Spoken text accompanying the PPT on Resources: Ministry Documents

Hello, my name is Nicolai Zimmermann, I work at the Third Reich Department or *Abteilung Deutsches Reich* of the German Federal Archives. In the following module of the EHRI online course Diplomatics of the Holocaust, we will take a closer look at ministry documents. First, I will introduce the different kinds of Nazi period documents that can be found in the files of the Reich ministries. We shall distinguish between incoming and outgoing external documents, which serve communication with the outside, and internal documents. Second, we shall look at practical cooperation within and between government agencies, hopefully shedding more light on work routines within the ministries.

We shall begin our introduction of the different types of external documents with a normal letter between a sender and receiver who are not part of the same hierarchy. The characteristic elements of such documents are well-known and have already been discussed in detail in this online course, for which reason I shall not be saying any more about the letter.

A subtype of the letter is the express letter or *Schnellbrief*. These are conspicuously outlined in red and the words *Schnellbrief* at the top is also outlined in red. These letters were to be dispatched quickly and given top priority upon receipt. The example here, an invitation from Heydrich to a meeting about the creation of bordellos for alien forced labourers, is from September 1941.

Another special form of letter is the circular, a *Rundschreiben* or *Rundbrief*. These documents were copied multiple times and sent simultaneously to multiple addressees. This example of a circular from January 1934 is from the Reich Ministry of the Interior and informs about the introduction of the so-called German greeting in all general official communication. It was sent to a large number of addressees, namely all high-level Reich agencies: the ministries, the state governors and the governments of all Reich territories. The advantage of a circular is that it enables the sender to inform many people of the same thing at the same time. When information is sent from one government agency to another that is lower down the ladder, it must be treated as a directive. In the military, it would be an order.

If the directive stems from a top-level Reich agency, it is called an *Erlaß* or decree. Here we see a decree issued by Himmler in September 1941, ordering the Gauleiter of the Wartheland, Arthur Greiser, to help deport 60,000 Jews to the Lodz Ghetto. Greiser was Himmler's subordinate in all of his many functions: as SS *Gruppenführer*, as state governor or *Reichsstatthalter*, as Commissioner for the Defence of the Reich or *Reichsverteidigungskommissar*, and as regional representative of Himmler in his capacity as Reich Commissioner for the Fortification of Germandom or *Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums*. What you see here is the draft of the decree, to which Himmler's adjutant, Rudolf Brandt, added directives. It is signed twice in green initials by the Chief of the Personal Staff of the Reichsführer SS, Karl Wolff.

Drafts and carbon copies are an interim form of written communication situated somewhere between external and internal communication; they are internal in that they are kept in the agency's files, at the same time they exhibit important characteristics of external communication. If you would like more information about the genesis of documents, please see the module on genetic diplomatics, which discusses just this question.

The final type of external document that I would like to present is the telegram. The main characteristic of these missives is the way in which they were sent, namely telegraphically, usually via teleprinters or telex machines, which made use of electric signals. These usually arrived in long, thin, strips of paper that were then cut up and glued onto a sheet of paper, as in this telegram from Heydrich to Himmler on Government President Uebelhoer's resistance to letting more Jews and so-called gypsies into the Lodz Ghetto. Such missives were characterized not only by what has come to be known as telegrammatic speech, or short sentences or sentence fragments containing only the most important information, but also by other elements of interest in diplomatics, such as an incoming stamp that includes not only the date, but also the exact time, as well as the lack of signature. Often, special forms were used for these texts.

The draft of a telegram on the other hand, usually looks like any other written communication, except for the directive to send it via teletype. The exact time of transmission is often also noted on the draft. It is normal for there to be a difference between the time of sending and the time of receival, because of the time needed for coding and decoding.

As a rule, internal documents differed from external documents in multiple ways. Formal greetings or endings, for example, were sometimes missing completely, while other elements not always found in external missives, such as the unit from which it originated, were in contrast required. These messages are usually short and to the point. A good example is this internal memo from April 1942 on the forwarding of a case regarding a conflict between the *Oberfinanzpräsident* or Chief Finance President and the *Reichsstatthalter* or state governor on the right of disposition of the apartments of Viennese Jews. Many internal documents were saved thanks to the regulation that all administrative acts must be traceable. Only when each main step taken is jotted down and documented is it possible to understand the history and stand of any case at any time by looking into its file. These steps were usually noted in short, handwritten file memos, in memos on conversations or in more comprehensive file notes. On the right, you see another internal missive from a clerk in Dr. Maedel's division in the Reich Ministry of Finance informing Dr. Schwarz that the original or *Urschrift* of two attached documents had been sent to the division headed by Herr Schlüter. However the documents were sent back to Maedel's division. The explanation of this act was handwritten on the document itself: Herr Schlüter's division, denoted internally by the Roman numerals IV.XI, did not believe it had authority in this case.

