

RG-50.862: EHRlich COLLECTION - SUMMARY TRANSCRIPTION OF AUDIO FILES

Introduction by Anatol Steck, Project Director in the International Archival Programs Division of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum:

These are English summary transcription notes of the digitized interviews recorded by Leonard and Edith Ehrlich in the 1970s as part of their research for their manuscript about the Jewish community leadership in Vienna and Theresienstadt during the Holocaust titled "Choices under Duress." These notes are intended as a finding aid for the researcher; researchers are strongly encouraged to consult the digitized recordings for accuracy and authenticity and not to rely solely on the notes. As much as possible, persons mentioned by name in the interviews are identified and described in the text; however, as persons are often referred to in the interviews only by last name, their identification is sometimes based on the context in which their names appear within the interview (especially in cases where different persons share the same last name). In case of some of the longer interviews, including the interview with Benjamin Murelstein, unless specifically stated at the beginning of each segment by Leonard Ehrlich, it is not always clear whether a particular interview segment continues in the correct order or, in case the interview was recorded over several days, a particular interview segment continues where the interview concluded on the previous day. It is possible that the individual interview segments are not in their correct order. Leonard Ehrlich and Edith Ehrlich are identified in the summary notes as LE and EE.

RG-50.862.0023

Length: 01 hour:33 minutes:48 seconds

Sound quality: very good

Interview conducted and recorded in the 1970s by **Leonard and Edith Ehrlich** (henceforth: LE and EE) in German with **Hans Günther Adler**, author of *Theresienstadt 1941-1945. Das Antlitz einer Zwangsgemeinschaft*. Dr. Adler's wife **Bettina Gross Adler** participates in the interview. Interview appears to take place in the Adlers' private residence in London. During the interview the sounds of coffee or tea being served can be overheard and Adler gets up several times while talking to retrieve books from a shelf in the back of the room. At one point in the interview, the Adlers' son **Jeremy Adler**, enters the room and is introduced to the Ehrlichs. Summary transcription follows [explanatory and editorial comments are placed in square brackets.]

H. G. Adler states that he was deported from Theresienstadt on October 12, 1944 and arrived in Auschwitz on October 14, 1944. From there he was transferred to Halberstadt. Wonders about LE's and EE's motivation to conduct research about **Josef Löwenherz** and **Benjamin Murelstein**. LE and EE turn off the tape recorder to explain their project.

[00:02:19] Interview resumes with Adler reading a passage from a "little essay" that he wrote about **Leo Baeck** soon after his death and that he deems important for the Ehrlich's research: "Jeder grosse Mensch repräsentiert durch sein Leben und Wirken die gesamte Menschheit doch in seiner persönlichen Eigenart. Er steht für etwas da: für seinen Gott, für sein Volk, für seine Überzeugung, für seinen Auftrag. Leo Baecks Auftrag war der Dienst an seinem Volke, an

