

**Brigitte Lohff, Hinderk Conrads.** *From Berlin to New York: Life and Work of the Almost Forgotten German-Jewish Biochemist Carl Neuberg (1877-1956)*. Translated by Anthony Mellor-Stapelberg. *Geschichte und Philosophie der Medizin: History and Philosophy of Medicine*. Stuttgart: Steiner, 2007. 294 pp. Illustrations. ISBN 978-3-515-09062-9.



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## No Longer Forgotten

Brigitte Lohff's and Hinderk Conrads's monograph is a meticulously researched account of the life and scientific achievements of almost forgotten German-Jewish biochemist, Carl Neuberg (1877-1956). The book follows Neuberg from Hannover, his city of birth, to Berlin, where he did his most important work, to Amsterdam, Jerusalem, and Los Angeles (stops while fleeing National Socialist Germany beginning in 1939), and finally to New York in 1941. The book seeks to rescue Neuberg, who was nominated for the Nobel Prize twenty-five times yet never received it, from being forgotten, or at least passed over, by present-day biochemists as well as scholars of the history of medicine. One of the book's major strengths is its combination of general readability with a strong focus on the minutiae of Neuberg's life, such as how spacious his villa in Berlin-Dahlem was, how many cats lived with the Neuberg family, or how many domestic helpers they employed. These apparently trivial details allow the reader to reconstruct the life of a German-Jewish scientist. Neuberg was part of the uppermost echelons of German academia during its heyday, from the

first years of the twentieth century to the early years of the Third Reich, when he and many other scholars with a similar religious-ethnic background were first forced out of academia, and then out of the country (if they were lucky).

The book is structured topically and chapters focusing exclusively on Neuberg's work interrupt the biographical narrative. His work for the *Biochemische Zeitschrift*, a journal he conceived and edited from 1906 to 1936, when Springer Publishing House forced Neuberg to give up his post as editor, thus receives particular attention, as does Neuberg's work for the Kaiser Wilhelm Society and later on, the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Biochemistry (KWI). These chapters show unequivocally why the book provides a much-needed reminder of Neuberg's importance for the field of biochemistry: As editor of the *Biochemische Zeitschrift*, Neuberg oversaw and supported the publication of papers by no fewer than twenty-nine Nobel Prize-winners in both medicine and chemistry.

One of the most gripping parts of the book deals with Neuberg's semi-hidden existence in Nazi Germany between the time he was forced out of the KWI and his eventual escape in 1939. After his dismissal from his own institute in 1936, Neuberg did not leave Germany immediately. Instead, he stayed in Berlin and continued to do research in the back rooms of a bakery in Steglitz. After 1945, Neuberg's "Aryan" successor at the KWI, Adolf Butenandt, claimed that Neuberg relied heavily on his clandestine support when it came to equipping this underground laboratory—a claim aimed to make Butenandt appear less closely aligned with the Nazi regime than he actually had been.

Lohff and Conrads use their account of Neuberg's last years in Berlin in order to highlight the latter's strong emotional connections to Germany. Neuberg never hid his Jewish background, yet also never experienced any tension between being Jewish and being a proud, at times even nationalist, German. For example, during World War I, Neuberg contributed to the capability of the German army to effectively use poison gas. His wartime research greatly improved the effectiveness of gas masks used by the army.

In the United States, Neuberg never again held a tenured teaching post, only temporary research or honorary positions—for example, at New York University or at the Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn. He remained skeptical about the American university system, and while deeply affected by the way he had to leave Ger-

many, Neuberg remained somewhat discontent with his life in America until his death.

The book is geared towards recounting Neuberg's life and achievements. In addition, the account also makes sources pertaining to Neuberg's biography and work accessible to a broader public. There can be no question: the authors achieve their goals. However, for non-specialists, which in this case would include many historians whose primary focus is not the history of science, this very specific focus can at times be frustrating: What were Neuberg's attitudes towards the German Revolution of 1918, and to the Weimar Republic? What does the fact that in 1954 Neuberg asked his German lawyer to acquire an Iron Cross medal in a junk shop in Germany because he had lost his during his escape tell us about his role in World War I? Lohff and Conrads often do not provide a broader historical context for the events of their account, which leaves readers to fill in the blanks: What were Neuberg's politics? Given his Jewish background, did he face obstacles even before 1933? What does his career tell us about the integration of German Jews in German academia during the days of the German Empire, and in the Weimar Republic?

Even so, there can be no doubt that *From Berlin to New York* is an important book. It contains a plethora of references to primary-source materials relevant for scholars interested not only in the history of science but also in researching early-twentieth-century German history in general.

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