



The Spanish Agents

Elaine Penn of the Rothschild Archive describes the first steps in a major programme to examine the work and papers of the Rothschilds' international network of agents.

As the first stage of a programme to catalogue the correspondence of N M Rothschild & Sons' major agents around the world – a priority in the process of opening up the collection to researchers – a pilot cataloguing project, concentrating on the papers of Daniel Weisweiler and Ignacio Bauer, agents for the Rothschilds in Spain in the 19th century, was begun in May 1999.

The pilot project concentrates on 20 boxes of private correspondence from Weisweiler and Bauer during the period 1881-1892 (Ref. XI/92/0-5). The work involves summarising each year of correspondence, noting any events or facts which may be of special interest to a researcher. The choice of the Weisweiler and Bauer series as a pilot is because the series is one of the finest and most complete examples of agents' correspondence in the collection, giving an insight into Rothschild interests in Spain over the course of a century.

By 1821, the Rothschilds had established a global network of Banking Houses. It was crucial to their expansion plans for the family to have a representative in each of the places where they were doing business, reporting on markets and prospects and acting on their behalf. However, family commitments often meant that their preferred choice of sons and nephews to head branches in other countries was not always possible. The alternative, of which the Rothschilds made great use, was to send or appoint agents, carefully chosen from among their friends and intimates. Many of the agents were known to the Rothschilds through trusted connections with other banking families. Ignacio

Bauer was nephew of Salomon's chief clerk in Vienna, Moritz Goldschmidt, and married to Ida de Morpurgo of the Trieste banking dynasty.¹ Daniel Weisweiler, originally from Frankfurt,² moved up quickly through the ranks of clerks in the Rothschild company.

The Rothschilds became interested in Spain during the first half of the 19th century, when many others were wary of involving themselves in a volatile country prone to political instability and national insolvency. In 1835, two years after the accession of Queen Isabella II, Nathan Mayer Rothschild in London agreed to make a loan of 15,000,000 francs to the Spanish Government. The other Rothschild Houses felt obliged by the wishes of their respective governments not to support this new liberal government. Nathan, however, saw the potential in quicksilver, a natural resource in Spain, on the international market. His son, Lionel, travelled to Madrid to negotiate the contract for the control of the Almadén quicksilver mines with the Spanish Government. Quicksilver, or mercury, was vital to the refining process of gold and silver and as such was a valuable asset to the Rothschilds. The Almadén contract was renewed continually up until 1912 as the Rothschilds saw the value of using a commodity as security for the various loans made to the Spanish Government.

Daniel Weisweiler joined Lionel in January 1835 and, upon Lionel's departure later that year, he established himself as the Spanish agent for all the Rothschild Houses. The Rothschilds' agency in Spain remained in the hands of this one firm for almost a century. Daniel Weisweiler engaged Ignacio Bauer as a partner in 1864, and the firm

¹ Niall Ferguson, *The World's Banker*, (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998), p.300; Inés Roldán de Montaud, "Nathan Mayer Rothschild & Sons de Londres y su archivo en la city de Londres" (Hispania, 1999, p.1002)

² Alfonso de Otazu, *Los Rothschild y sus socios en España*, (Madrid: O. Hs. Ediciones, 1987) p.40



traded as Weisweiller & Bauer before being taken over by Ignacio's son, Gustavo in 1894, becoming Bauer & Co. in 1914. This latter company was finally liquidated in 1935.

Among the holdings of the Rothschild Archive are several correspondence series from the Spanish agents in Madrid. Private business and general correspondence exist as separate series for the period 1833-1929, from Daniel Weisweiller, Ignacio Bauer and Gustavo Bauer respectively. Although some researchers have been able to penetrate the correspondence,³ on the whole it has not been easily accessible due to palaeographic and linguistic problems (the letters are written in several languages including German, French and Judendeutsch). Yet the importance of Weisweiller, and later Bauer, to an understanding of the Rothschild empire is immense. Both are excellent correspondents, relaying daily economic and financial news vital to the Rothschilds' decision-making process. The Spanish agents also inform their employers of any events of interest happening in, or in relation to, Spain and its colonies.

The letters in the pilot project, covering the years 1881 to 1892, are written in several different hands, with two dominating the correspondence. The language used is mainly French, with occasional letters written in German. From 1888, letters from Gustavo Bauer appear, usually during periods of his father's absence from Madrid. The series of private letters is full of political and social comment, as well as business information, and provides a vivid description of Spanish society at the time. All the Rothschilds' business interests in Spain and the Spanish colonies – government bonds, quicksilver, railways and tobacco – are discussed and analysed, and prospects for new business ventures are suggested and described. For example, the formation of a

British naval construction company, with yards in Bilbao, is discussed in 1888⁴, and virtually every letter details the daily trading on the Stock Exchange. Regular updates of the monthly Bank capital figures are also given, along with any details regarding shipments of bullion, silver or mercury.

Weisweiller and Bauer keenly observe events in the capital and the provinces. The behaviour of the population of Málaga following an earthquake in Granada in 1885 provokes withering comment when it is revealed that false claims are being made on emergency funds set up in aid of the earthquake victims.⁵ Health is a particular concern, both generally, as Spain suffers several cholera epidemics, and personally, as Bauer especially complains regularly of rheumatic aches and pains. Any events which affect the stability of the country, and thus the Rothschilds' financial interests, are noted. In particular, matters concerning the Royal family are discussed in some detail in the correspondence. For example, the death of King Alfonso XII and the subsequent Regency of Queen Maria Christina.