seiner weit gespannten Gemeinde in dunklester Zeit. [...]" [see: "Leo Baeck in Theresienstadt" by H. G. Adler in *Worte des Gedenkens für Leo Baeck*, edited by Eva Reichmann]. EE asks whether Adler knew Baeck. Adler replies that of course he knew him and that he knew him pretty much from the "very beginning." LE asks for clarification what he means by the "very beginning." Adler clarifies that he met Baeck at latest in March 1943. LE asks when Adler arrived in Theresienstadt. Adler: February 8, 1942. States that Baeck arrived around January 27, 1943. Adler briefly talks about when Baeck left Theresienstadt after liberation and flew on an RAF plane to London. Adler describes how he received his documents back from Baeck, how he still has the old tattered briefcase which contained the documents, how Baeck also gave him cigarettes because at the time Adler still smoked. Referring to Baeck he says: "Also, ganz, ganz lieb." How he remained in close contact with Baeck until shortly before his death in 1956. LE asks about how familiar Baeck was with Adler's draft manuscript. Adler states that everything he wrote about the members of the Council of Elders he first discussed at length with Baeck. How they discussed in detail Murrelstein, **Paul Eppstein**, and **Jakob Edelstein** ("diese drei Steine") including how Baeck treated Eppstein, that he has a "very interesting anecdote" in this regard which he intends to tell LE and EE a bit later. Briefly talks about Baeck's teaching position in Cincinnati, his travels to Israel and Germany. LE asks what Adler's position was in Theresienstadt. Adler replies that it is completely uninteresting, that he was nothing but an average prisoner. LE states that this is why he is asking, i.e. how close or how far was he, Adler, from the Council of Elders. Adler discusses his contacts with the Council of Elders, also through his late wife, a bacteriologist, who "remained behind in Auschwitz." Mentions that there were two, at times three, doctors who were on the Council, in particular **Dr. Erich Munk** whom Adler calls "a very weird character" ("eine sehr merkwürdige Figur"). He describes Dr. Munk as "very smart, very indifferent ("kaltschnäuzig"), very dictatorial." Describes the sign Dr. Munk had hanging on the door to his room: "Hier wohnt aber amtiert nicht Dr. Munk." Describes Dr. Munk as possessing an incredible sense of humor. Gives an example. Continues to state how Dr. Munk took great pride in being incorruptible and how this carries a special sense of meaning within the camp context. Explains what he means by that, i.e. the impossibility for a decent person to remain guilt-free when having to function under such a system. That he discussed this in *Der verwaltete Mensch*. Discusses Baeck's relationship with 'guilt entanglement' ("Schuldverstrickung"). Gives practical examples. Adler mentions a certain Mr. Kantor who was a member of the "Transportkommission" and who is still alive. LE asks whether the Council made the determination "who goes and who stays." Adler responds that it was much more complicated than that. Describes how only the Judenälteste or his designated representative was permitted to approach and talk to the Nazi administration. How Baeck thus did not even have the possibility to communicate with the Nazi administration. Gives examples of how individuals who had been placed on a transport went in desperation to see the Nazi commandant and how they were beaten as a result, that the same happened to his late wife. How the "half Jew" Löwenstein [**Dr. Karl Löwenstein**] had the greatest success in dealing with the Nazi administration and that Adler maintained contact with him until his death. Mentions that Löwenstein lived in Australia after the war and then returned to Europe to settle in Berlin and that Löwenstein has two sons and several grandchildren in Australia. Adler talks about Löwenstein's last months of his life. Mentions that Löwenstein is one of the most despised figures of Theresienstadt but that he was of the highest integrity but a complete fool. That he

was a "Don Quixote." LE asks whether Adler has read what Löwenstein writes in his autobiography about the members of the Council of Elders. Subject turns to Löwenstein in Minsk. LE, EE, and Adler discuss **Wilhelm Kube**. Adler mentions again his book *Der verwaltete Mensch*. LE calls it an overpowering book ("ein überwältigendes Buch"). Adler responds that an acquaintance of his, "an old lady," visited him recently from Chicago and wanted to know what is in the book and he read passages from it to her and he realized during this occasion the he likes the book because "one does not always like one's own books."

[00:19:41 recording interrupts]

[00:19:42 recording resumes]

Discussion resumes with Murrelstein's last official days in Theresienstadt. Adler mentions that Murrelstein sued him for libel ("Verleumdung") over the 2nd edition of his book. [NOTE: Murrelstein mentions this in his interview] Adler discusses the case at length, how lawyer **Dr. Hans Reichmann**, the husband of **Eva Reichmann**, helped him. LE asks Adler whether it is correct that in the introduction to the 2nd edition of his book, Adler takes back the assertion that Rahm had the assistance of Murrelstein in compiling the deportation lists. Adler affirms that this is more or less the case and asks for the tape recorder to be switched off.

[00:23:30 recording interrupts]

[00:23:31 recording resumes]

