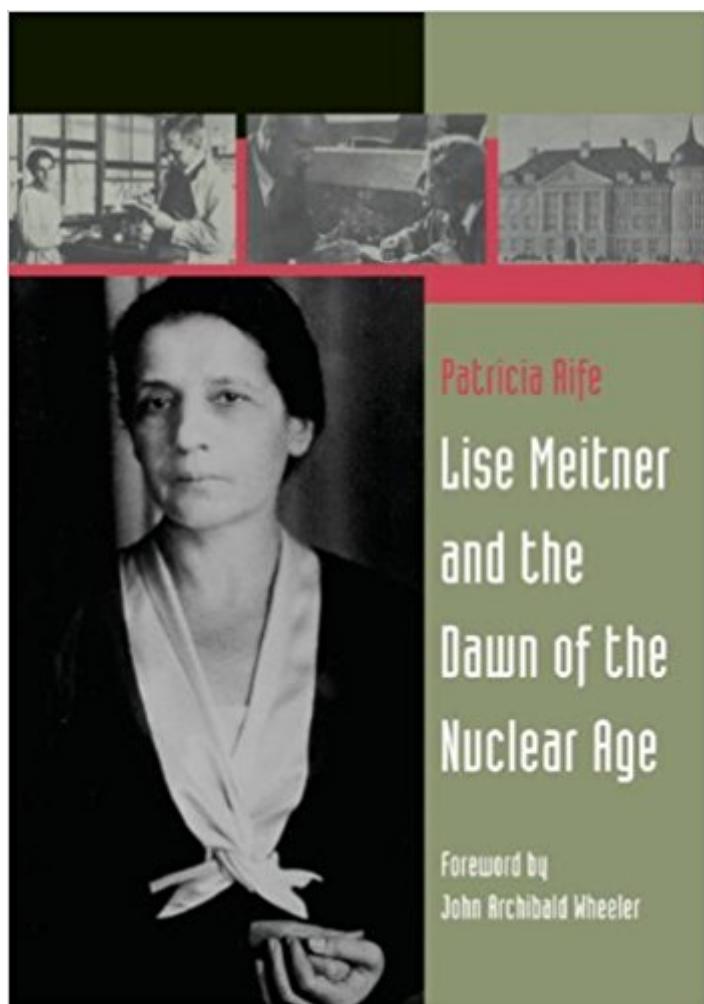


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# Lise Meitner And The Dawn Of The Nuclear Age



## Synopsis

In this fascinating biography, Patricia Rife interprets both the life and times of Lise Meitner (1878–1968), providing a rich background of the scientific discoveries and social milieu that affected the research, events, personalities, and politics of 20th century quantum physics. Rife asks the central question of why, given the priority evidence of Meitner's role in the interpretation of nuclear fission, was she too not awarded the Nobel Prize?

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

From the reviews: "Lise Meitner comes to life as author Rife skillfully weaves social, political, and scientific events into a well-researched and documented work. Lists of Meitner's awards and publications and an extensive bibliography complete this excellent book." — Association of Women in Science Magazine "The particular merit of Rife's biography of Austrian physicist Meitner is that it places her life and work within the historical context, successfully combining her own achievement as the discoverer of nuclear fission with the work of other eminent physicists. It is comprehensive, generally clearly written and appropriate for undergraduate students. Just enough science is included as to make clear the significance of her work and its connection with the course of physics in the 20th century... Extensive bibliography, informative footnotes." — CHOICE "The dramatic tale of the discovery of nuclear fission on the eve of WWII has been told before, but never with such attention to the barriers formed by gender and racial discrimination. This is not just a story of ideas leading to nuclear fission, but also

of the social and intellectual milieu in which these ideas were developed. It is also the story of how a shy, self-effacing young woman, through talent and hard work, became a world-class scientist. Rife tells this story very well. "The Antioch Review" Rife has produced an exciting book, which reads like a novel and she gives justice to Meitner's life full of science and human stories...[The] book is a beautiful tribute to an outstanding scientist; it has a lot to teach us about our world; and it is a great read. I warmly recommend it to everyone interested in science and in history." Structural Chemistry

"A story of one of the half dozen most remarkable women of the 20th century." John Archibald Wheeler "The dramatic tale of the discovery of nuclear fission on the eve of WWII is not just a story of ideas but also of the social and intellectual milieu in which these ideas were developed. It is also the story of how a shy, self-effacing young woman, through talent and hard work, became a world-class scientist. Rife tells this story very well."

