

Anselm von Rothschild, collector

Felicitas Kunth, author of a recent dissertation on the art collections of the Austrian Rothschilds, describes the early collecting of Baron Anselm von Rothschild

In 1850, Anselm von Rothschild (1803-1874) moved to Vienna to take over the running of the family-owned banking house S. M. von Rothschild.¹ In the following years, he was to make his name in the capital city of the Austrian monarchy not only as a financier, but also as an art-collector: he laid the foundation for the significant art collections of the Viennese Rothschilds, which were extended and improved continuously right through until 1938.²

Earlier, while living in Frankfurt, the Baron had begun to devote his attention to art. An important assistant in building up his collection was the Jewish artist Moritz Daniel Oppenheim³, who had already served Anselm's uncles in Naples and Paris. While Oppenheim was originally appointed as art tutor to Anselm's wife, Charlotte (1807-1859), he quickly progressed to become the Baron's art advisor and family portraitist.⁴

Anselm von Rothschild was a great lover of miniatures and miniature craft objects: "The older I get and the greyer I get, the more I love these delightful miniature objects with their uncomplicated pleasures".⁵ Oppenheim, who did not share his master's preferences in the least, continually attempted to persuade the Baron to buy oil paintings, which in his opinion were the only true art – although initially with absolutely no success. He had better luck once the family moved into a new town-house at Neue Mainzer Straße 45 in Frankfurt. At this point, Anselm von Rothschild was receptive to Oppenheim's recommendation to buy the art collection of the deceased Dutch businessman, Klerk de Reuss, to decorate the walls of his new home. He acquired the entire collection in 1842, at a price of 100,000 gulden. These 32 paintings served later as a practical illustration of the world of art for Anselm's children. At a stroke, the Baron had acquired important works from the Dutch School, with paintings by Wouverman, Teniers, van Ostade and Cuyp. Interest in works by the 17th-century Dutch School was to weave its way like a *leitmotif* through the collections over the following generations as well.

When Anselm moved to live in Austria, these paintings were newly accommodated in the rooms of his Palais in the Renngasse. While some works graced the walls of the red and green rooms, the majority of the paintings were housed in the so-called 'Gemäldesaal' or 'Museum'. This room adjoined the Baron's bedchambers which, furnished in Spartan style, contrasted with the impressive splendour found elsewhere in the Palace. The gallery was built especially for Anselm von Rothschild by the architect Flohr. It was lit from above – a rarity for private galleries of the time.

The Baron had led a lively social life in Germany. Both his home in Frankfurt and his country seat, the 'Grüneburg'⁶, had always been open to guests and the family were welcome invitees at the city's social events. In Austria, however, his



Anselm von Rothschild,
c. 1864

social outings were noticeably less frequent. Anselm dedicated his energies to the banking house, spending his free hours smoking cigars as he viewed his collections. In these, his miniature craft objects continued to have pride of place: Franz Schestag, who in 1866 drew up his first catalogue of the collections of Anselm von Rothschild⁷, lists a total of 452 individual items. These included ivory sculptures, medals, works by goldsmiths, wood-carvings, glass vessels, small boxes and manuscripts. These were supplemented by several miniatures, but oil paintings did not appear in the catalogue. Most of the small art objects probably came from the collection of his grandfather, Mayer Amschel, who even in his youth had started to collect coins and precious stones. When Schestag published a second edition of the catalogue in 1872, an additional 127 items had been added to the collection.

