

**Othmar Plöckinger.** *Geschichte eines Buches: Adolf Hitlers „Mein Kampf“ 1922-1945.* München: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2006. 632 S. EUR 49.80, cloth, ISBN 978-3-486-57956-7.



**Reviewed by** Richard Weikart

**Published on** H-German (April, 2008)

This massive book is a goldmine for anyone interested in researching the timing, writing, publishing, and reception of *Mein Kampf* (1925-26). Because of its length and detail, few will read it in its entirety, but scholars should still consult it since Othmar Plöckinger makes many interesting and important points. Plöckinger's book is really two books in one: the first part covers the origins and publication history of *Mein Kampf*; while the larger second part covers the reception of the book in Germany, Britain, the United States, the Soviet Union, France, and Austria. Both sections contain important insights for anyone wanting to understand the role of *Mein Kampf* in Nazi propaganda, as well as the reaction by non-Nazis, including journalists, politicians, diplomats, and literary figures. Plöckinger is a careful and judicious scholar, and this book supercedes most earlier works on *Mein Kampf*.

Plöckinger has done an incredible amount of research, basing his analysis on a myriad of archival and printed primary sources. He also has an excellent grasp of the secondary literature. He is properly skeptical of many legends that have

circulated about the work, and one of the great merits of this book is his critical scrutiny of the merit of these legends in light of the primary sources. One of the most prominent legends he explodes is the claim that *Mein Kampf* was an unread book. Even before Adolf Hitler came to power and its reading became obligatory, over 240,000 copies had sold and after 1933, it was translated into about fourteen languages. Plöckinger recognizes that not every copy sold was necessarily read. Nonetheless, he shows that many Nazis did indeed read it, and many journalists, writers, and politicians discussed it publicly, especially as Hitler gained popularity in the early 1930s. Also, during the Nazi era, many libraries purchased multiple copies, and though reliable circulation statistics for many libraries no longer exist, the data available suggests that these copies did not languish on the shelves.

Plöckinger also thoroughly examines the claims that Hitler was not the sole author and concludes that *Mein Kampf* was solely Hitler's book. The many stories about various people helping Hitler compose his book simply do not

stand up. The most prominent one, that Hitler dictated it to Rudolf Hess, cannot be true, as is evident from comments Hess made in his correspondence from Landsberg.

The book includes some conclusions that will be interesting for specialists. Considering Hitler's own emphasis on the spoken word, for example, I was surprised to learn that Hitler turned down speaking engagements in 1925 in order to work on the second volume of *Mein Kampf*. Because of the ban on his public speaking, these engagements were not for mass meetings, but this choice shows the importance Hitler attached to his book. Another interesting discovery is that the book was not nearly as widespread a wedding gift as often thought. Galvanized by the publisher, the Interior Ministry instructed local governments in 1936 to present it to newlyweds. However, bowing to pressure from some local governments, the Interior Ministry only required them to do so if they had available funds. Many local governments used this escape clause.

Another important finding that influences our picture of the text's reception is Plöckinger's description of the "double strategy" pursued by the author and his publisher. Hitler refused to revise *Mein Kampf*, which continued to be sold and quoted widely in Nazi propaganda. Most translations, however, were abridged and passages offensive to foreign audiences were sometimes expunged. Also, German diplomats tried to reassure foreign governments that the foreign policy views Hitler espoused in *Mein Kampf* were no longer valid. This effort was only partially successful. Many British journalists and politicians swallowed the official German story in the mid-1930s. Soviet leaders, however, continued to believe in the 1930s that Hitler's foreign policy positions as expressed in *Mein Kampf* were still valid and constituted a threat to them.

For the most part, Plöckinger does not analyze the content of Hitler's book. He does present *Mein Kampf* as an exposition of Hitler's ideology,

and he cannot avoid mentioning the content in places. However, he never analyzes or explains Hitler's world view systematically. He also does not attempt to locate the sources from which Hitler derived his ideas. That was not his task, however, and I only mention it because some readers might expect him to tackle this issue.

Overall, Plöckinger's work is a considerable achievement, and the book includes much more material than I have been able to discuss in this brief review. Anyone working on the history of Nazism, especially those interested in Hitler, the German public's reaction to Nazism, or foreign reactions to Nazism, will need to consult this book and engage its arguments.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at  
<https://networks.h-net.org/h-german>

**Citation:** Richard Weikart. Review of Plöckinger, Othmar. *Geschichte eines Buches: Adolf Hitlers "Mein Kampf" 1922-1945*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. April, 2008.

**URL:** <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=14453>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.