

The Rothschilds and the Austrian (Austro-Hungarian) Consular Service¹

Rudolf Agstner reveals the extensive ties of the Rothschild family and their agents in the diplomatic sphere.

The Austrian consular service began comparatively late. Only by the Treaty of Commerce and Navigation of Passarowitz on 17 July 1718, after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, were consulates established in Ottoman ports and it was not until 1752 that the Empress Maria Theresia ordered the same consulates to be created in the West.² Thereafter Austria mostly relied on honorary consuls, many of whom were from the Jewish community.³ In 1784 Raphael Picciotto, a Jewish merchant from Livorno (Leghorn), is mentioned for the first time as Imperial Royal (I.R.) honorary consul in Aleppo, beginning a dynasty of Picciottos as Austrian (Austro-Hungarian) consuls ending only in 1894 – the longest period of any family serving the Emperor as honorary consuls.

London

The question of whether Jews were eligible to serve as Austrian honorary consuls had already been decided when on 15 February 1818 Prince Metternich sent the following note to Ritter von Stahl,⁴ President of the Commercial Court Commission: ‘... that apart from their religious denomination no other reservations prevail against the Rothschild brothers; and this latter point would seem not to stand in the way of their appointment as I.R. Consuls General in London and Paris, as according to my knowledge in both places commercial agents do not enjoy admission to the court; in such a way any diplomatic inadequacies will be cancelled out as a matter of course’.⁵

A further two years were to pass until, in 1820, the century of four Rothschilds as Imperial Austrian – from 1867 Imperial & Royal Austro-Hungarian – Consuls General in London began. The advantages to both parties, the Austrian Government and the Rothschilds, were significant. On 31 March 1820 Nathan Mayer Rothschild was appointed I.R. honorary consul in London with the role being clearly defined.⁶ The first of 41 paragraphs of his instructions of 8 May 1820 read

It is the task of the Austrian Consul in London, to further and promote the already existing trade relations between Austria and Great Britain, and to protect the Austrian merchant flag on ... every occasion, and to maintain sovereignty as established by international law⁷

It is difficult to imagine anyone better qualified to promote trade relations.

On 16 January 1823, Emperor Franz I appointed Nathan Mayer Rothschild honorary Consul General, reiterating ‘that the rule that a consulate should not be granted to an Israelite, remains in force’.

When Nathan Rothschild died on 28 July 1836 in Frankfurt his brother Salomon immediately turned to Prince Metternich requesting him to see to it that the role ‘... of Consul General be transferred to the oldest son of [my] late brother, Lionel Nathan Baron Rothschild’. However, it took until 12 December 1837 before Emperor Ferdinand I appointed Lionel as his honorary Consul General. In 1850 the consular network in the United Kingdom was reorganised and from 1851 to 1914 the Rothschild honorary Consuls General were assisted by an experienced career consul as ‘head of chancery’.



Letters patent creating
Nathan Mayer Rothschild
Austrian Consul in
London.
RAL 000/274

When Lionel de Rothschild took his seat in the House of Commons on 26 July 1858, the I.R. minister Count Apponyi reported: 'Baron Lionel de Rothschild has informed me, off the record, that [...] he will no longer be able to discharge scrupulously his duties as Imperial Consul General, and thus he had to decide to renounce this post ...'. Apponyi informed Vienna that Lionel's younger brother Anthony 'would be prepared and very much honoured, if the imperial Government were to feel motivated to appoint him to the post ...'. Apponyi saw 'the biggest advantage of having a Rothschild as Consul General' in the 'influential, respected position which this house has in the local trade, and in its useful and wide-ranging connections with the highest political circles...'.⁸

The Austrian Trade Ministry followed Apponyi's reasoning and requested that 'with regard to the great importance the house of Rothschild attaches to the fact that said honourable position be again awarded to a member of this house, and in view of its wide-ranging connections in British trade and in particular its longstanding, important connection with the financial operations of the imperial house', Anthony de Rothschild be appointed. On 26 August 1858 Lionel de Rothschild's resignation was accepted by Emperor Franz Joseph 'with the expression of the particular supreme satisfaction' and Anthony, Baron de Rothschild was appointed unsalaried Consul General. Before Anthony died on 4 January 1876, Lionel de Rothschild submitted the candidacy of his son Alfred, a proposal that met with the approval of the I.R. Ambassador in London, Count Beust, 'in view of the reputation this worldwide house enjoys, as well taking into consideration the custom of many years that a member of the house of Rothschild is invested with the dignity of this honourable office...'. Within a matter of weeks, on 16 February 1876, Franz Joseph appointed Alfred de Rothschild, then 34 years old, his Consul General in London. He held the position until 12 August 1914 when the United Kingdom declared war on Austria-Hungary.

