EXPLORING THE HOLOCAUST

THE ‘FINAL SOLUTION’

INTRODUCTION

This lesson forms the centrepiece of *Exploring the Holocaust* since it focuses on the evolution and perpetration of the Holocaust by the Nazis and their allies and collaborators during the Second World War.

It does so first by examining how Nazi policy developed between 1939 and 1942 into one of mass murder on a European scale. The lesson then proceeds to address challenging questions regarding the identity of the perpetrators and the methods used to carry out the ‘Final Solution’ whilst seeking to maintain a focus on its human impact on individuals and communities. These are themes which students may understandably find upsetting so teachers should consider allowing them time for reflection during and after the lesson.

It is also important to emphasise that this is not intended as a stand-alone lesson, even for schools which choose not to follow the whole scheme of work. It uses a resource which refers back to the *Pre-war Jewish Life* lesson whilst its content can only be properly understood in the context of other previous lessons, notably *Antisemitism*, *Nazi Persecution of Jews in Germany* and *Ghettos*. Similarly, it should not be the end point of a programme of study: the questions regarding perpetrators are explored further in the *Dilemmas, Choices and Responses to the Holocaust* lesson whilst other responses should also be addressed through the *Jewish Resistance during the Holocaust* and *Rescue during the Holocaust* lessons.

For obvious reasons, the lesson has been placed in the History strand of the cross-curricular framework but its centrality to the scheme of work mean that it should be taught in any single-subject programme of study.

RESOURCES

The lesson makes use of the following resources:

- *The ‘Final Solution’* PowerPoint.
- *The ‘Final Solution’* cards: 15 double-sided cards which relate the fate of different Jewish communities during the Holocaust. Teachers and students will recognise the images used from the *Pre-war Jewish Life* cards.

- *Auschwitz testimonies*: a sheet of short extracts of memories of Auschwitz-Birkenau from survivors who came from some of the communities covered by the cards.

CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING

The 'Final Solution' ('*Endlösung*' in German) was the Nazi euphemism for what we commonly see as the Holocaust, i.e. the systematic attempt to murder every Jewish man, woman and child in Europe.

Though radical antisemitism was the defining feature of Nazi ideology, pre-war policy aimed to exclude Jews from public life and then, through emigration, from Germany altogether. It was only during the Second World War that this was transformed into continental mass murder. How and why this transformation took place has been a subject of considerable historical debate, notably in the 1970s and 1980s (when Holocaust studies were still largely in their infancy) in the debates between so-called 'intentionalist' and 'functionalist' historians. However, although these often acrimonious disputes are sometimes still the subject of A Level History questions, they have long since been overtaken by the enormous body of historical research undertaken since the 1990s which has produced a considerable consensus as to the origins of the Holocaust.

Whilst historians still disagree as to the relative importance of factors such as ideology, economics, and wider Nazi demographic plans, there is today near unanimity on the broad chronological and conceptual outlines of the development of the Holocaust. Essentially, Nazism's antisemitism and its obsession with Lebensraum – targeting precisely those areas of Europe which had the continent's largest Jewish communities – always carried genocidal potential but the precise form in which this potential was realised evolved radically during the course of the Second World War. Rather than there being a single moment at which the Nazi leadership decided to murder all of Europe's Jews, a process of cumulative radicalisation took place. In this process, both the central authorities in the Reich and local German administrators in the occupied territories played a key role, each tending to reinforce the other's radicalism.

