Salomon's archive

The return of a collection of papers seized from the Rothschild family in Vienna in 1938 gives a glimpse of what was almost certainly the first attempt to create a Rothschild Archive a century and a half ago. Melanie Aspey explains...
item in Salomon’s Archive was already 75 years old when he gathered together his
collection, others date from the very year of the Archive’s creation. The Register
gives no real sense of Salomon’s selection criteria. Indeed, it is not clear where he
found the materials for his Archive: did he search through business and domestic
premises in Frankfurt? and Vienna looking for ‘old’ things, or was the family
already accustomed to preserving documents and artefacts? How much did he
select, and how much had survived anyway?

Whether or not his aim was to represent specific aspects of his family’s
achievement, the documents in the Archive do in fact pick up a number of themes
that provide a convenient structure in which to examine them. First among these is the life of Mayer Amschel Rothschild. The Rothschild
brothers built on a business founded by their father, Mayer Amschel, who created
the Rothschild partnerships that flourished formally for over a century and endure
to this day. In their letters the brothers frequently invoke the memory of their
father, and remind one another of his business maxims and principles. One of his
cautions – ‘lack of order will make a beggar out of a millionaire’ – perhaps
underlay Salomon’s archival efforts. Mayer Amschel’s own balance of account for
the year 1797, preserved here, is in meticulous order. The father had made clear
to his sons, with whom he entered into business partnership, that he expected them
to work together in harmony to create a business that would survive across
generations of the Rothschild family, i.e. his descendants through the male line. He
pointedly excluded his daughters from taking a role in the direction of the business.
Records of family marriages and estate papers, together with the associated transfer
of assets, were therefore of special significance, not only in terms of the family per
se but to the family as businessmen and shareholders. Other documents relating to
the holdings of individuals in the family business, which Salomon had intended to
remain in the Archive, were removed after they were assigned to the Archive
because they were still in use.

The acquisition of property had a deeper significance for the Rothschild family
than for their non-Jewish contemporaries as Jews, they had long been debarred
from the purchase of real estate, except in designated areas. Two items in the
Archive relate to property in Frankfurt: one to the acquisition of land on Fahrgasse
in 1809 on which to build a new banking house and the other a contract for the
construction of a synagogue in 1843. Salomon also set aside plans and other
information relating to property that he had acquired in the Austrian Empire as
soon as he was able to do so, but these documents were removed from the
Archive, presumably soon after 1844, again because they were still in regular use.

The earliest title acquired by the Rothschild family – the award of the status
of Court Agent (Hoffaktor) of Hesse, granted to Mayer Amschel Rothschild in 1769
marks the very beginning of the Rothschild family’s rise as financial advisors in
Europe. Its survival in these papers provides us with the family’s earliest known
business document. The significance of honours and titles, of which this was only the first, was not
lost on the brothers: Carl von Rothschild’s remark, “When a Jew is a baron, all Jews
are barons”, shows the family’s pride in the effect their own achievements had on the
rest of their community. The retention of documents conveying titles from Austria,
Hesse, Prussia, France, Denmark, Russia, Naples and Belgium is in no way surprising.
Besides a strategy of benefactions intended to secure civil rights for themselves and the Jewish community, the Jewish tetem of Zedelkak motivated the Rothschild family to participate in all aspects of social welfare. The philanthropic activities documented in Salomon’s Archive relate to his personal engagements in Austrian communities, specifically around the time that he was granted honorary citizenship.

A collection of addresses and letters of thanks in the Archive all date from 1842–1844 and reflect to the celebrations in 1843 of Salomon’s honorary citizenship and of his 70th birthday in 1844. They are the most visually interesting items in the collection, their beauty and the effort that produced them bearing testimony to the regard in which Salomon was held by his contemporaries.

