



THE IMPACT OF
WORLD WAR II
ON POLAND



MAIN TOPICS

- › Change of borders
- › Post-war population
- › Extermination of elites
- › Plunder and destruction of cultural goods
- › War damages

CHANGE OF BORDERS

The issue of Polish borders was first brought up during the conference in Teheran which took place in 1943 and finally confirmed at the conference in Potsdam in 1945. Although the decisions concerned the fate of the eastern territories and the shape of Polish borders, Polish authorities were not invited to the conferences. All the decisions were made by the so-called Big Three: the leader of the USSR Joseph Stalin, the US President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill.



Under the adopted provisions, in total the area of Poland decreased from around 388,000 to around 312,000 square kilometers. Poland lost to the Soviet Union over 45 percent of its pre-war territory, largely underdeveloped economically, but with two important cultural centers: Vilnius and Lviv.

THE BORDERS OF POLAND BEFORE AND AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR



In return Poland was given German lands in the west and north. They stood at a higher level of economic development than the lost territories, but were terribly devastated by the warfare and the plundering policies of the Soviet army and administration.

POST-WAR POPULATION

The changes in borders were accompanied by great migratory movements. Since the end of 1944, nearly 5 million Germans fled from the eastern German provinces from the approaching front and the Red Army's revenge. After 1945, as a result of wild expulsions and then a planned deportation action, a total of 2.5 million people were forced to leave Silesia, Pomerania and former East Prussia. The place of refugees was taken by about 2.9 million people from central Poland and over 1.5 million Poles who were forced to leave their homes in the territories taken over by USSR.



Under the agreements with the USSR, Belarusians living in Poland (about 40,000) and some Ukrainians (half a million) had to leave the Polish lands. Then, nearly 140,000 Lemkos and Ukrainians were displaced in 1947 as a result of Operation "Vistula" from the south-eastern part of the country to Lower Silesia, Masuria and Pomerania. Hundred thousand people who returned from deportations from Siberia and Kazakhstan were settled in the western lands. As a result, the war and post-war migration movements made Poland in 1947 a country of almost homogeneous nationality.

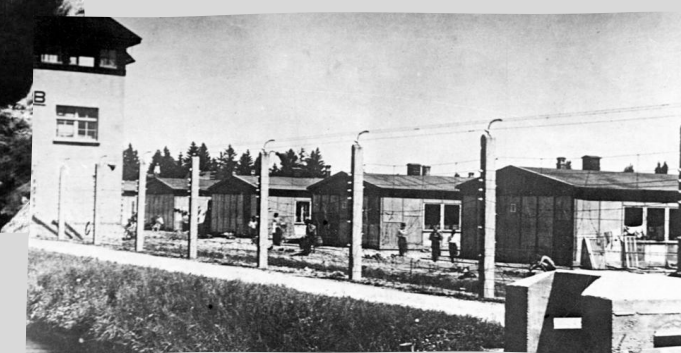


EXTERMINATION OF POLISH ELITES

The occupation of Poland by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union began with the German-Soviet invasion of Poland in September 1939. Throughout the entire course of the occupation, the territory of Poland was divided between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Both occupiers created an oppressive legal system defining in detail the framework for the functioning of Poles and Polish citizens under the conditions of occupation which resulted in mass repressions against Poles, taking more and more brutal forms and encompassing a rapidly growing number of victims. It was used to eliminate and intimidate all attempts to resist by Poles. Above all, however, both systems were aimed at the extermination of the Polish intelligentsia which could be a potential threat to the Third Reich or communism.