From the beginning the consulate was located in two small rooms '8 paces long and 6 paces wide' at 29, St. Swithin's Lane.⁹ In 1881 it quit these premises and moved to four rooms in Mansion House Chambers, 11 Queen Victoria Street, Alfred de Rothschild contributing to the annual rent.¹⁰ In 1896 vice-consul Princig von Herwalt complained that 'the Austro-Hungarian consulate-general continues to be housed in five [*siz*] dark, evil-smelling and low rooms of an extensive apartment building of the city, which counts no less than 670 offices.' In the same year Alfred de Rothschild rented rooms at 22 and 23 Laurence Pountney Lane, where the chancery remained until 12 August 1914. Alfred Charles de Rothschild, the last Rothschild Consul General, died on 31 January 1918.¹¹

Paris

As Prince Metternich was unable to suggest a 'more suitable individual' than James de Rothschild for the new position of I.R. honorary Consul General in Paris, Emperor Franz I appointed him to this post on 11 August 1821. James de Rothschild had bought from Joseph Fouché, once Napoleon's police minister, his palais at 21 Rue Laffitte where the Rothschild Bank and the Consulate General in Paris were located. James remained Consul General until his death on 15 November 1868. Just as in Great Britain, a review of the consular service in 1850 led to the appointment of a civil servant at the consulate as head of chancery to take care of daily consular business. Following James's death, on 28 December 1868 Emperor Franz Joseph I appointed his son, Gustave de Rothschild, honorary Consul General. In turn Gustave held the position until his death on 28 November 1911 which brought to an end nine decades of Rothschild service as the Emperor's Consul General in Paris. Vienna made use of the opportunity to change the status of the Paris consulate: '[...] it would be in the interest of the service to refrain in future from appointing an honorary head of the office, and notify the present deputy Consul-General [...] as head of office to the French authorities by issuing him a new consular patent'.¹² In 1912 the office moved to an apartment at 89A Boulevard Haussmann.

Circular

v o n d e m

k. k. N. De. Kreisamte B. U. W. W.

Bestellung des Freyherrn Anselm von Rothschild zum General-Consul zu Frankfurt am Main.

Laut des durch hohes Regierungs-Decret vom 29. v. M. J. 11938, hierher eröffneten hohen Hofkammer-Decretes vom 25. Februar d. J. J. 1181, haben Seine Majestät mittelst Allerhöchster Entschliehung vom 20. v. M. die Errichtung eines k. k. unbefoldeten General-Consulats für das Gebieth der freyen Stadt Frankfurt am Main Allerhöchst zu genehmigen, und den Anselm Freyherrn v. Rothschild, Sohn des Freyherrn Salomon v. Rothschild und Gesellschafter des Banquierhauses M. M. v. Rothschild und Söhne in Frankfurt am Main, zum k. k. General-Consul daselbst allergnädigst zu ernennen geruht.

Wien den 17. März 1836.

*Was bekam Metternich für diese Auszeichnung auf den Triumph
des Fürsten?*

Carl Edler von Seydel,

k. k. N. De. Regierungsrath und Kreishauptmann.

(18.)

Circular announcing the appointment of Anselm von Rothschild (1803–1874) as Austrian Consul General in Frankfurt am Main, issued in Vienna 17 March 1836.
RAL 000/2014

Frankfurt

In 1835 Salomon Mayer von Rothschild, always close to Metternich, suggested establishing an I.R. consulate general in Frankfurt and appointing his son Anselm, a resident of that city, to this position. Ritter von Eichhoff,¹³ President of the Court Chamber Commission, seeking Metternich's consent, advised him that

appointing a Consul General in such an important trading place in Germany as Frankfurt/Main, where until now no representative of Austrian commercial interests exists, would be highly desirable if no costs were involved for the treasury [...] Under the circumstances the proposal and request of Baron Rothschild seem desirable [...]¹⁴