In addition to Salomon’s original archive collection of 1844, the Family Archive Register lists a further 21 items, entered under different hands and over an indeterminate time scale, although one, a trading licence for Baron von Rothschild, is dated 13 October 1926. Salomon indicated in his preface to the Register that he wanted the Archive to pass to the care of his son, Anselm. A second, typewritten list, dated January 1927 and also preserved in Fonds 637, suggests that Anselm respected this wish. The list comprises 12 items, incorporating most of the contents of Salomon’s Archive, but adding to them later documents relating to the lives of Anselm and his children. A covering note indicates that it was compiled at the time the Archive was transferred to a new home. The places of despatch and receipt are not indicated, but the use of the word ‘Jänner’ for January suggests it was sent to Austria, probably to Vienna. Salomon’s original inscription in his Register is dated 20 October 1844, and the Archive probably remained there, most likely in family hands, until its transfer in 1927. The presence of one particular item of note on this typewritten list, a decorative 70th birthday greeting to Wilhelm Carl of the Frankfurt branch of the family, suggests that the member of the family who maintained the Archive was Wilhelm Carl’s wife, Mathilde, who was Anselm’s mother (c.1808–1870). She died in 1924, and the transfer of the Archive may have coincided with the winding up of her estate.

It is clear that the English family knew of the existence of the Archive, since a summary of the ‘Archive of S M de Rothschild, Vienna’ was preserved among family papers in the London bank’s vault (RAL 000/573/11, nd.) There are only 28 elements in the summary, although one element consists of the group of appointments and titles that are identified separately in Salomon’s Register. The summary is accompanied by transcripts of some of the documents in the collection, which have been typed onto paper with the watermark ‘SMR’. This evidence points to the conclusion that the Viennese bank received the Archive at some stage, but there is no degree of certainty as to the chronology. What is certain is that the Archive was taken from the Viennese bank on 2 April 1938: the survival of a packing list in the files of Fonds 637 proves that the ‘family archive collection’ was among the items seized from the family after the Anschluss. The arrival of Fonds 637 at The Rothschild Archive presents the opportunity to reconstruct, for the first time since 1844, what remains of Salomon’s Archive, tracing its passage across many countries and through the hands of conflicting ideologies. That the Archive should once again be in the trust of the Rothschild family is a fitting conclusion.

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**Salomon’s archive: a schedule**

The document listed below formed the original contents of Salomon’s family Archive Register and were all listed by the same hand.

The items that have not been located in Fonds 637 are shown in italics. Items marked * were recorded in the Register as having been removed from the Archive because they were still in use. The titles as given here are amended to suit different translator's tastes in the Register.

The categories of document shown here have been adopted simply for ease of reference. The original Register has no sub-divisions and is purely alphabetical in arrangement. The position in the Register of each item is given at the end of its description; the reference indicates the letter of the alphabet under which it was listed (the original Register is of course written in German) and the sequential number within that letter of the alphabet.

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**Business papers of Mayer Anselm Rothschild**

- **Balance of the account, 1790 B7**
- **Balance of the account, 1794 B8**
- **Contract, 1889 F1**
- **Documents relating to the trial and acquittal of Mayer Anselm Rothschild for trading in Worpswede, 1809 P1**
- **Draft will, 1831 D1**

**Family documents**

- **Biographical account of Mayer Anselm Rothschild by S. I. Cohen, 1835 B2**
- **Marriage contract etc. of Salomon Mayer Rothschild, 1830 E2**
- **Documents relating to the birth and marriage of Salomon Mayer Rothschild and marriage records of James and Betty, 1842 C1**
- **Draft will, T1**
- **Document about the sale of capital by a Rothschild daughter, 1842 E2**
- **Document about the death of capital by Anselm von Rothschild, 1852 U1**

**Property documents**

- **Concerns by the authorities in Frankfurt for the promotion of a purchased plot of land in the Gießerthalergraben, 1843 C1**
- **Contract, 1846 W1**
- **Contract for Wirklingsweg, 1 April 1843 B2**
- **Letter from the Mayor of Frankfurt about buying the purchase of Vokoren, 1843 W1**
- **Letter from the Kurfürstlich Hessen, 30 Jan 1843**
- **Deed of sale of land in Lahnschloßköpfchen, 1844 P1**
- **Gift of the building of a polytechnic institute in Brühl, 1844 R1**
- **Gift of the building of the German Mutual Aid Society of the Savings Bank of the City of Brühl, 1846 R1**