The Antioch Review "The particular merit of Rife's biography of Austrian physicist Meitner is that it places her life and work within the historical context. It is comprehensive, generally clearly written and appropriate for undergraduate students. Just enough science is included as to make clear the significance of her work...Extensive bibliography, informative footnotes." Choice In this captivating biography, Patricia Rife interprets both the life and times of Lise Meitner (1878-1968), the female physicist at the heart of the discovery of nuclear fission. She was a colleague and friend of many of the giants of 20th century physics: M. Planck, her Berlin mentor, A. Einstein, M. von Laue, Madame M. Curie, J. Chadwick, W. Pauli, and N. Bohr. Meitner was the first woman to earn a Ph.D. in physics at the University of Vienna, a pioneer in the research of radioactive processes and, together with her nephew Otto Robert Frisch, an interpreter of the process of nuclear fission in 1938. Yet at the end of World War II, her colleague of thirty years, radiochemist Otto Hahn alone was awarded the 1944 Nobel Prize in Chemistry for the "discovery" of nuclear fission -- a discovery based on years of research in which Meitner was directly involved before her secret escape from Nazi Germany.

What an amazing person. She entered a field of study where she wasn't always welcome at lectures, was the first woman to become a full professor in Germany, was forced to work in a basement segregated from the men, and for many years she wasn't paid so had to depend on family and outside work for a living. I was amazed at the drive Dr. Meitner had and how little I had heard of her and her work. While Meitner never received a Nobel Prize, she was nominated over

twelve times and had an element named in her honor. Her seminal discovery with Otto Hahn, for which he not they received the Nobel Prize, was nuclear fission. Contemporary and colleague of Bohr, Einstein, and Plank what a fascinating life and a fascinating book

While there has been a recent renewed interest in the life of Lise Meitner, and a number of biographies have appeared, this I believe is the first one to focus on physics, as opposed to personalities. I may add that the authors do weave together an entangled web of scientists, their thoughts (through correspondence), their ambitions, and their (in many cases) flawed judgments. And the narrative is captivating! Lise Meitner was born in Vienna in 1878, and she started her career in the turbulent times of the First World War, at a time when Germany was a clear leader in physics research, in the Golden Era of physics. Yet, Lise Meitner was the first woman German scientist; first PhD in physics. When she started her studies, German universities were almost entirely closed to women; and especially so in the sciences. The authors bring to life the turbulent events in modern history which shaped Lise Meitner's career. A central theme in the book is the physics community's reaction to the first use by the USA of a fission bomb over Japan in 1945. In Berlin, building on a decade of research by Meitner and Otto Hahn, in 1938, the three Lise Meitner, Hahn, and Fritz Strassmann discovered nuclear fission. The Nobel Prize went to Hahn alone, and Lise Meitner has until recently been largely forgotten. In this interesting book, the authors examine why. Readers may find that the reasons are different from what we might have guessed. Many of the German scientists in the 1930ties were Jewish, or partly Jewish, and they were dismissed by Hitler in 1933, or in the years up to the war. The year before the outbreak of war in 1939 was the last chance to escape, and the entire physics community dispersed as German scientists had to flee, --- some chose to escape. A small number went to neutral Sweden, and others who had left earlier ended up in the USA, and became leaders in the Manhattan project, the secret Los Alamos team of scientists, led by Oppenheimer, the team which built the first atomic bomb. There were some German scientists, Otto Hahn among them who didn't have to flee. They included Lise Meitner's research collaborators, Hahn, and Strassmann, plus Max von Laue, Werner Heisenberg. At the end of the war, their relationships resumed, and an examination (in the book) of private letters reveals some fascinating new insight. Palle Jorgensen, October 2005.

Lise Meitner and the Dawn of the Nuclear Age, by J.A. Wheeler is a fascinating book documenting the extraordinary life of an aspiring woman scientist whose life was filled with adversity. Surviving both World Wars and gender discrimination, Meitner was a pioneer at the forefront of her discipline

involving the study of radio-elements and nuclear fission. At the University of Vienna and the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute, Meitner was inspired to study experimental physics with a focus on atomic structure by her two most memorable professors Boltzmann and Planck. Meitner's major discovery was her work with Hahn and the splitting of the atom (nuclear fission). This monumental discovery led to the invention of the atomic bomb, which drastically changed warfare. Besides her accomplishments Meitner was a truly inspiring woman for her strength and personal conviction. Meitner barely escaped from Nazis Germany only to be isolated in Sweden from the international scientific community. She helplessly watched her lifetime of dedication and achievement be overlooked by the Nobel Prize Committee countless times, only to have Hahn receive all the credit. In the face of the immanent destruction of her career and life by the Nazis she experienced the pain of being abandoned by close colleagues. Rising above her obstacles she dedicated her life to helping victims of the Holocaust and refusing to work on chemical warfare or nuclear bomb research, but instead working towards awareness of the moral responsibilities scientists needed to have in this new nuclear age.

Patricia Rife has made a scientific subject meaningful in the comprehensible biography: "Lise Meitner and the Dawn of the Nuclear Age." This is a well researched and an acknowledgement of a woman's contribution to peace and medical technology. Lise Meitner devoted her life to research and was denied many Nobel Peace Prize awards because of her sex. This book is for every young woman, public library, high school library or anyone interested in an outstanding book of historic subjects. Special accolades to the author, Patricia Rife, for her professional treatment of this manuscript.

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