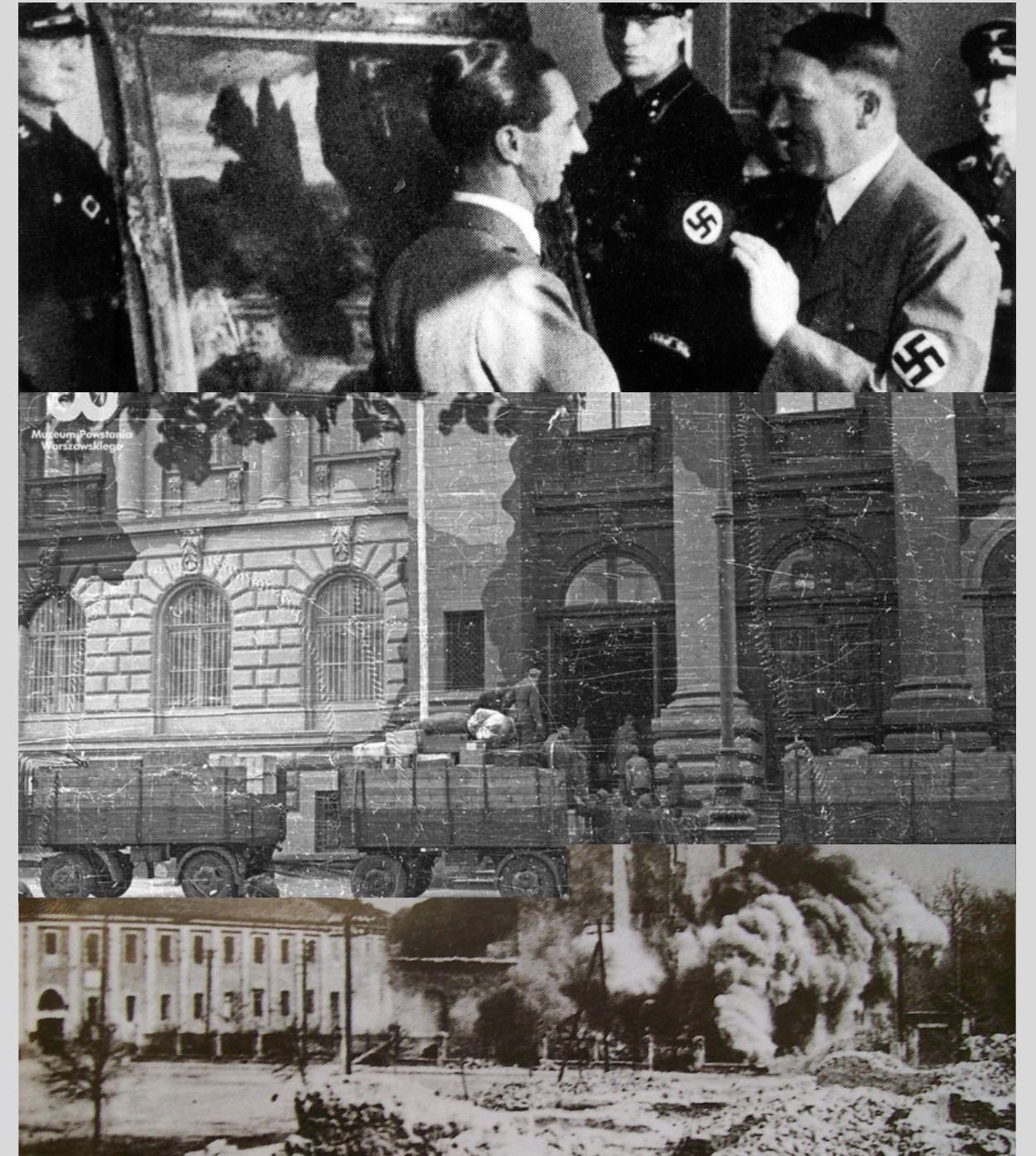


The most brutal examples of such actions were the Katyn Massacre conducted by the Soviet Union and the German AB operation. The Katyn Massacre resulted in the death of over 20,000 people. They were Polish citizens, including over 10 thousand army and police officers. During the AB (Intelligenzaktion) operation, German occupiers murdered at least 6.5 thousand Poles - including approx. 3.5 thousand representatives of Polish political and intellectual elites. Except for mass extermination of Poles, other forms of systemic repression against Polish citizens were displacement and deportation actions or deportations to concentration and labour camps. The extermination of intelligentsia made an enormous impact on Poland, it successfully stopped progression and economic growth after the war.

