



A Concise History of Poland

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Poland only sporadically makes the headlines of the Anglo-Saxon world, and its history remains comparatively unknown. It has suffered the dubious distinction of being wiped off the political map in 1795, to be resurrected after the First World War, to suffer seeming annihilation during the Second World War, reduction to satellite status of the Soviet Union after 1945, only to emerge during the 1980s. It is presently a contender for membership in the European Union. The only general introduction to the politics of Polish history in English, *The Concise History of Poland* covers medieval times to the present. The authors describe how Polish society developed under foreign rule in the 19th century and how it was altered by and responded to 45 years of communism, and developments since its collapse. Primarily a political outline of Poland's turbulent and complex past, it traces the process of its rise and fall from the middle ages, from a dynastic realm to a remarkable constitutional experiment in multinational, consensual politics, embracing much of Lithuania, Ukraine, and Belarus. Jerzy Lukowski is Senior Lecturer in Modern History, School of Historical Studies, at the University of Birmingham, UK. He is also the author of, *The Partitions of Poland* (Addison Wesley, 1998), and *Liberty's Folly* (Routledge, 1991), and many journal articles. Herbert Zawadzki is Teacher of History at Abingdon School, in Abingdon, UK. He spent the first ten years of his life in various Polish resettlement camps across the length and breadth of Britain, eventually settling near Stratford-on-Avon. He has since traveled extensively in Poland, Belarus, and Lithuania. He has written for several journals and contributed to the *Cambridge Encyclopedia of Russia and the former Soviet Union* (1994).

A Concise History of Poland Details

Date : Published November 12th 2001 by Cambridge University Press (first published 2001)

ISBN : 9780521559171

Author : Jerzy Lukowski

Format : Paperback 336 pages

Genre : History, Cultural, Poland



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Richard Lynn says

I saw an incredible film in 2006 named "Jestem" by Polish director Dorota Kedzierzawska who was in attendance at the screening during the Austin Polish Society Film Festival. Not only did I love this film (that was set in Poland), it made me want to learn more about Poland. This book is "concise" as the title says, but you should be warned, if you don't know much about history of eastern Europe, you might get a little lost. I did. But I still want to visit Poland and see if appears as it does in the film Jestem.

Emily says

I finished!! I've only been reading this book for a little over two years. I found most parts of it a little hard to follow - even though I know the basic history of Poland. But towards the end it made more sense. I wouldn't recommend it as a good introduction to Polish history.

Mieczyslaw Kasprzyk says

This is beyond a doubt the best history of Poland I have read so far (and I run a website on Polish History). It is concise yet detailed enough for any reader or for the curious. There are fascinating facts that one does not come across in any of the other histories which add to the general background and it is written in a eminently readable fashion. Lukowski is a very familiar name amongst students of Polish History - his account of the Partitions is a classic and the partnership with Zawadzki makes me want to read that historian's work also. I cannot recommend this book enough. If you want a History of Poland then this is the definitive version.

Mel Bossa says

Ah, Poland. Russians to the left of me, Germans to the right--here I am stuck in the middle with you. Read this for my Polish boy. :-) Such an interesting, rebellious, and complicated scarred little country, as he is...

:-)

Nick Lofthouse says

Well researched, written in engaging ways, and just the right amount of detail to be comprehensive while balancing length.

Wendy Jackson says

More a 3.5 than a 3. I read this prior to a short trip to Poland, and I feel it has given me a good understanding of the country's history and people.

Pros: Fairly readable, comprehensive. Lots of useful maps, which are needed considering how much the country has changed, even in relatively recent history.

Cons: The authors often provided extensive detail on particular historical events, and it was not apparent to me if/why they needed so much attention. It might be apparent to people who know Polish history better than I do.

Lorenzo Berardi says

Went to one of the Italian presentations of this book, already printed in the UK with Cambridge Press.

It was a very typical (and rather boring) example of academic exhibitionism of both Italian and Polish university professors babbling about their own little corner of a self representative world. Instead of introducing the book as it may have deserved these people were criticizing the tiniest "wrong" detail in it.

Three hours of debate almost without talking about what is really inside this book I didn't read yet, but concentrating on its editing, minor translation choices and small historic episodes the two authors forgot to mention.

Well, probably they had to "forget" them! Otherwise would have been kind of impossible concentrating 900 years of Polish history in 350 pages. But go and tell this to the "Italian Polonists": they would never understand. Quoting one of the professors at the presentation "this book has a limit, there are no notes to the text and a book without notes is a naked one".

Sure. Certo. Jasne. Have you ever heard of artistic nakedness?

Probably not. Personally, I'm glad this book doesn't have notes.

What the most brilliant minds studying the Polish language and lovely discoursing on it, didn't get is that here we have a way for presenting Poland to a wider Italian audience. An audience that may have not studied the magic of Polish strumental case at the university and maybe is just interested in knowing more about a country long time forgotten on our history books.

Lukowski and Zawadki tried to do their best and this book is interesting to read and full of documentation. The Italian publisher should have worked more for introducing this book (no English interpreter for the very patient Lukowski at the presentation), but had the worth and intelligence to translate and print it.

And in Italy the same idea of investing money and time for promoting a history book is enough for a sincere handclap.

All that said, the book is not perfect, but important and accurate.

PS: The only thing the Italian editor is really to blame for is not adding any extra information about what happened in Poland after 2005 when the English edition ends. Guys, if you publish a book in 2009 presenting it as an account on what's happening in a country you should write down some lines about its last

four years.

J.M. Hushour says

Not bad, but a little much at times. (1914-1945 consumes 80 freakin' pages! 1/4 of the book!) The early bits up to partition in the late 18th century are just mind-numbing, with little to no prehistory, the cool shit. After partition, one slogs through the obligatory nationalist crap, 1848, blah blah blah, World War I, etc., etc. The Soviet period and post-1989 are the good parts but reduced to little-to-nothing. Woefully inadequate in the arts department. Milosz mentioned once??

Nando says

Tedious. Lots of information.

Afina says

I love this book, mostly because it really is concise as the title explains to the readers, but this book will be less useful if the readers have no needed knowledges about history in East European or European history as a whole. This book helpfully explains the events happened in Poland, but what I like most is the part when both of the authors give us The Grand Duchy of Lithuania to read. There is not part when The Pale of Settlement mentioned (it happened when Catherine II ruled as a Russian Empress).

Danny says

My knowledge of Polish history going into this was fairly limited, which is why I thought that this book would be a good introduction to the topic. I ended up feeling a bit ambivalent about this presumption. On one hand, there's no doubt about the fact that it is a concise book which presents events throughout the country's history in an accessible manner. On the other hand, there are several times where you feel that you lack the necessary background or pre-history to properly understand a given period or event.

I am going to supplement this book with further readings, as should anyone else who has been through this fine book as an introduction to Polish history.

Sheila says

Considering Poland's history and the significance of the material, I feel a bit guilty rating this book a 2. But I felt it was a difficult read for the novice (such as me).

Joseph Serwach says

Good overview of the 1,000 year history of Poland from 966 to the present day. Most good books on Poland stop in the 1980s or early 1990s and this book was helpful because it adds the perspective of the past 20 eventful years to the mix.

Sonya S says

So far, this is a very interesting book. There's a lot I didn't know about where my grandparents came from!

Andrew says

I picked up this book as a quick review, to recover all that was slipping from Norman Davies' amazing but not at all concise "Poland" books. Touched on the major points in history, with some light editorializing, but I'd still call this an objective work. I also appreciate the authors/editors from taking the same routine historical analysis that treats Poland as if WWII and Communism were the only thing to ever happen there.
