

And a Lurking League of Letter Openers: the Austrian Black Chamber.

Author: Marty Busse

Some context

Adolf Fischhof said in the 1850s that Austria depended on four armies: "A standing army of soldiers, a sitting army of bureaucrats, a kneeling army of priests and a sneaking army of snitches."

Actual quote is a bit different

- Bach hatte wohl zur Erhaltung des Einheitsstaates mchtige Schutzmittel aufgeboden: ein stehendes Heer von Soldaten, ein sitzendes Heer von Beamten, ein knieedes Heer von Priestern, und ein schleichendes Heer von Denuncianten; aber vergeblich!
- Bach created a powerful force for the protection of state power: a standing army of soldiers, a sitting army of bureaucrats, a kneeling army of priests, and a sneaking army of snitches: all in vain!

Another quote

- Uralt und doch ewig neu ist die geheime amtliche Forschung offiziller und privater Briefschaften.-Josef Karl Mayr
- Ancient and yet eternally new is the secret examination of official and private correspondence.

Some background

- Speaking mainly of era from 1714 to 1918.
- Ziffernkanzlei = Austrian letter opening and cryptanalysis office
- Ziffernkanzlei built on earlier foundations
- Some predecessor/ancestor in Holy Roman Empire
- Predecessor had to do with Thurn und Taxis post: details murky.

What I mean by Austria



Some research difficulties

- Postal interception and cryptography are always closely held historically
- When capitol falls or is threatened, closely held documents get destroyed
- Vienna threatened in 1529, 1683, Seven Years' War
- Vienna captured in 1805, 1809, 1938, 1945
- US bombing of Vienna destroyed documents in 1945
- Had to use secondary sources

- Major source of info: memoirs of Alois Cobelli
- Worked in Ziffernkanzlei from 1822 until closure in 1848.
- Memoirs destroyed in 1945 bombing
- But..source for Mayr and Fournier books
- Harald Hubatschke found enough for dissertation

- Initially Thurn und Taxis monopoly did this for Holy Roman Empire (HRE)
- Records of that limited, murky
- 1714, Charles VI established separate group
- Timing: Pragmatic Sanction

- Thurn und Taxis still handed over copied mail from HRE
- Initially concerned with diplomatic mail
- Started small: three employees
- By 1726, was concerned with foreign and domestic mail

- Set up new post-lodges at request: Prince Eugene, 1735
- Central office in Vienna handled cryptanalysis and analysis
- At one point, located in Stallburg palace

Stallburg Palace



Who worked there

- Highly educated people
- Typical employee knew several languages
- Stenographers (*Schnellschreiberen*)

A note on Stenography

- Lots of letters to copy: volume increased over time
- Shorthand made this much easier
- Stenographers at various sites, forwarded copies to Vienna
- Uncertain whether custom shorthand used

- Ziffernkanzlei worked hard to avoid postal delays
- Copying done in teams: sometimes 4 to a letter.
- Letters for copying came in four batches a day
- Work was done 24x7
- Interceptions based on lists of people and places to be watched

Problems

- Hard to recruit people
- Volume of work led to breakdowns
- Budget cuts hit salaries: man in cloak?
- Private couriers in Austria: Rothschild
- Metternich aimed to make government mail better than private

- Chancellor 1753-1793
- Expanded number of post-lodges
- Had post-lodges at every border crossing, places in HRE

- Allegedly ordered every letter opened
- International mail went through HRE, esp to and from Russia
- Some Russia to Russia mail went through HRE
- Used French Revolution to justify increased perustration

A passage from one of Kaunitz' letters I

Nos lettres passent, comme vous savez, par quelques bureaux de la domination Palatine; il ne seroit pas mauvais, ce me semble, de savoir sans bruit, par le canal de M' de Lilien, si les tenantposte ont assez de tems pour pouvoir les paquets? Et s'il donnoit les ordres necessaires, pour que sure cetter route on eut une attention particuliere sur les Stunden Zedel.

A passage from one of Kaunitz' letters II

As you know, our letters pass by Palitinate authority; it would not be bad to check, via Madame de Lilien, if they have enough time to open parcels? And it would be good if the necessary orders were given to pay special attention on this route to the Studen Zedel.

- Metternich greatly relied on postal interception
- Congress of Vienna was big event for Ziffernkanzlei
- As Chancellor, Metternich made for large increases in interception lists.

- Late 1847: postal interception scandal starts
- Becomes issue in the early months of 1848
- Postal interception one of the complaints
- Metternich resigns on March 13, 1848
- Ziffernkanzlei closure on April 4, 1848

The Ziffernkanzlei comes Bach

- Rebellions crushed in Austria, Hungary, other lands under Hapsburg rule.
- Baron von Bach becomes Minister of Interior
- Resumes postal interception
- However, not on scale of Metternich
- Bach fell from power in 1859, but his methods stayed

- 1861 Constitution meant new restrictions
- 1867 Dual Monarchy means other changes
- Appears postal interception more common and less restrained in Hungary
- Continued as regular practice until the fall of the Hapsburgs in 1918.
- Massive increase in communications caused other issues.

Questions?

References I



Adolf Fischhof

Oesterreich und die bürgerhaften seines bestandes: politische studie.

J. Klemm, 1869



A. Fournier

Die Geheimpolizei auf dem Wiener Kongress

F. Tempsky, 1913



Ludwig Kalmus

Weltgeschichte der Post : Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des deutschen Sprachgebietes

Göth, 1937



David Kahn

The Codebreakers

Simon and Schuster, 1996.

References II



Josef Karl Mayr

Metternichs geheimer Briefdienst : Postlogen und Postkurse

Verlag Adolf Holzhausens Nachfolger, 1935



Donald E. Emerson

Metternich and the Political Police: Security and Subversion in the Hapsburg Monarchy

Nijhoff, 1969



Fürst Wenzel Anton Kaunitz-Rietberg and Ignaz freiherr von Koch

Correspondance secrète entre le comte A. W.

Kaunitz-Rietberg, ambassadeur impérial a Paris et le baron Ignaz de Koch, secrétaire de l'impératrice Marie-Thérèse, 1750-1752

E. Plon, Nourrit, 1899

References III



E. Boutaric

Correspondance secrète inèdite de Louis XV sur la politique étrangère avec le Comte de Broglie, Tercier, etc: Et autres doc. relatifs au Ministère Secret. Publiés d'après les orig. conservés aux Archives de l'Empire et précédés d'une étude sur le caractère et la politique personnelle de Louis XV
Plon, 1866.



B.E. König

Schwarze Cabinette: Eine Geschichte der Briefgeheimniss-Entheiligungen
F. Luckhardt, 1899.



Ernst Keil

Die schwarzen Cabinete
Ernst Keil Verlag, 1863.



Alois Cobelli record

Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, 1868.



Manfred Klotz

Stenographie im Schwarzen Kabinett

Verband der Parlaments- und Verhandlungsstenografen e. V.,
2012.



David Kahn

Back when Spies Played By The Rules

New York Times, 2006.



Zhores A. Medvedev

Secrecy of Correspondence is Guaranteed by Law

MacMillan, 1975, page 79.

-  *James Westfall Thompson and Saul Kussiel Padover*
Secret Diplomacy: Espionage and Cryptography, 1500-1815
Padover, Jarrolds, 1937.
-  *David Alvarez*
Faded Lustre: Vatican Cryptography
Cryptologia, Volume 20, Number 2, page 106, April 1996.
-  *Wilhelm Flicke*
War Secrets in the Ether
translated by Ray Pettengill, National Security Agency, 1953
(declassified 2014).