

# **Hitler's "Table Talk": a purely fraudulent document**



## **INTRODUCTION**

There are multiple accounts regarding the origins of Hitler's table talks. One widely accepted version suggests that these transcripts capture his candid remarks made before a small group of close associates at various military Führer Headquarters (FHQ), spanning from the launch of the Soviet Union invasion in the summer of 1941 until late 1944. The conversations were carefully recorded by two stenographers, Heinrich Heim and Henry Picker, under the directive of Reichsleiter Martin Bormann. A few entries were also noted down by Bormann himself and, on occasion, by Hans Müller—though Müller is often overlooked in this context.

It is commonly believed that Hitler was unaware that his words were being documented, which is why they are considered to reflect his unfiltered thoughts. However, Picker later claimed that Hitler did, in fact, know about the note-taking, had reviewed parts of Picker's records, and even granted him permission to publish them after the war.

## **THE VARIOUS PUBLISHED EDITIONS**

Henry Picker was the first to publish his version of the notes in 1951, under the title *Tischgespräche im Führerhauptquartier 1941–1942* (hereafter referred to as *Tischgespräche*). This edition included not only Picker's own notes but also some of Heinrich Heim's. The publication was thematically organized by historian Gerhard Ritter and released by Athenäum Verlag in cooperation with the Institut für Zeitgeschichte in Munich. The first edition, however, was not the last. In 1963, a second edition with the same title was released, this time arranged chronologically and edited by historian Percy Ernst Schramm. This chronological structure provided a different perspective on the content, enhancing its historical value.

In 1952, Swiss banker and Nazi sympathizer François Genoud published the first volume of *Libres propos sur la guerre et la paix* (hereafter referred to as *Libres propos*), with the second volume following in 1954. Genoud's edition was based on another manuscript known as the *Bormann-Vermerke*, which he had acquired after the war. This manuscript largely consisted of Heim's notes but also contained contributions from Picker, Bormann, and Müller. Genoud's efforts went beyond the French editions; in 1953, he published an English version titled *Hitler's Table Talk 1941–1944* (hereafter *Table Talk*), introduced and assisted by British historian Hugh R. Trevor-Roper. Additionally, Genoud published an Italian single-volume edition in 1954, broadening the reach of the content across different languages.

The final major edition of these table talks came in 1980 with the German release of *Monologe im Führerhauptquartier 1941–1944* (hereafter *Monologe*), edited by historian Werner Jochmann. However, unlike the earlier editions, *Monologe* did not include Picker's notes due to a copyright dispute. This omission marked a significant difference between the German edition and its predecessors, with Picker's contributions left out of this particular publication.

## **TROUBLING FINDS INDEED**

It was only recently that a serious attempt to critically investigate the various editions and translations was published. In a 2003 article in *German Studies Review*, American historian Richard C. Carrier compared the English, French, and German versions of the table talks and concluded that historians have a significant amount of source-critical work to undertake before any of the German editions can be regarded as an authoritative record of Hitler's statements. Carrier's comparison of the different editions yielded concerning results. He demonstrated that Genoud had added statements in several instances, often making Hitler appear more critical of Christianity than in the German editions. Furthermore, Carrier proved that Trevor-Roper's English edition was at least partially translated from Genoud's French version, raising further questions about the accuracy and reliability of the English text. [1]

## **THE PUBLICATION OF HENRY PICKER'S HITLERS TISCHGESPRÄCHE IN 1951**

The involvement of the Institute for Contemporary History (IfZ) in the controversial *Tischgespräche* affair began almost immediately after its formation. In late January 1951, historian Gerhard Ritter was contacted by Paul W. Junker, the director of the Bonn-based publisher Athenäum Verlag. In his introductory letter, Junker announced the acquisition of a manuscript containing notes from speeches delivered by Adolf Hitler during meals at the Führer's headquarters. The letter began in the following way:

**"Honourable Professor, I come today with an offer for you: We have acquired a manuscript that contains notes from the speeches regarding a series of problems held by Hitler during dinner at the Führer headquarters. These notes were made by two government clerks from the Department of the Interior on Hitler's orders. It is an extremely interesting document that sheds light on the history of National Socialism, and it is particularly characteristic of Hitler's personality."** [2]

However, the issue of the text's authenticity soon emerged due to the multiple editorial manipulations made by Heinrich Picker, one of the authors of the transcripts. Picker made numerous stylistic interventions, often without any real necessity dictated by the original manuscript, but rather for aesthetic or readability reasons. Each draft of the text underwent small changes, suggesting a transformation of the content from a historical document into a literary text. This process raised fundamental questions about the reliability of the transcripts, especially for those wishing to conduct a thorough analysis of Hitler's ideological thinking. In fact, even a single altered word could radically change the meaning of a statement, making the interpretation of his thoughts uncertain. [3]

