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In Close Tandem? The Parallel Biographies of Harold Nicolson (1886–1968) and Allen Leeper (1887–1935)

Nearly eight thousand miles apart, the two cities, Tehran and Melbourne had a lasting impact on twentieth-century Hungarian history and culture. The 1943 Tripartite Conference or the 1956 Olympics may come to mind first, but the present paper focuses on Harold Nicolson and Allen Leeper, who had been born in the two cities more than half a century earlier. It was in Paris where their paths crossed in 1919, which had a profound impact on the fate of the people in the Carpathian Basin and beyond.

In November 1886 Catherine Rowan Hamilton gave birth to her third son, Harold George in the capital of the Persian Empire where her husband, Arthur Nicolson, the future Lord Carnock was serving as Consul General. The family moved on soon from Tehran, and little Harold happened to spend a part of his early childhood, the years between 1888 and 1893, in Budapest. It was from here that his father sent reports to London condemning the Hungarian government, particularly for its oppressive policies against the nationalities, and his dislike of Hungary peaked when, according to persistent rumour, he discovered that his wife was having a lengthy affair with a local aristocrat.¹ Understandably, little Harold did not take a liking to the Hungarian elite or the capital, later recalling his time in Budapest as “four years of boredom.”² Owing to his father’s frequent postings, however, change was soon to come and he spent his formative years throughout Europe and the Near East, notably in St. Petersburg, Constantinople, Madrid, Sofia, and Tangier.

In Melbourne, six weeks after the birth of Harold Nicolson, the Australian Adeline Marian Wigram Allen and Alexander Leeper, the Irish-born but Anglophile principal of Trinity College in Melbourne, also welcomed their child. Alexander Wigram Allen was so feeble at birth that at first he was thought to be stillborn. Beyond all expectations, however, the little boy survived and soon stood out from his peers, although mainly in terms of his mental abilities. Leeper had studied at the University of Melbourne and then at Balliol College, Oxford, before joining the British Museum in 1912 as an Egyptologist-Assyrologist. His talent for languages

¹ Géza JESZENSZKY: *Lost Prestige: Hungary’s Changing Image in Britain 1894–1918*, Budapest, CEU Press, 2020, 109n.

² Harold NICOLSON: *Sir Arthur Nicolson, First Lord Carnock. A Study in Old Diplomacy*, London, Constable, 1930, 78.

was evident from an early age: in addition to Western languages, he read Hebrew, Russian, Czech, Serbian, Romanian, Bulgarian and Hungarian: altogether fifteen (!) languages, a unique feat among his contemporaries.³

It was in the same Oxford college that Nicolson also carried out his undergraduate studies, enjoying the liberal and intellectually stimulating atmosphere of the institution which reinforced his heritage of historical perspectives from the aristocratic home. It also raised his awareness of the long-standing contrasts between nations.⁴ But – unlike Leeper – he barely managed to graduate. In October 1909, however, he came second in a competition for admission to the diplomatic service; he was appointed attaché in Madrid in 1911 and then secretary at the British Embassy in Constantinople from January 1912 to October 1914.

For the two young men who were spared the horrors of the trenches, WWI opened up new opportunities. Nicolson came to be employed at the Foreign Office: as the lowest-ranking member of the staff, on August 4, 1914, he had the duty of delivering Britain's declaration of war to the German ambassador in London, but he soon rose to the position of Second Secretary. At the same time, the physically weak Leeper, who had been dismissed from military service, became a member of Lord Edward Gleichen's Intelligence Bureau in 1915, where he wrote weekly reports on the situation in the Middle East and Russia. In the meantime, he maintained a particularly close relationship with certain Romanian diplomatic-political figures, such as the unwaveringly anglophile⁵ Take Ionescu, the founder of the *Council of Romanian National Unity*, one of the select few to receive first-name billing in Leeper's diary, and the Romanian ambassador in London, Nicolae Mișu.⁶

