

“The System of Odd and Even Numbers”: Lewis Namier the Diplomatic Historian.’

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All men are unique; but some are unique than others. There is no avoiding this feeling when we contemplate the massive frame and fabulous career of Sir Lewis Namier.

Anon.¹

Sir Lewis Namier is the only historian whose name has entered the English and other languages as a verb.² It has also given rise to an -ism. While Rankean or Braudelian approaches have dominated the scene elsewhere, in Britain, Namier’s adopted country, one searches in vain for something comparable. There was no Stubbesism; there were no Butterfieldians or Maitlandites; nor is there any evidence of “Pollarding”. And yet with this lexicographical achievement Namier has been quasi-namierized himself; his name has become synonymous with only a portion of his scholarly work, the pioneering prosopographical studies of eighteenth-century parliamentary history, “the explosions let loose by [him] in the 1930s” whose reverberations were felt until the 1960s.³ By then, Namier and the Namier School had become the butt of satire. Its adherents pursued the same research agenda, asked the same questions, employed the same techniques, and so arrived at very similar conclusions – they were part of a single corporation, “Namier, Inc.”, a vast historical-industrial complex that specialized in mining vast quantities of “raw namierite”.⁴

The enduring qualities or, conversely, the shortcomings of Namierism remain subjects of debate amongst period specialists.⁵ Namier the student of great power relations, by contrast, has been largely allowed to slide into oblivion.⁶ It is a curious fate, for in his day his public profile as a commentator on international affairs was very high. What follows here is an attempt to reconstruct Namier as a diplomatic historian, the intellectual assumptions that underpinned

his work, the manner in which he framed the study of European great power politics, and the methods he employed.

Namier's route to diplomatic history was no more straightforward than his professional career or his personal life. He was an outsider who strove to be, and frequently was, on the inside. In some respects, his was a story not untypical of cosmopolitan Britain towards the end of the long nineteenth century but also of altogether more insular British academia.

Namier was born Ludwik Bernsztajn vel Niemirowski in 1888 in Wola Okrzejska in Russian Poland to Polish parents of Jewish extraction.⁷ Much of his childhood was spent across the border, at Koszyłowce (Kosjylivtsi), a country estate near Tarnopol (Ternopil') in Austrian Eastern Galicia, where his parents sought to establish themselves amongst the landowning Polish gentry. A brief stint at Lemberg (Lviv) university exposed him, who had not been brought up as a Jew, for the first time to Polish antisemitism. On Lemberg followed Lausanne, where the sociologist Vilfredo Pareto impressed upon him the imperative of statistical data and the importance of studying elites, though it is impossible to determine the Italian polymath's precise influence on the young Galician student.⁸ From Lausanne Bernsztajn moved to Britain where he eventually came into his own. The London School of Economics gave him a taste for social problems, and Halford Mackinder's lectures sharpened his appreciation of geopolitics.⁹ But it was at Oxford, under A.L. Smith¹⁰ at Balliol, that he found congenial surroundings, discovered history properly, and flourished. A first setback, a harsh reminder of his being an outsider, came in 1911, when he was rejected for an All Souls' fellowship. As the external examiner, A.F. Pollard¹¹, reported: "The best candidate <Namier> in sheer intellect was a Balliol man of Polish-Jewish origin, and I did my best for him: but the Warden [Sir William

Anson] and the majority of Fellows shied at his race, and eventually we elected the two next best.”¹²

In 1913, he became a British subject as Lewis Naymier (- he dropped the ‘y’ only in 1916 -). After a year as a press agent in America, in August 1914 he enlisted, somewhat quixotically, in the Public Schools battalion, only to be discharged in 1915 owing to his poor eyesight. Oxford contemporaries rescued him. Namier, wrote the father of one of them to a close aide of the war minister in the autumn of 1914, was “an exceptionally clever Jew. [...] I was much struck with his ability and linguistic power, and, for a foreigner, his knowledge of history was astounding. [...] [A]n individual of the type of Naymier might be very useful if his loyalty can be absolutely depended upon.”¹³

The praise was double-handed, and Namier himself remained conscious of being a “stranger” and not one “of you H[is] M[ajesty]’s native born subjects.”¹⁴ But his talents were beyond doubt. Following a spell at Wellington House compiling précis of the Austrian press, he joined the Foreign Office’s Political Intelligence Department (PID) in 1918. In Whitehall Namier was known for “a hard-headed able fellow.”¹⁵ His services, however, were not retained beyond the end of the peace conference. He had, in fact, grown “dispirited and felt that all of [his] work was in vain” well before then.¹⁶ More especially the Peace Handbooks, a series of *vademecums* instigated by G.W. Prothero, the first historical adviser to the Foreign Office, to guide the British peace delegation through the thickets of Europe’s fraught history and politics, he now viewed as a futile enterprise “likely to go to waste.”¹⁷ He was moreover profoundly out of sympathy with Britain’s yielding to “Polish Imperialists ... flouting us most successfully” on Poland’s frontiers and the rights of the country’s Jewish minority, which incidentally has made Namier again the target of conspiracy theorists in modern-day Poland.¹⁸ His experience with the awkward realities of officialdom and the loss of his parental manor house, plundered and razed to the ground by Ukrainian peasants, may well have expedited Namier’s conversion

to Zionism, his only real political commitment. Otherwise, he entered the post-war world without any of the ideological attachments of his contemporaries but with a grim and unrelenting hostility towards League idealism, Anglo-Saxon legalism that buttressed it, and “nonsensical ‘liberal’ ideas” in general.¹⁹ Alternately anxious to return to academia and tempted by an offer from “my late American boss”, Namier was often on the brink of resignation, but invariably found that there was “[n]o rest in this mess.”²⁰ In the autumn of 1919 he finally left Whitehall for “Oxford for a quiet two years ... to get away from current politics and business and do some proper historical work.”²¹ The longed for permanent position, however, never materialized.

The 1920s were an unsettled period in Namier’s life: his first wife deserted him, his estranged father disinherited him. For a few years between 1921 and 1924/5, he sought his fortune in Vienna and Prague, initially as agent for a cotton exporting business which soon went under, leaving him to supplement his income with reviews for the *Times Literary Supplement* and occasional journalism for the *Manchester Guardian* and the Vienna *Neue Freie Presse* as well as shrewd stock exchange speculations on the Vienna bourse.²² While in the old Habsburg capital, Namier remained a trusted source of information on Eastern Europe for the Foreign Office. “When I am in difficulty”, wrote J.W. Headlam-Morley, Prothero’s successor as Historical Adviser, “about everything connected with that part of the world, I always turn to you, especially when it is a matter in which economic and political things interact.”²³

Namier declined the offer of a Vienna-based management position with the *Manchester Guardian* as “not a gentleman’s job”.²⁴ By early 1924 he was settled in Britain, initially at Oxford, where he tutored Headlam-Morley’s son and daughter, but from 1925 onwards permanently in London.²⁵ External circumstances had conspired against Namier, but Headlam-Morley was not far of the mark when he chided him for “find[ing] it difficult to stick to anything

for long.” Namier admitted as much, but there was more: “The truth is that so far all my life was spoiled by a very severe neurosis.”²⁶ From 1920 onwards he suffered from a creeping paralysis of his right hand, underwent psychoanalytical treatment and, shuffling from one Viennese couch to another, became something of “a psychoanalyst’s groupie”.²⁷ Freudian precepts had left their mark on his thinking, and they influenced also his approach to the study of history.

Work for the Zionist Central Office and, after 1926, a grant by the Rhodes Trust enabled Namier to work on “a piece of profound, tho[ugh] unauthorised research [which] will be added to the vast work of Oxford Professors (when I, years ago, told the distinguished present Regius Prof about the work I had started, he replied, in his omniscient manner, that Lecky had done all there was to be done about it.”²⁸ Lecky had clearly left something to be said, for in early 1929 the two stout volumes of Namier’s *Structure of Politics* appeared in print. The political system they described was “certainly not attractive, based as it was upon a possibly enlightened but certainly sordid self-interest”.²⁹ They confirmed their author’s reputation as a serious scholar, however, albeit one still outside academia. Many considered him “chairable” now. When a vacancy arose at Manchester, the inveterate academic fixer Pollard advanced two names for the position, one “a bit of porcelain”, the other Namier,

a brazen pot, a Jew of the Jews, and the worst bore I know. Still he may be one of those intolerable bores who ... are “the salt of the earth”. He extraordinarily able, hard-working, vigorous and original, and has certainly developed a genre of historical investigation of his own. You would gain enormous reclama by his appointment, but I should not envy you the task of controlling him as a colleague.³⁰

Pollard’s encomium encapsulated some of the ambivalence with which his peers viewed Namier. Even so, the offer was made; Namier accepted, and remained at Manchester until his retirement in 1953. By then, he had been knighted (1952) and elected to a fellowship of the British Academy (1944). He had established himself as “the most original of historians of his status and ha[d] made a real contribution to the techniques of historical study.”³¹

