

PREFACE

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The Baltic: a Tour d'Horizon

Good Morning! Dzień dobry, Hello Brendan.

I am very pleased to be talking to you in Gdańsk today, but very sorry that I can't be with you in person. We live in strange times. The University of Gdańsk was the very first to grant me an honorary doctorate, so I take special pleasure in re-connecting with you.

The link between the universities of Gdańsk and Cambridge also gives me much satisfaction. Since my country, the United Kingdom, has left the European Union – in my view, foolishly – it is all the more important that British universities work and co-operate with their European counterparts. And I hope that students and academics from Gdańsk will maintain their contacts with friends in Britain.

In Oxford, where I live, Cambridge is known as “the other place” – *to drugie miejsce*. In our local pub, the Rose and Crown, a so-called “swear box” is kept to hold the money collected for verbal offences. Clients are required to pay a traditional fine a) for speaking obscenities, or b) for mentioning the name of the “other place.” In Cambridge, of course, Oxford is known as “the other, other place” – *to drugie, drugie miejsce*.

Fortunately, I have good relations with Cambridge as well as Oxford – being a member of Peterhouse, Clare Hall and Pembroke colleges. And, in case you didn't know, Britain has 130 universities. Among the youngest is the university of my home town, Bolton, founded in 2004, which also awarded me an honorary doctorate and which specialises in vocational and industry-related programmes and high-quality teaching. I hope that some of you, someday will visit Bolton.

Today, instead of a stodgy academic lecture, I shall serve up a smorgasbord of personal recollections and historical observations. I hope it doesn't sound too self-indulgent.

I first saw the waters of the Baltic in August 1958 in Copenhagen at the Baltic's western entrance. It was my elder sister's 21st birthday, and my father's present was to fund a visit to any European capital of her choice. For reasons unknown, she chose Copenhagen. And I went along as her “caddie” or “sherpa.”

The events of that trip were imprinted on my young mind. For one – the sea crossing from Harwich to Esbjerg was extremely rough. Everyone, except me, was terribly seasick, and I was left alone in the dining room sampling a vast smorgasbord of Scandinavian delicacies. For two – pornography, still illegal in England, was full, brazen display in Denmark. And for three – we benefited from a wonderful scheme called “Meet the Danes”, whereby foreign visitors could be invited to a meal with a Danish family. This was only 13 years after the end of World War Two. Our host was a local doctor, who in 1945 had witnessed the Red Army’s liberation of the island of Bornholm. As he told us with a smile, the Soviet regiment which landed on Bornholm consisted largely of lice-ridden women. The young doctor then watched in amazement as 15,000 females crowded into a football stadium, stripped off their clothes in the sunshine, and stood in line for the showers. Some historians would call that “an intercultural encounter.”



COPENHAGEN

Fig. 1. Copenhagen, Igor Sorokin, Alamy Vektorgrafik, Alamy.de, Bild ID: G911E3 (RF)

Danish history is not my forte, but I recently came across a curious phenomenon in the 18th century. I was doing research on the British King, George II (r. 1727–1760), who ruled Britain and Ireland in parallel with the German Electorate of Hanover. I knew that Hanover lay next to the Electorate of Saxony, whose Prince-Elector, August III, was simultaneously King of Poland. I then realised that, on its other side, Hanover lay next to the Duchy of Oldenburg, whose dukes had been kings of Denmark for 300 years. It eventually dawned on me that a large cluster of north German princes all had royal ambitions. Those German dynasties supplied the monarchs not only of Britain, Poland-Lithuania and Denmark, but also of Sweden, Prussia and briefly of Russia. And it was the Danish Kings, the Oldenburgs, who acted as their role models.

Nowadays, one drives from Denmark to Sweden across the beautiful Øresund Bridge. During my first visit that bridge was forty years in the future. But my academic career was to take me to Sweden on various occasions, not least because a number of my books were translated into Swedish.