Weisweiller and Bauer are extremely knowledgeable about Madrid society and their positions, as agents to the Rothschilds, give them access to the centres of political and social power. Politics is discussed constantly, with much personal comment on the fluctuating nature of the Spanish political scene.⁶

The letters also provide an insight into the functioning of the Rothschild organisation and the relationship between the agents and the House they represented. The private business correspondence of Weisweiller & Bauer is addressed to 'Messieurs, Paris, London'. Each letter was probably sent from Madrid to Paris in

³ For example, Inés Roldán de Montaud's excellent article on the Rothschilds, "Nathan Mayer Rothschild & Sons de Londres y su archivo en la city de Londres" which was published in *Hispania* in 1999.

⁴ N M Rothschild & Sons made a loan to The Naval Construction & Armaments Co. Ltd. on 20th February 1888 to the value of £300,000 (Rothschild Archive: XIII/230/91).

⁵ Rothschild Archive: XI/92/2A.

⁶ For example, XI/92/1B/9-20 and XI/92/2A/80-100. Later in the series, Weisweiller and Bauer express both humour and concern that debates surrounding the health of the child-king, Alfonso XIII, carry great political weight (XI/92/4B/10).



Ignacio Bauer, 1859



Daniel Weisweiler, c1860

the first instance. It is possible that the French House took a copy of the original letter before forwarding it on to England.⁷ It is clear that, although the series now in the Archive is virtually complete, additional letters referred to in the correspondence and originally sent with this correspondence have been removed, possibly at the time of receipt, while others survive intact. Usually they are addressed solely to the London House, N M Rothschild & Sons, and are often in English, detailing a business transaction or financial information of particular interest to that House.⁸ It is interesting that even though the agents feel it necessary to address this information in a separate letter to the English House, it is sent to the French House along with the usual correspondence and no secret is made of its contents within the Rothschild partnership.

Occasionally the forwarding system fails, as in June 1887, when handwritten notes at the top of some of the letters suggest that they have been retrieved from the Paris House at a later date: 'lettre rapportée par erreur à Paris par le B[aro]n Alphonse qui devait la remettre à la Maison de Londres'.⁹

The letters also indicate the reliance both the agents and the Rothschilds placed on the postal network of the time. Many letters complain of delays in receiving mail from either the English or French banking houses. Reasons for the delay include the closure of services for religious festivals, heavy snow and rainfall preventing the mail trains reaching Madrid, and the fumigation of letters and parcels following a cholera outbreak in 1884.¹⁰

⁷ It is hoped that a study of the Rothschild papers held at Roubaix, France, will shed more light on this matter.

⁸ For example, XI/92/4A/274-6 which discuss the Almadén quicksilver mines.

⁹ XI/92/3A/157.

¹⁰ Examples include XI/92/4A/52, XI/92/1B/265, XI/92/1B/342 and XI/92/1B/306.

Compiling summaries for each year of correspondence within the series XI/92/0-5 has proved to be a time-consuming process. The volume of the letters, averaging between 350 and 400 per year, and the poor legibility of much of the handwriting have slowed progress. Although this project has involved a tiny fraction of the correspondence held in the Rothschild Archive, London, it has been useful in demonstrating the time-scale necessary for such cataloguing. The eventual visual layout of the summaries has not yet been finalised, but it has been decided to create subdivisions within each year according to a set of six fixed subject groups: cultural, finance, international affairs, mining, politics and railways. These groups were chosen following initial analysis of the correspondence and identification of the main topic areas covered within it.

Separating the summary notes into these subdivisions will permit quick and easy information retrieval.

Once the XI/92 series has been completed, hopefully in Summer 2000, the extension of the work to the other Weisweiller and Bauer series will be considered. This will allow greater access to the whole collection, not simply to a small section of correspondence from the Spanish agents. It is hoped that this cataloguing project will be supplemented by work to be undertaken in the archives of the Paris House, held in Roubaix, France. There is also scope for exploration into archive sources that may exist in Spain. The project will ultimately lead to a greater understanding of the functioning of the Rothschild business as a whole.

Archival Sources

Rothschild Archive, London

Weisweiller, W.D., Madrid	1822-1863	RAL XI/91/0-4
Weisweiller, W.D., Madrid	1837-1879	RAL XI/110/0-10 RAL XI/109 RAL XI/28/33
Weisweiller, D.B. (Baron) (Deceased account)	1893	
Weisweiller & Bauer, Madrid	1863-1893 1881-1892	RAL XI/91/4-16 RAL XI/92/0-5
Bauer, G., Madrid	1893-1917	RAL XI/58/0-5 RAL XI/59 RAL XI/111/75 RAL XI/58/6
Bauer & Company, Madrid (liquidated 1935)	1914-1929	
Quicksilver	1869-1911 1912-1921	RAL 000/374/1-2 RAL 000/474

Rothschild Papers, Centre des Archives du Monde du Travail, Roubaix

Lettres reçues: Madrid: Weisweiller	1838-1931	132AQ 6136-6272
Copies de lettres: Madrid	1851-1860	132AQ 722-753
Agence de Madrid	1888-1931	132AQ 24/1
(Liquidation Bauer)	1928-1947	132AQ 25-27)
Chemins de fers espagnols	1860-1936	132AQ 80
Métaux précieux – monnaies d'or – affaires avec Madrid	n.d.	132AQ 86/3

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