

archives for the Soviet cases underscores that much of this potential lies in Russian secret police archives that continue to remain beyond the reach of scholars. The lessons from the Romanian Orthodox Church offer some insight into why that potential remains unrealized.

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A State of Secrecy: Stasi Informers and the Culture of Surveillance. By Alison Lewis. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2021. 315 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Photographs. \$60.00, hard bound.
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For more than thirty years, the history of the East German Ministry of State Security, the MfS, or Stasi, has been almost synonymous with the history of the former GDR. One of the reasons is that the East German version of socialism held the unofficial world record in denunciation. Although the GDR's population was only 16–18 million inhabitants and existed four decades, the MfS recruited some 620,000 agents, which does not even count the agents recruited by Military Intelligence or the Police, which ran their own networks. Together with the massive Soviet military presence and the hermetically closed borders this army of spies was the central pillar of the Communist Regime in East Germany.

After the peaceful revolution of 1989, the gruesome legacy was made available to the public. The opening of the Stasi-Archives was the first step of what is known as the Archival Revolution in central and eastern Europe. In its wake, a flow of research followed, based on the 111 km of Stasi documents. The vanguard were the employees of the research department of the archive, which possessed privileged access. Regarding the agents of the MfS, most prominent scholarship of the political scientist Helmut Müller-Enbergs must be mentioned. Although the German research on the MfS is usually thorough, it has often slipped the attention of the international public in the English-speaking world. The job of “translating” German research to the world audience has fallen to a handful of outside scholars. The work of Alison Lewis is a fine example of such a successful knowledge transfer to the Anglosphere.

Lewis's book is structured around five widely known cases of authors who were working for the MfS. The cases are Paul Wien, Maja Wien, Helga H. Novak, Paul Gratzik, and Sascha Anderson. Lewis uses the secret spy careers of her case persons to make operational mechanisms of the spy craft, such as motivation and dependency, come alive. The cases are quite different: Novak only had a short and rather unsuccessful cooperation with the repression apparatus, whereas Paul Wien supported both the MfS and the KGB for decades with information on a cavalcade of famous cultural personalities like Günther Grass, Lew Kopelew, Stefan Heym, or Christa Wolf.

Alison Lewis does not make lengthy arguments for her case choices, except that “each represents a different point along the spectrum of personalities involved in collaboration with the Stasi” (xxxiii). However, her choice mirrors the German public debate quite well. The work of the Main Department XX of the MfS has been a flagship in understanding it. This part of the Stasi was among others responsible for alleged underground activities within the cultural scene and academia. In many ways, this part of the Stasi surveillance machinery corresponds well with the image of repression known from the Oscar-winning film *The Lives of Others*. Prying into the life of cultural celebrities attracted more public and scholarly interest than the military security of Main Department I, for instance. Furthermore, both victims and perpetrators within

this field of life have easy access to the media. Already 1991, Helga Novak was one of the notable and brave few who spoke out about her Stasi collaboration before being forced by the opening of the files. At the same time, Sascha Anderson became the personalization of betrayal due to his infiltration of the prominent cultural milieu in Prenzlauer Berg, Berlin. Paul Gratzik was the main person in the documentary film *Vaterlandsverräter* (Traitor to the Fatherland, 2007).

Lewis's prominent case persons inevitably raise the overall question of cultural celebrities' flirtation with totalitarianism. This becomes particularly evident in the case Helga Novak. Even though she did not want to be a Stasi pawn, the system still attracted her. She knew the dark side of communism and left to the west several times, however she kept returning, every time choosing the dictatorship in the east over the democratic experiment in West Germany. In this light, the willing denunciation can be seen as just one aspect of a larger complex of fascination with and adaptation to the communist regime. In the end, Lewis demonstrates how incapable the GDR was in handling its cultural elites. Instead of embracing it, "the MfS became apparent in its paranoid and obsessive persecution of dissidence" (210).

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Conscious History: Polish Jewish Historians before the Holocaust. By Natalia Aleksium. Liverpool, Eng.: Liverpool University Press, 2021. The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization. xii, 329 pp. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$59.95, hard bound.

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The Holocaust looms over Polish Jewish history, the interwar period specifically, and the title of this compelling book explicitly. In *Conscious History*, Natalia Aleksium explores the "professional trajectories" of a "cohort of university-educated Polish Jewish historians" and their "self-conscious deployment of historical writing" before the *Shoah* (2). While her narrative focuses mostly on "Jewish scholars, university students, teachers, rabbis, and journalists" in the 1920s and the 1930s (3), awareness of "what comes next" cuts through the body of this monograph and its name. How could it not, we might concede? Most of the public-facing historians in this narrative, like Majer Bałaban, Emanuel Ringelblum, and Mojżesz Schorr died during the Holocaust and we tend to know more about the tragic circumstances of their dying than *how* they lived before 1939. Drawing from her own dissertation and aligned with the early chapters of Samuel Kassow's excellent book *Who Will Write Our History?*, *Conscious History* locates a group deserving of a "collective biography" and uses the lens of this particular "they" to more deeply conceptualize the Polish Jewish experience between the World Wars.

Collective biographies demand overlap and this cohort certainly does. They almost always came from Galicia, professed a particular form of Zionism that allowed for a firm commitment to life in the "diaspora," and inhabited the same archives, newspaper pages, and seminar rooms. In Aleksium's telling, this group of roughly a dozen scholars generated a "Jewish communal consciousness"—one that transcended regional, political, ideological, and religious divisions (4) and developed a new conceptual framework for the history of Polish Jewry (6). Poignantly, as they wrote about the Polish Jewish past, this cohort made claims about their own present, argued that Jews were "native to Poland" and had a "rightful place in Polish society" (8), while they publicly disagreed with some Polish historians who imagined Jews as historical