Discussion resumes with an anecdote told by Adler of a personal interaction between him and **Adolf Eichmann** in the Theresienstadt book depository/library. How Eichmann stood on a ladder to retrieve a book and Adler steadied the ladder; how Eichmann turned to him and demanded to know what he was doing and how Adler replied that he was making sure that Eichmann did not lose his balance and fall; that Eichmann was silent in bafflement by this reply. How Murrelstein reacted when Adler told him about the incident by telling him "Seinen Feind soll man nicht stützen." EE states that Murrelstein had also mentioned this anecdote. Adler remarks that the anecdote might also be described in a book by a certain Mr. Baker whom he had assisted with his book project. LE wants Adler's reaction about "this other book" by Friedlander [most likely **Albert H. Friedlander**] by the title *Teacher of Theresienstadt*. They discuss the book. LE asks about an episode in the book in which Baeck is described as pulling a wagon. LE wants to know if it is true. Adler states that it is true but the context in which it is described is somewhat misleading, others in Theresienstadt had done the same, especially in the beginning. LE states that this episode made the book untrustworthy for him because, as far as he knows, prisoners over 65 did not have to perform such labor. Adler differentiates and explains why older prisoners voluntarily performed labor even if they were not forced to do so. Adler explains how Theresienstadt was different from a regular camp. Goes into detail about different age groups. Talks about Baeck's role in Theresienstadt. LE wants to know what Baeck knew about Eppstein and Murrelstein. Adler explains Baeck's criticism of Eppstein. References Lederer's book about Theresienstadt [see: **Zdenek Lederer**, *Ghetto Theresienstadt*], retrieves the book from a shelf and shows LE and EE a statistical compilation in the book. States that Lederer's book is the only other book on Theresienstadt besides his own book that he recommends everyone should read, especially for someone who wants to get a quick sense about Theresienstadt or someone who does not read German. LE states that Lederer is living in London. Adler calls Lederer "a nice fellow" ("ein netter Kerl"), "no mental heavyweight but truly a decent person" ("kein Geistesgewicht aber durchaus ein anständiger Mensch"). Talk

continues about Lederer's book and its influence on **Raul Hilberg** and **Hannah Arendt**. EE asks Adler whether he has communicated with Hilberg. Adler responds that he has not and that he prefers not to.

[00:32:43 recording interrupts]

[00:32:44 recording resumes]

Discussion resumes with what a certain Prof. Botterweck [?] told Adler about Murrelstein. How Adler met Prof. Botterweck [?] at a conference in Aachen sponsored by the Gesellschaft für Christlich-Jüdische Zusammenarbeit and how they spoke about Murrelstein, that Prof. Botterweck [?] told him that he had taken a seminar in rabbinical studies with Murrelstein in Theresienstadt and how he had shared with Murrelstein in confidence and in private ("unter vier Augen") his opinions about the Nazi administration; that a short time later the Gestapo came to pick him up, how Prof. Botterweck [?] told Adler "Too bad that you did not know this when Murrelstein gave you so much trouble." LE wants to know how Prof. Botterweck [?] can be sure that it was Murrelstein who delivered him to the Gestapo, Adler replies that according to Prof. Botterweck [?] the Gestapo knew details that only Murrelstein could have known from their conversation, that Adler believes this story to be true. Adler asks the Ehrlichs to only quote from the 2nd edition which is much more correct, especially the 7th chapter in the first edition has errors because of the lack of materials that he had access to only later. Talk continues about Prof. Botterweck [?].

[00:38:29 recording interrupts]

[00:38:30 recording resumes]

Discussion continues with LE posing the question what could the Council of Elders have done differently. Adler talks about the ethical and philosophical as well as societal aspects of being part of a "Schuldgemeinschaft" ("collective guilt community"). LE asks Adler about Leo Baeck in the exempted context of not having been a member of the Council. Adler: Leo Baeck knew what was happening in the East but he did not share this knowledge. LE: How do you know that? What is the proof? Why do you believe this? Adler: because these people (i.e. he clarifies that he means returnees from Auschwitz in the year 1943 who reported about gassings to the Council of Elders in Theresienstadt) were hoping that by doing so they would stimulate a sense of resistance. LE expresses his disbelief because the Nazis would not have allowed anyone with such knowledge to return and he deems it impossible for someone to be able to escape Auschwitz and to smuggle their way into Theresienstadt. Adler: Baeck was informed even before he arrived in Theresienstadt, that he had learned what was happening from survivors from Minsk, but he did not tell anyone. Adler states that there were so-called messengers who had been able to escape from Auschwitz with the help of an SS man and were able to smuggle themselves into Theresienstadt. EE asks whether these messengers remained in Theresienstadt. Adler replies that they only stayed for one or two days and then left again. Those who knew for sure [what was happening to the Jews in the East] were, according to Adler, Eppstein, Edelstein, Zucker, Baeck, but not Löwenstein [Adler first mentions Löwenstein, then corrects himself], and a couple more, five to six people only. LE asks what about Murrelstein. Adler states that Murrelstein knew, that he knew only too well, that he now pretends that he did not know, that he writes in his memoirs that he did not know initially and only found out in the Fall of 1944.