Written notes were also made and then added to the case file after all telephone calls or conversations deemed important to the progress of a case. The example shown here contains two notes on the confiscation of the Rothschilds' assets in Paris in March 1941. The first typed note is a transcription or *Abschrift* of two telephone calls announcing the delivery of a treasure trove from Paris to Berlin Grunewald. Six days later, a handwritten note was added, reporting that the boxes had been picked up and were now with Reichsmarschall Göring.

The conversation memo that follows is a summary of a meeting with the Reich Minister of Finance on the utilization of the stolen Rothschild jewels. Written notes were and are made about meetings with top-level officials in particular, so that the content of these talks is kept for the files.

If a clerk needed to inform not about one meeting, but about more complex and larger cases, they would usually write a file note. Within such missives, the state of a case can be summarized with an eye to particular aspects, and problems can be pinpointed. Such a note might eventually provide the basis for a decision or a retrospective written report of the completion of an oral assignment. It is not possible and probably also not necessary to differentiate clearly between file memos, conversation memos, and file notes, but as a rule it can be said that file notes are longer and deal with more complicated content. As an example, here is a multiple-paged note from the Reich Ministry of Finance in December 1942 on financing the deportation of Jews. As always, it is euphemistically referred to as a "measure to solve the Jewish question." With no thought to morality, the note discusses the technicalities of two means of financing the deportation of Jews, either as part of the regular budget or, the path preferred by the Reich Security Main Office, self-financed from Jewish assets. Often, file notes first summarize the case and then make a proposal that is presented to a superior for approval. Proposals can also be in the form of a draft, as in this office directive that combines a file note on the content, a draft for a letter, and a final, albeit short, directive; *zu den Akten* or add to file.

In part two of this presentation, we shall look more closely at cooperation within the divisions and units of the same government agency, or between different offices. Key to case management are the official directives that were added to every document and that, along with the more general Joint Rules of Procedure, determined how each document was handled. To concretize this procedure, we shall look at some typical directives and the individual steps of working procedure, namely the response or *Stellungnahme*, the co-signature or *Mitzeichnung* and the follow-up or *Wiedervorlage* before going on to look at how documents were moved from one government official to the next.

Directives are a steering mechanism for administrative procedures, especially decision-making processes. They are written on the document in question in the form of a numbered list of the individual steps to be taken. Each official responsible for a task confirms with his initials and the date that he has completed his step and passes the document on to the next person or office. The difficulty in understanding directives is that they are often handwritten and usually also abbreviated. For example the formulaic phrase for a request, *Mit der Bitte um*, is abbreviated "m.d.b.u."

There are many different directives. You have perhaps already seen "GG" for *Geschäftsgang* or workflow, which simply means that the document should follow the usual operative steps from the entry point to the registry office of a minister, state secretary, or head of a department or division, and finally to the clerk who formulates the response. Other typical directives that steer cooperation in handling a case include the order to file a document after it has been processed, "zdA" or *zu den Akten*, as well as the directives we shall discuss in more detail below, *Stellungnahme*, or a demand for a response and the directives for co-signature, *Mitzeichnung*, and follow-up, *Wiedervorlage*.

Whoever writes a file note can also use a directive to determine who should read the note with a simple *zur Kenntnisnahme*, or "for your perusal." For example, the telephone memo from 1943 that Hitler wished for smoother writing paper was, following the directives on the memo, sent to the Chief of the Reich Chancellery for his perusal. The initials confirm that everyone who was supposed to see the memo in fact did. When a document has gone through all desired steps and is ready to be filed, the directive "z.d.A." or *zu den Akten* is given.

