



by Willy Cohn, ed. Norbert  
Conrads

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Non-Fiction

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## Diaries from Breslau 1933-1941

### *Kein Recht, Nirgends. Breslauer Tagebücher 1933-1941. Eine Auswahl*

#### review

Willy Cohn (18-1941) was a historian from the then German town of Breslau, which today belongs to Poland and is known under the name of Wrocław. He was an active participant in the intellectual and cultural life of Breslau, and a well respected member of its Jewish community, by then the third largest of Germany. In 1933 Cohn witnessed Hitler's coming to power and the consequent increasing pressure on Jewry in Germany. From early on he was aware of the importance of bearing witness to these events and made sure that his diaries would be saved in the event of his death. Embedded in the historical context – sometimes Cohn's statements are of an astonishing clarity given the lack of information and the power of the NS-propaganda machine – the diaries describe the inhumane and cynical policies of the Nazis towards the Jewish community, the everyday struggle to carry on, the so often fruitless attempts to leave Germany for a safe future in Palestine, and finally the catastrophe of the Shoah. Apart from offering an account of those important historical events, these diaries are also about the personal fate of Willy Cohn and his family: his eldest son had to leave Germany for Paris in 1933, the second son escaped to Palestine in 1935, and the eldest daughter fled via Denmark to Palestine in 1940. Willy Cohn, his wife Gertrud, and their two younger daughters Susanne and Tamara were deported to Lithuania and murdered in 1941.

The diaries were found in Berlin after the war. Finally published in

their entirety in 1995, they now appear in this excellent abbreviated version. Like Victor Klemperer's, they depict a social and academic background, which led to similar experiences of middle-class Jewish life during the Nazi years. What makes Cohn's account different is the location of Breslau, for he is the historian of the final German years of that town and the decay of its large Jewish community which had contributed so much to the cultural and intellectual life of Germany before 1933. Historical interest apart, these diaries will appeal to the reader's sense of self-courage and critical opposition, in times when civil rights are increasingly under threat.

## press quotes

*'Through the publication of his Diaries, a monument has been raised to Willy Cohn – as the most important chronicler alongside Viktor Klemperer of the fate of Jewish Germans in times of the darkest barbarity.'* – Die Zeit

*'These diaries depict the downfall of German Jewry like no other document before.'* – Die Welt

*'Meticulously and soberly transcribed, introduced and commented upon, historian Norbert Conrads has made accessible one of the most moving, but also informative, of eyewitness accounts.'* – Süddeutsche Zeitung

*'An unparalleled book of remembrance and historical source.'* – Neue Zürcher Zeitung

## about the authors

**Willy Cohn** (1888-1941) was the most important writer of his generation to study and record the lives of the Jewish population of Breslau. He knew the town and its Jewish community like no other. His diary entries, written in secret until his death in 1941, provide a uniquely comprehensive eye-witness account of the downfall of what had been Germany's third largest Jewish community.

### Previous works include:

*Kein Recht, nirgends. Tagebuch vom Untergang des Breslauer Judentums 1933-1941*, edited by Norbert Conrads (2007 – two volumes); *Verwehte Spuren. Erinnerungen an das Breslauer*

*Judentum vor seinem Untergang*, edited by Norbert Conrads (2005) – both Böhlau Verlag.

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