[00:46:32 recording interrupts]

[00:46:50 recording resumes]

Adler poses the rhetorical question how can we, if we find ourselves in an extreme situation, accept or reject truths which we are not experiencing ourselves. Philosophical argumentation follows. Adler mentions the case of survivors who had escaped from Treblinka who were met with disbelief and scorn by the inmates of the Warsaw ghetto. "Der Drang des Menschen das Schrecklichste nicht zu glauben, ist sehr, sehr gross." Talks about a friend from his youth who was a doctor, "a clever man," who knew that those who were deported from Lodz died in the East but who believed that they had been electrocuted in a bath when in reality they were killed in the mobile gas vans. Gives an example from *Der verwaltete Mensch*. Adler gives LE and EE a book as a parting gift and asks them whether they are planning to be in England again and that it will be his pleasure to meet with them again to continue the conversation. EE asks him "one last question" about **Hannah Arendt** and her assertion that the Jews should not have participated in any way. Adler gets up to retrieve something he wrote, mutters to himself that "it is bad when one writes too many things" as he can't find what he is looking for; eventually he finds what he was looking for, an article by the title "Was weiss Hannah Arendt über Eichmann und die Endlösung" that was published on November 20, 1964 in the *Jüdische Allgemeine* (Düsseldorf) and in which he criticizes Hannah Arendt and her book. Reads a large portion of the article aloud. LE and EE ask Adler about a couple of books by other authors that were published in response to Hannah Arendt and what his opinion is about each one. Discussion continues. LE and EE ask about **Jony Moser** and that they are about to travel to Vienna to meet with him. Adler states that Moser is a personal friend of his and asks LE and EE to greet him on his behalf. Adler recommends that in Vienna they also meet with a lady whom he refers to as "Dr. Kramer" who is originally from Berlin, one of the few who came to Theresienstadt from the East. He refers to Dr. Kramer as a remarkable person. Adler asks LE and EE where else they will travel to. LE: Ludwigsburg, Bad Arolsen [i.e. International Tracing Service], Czechoslovakia. Adler wants to know where in Czechoslovakia. LE: first to Prague to get permission to see the court records of Litomerice. They discuss the various trials, i.e. trials of Seidl, Rahm, and Burger. Adler talks about the research he conducted immediately after the war. LE asks whether Adler knows more about the post-war investigation of Murrenstein. Adler responds: almost nothing, Löwenstein would have known a lot about that. LE mentions that Löwenstein has said "horrendous" things about Murrenstein. Adler responds: "Look, a Don Quixote can only say horrendous things." Refers to Löwenstein as a man of integrity. Gives a couple of examples. LE asks Adler whether he knows if there ever was an "honor court" convened in Prague to judge Murrenstein. Adler replies that as far as he knows nothing came of it, he thinks that the Czech contingent was afraid that Murrenstein might know too much about them and that this would come out. Recalls how the members of the Prague contingent of survivors, including those who had emigrated to the United States, refused to stand by the statements that they had made to him about Murrenstein after Adler published his book. LE asks whether this is the case because they had no direct knowledge of the events they recalled to Adler. Adler responds that they did have direct knowledge. EE asks whether Adler knows a journalist by the name of **Theodor Horowitz**. Adler does not. EE then asks whether he knows **Rudolf Bunzel**. Adler replies that he does but that Bunzel is unremarkable, "no shining light," an accountant who, nevertheless, "sat at the source" so "he might have overheard this or that." LE states that while Bunzel is "no shining light" he is a correct person. Adler: a typical

