at the same time, that they will find a resonance all over the world. Both meanings can safely been accommodated within the word 'international'.

Yet, what is the advantage of introducing the special semantics of the 'transnational' alongside the established meanings of the 'international'? Sometimes, shifts in emphasis have been slow and almost imperceptible: multinational companies, for example, gradually came to be known as 'transnational corporations'. In the theory of International Relations, the term 'transnational politics' was introduced in the late 1960s. Initially, it encompassed all sorts of interdependent relationships in 'world politics', with the exception of the official relations between national governments. This later turned out to be impractically vague. Recent attempts at definition put an emphasis on 'clearly identifiable actors or groups of actors ... linking at least two societies'. This kind of formalism, typical for International Relations theory, however, is of little help for social historians.

Other approaches seem to be much more interesting. To give just two examples: sociological and ethnomethodological studies of migrants in the present-day world have shown how it is possible to lead a life in a kind of permanent transgression of boundaries between persisting national cultures. People and communities 'in between' do not necessarily live in the rarefied world
of a rootless cosmopolitanism, nor are they lost in a no-man's-land. Both options have, of course, existed in the past. But there is also the possibility of multiple identities, bilingualism, and the flexible enacting of roles. For this third type of cases, the concept of 'transnational social space' seems to offer an adequate solution. Spatial metaphors have the general advantage of addressing the problem of the 'framing' of social relations. They open up the large fields of a history on the impact of political borders on social configurations. In this sense, 'transnationalism' refers to a special category of social relations that unfold in tension with and in contradiction to the assertion of national sovereignties.

Secondly, it becomes more and more obvious that the social influence of religions is not contained within political boundaries. After a period when religion, in the sense of individual experience and piety, became one of the favourite subjects of microhistory, it is now being discovered as a factor of transnational cultural ordering. The old concept of 'ecumenism' in the sense of large-scale communities of shared meaning assumes new importance. More and more, the nationalization of creeds and churches in post-Reformation Europe (much later in Catholicism than in Protestantism) is revealed as a very special case in the world history of religion.

It would not be difficult to continue like this. New developments in the contemporary world prompt us to take a new view of the past, and new theories help to detect or even 'constitute' new fields of inquiry. Both forces shaping the agenda of historians, the empirical and the theoretical one, have to be situated within larger historical contexts. Those who now advocate 'transnational history' should ask themselves what it is that motivates them to champion such a new 'turn'. It should also encourage them not to establish their new direction in an exclusive and sectarian way. Transnational history does not have to take sides in the long-term quarrel, so typical of German historical scholarship, between social historians and historians of international relations. On the contrary, transnational history could be an ideal bridge to bring together those 'two cultures' in historical studies.

Finally, a small number of general points must suffice to outline the contours of a future transnational social history:

1. *Nationalgeschichtsschreibung*, the history of nations and nation states, has not been the 'normal' mode of historical writing. It emerged as a by-product of the formation of nation states in the mid-eighteenth century. David Hume, the Scottish-born historian of England, was the inventor of that genre. The call for a social history in a transnational perspective (abreviated: TSH) responds to: (a) a new definition of problems and priorities in an age of continuing globalization; (b) a certain kind of exhaustion of the paradigm of *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* after three decades of specialized research; and, (c) the demand by major theorists in the social sciences that 'notions' of society with a regionalist or nationalist colouring are no longer acceptable from a theoretical point of view.

2. TSH builds upon a program of social history in terms of structures and configurations, but supplements it with the idea of exchanges, flows, and streams. A central concept is that of the network.

3. TSH takes leave of the scant regard for space in the German historiographical tradition of all schools and tendencies. While it would be an exaggeration to speak of a 'spatial turn', transnational history is much more sensitive to topics such as borders and boundaries, territoriality and the ordering of space, the natural environment of social and political processes, etc. The classical authors of sociology, with the exception of Georg Simmel, have, by and large, avoided such questions. Recent social science has taken them up again, and geography once again has to be taken seriously, as it was in the eighteenth century as a sister discipline of historiography.

4. To praise the virtues of TSH does not imply a general denigration of the nation state as a unit of analysis. The nation state continues to be the most important institutional framework for the lives of most people in the world. National governments still have a decisive impact upon individual lives through legislation, law enforcement, taxation, public welfare, etc. Even the prototypical diaspora nationalities are striving for their own nation state—and have achieved it in cases such as Israel and Armenia. If a homogeneous European society slowly may be emerging, 'world society' is little more than a useful fiction, mainly limited to networks of elite communication. It is not a sociological fact in the sense of Emile Durkheim's 'crystallized life'. A primacy of transnational or cosmopolitan norms and values is still limited to minorities and other small groups. There is, thus, no basis for transnationality in major social structures. On the other hand, conventional ideas of a Gesamtgesellschaft, with clearly demarcated boundaries and a high level of cultural uniformity, rapidly lose their attraction. Many societies in the world are heterogeneous societies constituted by immigrants, colonial, and ex-colonial 'plural societies' or simply 'multi-cultural' urban spaces. This needs no special mention for the United States, but in the case of Europe, closer inspection will help to discover the enormous importance of ethnic and cultural plurality, with all its concomitant tensions and conflicts.

5. For practical reasons, TSH will initially be mainly restricted to European history. However, such a limitation cannot be defended on systematic grounds. The old dichotomies Orient/Occident, Europe/non-Europe,
West/rest, civilisation/barbarism, etc., are increasingly hard to maintain. Many arguments have been marshalled against them: from the critique of 'orientalism' to the latest theories of 'plural modernities'.

