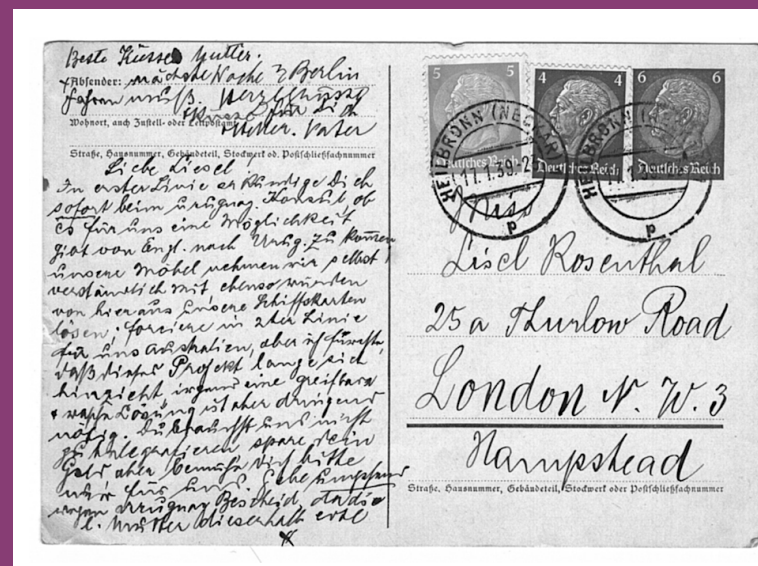




Family letters as a source II: Father and daughter discuss emigration

This postcard is part of a private correspondence which Liesel – by then Mrs. Alice Schwab – has put in boxes and stored away sometime in 1948. Her daughter, Baroness and Rabbi Julia Neuberger, opened the boxes in 2012, and together we started reading. Julia Neuberger allowed me to write the story of her mother's emigration from Heilbronn, Germany to London. The documents are still private property but will be handed over to the Heilbronn city archives. They tell – if we are able to make them speak – of a Jewish wine merchant family's life in a small Southwest German town where they had felt at home for generations. With the Nazi's rise to power everything changed, and it was the daughter Liesel (Alice) Rosenthal who, with her decision to leave Germany in 1937, acted as a kind of pioneer for her family. She arrived in England through the Domestic Servant scheme, stayed with a family in Birmingham, but soon moved to London. Here she built up a new circle of friends and acquaintances and developed a degree of independence – her own emancipation – that was worrying for her parents. It took Ludwig and Hermine Rosenthal a long time to realize that they also had to emigrate and that they now depended on their daughter. The postcard from 17 January 1939 shows that they tried to make their own plans (Uruguay or Australia), that they still hoped to keep their possessions, and that they looked for help from Jewish aid organizations and foreign consulates in Germany. In the end, Liesel who had begun working for the German Jewish Aid Society in London's Bloomsbury House managed to find guarantors and to bring her parents, as well as her younger brother Helmut (later Jack), to security in



Postcard from Ludwig Rosenthal to his daughter Liesel, 17 January 1939

England. The source offers an insight into family and gender relations in a time of crisis, but also a close look into the cultural practice of emigration. As a personal document, it needs to be contextualized with the political situation both in Germany and in Britain, with the approaching war and the increasing persecution of Jews in Europe – at the same time, the study of sources like this allows us to give such abstract notions a human face.

Notes

Joachim Schlör, *Liesel, it's time for you to leave.' Von Heilbronn nach England. Die Flucht der Familie vor der nationalsozialistischen Verfolgung.* Heilbronn: Verlag des Stadtarchivs. English translation: *Escaping Nazi Germany. One Woman's Emigration from Heilbronn to England.* London: Bloomsbury Academic 2020 (forthcoming).



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