

## Lecture by Susanne Uslu-Pauer

Archive of the Jewish Community of Vienna, Austria

Subject:

### THE ARCHIVE OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF VIENNA

#### HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The Archive of the Jewish Community (IKG) of Vienna was officially founded in 1816, when the Council of Representatives of Vienna's Jews voted to establish an archive in order to gather and process regularly produced official documents.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless it took another thirty years for it to become an institutional archive. From the 1840ies onwards most records have been kept continuously, depicting institutional concerns of a religious community with increasing educational and social functions. The oldest patents and decrees date back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Archive was professionally organized and until the 1920ies the records were catalogued by subject terms and individual names.

In 1901 the Historical Commission was established and assisted with these activities. However, the main focus of this Commission was the research of the history of the Jews in Austria, collecting all different kinds of sources from all archives in Austria.<sup>2</sup>

After the so called "Anschluss" in March 1938 the National Socialists forced the IKG to relinquish its Archive. Extensive archival records, manuscripts,

incunabula and prints of Jewish organizations and individuals were seized by the Protective Squadron (SS) in 1938/1939 and transported to Berlin to the Reich's Main Security Office (Reichssicherheitshauptamt). How and why other records were kept in Vienna under most difficult conditions remains unknown. During the air raids on Berlin in summer 1943, the Nazi authorities, transferred these records to Silesia. After the end of the war the Red Army discovered the records. The material was secured, moved to Moscow and stored in the so-called Special Archive (Osobyi).

Excursus: Today the entire archival holdings of the Jewish Community of Vienna are situated at the Russian State Military Archive (RSMA) and at the Manuscript Division of the Russian State Library (RSL). In May 2009 the classification and determination of the provenance of the archival material in Moscow was completed. The majority of the archival records (more than 2,580 fascicles) and 66 Jewish manuscripts were identified as material of Jewish organizations and individuals. In cooperation with the Austria Foreign Ministry the Jewish Community of Vienna has been taking all necessary steps to realize the project concerning the return of the archival holdings to Vienna.

#### THE ARCHIVE AFTER 1945

After 1945 the Archive was initially not reopened.

The newly established Jewish Community after June 1945 was a religious organization with typical responsibilities for the Jewish population which had become very small due to NS persecution. But it was also responsible for returning and newly settled Jews, for Holocaust survivors in Austria and abroad as well as for compensation and restitution issues.

The Jewish Community had to face enormous challenges in the post-war period and the Archive was a matter of less importance. Besides it was thought to be impossible that a Jewish community would re-establish itself in Vienna after the war. About 120,000 Jews had emigrated, 48,000 had been deported to concentration camps and 65,000 Jews had been murdered by the National Socialists.

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<sup>1</sup> Concerning the history of the Archive of the Jewish Community of Vienna see Susanne Belovari, *Continuity and Change: Record Creators and Record Values*, Proceedings ICA-SUV, Annual Seminar of the Section on University and Research Institution Archive: Shared Concerns and Responsibility for University Records and Archives, Reykjavik, Iceland: 2006, online publication (<http://www2.hi.is/Apps/WebObjects/HI.woa/swdocument/1010347/Susanne+Belovari.pdf>, download May 2009); see also Gerhard Milchram, Christa Prokisch, *Entropie oder vom vergeblichen Versuch, Ordnung zu schaffen*, in: *Ordnung muss sein. Das Archiv der Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde Wien*, published by order of the Jewish Museum of the City of Vienna by Felicitas Heimann-Jelinek, Lothar Hölbling, Ingo Zechner, Exhibition Catalogue, Vienna 2007, p. 24-28.

<sup>2</sup> Concerning the Historical Commission see Merete Aagaard Jensen, *Traditionen der Forschung – Die Historische Kommission der Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde Wien 1901-1938*, in: *Ordnung muss sein*, Exhibition Catalogue, Vienna 2007, p. 35-38.

In the beginning of the 1950ies thousands of archival records were transferred to Jerusalem and given to the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People as a loan. This procedure was repeated in the beginning of the 1960ies and 1970ies.

For a long time it was assumed that the entire archival records had been deposited at the Central Archives in Jerusalem. But the IKG authorities seemed to have overlooked numerous records, indices and books relating to the periods before, during and after the National Socialist era.

### THE REDISCOVERY OF THE ARCHIVE

During the renovation of the synagogue in the first district of Vienna in 1986 the cellar beneath the synagogue had to be cleared. During the inspection of the cellar, innumerable records, praying books and furniture from the synagogue were found.<sup>3</sup> Among this material was the card index of emigration, dozens of wooden boxes in a cabinet.



Cellar beneath the synagogue, 1986 (photo by Ernst Meir Stern)

On this photo you can see the highly improper storage of the archival holdings, on the left side the numerically and on the right side the alphabetically ordered card index. I will refer to this emigration card index later on.

Although the discovery of the material was very precious the entire archival holdings were brought to a place that remained unknown until 2000.