accountant. LE: Bunzel was in the financial department in Theresienstadt and arrived in Theresienstadt with the Aufbaukommando "AK1". Adler: Friedmann from Vienna was the head [i.e. **Desider Friedmann**]. LE states that it is getting late but he still has many questions. Mrs. Adler and Dr. Adler tell him not to worry. Adler continues: after Friedmann "had to go", Bunzel took over as head and he surely will be a good source for "the liquidation period." LE goes back to a statement Adler made earlier about whether the Council of Elders could have strengthened the will among the ghetto population to engage in resistance. Adler responds that there is not much that could have been done in this regard. Adler examines the question whether resistance in Theresienstadt would even have been possible, the practical preconditions for resistance. LE asks what Adler thinks about the Zionist view that resistance cells existed [in Theresienstadt]. Adler states that there are all sorts of theories in this regard, also among the Communists. He credits Löwenstein for training the Jewish police with such discipline that they might have been able to take over Theresienstadt during a "critical time", even though they were armed only with batons. Adler states that there were several resistance attempts, including among the fire brigade. However, due to the presence of spies many of the individuals who were involved in these attempts did not survive. Löwenstein's staff also was deported en masse. LE reminds Adler that he has critics in terms of his treatment of resistance in Theresienstadt. Adler responds that there are many such critics, that there are some who even call him a fascist. LE remarks that he has not read this. Adler clarifies that this was published in the Czech language and not in German. EE states that "the Zionists do not like you either." Adler agrees that "they do not like me at all" that one of them has written about him that his friends were "the gentlemen of the SS." Bettina Gross Adler clarifies that this statement was actually made by the Czechs and not the Zionists. Adler states that this is correct, that this was written by the Czech Jews, and that the Zionists, on the other hand, criticize him for glorifying Löwenstein. Adler says that he has always maintained that "all of them [i.e. members of the Council of Elders] could be humane although with Murrenstein I have some reservations." Ponders whether Murrenstein survived because he was "so ice cold." Discusses his theory [he acknowledges that he was no longer in Theresienstadt during the final phase] of Murrenstein's knowledge of the gas chambers and that Murrenstein was allegedly told by the Nazi administration that there will be no gas chambers built at Theresienstadt. "Hier machen wir keine Gaskammern." LE mentions that he and EE intend to pay an unannounced visit to Ing. Vogel [i.e. **Jiří Vogel**]. Adler describes Vogel as a Communist, intelligent, a good former compatriot who, towards the end of the war, was in charge of the camp's liquidation as the last, so-called "chief." Adler recounts how, when he went to see Baeck to pick up his briefcase, he also met with Vogel and made a negative remark to him about Murrenstein; how Vogel gave him an "enraged look" and demanded to know "what do you have against the man." Adler states that with this he had had enough but who knows, maybe Vogel will talk differently to the Ehrlichs about Murrenstein. LE asks about the circumstances of Murrenstein's arrest. Adler replies that he does not know the circumstances other than the fact the Murrenstein and Löwenstein at first were held under arrest inside the former ghetto until the start of the formal investigation. Adler states that he sent in a long statement written in Czech in support of Löwenstein. Bettina Gross Adler chimes in: "We liked him very, very much, really very, very much indeed. A wonderful man." Adler agrees: "Er war ein sehr, sehr prächtiger Mann." Calls him a fool but a wonderful man. Adler states that Löwenstein treated Adler's son like his own

