

Tying Together a Story's Disparate Parts: On the Concept, Complexity, and Composition of the Comprehensive History of the Holocaust in Poland – 1941 As a Case Study

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The book *The History of the Holocaust in Poland* was originally conceived nearly forty years ago as part of the series *The Comprehensive History of the Holocaust*. Poland is perhaps the most complicated volume to compose. This paper will present this multi-authored book's analytical concept and planned composition, along with some of the complexities in tackling this topic, through the prism of 1941. One of the complex issues is determining what territory constitutes the Poland under discussion. Having decided on the prewar borders as the book's territorial framework, the authors were faced with a complicated division of Poland into ten separate German administrative units that followed several different paths of development during the Holocaust. Four large national groups lived in these areas, professing five main religions, along with numerous smaller national and ethnic groups and religions made up these ten regions, much of which were under Soviet rule until June 22, 1941. In most of the areas that had been annexed by the USSR, the policy regarding Jews shifted to total murder during the second half of the summer or fall 1941, whereas in the areas that had been under German rule since 1939 the first discussions and preparations for genocide took place at the same time. Although these disparate parts were brought together under German rule during the summer of 1941, they continued in many ways to follow diverging paths towards the Jews' ultimate fate. In some of these regions, one national group constituted a significant majority, whereas in others there were two or more groups competing for dominance. Did a group's status as majority or minority in a region have an impact on the attitudes of its members toward the events? Did Jews' differing backgrounds and differing prior experiences in the war affect their reactions to events? These and other questions and issues that cut across all the above territorial subdivisions and backgrounds challenge the authors in their efforts to compose a cohesive and comprehensive narrative about a complex and diverse land. Indeed, we might ask if there is one cohesive narrative to be written.