The invasion of Poland in September 1939 led to immediate escalation, both because it brought two million Jews under Nazi control and because it represented the crossing of an important psychological threshold – tens of thousands of Poles and Jews were murdered in late 1939 in a climate of unrestrained racist violence which surpassed anything yet seen in the Reich. It was in this atmosphere that the SS developed the concept of a Jewish 'reservation': a location to which all of the ever growing numbers of Jews living under Nazi rule would be deported. Although the site of the planned reservation changed – the Lublin region of Poland, the French colony of Madagascar, the Soviet Union – the concept remained a central obsession well into 1941. Put simply, this was a policy of genocide since the Nazis fully expected that large numbers of deported Jews would die in the inhospitable living conditions. However, these plans were frustrated: logistical chaos and resistance from local Nazi leaders prevented mass deportations to Lublin whilst Britain's refusal to surrender thwarted the Madagascar Plan. Increasingly, Nazi leaders in Poland responded by creating ghettos to intern Jews prior to their anticipated deportation: conditions in these ghettos brought spiralling death rates.

By early 1941, therefore, the Nazis were already committed to genocide but not yet to the Holocaust – to the long-term decimation of Europe's Jews through starvation, disease and the like rather than to immediate, total murder. The planning for the invasion of the Soviet

Union was based on similar precepts, with the SS envisaging Russian territories in the Arctic Circle as the latest lethal territorial 'solution'. However, Operation Barbarossa was developed in an increasingly murderous atmosphere in which Nazi leaders and officials openly spoke of starving tens of millions of Soviet citizens to death. This reflected the view of the USSR as both a racial and ideological enemy of the Third Reich. Given the instinctive Nazi association of Jews with Communism, the invasion in June 1941 therefore brought a further radicalisation with Soviet Jews being murdered in situ – initially men, and then, from late summer, entire communities – by SS Einsatzgruppen killing squads and local collaborators. It is generally accepted that there was no central order for this but rather that individual commanders chose to interpret their instructions to eliminate Communist influences by killing Jews in the knowledge that radical initiative was welcomed by the regime.

Whilst mass murder was underway in the Soviet Union by September 1941, it seems that most Nazi leaders still expected the deportation of other Jews once the war was won (which was expected to be in the very near future). However, during the autumn this changed to a policy of murdering Jews across eastern Europe whilst the war was still in progress. Hitler's decision in September 1941 to deport Jews from the Reich to eastern ghettos before the USSR was defeated (variously attributed to anticipation of imminent victory or, contrarily, to the frustration of this expectation) prompted some Nazi leaders to murder local Jews both in the USSR and, crucially, in western Poland, where Chełmno extermination camp was created (murders began in December). As it became increasingly clear that Germany would not defeat Stalin's empire in 1941, other local Nazi officials – in the General Government region of Poland which had the largest Jewish population under German control – pushed for the elimination of non-working Jews who were seen as a drain on resources given that they could not be deported eastwards in the immediate future. Some carried out mass shootings whilst in October 1941 Himmler authorised the construction of Bełżec extermination camp for the murder of non-working Jews in the east of the General Government. Meanwhile, the rise of partisan movements in the USSR and Serbia was blamed on the Jews, leading to more massacres, whilst Germany's allies Croatia and Romania had also begun to murder Jews under their control.

By December 1941, these developments had coalesced. Whether Germany's declaration of war on the USA – the "*world war*" which Hitler had prophesied in 1939 would lead to "*the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe*" – was a decisive tipping point has been debated, but it is certainly clear that by this stage the murder of Jews across Europe was planned. The meeting of second tier officials at the Wannsee Conference of January 1942 (which was originally due to have taken place in December but was postponed due to Pearl Harbor) then set about coordinating this process. However, it was assumed at the conference that able-bodied Jews would be victims of 'extermination through labour' – that is, they would be worked to death.

It was then in the spring of 1942 that the Holocaust took on its recognisable form as a further wave of radicalisation swept all levels of the regime. What would become Aktion Reinhard – the murder of Jews in the General Government – began at Bełżec in March 1942. In the following months, two further extermination camps were created at Sobibór and Treblinka, an indication of the acceleration of the killing process in the region. Auschwitz-Birkenau began to receive transports from western Europe and Slovakia whilst Jews from the Reich were increasingly deported not to ghettos but directly to killing centres. During a tour of Poland in July 1942, Himmler ordered a further acceleration of the murders. In the months and years that followed, the Nazis attempted to murder the Jewish communities of every country under their control.