grandchild. The Adlers, talking over each other, both affirm that Löwenstein would send them care packages from Australia after the war although he had only little as he worked in a factory. Adler adds that they were not the only recipients of Löwenstein's care packages, he sent them to many others. They go on praising Löwenstein. LE states that he was truly a Don Quixote figure. Adler asks him not to print this but that he agrees. LE mentions that he has never met Löwenstein but that it appears from what Löwenstein has written that he thought that the Nazis would regard him as an authority figure. Adler responds that it is a fact that Edelstein would approach Löwenstein for "sensitive missions," asking him to go to the Nazi administration instead of himself. Bettina Gross Adler states that there was a good reason for this due to Löwenstein's exalted former position, LE states that Löwenstein had been the former aide-de-camp of the heir to the throne ("Adjutant des Thronfolgers"). Bettina Gross Adler: "He knew how to talk to these people." Adler: he spoke to them in a normal way, not like Edelstein who had the "mannerisms of the Galician Jews" ("anschmeichelnd"). Adler goes on to state how Eppstein and Edelstein were both broken individuals but how Zucker was not, that Zucker had a strong personality [most likely **Otto Zucker**, b. October 3, 1892 in Prague; d. September 29, 1944 in Auschwitz]. How he, Adler, could recount several nice things about Zucker but that he never got a real sense of Zucker's personality although Zucker was the most cultured of all of them [i.e. members of the Council of Elders], that he owned a fantastic collection of records which he, as a member of the Council of Elders, had been permitted to bring with him. Adler mentions that Eppstein was allowed to even bring his grand piano. Adler states that unfortunately some like Eppstein started to behave like a "Viceroy." But not Löwenstein. Adler recounts a story which Löwenstein liked to tell and which he, Adler, believes to be true: how Löwenstein went to Bergl [i.e.: **Karl Bergl**] who had his pistol lying on his desk and how Löwenstein, with a small gesture of his hand, told Bergl to put the weapon away ("Das stecken sie mal ein.") and how Bergl complied. Adler about Löwenstein: "Er hat sich völlig normal benommen." "Alle anderen mussten stehen, er hat sich gesetzt." EE asks how come Löwenstein was imprisoned [i.e. deported]. Adler calls it an act of vengeance and that it would take a long time to explain, that it had something to do with the "Bekennniskirche" [i.e. the Lutheran Church], that he was denounced as a Jew of mixed heritage, that he was deported to Minsk where Kube [i.e. **Wilhelm Kube**] noticed him as a former fellow member of a German fraternity and gave him the command over the ghetto police ("Ghettowache"). How, at the order of Lammers [likely **Hans Heinrich Lammers**] Löwenstein was sent back from the Minsk ghetto to Central Europe.

[01:27:45] **Jeffrey Adler** enters the room. Adler introduces him to LE and EE ("Das ist mein Sohn, Germanist.") Bettina Gross Adler tells her son: "Wir reden grad vom Löwenstein." LE, EE and Jeffrey Adler exchange pleasantries.

Interview continues.

Adler recounts [with some amusement] how Löwenstein ended up in Vienna where he knew no one and "the poor fool" ("der arme Narr") went to see the Jewish Community administration which reacted with panic believing that Löwenstein might be a spy and immediately went to report to Brunner [i.e. **Alois Brunner**] who had Löwenstein arrested. LE asks when this took place. Adler: around June 1942. Brunner reported to Berlin and Berlin decided that Löwenstein knew too much and therefore the decision was made to deport him to Theresienstadt, but not on a regular deportation transport but instead as a single deportee ("Einzelzuwachs"). Thus,

Löwenstein was transferred in a regular train, in the 2nd class compartment with only his toothbrush and no other luggage, under the watch of a Gestapo officer to Theresienstadt. Adler recounts that Löwenstein had lost most of teeth due to having been badly beaten in Minsk. Immediately upon arrival in Theresienstadt he was placed under solitary arrest [Adler clarifies that Löwenstein was placed in Jewish arrest and not in the so-called SS bunker]. Because of his physical injuries Löwenstein soon met Adler's late wife in her capacity as doctor and hematologist. Löwenstein spent approximately one month in solitary confinement. He did receive 'SS food' ("SS Essen") which was the best one could have under the circumstances. Then Löwenstein was brought to the commandant's office where he was told that Berlin had decided that he should take over the ghetto police ("Ghettowache"). Adler states that the members of the Council of Elders continued to be extremely suspicious of Löwenstein. LE asks whether the Nazi commandant's office expected Löwenstein to be a spy. Adler and Mrs. Adler say that Löwenstein had told them often that this was indeed the case but that he had refused with the words [Adler paraphrases]: "Die Nachrichten von einem Spion schätze ich, aber den Spion verachte ich." Adler states that this [i.e. the suspicions that Löwenstein was a spy] are the reason that a Jewish court convicted him for abuse of power ("Amtsmissbrauch") and sentenced Löwenstein to six months arrest.

LE and EE thank Dr. Adler and Mrs. Adler for the interview and their patience and remark that they "must already be very hungry because we kept you so long but we only had this one opportunity and it was so interesting." Adler reiterates that he will be pleased to be of further assistance, as needed.

[01:33:48 recording ends]