

## Preface

When the first edition of the *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* (VfZ) appeared in January 1953, it was not clear whether this new journal would be accepted among historians or find a general audience. For this reason, the creation of the *Vierteljahrshefte* was a “gamble,” and in light of methodological uncertainties and the difficult institutional situation that prevailed at the time, it was perhaps even a “headlong rush into the future” (*Flucht nach vorn*).<sup>1</sup> Since that time, the field known as “contemporary history” (*Zeitgeschichte*) has been widely accepted as a historical discipline, and the *Vierteljahrshefte* has become a prominent feature of the international landscape of historical journals. It has, in spite of every innovation, adaptation, and modernization, preserved an unmistakable essence. The time is, therefore, right to open a new chapter in the history of the VfZ with the introduction of the *German Yearbook of Contemporary History* (GYCH).

The VfZ is published by the Institute for Contemporary History, Munich – Berlin, which was founded in 1949 as the “German Institute for the History of the National Socialist Era.” Consistent with the Institute’s initial purpose, the VfZ dealt at first primarily with the central questions of Adolf Hitler’s “seizure of power” in 1933 and the subsequent establishment of the National Socialist dictatorship. The earliest volumes of the journal were therefore generally dominated by topics such as the crises of the Weimar Republic, the rise of the NSDAP, the development and structure of the National Socialist system of government, the Second World War, wartime atrocities, and resistance. New emphases, such as the history of divided Germany after 1945, were first taken up only in the 1970s. Currently, three trends can be discerned. First, the history of National Socialism remains a central focus of the VfZ. Second, the maxim of the founding editor, Hans Rothfels, that “*Zeitgeschichte*” is the “epoch of our contemporaries,”<sup>2</sup> is being followed, leading to a greater emphasis on more recent events. Third, alongside the history of Germany and its place on the international stage in the twentieth century, more attention is being given to subjects beyond national history, providing a more expansive view of Europe – especially Eastern Europe – as well as North America. Attention is also being given to questions of post-colonial history.

The Institute for Contemporary History and the VfZ are inextricably bound together, and indeed, from the outside, they appear to be one and the same. The

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1 Hans Maier, *Die Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, in: Horst Möller/Udo Wengst (eds.), *50 Jahre Institut für Zeitgeschichte. Eine Bilanz*, Munich 1999, pp. 169–76, here pp. 169–70.

2 Hans Rothfels, *Zeitgeschichte als Aufgabe*, in: *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 1 (1953), pp. 1–8, here p. 2; the quotes that follow pp. 7, 8.

*Vierteljahrshefte*, however, has always been more than just the journal of the Institute, as it has enjoyed a considerable degree of autonomy, a development that can be attributed above all to the powerful position of its editors. These editors, who enjoy intellectual independence, have included, and continue to include, recognized leaders in the field. In the early days, they tended to operate at the intersection of history and political science. The editorial board currently includes Helmut Altrichter (Erlangen), Horst Möller (Munich), Margit Szöllösi-Janze (Munich), and Andreas Wirsching (Munich), the latter of whom serves also as director of the Institute for Contemporary History. These editors are supported by four associate editors: Elizabeth Harvey (Nottingham), H el ene Miard-Delacroix (Paris), Herfried M unkler (Berlin), and Alan Steinweis (Burlington).

If the founding fathers of the VfZ gathered around Theodor Eschenburg and Hans Rothfels took a “gamble” in 1953 when they gave a voice to the young discipline of *Zeitgeschichte*, then the editors and the editorial staff of the present day are starting an equally exciting experiment with the *German Yearbook of Contemporary History*. The GYCH will pursue multiple aims. With each edition organized around a single theme, the *Yearbook* will make available to a broad academic audience key articles originally distributed in German, offering their important findings in English translation, thus helping to overcome language and cultural barriers that continue to exist even in the twenty-first century. At the same time, the translated VfZ articles will be accompanied by new, original essays. In so doing, the GYCH will fulfill the same strict publication criteria as the *Vierteljahrshefte*. The VfZ is a peer-reviewed journal featuring articles that undergo a three-tiered review process. Following an anonymous screening and assessment of articles by the editorial staff, peer reviews are commissioned from experts in Germany and abroad. Then, after some discussion, the editors and the editorial staff decide which articles to publish.

Articles featured in the GYCH will have successfully withstood this strict process of peer review and quality control. Thematically organized, overseen by an international editorial team, and guided by experts from the Anglophone world, the GYCH will provide more than a selection of research on contemporary history originally published in German. It will reflect current thematic and methodological trends, illustrate the current state of the field of contemporary history in Germany and Europe, promote the exchange of ideas across the Atlantic, and serve as a bridge between academic cultures. The next two issues will deal with the arms trade, human rights, and international crises in the 1970s and 1980s, and with new research about Adolf Hitler, respectively. We wish the new publication as many informed and interested readers as possible.

Munich, July 14, 2016  
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