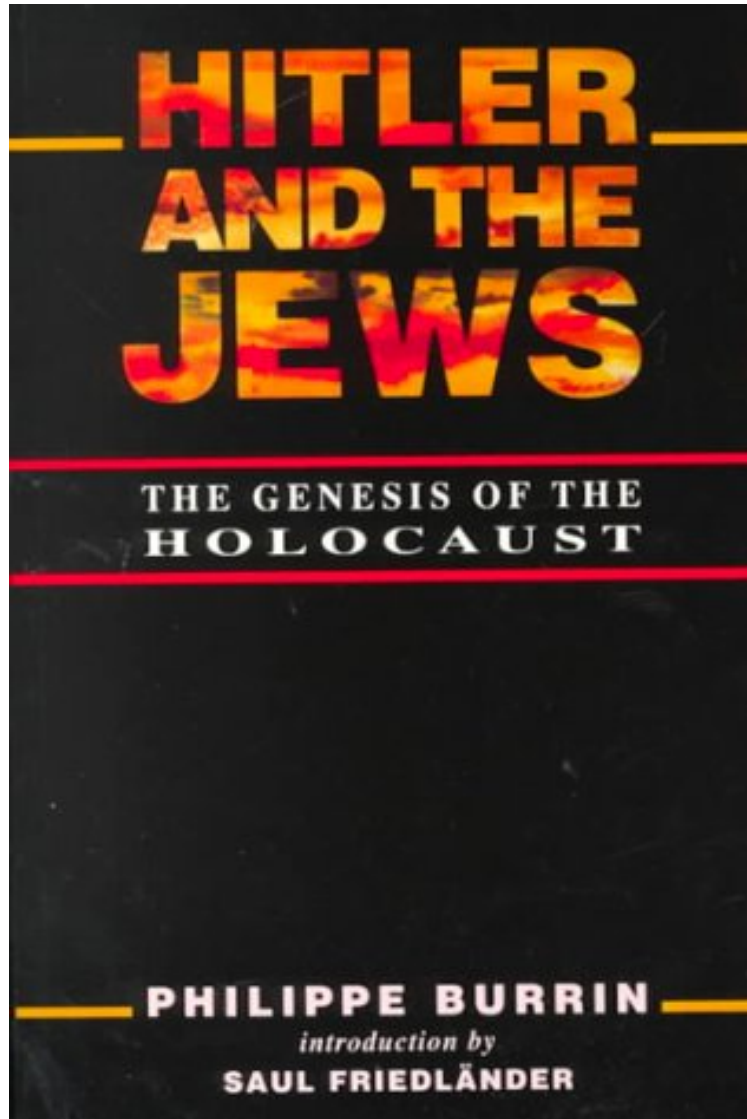


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## Hitler and the Jews: The Genesis of the Holocaust

*Philippe Burrin*

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**Philippe Burrin : Hitler and the Jews: The Genesis of the Holocaust** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Hitler and the Jews: The Genesis of the Holocaust:

16 of 16 people found the following review helpful. A new work on the Holocaust leaves many questions unansweredBy A CustomerDuring the past twenty years historians have debated the circumstances in which the 'Final Solution' became reality and the role of Hitler in the planning and execution of mass murder. The two schools of thought have been labelled 'intentionalist' and 'functionalist' (or 'structuralist').Burrin attempts to give us a synthesis

of the current debate. He agrees with the intentionalists, but as Christopher Browning has previously done, Burrin argues that a killing final solution "would be carried out only in the event of a well-defined situation such as the failure of his [Hitler's] planned world conquests" (p. 23). Passing over much previously studied ground, Burrin argues that Hitler had developed a notion of 'conditional mass murder' even before the Nazi *Machtergreifung*. This notion developed throughout the early years of Nazi rule. Further to this he cites a previously overlooked document written by Walter Gross, the head of the Nazi Bureau of Racial Policy. The document, dated 25 September 1935, is a record of a meeting between Hitler and his regional chiefs on the implications of the infamous Nuremberg Racial Laws. Gross recorded Hitler as saying that "in the event of a war on all fronts", Hitler "would be ready for any consequences" (p. 49). Burrin argues that in the context of the conversation, which focussed exclusively on the 'Jewish Question', the statement is a barely veiled threat of conditional mass murder and that Hitler's infamous Reichstag speech of 30 January 1939 was merely a continuation of this idea. The problem with Burrin's interpretation is that it relies too much on language. The peculiarities and dualism of Nazi idiom have long been recognised. There is no doubt that the document cited may be a 'signpost' on the path to destruction, but it is not a smoking gun. Burrin argues that the decision to implement full-scale mass murder came from Hitler in mid-September, 1941. There are two central turning points: the first is that by August, the killing of Soviet Jews had reached genocidal proportions; the second is that the decision was made to deport Jews to the East was made in mid-September. It is at this point, Burrin argues, that the final decision was made (p. 134). The major piece of evidence that Burrin uses to come to this conclusion is another previously overlooked document. Burrin analyses a communication from Reinhard Heydrich (Chief of the Security Police and Security Service) to OKH (High Command of the Army) dated 6 November 1941. In the letter Heydrich takes responsibility for the destruction of Paris synagogues on 2-3 October. The attack took place as a retaliation against assaults on sympathetic French politicians. Heydrich states that he accepted assistance from French collaborators (in attacking the synagogues) "only from the moment when, at the highest level, Jewry had been forcefully designated as the culpable incendiary in Europe, one which must definitely disappear from Europe" (p. 124). Burrin interprets the passage as meaning that "the deportation order had been, simultaneously, an extermination order" (p. 124). Burrin interprets the language as indicating that the order came from Hitler. The problem with this argument, once again, is that it relies on the Nazi idiom too much. In the end it is no more and no less inflammatory than any Nazi rhetoric either proceeding or following it. Burrin has not pushed forward the debate-most of his findings have been previously aired. In the end, he has only reconfirmed the findings of other scholars. These criticisms aside, Burrin has done scholarship a service by mining the archives for under-utilised documentation. Burrin's work should be read as a synthesis of the available views, not for new insights. As a work of this sort Hitler and the Jews performs admirably.

Burrin offers bold new insights into the web of decisions and events that led eventually to a genocide unprecedented in character and unparalleled in scale.