The Holocaust from 1942 onwards was carried out by every means at the Nazis' disposal, not only through purpose-built extermination camps. Mass shootings continued throughout the Holocaust, especially in the Soviet Union and Poland. Meanwhile, the strategy of extermination through labour was never completely abandoned: a minority of able-bodied Jews were enslaved in forced labour camps and the ever diminishing numbers of surviving ghettos. However, whilst their labour was designed to help the German war effort, the intention remained their murder.

The emergence of the Holocaust had implications for numbers of perpetrators as well as of victims. Murder on such a scale, and by so many means, entailed the *direct* involvement of hundreds of thousands of people: not merely the SS men in the camps and in the Einsatzgruppen, but also ordinary German policemen, the army, and administrators (who often participated in killings and round-ups themselves). Equally, many perpetrators were not Germans, ranging from the Romanian and Croatian government forces which murdered Jews themselves through the non-German volunteer killing squads in many parts of the USSR to the ordinary policemen in almost every country who rounded up Jews for deportation. Whilst a large group of Nazi leaders contributed to the decisions which led to the Holocaust, a far larger number of people made its perpetration possible.

LESSON PLAN

Given the emotionally challenging content of this lesson, which some students may feel uncomfortable discussing, teachers should throughout consider what are the most appropriate strategies for their students, allowing them to work individually, in pairs or small groups, or as a whole class.

Aims

To examine how Nazi anti-Jewish policy evolved to continental mass murder during the Second World War

To consider the range of institutions, individuals and sites involved in the perpetration of the Holocaust

To reflect on the human impact of the Holocaust on both individuals and communities

Starter

Show the class slide 2 in the PowerPoint and ask students what they think it represents. Explain that this was a list of the estimated Jewish populations of every country in Europe drawn up by the Nazis in early 1942. Ask why they think it was created – some students will probably grasp that these were all communities targeted for extermination. They may also note the inclusion of 'England' in the list – highlight that this, and the presence of neutral countries such as Sweden and Turkey, demonstrates that the Nazis aimed to murder all Jews. Explain the context: this document was produced for the Wannsee Conference, a meeting of Nazi officials in January 1942 which sought to coordinate the planned murder of Europe's Jews.

Now show the class the quotation (slide 3) from Hitler's speech to the Reichstag of 30th January 1939 (i.e. from before the war). Ask them what they think the significance of this quotation is (some words may need explanation). It is likely that many students will assume a direct line between this speech and the Wannsee Conference, i.e. the Holocaust was always planned. Explain that the truth was actually more complex. Depending on the prior knowledge and ability levels of the class and the time available, teachers may also wish to analyse the details of the quotation with the class, stressing the following points in particular:

- It shows the apparently illogical but strongly held Nazi belief that both capitalism and Communism were aspects of the supposed Jewish conspiracy against Germany.

- What is the significance of Hitler's reference to "*Jewish financiers in and outside Europe*"? In other words, Hitler was referring to the USA.

- Similarly, what is the meaning of "*world war*"? This has generally again been interpreted as a warning to the USA not to seek to resist Nazi expansion.

Therefore, the quotation can be seen as a warning to the Western powers not to challenge Germany, essentially using the Jews of Europe as hostages – this reflected Hitler's belief

that Britain and the USA were controlled by Jews. At the same time, the quotation does illustrate the genocidal potential of Nazi ideology. Teachers may also wish to remind the class that this shows the care which must be taken in analysing historical sources, especially if they are studying the Holocaust for source-based exam papers or coursework.

Activity 1

Divide the class into pairs. Give each pair a card. Explain that each card describes the fate of a particular Jewish community during the Holocaust. (Depending on class size and time available, teachers may choose not to use all 15 cards; if so, they should ensure that the following are used: Prague, Kłodawa, Kraków, Kaunas and/or Kuršėnai, Zagreb, and Paris and/or Amsterdam.)

