

Noddack, who earned her doctorate from the Technical University of Berlin in 1921. At the Physico-Technical Research Agency in Berlin, she worked alongside Otto Berg and Walter Noddack, her future husband. In 1925 they discovered element 75, rhenium.

In her 1934 paper “On element 93,” Noddack did not accept Enrico Fermi’s claim to have possibly produced transuranic elements.³ Noddack wrote, “It is conceivable that the nucleus breaks up into several large fragments, which would of course be isotopes of known elements but would not be neighbors of the irradiated element.”

Although the paper was generally ignored, it now serves as one of the earliest expressions of the idea of nuclear fission. There was no excuse for the paper being overlooked, since Noddack sent copies to Otto Hahn and to Fermi. The paper also was probably available to the academy, since Noddack was three times nominated for a Nobel Prize. Very much later, after he was awarded his Nobel Prize, Hahn acknowledged his mistake in not paying sufficient attention to Noddack’s paper. Ironically, Fermi is reputed to have not endorsed Noddack’s work because of the controversy over her team’s discovery of element 43, now called technetium.

Carsten Jensen’s book *Controversy and Consensus* contains a detailed account of the early beta-decay events.⁴

References

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Charles Day, in his editorial “Discoveries and explanations,” uses Christopher Columbus as an example of a quintessential “discoverer” and erroneously states that in May 1498 Columbus “set out . . . on his third and final voyage” (emphasis mine). Day’s story forgets what followed after that third

voyage, which ended when Columbus was arrested and shipped back to Spain in chains for committing atrocities, including enslaving the local population in defiance of Queen Isabella’s orders: Columbus returned to the Americas in 1502 on his fourth voyage.

The story of Columbus’s visits to the Americas has been mangled and abridged for centuries—most famously by the persistent and baseless conflation of his voyages with the flat-Earth myth.¹ Perhaps that tendency comes from the

discordance between using Columbus as an exemplar of discovery and acknowledging his crimes against humanity, which were widely condemned even during his lifetime.

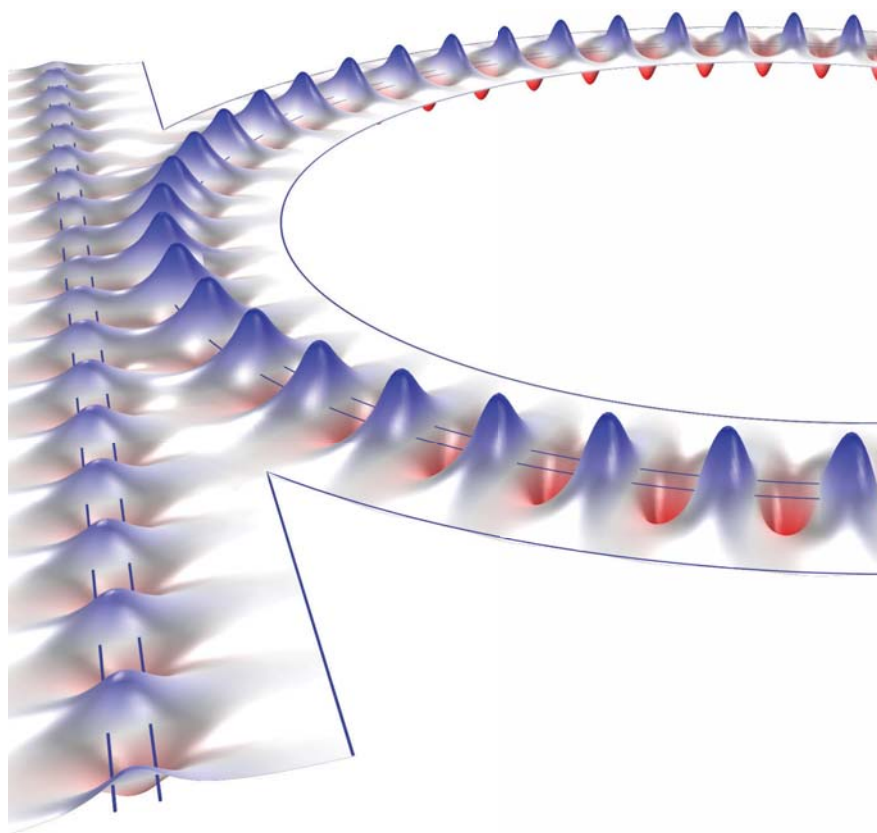
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