However, the connection with Sweden which I choose to mention here, concerns my wife's family. My Polish wife's parents were refugees from Lwów, but her relations on the maternal side had a curious, very un-Polish surname – KUBISZTAL. A bit of genealogical research has revealed that the Kubiszta family originated in a village near Dąbrowa Tarnowska. What is more, when my wife went to school in Dąbrowa in the 1950s, the children from that group of villages, were still nick-named "Szwedy" (Swedes). After that, it was easy to establish that a batch of surnames in the district were of Swedish origin. A battle had taken place in 1655, when many Swedish soldiers surrendered. The Sanctuary of the Virgin Mary at Odporyszów, five miles from Dąbrowa, marks the site of the battle to this day. Swedish friends have told us that Kubiszta sounds like a corrupted form of Jacobsdal – the name of Stockholm's royal palace.

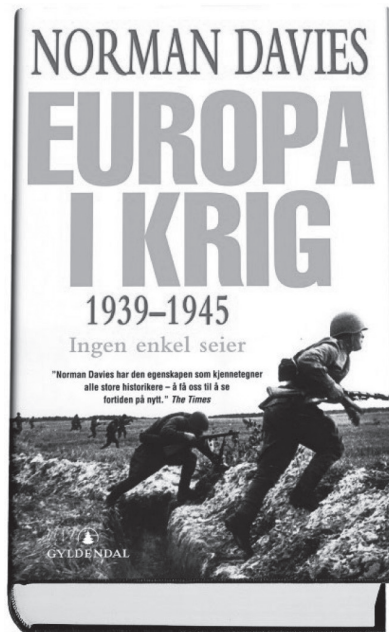


Fig. 2. Davies Norman, *Europa I Krig 1939–1945 Ingen Enkel Seier*, transl. by Gunnar Nyquist (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2007)

Swedish history is central to the evolution of the Baltic region, and the obscure battle of Odeporyszów was fought at a time when Sweden was at the height of its power. The House of Vasa, which ruled and reigned from the 1520s to 1660s, commanded an empire which at one time or another controlled much of the Baltic shore. Swedish armies played a major role in Germany's Thirty Years War, in the "Potop" of Poland-Lithuania and in the rise of Russia. If the Vasa Union between Sweden-Finland and Poland-Lithuania had not been broken up by civil and religious wars, the shape of Europe might have looked very different. The learned Queen Christina, who reigned from 1644 to 1654 and whose gender ambiguity arouses great interest in some quarters, was almost the last of the line. Her titles included: Queen of Sweden, Grand Princess of Finland, Duchess of Estonia, Livonia, Karelia, Pomerania, Cassubia, Vandalia, Bremen & Verden, Stettin, Ingria and Wismar. After her abdication and conversion to Roman Catholicism, she retired to Rome; she was an unsuccessful candidate in Poland's royal election of 1668.

Finland formed part of the Swedish empire for centuries, but in 1809, at the end of the last Swedish-Russian war, it was acquired by Russia, and turned into a Tsarist Grand Duchy. The Tsar's position as Grand Duke of Finland was similar to his status after 1815 as King of Poland.

I'm sorry to say that I have only spent one half-day in Finland in my whole life. I'm sure that I have missed many good things. A ship on which I was a passenger made a short stop in Helsinki in 1964 or 1965. The weather was atrocious, and there was no time to book a theatre or a concert. So I remembered the advice of my aunt, who was both a Protestant pastor and a great globe-trotter, and who had told me tales of skinny-dipping in Finland under the midnight sun. So I rolled up for a session in Helsinki's municipal sauna house. Once inside, I was taken in charge by a burly Finnish sailor, who had just got off a boat like me. He led me through the cold, hot, wet and dry rooms before giving me such a thrashing with the birch leaves that I fell asleep like a child.

Actually, I learned more from Finnish friends in London. One of them, the wife of a colleague, had been born in 1940 in Vyborg (Viipuri) from which she and her parents were promptly deported by Stalin's NKVD. She never saw her Karelian homeland again. Her story was very reminiscent of my own wife's parents who did not live to re-visit their beloved Lwów.

Finnish history, in fact, is very instructive. Finland's national awakening in the 19th century is a textbook example of a nation locked into subservience by its neighbour's empire, aroused by the folktales of the Kalevala, inspired by the music of Jan Sibelius, and finally freed by the bold exploits of General Mannerheim.