Anselm von Rothschild was therefore appointed honorary Consul General on 20 February 1836. After he moved to Vienna in 1855, he was succeeded by Wilhelm Carl von Rothschild on 16 July 1856. As a result of the Austro-Prussian war of 1866 Austria had to leave the German Federation, Frankfurt was annexed to Prussia, and diplomatic missions there were closed. This

prompted France, England, Italy, Russia and the USA to appoint career Consuls General in Frankfurt. On 28 February 1867 Chancellor Beust suggested to Emperor Franz Joseph that 'Austria, whose political, commercial and financial interests in Frankfurt are of importance, cannot remain without an efficient representation there [...] would make a career consulate general desirable. However, as the House of Rothschild attaches the greatest importance that one of its members in Frankfurt continues being entrusted with the Austrian consular representation there' another solution had to be found.¹⁵ The Emperor approved allocating an experienced consular official to Wilhelm von Rothschild, following the example of London and Paris. When Wilhelm died on 25 January 1901, his son in law Maximilian Goldschmidt-Rothschild was appointed honorary Consul General on 11 August 1901, remaining in office until the Austro-Hungarian monarchy ended on 12 November 1918.

Rothschild in-laws as honorary consuls

In 1851 the Consulate General in London suggested 'appointing an agent in Manchester who should report on developments and occurrences in the field of industry [...]'. An appropriate candidate for the post was found in August Sylvester Sichel. The reasons for this choice were delicate and can be found in a letter by Lord Westmorland¹⁶ to Foreign Minister Count Buol-Schauenstein:¹⁷

[...] I transmit to you highly confidentially a letter of Lord Clarendon,¹⁸ containing a request, which he [...] would like to see fulfilled. You are aware, that Mr. Sichel during the long period since his arrest in Milan and as long as his case was on trial has acted with the greatest propriety refraining from any incitement of emotions, be it through the press or by causing a debate in Parliament, which could have caused the greatest troubles. Lord Clarendon therefore would request that as Mr. Sichel has undoubtedly incurred a considerable loss¹⁹ due to his long imprisonment, that he might be given an honourable distinction. Mr. Sichel is related to Baron de Rothschild, your consul in England. Mr. Sichel senior would thus request to be appointed consul or vice-consul under his relative Baron de Rothschild.²⁰ I believe that you have no consular agent in Manchester, and if this respected merchant could be appointed by his relative to this post, I am convinced that you [...] would do a favour to Lord Clarendon and grant compensation to a person, who [...] has been dealt with very harshly...

Augustus Sylvester Sichel was a partner in Sichel Brothers, cotton merchants of Manchester. Two months after Lord Clarendon's letter had reached the Ballhausplatz,²¹ on 30 November 1853 Emperor Franz Joseph appointed Sichel his honorary vice-consul in Manchester. The office was located at 7 Port Street. When Augustus Sichel died in 1858, his son Julius Friedrich Sichel succeeded him in the position on 6 March 1859, serving until October of 1874.

In Edinburgh, a new honorary consulate was established in Leith in 1867 following 'the offer of banker George Worms²² in London, to assume the post of unsalaried consul in Edinburgh. Worms [...] will soon establish a branch office of his business in Edinburgh, where he intends to spend part of the year [...].²³ During Worms' tenure, lasting until 30 July 1877, the office was located at 44 Constitution Street.

Rothschild's agents as honorary consuls

The most prominent agent of Rothschild and Austrian Consul General was August Belmont,²⁴ an employee of the Frankfurt branch sent in 1837 to Havana to head the local Rothschild agency. Travelling via New York, he stayed there, established August Belmont & Company and became Rothschild agent in New York. Acting Austrian Consul General from 26 August 1845, he was appointed I.R. honorary Consul General in New York on 13 September 1847, remaining in this position until 14 July 1853.²⁵

The clerk who eventually set up the Havana agency, Carl Franz Joseph Friedrich Scharfenberg was himself appointed honorary consul in Cuba.²⁶ The file on him notes that he was 'executing tobacco and cigar shipments from Havana on behalf of the local wholesale establishment of S.M. von Rothschild to the I.R. Tobacco Régie. In this capacity, he has laudably contributed to the favourable success of carrying out these shipments at any time.'²⁷ On 2 November 1853, Emperor Franz Joseph appointed him honorary consul in Havana 'as in Cuba the need for a regular, qualified consular official has from year to year become more manifest [...]'. Carl Scharfenberg resigned his post in 1867.²⁸ On 8 January 1868 Wilhelm Scharfenberg was appointed honorary consul, and promoted to honorary Consul General on 9 October 1871. His resignation was accepted by Franz Joseph on 16 May 1875.²⁹

Passport for Charles
Stuber, 1825, signed by
Nathan Mayer Rothschild.
RAL 000/274

