

## **Laudatio for the 2013 Hans Rosenberg Prize of the Central European History Society**

Prize Committee: Pamela Swett (McMaster University), William Hagen (University of California, Davis), Michael Meng (Clemson University).

Winner: Lars Maischak *German Merchants in the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

The committee unanimously awards this year's prize to Lars Maischak for his splendid book, *German Merchants in the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic*. This study demonstrates how Bremen merchants, while embedded in a pre-industrial culture of commercial capitalism, made a decisive contribution to the inclusion of the United States in the nineteenth-century global economy through the channelling of German immigrants across the Atlantic and the return trade with Europe in American cotton and other commodities. At the same time, Bremen merchants who settled on the American eastern seaboard came to form an influential part of the capitalist bourgeoisie in this country. Maischak traces the elective affinities between mid-century American Whigs and Bremen merchant families, socially and religiously conservative and inclined in politics toward gradualist, Burkean anti-populist liberalism.

This larger argument, drawing on yet also critiquing Marx's writings and present-day theories of globalization, is that the world of industrialization that emerged in the late nineteenth century, after the American Civil War and German unification, emerged from the workings of a European commercial capitalism with medieval roots and a New World slave economy unable in itself to give birth to industrialism. He argues against a priori deduction of economic history from neo-classical economic and rational-actor social science theory, proposing instead that socially conservative merchant capital, as exemplified in Bremen transatlantic commerce, helped develop nineteenth-century global capitalism without aiming to transcend itself in a future industrial capitalism embedded in the populist-nationalist modern nation-state. He strengthens the point that there have been many forms of historical capitalism, whose agents commonly failed to foresee the end-station on their own paths, i.e., their *Aufhebung* or transcendence in unanticipated or unwished-for new forms of capitalism. Maischak thus calls into further question modernization theories that suggest a self-generation of industrial capitalism out of technology and entrepreneurial self-interest alone.

Maischak's work rests on innovative and complex research on both sides of the Atlantic. Displaying an impressive grasp of the relevant secondary literature, including texts on nineteenth-century American economic and political history, his book employs transnationalist methodology in an insightful manner. It views German history from the angle, not of Berlin or Vienna, but the Hanseatic city-states. Maischak's book also paints vivid portraits of Bremen merchant or commercial lineages, illuminating and enriching nineteenth-century German social history, especially that of the family and women. The book is crisply and confidently written. It is an admirable blending of numerous intersecting trends in contemporary historiography, an entertaining entanglement of fresh ideas and empirical evidence, and an impressive demonstration of the deep significance of the German-American relationship.