The representative for restitution affairs, Ms. Erika Jakobovits, could not accept this situation and consistently investigated the allegedly missing Archive. She could not imagine that an archive could disappear that easily. Not even the Secretary-General of the IKG could help at this time as he was convinced that no more archival holdings had been preserved in Vienna. In autumn 1998 Ms. Jakobovits was informed about several boxes found at the sanatorium of the Maimonides-Center. And indeed, archival holdings were found in one of these boxes. So it was obvious that the rest of the archival material must have been deposited somewhere in Vienna a well.

In 2000 Ms. Jakobovits heard about a storage room in one of the buildings of the IKG at Herklotzgasse in the 15<sup>th</sup> district of Vienna. She intuitively felt that the archival material could be stored in this house. She informed the President of the IKG, Mr. Ariel Muzicant, and visited the storage room together with the IKG's Vice President Oskar Deutsch. The room was filled with 800 cardboard boxes, index cards, large books reaching from the floor to the ceiling. On closer inspection, the majority of the documents were identified as dating from the National Socialist era in Austria, pages of reports, letters, emigration and financial documents, deportation lists, card files, books, photographs, maps, and charts. They were mixed with more recent as well as older material from the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

On the initiative of Ms. Jakobovits and Mr. Deutsch this time the archival holdings were transported to the former Holocaust Victims' Information and Support Center of the Jewish Community, an institution of the IKG, representing the interests of Holocaust victims and their families, and also doing historical researches on this matter.

### RESTORATION OF THE ARCHIVAL MATERIAL

Unfortunately the documents had been stored improperly in the storage room at Herklotzgasse, they were disordered, incomplete, scattered, deteriorated, crumbled and dirty. Besides, there were no inventories or finding aids.

<sup>3</sup> See "Überraschende Funde in den Katakomben des Stadttempels" in: Der Bund, Nr. 95, März 1986, p. 1, p. 5.

A process of sorting and categorizing the material began. Records relating to the National Socialist era were separated from other holdings. The Historical Commission of the Republic of Austria - implemented in 1998 - was granted access to the records in order to conduct historical research into the expropriation of Jewish assets in National Socialist Austria.

Some material obviously had heavily suffered from the storage situation. Some of the documents were actually falling apart. So the main question was: How to secure the information contained and how to prevent the material from further destroying itself?



Sorted and categorized archival material, 2004, Archive (photo by IKG)

In 2001/2002, the project of the restoration of the Archive started. After the conservational treatment, removing harmful staples and paperclips, the staff of the Archive organized, sorted, registered, inventoried and categorized the materials. In many cases – especially regarding card indexes - the documents had to be reorganized alphabetically or numerically. After the process of sorting and identifying, the holdings were wrapped into acid-free paper and stored in acid-free boxes.

With the financial support of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum the IKG could start to microfilm Holocaust-related records in Vienna in 2002 and in Jerusalem in 2003, about two million pages have been microfilmed since then.

### THE ARCHIVAL HOLDINGS IN VIENNA

The records of the IKG discovered in Vienna in 2000 and those deposited in Israel represent the worldwide largest preserved archive of a Jewish Community still

in existence. Besides they are the most extensive collection from the NS period regarding the IKG and its members.

### Registry Books



Burial Registers, Archive (photo by IKG)

The Archive in Vienna owns dozens of registry books concerning birth, marriage and death, the most important events in a person's life. Among them there are also records of marriage announcements or contracts, moreover announcements concerning birth or death. These archival holdings were microfilmed between 2004 and 2006 and are essential for genealogical researches as well as for restitution claims.

### Emigration Card Index

The most important documents are those dealing with social welfare, emigration and deportation. Immediately after the so-called "Anschluss" in March 1938 the IKG was temporarily shut down. After its reopening in May 1938, the Jewish Community was forced to organize emigration on the basis of its own files and records and in February 1941, when mass deportation started, the Jewish Community was forced to participate in the deportation of the remaining Jewish population.



Emigration Card Index, Archive (photo by IKG)

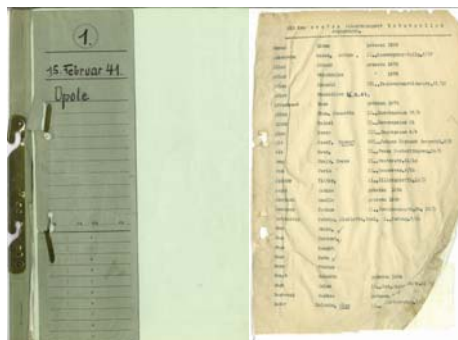
The most remarkable discovery was the Emigration Card Index. It is one of the most extensive holdings offering personal data of Austrian Jews from the years 1938/39. The Index was produced by the Community's Emigration Department and contains the names and essential information of about 118,000 Jews.<sup>4</sup>

There are three card indexes, one sorted numerically, one alphabetically and one arranged by professions. As I mentioned before, it is not known, why the cards remained in Vienna. All three indexes are incomplete but correspond to the emigration questionnaires that are stored in Jerusalem. Each head of household had to fill out a detailed questionnaire which included the applicant's name, address, birth date, birth place, profession, languages, financial circumstances and monthly income, as well as comprehensive emigration-related information, the ability to obtain the necessary documents, destination, relatives and friends living abroad and passport information.

