PIAST DYNASTY

966 POLISH DUKE MIEZKO I ADOPTS CHRISTIANITY
The adoption of Western Christianity from Rome, rather than Eastern Christianity from Constantinople, was very significant as it meant Poland became part of Western civilisation.

1025 BOLEŚLAW I THE VALIANT BECOMES THE FIRST CROWNED KING OF POLAND
His coronation testified to the independence of the Polish state and strengthened its standing among the kingdoms of Europe.
1138–1320 INTERNAL FRAGMENTATION OF POLAND
In 1138 King Bolesław III divided the country among his sons. The country was further divided in subsequent years and became a loose collection of small principalities. Władysław I the Elbow-high reunited the country in 1320 and was crowned king of Poland.

1334 CORONATION OF KAZIMIERZ THE GREAT (1310–1370)
Kazimierz was the only Polish king in Polish history who received the title ‘the Great’.

1370 DEATH OF KAZIMIERZ THE GREAT – END OF THE PIAST DYNASTY. THE ANGEVIN DYNASTY IS BROUGHT TO POLAND
After Kazimierz the Great died without a legitimate heir to the throne, Louis the Great of Hungary (called Louis of Hungary in Poland) from the Angevin dynasty was crowned king of Poland.

ANGEVIN DYNASTY

1384 LOUIS’ DAUGHTER JADWIGA (1373–1399) IS CROWNED QUEEN OF POLAND
Jadwiga was the first Queen Regnant in Polish history.

1410 BATTLE OF GRUNWALD
The Polish-Lithuanian forces claimed a decisive victory over the Teutonic Knights.

1505 NIHIL NOVI ACT – THE BEGINNING OF THE NOBLES’ DEMOCRACY
Latin: Nihil novi nisi commune consensu (‘Nothing new without the common consent’). This meant limiting the power of the king. Nihil novi established the so-called Nobles’ Democracy in Poland. In this political system, the power of the king was limited and the country was in practice ruled by the Sejm, which was divided into two chambers: the Senate, composed of dignitaries and bishops, and the Chamber of Envoys, composed of representatives elected by local assemblies of Polish and Lithuanian hereditary nobles. The Sejm was in charge of all legislation, treasury matters (including taxation and budgets) and foreign affairs.

1569 UNION OF LUBLIN.
Beginning of the unified Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

1572 END OF THE JAGIELOŃIAN DYNASTY
When the Polish King Zygmunt II Augustus died without any heirs, Poland became an elective monarchy where the king was elected by the nobility.

with Poland in exchange for Jadwiga’s hand and the Polish crown. At his baptism, Jagiello received the name Władysław. The Union of Poland and Lithuania strengthened both nations in their shared opposition to the Teutonic Knights and the growing threat of the Grand Duchy of Moscow.

CONTEXTUALISING VISITS TO POLAND
1574 FIRST ELECTED KING
Henri de Valois of France was elected King of Poland.

1648 CHMIELNICKI UPRISING AND THE POLISH-RUSSIAN WAR
The Chmielnicki Uprising was a Cossack revolt that ravaged south-eastern Poland. Starting in 1654, the Cossacks were supported by the Russian tsar, beginning a period of Russian influence over the area that is now Ukraine. The Chmielnicki Uprising ended in 1667.

1655 THE DELUGE
The Swedish invasion of the Polish lands, which ended in 1660 with the signing of the Treaty of Olivia.

1683 BATTLE OF VIENNA
Polish troops led by King Jan III Sobieski came to the aid of Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I to break the Turkish siege of Vienna. The victory at Vienna marked the end of the expansion of the Ottoman Empire and the Austrian Empire emerged as a major player in Central and Eastern Europe.

1700 POLISH INVOLVEMENT IN THE GREAT NORTHERN WAR
Poland’s role in the Great Northern War weakened the state and contributed to increased anarchy and economic collapse.