When the new Austro-Hungarian monarch Karl put out feelers for a separate peace between his crumbling empire and the Entente, Harold Nicolson, quite a lone voice in the Foreign Office, was supportive.⁷ Leeper, on the other hand, became a staunch advocate of the ethnic reorganisation of East-Central Europe, getting close to the group that launched the influential weekly journal, *The New Europe* and the principal figure behind it, the historian-publicist Robert William Seton-Watson (1879–1951). Leeper was full of praise after their first meeting: "Seton-Watson knows everyone worth knowing in Hungarian, Serbo-Croatian, Rumanian

³ Robert William SETON-WATSON: "Allen Leeper". *The Slavonic and East European Review*, XIII, April 1935, 683.

⁴ Derek DRINKWATER: *Sir Harold Nicolson and International Relations: The Practitioner as Theorist*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2005, ix.

⁵ The London-born actress Bessie Richard was Ionescu's first spouse. His parents were adamantly against the relationship since they wanted their son to marry a girl from an affluent family, but they were powerless to stop the marriage. As a result, they disinherited him and broke off contact for a long time. <https://dosaresecrete.ro/iubirile-lui-take-ionescu-bessie-richards-si-adina-olmazu/> Accessed April 28, 2023.

⁶ Leeper to his father, Alexander Leeper, January 26, 1919. Allen Leeper Papers, University of Cambridge, Churchill Archives Centre, [further on: Leeper Papers] 3/9.

⁷ Norman ROSE: *Harold Nicolson*, London, Pimlico, 2006, 62.

and Čech political circles. [...] I was of course just like a child with him. And most of the little knowledge I have is based on his books.”⁸ Leeper often contributed to the journal under the pseudonym “Belisarius,” and he and Seton-Watson were to remain close friends for the rest of their lives.

With the support of Steed and Seton-Watson, Leeper founded the *Anglo-Romanian Society* in August 1917, of which he was elected Honorary Secretary. The new group’s objectives were to support the Romanian people’s legitimate aspirations and advance overall relations between Britain and Romania. The Secretary not only spoke excellent Romanian, but also published *The Justice of Rumania’s Cause*. In his pamphlet he put forward the idea that the at least (!) four million Romanians in Hungary were “socially and politically democrats,” the incorporation of whom into the kingdom of Romania would greatly serve “the cause of progress and democracy.”⁹

In March 1918, Leeper became a member of staff in the Political Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office (the Austro-Hungarian Division of which was led by Seton-Watson), and was sent to Paris with his close associate Nicolson to attend the opening of the peace conference. The two of them then began to work in an office in room 108 of the Astoria Hotel, processing and organising the vast amount of material on the Danube and Balkan border disputes, as the most valuable and tireless assistants to Sir Eyre Crowe (1864–1925), then Assistant Under-Secretary of State. On February 4, 1919, Leeper was appointed to the Romanian territorial claims commission, which coincided with his main area of expertise and Nicolson was assigned to the Czechoslovak commission, despite the fact that he considered himself inexperienced and totally unprepared. As for the roots of his convictions about the reconstruction of Europe, he was in agreement with Leeper: he acknowledged that he had been “overwhelmingly imbued” with the doctrines put forward by *The New Europe* to which he had devoted diligent study.¹⁰

Thus, the British representation of both Romanian and Czechoslovak interests in Versailles reflected the influence of *The New Europe* and its renowned founders,¹¹ all advocates of national self-determination. According to the recollection of Nicolson, Leeper and he “never moved a yard without previous consultation with experts of the authority of Dr. Seton-Watson [...]”¹² who, in turn, stressed that there

⁸ Leeper to his father, Alexander Leeper, February 3, 1916. Hugh SETON-WATSON – Cornelia BODEA: *R. W. Seton-Watson and the Romanians 1906–1920*, Bucharest, 1988, Vol. I, 558.

⁹ Allen LEEPER: *The Justice of Rumania’s Cause*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1917, 5, 15.