Namier's standing has declined since. Already during his lifetime, his "angular personality" and his penchant for "declaring total war" on anyone suspected of having crossed him had incurred him the enmity of many.³² His failure to produce another major work after *Structure of Politics* was also held against him. Various long-planned and oft-promised projects – a multivolume study of the "imperial problem" in the age of the American revolution, a major history of nineteenth-century Europe and a systematic analysis of "prewar diplomatic history" – never materialized.³³ His romanticized vision of English landed society whose chronicler, perhaps by compensation, he became, may grate on present-day sensibilities, as may his overt partisanship of a rather arch High Tory-type and his rabid anti-Germanism.³⁴ Similarly, his "purely factual approach" has fallen out of fashion, if ever it was in fashion; and, perhaps, he was too "extreme [a] splitter: he saw so many exceptions to any generalization that explanation became impossible."³⁵

One criticism frequently made of Namier is that he had sought 'to take the mind out' of history.³⁶ There is a kernel of truth in this charge. "How intelligent you must be to understand all you write", Namier complimented Isaiah Berlin on one of his lectures: "As for your quotation from me: having pondered on what you say I have come to see that indeed it is possible and legitimate to develop it in the way you do; but I had never gone so far myself."³⁷

If Namier's comment revealed a certain reluctance to over-intellectualize, he had nevertheless given considerable thought to the nature of history and its study. To him the past was all-enveloping and inescapable. "Like the Cheshire cat, the past hovers over mankind."³⁸ It was also to be endured. When, for instance, the military tide turned against the Allied powers at the turn of 1916/17, Namier observed that he would judge the situation bad "beyond expression if it

were not for my historical training which teaches the force of things. They will survive in spite of human stupidity.”³⁹

Namier's conception of diplomatic history was that of an *histoire événementielle*. The historian was primarily concerned with “concrete events fixed in time.” There was no better preparation for historical work “on any given period than a study of the lives of the men of that time.”⁴⁰ It was not their “political and moral acrobatics” that had to be examined, for history was “determined by the basic, enduring facts of a situation.” These did not allow for linear progression, and often history followed “a spiral road: the same point is never crossed twice; history does not exactly repeat itself; but the same landscape recurs, seen from different levels.”⁴¹ This presented the historian with an epistemological problem. As events moved steadily along that twisted road, it was “difficult to fix the moment when decisions ripened until suddenly they are treated as irrevocable.”⁴² There was a rhythm of “repose and action” in the affairs of mankind, he noted, but unless “the ruts run in the desired direction even force may not prevail.”⁴³ Yet it was futile to search for any deeper sense in human history: “[T]he historian, when watching strands interlace and entwine and their patterns intersect, seeks for the logic of situation and the rhythm of events which invest them at least with a determinist meaning.” Recurrent situations thus created “analogous forms”, to which was added a further and rather more dangerous element, deeply engrained in human character: ‘imitation engendered by historical memory.’⁴⁴ People were prone to expect automatic repetitions, they juggled with “uncorrelated precedents and analogies; they must be trained to fit things into long-range historical processes, and not to think in isolated word-concepts working in a void.”⁴⁵

Government documents and memoirs were the two principal quarries that furnished Namier with the building materials for his diplomatic histories, far more so than “spicy [private] letters”.⁴⁶ Official despatches were central to piecing together the course of international exchanges:

You must dig into them before you obtain enlightenment or amusement; first each must be read separately, then with its "partner", and finally all of them together. This is a laborious proceeding; but by the time you have them all round you talking past each other - a Bedlam - you begin to understand what they say, and, which is more important, what each prefers to leave unsaid and unexplained.⁴⁷

This process of sifting of evidence and interlacing of timelines remains the mainstay of all international history. For all his emphasis on official documents, Namier dismissed as naive the idea that foreign ministries were "full of dreadful secrets."⁴⁸ Nor was he blind to the potential pitfalls of documentary evidence. Writing history on that basis was "a funny job":

I once told a class of mine, when a student argued from some well authenticated statements ... that I should undertake to write a most thoroughly documented history in which every single statement would be wrong. People will say, or even write, the most fantastic nonsense about their own thoughts, to say nothing of deliberate lies about their actions.⁴⁹

Hard labour at the archival coalface could never substitute for acute judgment. Memoirs and other autobiographical works, meanwhile, were of supplementary value "as illustrating the minds characters of their authors, and certain trends in the formation of [nation-specific] myths."⁵⁰

The "basic medium" for capturing the flow of events was a structured narrative, which had to proceed "logically ... from the elements of a situation, across the motives of actors, to the resultant course of events."⁵¹ Stern analysis had to be the driving force rather than artistic design and literary flourishes, "mostly irrelevant juxtapositions of a very pretentious kind: carriages clattering over cobbles & music drifting into the summer night."⁵² In pursuit of this austere aim, the student of the past "should have no other object than the search for the truth; this itself stands to gain by being carried on under the impelling and focusing urge of a practical need."⁵³ In turn, this required a particular mindset. Historical enquiry called "for impartiality and scientific detachment."⁵⁴ Its practitioner had to possess "so many qualities, and so many perfections, that it is difficult to believe that good history can ever be produced to order."⁵⁵ Too much history, he thought, that "is written by don-bred dons with no knowledge or understanding of the practical problems of statecraft."⁵⁶ Historians had to accept the harsh realities of international politics; they

had to imbibe the precepts of *realpolitik* and appreciate “the means at his [a politician’s] disposal and the true difficulties confronting him.”⁵⁷ And they had to grasp the tragic aspects of all political endeavour, that politics entailed “hard-headed choices”, and that there were situations “wherein it is well-nigh impossible for statesmen or diplomats to be justified by results.”⁵⁸

The practising historian Namier fell somewhat short of his own standards, not least because, as A.J.P. Taylor, “incalculable and irrepressible” and Namier’s one-time mentee, noted, “he could not provide sustained narrative” and his work “killed movement.”⁵⁹ Namier was prone to dismiss shortcomings in political leaders in the harshest and most intemperate terms. He abhorred hypocrisy and saw virtue in scepticism. On the death of Sir John Simon, one of the architects of appeasement, for instance, he approved of critical comments made by one of the deceased former foreign secretary’s contemporaries for their “straightforward manner on an occasion when most people turn unctuous. *De mortuis nil nisi buncum.*”⁶⁰ And bunkum was not a commodity in which historians ought to trade. There was a strong moral streak in him, as Isaiah Berlin later reflected: “His belief in the moral duties of historians and scholars generally was Kantian in its severity and genuineness.”⁶¹

Others, more especially in the historical profession, were less forgiving. In 1954 Namier found himself under “attack ... of the would be clever type from one of the Cambridge pro-Germans.”⁶² His assailant, in fact, was the product of his own *alma mater*; it was the young D.C. Watt, then in the early stages of his career as the leading international historian of his generation.⁶³ Watt’s critique was a mixture of academic drive-by shooting and sustained battery, while simultaneously wielding a forensic examiner’s scalpel. Namier’s collected essays on interwar international politics commanded the field, Watt suggested, because there were no competing works in the English language. They were “of a slight nature”, “scholarly exercises in journalism”, “partly conceived as propaganda” and so “merely substituting new myths for old”. Namier had made the Churchillian version of the 1930s his own, and his method was “that of a prosecuting

counsel” rather than a historian who carefully weighed the evidence and probed its context; he usurped “the rôle of the judge or the headmaster, to award marks for good or bad conduct.” He was also closer to “his East European forebears”, Watt needled his target, in having no sense of “the weight of extra-European factors.” More troubling still was Namier's tendency “to explain what did happen in terms of what should and still more what should not have happened - surely a questionable practice in the writing of history.” In issuing moral judgments, Namier neglected or omitted “the essential process of comprehending the motives of those judged”. They, in turn, were either “fools, or knaves, or criminally stupid.” Namier, Watt contended, “seems to combine in his person the functions of detective, prosecuting counsel, judge and jury, the entire process from the discovery of the criminal's fingerprints to the donning of the black cap.”⁶⁴

Namier was a far more nuanced and subtle diplomatic historian than his youthful assailant allowed. At the root of his analyses was the dynamic tension between the manoeuvrings of ministers and diplomats, the imperatives of geopolitics and the constraints of the international system.

