

Dear Readers,

It is our great pleasure to introduce to you the Spring 2016 issue of the *Chicago Journal of History*. Conceived as a forum for innovative research and interdisciplinary dialogue, the journal brings together students of all backgrounds to explore a wide range of topics in historical inquiry and allied fields. Thanks to support from our authors, readers and faculty advisers, we continue to publish outstanding essays that reflect our commitment to rigor and diversity. In this issue, you will find topics across a wide temporal, geographical and thematic spectrum. In general, the authors are concerned with tensions between ethnic identities, religious groups, gender divisions and economic classes in complex societies. As editors, we do not impose an artificial common thread to knit these disparate worlds into a single narrative. Rather, it is our desire to leave this interpretation to the readers' own judgment.

The story begins in the High Middle Ages Eurasia. Given its vast territory and internal pluralism, Mongol imperial history demands sources from a variety of traditions and in a plethora of languages. Among the most important is Persian historiography, its primary scholars for this period being Jovayni and Rashid al-Din: while the latter receives much more academic attention, Jovayni has been seen as a mere sycophant. However, according to Darren Wan, student of history at the University of Chicago, Jovayni's position was in fact the more nuanced. And the *Tārīkh-e Jahāngoshā-ye Jovayni*, once analyzed in this new light, emerges as a useful source that treads the line between two audiences, the ruling Mongol patrons and the downtrodden Persians.

Moving into 16th century Prague, you will find yourself reading an extraordinary religious text with Michaela Nakayama Shapiro, student of history at Northwestern University. The title of her article suffices as an eloquent summary of her thesis: "Rivkah bat Meir: Subtle Redefinition of Gender Roles within the Confines of Traditional Jewish Society". Shapiro argues against traditional scholarship's uniform understanding of early modern Jewish women as powerless victims to masculine domination in religious life. Instead, she argues that, despite due concessions to the Jewish authority in the treatise "Meneket Rivkah", Rivkah bat Meir created a niche for women to interpret religion for themselves.

If the previous author studies gender in relation to religion, Sarah Welz Geselowitz, student from Swarthmore College, investigates a problematic category of gender as portrayed in medical writings: the Hermaphrodite in the 18th century. According to Geselowitz, critics of the time considered the hermaphrodite as superstitious and contrary to reason on the basis that medical knowledge in human reproduction failed to explain the phenomenon. She concludes that the subjectivities of the hermaphrodites have been permanently lost; there is no way to think what they thought. Still available are the fragments of medical writings *about* the hermaphrodites. Perhaps more than her excellent textual analysis, the essay's implications for historical study is remarkable.

Ararat Gocmen, student from Princeton University, tracks two Italian newspapers: *La Stampa's* and *L'Illustrazione italiana's* coverage of workers' activism from 1919 to 1922, in order to understand the Italian liberals' changing attitude toward workers' demonstrations. Hoping to offer an important insight on the rise of Fascism, the author also makes it clear that he undertook this research project in the context of today's reemergence of far-right movements. In other words, it is his present interest in the leftist, liberal and rightist politics that motivates him to delve deep into historical archives of the past. In this way Gocmen, too, sends his readers a message about the practice of history.

Kathy Higgins, a student from Smith College, approaches women's history at its intersection with consumerism, class divisions, and politics. Rather than isolate a particular identity from others, this paper explores the interwoven dynamics of a complex issue from 1935 to 1948, devoting particular attention to the success and limitations of the League of Women Shoppers, a privileged middle-to-upper-class women's consumer activist group. Higgins carefully delineates for her readers the position of an organization that both insisted on its own culture and built cross-class coalitions to champion for civil rights and consumer justice,

In addition to the five articles authored by aspiring historians, you will also find in this issue the exciting opportunity to converse with some of the most excellent professional scholars in the field of history. On behalf of the Department of History faculty members, Matthew Briones, Associate Professor of American History and Chair of the Collegiate Affairs Committee, congratulates the Class of 2016 historians for their accomplishment, and encourages history majors to carry on the legacy of rigorous inquiry. In a conversation with the *Chicago Journal of History*, renowned Byzantine scholar Walter Kaegi discusses his passions in early years and how he became a historian. As a member of the Oriental Institute and long-time professor at the University of Chicago, he not only relates his extensive travel experiences in the Middle East and North Africa but also recalls the old days when Harper was still a dark and ill-lit library. Finally, the *Chicago Journal of History* is fortunate to have the opportunity to speak with our distinguished faculty member, Constantin Fasolt, Karl J. Weintraub Professor of History at the University of Chicago. Professor Fasolt discusses his childhood in Post-World War II Germany, his early encounter with philosophy and history, as well as his opinions on education. He tells us the stories behind the enigmatic course on Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, and the ways in which the book may contribute to our understanding of history and politics. The editors are confident that you will be both inspired and challenged by the ideas and perspectives presented in these interviews.

The *Chicago Journal of History* editors invite you to explore this issue and encourage you to share any afterthoughts and criticisms with us. We could be reached on the "Chicago Journal of History" Facebook page and by email: ughistoryjournal@gmail.com. If you live in Chicago, or have the opportunity to visit the University of Chicago, we invite you to join us in our future events. If you would like to receive the copy of a particular issue by mail, please contact the editorial board. We appreciate your readership and your valuable feedback, and we look forward to introducing you to the upcoming Autumn 2016 issue very soon.