The editorial changes were not limited to the content. The organization of the text was also altered. Ritter, for example, expressed dissatisfaction with the titles and subtitles inserted by Picker, judging them inappropriate and personally taking the liberty of correcting them. Although Picker accepted many of Ritter's proposed revisions, the final result did not fully satisfy him, and he sought further improvements. [4]

An additional issue arose with Picker's own narrative consistency. He claimed, on one hand, that he had made most of the notes without explicit requests from Martin Bormann, but on the other hand, he acknowledged that on at least one occasion, Bormann had specifically instructed him to transcribe Hitler's words. This statement suggests, as noted by Matthias Rheindorf, that Bormann's orders were not exceptional but rather recurring. Therefore, Picker seems to have deliberately omitted the systematic role of Bormann in the production of the notes, raising doubts about his transparency toward readers. [5]

Compounding the issue further is the contradiction between the claim that the notes had been authorized by an unspecified figure (Genehmigung), and the simultaneous denial of Hitler's direct involvement. This contradiction becomes more pronounced when Picker claims that Hitler had "acknowledged" the accuracy of his transcripts. However, it remains unclear to whom this recognition was directed and in what context it occurred. Rheindorf found no satisfactory answer to this within the Tischgespräche, while the apparent inconsistency went unnoticed by both Ritter and the IfZ. [6]

Ultimately, the analysis of the publication of the Tischgespräche highlights a series of serious source-critical and historiographical issues. From the outset, the work stirred strong controversies, with accusations directed at the IfZ and Gerhard Ritter for allowing the publication of a text perceived by many as a form of glorification of Hitler, lacking an appropriate critical apparatus. The difficulties Ritter encountered, compounded by Picker's opposition to any form of explanatory commentary, reveal the complexity of the editorial context. Further problems emerged when unauthorized excerpts were published in the magazine Quick, which sparked indignation within the IfZ. [7]

## **THE 1963 SECOND EDITION OF PICKER'S TISCHGESPRÄCHE**

The second edition of Picker's Tischgespräche, published in 1963 and edited by Percy Ernst Schramm, raises significant historiographical concerns regarding the authenticity of Hitler's so-called table talks. When historians cite these conversations—regardless of the edition—they are not quoting Hitler directly, but rather a reconstruction of what he may have said. The spirit of the statements may reflect Hitler's views, but the actual words often do not. Furthermore, since the original notes or audio recordings are not available, there is no way of knowing when the quotes were remembered or recorded verbatim. [8]

The 1963 edition introduced several key changes compared to the original 1951 publication. One notable alteration was the chronological organization of the notes. However, it also included entries and segments that were not present in Ritter's earlier edition. Some of these additions exhibit clear signs of being literary inventions, likely created after 1951. A close comparison with the manuscript on which the edition was based—referred to as Ms. 63—makes these editorial interventions evident. [9]

For instance, a note dated 2 May 1942 claims to capture a conversation that occurred during a train journey from the Berghof to the Wolf's Lair, in which Hitler supposedly spoke about the centrality of the Berghof in his regime. In Ms. 63, the entry reads:

**“I introduced myself to Ribbentrop at the Berghof”**

with handwritten edits modifying it to:

**“At the Berghof I also introduced myself to Minister Ribbentrop”.**

In the published 1963 edition, the latter version appears. However, this statement is demonstrably false, as Hitler met Ribbentrop—who became Foreign Minister in 1938—as early as 1932 in Berlin. This fabricated detail highlights how Picker altered the text during the manuscript preparation process. [10]

Another noteworthy example involves a quote in which Hitler supposedly declared himself a true Christian for encouraging antisemitic education among German youth. This particular statement does not appear in the Table Talk, which might suggest that Picker invented it.

