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Honouring the biography of Michael Jebsen

Prize of the Association of Schleswig-Holstein History for Professor Bert Becker, Hong Kong, author of the book on the Apenrade shipowner

Apenrade/Kiel – The biography of the Apenrade shipowner Michael Jebsen (1835-1899), written by Professor Bert Becker, Hong Kong, has been awarded with the Prize of the Association of Schleswig-Holstein History. The Prize is awarded annually by the Association and comes with the prize money of 3,000 Euros for outstanding achievement in the research of the history of Schleswig-Holstein. At the general assembly in the Schleswig-Holstein State Library, Jörg-Dietrich Kamischke, chairperson of the Association, awarded the Prize to Professor Bert Becker from the University of Hong Kong.

Professor Becker was born in Witten-on-the-Ruhr in 1960. He studied History, German Language and Literature, and Political Science. After obtaining his doctorate, Becker was a member of staff at the Konrad Adenauer Foundation for more than a decade, and was also a part-time lecturer at several universities. He obtained his postdoctoral qualification “Habilitation” at the University of Rostock to subsequently start teaching and research at the Department of History at the University of Hong Kong in 2007.

As the chairperson of the History Association highlighted in his laudation, Becker drew a large circle with his biography of Michael Jebsen, shipowner and politician from Apenrade, in its more than 850 pages. It spans from the seafaring ancestors of Michael Jebsen to his early career in sail shipping in which he evolved from deck hand to shipmaster, to his occupation as the fleet manager of the Krupp Company in the Netherlands, and finally to his own shipping company: A shipping company which Jebsen directed from Apenrade through intensive letter correspondence, and which was active in freight shipping in South East Asia with its location in Hong Kong.

In the biography, Hamburg and especially Kiel are put centre stage via family and friendly relations, investors in Hamburg aiding the development of the fleet, and the shipyard owner Georg Howaldt in Kiel being in close contact with Jebsen. As a politician Jebsen advocated free trade and the naval policy of the German Empire. Jebsen was a national-liberal deputy of the Reichstag from 1890 to 1898, and member of the Prussian Diet for a short period until this death. Although he found himself in opposition to the Conservatives who were characterised by their agrarian interests, and on whom Bismarck relied, Jebsen due to his distinct German position became a decisive supporter of a Bismarck monument on the Knivsberg [Knivs hill] situated between Apenrade and Hadersleben.

In his laudation, the chairperson of the History Association drew attention in particular to the scope of Becker’s perspective. Bert Becker used literature and primary sources from German, Danish, Dutch, French, English, and Chinese libraries and archives. He has created a book which ventures forth from the history of the Schleswig-Holstein region into one of almost global dimensions. As Becker stated in his keynote address which brought the award ceremony to a close, he will continue his academic research on the Jebsen family, so important for Apenrade, with the biography of Jacob Jebsen, son of Michael Jebsen.

The prizewinning book “Michael Jebsen: Shipowner and Politician (1835-1899) was published by Ludwig in Kiel.

Frank Lubowitz

Caption of left photo: The prizewinning book on Michael Jebsen was published by Ludwig in Kiel.

Caption of right photo: Professor Bert Becker (Hong Kong) receiving from the hands of Jörg-Dietrich Kamischke the Prize of the Association of Schleswig-Holstein History.