

Society in Philadelphia during the war.
Luria met. Luria had recently arrived in the United States. He was not a

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← what's a story in itself! →

"He was a very remarkable fellow." • 53

physicist, despite his presence at a physicists' convention; yet he knew some physics, was a friend of Enrico Fermi, and had begun phage research of his own while still in Italy. After several hours' conversation, Luria wrote later, they had dinner with Wolfgang Pauli and another European physicist "during which the talk was mostly in German, mostly about theoretical physics, mostly above my head." Afterward, "Delbrück and I adjourned to New York for a 48-hour bout of experimentation in my laboratory at the College of Physicians and Surgeons" of Columbia University. "It was not an experiment to do," Luria said in the fall of 1973. "It was just to see—because, what happened is that Max wanted to work with a particular phage that attacks staphylococcus, a phage named Krueger phage after the man that first wrote it up, and Max had been told by Krueger that this phage should not be assayed by plaques, the way one does all the assays, but should be assayed by a very complicated method, which partly turned out later to be the cause why Krueger got very crazy results, results that he interpreted in a very crazy way. And I had gotten the same phage from Krueger, and I was assaying it all the time in the usual way like every other, and I told that to Max, and he said, 'I want to see,' so I said, 'Fine. If you come up on Monday I'll have plates and everything ready and we'll play around.' And he did, and we did."

The two men planned a series of experiments to do together and debated where to do them, whether at Vanderbilt in Nashville or in New York. Three weeks later, Delbrück wrote to Luria that he had been invited to attend the next annual symposium at Cold Spring Harbor and to spend the rest of the summer there; could they work together there? "If that could be arranged satisfactorily at C.S.H., I might overcome my antipathy to the place." In fact, Delbrück got married that summer, and spent the first weeks of his marriage at Cold Spring Harbor. At that symposium, Luria wrote much later, "The whole idea of the nature of the gene—I do not know if it was the first time; it was the first time in my experience—was dealt with in an environment in which geneticists and people interested in molecular structure were interacting freely." Delbrück has returned there to work and teach many summers since.

At the end of January 1943, at Delbrück's invitation, a microbiologist named Alfred Hershey visited Nashville for a few days; he had written papers about phage that caught Luria's and Delbrück's attention. In a letter to Luria, along with the draft of a new theoretical idea, Delbrück gave his first impressions of Hershey: "Drinks whiskey but not tea. Simple and to the point. Likes living in a sailboat for three months, likes independence." The three men were the nucleus of the phage group. Delbrück recently characterized this beginning as two enemy aliens and "another misfit in society." The three shared the Nobel Prize for physiology and medicine in 1969, seven years later than Watson, Crick, and Wilkins.

Judson does accept that line.

The next essential discovery about the relation of genes to bacteriophage

C. Kogge

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-- on Delbrück
— which will surely interest you.

But it is unsatisfactory "pop history" on many accounts. Two leaps to the eye on p. 353

1) Does AD Hershey count himself part of the "phage group"?

(In '46 (ZSH) Delbrück rather resisted Hershey's virus recombination in favor of some "modification from without".)

2) Exactly when and how did Luria and Delbrück meet?

Judson gives a precise account. Is there any reason to doubt it?