This passage reads:

**“In recognizing the importance of this spectacle, and by encouraging it, who can say that I do not act irreproachably Christian!”.**

Yet, the same sentence is found in *Libres propos*, indicating that it was indeed part of the version Picker submitted to Bormann in 1942 and was later omitted from Table Talk for unknown reasons. [11]

It is also established that the 1951 edition of *Tischgespräche* was heavily redacted—far more than Ritter disclosed to readers. It is possible Ritter was unaware of the full extent of Picker's editorial revisions. The alterations made in Ms. 63, some of which appear in the 1963 edition, occasionally bring the text closer to the “original” source, but in many cases, they move it further away. [12]

Ultimately, the subsequent 1963 edition, which has never been critically analyzed until now, reveals significant changes made by Picker compared to the 1951 version—changes that, while seemingly minor, seriously compromise the text's fidelity to the original statements. The lack of critical reflection on these edits, even by the editor Percy Ernst Schramm, points to a broader lack of attention to accuracy by those who have relied on the *Tischgespräche* without questioning how trustworthy it really is. For this reason, anyone referring to the *Tischgespräche* should be very cautious: it's often unclear what is actually being quoted, and the reliability of the words attributed to Hitler remains highly questionable. [13]

## **THE MYSTERY OF THE BORMANN NOTE FACSIMILE**

The mystery surrounding the facsimile of Bormann's note is tied to his focus on political issues he considered most pertinent, such as Jews, the Volk, and Church-related matters. According to Picker, Bormann was primarily interested in notes regarding these topics, which he believed were essential to his political agenda. On several occasions, Bormann wrote notes himself, although these were not included in Genoud's manuscript. One such note, dated at the end of November 1944, dealt with Jews and Christianity. Picker asserts that the notes Bormann made were from memory and that, as they were intended to align with his political objectives, he edited them to serve his purposes. He may have also dictated parts of these notes to ensure a sharper formulation. [14]

an Gg Bormann  
Hauptamt 2M

Führerhauptquartier, den 30.11.1944  
Bo/Leh.

HAUPTAMT  
Niederschrift

M. 30/11

Betrifft: Führer-Gespräch.

Bei einem Tee-Gespräch am gestrigen Abend äusserte u.a. der Führer:

"Jesus war sicher kein Jude, denn einen der ihren hätten die Juden nicht den Römern und dem römischen Gericht ausgeliefert, sondern selbst verurteilt.

Vermutlich wohnten in Galiläa sehr viele Nachkommen römischer Legionäre (Gallier) und zu ihnen gehörte Jesus. Möglich, daß seine Mutter Jüdin war.

Jesus kämpfte gegen den verderblichen Materialismus seiner Zeit und damit gegen die Juden.

Paulus - zunächst einer der schärfsten Gegner der Christen - erkannte plötzlich, welche ungeheuren Möglichkeiten die richtige Verwendung einer faszinierenden Idee bot. Paulus erkannte, daß die richtige Verwendung einer tragenden Idee bei Nichtjuden eine weit höhere Macht gab, als das Versprechen materieller Belohnung beim Juden. Und nun fälschte Saulus-Paulus in raffinierter Weise die christliche Idee um: Aus der Kampfansage gegen die Vergottung des Geldes, aus der Kampfansage gegen den

**"During a tea conversation yesterday evening, the Führer said, e.g.: Jesus was certainly not a Jew. [...] Jesus fought against the pernicious materialism of his time, and thus against the Jews. [...] Saul-Paul cleverly falsified the Christian idea: from the challenge against the deification of money, from the challenge against Jewish selfishness, Jewish materialism became the supporting idea of the infatuated, the slaves, the oppressed, the ones in money and goods, against the ruling class, against the superior race, "against the oppressors"! Paul's religion, and the Christianity represented from then on, was nothing more than communism!" [15]**

While Picker's account is valuable, it is not necessary to rely solely on his word. Bormann himself confirmed in the facsimile that any note which did not align with his memory was edited by him. This statement is further corroborated by Peter Longerich's research, which shows that Bormann consistently edited the notes to better align with his own agenda, often tailoring Hitler's words to fit his political needs. Longerich also demonstrates that as Bormann grew more confident in understanding Hitler's mindset, he began to assert Hitler's views on various matters without consulting him directly. [16]

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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- [2] Nilsson, Mikael, *Hitler Redux: The Incredible History of Hitler's So-Called Table Talks*, Page 58-59
- [3] *Ibid*, Page 70
- [4] *Ibid*, Page 60-70-71
- [5] *Ibid*, Page 63
- [6] *Ibid*, Page 63
- [7] *Ibid*, Page 103
- [8] *Ibid*, Page 98
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- [10] *Ibid*, Page 99
- [11] *Ibid*, Page 102
- [12] *Ibid*, Page 102
- [13] *Ibid*, Page 103
- [14] *Ibid*, Page 95.
- [15] BArch NS 6/133
- [16] Nilsson, Mikael, *Hitler Redux: The Incredible History of Hitler's So-Called Table Talks*, Page 96