

Newsletter *Mitteilungen* no. 87 (October 2014) of the Association of Schleswig-Holstein History, pp. 23-27:

**Laudation of the Chairman of the Association of Schleswig-Holstein History on the occasion of the award of the Prize of the Association of Schleswig-Holstein History 2014 to Professor Dr. Bert Becker**

The Association of Schleswig-Holstein History can count itself lucky to be again able to award this year a prize for an especially outstanding achievement in the field of Schleswig-Holstein's regional history. It is good that our prize has in the meantime become well-known both near and far so that our jurors once more had to choose between a whole range of interesting and academically-impressive works. We appreciate the engagement of academics participating in our competition with the results of their research; and in this connection we want to remind in advance that such a prize will be awarded again next year.

That we are able to offer our prize every year is not only because the region between the North Sea and the Baltic has a very interesting history and possesses rich records of cultural history, and that many people contribute to its documentation and research. It is also and especially because of the financial commitment of the Brunswik Foundation. It is due to this charitable institution that capital is made available by Mr Jarchow that we – with indescribable appreciation – are able to award a prize to people like this year's prize-winner, and can organise the prize award ceremony in such celebratory style. (...)

For the prize of 2014, our jurors intend to put into focus the book by Professor Dr. Bert Becker, as voluminous with its more than its 850 pages as it is essential, on the shipowner and politician Michael Jebsen (1835-1899) coming from Apenrade in North Schleswig. For that I thank our board member Professor Kraack for preparing the assessment base. What looks at first glance as a classic biography, reveals in its single chapters deep insights into the economic and political history of 'the Land between the Seas' [Schleswig-Holstein] in the second half of the nineteenth century which certainly did not lack historical shifts. After the German-Danish nationality conflict had culminated in war and in Bismarck's 'solution' of the Schleswig-Holstein question which brought the duchies as now-Prussian provinces into the small-German-Borussian state founding of 1871, this period of time, on the one hand, experienced under Prussian auspices an accelerated introduction into modernity, and on the other hand – which is the supra-regional background of the book – economic perspectives in some parts of the local economy began to take on – at least partly – real global dimensions. That the sable-rattling of the Wilhelminian Empire revelling in national overestimation of its own capacities finally razed the world, edged out quite a few positive and remaining things which is worth every remembrance and research.

Therefore in Becker's book a wide circle is spanned, from the seafaring ancestors of Jebsen in Loitkirkeby, main town of the Loit peninsula north of Apenrade, via the somewhat relatively modest beginnings of the protagonist as shipmaster and shipowner to his shipping company empire of global dimensions stretching up to Southeast Asia at the end of the nineteenth century. (...)

However, back to the opus itself chosen by our jurors. Only a look at the contents but particularly into the list of primary and secondary sources provided in the appendix reveals that the writing of such a work needed not only a wide breadth and perspective but that numerous public and private archives both far and wide had to be visited and that besides the German, Danish, Dutch, French, and English academic literature, current research of Southeast Asian academics had to be considered. Because it was finally there where the ships of the Jebsen Shipping Company in intermediary trading operated lines along coasts and on big rivers. It concretely means that anyone wanting to appreciate Becker's research in its substance cannot

avoid reading one or the other book in Chinese and getting into Southeast Asia's economic history. Indeed in the present context a lucky coincidence seems to have referred the right man equipped with such special competences and interests, at the right time to an exciting subject.

This man, this year's prize-winner Bert Becker was born in Witten-on-the-Ruhr in 1960. After studying History, German Studies, and Political Science at the Ruhr University of Bochum, he passed the First State Exam and two years later received his PhD in Contemporary History from that University with a study on the political, economic, and cultural relations between the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and Great Britain from the immediate post-war period to the 1970s.<sup>1</sup> From 1991 to 2002 he was staff of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Bonn, Berlin, Rostock, and Potsdam; at the same time he was part-time teaching fellow in German and East Asian History at the Free University of Berlin, the University of Rostock, and the European University Viadrina at Frankfurt-on-the-Oder (1996-1999). His Habilitation for which he qualified with a voluminous biography of imperial chancellor Georg Michaelis (1857-1936),<sup>2</sup> took place in Rostock in 2004. Furthermore from 2002 to 2007 Bert Becker was lecturer in History and European Studies of the German Academic Exchange Service at the University of Hong Kong, and in 2011 senior fellow of the Stiftung Alfried Krupp Kolleg in Greifswald, one of the finest addresses for anyone looking for leisure and resources to finish a research project or to realise a bigger book project. From 2007, he was assistant professor and since 2009, associate professor for Modern European History at the Department of History of the University of Hong Kong. There he is doing research on the history of the Germans in this Southeast Asian metropolis during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries,<sup>3</sup> and is working in this context on a biography of Jebesen's son Jacob (1870-1941) who went abroad for his fortune.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, Professor Becker reveals himself as an internationally acting herald of our regional history radiating far into the world. We hope to soon read from him again in this sense, and expressively want to also inspire others to do so.

Even when the prize of the Association goes this year to an up till now unequalled distance, it resulted by good fortune that the recipient is among us to accept the prize in person. Furthermore, Bert Becker has kindly agreed to present major results of his research on Michael Jebesen in the form of a short lecture.

In the name of the board and all members of the Association I want to ask you, dear Professor Dr. Bert Becker, to come to me to very formally hand over to you this year's prize of the Association of Schleswig-Holstein History.

*Subtitle of photo:* Professor Dr. Bert Becker (left) receiving from Jörg-Dietrich Kamischke the prize of the Association of Schleswig-Holstein History.

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<sup>1</sup> Bert Becker, *Die DDR und Großbritannien 1945/49 bis 1973: Politische, wirtschaftliche und kulturelle Kontakte im Zeichen der Nichtanerkennungspolitik [The GDR and Great Britain 1945/49 to 1973: Political, economic, and cultural contacts during the non-recognition period]*. Bochum: Brockmeyer, 1991.

<sup>2</sup> Bert Becker, *Georg Michaelis: Preußischer Beamter, Reichskanzler, Christlicher Reformator 1857-1936: Eine Biographie [Georg Michaelis: Prussian Official, Imperial Chancellor, Christian Reformer 1857-1936: A Biography]*. Paderborn: Schoeningh, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> See the homepage of the Department of History of the University of Hong Kong: *The Germans and Hong Kong, 1843-1997*, announced for 2016/17.

<sup>4</sup> See the homepage of the Department of History of the University of Hong Kong: *Jacob Jebesen, 1870-1941: Reeder und Kaufmann: Eine Biographie [Jacob Jebesen, 1870-1941: Shipowner and Merchant: A Biography]*, announced for 2017/18.