



The biochemist and essayist Lothar Jaenicke presents 36 portraits of biologists and chemists, in his words, “gifts, talents, and distalents from central Europe fogged by biologicistic race doctrines during the first half of the 20th century” as an “admonishing reminder for the Germans” (*Gaben, Begabungen und Ungaben aus dem vom biologoiden Rassedenken umnebelten Zentraleuropa der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts*“ als “mahnende Erinnerung für Deutsche”). His collection includes renowned scientists such as Bernhard Katz and Feodor Lynen, less well known, but accomplished ones such as bacteriologist Lydia Rabinowitsch Kempner, the first female student of Robert Koch and first German female professor, who founded the first research and teaching centre of tuberculosis in Berlin (and was dismissed in 1933), and those without major achievements. The majority, 22 individuals, were Jewish victims of the Nazi regime; among the others were active National Socialists and a few (non-Jewish) scientists who preserved the “tradition of unmanipulable science” (“unbeeinflussbarer Wissenschaftlichkeit”). Jaenicke’s portraits encompass not only individual biographies and works, but also information about families and intellectual milieus. The beginnings of the stories are often in Eastern Europe, for example in Galicia, the centres are in Germany, and the endings in England or the United States. The excursions into the families provide interesting impressions of the academic and cultural life of the time and the role of Jewish scholars. An example is the Bresslau family with famous historian Harry (Hermann) Bresslau, his son Ernst Bresslau, zoologist in Köln, daughter Helene, who as the wife of Albert Schweitzer worked in Lambarene, and nephew Jacques Loeb, a physiologist, who from around 1900 was a central figure of experimental biology in the US.

The book contains many essays on biochemists, especially pioneers of intermediary metabolism, as well as essays on organic and physical chemists, physiologists, protozoologists, geneticists, and biotechnologists. Among the portraits are: Siegfried Thannhauser who as professor at the University of Freiburg was one of the pioneers in combining clinical medicine and biochemistry, before he like his most famous student Hans Krebs was expelled; physiologist Ernst Laqueur who after working on the treatment of phosgene poisoning at Fritz Haber’s Institute during WW1, in the 1920s was the first to produce insulin in Europe, and in Amsterdam founded a science-based pharmaceutical firm dealing with hormones, which was seized from him after the German occupation of the

Netherlands; chemist Leopold Ružička from Slavonia, who received a position the ETH in Zurich in 1929 and shared the Nobel Prize with Adolf Butenandt (who due to a prohibition by Hitler to accept Nobel Prizes had to reject it) in 1939 for his work on terpenoid natural products; and biochemist Karl Lohmann, co-worker of Otto Meyerhof and through his discovery of ATP in muscle tissue a pioneer of intermediary metabolism. After Meyerhof’s dismissal he became professor at the University of Berlin and later an influential biochemist in the German Democratic Republic. The collection hardly contains any cytologists in the proper meaning—an exception is the gifted karyologist Karl Belar—the title of the book is thus misleading.

The essays are insightful, in some cases generous (in regard to scientific achievements), and in keeping with Jaenicke’s style of writing written in complex sentences. There are many ironic allusions and insinuations. It has to be regretted that this style sometimes leaves things unclear. What is behind the indication, for example that the American charlatan-hunter Morris Fishbein “efficiently, finally deadly”, succeeded to stop a swindler from practicing (p. 80), or that Laqueur had a severe dispute with Abderhalden in Halle as a result of which Laqueur quit his position. A sentence like “Abderhalden flourished in Halle, .. and his reputation rose as a faithful-tireless, seizing, and crossing-out president of Leopoldina” (“Abderhalden florierte in Halle, .. und sein Renommee stieg zusätzlich als linientreu-unermüdlicher, zusetzender und streichender Präsident der Leopoldina”; p. 321) veils the fact that Abderhalden’s main work, highly questionable research on non-existent defence enzymes, flourished in Germany, especially in the Nazi era though it had been refuted among others by the German biochemist Leonor Michaelis. In addition, it does not make sufficiently clear that as president of the Leopoldina in the 1930s Abderhalden crossed out from the membership lists the names of the Society’s Jewish members.

Jaenicke, too, contributes to the myth of the Jewish physician Ludwik Fleck as someone who was not an “analytical reductionist”, but a “synthetic inter-activist and networker” (“synthetischer Interaktivist und Netzwerker”). Even if we acknowledge the life-threatening circumstances under which Fleck as a prisoner-physician conducted his research on typhus vaccines at Buchenwald concentration camp (on which he based his “Denkstil” concept, and which he published after 1945), it should not be overlooked that the work was methodically highly flawed (apart from the fact that Fleck most probably conducted fatal experiments on fellow-prisoners).

To conclude, Lothar Jaenicke’s book contains valuable essays on central European scientists,



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their work, lives and fates. It contributes to preserving the memory of many of those non-Nobel-laureate pioneers, who due to the 12 years of National Socialism would have been forgotten in Germany. It is welcome that these essays are now collected in a single volume, thus rendering it

possible for a wider public to be reminded of the otherwise easily forgotten roots of science of today.

*Ute Deichmann*

Institute for Genetics, University of Cologne  
(Germany) and  
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (Israel)

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