For Poles, the "Winter War" of 1939–1940 is especially relevant. Russian apologists have always said that the Soviet Union remained neutral at the start of World War Two. Well, it didn't. Soon after invading Poland in September 1939 alongside

the Nazi Germans, the Red Army invaded Finland, and to everyone's surprise, received a beating.

HELSINKI



Fig. 3. Helsinki, Igor Sorokin, Alamy Vektorgrafik, Alamy.de, Bild ID: 2JC339A (RF)

Helsinki lies barely 100 km from the Russian frontier, and the sea-crossing to St. Petersburg is less than twice that. What I didn't tell you is that the ship which dropped me off at Helsinki was actually bound for Leningrad (as St. Petersburg was called in Soviet times.) It was an old British India liner, SS Nevasa, which had been used during the war as a troopship, and which had been slightly refurbished to cater for educational cruises, taking students and schoolchildren round the world. I was employed as a teacher on that cruise. The ship's officers were entirely "white" British males, wearing bright, white, tropical uniforms, and the crew was made up entirely of dark-skinned Lascars from Calcutta. It was a rusting microcosm of the fading British Empire on the high seas.

Our educational visit to Leningrad was educational in more ways than one. It took place in the Krushchev era. It began, literally, with a bang, as the 20,000 ton SS Nevasa sailed into the port of Leningrad, failed to slow down, and hit the dockside, demolishing a wooden pier and scattering the Soviet naval orchestra, whose rendering of "Land of Hope and Glory" was cut ingloriously short. After that, we saw the sights over a couple of days, gaping in amazement at the Winter Palace, the Hermitage Gallery, the Bronze Horseman, the Museum of Atheism, and the monuments to the Siege of Leningrad. Then the visit was cut short. We were recalled to the ship, which sailed off ahead of schedule. It later transpired that the ship's Indian Lascars had started a fight in the Soviet Sailor's Club, where two Russians and two Indians were knifed and killed. The Lascars told us that the fight began because the British Empire had been insulted, and at night they buried their dead at sea.

Russian history, of course, and "Russia's Window on the West" has played a critical part in the Baltic in modern times. But the lasting impression made on me by St. Petersburg-Leningrad was that Russia is a latecomer to the Baltic, if not an

imperial intruder. St. Petersburg was founded in 1701 on Swedish soil and on territory which had no native Russian inhabitants. It was an imperialist venture par excellence – about which we Britons have no right to complain.

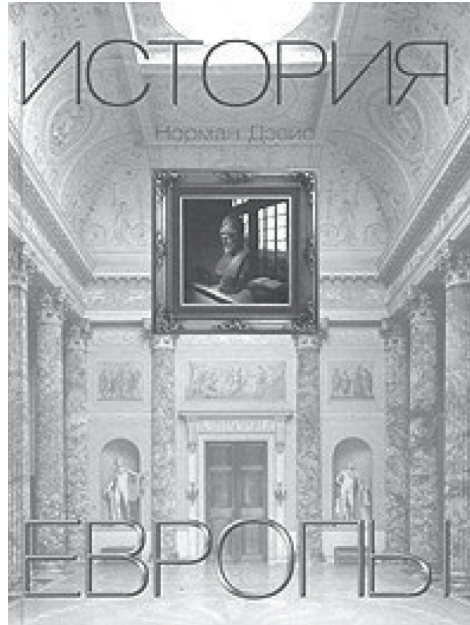


Fig. 4. Norman Davies, *История Европы*, transl. by Т.Б. Менская (Moskva: AST: Tranzitkniga, 2004)

Since the collapse of the USSR, I have visited Russia several times – presenting lectures, working in the archives, or following the Anders trail. Most memorably, my wife and I flew with the Polish government delegation to Smolensk in April 2010, participated in the 70th-anniversary commemorations at the site of the Katyn massacres, and watched Vladimir Putin at close quarters. We were most impressed perhaps by the terrible dilapidation and shocking poverty of Russia's most westerly city. It was a different world from Moscow and Petersburg. Three days after our return, the same aircraft, in which we had flown, an ageing Tupolev, took a Polish presidential delegation to Smolensk, tragically attempted to land in dense fog, and crashed, killing all on board.