Individual actors populated the foreground of Namier's diplomatic studies: “In foreign policy, to this day the man in charge counts for more than where masses are engaged.”⁶⁵ One of the characteristic features of his essays is the proliferation of neat, penetrating, but rarely flattering vignettes. Thus, Napoleon III is summed up as “shallow and confused”, a would-be emperor who “talked high and vague idealism, yet uncorrelated to his actions.” The memoirs of Prince Bülow, the last Kaiser's courtier-chancellor, were “a smooth *causeur's* chatter” that exposed the “pitiful set which ruled and ruined a nation.”⁶⁶ In Józef Beck, the Polish foreign minister on the eve of the Second World War, Namier had detected “a streak of the gangster”, though he was little more than “a hardman without depth”, “mean, brutal, and stupid.”⁶⁷ His

Czechoslovak counterpart, Edvard Beneš, was a well-meaning man who tried to survive by “being reasonable ... in an age when reason had ceased to count: a Victorian in twentieth-century Central Europe.”⁶⁸

No less dislocated was Adolf Hitler, the perfect representative of “unadulterated provincial Austria with its surly hostility of Imperial, cosmopolitan Vienna and its Jewish intelligentsia” and of the pre-1914 pan-Germans of Bohemia, for whom Prussia was a role-model and Russia the enemy. Such “sentimental antecedents” mattered, for instance, in explaining the pact with Poland in 1934, which was “an unconscious inheritance from his Austrian past.” Every man, Namier paraphrased Machiavelli, “has only one method, as he has only one face; he is born with both.”⁶⁹ In Hitler's case it was “‘somnambulant’ but gangsterlike skill” in exploiting the weaknesses of others. Even so, his case demonstrated “how far even a bare minimum of ideas and resources can go, when backed up by a nation.”⁷⁰

Namier's comment on Hitler's limitations throws into sharper relief the tension inherent in his studies between the emphasis on individuals and his appreciation of profound forces operating in the background.

His views on this matter were not entirely consistent. In the immediate aftermath of the First World War, he dismissed the notion that individual leaders were of any significance: “Men matter little in politics, systems and ideas are everything.”⁷¹ More importantly, Namier's work throughout is marked by an acute sensitivity to the physical realities of great power politics. National policy was rarely “determined, in the long run, by calculation and thought ...; States, like planets, move in predestined courses.” They were dictated by geography, which he accepted as immutable: “The destiny of nations is written on the globe.”⁷² Namier's accounts of past and current international politics were infused with a strong dose of geopolitics. French

history, for example, was influenced by the concentric nature of France's geography, which he likened – in somewhat Shakespearean language – to “a ring with a precious stone set at the top, the Île de France, and the predestined capital.” By contrast, Germany “excentric, devoid of structural unity and centre. In fact there were three Germanies: Western Germany on the Rhine; Germany of the Northern Plain, facing towards the North Sea and the Baltic; and Southern Germany, on the Danube, facing towards the Adriatic.”⁷³ Until the end of the *ancien régime*, the two leading German powers, Austria and Prussia, were “on the periphery”, their capitals mere border-towns, while Central and Western Germany remained “politically inert, a beneficial shock-absorber ministering to the tranquillity of the Continent.”⁷⁴ In Namier's reading of Prussia's history, her rise was shaped by geography:

In the barren Baltic plain, devoid of a cultural past, arose the Prussian State, the one potent, formative synthesis in Germany political history. Its original founders were the Teutonic Knights, a semimonastic military order; cruel conquerors and harsh masters. Austerity, discipline, and self-denial remained basic elements in the Prussian tradition; they made its strength and invested it with a semblance of greatness - a hollow greatness⁷⁵

The “German octopus” – like all Germanophobes, Namier had an exaggerated view of Germany's capabilities – thus moved along lines determined by geography, “one arm [extending] far along the Baltic, another up the Oder, a third down the Danube, dominating, permeating, encircling non-German territories.”⁷⁶ His own Eastern Central European upbringing, as much as Mackinder's writings, had sharpened Namier's sense of geographical realities and their military-strategic relevance. In Belorussia, for instance, “‘the movement’ is restricted before the middle of May; not in the Ukraine; Pilsudski's expedition against Kiev started around the middle of April and the ground was in perfectly good condition.”⁷⁷ But geographic location had broader strategic implications, as Namier demonstrated in June 1935 in a prescient warning of the dangers facing Austria. Vienna, he observed, was

the focal point on the Danube, and perhaps the most important strategic position in the politics of Central and Eastern Europe. The moment the Nazis successfully set up their standard in Vienna the whole of Central and South-Eastern Europe ...

would be aflame, and the political balance of Europe would be destroyed. Czecho-Slovakia, surrounded by Nazis and Magyars, ... would either have to pass into the German orbit or cease to exist; while Yugo-Slavia and Rumania would be attacked from two sides, by the Magyars and Bulgars. Italy ... would have to think of her own safety. If then the Western Powers remained passive spectators, German hegemony on the Continent would be re-established, beyond anything known in 1914.⁷⁸

Geography also influenced the alignments of powers, which were “usually based on the system of odd and even numbers.” Common frontiers tended to generate friction between states: “‘Les ennemis de mes ennemis sont mes amis’ (neighbours quarrel; odds and evens are natural allies). This is the ‘sandwich system’ of international politics.”⁷⁹ Even sharp ideological differences could not suspend this geopolitical principle, as the Russo-German rapprochements of 1922 and 1939 demonstrated: “if Germany was France's enemy, then Poland was France's ally, and consequently Russia the ally of Germany - numbers one and three against two and four.”⁸⁰

Namier was too good a historian to posit an immutable “rule of odd and even numbers”. Its presence in the inner mechanisms of international politics nevertheless underpinned his analyses of nineteenth- and twentieth-century great power politics. This was particularly noticeable in his treatment of Eastern Central European developments. The Polish question had been a key feature of nineteenth-century European politics, fusing together, for the most part in uneasy union, the three dividing Eastern military monarchies, until the First World War “unrolled the Polish Question which could not have been reopened in any other way”, and, having been reopened, so “unhinged at one blow the delicate system of compromises and balances” that was the Habsburg Monarchy but also the neighbouring Russian Empire.⁸¹ By 1918/19 the future of Poland had arisen as “a crucial and excruciating problem of international politics.”⁸²

His upbringing in Eastern Galicia, with its Ruthene peasant majority, his growing interest in political Zionism and his frequent run-ins with the extreme nationalist Roman

Dmowski and his followers, had left Namier immune to the romantic appeal of Polish nationalism. During the Paris peace conference his was a lone voice warning of the dangers of Polish expansionism while Germany and Russia lay prostrate. “[S]o very few people”, he lamented, “at the decisive moment seem to think of what may happen in ten or twenty years' time.” Extending Poland’s frontiers beyond the line of the rivers Bug and San would “be nothing short of a war calamity.”⁸³ Namier's warning – prescient in so many ways – was rooted in geopolitics. Poland's location was in part marked by a clash between two principles, “the unity of the seaboard *versus* the unity of the river basin”. The Poles were the people of the Vistula, their settlement area extending from the source of the river to its estuary where it came into conflict with German settlers who had moved East along the Baltic coast since mediaeval times. The creation of the so-called Polish corridor in 1919 was recognition of this irreconcilable clash: “The cutting through of the Corridor has meant minor amputation for Germany; its closing up would mean strangulation for Poland.”⁸⁴ Geography made independence near-impossible for Poland, and necessitated a “continuous acrobatic performance” between Germany and Russia. “Poland lacks both shape and expanse – she stands penultimate in the European chain of nations, for Russia intervenes between her and the only *Lebensraum*, contiguous to Europe, where unimpeded growth is possible.” Geography and history, he reflected after the Second World War, had “combined in setting an exceedingly difficult task to the Poles, and before 1945 little had been done to simplify it.”⁸⁵

Geography made the position of Czechoslovakia equally difficult, but also invested the country with great geopolitical significance. The Czechoslovaks, he wrote during the First World War, were an “old nation which has engraved its history deep into the annals of Europe.” They were threatened by Germany's Central European steam-roller, and yet they were “a spoke in its wheels, and unless broken up they threaten to paralyse its movements. Bohemia occupied the centre of ‘Mittel-Europa’. [...] Bohemia recreated ... will destroy the nightmare of a

German-Magyar hegemony of Europe.”⁸⁶ Her existence as an independent state alone was not sufficient for Bohemia to fulfil this broader European function, as Namier appreciated from the outset. During the First World War he emphasized the strategic role of the Czech lands as an “advanced bastion” against German ambitions, and with that role in view, advocated a pro-Czech solution in the dispute with Poland over the future of Teschen (Cieszyn; Tešín) in 1919.⁸⁷ By the time of Munich, however, as the Western powers abandoned Czechoslovakia, Bohemia had been turned from a bastion against German expansionism into German “battering-ram against the gates of the East.”⁸⁸ Once under German control, nothing stood between Hitler and war in the East.