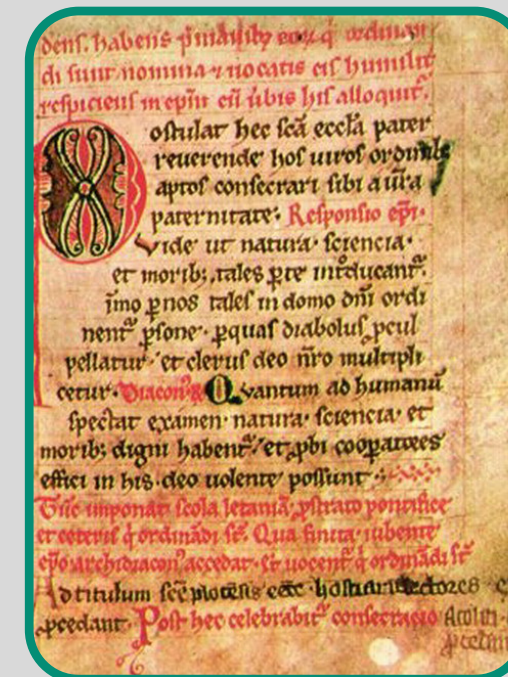
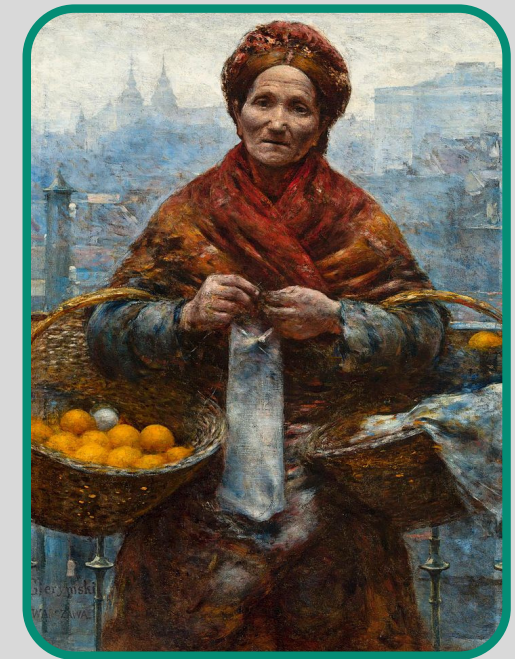
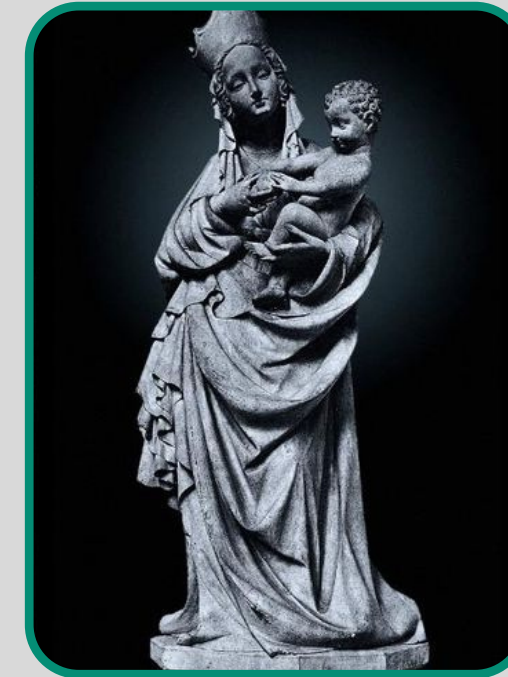


THE PLUNDER AND DESTRUCTION OF CULTURAL GOODS

The plunder and destruction began shortly after the German-Soviet aggression against Poland. The robbery and destructive activities were organized and carried out mainly by the Third Reich, but the USSR also plundered a significant part of the works of culture and art of the Polish state and its citizens both during the war and after it when Poland remained under the influence of USSR. Since the end of the war, the Polish state has made efforts to recover looted works of art. Although successful in some cases, tens of thousands of Polish works of culture and art are still lost without a trace.



The scale of these losses is practically impossible to estimate precisely and only rough estimates can be made. The German occupier stole 2.8 thousand paintings by famous European painting schools, 11 thousand paintings by Polish painters, 1.4 thousand valuable sculptures, 15 million books from various periods, 75 thousand manuscripts, 22 thousand old prints, 25 thousand historic maps, 300 thousand graphics, 50 thousand museum manuscripts and 5,000 church bells. The Germans also destroyed 26 thousand school libraries, 4.5 thousand educational libraries and 1 thousand scientific libraries (the total loss of libraries amounted to approx. 22,000,000 volumes), and many other undocumented exhibits and valuables. For political reasons, no estimation of the losses caused by the Soviet army during and after the war, which completed the scale of the destruction, was made.



WAR DAMAGES

Dilapidated municipal real estate	→	295.4 thousand
Dilapidated rural homesteads	→	467 thousand
Trade	→	65%
Post and Connectivity	→	62%
Public Administration and banks	→	60%
Schools and scientific institutions	→	60%
Health care	→	55%
Transport	→	50%
Culture and art	→	45%
Farming and gardening	→	33%
Industry, mining, power engineering, craft	→	32%



SOURCES

<https://ipn.gov.pl>

<https://tyflomapy.pl>

<https://historiamniejznanaizapomniana.wordpress.com>

<https://en.wikipedia.org>

<https://tropicielehistorii.pl>

<https://przystanekhistoria.pl>

<https://blogbeztabu.blog>

<https://www.rp.pl>

<https://dzieje.pl>

ILO Dubois

KOSZALIN

Prtesentation made by students from I LO Dubois
participanting in the project 'Memory of Europe'



Erasmus+