The Russian frontier with Estonia lies even closer to St. Petersburg than the Finnish frontier. The European Union's smallest land-based country sits cheek by jowl with the world's largest state, which is roughly 400 times its size. David and Goliath do not make a fair comparison.

When the SS Nevasa sailed out of Leningrad, I now realise that it must have passed the coast of Estonia. But we passengers did not notice. The Soviet Republic of Estonia was out of bounds for western visitors, and, I for one, barely knew of its existence.

Thirty years later, the scene had changed completely. The Baltic States declared their independence in 1991 before the Soviet Union had formally collapsed, and quickly became showpieces of democracy and enterprise. In that period, I learned that Poland's Solidarity had caused a sensation in the Estonian public, and that, in consequence my books on Polish history were translated into Estonian as soon as it was possible.

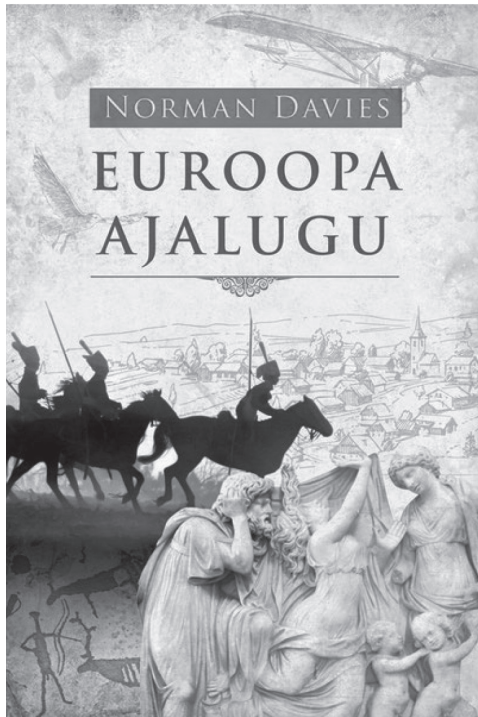


Fig. 5. Norman Davies, *Euroopa ajalugu*, transl. by Rein Turu (Tallinn: Varrak, 2014)

Before long, I and my wife were invited to Tallin and to the University of Tartu (formerly Dorpat); I appeared on Estonian television, speaking English; and I was honoured to be awarded a medal – the Order of Mariana Land (Third Class).

Estonians, exceptionally in Europe, are not Indo-Europeans. Their language and culture, like that of their Finnish cousins, belongs to the Finno-Ugrian group, originating in the Urals.

Estonian history has passed through many periods – Viking, Swedish, Russian, Soviet. Tallin was founded by Danes in the 13th century. In the 20th century, as in Poland, a brief interval of inter-war independence preceded alternating occupation by Soviet Stalinists and German Nazis. And mere survival is a great achievement.

Nowadays, as a member both of NATO and the EU, Estonia enjoys more security than beforehand, but tensions are palpable. Putin’s Russia regards it as the frontline of its so-called “near abroad.” Putin himself comes from nearby Leningrad-Petersburg. Pessimists say that the 2006 cyber attack, which shut down Estonia’s government for a day or two, was a taste of things to come.

Estonia’s southern neighbour, Latvia, is the piggy-in-the-middle of the three Baltic States, and its capital, Riga, is by far the largest city in the region. Latvia’s modern name, has only been used in modern times, its territory having belonged earlier to the duchies of Courland and Livonia – in German Livland, in Polish Inflanty.

The three Baltic States are often lumped together, as if they were almost indistinguishable, like peas in a pod. In fact, each of them is unique, with strongly individual features. The Latvian language, for example, being Indo-European in origin, bears no resemblance whatsoever to Estonian. Before the deportation of Germans in 1940–1941 in an arrangement between Hitler and Stalin, the country was subjected German settlement and strong Protestant influence. The Baltic Germans, who played a prominent role in Tsarist times, owed their origins to the medieval Livonian knights; at different times, Riga was a Hanseatic city, then a “free city” of the Holy Roman Empire. In the 17th century, Livonia was divided between Poland and Sweden. And today, Latvia hosts a much larger Russian minority than any of its neighbours.