Pace Taylor, Namier's attitude towards ideas was nuanced, but it was also conflicted. He was wont to dismiss ideological belief systems, especially German ones, in the starkest terms. Thus, National Socialism lacked any “original idea, but added coarseness to politics.” It was a “crude fantasy of a Wagner”, grafted onto Hitler's “primitive mind.”⁸⁹ He was equally dismissive of the capacity for political judgment of ordinary citizens. In his apodictic style, he pointed out the “mistake to suppose that people think: they wobble with the brain, and sometimes the brain does not wobble.”⁹⁰

Namier nevertheless understood the fundamental importance of ideological motivation: “As the Calvinists said, ‘non est in potestate uniusque hominis salvari’ - salvation must come through God alone. So in political action no man can save his soul or act efficiently except through one faith and leading idea. If a man entertains two at a time he is like a photographic plate with two photographs on it.”⁹¹ Above all, Namier was alive to the almost subterranean reach of intellectual or religious traditions. In his preparatory notes for the 1947 Waynflete Lectures, for instance, he stressed the formative influence of Lutheranism on German political

habits: “It is the faith of the introvert: it asserts the absolute supremacy of the individual conscience and enjoys obedience to the territorial ruler; ... it preserves a self-imposed inner discipline”, later manipulated by Prussian kings and their Nazi imitators alike. Namier contrasted this with the historical experiences of the Netherlands, Switzerland and the British Isles, where Calvinists, Puritans and Presbyterians had created “nurseries of self-government and democracy.”⁹²

Traditions reflected and in turn shaped the character and political orientation of individual nations. Namier's own historical thinking was infused with notions of nationality. In some respects, he was Central European Victorian, who – unliberal though he was – had imbibed Mazzinian and Gladstonian notions. The national idea was central to the course of nineteenth- and twentieth-century developments. Even the revolutionaries of 1917 “had been educated in the nationalist ideologies of their bourgeoisies.”⁹³ For Namier, the national idea provided “a logic and a rhythm” to Europe's recent history. The French Revolution welded the concept of the nation into an ideological entity, but it was its embrace by German revolutionaries in 1848 that marked the “opening of the era of linguistic nationalism.” It began as “the passionate creed of intellectuals”, but soon “‘nationality’ ... invade[d] the politics of central and east-central Europe” and so set Europe on course for two world wars.⁹⁴ Namier was no advocate of national self-determination, which was too much bound up with flawed concepts of popular sovereignty. But he accepted the legitimacy of the rising force of nationalism in the Balkans in the late nineteenth century, and its inescapable consequence, the dissolution of Austria-Hungary. The ruling dynasty, Namier observed shortly after the Habsburg collapse, had “never linked up its fate with that of any single nation; they had a capital and a territorial base, but no nationality they developed schemes territorially coherent, though devoid of all national idea.”⁹⁵ It was therefore “nonsense”, he reflected later, “to shed

tears over our having broken up the Habsburg monarchy when it quite obviously collapsed from within, and with the greatest effort could hardly have been maintained.”⁹⁶

The bond between man and land was “the old theme” in Namier's politics.⁹⁷ He distinguished between territorial and linguistic concepts of nationality. The former, of which Britain and Switzerland were examples, was in essence conservative and allowed for the organic growth of institutions; the latter – Germany after 1848 being the principal example – entailed change, usually by violent means. Freedom was “safest in a self-contained community with a territorial nationality; and where this has not ... grown up ..., it might perhaps best be secured by a transfer of populations. But it serves no purpose to expostulate with history: *on ne fait le procès aux révolutions*, nor any other historical phenomena.”⁹⁸ Such transfers took place in Central Europe after 1945, but Namier always remained alert to the disruptive force of nationalism: “[E]ven after the German nightmare has passed away, the problem remains of how to transform the ‘necessity’ of Yugoslavia into a ‘harmony’”.⁹⁹ Ultimately, this problem proved unsolvable, as Namier might well have predicted. Indeed, just as he was sceptical about the League of Nations in 1919, so he doubted the efficacy of all forms of internationalism. The force of nationality and the power of individual national traditions was too strong for any such contrivances:

Neither for good nor for evil has Europe ever been able to form a free union: not even against the conquering Turk, when religion and common tradition seemed most to demand it. European cooperation can sometimes be achieved through a concert of the Great Powers exercising a temperate measure of control. But integral European union would require coercion.¹⁰⁰

Namier's view of humankind was bleak.

Geopolitics and the national idea shaped Namier's understanding of the shifts in international power relationships. On his return from America on the eve of the First World War, he observed

that Europe was on the cusp of change “which seems to break over it in every second or third generation and by means of which the silent [daily] shifting of power ... finds expression in a changed balance and grouping of States and nations.”¹⁰¹

As a student of great power politics, in contrast to his work as a parliamentary historian, Namier's attention was focused on the period from the end of the Napoleonic wars onwards. His 1952 Creighton Lecture was perhaps “comparatively underpowered”¹⁰², but in it he limned some of the central arguments developed later by such diverse scholars as A.J.P. Taylor and Paul W. Schroeder. Namier stressed the importance of Britain for the Vienna order as “the flanking power in the West”, complemented by Russia in the East. As the two turned away from continental Europe, the weight of these two powers was rarely felt, “partly owing to the dispersal or poor organization of their forces, and partly because they seldom actively intervened in European questions, except when the Ottoman Empire was in question, an Asiatic Power which in the Eastern Mediterranean held the key position between three continents.” Although they usually worked against each other's interests, Britain and Russia combined to defeat the French and German bids for domination.¹⁰³

As for Bismarck and for Lenin, so for Namier, the key variable determining the pattern of European politics in the century and a half after 1800, were the relations between Russia and Prussia-Germany, “more so than was realized in periods which overrated the power and importance of France and Austria.”¹⁰⁴ Similarly overrated was Prince Metternich. He understood that a viable European equilibrium meant organizing Germany and Italy into effective counterweights to France and Russia, but in his person were blended “[t]he aristocrat and the diplomat, the professor and the prophet, and finally the old actor and buffoon.” He propounded “his doctrines to a world over which his master-mind seemed to preside”, and did so “in a spirit of self-glorifying logic.” It was all a mirage, however, for he could not control the world.¹⁰⁵ No more could France dominate Europe. The French bid for mastery had been

“started by the proudest national King, resumed by a revolution national, yet supranational, and consummated by an un-French Emperor of the French.”¹⁰⁶ Until the defeat of Napoleon Bonaparte, French predominance rested on the country's “superiority in numbers and organisation: on the relative size of her population and on the disunited condition of Germany and Italy.” France then comprised of around two-thirteenths of the entire European population, and “[a]ll the *élan* of the Revolution and the genius of Napoleon could not have established French dominance over Europe.” The revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, moreover, had worked for the national consolidation of Germany and Italy, and this pushed mastery of Europe further from France's grasp.¹⁰⁷ The efforts of the great emperor's nephew to re-establish French dominance were a last and doomed hurrah; “in eighteen years he waged three major wars and sent three expeditions overseas, without ever seeming to know what he was after” so that by 1867 French hegemony was at an end.¹⁰⁸

For Namier, modern European history revolved around Germany and her ambitions, which he regarded “a deadly menace to Europe and to civilisation.”¹⁰⁹ When American and Soviet soldiers shook hands at Torgau on the banks of the River Elbe on 26 April 1945, they brought to an end an era:

Two great waves closed over Europe when the armies of these two extra-European Powers met in the heart of the Continent. This was the end of the predominance of the European Peninsula in the world, and the end of the German century; the German bid for world dominion had run its course and failed. That century and that bid start in 1848.¹¹⁰

Bismarck's “wise restraint” after 1871 secured Germany's primacy on the continent. Unlike Napoleon, the German chancellor was careful not to drive either Britain or Russia “into active hostility”; and as long as this was so, “there was no one ... to dispute” *de facto* German predominance.¹¹¹ By 1914, the storm centre of international politics had shifted to Eastern Europe because of the slow decay of the Habsburg Empire – “for the purposes of foreign policy a dead body without any inherent force or inclination of its own” - and the aspirations of the

Balkan nations.¹¹² The First World War diminished Germany's material resources, but already in 1915 Namier was confident that she would not be weakened permanently, and that “[t]wenty years hence, the effects of the present war will once more make themselves felt.”¹¹³

Namier never ceased to stress the incongruity of the outcome of the First World War. Of the six Allied great powers Russia ended as one of the victims of the war, Italy and Japan were alienated, America withdrew into isolationism, and Britain sought to restrict her responsibilities. France was thus “left with the victory and its progeny”, the Paris peace settlement, which in the expanse between the Rhine and the Ukraine contained “more than a score of disputed frontiers, and some fifty burning problems.” The three world powers, the United States, Britain and the Soviet Union, had no interest in upholding the territorial arrangements there.¹¹⁴ Therein lay the fundamental problem of post-1919 international politics. Although victorious, France was merely a continental great power, while victory had been secured by the global Anglo-Saxon powers. This explained the continuous French search for security guarantees and the pivotal role allocated to Poland in French policy between the wars. Yet Namier castigated the geopolitical “folly of the Franco-Polish system ..., which tried both to encircle Germany and to draw a *cordon sanitaire* round Russia.”¹¹⁵ Locarno provided only temporary respite. The treaty was “a splendid instrument, so long as there was no occasion for it.” Indeed, “Locarno with all its connotations was ... a prelude to Munich.”¹¹⁶

The withdrawal of French troops from the Rhineland in 1930 also sounded the death knell of the Weimar republic. Further Anglo-French failures of statecraft compounded matters: “Abyssinia broke up the Stresa front; the Rhineland crisis exposed the political and moral weakness of the Western Powers; the victory of the Popular Front in France and of the Reds in Spain increased ideological tensions in the Mediterranean; Austria could no longer count on effective foreign support in maintaining her independence.”¹¹⁷ After the *Anschluss* the last remnants of the French security system collapsed, and, as Namier prognosticated in October

