Growing in the Shadow of Antifascism

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How did he include the Shoah in books seemingly unrelated to the topic? How did Knobloch position himself and how did he address his readership? First, this chapter will analyze his books on Mendelssohn and Jacob. Second, it will trace both reactions to the books and the publishing process, asking what role his discussion of the Shoah played for the reading of the public and for the censors. Third, it will examine Knobloch’s views on antifascism in his book on Krützfeld. Finally, it will analyze Knobloch’s work in the context of Shoah memory in the GDR.

Heinz Knobloch

Born in Dresden in 1926, Heinz Knobloch moved to Berlin with his family in 1935. He was forced to join the Reich Labor Service (Reichsarbeitsdienst) in 1943, and later drafted into the Wehrmacht, only to desert the army in France in 1944. He was taken as a prisoner of war by the Americans and held in various POW camps in Tennessee and Scotland. He returned to Berlin in 1948 and trained as a journalist at the Berliner Zeitung.

Following the uprising of 1953, the East German Communist Party (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, SED) decided to offer a slightly more diverse set of newspapers and journals in the hope of satisfying the public’s obvious need for less ideological forms of entertainment and information. From its first issue in late 1953, the Wochenpost (Weekly Post) emerged to become one of the GDR’s most popular weekly newspapers, gathering around 1.3 million subscribers, with an estimated 3–4 million readers a week. Knobloch worked at the Wochenpost from its establishment in 1953, writing his weekly column from 1968 onwards, advancing to become one of the paper’s most prominent and popular voices. In 1949, he joined the SED, leaving it in early 1990, “considerably too late,” as he later noted. However, his membership in the SED was hardly exceptional at the Wochenpost. The paper should not be seen as an opposition journal, but rather as a more diverse and multi-faceted newspaper. Between his column, en-

7 Heinz Knobloch, *Mit beiden Augen: Mein Leben zwischen den Zeilen* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1999), 35.
8 In this manner, the Wochenpost published articles about otherwise taboo topics, such as flight from the GDR or alcoholism. Reifarth and Reus, *Lässt sich das drucken?,* 13. Still, about 75 percent of the editors were members of the party, see Polkehn, *Wochenpost, 63.*
titled “With Both Eyes,” and his various books, which contained previously published as well as new texts, Knobloch produced over 1,700 articles.

**Herr Moses in Berlin**

In the late 1970s, Knobloch began researching the life of Moses Mendelssohn. Finally published in 1979, his book was not intended as a proper biography but as a more personal essay on the life and work of Mendelssohn in his time and his city, Berlin.\(^9\) He depicts Mendelssohn’s life, origins in Dessau, studies in Berlin, life as an entrepreneur and philosopher, close bonds with Lessing, and contacts with other intellectuals of his day. He frequently quotes directly from the works and letters of Mendelssohn or those associated with him, though rarely provides sources. Mendelssohn’s philosophy is barely addressed or contextualized, and the impact he or his work had at the time and beyond remains vague. In quoting his favorite, rather than the most important, passages of Mendelssohn’s works, Knobloch presents a book about his personal relationship with the philosopher and the relevance of his eighteenth-century writings for Knobloch’s time.

This is the important aspect that Knobloch addresses in his approach to seek traces of Mendelssohn’s, or more generally Jewish life, in Berlin. The opening of the book can be seen as outlining Knobloch’s broader agenda, and his call to “distrust” parks and the city landscape should be seen in this light. Throughout the book, the author strolls around (East) Berlin “not only as a flâneur, but as a detective and an archaeologist,” sharing his thoughts and questions about former inhabitants, buildings, cemeteries, and events.\(^10\)

Although Mendelssohn died long before the rise of National Socialism, Knobloch frequently considers sites related to the Shoah in the book. Beginning with the cemetery at Große Hamburger Straße, “which we innocently thought to be a small park,”\(^11\) the author guides his readers to other cemeteries, parks, squares, and buildings in Berlin, while sometimes going into tangents about their history. The former Jewish school right next to the cemetery—founded by Mendelssohn himself and used by the Gestapo between 1942 and 1945 as a gathering point for the Jewish inhabitants of Berlin prior to deportation—was