Metternich informed his ambassador in St. Petersburg, Franz Count Colloredo–Wallsee,³⁰ on 6 March 1847 that the Rothschilds had despatched Benjamin Davidson to St. Petersburg. The ambassador on 26 March reported: 'Mr. Davidson, sent here by the House of Rothschild, has called at this I.R. Embassy. [...] I will not fail to grant him if possible necessary assistance. One of the reasons of his presence here is, according to reliable sources, to entrust the representation of the local business of the House of Rothschild or at least part thereof to a St. Petersburg merchant [...]'. Colloredo recommended Austrian [honorary] Consul General, Mr. James Thal,³¹ and suggested Metternich's 'intervention with the House of Rothschild would certainly result in Mr. Thal being entrusted this important and profitable business [...]'.³² Thal had considerable expenses in paying for the transport of destitute Austrian subjects to the Austrian border for repatriation; a position as the Rothschilds' representative would have eased this financial burden. On 8 April 1847, in a letter to Salomon Mayer Rothschild, Metternich recommended Thal. Rothschild replied on 10 April 1847, 'As the activities of an individual acting on behalf of the House of Rothschild in St. Petersburg have to be agreed with all of its branches, mainly with those in Paris and London, I cannot alone express a decisive opinion, I however do not wish to conceal that I will bring the content of [...] letter immediately to their attention. I am confident, that my brothers and nephews will, if this should be the case, be glad to also make use of Mr. Thal's assistance.' In the end, Colloredo's scheme did not work out.

Fifty years later, a businessman with close connections to the house of Rothschild was appointed honorary vice consul in Baku in today's Azerbaijan. Heinrich Goldlust,³³ merchant of first order in Baku, enjoyed the protection of the Rothschilds when he was appointed Austro-Hungarian honorary vice-consul on 28 June 1898. His son-in-law Arnold Feigel was heading the Rothschilds' various enterprises in Baku.

The era when members of the Rothschild family or employees of the Rothschilds served to mutual benefit as honorary consuls for the Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary came to an end with World War I. Although the consular network of the Republic of Austria relies to an even larger degree than the Austro-Hungarian on honorary consuls, no Rothschild has ever expressed interest in serving as Austrian honorary consul.

Rudolf Agstner joined the Austrian Foreign Service in 1977, serving in Paris, Brussels, Tripoli, New York, Cairo, Bonn and as Austrian Ambassador to Ethiopia and Permanent Representative to the African Union (2006–2009). He is an authority on the history of the Austrian (Austro-Hungarian) Foreign Service and the Austrian presence in the Middle East and East Africa; author of over 20 books and over 200 articles on the history of the Austrian (Austro-Hungarian) Foreign Service and on the Austrian presence abroad; co-editor of 6 books of a 14-volume edition of political reports of the Austrian Embassy, Tel Aviv, Israel. Since 1978 he has been a contributor of biographies of diplomats and consuls to the Austrian Biographical Lexicon 1815–1950 of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. From 2001 to 2003 he was lecturer with the University of Innsbruck's Institute of Contemporary History.

No 854



Austrian Consulate General
in
LONDON.

These are to certify to all whom it may concern,
that the bearer hereof Charles Stuber
47 Years old, Height about five
feet inches, Hair dark Eyes dark
is a native of Carlsruhe and a Baden
Subject, and as such ought to be suffered to
pursue his way to Carlsruhe via Ostende
& Frankfurt without any
hinderance whatsoever.

Witness my hand and Seal of Office,
this sixteenth Day of September 1825

In the absence of the minister
resident of H. R. H. the Grand Duke of Baden
The Austrian Consul General.