1938, “East-Central Europe will become a witches' cauldron. [...] And if Russia is ever added to the German system ... a power will arise greater than the world has known.”¹¹⁸

The alliance between Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, Namier maintained, foundered on the rock of ideology. Even so, there were “situations inherent in the structure of Europe and enduring tendencies in the character of nations.” Just as Napoleon held the initial advantage, so the Germans had the edge in terms “numbers, *élan*, military organisation, and generalship; of an even more central position; and of never having to deal with a united Europe.” But however much Napoleon sought to evade it, the Polish problem stood between him and Tsar Alexander; and however much Hitler tried to hide them, ideological differences made a lasting settlement with the Soviets impossible: “Alexander and Stalin both saw that, sooner or later, they would be forced to fight Europe's dictator.”¹¹⁹

The interwar international settlement rested on the ruins of three empires; 1945 wiped out the arrangements of 1919. “The process which formed the essence of European history since the French Revolution has now reached its term”, Namier reflected when the old continent settled into its new Cold War landscape. Some of the cynicism and resignation, which had always edged his realism, shone through in his assessment of the post-war world. Power had shifted to Washington and Moscow. A return to a Metternichian system of great power politics was as impossible as a revival of the liberal certainties of the nineteenth century:

we no longer exult over the age of nationality and democracy and its victories. All past superiorities have been wiped out behind the Iron Curtain, and most of the cultural values which the educated classes had created. Anti-Socialist, clerical peasant communities may yet arise in States now satellites of Russia. But a reinstatement of the dispossessed upper and middle classes is impossible. And it is even more idle to think of reconquest of territories once held on the basis of those lost superiorities.¹²⁰

Old Europe had ceased to be the powerhouse of world politics. But the outcome of the Second World War was no less incongruous to Namier's mind than the settlement of 1919. The United States and the Soviet Union were, as he put it in the language of the nineteenth century,

“world empires”, but they acted only partially on *realpolitik* precepts: “World Empires blend power instincts with a measure of isolationism; and the resultant is a ‘sphere of interests’.” The obvious and most durable basis for any post-war settlement would be “a delimitation of such spheres; but a hazy ‘internationalism’, a hangover of nineteenth-century liberalism and League of Nations doctrines, has led ... to indiscriminate irresponsible meddling”, such as Soviet interference in Greece in 1947.¹²¹ If history taught anything, it was that only defined great power spheres guaranteed peace, not noble sentiments. Namier’s fundamental pessimism remained unchanged to the end.

Namier defined the work of a great historian in simple terms: “others should not be able to practise within its sphere in the terms of the preceding era.”¹²² Judged by this standard, Namier was no truly great diplomatic historian. His epigrammatic turn of phrase makes him eminently quotable. In contrast to his studies of Georgian politics, however, his writings on diplomatic history were too disparate, scraps in the form of disjointed collections of essays which, for all their sparkle, lacked sustained narrative, and did not offer an overarching systematic analysis. And yet, Namier had courage and insight, virtues “cardinal for the study of human affairs.”¹²³ They were key to his real influence on public debate and policy-making, albeit to varying degrees and often only intermittently. His vignettes of interwar diplomacy stirred considerable controversy in their day, but also shaped much of the later twentieth-century historiography of appeasement.¹²⁴ His diplomatic studies also offer “a valuable insight into a critical period in the development of British international thought.”¹²⁵ Above all, they touch on, and offer conceptual frameworks for, problems that are and remain fundamental to the study of past international relations – and therein lies greatness of a kind.

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Notes

¹ Anon. [A.J.P. Taylor?], "Prophet and Pedant", *New Statesman*, 25 June 1955, 882.

² See e.g. A. Momigliano's comment that Ronald Syme 'ha "namierizzato" la costituzione di Augusto', id., *Terzo Contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico* (Rome, 1966), 730.

³ D.C. Coleman, *History and the Economic Past: An Account of the Rise and Decline of Economic History in Britain* (Oxford, 1987), 104.

⁴ J. Raymond, "Namier, Inc.", *New Statesman*, 18 Oct. 1957, 499-500. The piece was presented as the 'Minutes of the 29th Annual General Meeting' of the corporation. John Raymond (1924-1977), ed. Winchester; the sparkling (Socialist) literary editor of the *New Statesman*, who suffered from an inferiority complex on account of not going to Oxford and who was friends with J.H. Plumb. For Plumb's dislike of Namier, see N. McKendrick, *Sir John Plumb: The Hidden Life of a Great Historian* (Brighton, 2019 (pb)), 85-6; see also C.T. McIntyre, *Herbert Butterfield: Historian as Dissenter* (New Haven, CT, 2004), 279-91.

⁵ For some reflections on this see L. Colley, *Namier* (London, 1989), 90-106; and, more recently, D.W. Hayton, "Sir Lewis Namier, Sir John Neale and the Shaping of the *History of Parliament*", *Parliamentary History* 32/1 (2003), 187-211, and id., *Conservative Revolutionary: The Lives of Lewis Namier* (Manchester, 2019), 391-414.

⁶ A notable exception is I. Hall, "The Realist as Moralizer: Sir Lewis Namier's International Thought", in id. and L. Hill, eds., *British International Thinkers from Hobbes to Namier* (Basingstoke and New York, 2009), 227-46.

⁷ For Namier's ancestry and early life see the biography by his widow, J. Namier, *Lewis Namier: A Biography* (Oxford, 1971), 3-77, which has now been superseded by Hayton's authoritative *Conservative Revolutionary*, 12-45.

⁸ Pareto did not work out his cyclical theory of elite formation until 1910-15, see *Trattato di sociologia generale* (4 vols., Florence, 1916). But his insistence on precision and a sense of realism, as he saw it, may well have struck a chord with young Bernszajn, see, e.g., V. Pareto, "Realtà", id., *Fatti e teorie* (Milan, 1920), 277-82.

⁹ Sir Halford John Mackinder (1861-1947); ed. Epsom College, Christ Church, Oxford; Reader in Geography, Oxford, 1887-92; Principal of University Extension College, Reading, 1892-1903; Co-founder, London School of Economics, 1895; Director of LSE, 1903-8; MP (Liberal Unionist), Glasgow Camlachie, 1910-22; British High Commissioner in Southern Russia, 1919-20; Professor of Geography, LSE, 1923.; see W.H. Parker, *Mackinder: Geography in Aid of Statecraft* (Oxford, 1982), 28-56.

¹⁰ Arthur Lionel Smith (1850-1924); ed. Christ's Hospital, Balliol College; Fellow, 1882; Dean, 1907; Master, 1916-24.

¹¹ Albert Frederick Pollard (1869-1945); ed. Portsmouth Grammar School, Felstead School; Jesus College, Oxford, Professor of Constitutional History, University College London, 1903-31; founder-director of Institute of Historical Research, 1923; contested (Lib) London University seat, 1922, 1923 and 1924.

¹² Pollard to parents, 5 Nov. 1911, Pollard MSS, Senate House Library, University of London, MS 860/3/4. Pollard added Namier's name later, in 1939. The chosen candidates were Alwyn Terrell Petre Williams (1888-1968); ed. Rossall School, Jesus College, Oxford; Fellow of All Souls, 1911-18; Headmaster, Winchester College, 1924-34; dean of Christ Church, 1934-9; Bishop of Durham, 1939-52; Bishop of Winchester, 1952-61; and Charles Robert Mowbray Fraser Cruttwell (1887-1941), ed. Rugby, Queen's College, Oxford; fellow, All Souls, 1911-12; tutor, Hertford College, Oxford, 1912-14; served on Western front, 1915-16; MI2(e), 1918-9; fellow, Hertford College, 1919-30; principal, 1930-9; contested (Cons.), Oxford University, 1935.

¹³ Wingate to Fitzgerald, 28 Sept. 1914, Kitchener MSS, The National Archives (Public Record Office), PRO 30/57/45. General Sir (Francis) Reginald Wingate (1861-1935), Sirdar and Governor-General of the Sudan, 1889-1916; High Commissioner of Egypt, 1917-19. His son Ronald was a Balliol contemporary of Namier's.

¹⁴ Namier to Headlam-Morley, 2 June 1918, Headlam-Morley MSS, C[hurchill] C[ollege] A[rchive] C[entre], HDLM Acc. 727/35.

¹⁵ Montefiore to Smith, 27 June 1918, Smith MSS, Balliol College Archives, Letters M. 64; for Namier's wartime work see E. Goldstein, *Winning the Peace: British Diplomatic Strategy, Peace Planning, and the Paris Peace Conference, 1916-1920* (Oxford, 1991), 72-3 *et passim*; and M.L. Sanders, "Wellington House and British Propaganda during the First World War", *Historical Journal* 18/1 (1975), 121-22.

¹⁶ Headlam-Morley to Namier, 10 Feb. 1919, Headlam-Morley MSS, HDLM Acc. 688/2.