Ferdinand, Anselm's second son, would occasionally criticise his father's preference for the "lesser" arts.⁸ In his opinion, he had failed to take advantage of the possibilities which the art market had to offer at the time, and only in the rarest of instances had he followed up leads provided by relatives. With regard to the collections of paintings, his son's criticism was to some degree justified. It should not be forgotten, however, that the record of Anselm's estate at the time of his death in 1874⁹ nevertheless lists 116 oil paintings, all impressive in their quality. Amongst these works, there were a total of 93 paintings by Dutch masters. Given that Dutch artists were represented neither in the Imperial Collection nor in other private collections in Vienna and enjoyed no great appreciation amongst the art-lovers of the time, these were not works collected with a view to establishing credentials in art circles. Anselm's interest in a foreign School, from a country where the collector had never lived nor with which he had a particular affinity, remains surprising. Within Dutch painting, he was particularly taken with the genre paintings¹⁰ and landscapes¹¹. But the Baron also laid the foundations of a collection of paintings by Frans Hals, whose outstanding portrait of Tieleman Roosterman¹² he had acquired at auction in 1872 for 15,200 florins from the Plach auction house.¹³ In the decade prior to his death, he became a more active collector of paintings. His son Ferdinand attributed this to his increased ambition to outdo his competitors. In fact, he engaged in bidding at international auctions, acquiring 13 paintings of the French School¹⁴ and portraits of the English School. Astonishingly, his collections also reveal seven works of Italian Schools, of which four are representations of the Madonna. This interest in Christian images may seem surprising in a Jewish collector, but it is said of the Baron that in his later years he developed an interest in Catholicism, which could be the reason behind these purchases.

Anselm did not confine his buying to works acquired simply for his own pleasure. He also committed himself to supporting and acquiring works for public museums. Following his own personal preferences, he showed a special interest in craft items and was a member of the Society for the Promotion of Applied Art (*Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Angewandten Kunst*).¹⁵ After Anselm's death in 1874, his sons Albert and Nathaniel von Rothschild significantly expanded their father's art collection and gave the works a prestigious setting by building two Palais in the Fourth District of Vienna. These grand houses were taken on by Albert's sons, Louis and Alphonse, who further enhanced the collections but also extended the range by purchasing works by 19th-century Austrian painters. As a result of this extensive collecting by his descendants, Anselm's rôle as the founder of the



Wooded evening landscape with hunter and dogs, by Jan Wynants and Adriaen van de Velde, c.1670. It once hung in Anselm's 'Gemäldeaal' in the Rennegasse. (by courtesy of Christie's)



Anselm von Rothschild with his family in the studio of his wife, Charlotte; a group portrait by Charlotte herself

collection has, perhaps, been overshadowed. While Salomon von Rothschild, his father and the founder of the Vienna banking house, had needed to devote his entire energies to building up the bank and to integrating into Viennese society, it was Anselm who was able, on the back of these achievements, to spend time in pursuit of other, non-business interests and in so doing not only to found but, by example, to encourage his children to develop one of the great Austrian collections.

SOURCES

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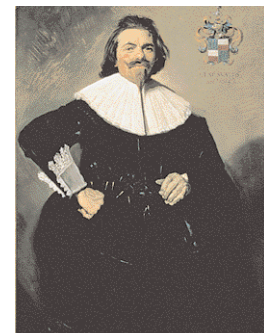
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Archiv des Kunsthistorischen Museums, [Archive of the Museum of Art History] (AKHM): Akten Rothschild [Rothschild files], Z. 239/1938/KL, Z. 442 – 1939: Liste Beschlagnehmter jüdischer Kunstsammlungen. [List of confiscated Jewish art collections]; Fasz. [Section] II.: Beschlagnahme Rothschild [Rothschild confiscation]; fol. 1-64: Inventar [Inventory of] Louis von Rothschild; fol. 1-389: Inventar [Inventory of] Alphonse von Rothschild. Verzeichnis der zur systematischen Ergänzung der Wiener staatlichen Sammlungen notwendigen Gegenstände aus der Sammlung Alphonse Rothschild [List of items from the collections of Alphonse von Rothschild necessary for the systematic enhancement of the national collections in Vienna]; fol. 1-137: Broschüre gedruckt, *Notizen über einige meiner Kunstgegenstände, Mit einem Vorwort von Nathaniel Rothschild Wien* [Printed book: *Notes on some of my artworks, with a foreword by Nathaniel Rothschild, Vienna*], 1903.