The card indexes and files provide the basis for investigating the fate of Jews who were expelled or killed. In connection with compensation programs these files also help survivors and their descendants to assert claims for compensation and restitution of property. Furthermore they provide researchers and private persons with information about the fate of victims and survivors. Besides they are very important for tracing the rightful heirs or successors. In some cases it is possible to reconstruct every administrative step, from someone's first contact with the emigration office to when the family boarded a train or a ship to flee the German Reich.

### Deportation Lists

The Archive preserves the complete set of deportation lists: 45 folders containing each about 1,000 names of individuals that were deported to ghettos, concentration camps or death camps.



List of Deportation to Opole, Archive (photo by IKG)

The photo shows an example of a deportation list dated from February 15, 1941 to Opole, in the South of Lublin in Poland. At the end of March 1942 the prisoners of the ghetto in Opole were transported to Belzec and in May and October 1942 to Sobibor. Only 28 of the 2003 Viennese Jews survived.<sup>5</sup>

### Special Archival Document

Unlike other disbanded Jewish communities in Germany and Austria, the IKG Vienna continued to exist during the National Socialist era until the end of October 1942 when it was finally replaced by the "Ältestenrat der Juden in Wien" [Jewish Council of Elders].



Wall-Chart: "Jewish Migration from the Ostmark", Archive (photo by IKG)

Probably by order of the "Zentralstelle für jüdische Auswanderung" [Central Office for Jewish Emigration] in Vienna, the Technical Department of the Jewish Community of Vienna had to produce several large-sized wall-charts concerning "Jewish Migration from the Ostmark".

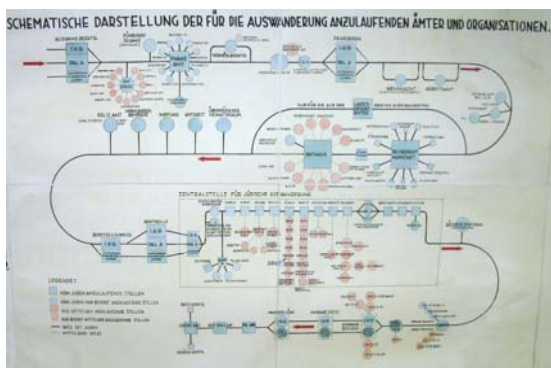
The wall-chart shows in a unique manner the expulsion of Jewish women and men from the

<sup>4</sup> See Report of the Vienna Jewish Community – A description of the activity of the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde Wien in the period from May 2, 1938 – December 31, 1939, p. 75.

<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.doew.at/projekte/holocaust/shoah/opole.html> (download May 2009).



territory of the former Austria – a horrible but perfect system developed by Adolf Eichmann and the "Zentralstelle".



Wall-Chart: "Jewish Migration from the Ostmark", detail, Archive (photo by IKG)

At the center of the wall-chart is a diagram, which might well be called the escape switchboard. It consists of the various agencies, NS authorities and government departments Jews had to turn to in the course of the forced emigration process. By centralizing expulsion, the NS rulers made sure that unpaid taxes such as the "Reichsfluchtsteuer" [emigration tax] and the "Judenvermögensabgabe" [tax payable on Jewish property] were paid by those "willing to emigrate." Organized looting and systematic expulsion became intertwined.

## RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AND FUTURE PLANS

Due to changes regarding the contents and a substantial reorganisation the Archive of the Jewish Community of Vienna was founded as a new department in January 2009.

At the moment the Archive is not open for the public. The archival holdings are initially accessible for the staff of the Department of Restitution Affairs of the Jewish Community. Besides we assist the members of the General Settlement Fund for Victims of National Socialism and the members of the Commission for Provenance Research in researching documents and personal data regarding compensation and restitution.

Furthermore the staff of the Archive tries to answer all kinds of requests relating to the archival holdings,

from researchers and scientists from all over the world as well as from descendants or relatives of Holocaust victims. We also support scientific projects of public and private communities and institutions. We regret that individual research requests cannot be answered immediately. There are currently waiting periods of up to two months.

Many projects are planned for the future. It is one of the most important interests of the Jewish Community of Vienna to rebuild the Archive and to continue with the proper storing and conservation of the archival material as well as to inventory, arrange and record such material. Furthermore we are working on standardizing archival tools and the practical utility of inventories. This work has not been completed yet but it is of high priority.

In this context accessibility of the Archive and usability of the holdings will be ensured.

Besides the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies (VWI) is a matter of particular importance to the IKG. It is planned to provide the VWI with substantial holdings of the Archive of the Jewish Community of Vienna as a loan.

## CONCLUSION

The Archive is the worldwide largest preserved archive of a Jewish Community.

The holdings of the Archive are of immense relevance not only regarding the research on the Shoah, but also regarding the history and development of the Jewish Community in Vienna and its members since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The holdings span three hundred years documenting the community's organisation, its religious, educational, scientific, cultural affairs and charitable facilities.

More than six decades after the Shoah it is evident that the Archive of the Jewish Community is not only the institutional memory of the Jewish community but also a place of remembrance and collective memory for future generations.