¹⁷ Namier to Headlam-Morley (private and confidential, no. VI), 31 Jan. 1919, Headlam-Morley MSS, HDLM Acc. 688/2. George William Prothero (1848-1922), ed. Eton, King's College Cambridge, Bonn; fellow, King's College, 1876-94; Professor of Modern History, Edinburgh, 1894-9; editor, *Quarterly Review*, 1899-1922; Historical Adviser to the Foreign Office, 1918-20; for an account of Prothero's work see E. Goldstein, "Historians Outside the Academy: G.W. Prothero and the Experience of the Foreign Office Historical Section, 1917-20", *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* lxii, 151 (1990), esp. 196-201.

¹⁸ Namier to Headlam-Morley (private and confidential), 26 June 1919, Headlam-Morley MSS, HDLM Acc. 688/2; for recent conspiracy theories surrounding Namier, see A. Kozuchowski, "Lewis Namier nie chciał Polski na wschodzie. Kim był ten „mały żydek” i szowinista globalnego mocarstwa?", *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 9 Dec. 2019.

- ¹⁹ Namier to Headlam-Morley, 4 June 1924, Headlam-Morley MSS, HDLM Acc. 727/39; for Namier's conversion to Zionism see N. Rose, *Namier and Zionism* (Oxford, 1971), 19-24; the minorities treaty with Poland was the "culmination of six months of equivocation", C. Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others: The Great Powers, the Jews, and International Minority Protection* (Cambridge, 2004), 261.
- ²⁰ Namier to Headlam-Morley (private and confidential, no. VI), 31 Jan. 1919, Headlam-Morley MSS, HDLM Acc. 688/2, and to Smith, 18 July 1919, Smith MSS, Letters N.1.
- ²¹ Namier to Headlam-Morley (private and confidential), 26 Aug. 1919, Headlam-Morley MSS, HDLM Acc. 688/2.
- ²² F.G. Steiner to J. Namier, 18 Feb. 1965, Steiner MSS, CCAC, STNR 6/5/1. Frederick George (né Fritz Georg) Steiner (1890-1968); ed. Vienna University; legal adviser Austrian-British Bank, 1921-4; international banking executive and investment advisor. Steiner and Namier were bound in mutual admiration of Disraeli.
- ²³ Headlam-Morley to Namier, 9 Feb. 1925, Headlam-Morley MSS, HDLM Acc. 727/39. Sir James Wycliffe Headlam-Morley (né Headlam) (1863-1929), ed. Eton, King's College, Cambridge; fellow, King's College, 1890-4; Professor of Greek and Ancient History, Queen's College, London, 1894-1900; schools inspector, Board of Education, 1902-15; attached to Department of Information (Wellington House), 1915-7; assistant director, Department of Information Intelligence Bureau, 1917-8; assistant director, PID, 1918-20; Historical Adviser, Foreign Office, 1920-8; see also E. Goldstein, "'Prominent Place Would Have To Be Taken by History': The Origins of a Foreign Office Historical Section", in T.G. Otte, ed., *Diplomacy and Power: Studies in Diplomatic Practice. Essays in Honour of Keith Hamilton* (Leiden, 2012), esp. 89-102.
- ²⁴ Namier to Headlam-Morley, 19 Jan. 1923, Headlam-Morley MSS, HDLM Acc. 727/38.
- ²⁵ Namier to Seton-Watson, 17 Dec. 1923, Seton-Watson MSS, School of Slavonic and Eastern European Studies, London, SEW 7/18, and to Headlam-Morley, 6 Mar. 1924, Headlam-Morley MSS, HDLM Acc. 727/39.
- ²⁶ Headlam-Morley to Namier, 19 Jan. 1923, and reply, 29 Mar. 1923, Headlam-Morley MSS, HDLM Acc. 727/38.
- ²⁷ Colley, *Namier*, 27; Hayton, *Conservative Revolutionary*, 138-41.
- ²⁸ Namier to Clark, 22 Dec. 1925 and 6 Dec. 1926, Clark MSS, Bod[leian Library, Oxford], MS Clark 268 (quote from former). The omniscient one was Sir Charles Harding Firth (1857-1936); ed. Clifton, Balliol College, Oxford; lecturer, Pembroke College, 1887; fellow, All Souls, 1901; Regius Professor of History, 1904-1925. Firth's reference was to W.E.H. Lecky, *A History of England during the Eighteenth Century* (8 vols., London, 1878-90).
- ²⁹ D.A. Winstanley, review of L.B. Namier, *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III* (2 vols., London, 1929), *English Historical Review* 46/3 (1929), 660.
- ³⁰ Pollard to Jacob, 25 Nov. 1930, Pollard MSS, MS 860/6b/2. Ernest Fraser Jacob (1894-1971); ed. Winchester, New College, Oxford; military service, 1914-18; Professor of History, Manchester, 1929-44; Chichele Professor of Modern History, Oxford, 1950-61. The 'bit of porcelain' was the Russianist (Benedict) Humphrey Sumner (1893-1951), ed. Winchester, Balliol; active service, 1914-17; MI2(e), 1917-9; International Labour Office, 1920-2; Fellow, All Souls, 1919; Fellow and Tutor, Balliol, 1922-44; Professor of History, Edinburgh, 1944-5; Warden of All Souls, 1945-51.
- ³¹ Webster to Pollard, n.d. [postmark 18 Jan. 1944], Pollard MSS, MS 860/20/1.
- ³² E.H. Carr, *From Napoleon to Stalin* (London, 1980), 191, and A.J. Toynbee, *Acquaintances* (London, 1967), 68.
- ³³ Namier to Kerr, 11 Aug. 1926, Namier MSS, John Rylands Library, Manchester, 1/1a/1, and to Liddell Hart, 8 Mar. 1951, Liddell Hart MSS, [Basil] L[jiddell] H[art] A[rhive, King's College London], LH 1/539; J. Cairns, "Sir Lewis Namier and the History of Europe", *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 1/1 (1974), 5-6.
- ³⁴ The latter trumped the former. Namier took great delight in making attendees of a Conservative Political Centre seminar leave in protest at his "home truths about the Germans", Namier to Selby, 8 July 1949, Selby MSS, Bod., MS.Eng.c.6600. Namier was an occasional lecturer at the party's Ashridge College in the 1930s, Bryant to Namier, 3 June 1938, Bryant MSS, LHAC, E/2/2.
- ³⁵ Pieter Geyl, quoted in V. Mehta, *Fly and the Fly Bottle: Encounters with British Intellectuals* (London, 1965), 132, and N. Annan, *Our Age: The Generation That Made Post-war Britain* (London, 1991 (pb)), 364.
- ³⁶ A.J.P. Taylor, *A Personal History* (London, 1983), 113.
- ³⁷ Namier to Berlin, 10 Feb. 1955, Berlin MSS, Bod., MS Berlin 140. The lecture was Berlin's 1953 Auguste Comte memorial lecture, *Historical Inevitability* (Oxford, 1954). For the unfortunate sequel to this letter see H. Hardy and J. Holmes (eds.), *Isaiah Berlin: Enlightening. Letters, 1946-1960* (London, 2009), 530, n. 1. Sir Isaiah Berlin (1909-1997), ed. St. Paul's, Corpus Christi College, Oxford; fellow of All Souls, 1932-97; in diplomatic service, 1940-6; Chichele Professor of Social and Political Theory, 1957-67; founding President, Wolfson College, 1966; President of the British Academy, 1974-8.
- ³⁸ L.B. Namier, "Skyscraper [1927]", in id., *Skyscrapers and Other Essays* (London, 1931), 6. In later years, he commented on Berlin's 1958 inaugural lecture as "the kind of political science I can understand", Namier to Berlin, 26 Jan. 1959, Berlin MSS, MS Berlin 156; see I. Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty", in id., *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford and New York, 1969), 118-72.
- ³⁹ Namier to Smith, 12 Jan. 1917, Smith MSS, Letters N. 1.

⁴⁰L.B. Namier, "History", in id., *Avenues of History* (London, 1952), 1; id., "The Biography of Ordinary Men [1928]", *Skyscrapers*, 53.

⁴¹ Id., *Palestine and the British Empire* (London, s.a. [1939]), 3. The parallel with Heraclitus' πάντα ῥεῖ seems obvious.

⁴² Id., "Hötzendorf: II [1923]", in id., *In the Margins of History* (London, 1939), 234-5.

⁴³ Id., "From Vienna to Versailles [1940]", in id., *Conflicts* (London, 1942), 9, and "The Makers of Munich", in id., *In the Nazi Era* (London, 1952), 165.

⁴⁴ Id., *Basic Factors in Nineteenth-Century European History: The Creighton Lecture in History 1952* (London, 1953), 1-2, and "The First Mountebank Dictator", in id., *Facing East* (London, 1939), 9.

⁴⁵ Id., "History", 7.

⁴⁶ Id., "Princess Lieven", id., *Avenues*, 144.

⁴⁷ Id., *Diplomatic Prelude, 1938-1939* (London, 1948), 4. This was also very much A.J.P. Taylor's approach, see K.M. Burk, *Troublemaker: The Life and History of A.J.P. Taylor* (New Haven, CT, 2000), 288.

