

## Hitler's Atomic Bomb

Who were the German scientists who worked on atomic bombs during World War II for Hitler's regime? How did they justify themselves afterwards? Examining the global influence of the German uranium project and post-war reactions to the scientists involved, Mark Walker explores the narratives surrounding "Hitler's bomb." The global impacts of this project were cataclysmic. Credible reports of German developments spurred the American Manhattan Project, the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and in turn the Soviet efforts. After the war these scientists' work was overshadowed by the twin shocks of Auschwitz and Hiroshima. *Hitler's Atomic Bomb* sheds light on the postwar criticism and subsequent rehabilitation of the German scientists, including the controversial legend of Werner Heisenberg and Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker's visit to occupied Copenhagen in 1941. This scientifically accurate but nontechnical history examines the impact of German efforts to harness nuclear fission and the surrounding debates and legends.

MARK WALKER is the John Bigelow Professor of History at Union College, Schenectady, New York. His research interests include twentieth-century science, particularly science and technology under National Socialism. Previous publications include *The Kaiser Wilhelm Society during National Socialism* (Cambridge, 2009) and *The German Physical Society in the Third Reich: Physicists between Autonomy and Accommodation* (Cambridge, 2012).

# Hitler's Atomic Bomb

*History, Legend, and the Twin Legacies  
of Auschwitz and Hiroshima*

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Mark Walker

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This book is dedicated to my wife Linda, son Chris, and daughter Kerry.

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## Preface

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Historians usually get only one chance to write a history. My Ph.D. dissertation, subsequently published as a book, also examined the German efforts to build atomic bombs during World War II.<sup>1</sup> This book is not an updated version of my earlier work but rather a new history written directly from the sources, many of which were not available when I first researched this topic. These new materials include the Farm Hall transcripts, documents from the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Physics retrieved from Russian archives, Niels Bohr's unpublished letters to Werner Heisenberg, Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker's papers, and the correspondence between Elisabeth and Werner Heisenberg.

I am breaking with historiographic tradition in a few ways. When writing about the Third Reich, as opposed to the postwar period, I use the adjective "National Socialist" or its acronym "NS" instead of "Nazi," except when a historical actor used the latter term. Rather than use Adolf Hitler's title in German, "Führer," I have translated it as "Leader." In both cases I want to help the English-language reader better experience what life was like during National Socialism. During the Third Reich a German would not have often heard or said the more pejorative "Nazi," while using the German word "Führer" in English hides the symbolism, which was very important and clear to Germans, that Hitler led and they were expected to follow.

Although I discuss historiography where appropriate in this book, this will be supplemented by a more thorough discussion of the literature in a forthcoming separate publication.

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## Abbreviations

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DAAD	<i>Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst</i> (German Academic Exchange Service).
DAL	<i>Deutsche Akademie für Luftfahrtforschung</i> (German Academy for Aviation Research).
DFG	<i>Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft</i> (German Research Foundation).
DFR	<i>Deutscher Forschungsrat</i> (German Research Council).
DWI	<i>Deutsches Wissenschaftliches Institut</i> (German Cultural Institute).
HWA	<i>Heereswaffenamt</i> (Army Ordnance).
IDO	<i>Institut für deutsche Ostarbeit</i> (German Institute for Eastern Work).
KWG	<i>Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft</i> (Kaiser Wilhelm Society).
KWIfC	<i>Kaiser-Wilhelm Institut für Chemie</i> (Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Chemistry).
KWIfP	<i>Kaiser-Wilhelm Institut für Physik</i> (Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Physics).
MPG	<i>Max-Planck-Gesellschaft</i> (Max Planck Society).
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration.
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization.
NDW	<i>Notgemeinschaft der Deutschen Wissenschaft</i> (Emergency Society for German Science).
NSDAP	<i>Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei</i> (National Socialist German Workers Party).
NSDB	<i>Nationalsozialistischer Deutscher Dozentenbund</i> (National Socialist University Lecturers League).
OKH	<i>Oberkommando des Heeres</i> (Army High Command).
OSRD	Office of Scientific Research and Development.
PTR	<i>Physikalisch-Technisches Reichsanstalt</i> (Reich Physical-Technical Institute).
REM	<i>Reichsministerium für Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung</i> (Reich Ministry of Science, Education, and Culture).

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RFR	<i>Reichsforschungsrat</i> (Reich Research Council).
RSA	<i>Reichssippenamt</i> (Reich Kinship Office).
SD	Sicherheitsdienst der SS (Security Service of the SS).
VDW	<i>Vereinigung Deutscher Wissenschaftler</i> (Federation of German Scientists).