**Gifts and foundations**

- **Foundation to award dowries to poor girls from Brühl, 1840 S1**
- **Foundation for the support of poor girls and skilled workers, together with related documents, 1841 S2**
- **Presentation of a letter of thanks for 8,000 [golden florins], 1844 E4**

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The list includes:

- **Jiidin, etc., etc., contract 1844 B6**
- **Awards and titles**
- **Creation of Mayer Anselm Rothschild as Court Agent of Home in Frankfurt, 1790 E1**
- **Naming of Anselm, Salomon, Carl and James as Royal Prussian Commercial Councillors, together with various letters, 1818, 1823 E3**
- **Diploma of Austrian nobility, 1817 D3**
- **Diploma (copy) of the nobility, 1817 and of the burghers, 1822, 1823 D2**
- **Diploma of the Danish Commercial Privity Councillor, 1819, and Order of Daneborg, 1819 D1**
- **Decree of the Kurfürst of Home of Financial Councillor, 1815, Financial Privity Councillor, 1821, Knight of the Order of the Lion, 1824, Commander, 1828 D2**
- **Diploma of the Roman Order of Vindelad, 6th Class, 1822 D4**
- **Diploma of the Neapolitan Order of Saint Ferdinand, [and Verdienst], 1823 D5**
- **Diploma of the French Order of the Legion of Honor, 1826 D6**
- **Diploma of the Belgian Order of Leopold, 1839 D7**

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**Adresses and letters of thanks**

- **Letter of thanks from the Jews of Hungary, 1842 D8**
- **Letter of thanks from the town authorities of Preßburg, 1841 D9**
- **Letter of thanks from P. Ochlerlick to an unknown addressee, 1841 D12**
- **Letter of thanks from the Mayor of Olissins, 1841 D10**
- **Letter of thanks from the Board of the North German Wool Trade, 1842 D11**
- **Letter of thanks from the Mayer of Brühl, 1844 D17**
- **Letter from the town authorities in Olten, 1844, D17**
- **Letter of thanks from the Jewish synagogue in Preßburg, 1844 D14**
- **Letter of thanks from the committee promoting institutions for the protection of small children in Hungary, 1841 D9**
- **Letter of thanks from the children’s home in Brühl, 1840 S1**
- **Letter of thanks from the Jewish community in Ofen, 1840, D17**

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**Gifts**

- **Gift of the building of a polytechnic institute in Brühl, 1844 R1**
- **Gift to the sick tradesmen’s institute, 1843 S4**
- **Gift of the building of the German Mutual Aid Society of the Savings Bank of the City of Brühl, 1846 R1**

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**Confirmation of gift from Count Ugarit and Israfil, 1844 S6**

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**Gifts for the Catholic and Jewish communities in Rechnitz, together with confirmation, 1844 S7**

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**Acknowledgement of letter of thanks from the community in Preßburg, 1844 B3**

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**Gifts for the Jewish and Turkish-Jewish communities in Vienna, 1844 G2**

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**Confirmation and thanks from Preßburg, 1844 D10**

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**Homage of the Jewish community in Alt Ofen, 1843 D10**

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**Gift of Thanks from the Jewish community in Preßburg, 1840 S1**

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**Gifts for the Jewish and dedicatory address from Preßburg, 1844 D2**

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**Homage of the Jewish community in the German-Jewish and the Turkish-Jewish communities in Vienna, 1844 G2**

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**Homage to the Jewish community in Alt Ofen, 1843 D10**

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**Gifts from the Jewish community in Pen, 1844 H2**

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**Gifts for the golde and dedicatory address from Preßburg, 1844 D2**

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**Homage of the Jewish community in Liptich, 1843 A3**

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**Repetition of the Mayor of Czopka, 1844 B4**

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**Floral wreath from Frickl, 1844 B5**

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**Frieden, etc., 1844 B3**

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**Frieden, etc., 1844 B3**