Fig. 6. Riga, Igor Sorokin, Alamy Vektorgrafik, Alamy.de, Bild ID: FX1YFN (RF)

I myself could not visit Latvia until the 1999 when I was invited to lecture at the University of Riga, and to meet the excellent lady president, Vaira Vike-Freiburga. I remember the Museum of Totalitarianism, where, in contrast to western fashion, the evils of German Fascism and of Soviet Communism are exhibited together under one roof.

Here, I shall pick out one moment from another trip, which I consider very revealing. In the early 1990s, I was sitting by the window of a British Airways plane, destination Moscow. The plane flew up to the Baltic coast until the unmistakable outline of the Bay of Riga came into view on the right-hand side. At which point, the captain's voice addressed the passengers on the intercom. "Riga can be seen down there," he said, "We are now going to turn over the Russian coast, and head east for Moscow." "Where on earth are we," I thought, scribbling a note for the captain, and handing it to the stewardess. "If this is the coast of Russia," the note said, "we are a long way off course."

As I have indicated, Latvia's history is pretty complicated, but the geography is straightforward. The trouble is: many westerners have a skewed mental map in their head; they don't know where Russia is, and Russia isn't.

Lithuania, Latvia's neighbour to the south, is different from both Estonia and Latvia. It is a largely Roman Catholic country whose longest and most complex historical connections were with Poland. Indeed, its capital city, Vilnius, or Wilno in Polish, which until the second World War had a large Polish-speaking majority, created a long-running bone of contention that poisoned relations throughout much of the twentieth century.

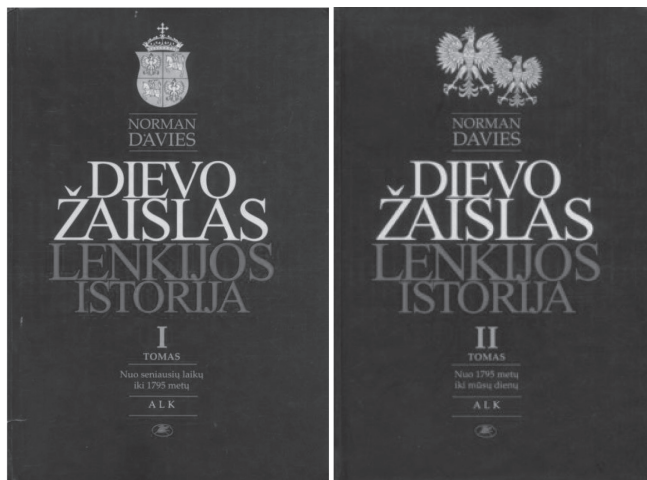


Fig. 7. Norman Davies, *Dievo Žaislas: Lenkijos Istorija*, transl. by Balčiuniene Vilija (Vilnius: Lietuvos rašytojų sąjungos leidykla, 2002)

The historic Grand Duchy of Lithuania, many times larger than present-day Lithuania, was joined to the Kingdom of Poland, first in personal union, then in constitutional union, for 410 years – from 1385–1795. I used to explain this set-up to my British students by comparing it to the union of England with Scotland, which started as a personal union under the Stuarts, and for the last 307 years has been a constitutional union. Incidentally, I am convinced that the Anglo-Scottish union is doomed, and that the United Kingdom – the state where I was born and raised – will soon cease to exist.

