

## Rudolf Mosse and His Family

### Childhood Home in Posen

Rudolf Mosse was the sixth of 14 children of the Jewish couple Markus and Ulrike Mosse. He and his siblings grew up in Grätz, a small town in the Prussian province of Posen, where his father had a practice as a country doctor. The period was shaped by the March Revolution of 1848, where the political participation of the middle classes and German national unity and independence were demanded as central goals. The struggle against the forces of restoration inspired the emancipation movement of the Jewish population and their striving for legal parity with other citizens of Prussia.<sup>1</sup> Rudolf's father was a convinced follower of Reform Judaism, which sought integration into the majority society by reforming their own theology. Markus Mosse was faithful to his ideals and raised his children in this way.<sup>2</sup> The transformation of the family name from Moses to Mosse was a sign of his desire to assimilate.<sup>3</sup> But despite all their orientation towards Prussian-bourgeois society the family did not abandon its Jewish-cultural tradition.

### Family and Social Status in Berlin

Rudolf Mosse moved to the future imperial capital in 1861 where he established himself successfully with his own company in the growing business of advertising and publishing. In 1874, he married Emilie Loewenstein, who came from a merchant family in Trier. The marriage was childless: Erna Felicia, who was Rudolf's biological daughter from a different relationship, was then adopted by the Mosses.<sup>4</sup> In the early 1880s, Rudolf Mosse had a neo-baroque three-floor residence erected as family home in the middle of Berlin's government district, which became known as Mosse-Palais. He amassed an art collection that referred to by experts as early as 1912 as one of the "greatest and richest collections of works of recent art."<sup>5</sup> Beside the city palace, Mosse also acquired other properties and land holdings in and around Berlin, including the castle Schenkendorf, where the family spent their summer months and which Mosse made into one of the most important sites for his social circle in the Berlin region to congregate.<sup>6</sup> Having made his way solely by way of his own efforts to the financially powerful haute bourgeoisie, Rudolf Mosse was very proud of his status. He imitated the lifestyle and representative forms of the aristocracy, ultimately questioning the privileged status of the old power elites in favor of a liberal-bourgeois society.

### Political and Social Commitment

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<sup>1</sup> Jewish emancipation began with the *Preußischer Judenedikt* (Prussian Jewish Decree) from 1812. For more on the complex history of Jewish emancipation, which repeatedly faced setbacks, and political-legal parity and Posen as a special case see Steven M. Lowenstein et al., *Deutsch-jüdische Geschichte in der Neuzeit* (Munich, 2000), Vol. 3, pp. 160ff.

<sup>2</sup> See Mendelssohn 1959, 89-90.

<sup>3</sup> It is not clear whether Markus Mosse changed the name or if his father Salomon Moses already did so. Kraus dates the name change to before 1822: see Kraus 1999, S. 19ff.

<sup>4</sup> Rudolf und Emilie Mosse, "Unser gemeinschaftliches Testament," January 18, 1920, Leo Baeck Institute New York / Berlin, George L. Mosse Collection, AR 25137, Box 30, Folder 22.

<sup>5</sup> Osborn 1912.

<sup>6</sup> See Oliwowski 2017, 35.

In political terms, Rudolf Mosse was closely affiliated to the Deutsche Freisinnige Partei (German Freethinking Party, 1884–1893), which promoted the establishment of a constitutional democracy.<sup>7</sup> Part of the program was the parity of all religious faiths, which Rudolf Mosse tried to support as chairman of the Jewish Reformed Synagogue. He was also convinced of the social politics of the party. The Freisinnigen, or “free thinkers,” a liberal party, rejected legislation that only ameliorated social need, instead seeking to establish institutions that did away with the causes of adversity. This is what characterized Rudolf and Emilie Mosse’s charity work, located between bourgeois philanthropy and the Jewish commandment of charity (tzedakah). Beside health and social welfare, they also supported universal and continuing education. They financed the building of hospitals and educational institutions, donated scholarships and supported charitable associations. They also provided for the social security of their employees at the publishing house.<sup>8</sup> In 1909, Emilie Mosse was awarded the Wilhelmsorden (Wilhelm Medal) for her work. Rudolf Mosse was named honorary citizen of his hometown, and in 1918 he was awarded an honorary doctorate from the Universität Heidelberg.<sup>9</sup>

### Descendents

Rudolf Mosse died in 1920; his wife Emilie died four years later. After the death of her adopted mother, Felicia inherited the entire estate in 1924. Her husband, the merchant Hans Lachmann-Mosse, whom she had married in 1909 and who had been a shareholder of the Mosse-Verlag since 1910, now took over the management of the company. In 1911, the couple had moved to a mansion on Maassenstraße 28 in Berlin-Charlottenburg, near artists, actors, musicians, and writers. During the lifetime of Rudolf and Emilie Mosse the grandchildren Hilde, Rudolf Jr., and Gerhard (later George) were all born here. Hans Lachmann-Mosse continued Rudolf Mosse’s philanthropic activities and also collected art, albeit with other emphases. Mosse-Palais at Leipziger Platz remained accessible to those interested with its art collection and library. Then as now, large receptions were held here. Hans Lachmann-Mosse was especially fond of music. He was a close friend of the head conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic Wilhelm Furtwängler, who lived nearby. The family life of the Lachmann-Mosses in Berlin and at Rittergut Schenkendorf was captured in the memoirs of Rudolf Mosse’s youngest grandson, George L. Mosse.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See Hans-Henning Zabel, “Mosse, Rudolf,” *Neue Deutsche Biographie* 18 (1997), 213–216. In 1918, Rudolf Mosse cofounded the Deutsche Demokratische Partei (DDP, German Democratic Party), the successor to the left-liberal Fortschrittliche Partei (Progressive Party), with Walther Rathenau, Albert Einstein. See Steven M. Lowenstein, *Dt.-jüd. Gesch. in der Neuzeit* (Vol. 4), 107.

<sup>8</sup> See Kraus 1999, 400ff.

<sup>9</sup> See Kohut 1901, 394; Urkunde zur Verleihung der Ehrendoktorwürde, December 1, 1918, Leo Baeck Institute New York / Berlin, Mosse Family Collection, Serie 3: Rudolf Mosse 1860–1977, Box 2, Folder 30.

<sup>10</sup> See George L. Mosse 1996 u. George L. Mosse 2003.