Ask the group to read through their card and to pick out the dates which they consider to be the most important in the development of the Holocaust for this community. If considered necessary, teachers may wish to scaffold responses by asking questions such as:

- *When was this country invaded by Germany?*
- *When did large-scale anti-Jewish persecution begin?*
- *When, if applicable, did Jews begin to be sent to ghettos or transit camps?*
- *When did the Holocaust (i.e. mass murder in situ or deportation to extermination camps) begin in this community?*

Take feedback to produce a whole-class timeline of the most significant developments across Europe. This could be done on the whiteboard or through Post-its affixed to the classroom walls. Although many dates were important, the following should be particularly highlighted:

- The invasion of Poland (Kłodawa, Kraków): students should note that Polish Jews were immediately subjected to persecution which exceeded that in the Reich (e.g. slave labour and marking). Highlight the radicalising effect of the invasion and the emergence, and failure, of territorial 'solutions' (Kłodawa).
- The invasion of the USSR and the Einsatzgruppen (Kaunas, Kuršėnai, Białystok, Drohobycz): links can be drawn with the Nazi association of Jews with Communism noted earlier. This same period also saw the beginning of the murder of Croatian Jews by the Ustaše (Zagreb) and deportations to Transnistria by the Romanian government (Vășcăuți).
- The deportation of Jews from the Reich (Prague, Leipzig): links can be made here with the cases of Łódź and Riga from the Trust's *Ghettos* lesson, i.e. the decision to murder local Jews to make room for deportees from the Reich. In the case of Łódź, this led to the creation of Chełmno extermination camp, whose first victims included the Jews of Kłodawa.
- The escalation of the murders in the spring and summer 1942: Aktion Reinhard (Drohobycz, Kraków) and deportations from central and western Europe (Prague, Leipzig, Topoľčany, Paris, Amsterdam) brought the Holocaust as we commonly

understand it. Teachers may wish to highlight that at least half of the victims of the Holocaust were murdered in 1942.

How far teachers wish to focus on the stages between these dates is a matter of judgement, based partly on the demands of exam specifications. The key points for students are:

- The nature of Nazi antisemitism (seeing Jews as *the* existential enemy of Germany) always made it likely that war would lead to catastrophe, as shown by the targeting of large numbers of Jews for death through the 'reservation' plans.

- Despite this, the Holocaust – the attempt to murder *every* single Jew in Europe and to do so *immediately in wartime* – was at least in part a result of the frustration of these earlier murderous plans. However, this progressive radicalisation itself again demonstrated the pervasive centrality of antisemitism to the Nazi worldview, with each setback – whether in anti-Jewish policy or the wider war – being seen to require ever more radical 'solutions'.

Activity 2

Ask the groups to return to their cards and to try to answer the questions on slides 5-6. Collect feedback and ask them to note down responses from other groups:

- *Who were the perpetrators of the Holocaust in this community?* Students should realise that they were not all Germans (e.g. the Ustaše and the Romanian government murdered Jews, the governments of Slovakia and Vichy France willingly handed over Jews to Germany, Lithuanian and Ukrainian auxiliaries took part in deportations and murders, French and Hungarian police rounded up Jews). Furthermore, the German perpetrators included groups such as ordinary policemen, not merely Nazi officials and the SS.

- *Which places were important in the murder of this Jewish community?* Students should consider not merely the killing sites but also the stages on the journey.

In coordination with slide 7, answers to this latter question can be used to highlight and clarify the range of sites:

- Extermination camps: purpose-built killing centres where almost all victims were murdered on arrival.

- Transit camps: primarily created in western Europe, these sites were an essential stage in the concentration of Jews prior to deportation to the killing centres. Note could also be made of the theatre in Amsterdam where Jews were held before being sent to Westerbork, which raises questions about the visibility of the deportations. (Similarly, most of the Parisian Jews captured in the mass arrests of July 1942 were held in an indoor cycling stadium whilst Prague Jews were held in an exhibition hall.)