6. There are numerous instances where not only those historians of Europe who are interested in overseas expansion and colonialism are well-advised to look beyond the confines of the continent, be it only to put Europe's alleged uniqueness into perspective. Thus, crucial features of 'European civil society' were, in fact, pioneered in other parts of the world. In 1893, the women of New Zealand, including the native Maori, received the vote. Australia's women followed in 1902, but female citizens of the United Kingdom had to wait until 1918. When, in 1935, property-owning women were enfranchised in India, the general vote for women in France was still nine years away. In all of these cases, local factors combined with 'transfers' from outside to achieve a specific outcome. Europe did not always take the lead. This is also true for the development of the welfare state or for the modernization of urban space, where, again, some noteworthy innovations originated in Australia, a pioneer of suburbanization.

7. Is TSH identical with 'the history of transfers'? Of course, many transfers are transnational, but not all of these transnational transfers should be classed as social history. TSH does not include the disembodied movement of ideas or even some kind of abstract interaction of cultural codes. In order to come to the attention of social history, transfers have to be connected to identifiable actors and institutions. It should be possible to study intentions, interests, and functions related to the transfers. Social historians are also interested in the effects of such transfers, and they want to explain where and why a specific transfer occurred and for what reasons it assumed the form that it did.

8. Does transnational history make a conventional history of society obsolete? Certainly not. A Gesellschaftsgeschichte, at least of the late modern period with its enormous importance of the nation state, cannot be based on networks, flows, and transfers alone. At the same time, some of the changes suggested by proponents of transnational history can not be accommodated just by making minor adjustments to the given framework of Gesellschaftsgeschichte. The very concept of 'society' employed by its practitioners requires a fundamental overhaul. Hans-Ulrich Wehler's 'four dimensions' — the economy, social inequality, political domination, and culture (a residual category including religion, education, and the public sphere) — should perhaps be augmented by other central aspects of social life. In addition, Gesellschaftsgeschichte might reconsider its narrow fixation on the rise of industry and industrial society. Industrialization took place in many different parts of the world, not just in Europe and North America. It failed to take root in many other quarters of the planet, some of which are unlikely ever to 'catch up' in the familiar sense of European development. And where industrialization happened, it did not necessarily result in fully articulated industrial societies. Therefore, Gesellschaftsgeschichte should broaden its range of types of society considered, and it should reflect once again on its ideas about the forms and temporal structures of social change. To look beyond Germany or even beyond Europe does not necessarily mean forfeiting one's own scholarly integrity and entering the extremely ambitious world of universal synthesis. Fortunately, there are many different ways of doing transnational history.

NOTES

1. J. Osterhammel, 'Transnationale Gesellschaftsgeschichte: Erweiterung oder Alternative?, Geschichte und Gesellschaft 27 (2001): 464–79; for a broader treatment of the subject cf. Osterhammel, Geschichtswissenschaft jenseits des Nationalstaats. Studien zu Beziehungs- und Zivilisationsvergleich (Göttingen, 2001). Since the purpose of the present volume is to introduce the German debate, the following references will focus on German contributions. This should not mean that the international discussions are not being followed in Germany.


3. The high watermark of this kind of ‘extension’ was a collection of articles: W. Hardtwig and H.-U. Wehler, eds., Kulturgeschichte heute (Göttingen, 1996).


6. Important articles advocating the usefulness of anthropological approaches for the social history of Europe were published in Gesellschaftsgeschichte's main journal, e.g., U. Daniel, "Kultur" and "Gesellschaft": Überlegungen zum Gegenstands bereich der Sozialgeschichte, Geschichte und Gesellschaft 19 (1993): 69–99. For an attempt to apply categories of Gesellschaftsgeschichte to


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Central European Approaches
and New Perspectives

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Comparison history deals with similarities and differences between historical units, e.g., regions, economies, cultures, and national states. It is the classical way of transcending the narrow boundaries of national history. Comparative history is analytically ambitious and empirically demanding. The last decades have witnessed the rise of comparative history, but its practitioners have remained a minority, and its critics have not been completely convinced.

Entangled history deals with transfer, interconnection, and mutual influences across boundaries. It can be another way of moving beyond the limits of national history. Its rise is more recent. It has been fuelled by post-colonial perspectives, by a renewed interest in transnationalism, and by the intellectual consequences of globalization. It has been practiced in different contexts, e.g., in the overlap between French and German history, in the study of transnational migration, with respect to cultural transfer, or in the expanding areas of global history.

There is much tension, but there is also productive and innovative cooperation between comparative history and entangled history. German-speaking historians have dealt with these issues, over the last years, grammatically, empirically, and with new results. They were influenced by the international discussions, but also could build on their own traditions. Most of their research and debate has been conducted in German. Their approaches and results deserve to be brought to the attention of readers who do not have access to this language.

It is the aim of this book to introduce readers to this type of research and debate. It presents a selection of unpublished and published articles and essays dealing with comparative and entangled history. The introduction surveys the field and discusses issues of theory and method. It proposes different ways of cooperation between comparative and entangled history. Five contributions follow whose authors play an important role in the German debate about comparative and entangled history. Finally, six case studies are presented, which apply and frequently combine comparative and entanglement approaches. The focus is on European history in the twentieth century, but there is also attention to global contexts and their impact on European and German history. In one way or another, the con-