

Summary

Poland in the interwar period (1918–1939)

The last two decades of the 20th century saw attempts made at various centres of university centres to produce an all-encompassing history of our state. This resulted in works related to the universities of Warsaw and Kraków, and to a limited extent, Poznań. The volumes produced in Poznań were the work of two professors: Jerzy Topolski (from the start of the 16th century up to the Partitions of Poland) and Czesław Łuczak (the Second World War). The Poznanian authors produced a work of extremely wide scope, as its subtitle suggests: *The history of a nation, state and culture*. This volume deals with the interwar period, and is intended by the author to be a continuation of this plan, and also to precede works analysing antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Partitions and the period after World War II.

When setting about retracing the years 1918–1939, we come across several basic conditions which consequently determine the arrangement of the material and the scope of the problems dealt with. As a result of the Partitions, the Polish state lost both its continuity terms of its political structures and a significant proportion of its territory, the majority of which was never to be regained, while those living there were subject to the rule of three highly diversified transformation processes that overlapped into the 19th century. These concerned political, economic and also cultural issues.

This resulted in the need to include in the narrative these years leading up to Poland regaining its independence in 1918, at least those following the January Uprising of 1864, and with Partition-related differences taken into account. The international circumstances are then taken into consideration, as well as processes shaping the drive for independence in the early 20th century. Particular attention is paid to the state's armed struggles for territory, and also to evaluating particular constituent elements of the new reality. This concerns the economy, processes shaping the political system, the situation in a society composed of various ethnic groups (also at the cultural level), and also the international backdrop against which the new state sought to find its rightful place.

Successive chapters deal with the arduous task of reconstructing the state, a task beset with enormous difficulties due to the conditions previously mentioned. This was expressed in the floundering parliament (the consequence of fierce inter-party battles), in the social tensions stemming from the discrepancy between expectations and the possibility to implement them, and economic deprivation, exacerbated by the international crisis. All these factors culminated in the slowly assembled democratic structures collapsing in the military coup of 1926.

The subsequent period, right up to and after the catastrophic year 1939, is one of an autocratic state and society, in which the problems mentioned earlier were tackled in various ways, with them being in part, but not entirely, eradicated by an upturn in the global economy. The next issues discussed relate to the dominant figure of Marshall Piłsudski, and these cover the entire interwar period, though

with the focus on the time from 1926 to 1935. It is true to say Poland was by no means exceptional in the Europe of the time, but the scale of this issue brought particular connotations regarding both its causes and effects. The book also covers issues related to cultural changes and the development of art and science, aspects that distinguished themselves in a decidedly positive way against the backdrop of what are understood as historical processes.

The book closes with a discussion of the September 1939 crisis. This takes into account internal processes leading up to the outbreak of war, which were to guarantee the security of the state (the expansion of the armed forces, the armaments industry), and also the attempt to guarantee Poland through a system of international alliances. The analysis leads to the conclusion that with regard to internal processes, not everything was done that was possible (although to a great extent this was also impossible). In terms of alliances, our state turned out to be a pawn in the game between the western powers and our insatiable eastern neighbour. In such conditions defeat was unavoidable. The narrative closes with an analysis of the tragic frontline events of September and October 1939.