- Ghettos: existing ghettos, such as Kraków, became holding pens whilst new ghettos were created as in Terezín, Drohobycz or, much later, Szeged. Ghettos themselves could become killing sites, as demonstrated during the round-ups in Kraków and Drohobycz in 1942-43.

- Forced labour camps: such sites offered an opportunity for the Nazis (and for their allies in Croatia and Romania) to exploit Jewish labour whilst also bringing about the death of their inmates.

- Mass shooting sites: almost as many Jews were shot as were murdered in gas chambers – the massacres in Kaunas, Kuršėnai, Białystok and Drohobycz were amongst thousands in the Soviet Union and Poland.

Discuss the implications of this range of sites:

- They show that the Nazis tried to kill Jews by every means available, highlighting the totality of their aims.

- They perhaps encourage us to broaden our definition of perpetrators. For example, who identified who was a Jew? (The Nazis often had to rely on the local civil service in occupied countries.) Who organised the complex, frequent deportations? Who timetabled the trains?

Activity 3

Explain that the class will now focus on one of these sites – Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest killing site of the Holocaust.

Explain that we know more about Auschwitz than the other murder sites mentioned on the cards, whether extermination camps such as Bełżec (Drohobycz, Kraków), Sobibór (Prague, Paris, Amsterdam) and Treblinka (Prague, Białystok) or mass shooting sites (Kaunas, Kuršėnai, Białystok, Drohobycz). Ask if there is any information on the cards which might tell us why this is, i.e. at these other sites almost everyone was murdered immediately so there were few, if any, witnesses. Auschwitz was unusual in that it was an extermination camp *and* concentration camp, meaning that some – still a minority – of Jews were selected for slave labour on arrival. This at least gave them a chance, however remote, of survival should Germany eventually lose the war.

Use slides 9-15 to illustrate what happened when transports arrived. These images come from the Auschwitz Album, a series of almost 200 photographs taken by the SS in May 1944 which depict the arrival of a transport from Beregszász in Hungary (now Bereghovo in Ukraine). Although these images were created by the perpetrators, they also remind us of the individuality of the victims, many of whom have been subsequently identified by survivors.

- Arrival (slide 9). As the Corfu card suggests, journeys to Auschwitz-Birkenau were often lengthy. They were also typically characterised by lack of food, water and sanitation. Arrival at the camp was thus often seen as a relief.

- Separation of the sexes (slide 10). This was a procedure repeated at other extermination camps. This image also gives students some opportunity to sense the size of the transports.

- Selection (slide 11). This was the decisive moment at which the fate of the majority of deportees was sealed. In Birkenau, selections were conducted by SS doctors (the man facing the prisoner at the front of the line and largely obscured by the guard).

- The march to the gas chambers (slides 12 and 13). These photographs make it clear which groups of people were most likely to be selected.

- Plunder (slide 14). The seizure and exploitation of possessions was also repeated at other extermination camps.

- Work (slide 15). Only a minority of people were selected for work. In Auschwitz-Birkenau, they were shaved and given uniforms. This did not happen in other extermination camps since the life expectancy of the much smaller numbers of prisoners was so short. However, most of those selected to work in Auschwitz-Birkenau also eventually lost their lives.

Give each student a copy of the *Auschwitz testimonies* sheet. Ensure that students understand that these are the testimonies of survivors so their experiences, horrific though they were, were not typical of most Jews sent to Auschwitz who were murdered immediately. Ask students to read through the testimonies and to note down answers to the following question:

- *What was the human impact of Auschwitz-Birkenau on these individuals?* Answers should note not only the struggle for survival in the face of appalling conditions but also the shock and pain of loss of loved ones and the sense of dehumanisation referred to by Gena Turgel.