⁴⁸ Namier to Headlam-Morley, 4 June 1924, Headlam-Morley MSS, HDLM Acc. 727/39.

⁴⁹ Namier to Liddell Hart, 12 Sept. 1949, Liddell Hart MSS, LH 1/539.

⁵⁰ L.B. Namier, "'Missed Opportunities': The Gravamen of German Memoirs", in id., *In the Nazi Era* (London, 1952), 3.

⁵¹ Id., "History", 8; and "The Anglo-French-Russian Negotiations of 1939", in id., *Europe in Decay: A Study in Disintegration, 1936-1940* (London, 1950), 239.

⁵² Namier to Liddell Hart, 19 Jan. 1952, Liddell Hart MSS, LH 1/539. Namier had Philip Guedalla's histories in his cross-hairs.

⁵³ Namier, "The Course of German History", *Facing East*, 27.

⁵⁴ Id., "Waynflete Lecture 1: The German Bid for Dominion", n.d. [1947], Namier-Waynflete MSS, Bod., MS.Eng.hist.d.341, fol. 1.

⁵⁵ Id., "His Letters [1934]", in id., *In the Margin of History* (London, 1939), 181.

⁵⁶ Namier to Churchill, 14 Feb. 1934, Churchill MSS, CCAC, CHAR 8/484A-B.

⁵⁷ Namier, *Germany and Eastern Europe* (London, 1915), 64.

⁵⁸ Namier to Headlam-Morley (private and confidential, no. XIV), 5 Mar. 1919, Headlam-Morley MSS, HDLM Acc. 688/2; Namier, "Diplomacy in the Interwar Period", *World Politics* 7/1 (1954), 118; for a discussion of some of this, see R.N. Lebow, *The Tragic Vision of Politics: Ethics, Interests and Orders* (Cambridge, 2003), 14-64.

⁵⁹ Namier to Bryant, 7 Dec. 1950, Bryant MSS, E/2/2; A.J.P. Taylor, "Namier the Historian", *The Observer*, 28 Aug. 1960. Alan John Percival Taylor (1906-1990); ed. Bootham School, York, Oriel College, Oxford; lecturer, Manchester University, 1930-8; fellow, Magdalen College, Oxford, 1938-76; for his relations with Namier see C. Wrigley, *A.J.P. Taylor: Radical Historian of Europe* (London, 2006), 75-77.

⁶⁰ Namier to Selby, 3 Mar. 1954, Selby MSS, Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS.Eng.c.6600. The reference was to Viscount Elibank's letter in *The Times*, 16 Jan. 1954.

⁶¹ I. Berlin, "L.B. Namier", in id., *Personal Impressions*, ed. H. Hardy (Oxford, 1982), 80.

⁶² Namier to Selby, 5 Nov. 1954, Selby MSS, MS.Eng.c.6600. Namier, no doubt, suspected the handoff his *bête noire*, Herbert Butterfield, behind the article; he launched his own 'full-dress attack' on Namier in 1957, see M. Bentley, *The Life and Thought of Herbert Butterfield: History, Science and God* (Cambridge, 2011), 255-58.

⁶³ Donald Cameron Watt (1928-2014), ed. Rugby, Oriel College, Oxford; assistant editor, *Documents of German Foreign Policy*, 1951-4; at London School of Economics from 1954; editor of *Survey of International Affairs*, 1962-71; Stevenson Professor of International History, LSE, 1981-93.

⁶⁴ D.C. Watt, "Sir Lewis Namier and Contemporary European History", *Cambridge Journal* 7/7 (1954), 580-1, 582, 584, and 598. Watt also criticized Namier for his anti-German bias, *ibid.*, 591-2; see also M. Kornat, "Historycy zachodni wobec układow Ribbentrop-Mołotow z 23 Sierpnia i 28 Września 1939", *Politeja* 1/5 (2006), 352-53.

⁶⁵ Namier, "Palmerston", in id., *Avenues*, 146. He acknowledged later the "decline in the position and influence of Foreign Ministries", "Diplomacy in the Interwar Period", 102.

⁶⁶ Id., "Mountebank Dictator", 21-2; and "Prince von Bülow [1931]", in id., *In the Margins of History* (London, 1939), 214 and 216.

⁶⁷ Id., "'The Unnecessary War'", in id., *Europe in Decay: A Study in Disintegration, 1936-1940* (London, 1950), 162; and "Diplomacy in the Inter-War Period", in id., *Personalities and Powers* (London, 1955), 134. Curiously, Namier's erstwhile assailant Watt came to much the same assessment of Beck in later life, id., *How War Came: The Immediate Origins of the Second World War, 1938-1939* (London, 1990 (pb)), 58.

⁶⁸ Namier, "Curtain-Raiser to the Czech Crisis", *Nazi Era*, 135.

⁶⁹ Id., "Hitler: A Study in Tyranny", in id., *Personalities*, 137; and "German Arms and Aims [1935]", in id., *In the Margins of History* (London, 1939), 30.

⁷⁰ Id., "Hitler's War [1940]", in id., *Conflicts: Studies in Contemporary History* (London, 1942), 53; and "Mountebank Dictator", 22. One might add "deception and lying" to his skills, V. Ullrich, *Hitler, I, Ascent, 1889-1939* (London, 2019), 504.

- ⁷¹ Namier to Headlam-Morley, 13 Feb. 1919, Headlam-Morley MSS, HDLM Acc. 688/2; see also Jacob Talmon's acute comments on the "veiled spiritual pilgrimage" in Namier's evolving thoughts, J.L. Talmon, 'The Ordeal of Sir Lewis Namier: The Man, the Historian, the Jew', *Commentary* 33/3 (1962), 5.
- ⁷² Namier, "From Vienna to Versailles [1940]", in id., *Conflicts*, 13; and "Poland", in id., *Facing East*, 83. For a "critical" interpretation of geopolitics see G. Ó Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space* (London, 1996), 141-86, and more nuanced J. Black, *Geopolitics and the Quest for Dominance* (Bloomington, IN, 2016).
- ⁷³ Namier, "Waynflete notes", n.d. [1947], Namier-Waynflete MSS, MS. Eng.hist.d.341, fols. 79-80.
- ⁷⁴ Id., "The Course of German History [1945]", in id., *Facing East*, 28.
- ⁷⁵ Id., "The German Army and Hitler", in id., *Nazi Era*, 14. This was a negative version of the "Borussianism" that dominated historical scholarship in Germany, see W. Hardtwig, *Geschichtskultur und Wissenschaft* (Munich, 1990), 146-60.
- ⁷⁶ Namier, "From Vienna to Versailles", *Conflicts*, 6.
- ⁷⁷ Namier to Liddell Hart, 24 Jan. 1951, Liddell Hart MSS, LH 1/539. Piłsudski's offensive began on 24 April 1920 for Namier and Eastern Central Europe see also A. Graziosi, "Il mondo in Europa: Namier e il 'Medio oriente europeo', 1815-1948", *Contemporanea* 10/2 (2007), 193-228.
- ⁷⁸ Namier, "German Arms and Aims", 33-4.
- ⁷⁹ Id., "From Vienna to Versailles", 14.
- ⁸⁰ Id., *Basic Factors*, 8. Fluke played a role as well in 1922, see P. Krüger, "A Rainy Day, April 16, 1922: The Rapallo Treaty and German Foreign Policy", in C. Fink, A. Frohn and J. Heideking, eds., *Genoa, Rapallo and European Reconstruction in 1922* (Cambridge, 1991), 49-64.
- ⁸¹ Namier, "The Downfall of the Habsburg Monarchy", H.W.V. Temperley (ed.), *A History of the Peace Conference of Paris* (6 vols., London, 1920-1) IV, 69.
- ⁸² Id., "Poland", *Facing East*, 83; also "From Vienna to Versailles", *Conflicts*, 17. Namier understood that familial connections and human affinities, autocratic instincts and common interests in Poland shaped Franco-Austrian animosity in the eighteenth and Russo-Prussian friendship in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, *ibid.*, 9.
- ⁸³ Namier to Headlam-Morley (private and confidential), 3 Apr. 1919, Headlam-Morley MSS, HDLM Acc. 688/2. Intriguingly, the Nazi-Soviet partition of Poland in 1939 followed the Bug-San line nearly as closely as the Curzon line of 1919; for the latter see B. Rusin, "Lewis Namier a kwestia "linii Curzona" i kształtowania się polskiej granicy wschodniej po I wojnie światowej", *Studia z Dziejów Rosji i Europy Środkowo – Wschodniej*, 48 (2013), 95-116; for Namier and Dmowski see N. Davies, "The Poles in Great Britain", *Slavonic and East European Review* 50/118 (1972), 74 and 81-5.
- ⁸⁴ Namier, "The Polish Corridor and Upper Silesia [1933]", id., *Conflicts*, 44-5; F.-G. Dreyfus, *1919-1939 L'engrenage* (Paris, 2002), 41-43.
- ⁸⁵ Namier, *Diplomatic Prelude, 1938-1939* (London, 1948), 42; and "Poland", *Facing East*, 83 and 92; see also P. Wandycz, "The Polish Question", in M.F. Boemeke, G.D. Feldman and E. Glaser, eds., *The Treaty of Versailles: A Reassessment After 75 Years* (Cambridge, 1998), 313-35.
- ⁸⁶ Namier, *The Czecho-Slovaks: An Oppressed Nationality* (London, 1917), 3; and *The Case of Bohemia* (London, 1917), 5 and 10 (first published in *The New Statesman*, 9 Dec. 1916). Mackinder, too, stressed the importance of the Czech lands as the "apex of a broad wedge of independence", id., *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction* (London, 1919), 214. Likewise, German *Geopolitiker* noted the role of the "Böhmische Kastell" (Bohemian redoubt), K. Haushofer, *Weltpolitik von heute* (Berlin, s.a. [1936]), 196-99; R.E. Dickinson, *The German Lebensraum* (Harmondsworth, Mdx., 1943), 88-90 *et passim*.
- ⁸⁷ Namier, *Germany and Eastern Europe*, 41. To ensure the viability of the Czech state, access to the coal fields around Teschen, Namier argued, was more important than the principle of ethnicity (which would have favoured Polish claims to the area), Namier to Headlam-Morley (private and confidential, no. VII), 1 Feb. 1919, Headlam-Morley MSS, HDLM Acc. 688/2.
- ⁸⁸ Id., *Diplomatic Prelude*, 37. The phrase was first coined by the French diplomat Robert Coulondre.
- ⁸⁹ Id., "Hitler's War [1940]", *Conflicts*, 60; 'Hitler', *Personalities*, 146; "Halder on Hitler", *Nazi Era*, 42. Namier's objection to investing ideas with exaggerated significance was confined principally to eighteenth-century England, where there was a consensus amongst the ruling class.
- ⁹⁰ Id., "Symmetry and Repetition", *Conflicts*, 72.
- ⁹¹ Namier to Headlam-Morley (private and confidential, no. X), 13 Feb. 1919, Headlam-Morley MSS, HDLM Acc. 688/2.
- ⁹² Id., "Waynflete notes", n.d. [1947], Namier-Waynflete MSS, MS.Eng.Hist.d.341, fols. 80-1. See also "Germany: I. National Character", *Conflicts*, 78-82 (first published in *The Spectator*, 28 Feb. 1941).
- ⁹³ Id., "Downfall", 77.
- ⁹⁴ Id., "Nationality and Liberty", *Avenues*, 32; "From Vienna to Versailles", *Conflicts*, 7; and *1848: The Revolution of the Intellectuals. The Raleigh lecture on History 1944* (London, 1946), 31, 33 and 43; S. Woolfe, "I demoni d'Europa", *Contemporanea* 9/1 (2006), 165-66.