1764 THE CONVOCATION SEJM
During the Convocation Sejm, attempts were made to introduce political and economic reforms in order to strengthen the Polish state and to prepare for the election of a new king. The liberum veto, which allowed a single representative to end the session or veto proposed legislation, was abolished during the Convocation Sejm. These attempts to reform the weakened state were insufficient and did not halt the expansionist policies of Poland’s larger and stronger neighbours. After the Convocation Sejm, the last king of Poland, Stanisław August Poniatowski, was elected and crowned.
**THE PERIOD OF THE PARTITIONS**

**1772 FIRST PARTITION OF POLAND**
The Nobles’ Democracy led to the weakening of central government, causing Poland to become a collection of small autonomous principalities. Poland’s three neighbours – Austria, Prussia and Russia – took advantage of the collapsing state to annex large areas of Polish territory.

**1788 THE FOUR YEAR SEJMJ**
The Four Year Sejm, also known as the Great Sejm, took place from 1788-1792. The goal was to introduce major structural reforms, including the strengthening of executive power.

**1791 THIRD OF MAY CONSTITUTION**
The greatest achievement of the Four Year Sejm was the adoption of the constitution on 3 May 1791. However, the Targowica Confederation, formed by a group of nobles under the patronage of Catherine II of Russia, led to the overthrow of the constitution and the Second Partition of Poland.

**1793 SECOND PARTITION OF POLAND**
Poland was partitioned for the second time between Russia and Prussia. The annexation of the country’s most fertile lands and industrial centres led to Poland’s total economic collapse.

**1794 KOŚCIUŚZKO UPRISING**
Tadeusz Kościuszko returned to Poland from America to attempt to free Poland from foreign domination. He counted on foreign support, particularly from France, and mass support among Polish society. Despite his appeals to peasants, Jews and other groups, Kościuszko’s uprising did not garner enough support to defeat the Russian and Prussian armies. His defeat marked the final loss of independence and the disappearance of Poland from the map of Europe.

**1795 THIRD PARTITION OF POLAND**
The Third Partition was carried out by Russia, Prussia and Austria. The Polish lands were completely annexed and Poland ceased to exist as an independent state.

**UNDER FOREIGN RULE**

**1807 THE DUCHY OF WARSAW**
The Duchy of Warsaw was created by Napoleon I out of the Polish lands surrendered by Prussia as part of the Treaty of Tilsit. It was later enlarged with territories ceded to Napoleon by Austria. The Duchy of Warsaw ceased to exist after Napoleon’s defeat in 1813.

**1815 CONGRESS OF VIENNA**
During the Congress of Vienna, Polish territories were further divided among Austria, Prussia and Russia. These divisions remained in place for 100 years.

**1830 NOVEMBER UPRISING**
The November Uprising was an attempt for independence in the Polish territories under Russian rule. It occurred in reaction to repressive tsarist policies in Poland. However, the revolt was poorly
planned, with many commanders unwilling to completely devote themselves to the fight, and did not achieve broad popular support. After the uprising was suppressed in 1831, the Russian authorities launched a series of reprisals.

**1848** SPRING OF NATIONS (ALSO CALLED THE EUROPEAN REVOLUTIONS OF 1848 OR THE YEAR OF REVOLUTIONS)

During the Spring of Nations, a period of revolutions and political unrest in several European countries, Poles fought against the Prussians in Greater Poland and the Austrians in Galicia. They also took part in revolutions in other parts of Europe, including Hungary and Italy.

**1863** JANUARY UPRISING

Another uprising took place in the Russian territories due to tsarist policies and the patriotic revival of Polish society. Despite some initial successes, the uprising was brutally crushed in 1864. About 25,000 Poles were killed, and thousands were deported to Siberia.

**1863** OUTBREAK OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The outbreak of World War I galvanized many Polish political activists who hoped that they would be able to establish an independent Polish state. However, there was a large debate about what side the Poles should take during the war.

**1878** END OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Poles fought on all sides of the First World War. There was also a group of so-called Legionaries led by Marshal Józef Piłsudski, specifically fighting for Polish independence.

At the end of the war, the Polish cause received support from American President Woodrow Wilson, who announced in January 1918 that it was necessary to re-establish an independent Polish state. Shortly after, the revolutionary Russian government issued a decree cancelling the partition treaties and all the laws resulting from them.