Consider discussion of the purpose of this dehumanisation. It could be seen as a product of Nazi ideology, which viewed Jews as enemies of humanity, and as a means of bringing about their deaths via the strategy of extermination through labour. Was it also a psychological tactic for the perpetrators' benefit? If Jews were seen as less than human, was it perhaps easier to murder them? Consider also the historian Yehuda Bauer's argument that it was the perpetrators not the victims who were truly dehumanised, by their abandonment of basic human values.

Plenary

Ask students to consider what made the Holocaust possible, encouraging them to draw on their learning not merely from this lesson but also from those that preceded it. Discussion should dwell not merely on the mechanics of Nazi policy but also on the ideology which underpinned it and on the role of human agency, a theme which will be further explored in the *Dilemmas, Choices and Responses to the Holocaust* lesson.

THE CARDS – FURTHER INFORMATION

Kaunas [pronounced 'Cow-nas']: Makabi Kaunas, 1936. (Yad Vashem)

The fate of the Lithuanian capital's large Jewish community highlights the significance of the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 in the radicalisation of Nazi policy, since it demonstrates both the immediate wave of murders and the further escalation from late summer when the Einsatzgruppen and their collaborators began shooting women and children in large numbers. At the same time, the mass shootings also show the significant role of non-Germans in through the prominent part played in the massacres by far-right Lithuanian nationalists.

Kraków [pronounced 'Kra-koof']: Religious Jews in Kazimierz, 1936. (Public domain, courtesy of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum)

The impact of the invasion of Poland in 1939 was acutely felt in Kraków, especially after its designation as capital of the General Government (GG), the territory containing the largest Jewish population under Nazi rule. It was here that multiple anti-Jewish decrees were issued which applied to all Jews living in the GG. These laws and the forced population movements (expulsion of most Jews in 1940, ghettoisation of the remnant in 1941) were largely initiated by German officials in the GG, showing that it was not only the authorities in Berlin who contributed to the evolution of the Holocaust. The emergence and perpetration of Aktion Reinhard, the largest killing operation of the Holocaust, similarly relied on a wide range of people. As the card demonstrates, the murders were carried out not only in extermination camps such as Bełżec but also in the streets of cities by regular police, not all of whom were German.

Amsterdam: The Jewish High School, 1929. (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of David and Aviva Ben Heled)

The case of Amsterdam demonstrates how escalating anti-Jewish persecution invariably followed Nazi occupation whilst the onset of deportations to the East in the summer of 1942 was clear evidence of the rapid expansion of the Holocaust in that year to cover the whole of Europe. The fact that western European Jews were not murdered locally in part reflects differences in the nature of occupation policy: countries such as the Netherlands saw an attempt to maintain some semblance of conventional rule whereas in eastern Europe, where Nazism was at its most brutal, murder in plain sight took place.

Szeged [pronounced 'Se-ged']: Dedication of a memorial to Hungarian Jewish soldiers who died in the First World War, 1930s. (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Zvi Frenkel)

The Holocaust in Hungary was untypical due to its status as a German ally. Policy prior to 1944 was thus entirely in the hands of a sovereign government; its actions caused the deaths of large numbers of Jewish men sent to the Eastern Front in labour battalions. However, like some other German allies (Italy, Bulgaria), it largely refused to hand over its Jews to the Nazis. It was thus, somewhat paradoxically, Hungary's attempt to abandon Germany that sealed the fate of its Jews by provoking invasion and the subsequent deportations to Auschwitz. At the same time, it should be stressed that Hungarian ministers, officials and police then played a vital role in this process.

Drohobycz [pronounced 'Dro-ho-bich', 'o' as in 'orange' in both cases]: A marketplace, 1921. (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Paul (Leopold) Lustig)

As an eastern Polish city which was occupied by the Soviet Union under the Nazi-Soviet Pact, Drohobycz highlighted the importance of both the invasion of the USSR and the later onset of Aktion Reinhard as decisive moments in the development of the Holocaust. This area of Poland was a centre of far-right Ukrainian nationalism and, as the card shows, followers of this movement played an important role in the perpetration of mass murder of the Jews as soon as the Germans invaded. Even more than in Kraków, the Holocaust in Drohobycz also demonstrated that mass shootings were as significant in Aktion Reinhard as extermination camps like Bełżec.