J. J. Jottent

Signature of the Bearer
Charles Stuber

NOTES

- 1 Revised version of a lecture on 'The Austrian (Austro-Hungarian) Consulates in the United Kingdom' presented on 15 September 2009 at a reception held at The Rothschild Archive.
- 2 Pozarevac, Serbia.
- 3 In 1763 ten of 27 consular posts were run by honorary consuls; in June 1914 the ratio was 364 of 474 consulates.
- 4 Philipp Georg Ritter von Stahl, b. Bruchsal, Baden/Germany 1760, d. Vienna 26 January 1831, President of Commercial Court Commission 1816–1824.
- 5 Metternich to Stahl, 15 February 1818, State Chancery, communications to the Commercial Court Commission 1817 VII–1819 V, box 205, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv / Family, Court and State Archives Vienna (HHStA hereafter).
- 6 Stahl to Metternich, 4 April 1820, letters from Commercial Court Commission 1819 VIII–1820 V, State Chancery, box 216; Rudolf Agstner, *Die Freiherrn von Rothschild als k.k. (k.u.k.) Generalkonsuln in Frankfurt, London und Paris, in Die Gemeinde*, Nr. 541, Vienna, September 2002, pp.60–61.
- 7 Meeting of 10 April 1820, folio 125 ex April 1820, Commerz, 17, red 1199, Hofkammerarchiv / Court Chamber Archive (HKA) Vienna,
- 8 Apponyi to Count Buol-Schauenstein, 28 July 1858, Legation London XLVI A–E, box 293, dept. 4, HHStA, Administrative Registry (AR hereafter), Vienna.
- 9 Consulate General London XVI adm of 22 September 1880, box 162, dept. 8, AR, HHStA.
- 10 Consulate General London, annex to report XV adm of 26 November 1881, box 162, dept. 8, AR, HHStA.
- 11 For details see HHStA, State Chancery, Consulates, London, box 30; AR, Dept. 8, boxes 2, 50, 161, 162.
- 12 HHStA, Cabinet Chancery (KZ), 1912, No. 245/1912, Imperial resolution of 4 January 1912.
- 13 Peter Joseph Ritter von Eichhoff, b. Bonn, Germany 16 April 1790, d. Vienna 1 January 1866, President, Court Chamber 1835–1840.
- 14 Eichhoff to Metternich 26 December 1835 HK 8057/PP, correspondence from Court Chamber 1835 X – 1836 IV, State Chancery, box 152, HHStA
- 15 File Schwarz-Senborn, box 310, dept. 4, HHStA, AR.
- 16 John Fane, 11th Earl of Westmorland, b. 2 February 1784, d. 16 October 1859, British Ambassador to Austria 1851–1859.
- 17 Lord Westmorland to Count Buol-Schauenstein, 28 September 1853, box 317, file Sichel, dept. 4, AR, HHStA
- 18 George William Frederick Villiers, 4th Earl of Clarendon, British Foreign Secretary in 1853.
- 19 According to the Sichel file in HHStA around 7000 Lst.
- 20 Bernhard Judah Sichel (b. 1780, d. 1867) had married Belche/Isabelle Rothschild, daughter of Mayer Amschel Rothschild and sister of Nathan Mayer Rothschild on 17 February 1802.
- 21 Seat of Austrian Foreign Ministry 1720–2005.
- 22 Elder son of Salomon Benedikt Worms; born in 1827; upon the death of his father succeeded to the title of Baron de Worms in 1882. Related to Baron Rothschild as on 28 October 1795 Schönche/Jeannette Rothschild had married Benedict Moses Worms (b. 20 August 1771, d. 25 February 1859).
- 23 Imperial resolution 30 November 1853, box 19, Ministerial Chancery (MCZ hereafter), 3578/1853, HHStA
- 24 Born Alzey, Hesse/Germany 8 December 1813, died New York City 24 November 1890.
- 25 Rudolf Agstner, *Of consuls and co-nationals – Austria (– Hungary) and her consulates in the United States of America 1820 – 1917*, Austrian Embassy Addis Ababa Occasional Paper No. 2/2007, Addis Ababa 2007
- 26 Born Bremen/Germany? 26 May 1812.
- 27 I.R. Finance Ministry to I.&R. Foreign Ministry ref. 32355 of 31 December 1875, file Carl Scharfenberg, box 299, dept. 4, AR, HHStA.
- 28 Imperial resolution of 2 November 1853, box 19, MCZ 3627/1853, HHStA
- 29 Details are difficult to ascertain, as the consulate's archive was handed over in 1921 to the Spanish Legation in Havana.
- 30 Austrian Ambassador to the Imperial Russian Court 13 June 1843 – 7 November 1847.
- 31 Thal was a Russian citizen, merchant of 1st order, honorary citizen of St. Petersburg and president of the Stock Exchange Committee; appointed honorary consul general on 12 December 1843.
- 32 Colloredo St. Petersburg No. 50 of 26/14 March 1847 to Metternich; Metternich to Rothschild, 8 April 1847; Rothschild to Metternich, 10 April 1810, box 349, Thal, dept. 4, AR, HHStA.
- 33 Born Tarnow, Galicia /Tarnów, Poland 2 June 1837, died Vienna 2 September 1909.

Right

Austro-Hungarian
consular flag, 1868–1918.