**1919** POLISH-SOVIET WAR

A dispute over the new Polish state’s eastern territories and the desire of the Soviets to bring communism into Europe led to the outbreak of the Polish-Soviet war. The Polish army managed to stop the Soviet advance on 15 August 1920. The Polish victory put a halt to the early Soviet regime’s expansionist aims and determined the Polish-Soviet border for the rest of the Interwar Period.

**1921** MARCH CONSTITUTION

The March Constitution established Poland as a democratic and liberal country, giving its citizens a wide range of civil rights.

**1926** JÓZEF PIŁSUDSKI’S Coup d’ÉTAT

Poland’s political and economic turmoil in the aftermath of the war, along with the inability to create a viable parliamentary coalition, led to Marshal Józef Piłsudski’s coup d’état. Piłsudski became the country’s de facto dictator and primarily was involved with military and foreign affairs. His close associate, Ignacy Mościcki, was elected president and parliament’s role was limited. Józef Piłsudski, as a war hero, had a large following in Polish society and his vision of a multi-ethnic Poland especially appealed to minorities.

**1935** APRIL CONSTITUTION, DEATH OF JÓZEF PIŁSUDSKI

Instituted by Piłsudski’s supporters, the April Constitution completely changed the Polish political system, strengthening the authority of the executive and limiting the role of parliament. The constitution can be seen as the next step following the May 1926 coup to authoritarian rule. Józef Piłsudski died shortly after the constitution was adopted.
1938 **Munich Agreement**
Taking advantage of the annexation of Czechoslovakia by Nazi Germany, Poland annexed the disputed territories of Zalożie, Orava and Spis. These actions were condemned by public opinion in Poland and abroad. Shortly after this, Nazi Germany began advancing territorial claims on Polish territories.

1939 **Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact**
Also known as the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, this was signed by the foreign ministers of Nazi Germany and the USSR on 23 August 1939. A secret clause in the pact outlined the Nazi and Soviet spheres of influence in Central Europe and was mainly concerned with the division of Poland.

**Second World War**

1939 **Outbreak of the Second World War**
- 1 September 1939: Nazi Germany invades Poland.
- 17 September 1939: the Soviet Army invades Poland from the east.
After more than a month of fighting, Polish resistance was crushed in early October 1939. Following the guidelines of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the Polish lands were divided between the USSR and Nazi Germany. Parts of western Poland were annexed directly to Nazi Germany and the rest became the General Government.

1940 **Murder of Polish Officers in Katyn, the First Transport of Prisoners Arrives in Auschwitz**
Approximately 230,000 Polish soldiers were taken prisoner by the Soviets during the so-called September Campaign in 1939. They were sent to prisons and camps in the USSR. Nearly 20,000 officers who were imprisoned in camps in Kozielisk, Starobielsk and Ortashkov were murdered by the NKVD in 1940 in forests near the towns of Katyn, Kharkov and Mednoe.
On 14 June 1940, the first transport of Polish political prisoners were sent from Tarnów to Auschwitz I.

1943 **Teheran Conference, Warsaw Ghetto Uprising**
Representatives of the three Allied powers – Great Britain, the United States and the USSR – agreed the positioning of Poland’s post-war eastern borders, which would annex large areas of eastern Poland (today in western Lithuania, Belarus and western Ukraine) to the USSR, and instead give Poland additional territories in the west, annexed from Germany.
The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising broke out in April 1943. It was the largest action launched by the Jewish resistance against the Germans in occupied Europe.

1944 **Warsaw Uprising, Polish Committee of National Liberation (PKWN) is formed**
As the Soviet Army advanced west, the command of the Polish underground planned an uprising to liberate the capital from the Germans before the Soviets arrived. The Warsaw Uprising lasted 63 days but ended in failure. About 80,000 Polish fighters and 130,000 civilians were killed and the city was almost completely destroyed.
The Polish Committee of National Liberation (PKWN) was set up in Moscow in 1944, comprising of Polish Communists who had survived Stalin’s purges in the 1930s or fled to the USSR during the war. The PKWN was supported by the USSR and proclaimed its authority in July 1944 in Lublin. Its role was to set up the Communist system in Poland.