In difficult cases, more than one unit in an organisation or even from other agencies were usually consulted. This was instructed by means of a request for a response, or *Bitte um Stellungnahme*, as in this decision on financing the creation of bordellos for foreign forced labourers. The responses can be anywhere from a few words to entire pages with detailed explanations, as you can see in these two responses to the same request. On the right is the response from Gerhard Meyer's division, on the left the response from the general division of the Reich Ministry of Finance, written in Fall 1942, on the question of financing deportations from the Reich to the General Government.

When a government official desires the support of one or more divisions before making a decision that could have bearing on their authority, he can ask for their co-signature. With it, they accept co-responsibility for the proposal and agree to its content and form. At the same time, they are given the opportunity to propose minor changes. As an example, I have photographed this communication from February 1938 between the Reich Chancellery and the Reich Ministry of Finance on making provisions for Hjalmar Schacht's possible dual salary as Reich Minister and President of the Reichsbank. In the Reich Chancellery an answer to Schacht was drafted that was approved by everybody up to Lammers himself as we see here on the left. Before being sent, it was also to be presented in the original to the Minister of Finance to respond and co-sign. In the Ministry of Finance, the draft was stamped with the date of receipt and all top-level officials confirmed having seen it: the minister in green, State Secretary Reinhard in brown, and the heads of the two divisions in blue. The minister also added a green cross, a directive that he wanted to personally sign the answer, which he did, as we can see in the partial photo of the answering letter on the right. That letter includes not only the co-signatures and a declaration of consent, but also a new proposal for the wording, which the Reich Chancellery (marked in red) added to the first draft of the letter to Schacht.

In our next example from the Reich Security Main Office, a special element was added to ensure broad support: a *Zeichnungsleiste* or bar for the initials of every unit mean to approve the letter's proposal, namely that regional SD offices should be required to subscribe to various Jewish newspapers. This bar is a horizontal line with the Roman numerals of the units that should approve the document, moving up the organisational ladder from right to left. The head of each unit put their initial and date under their unit number in their respective colours, showing that they stood behind the proposal. In this case, we can also see what happens when a government official is not in office. Every public official has a permanent proxy who stands in for the official by adding his own initial, but in the colour of the person he is substituting. To indicate that it was not signed by the official himself, he puts "i.V. " in front of his initials, for *in Vertretung* or "on behalf of."

There is a further directive on this document, a follow-up directive, or *Wiedervorlage*. A *Wiedervorlage* determines that the registrar must show the document to the person in charge after a certain amount of time has passed or on a certain date. Such directives were and are often used to remind the official to check whether a particular event had taken place after a certain date, for example, whether an answer had been received or to review the stand of a case when no final decision had been made. In our example, on July 15, 1937 the official was to check whether all offices had sent in a report that the orders had been carried out. To ensure follow-up, the registry office makes a note of the desired document and the date and often confirms having followed the directive by writing "not." for *notiert* on the document next to the directive. Usually, a note is also made that the follow-up took place.

Such follow-ups can be repeated as often as desired, for example when the reason for wanting to check on a case is still extant. These two documents are examples of multiple follow-ups. On the left is a missive on a chief government inspector transferred to the office of the Reich Chancellery, confirming that she had been checked on every six months during her three-year probation period. The document on the right is about the Rothschild jewels discussed above, which remained with Göring instead of arriving as planned at the *Reichshauptkasse* or main bursar of the Reich.

Now that we have looked at the division of labour in the Reich administration, we shall turn to the question of how these many documents were transported within the agencies. It should not be forgotten that each of these missives travelled long distances, from the entry point to the superior officers, to the clerks who handled them and to the officers who responded to or co-signed them and finally to the chancellery, the outgoing post office and the registry office. To this end, all administrative tasks, letters, memos and other written documents were placed into floating files with the names of one or more addressees, usually agency clerks, and brought to the addressees by delivery clerks. The delivery clerks usually went to every office multiple times a day to check the out-box and fill the in-box. When an officer had completed his task, he would cross out his name on the grid printed on the front cover and jot down, if necessary, the next station. The last place all documents went to was the registry office. These file folders were also colour-coded to indicate the degree of urgency. For example in the Reich Ministry of Finance, normal floating files were grey, while red folders were for immediate attention and yellow signalled "urgent."

I hope that this presentation has given you a better understanding of the types of ministry documents and the concomitant workflows. Thank you for your attention.

Translation: Laura Radosh