Throughout my early academic career, however, when I was writing books like *God's Playground* (*Boże Igrzysko*), which contains several prominent chapters on the Polish-Lithuanian Union - I was never able to visit Lithuania. Very sensibly, the Soviet authorities would never grant me a visa. So, in the 1990s when it became possible, I was eager to go, and I went there in the company of a group of students from the University of Warsaw led by the late and great Professor Alexander Gieysztor. In Vilnius, I was asked to present a lecture on the delicate subject of Polish-Lithuanian relations. Conscious that I was walking across a minefield, I opened by drawing a map on the blackboard, where one part was marked ENGLAND (in place of the Korona) and the other part SCOTLAND (in place of the Grand Duchy.) For one hour, I managed to talk without mentioning either Poland or Lithuania by name, talking instead about the (non-existent) “Anglo-Scottish Commonwealth.” At the end, a cameraman from Lithuanian TV rushed in to take pictures of my strange map before it was rubbed out.

The salient point of Lithuanian history is that the contemporary Republic of Lithuania covers only a fraction of the huge territory of the former Grand Duchy. Today's Lithuania is a nation-state, inhabited by ethnic Lithuanians. The Grand Duchy of the past was a multinational, dynastic state, stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea, including not just Lithuania but Belarus and Ukraine, too. Some Belarusian historians claim it as their nation's historic homeland.

If you look at the map of Lithuania, in the bottom left, south-west corner you will find the small, port city of Klaipėda – the former German Memel. This unobtrusive place was seized by the German Nazis in March 1939, and was visited in person by Adolf Hitler. Of course, Adolf Hitler, the Third Reich and its furthest outpost at Memel have long since disappeared. But the geography hasn't changed. Klaipėda – Memel – lies at the northern edge of a large coastal lagoon, whose waters spread out for some thousand square miles between a long narrow sandy spit on the seaward side and the main line of the Baltic coast on the other. The lagoon's only entrance flows between the pointed end of the spit and Klaipėda's docks. This is the extraordinary Curonian Lagoon – once known as the Kurische Haff, and the country that borders it is what I once called the “Land of the Prusai,” the original Prussia.

The Ancient Prussians, who lived here a thousand years ago – together with the related Curonians and Jadzwing – were a Baltic people, now extinct. Their language, akin to Lithuanian and Latvian, belonged to the Baltic linguistic family and it lasted long enough to be written down and in the 16th century to be published in the Old Prussian Bible. Their misfortune was to be pagans and a prime target of the Teutonic Knights, who harried them mercilessly by fire and sword, forcibly converting them to Christianity, and turning their survivors into Germans. Their central fortress became the base for the great city of Königsberg.

Since then the Land of Prusai has been radically transformed several times over. The Teutonic Order was conquered by the Poles. The last Grandmaster of the Teutonic State, Albrecht von Hohenzollern, became a vassal of the Polish king, and as Duke of Prussia. His descendants later joined with Brandenburg to form Brandenburg-Prussia, then the Kingdom of Prussia, and eventually in 1871, the German Empire. In 1945, when the Soviet Red Army arrived, it treated the East Prussians as the Teutonic Knights had treated the Prusai. All the Germans, who hadn't fled, were expelled. Königsberg became the Russian city of Kaliningrad, and the Land of the Prusai, the Kaliningrad Oblast.



Fig. 8. Kaliningrad, Yurkaimortal, Alamy Vektorgrafik Alamy.de, Bild ID: 2F963DH (RF)

To be honest, I have never been to Kaliningrad, but I wrote about it at some length in my book *Vanished Kingdoms*. And to dip into that book is almost as good as seeing it with your own eyes. People often say that Poland lies between Germany and Russia, and I used to correct them by saying, “No, Poland lies between Germany and Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine.” But even that is not quite correct. I was overlooking Russia’s Kaliningrad Oblast, sandwiched between Poland and Lithuania, which is little more than 100 km from where you are sitting at this moment in Gdańsk. I am particularly proud of the short, penultimate paragraph, which ends the chapter on Prussia in *Vanished Kingdoms*. “All the nations that ever lived have left their footsteps in the sand,” it reads, “The traces fade with every tide, the echoes grow faint, the images are fractured, the human material is atomized and re-cycled. But, if we know where to look, there is always a remnant, a remainder, an irreducible residue.”