Prague: Ota and Katerina Margolius, c. 1930. (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Andrea Renner)

This card exemplifies several key developments. In 1939 Czech Jews were subjected to the same laws as German Jews but in their case the legal barrage was instantaneous rather than incremental. Hitler's decision to deport Jews in September 1941 was crucial both in itself and in its impact on the reception territories: the 5,000 Prague Jews sent to Łódź in October were amongst 25,000 from the Reich as a whole, with tens of thousands more planned. This contributed to the decision by German officials in Łódź, and Himmler, to create Chełmno extermination camp to murder local Jews to make room for the new arrivals. However, as the card demonstrates, deportees to the East from the Reich also began to be murdered from late spring 1942, marking the onset of the continent-wide Holocaust.

Topoľčany [pronounced 'To-pol-cha-ny', 'o' as in 'orange' in both cases]: Robert Vermes celebrates his bar mitzvah with friends, 1937. (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Erica and Joseph Grossman)

Whereas the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia left the fate of Czech Jews in the hands of the Nazis, that of their Slovak counterparts lay with their own newly independent government, as shown by its legislation, use of Jews as forced labour, and, crucially, decision to deport its Jews – the first German ally to do so. The fact that Slovakia paid Germany to take them on the promise they would never return (to ensure government claims to their property) is particularly striking. Tiso's later cessation of deportations further illustrated his initial complicity as it showed his relative autonomy: although the Nazis were frustrated, they took no action until an anti-Tiso uprising in September 1944 provoked German invasion for military reasons.

Kłodawa [pronounced 'Kwo-da-va', 'o' as in 'orange']: Members of the Tabaczyński family at a train station, 1935. (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Eugenia Tabaczynska Shrut)

As with Kraków, the fate of Kłodawa demonstrates the significance of the invasion of Poland. However, unlike Kraków, it was directly incorporated into the German Reich. This region of Poland was the first territory to be earmarked for deportation of its Jews under the early plans for a territorial 'solution'. The reference to deportations in 1939-41 can thus be used to introduce the development and failure of the 'reservation' plans. The subsequent rapid murder of Kłodawa's Jews (amongst the earliest victims of Chełmno) in January 1942 illustrates the spread of mass murder beyond the USSR and can be linked to the Prague card since deportations from the Reich proper to Łódź in late 1941 were crucial in the creation of Chełmno.

Kuršėnai [pronounced 'Koor-shen-y']: Studio portrait of the Fleisher family, 1920s. (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Yeheskel Fleisher)

This card raises broadly the same themes as that for Kaunas, including the roles of local collaborators as murderers, but perhaps even more starkly highlights the scale of the massacres in 1941: whereas in a large city like Kaunas some working-age Jews were initially spared for use as forced labour, in Kuršėnai – like hundreds of other small communities across Lithuania and Latvia – all Jews were murdered by the autumn.

Paris: A street in the Marais, 1930s. (Public domain, courtesy of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum)

The Holocaust in Paris was in many respects similar to that in Amsterdam: escalating persecution following German invasion; deportation to the East via transit camps in 1942. However, a crucial extra dimension was the fact that France still had its own government which retained some measure of sovereignty even in the occupied north. French politicians, officials and police thus played a key role in the persecution and deportation of the Jews. Indeed, Vichy policy was decisive in the pattern of the deportations: whilst the government was reluctant to hand over French citizens (which helps to explain the relatively high survival rate in France), it willingly arrested foreign-born Jews and indeed encouraged the Germans to take them.