- ⁹⁵. Namier, "Downfall", 59. For Namier's attitude towards popular sovereignty see Hall, "Moralist", 236.
- ⁹⁶. Namier to H. Seton-Watson, 10 July 1957, History of Parliament Trust Archives, London, N-6b. I am grateful to D.W. Hayton for sharing this document. (George) Hugh (Nicholas) Seton-Watson (1916-1984); ed. Winchester, New College, Oxford; employed in diplomatic service, 1939-41; military service, Special Operations Executive, 1941-5; *praelector*, University College, Oxford, 1946-51; Professor of Russian History, University of London, 1951-83.
- ⁹⁷. Namier, *Namier*, 302.
- ⁹⁸. Namier, "Liberty and Nationality", *Avenues*, 44. Less trenchant on German nationalism but substantively not different, G. Wollstein, *Das "Grossdeutschland" der Paulskirche: Nationale Ziele in der bürgerlichen Revolution 1848/49* (Düsseldorf, 1977).
- ⁹⁹. Namier, "Yugoslavia", *Facing East*, 82.
- ¹⁰⁰ Id., "Russia", *Facing East*, 100.
- ¹⁰¹ Id., "The European Situation [1914]", in id., *Skyscraper*, 63. Namier returned from New York in April 1914; the article appeared in *The American Leader*, 9 July 1914.
- ¹⁰² R.J.W. Evans, "The Creighton Centenary: British Historians and Europe, 1907-2007", *Historical Research* 82/216 (2009), 216. Namier had been ill, and blamed himself for being "a fool to take on so much work", Namier to Selby, 20 Nov. 1952, Selby MSS, MS.Eng.c.6600.
- ¹⁰³ Namier, *Basic Factors*, 7; see A.J.P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery of Europe, 1848-1918* (Oxford, 1954); P.W. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763-1848* (Oxford, 1994)
- ¹⁰⁴ Namier, "Russia [1943-4]", *Facing East*, 103. This essay appeared first in *The Times*, 10 Mar. 1943 and 14 and 15 Jan. 1944.
- ¹⁰⁵ Id., "Metternich's Doctrine [1926]", *Skyscrapers*, 96.
- ¹⁰⁶ Id., "Waynflete Lecture 1: The German Bid for Dominion", n.d. [1947], Namier-Waynflete MSS, MS.Eng.hist.d.341, fol. 3.
- ¹⁰⁷ Id., "From Vienna to Versailles [1940]", id., *Conflicts*, 12-13.
- ¹⁰⁸ Id., "Mountebank Dictator", 21.
- ¹⁰⁹ Namier to Martin, 28 Aug. 1942, Namier MSS, 1/2/12. Kingsley Martin (1897-1969); ed. Mill Hill School, Magdalen College, Cambridge; editor, *New Statesman*, 1930-60. For Namier's sometimes wilful reading of German sources see also L.E. Hill, "The Wilhelmstrasse in the Nazi Era", *Political Studies Quarterly* 82/4 (1967), 564, n. 65.
- ¹¹⁰. Namier, "Waynflete notes", n.d. [1947], Namier-Waynflete MSS, MS. Eng.hist.d.341, fol. 79.
- ¹¹¹. Id., "After Vienna and Versailles [1940]", in id., *Conflicts: Studies in Contemporary History* (London, 1942), 21.
- ¹¹². Id., "European Situation", *Skyscrapers*, 67; and id., *Germany and Eastern Europe* (London, 1915), 103, 107-9. For Namier the Habsburg lands were never "the forgotten realm" of later historiography, see J. Deak, "The Great War and the Forgotten Realm: The Habsburg Monarchy and the First World War", *Journal of Modern History* 86/2 (2014), 336-80.
- ¹¹³. Namier, *Germany and Eastern Europe*, 114-5.
- ¹¹⁴. Id., "After Vienna and Versailles", 19-20.
- ¹¹⁵. Id., "Russia and Poland", *Facing East*, 107; and "French Policy in Europe, 1919-1938 [1938]", in id., *In the Margins of History* (London, 1939), 36. In its inception French policy was designed to prevent the formation of a Russo-German alliance, K. Hovi, *Alliances de reverse: Stabilization of France's Alliance Policies in East Central Europe, 1919-1921* (Turku, 1984).
- ¹¹⁶. Quotes from Namier, "Diplomacy, Secret and Open [1938]", *Margins*, 17; and Namier to Selby, 4 Sept. 1957, Selby MSS, MS.Eng.c.6600.
- ¹¹⁷. Id., "Prolegomena to the 'Anschluss'", *Nazi Era*, 113.
- ¹¹⁸. Id., "French Policy in Europe", 42-3; N. Rich, *Hitler's War Aims* (2 vols., London, 1973-4) I, 100-1.
- ¹¹⁹. Namier, "1812 and 1941 [1942]", *Conflicts*, 62-3. Namier overestimated Stalin who had made the necessary concessions in August 1939, see R. Ahmann, *Nichtangriffspakte: Entwicklung und Operative Nutzung in Europa, 1922-1939* (Baden-Baden, 1988), 629-41.
- ¹²⁰. Namier, *Basic Factors*, 13-4; also *1848: The Revolution of the Intellectuals. Raleigh Lecture on History 1944* (London, 1946), 7.
- ¹²¹. Id., "Russia", *Facing East*, 96. There is a striking parallel here to the notion developed by Carl Schmitt during the Nazi period of a "European Monroe Doctrine", *Land und Meer: Eine weltgeschichtliche Betrachtung* (Leipzig, 1942). Schmitt appreciated the parallel, even if he did not fully grasp Namier's aims, Schmitt to Koselleck, 30 Mar. 1954, J.E. Dunkhase, ed., *Reinhart Koselleck – Carl Schmitt: Der Briefwechsel, 1953-1983* (Frankfurt, 2019), 48-9.
- ¹²² Namier, "History", *Avenues*, 8-9.
- ¹²³ Toynbee, *Acquaintances*, 80.

¹²⁴ Still pertinent D.C. Watt, “Appeasement: The Rise of the Revisionist School?”, *Political Quarterly* 36/2 (1964), 191-213.

¹²⁵ Hall, ‘Realist as Moralist’, 230; for some of the background see B. Vigezzi, *The British Committee on the Theory of International Politics (1954-1986): The Rediscovery of History* (Milan. 2005).