Archiv des Bundesdenkmalamts, [Archive of the Federal Department of Historical Monuments] (BDAM): Akten [Files re] Louis und Alphonse von Rothschild: Karton [Box] 51, Karton 52, Karton 53, Karton 54



Tielman Roosterman by Frans Hals (by courtesy of Christie's)



Evening river landscape with cowherd and cows by van Calraet, bequeathed by Anselm to his son Ferdinand and by him to his brother Albert. (by courtesy of Christie's)

NOTES

1. Anselm von Rothschild had already been managing the Vienna branch of the bank since 1848, the year in which his father Salomon had left the city in the wake of the political upheavals. See Morton, Frederic, *Die Rothschilds, Portrait einer Dynastie*, Vienna 1961, pp. 294-296. After he moved permanently to the Austrian capital in 1850, he co-founded the Österreichische Creditanstalt für Handel und Gewerbe (Austrian Loan Corporation for Commerce and Trade) in 1855.
2. From the 1880s until the family were dispossessed by the Nazis in 1938 these art collections were housed in the two Palais built by Nathaniel and Albert von Rothschild in Vienna District IV, as well as in the numerous other houses belonging to the family in the Austro-Hungarian Empire.
3. Moritz Oppenheim himself extensively discusses his services to the Rothschild family in his diaries, and these documents, published by his son, are the most important evidence from this period. Oppenheim, Moritz, *Erinnerungen*. Published by Alfred Oppenheim, Frankfurt am Main 1924.
4. In his capacity as art tutor, Oppenheim was a visitor to many artistically-minded households. As a result, he learned at first hand when items were for sale, and in some instances was able to persuade the owner to entrust works to Baron Rothschild.
5. Prévost-Marcilhacy, Pauline, *Les Rothschild, Bâtisseurs et Mécènes*, Paris 1995, p. 154.
6. The country house is given various names in the literature, in some instances 'Grüneburg' and in some instances 'Gruneburg'.
7. See Sources, 2.
8. Ferdinand von Rothschild (1839-1898) moved from Austria to England in 1860 where he was to spend the rest of his life, having married his English cousin, Evelina, in 1865. After her death, he built Waddesdon Manor in Buckinghamshire and filled it with immense art collections which can still be seen today (Waddesdon Manor is a property of the National Trust). Although he collected most of his artworks himself, he inherited about 30 pieces – mostly craft objects – from his father Anselm in 1874. Among his inheritance were also a few paintings: 'Hunters resting in front of a tavern' by Wouvermans (36.2 x 41.3 cm, inventory number WI/62/4, catalogue Waddesdon 1967, n° 78, p. 182) and Adrian van Ostade's 'Musicians' (28.5 x 22.2 cm, catalogue Waddesdon 1967, n° 67, inventory number W 2/19/6*). Both paintings are still at Waddesdon. Three other paintings, inherited by Ferdinand from his father, were returned to the collections of his surviving brothers in Vienna after his death (see *Inventarliste* in the dissertation by Kunth).
9. See Sources, 3.
10. 40 pictures in total.
11. 29 pictures in total.
12. Inventory number AR 866. Frans Hals, oil on canvas 117 x 87 cm. Signed and dated 'Aetat Svae 36/an/34'. From the estate of Friedrich J. Gsell, Auctioned at Plach lot nr. 40. Today in the Cleveland Museum of Art (sold at auction Christie's 1999), Hofstede de Groot, book II, No. 322. Exhibited at the World Exhibition 1873, Vienna. 1947-1998 Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.
13. Since Moritz Oppenheim remained in Germany when Anselm moved to Austria, the Baron looked for new advisors in Vienna. The main person who served him in that capacity was the dealer and auctioneer Gustav Plach.
14. Mainly works from the 18th century. Probably under the influence of his wife Charlotte, for whom he had arranged to have a room at the Grüneburg country house decorated in the manner of Louis XV.
15. See the letter regarding his acceptance into the Society dated 14.12.1841, Rothschild Archive, London: 000/1059: 637-1-312, under 5g