1945 **End of the Second World War, Yalta Conference Confirms Soviet Influence over Poland**
The Allied leaders met at Yalta in 1945 to discuss the political landscape of post-war Europe. It was at Yalta that the borders of the post-war Polish state were decided and Poland, along with most other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, found itself in the Soviet sphere of influence.
1947 **Parliamentary Elections**

The Communists rigged the elections in order to seize total power in Poland. After the elections, the legal opposition ceased to exist.

1948 **Establishment of Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR)**

The Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR) was formed from the communist Polish Workers Party and several smaller satellite parties, both communist and socialist. As a result, a single-party system, typical for Communist regimes, was introduced in Poland. From then on, the PZPR was referred to simply as “the Party”.

1956 **The Thaw, Strikes in Poznań**

Stalin’s death in 1953 led to a period of liberalization known as the Thaw, which lasted until 1957. Despite this, the Polish United Workers Party continued to dominate the country. In June 1956, a series of strikes took place in the city of Poznań, where workers protested against shortages of food and consumer goods, bad housing and a steep decline in real income. About 75 people were killed during the protests when the army was sent in to put down the riots. In the aftermath, wages were raised by 50% and the regime promised economic and political reforms.

1968 **Student Protests, State-Sponsored ‘Anti-Zionist’ Campaign**

In March 1968, students in Warsaw took to the streets to protest intellectual restrictions introduced by the Communist government. The protests spread to other cities. All were eventually suppressed by the police and groups of so-called worker squads, who were sent by the regime to attack the students.

At the same time, the Soviet Union decided to fully back the Arab countries in their conflict against Israel, a Western ally. Following the defeat of the Soviet-backed Arab states by Israel in the Six-Day War in 1967, the countries of the Soviet Bloc (with the exception of Romania) broke diplomatic relations with Israel. The Polish Communist government ordered an anti-Zionist and anti-Israel propaganda campaign and began purging Jewish party members. Additionally, the regime blamed ‘Zionists’ for the student protests, which became a springboard for a larger antisemitic campaign in Poland. About 20,000 Jews left Poland as a result of the campaign.

1970 **Strikes in Gdańsk, Gdynia, Szczecin, Radom and Ursus**

Workers launched strikes in cities across Poland, particularly on the coast and in central areas, protesting against increases in food prices. Many cities were marked by riots and battles with the police. The most dramatic events occurred in Gdańsk and Gdynia.

1978 **John Paul II is elected Pope**

For many Poles, the election of Karol Wojtyła as Pope was one of the highlights of the era. One of John Paul II’s earliest official visits was to Poland in June 1979, where enthusiastic crowds numbering in the hundreds of thousands greeted him. He also gave tacit support to the anti-Communist movement on later trips to Poland.

1980 **Solidarity Trade Union is founded in Gdańsk**

The independent self-governing trade union Solidarity was founded in the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk and led by Lech Wałęsa. Solidarity was not only a trade union independent of the Communist regime, but also a broad social movement that united Poles across the social spectrum – from people with strong connections with the Roman Catholic Church to members of the moderate left.

1981–1983 **Martial Law (Stan Wojenný)**

Following a period where Solidarity functioned as a legal organization, the Communist government of Poland moved to crush the political opposition by declaring martial law. Daily life was greatly restricted and pro-democracy movements such as Solidarity were banned. Major opposition leaders, including Lech Wałęsa, were arrested and detained, and soldiers in military vehicles patrolled the streets of every major Polish city. Thousands of ordinary people with connections to the opposition were also arrested. Martial Law was lifted by parliament on 22 July 1983.
In recent years, historians have attempted to determine the number of victims of Martial Law. Estimates range from about 60 to over 100.

In 1990, the Polish United Workers’ Party dissolved and in 1991 the first entirely free parliamentary elections were held. This was the final end of Communist era in Poland.
2004 **POLAND BECOMES A MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Poland formally became a member of the European Union on 1 May 2004.

*President Aleksander Kwaśniewski signing the EU accession treaty*