Białystok [pronounced 'Bee-a-wi-stok']: May Day parade by members of the Bund, 1934. (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Leo Melamed)

As another Polish city occupied first by the Soviets and then by the Nazis, Białystok suffered a similar fate to Drohobycz, with mass shootings in 1941 and then deportations to extermination camps within the framework of Aktion Reinhard. The reason for the latter only commencing in early 1943, rather than 1942, was that Treblinka's first priority in late 1942 was the murder of the Jews of Warsaw and the west of the General Government (more than 700,000 people were murdered there in just five months in 1942) so Białystok, which lay outside the General Government, had to wait.

Zagreb: Members of a Zionist youth group, c. 1930. (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Rina Elisha)

More than almost any other card, this case highlights the role played by non-Germans in the Holocaust. The mass murder of Croatian Jews was initiated and largely carried out by the Ustaše as part of a wider programme of genocide which also targeted Serbs and Roma with the aim of creating an ethnically 'pure' Croatia: more than 300,000 people, the majority Serbs, were murdered. A particularly significant part was played by Jasenovac, later nicknamed 'the Auschwitz of the Balkans' as a reflection of its size, large network of satellite camps, and role as a mass murder site. However, unlike Auschwitz, there were no gas chambers in Jasenovac: the brutal methods of killing deployed by the Ustaše illustrate the limitations to the dated view of the Holocaust as a supposedly 'industrialised' mass murder.

Leipzig: Berta Rosenhein on her first day at school, 1929. (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Berta Rosenhein Hertz)

As this card demonstrates, German Jews had a somewhat better chance of surviving the Holocaust than those in most other countries precisely because their pre-war persecution led most to emigrate. Although many fled to countries subsequently invaded by Germany, others were luckier, including the girl in the photograph – Berta Rosenhein – who came to the UK on the Kindertransport. However, those who remained were deported following Hitler's September 1941 decision to clear the Reich of Jews; amongst them was Berta's mother Irma, who was on the first transport from Leipzig – to Riga in January 1942. The reason why deportations from Leipzig started later than those from Prague was that the cities with the largest Jewish populations (which also included Berlin and Vienna) were prioritised.

Vășcăuți [pronounced 'Vas-koats']: The Lifschitz family outside their shop and home, 1920s. (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Rita Lifschitz Rubinstein)

This card is similar to that for Zagreb in highlighting a murder operation not orchestrated by the Nazis. Although the Romanian government was not as systematic as the Ustaše, it murdered more Jews – at least 150,000, mainly in Transnistria. Most of them were either from territories Romania had lost to the USSR in 1940 (modern Moldova and, as in this case, south-western Ukraine) or from Transnistria itself, especially the Odessa, where tens of thousands of Jews were shot by Romanian troops in October 1941. By contrast, the Jews of Romania's historic core, though subjected to horrendous persecution, were mostly spared, again showing that German allies had some freedom of manoeuvre. More than 200,000 Jews from Transylvania, part of pre- and post-war Romania, were also murdered but this was wartime Hungarian territory so their murder was carried out by the Nazis and Hungarians.

Corfu: Studio portrait of Jacob Mordo with his children, 1930. (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Perla Lina Mordo Koulias)

The Holocaust in Corfu again highlights the autonomy of Germany's allies: although Greece's largest Jewish community (in Salonica/ Thessaloniki) was under German occupation and destroyed in 1943, most other Greek Jews lived in Italian-controlled zones. Unlike, for example, Slovakia, Italy refused to hand over Jews from its territories; indeed, whatever Mussolini's own view, many Italian diplomats and soldiers actively protected Jews. It was only after Mussolini's fall from power provoked German occupation (of Italy and its territories in France and Yugoslavia as well as in Greece) that these Jews were vulnerable. The role of Corfu's mayor is notable although this was not necessarily typical of the whole of Greece: many local officials sought to frustrate the Nazis whilst the Greek Orthodox Church took a clear public stand, unlike most other Christian churches. The fact that the Nazis were still deporting Jews after D-Day may also be seen as significant.

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