Poland is a big country with a long history, and I really don't know where to start. *Przede wszystkim, jestem obywatelem polskim.* My personal connections have been more with distant Kraków and Wrocław, but I love coming up to the Baltic Coast, as I have done many times, and I could regale you with stories about our holidays on Hel, my appearance in full Kashub dress at Kościerzyna, our meetings with Lech Wałęsa, or my nine years as Chairman of the Academic Committee of the Museum of the Second World War in Gdansk – a position which was terminated very suddenly.

Instead, I shall restrict myself to one day: 21 August 1968. On that day, I left Poland in a hurry on an English tramp steamer sailing from Gdynia. I had been living in Poland for three years, teaching English in Kraków, and studying as a *doktorant* at the Jagiellonian University. I decided the time had come to leave for circumstances contrived to make an early exit necessary. I arrived in the docks at Gdynia, after a long drive from the south of Poland, and my little car, a battered Renault 4, with all my worldly goods, was lifted by a giant crane onto the tramp steamer's open deck. Then came passport control, where I was stopped, and told I wasn't permitted to leave, because I didn't have an exit visa – *wiza wyjazdowa* – which is something I'd never heard of. Marched under guard to an Army hut, I was held for 12 hours incommunicado, with only a soldier for company and a television to watch. The television was showing pictures of the Red Army's entry to Prague – of Soviet tanks rolling into the city and of people throwing flowers to welcome them. Only later did I realise how I'd been tricked. That day, the Warsaw Pact had indeed invaded Czechoslovakia – but the film on Polish TV was showing scenes from Prague in 1945. I, the supposedly budding historian, fell for the trap completely. Then, without warning, the UB-man came, and handed me my passport. As I walked up the gangplank, the steamer sounded its hooter, and pulled away from the dockside.

Once on board, I shared a tiny bunk room with a greatly relieved Polish man, who sweated profusely as he told me that he had been sure the delay was caused by him and that the UB were going to re-arrest him. Then, as we sailed out into the Baltic, he recounted a hair-raising Cold War story. His parents, who came from Lwów, had arrived in England with the Anders Army. He himself had done post-war national service in the British Army, before accepting a huge bribe of £10,000 from a fellow Polish exile to undertake a special mission. His plan was to travel to the Soviet Union, to marry the man's daughter in a fictitious marriage, and, using his British passport, to help her escape. He never got further than the port of Leningrad, where he was promptly detained, and thrown into the Gulag. Twenty years later, released from the Gulag and extradited to Poland, he had been given stateless travel papers and was heading for freedom. For hours, as the ship followed the Baltic coast, I heard for the first time in my life and in detail what the Gulag really meant.



Fig. 9. Norman Davies, *Boże Igrzysko: Historia Polski*, transl. by Elżbieta Tabakowska, 5th ed. (Kraków: Wydawn. Znak, 1999)

At this point, I should be adding a passage about Polish history, but time does not permit. Suffice it to say, that Poland is a unique country, which has suffered extremes of fortune. It once hosted Europe's largest state, was twice completely destroyed, was twice reborn, and only exists today through miracles.

The little tramp steamer, which took me out of Gdynia in 1968, was bound for the port of Hull in England, but to get there, after sailing along the German coast, we had to pass through the Kiel Canal from the Baltic to the North Sea. In those days, most of Germany's Baltic Coast from Szczecin to Lübeck lay within the grim communist state of the German Democratic Republic, though the Kiel Canal itself, in the Land of Schleswig-Holstein, was entirely within West Germany.

I have many reminiscences of the DDR, none of them pleasant. For over twenty years, when I used to travel regularly by car between Britain and Poland, the fastest transit route passed through the DDR. Yet no westerner was permitted to leave the autobahn even for a minute, and the black-suited *Volkspolizei* preyed mercilessly on foreign travellers. They would flag you down without warning to make you clean the car or to extract phoney fines for imaginary traffic offences. Once, when we pulled off the autobahn into a designated parking area to change the baby's

nappy, we were ordered to pay the huge sum of £60 sterling in foreign currency. When I protested and told them that we didn't carry such a lot of cash, they simply kept us waiting for four or five hours until the baby started to cry uncontrollably and we had to pay up. If time permitted, I preferred to drive the long way round to Kraków via Bavaria and Czechoslovakia.

On one occasion, however, I was made to laugh by a story about the bridge, which spans the Oder at Görlitz/Gorlice and which used to link Poland with the DDR. "Every morning," the story goes, "the border guards would watch a little man who cycled across the bridge with a sack over his shoulder. And every evening, they would stop him, examine the sack, and find it empty. What are you smuggling? – they would ask, and he would only smile. Eventually, having searched the sack in vain, they said: "Just tell us what you are smuggling, and we will never stop you again." To which he replied: "Bicycles."

As you may have noticed, my rambling reminiscences are coming full circle to their starting-point. But before we get there, I would like to take you back to the theme of German princes with royal ambitions.



Fig. 10. Norman Davies, *Verschwundene Reiche: Die Geschichte Des Vergessenen Europa*, transl. by Karin Schuler (Darmstadt: Theiss, 2017)

The city of Kiel, once the home port of the Kaiser's imperial fleet, lies at the Baltic end of the Kiel Canal. But two centuries before Kaiser Wilhelm, Kiel was the birthplace of a German prince, Karl Pieter von Holstein-Gottorp (1728–1762), who, amazingly, was destined to become Tsar Peter III of Russia. What is more, in 1745, Duke Charles Peter married his cousin, Sophia-Augusta, who had been born in nearby Stettin. Perhaps you have guessed, Sophia-Augusta changed her name to Catherine, murdered her husband, and emerged as Empress Catherine the Great. All of which would have been impossible without the regular sea lanes linking both ends of the Baltic.

Before I stop, I shall treat you to one last tit-bit. A few miles up the coast from Kiel, one comes to a long inlet, the Flensburg Fjord, which nowadays forms the frontier between Germany and Denmark. On one side of the fjord stands Sønderburg Castle, and on the other the Castle of Glücksburg. These two properties once formed the home base of yet another German dynasty, the House of Sonderburg-Glücksburg or more exactly Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Glücksburg. This dynasty was an offshoot of the Oldenburgs – remember them? – and were fired by the same arriviste ambitions. They supplied a bevy of princes and princesses, to mount the Danish, Greek and British thrones. The late Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, who died earlier this year, after 73 years as Queen Elizabeth II's Consort, was one of them. Prince Philip was invariably presented as "Philip Mountbatten," or as "Philip, Prince of Greece and Denmark" since he went to great lengths to conceal who he really was. Only a select few – now including yourselves – know that he was the son of a family which originated on the Baltic shores of the Flensburg Fjord.

And there I must stop. By giving you a whistle-stop tour of all the countries that line the Baltic Sea, I hope that I have conveyed something of the essence of history – namely that all historical events occur at very precise points on the matrix of Time and Space. And that concept, with a strong emphasis on the spatial dimension, lies at the heart of geopolitics.

So far I have not said much about geopolitics – which provides the framework for this conference. So perhaps, I should close with a couple of relevant sentences.

The acknowledged pioneer and founder of the science of geopolitics was a remarkable man called Halford Mackinder (1861–1947), who in 1887 became the very first professor of geography here in Oxford, before gaining top positions as the first Principal of the University of Reading and then of the London School of Economics. In 1904, before the Royal Geographical Society, Mackinder presented a paper entitled "The Geographical Pivot of History" in which he formulated his Heartland Theory. "Who rules Eastern Europe," Mackinder famously said, "commands the Heartland; who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island and who rules the World-Island, controls the World." („Kto panuje nad wschodnią Europą, ten włada sercem Eurazji, kto panuje nad sercem

Eurazji, ten włada “Światową Wyspą,” kto panuje nad “Światową Wyspą,” ten włada światem.”) Eastern Europe, one should add, included both the Baltic and the Black Seas basins.

My personal connections with Halford Mackinder are slim. But I did have to study him when preparing for Oxford entrance, and I did spend a very short time in Oxford’s Faculty of Geography, which he founded, before deciding to transfer to the History Faculty, and train to be a historian. That was in 1958, a few days after I arrived home with my sister from Copenhagen. The rest, as they say, is History – and Geography.