¹⁰ Harold NICOLSON: *Peacemaking 1919*, London, Constable, 1934, 113, 33.

¹¹ Besides Seton-Watson there were several other influential figures: Henry Wickham Steed, the foreign editor of *The Times*, British archaeologist and academic Ronald Burrows, who served as Principal of King’s College London and finally the liberal politician-journalist Alexander Frederick Whyte.

¹² NICOLSON: *Peacemaking*, 126. The second half of Nicolson’s statement is rarely, if ever quoted, but it is extremely instructive: “On the other hand, I question whether a lifelong knowledge of a country is always an advantage when it comes to making decisions that must be broad, impartial, unbiased and adapted to needs and proportions outside the area under discussion.”

“never was a more unjust and foolish mare’s nest put forward than the allegation as to ignorant experts. For months Allen Leeper, Nicolson and a number of others, and the bevy of brilliant Americans were bombarded with 685 materials of all kinds from the most opposite and conflicting sources, and steered a steady and unflinching course through them all.”¹³

The official border proposal of the British peace delegation regarding Hungary, presented in Paris in February 1919, was based on the Seton-Watson Memorandum of December 1918, but its most positive feature, the concept of the ethnically disputable territories, the so-called “grey zones,”¹⁴ was abolished, except for the Austro-Hungarian border, since no on-the-spot investigations had taken place until then, and there was no prospect of them in the future. Thus, although the border line proposed by the British left the island southeast of Pozsony (Bratislava, Pressburg) called Csallóköz (Grosse Schütt, Velký Žitný ostrov) with Hungary, it followed the Danube and the river Ipoly from Komárom (Komárno): the deviation from the ethnic boundary was justified by economic reasons in the west (free access to the Danube) and in the east by the need for uninterrupted rail links between Romania and Czechoslovakia. The Romanian border also ran within the “grey zone”, separating from Hungary Szatmárnémeti (Satu Mare), Arad and the north-western part of Banat, again citing the importance of rail links. In comparison, the Yugoslav-Hungarian border along the Zombor (Sombor)-Danube-Drave line was considered ethnically relatively fair.¹⁵ One of the signatories of the document was Harold Nicolson, who confessed in his memoirs, that

my feelings toward Hungary were less detached. I confess that I regarded and still regard that Turanian tribe with acute distaste. Like their cousins the Turks, they had destroyed much and created nothing. Budapest was a false city devoid of any autochthonous reality. For centuries the Magyars had oppressed their subject nationalities. The hour of liberation and retribution was at hand.¹⁶

A few months later, he acknowledged in a personal letter that besides his traumatic experience in Budapest Seton-Watson had had an impact on him.¹⁷

Nicolson’s memoirs give us an accurate picture regarding Hungary’s northern borders, i.e. the work of the Czechoslovak commission. At the meetings of February 28 and March 2, 1919, Pozsony (Bratislava or Pressburg), fifteen percent of which was Slovak, was, after a brief discussion, awarded to Czechoslovakia, but the future of Csallóköz, (Grosse Schütt, Velký Žitný ostrov) provoked heated debate: the

¹³ R. W. SETON-WATSON: *op. cit.* 684–685.

¹⁴ R. W. SETON-WATSON: “Hungary: Frontier Delineation between Hungary and Her Neighbours”. Public Record Office, Political Intelligence Department, No. P.O. 52, f. 301–311.

¹⁵ Ignác ROMSICS: “A brit külpolitika és a magyar kérdés”. *Századok*, CXXX (1996), 287–288.

¹⁶ NICOLSON: *Peacemaking*, 34.

¹⁷ Gyula JUHÁSZ: *Uralkodó eszmék Magyarországon 1939–1944*, Budapest, Kossuth Kiadó, 1983, 244.

French delegates were in favour of annexation by Czechoslovakia, the Americans of status quo. Nicolson then took a wait-and-see attitude. The situation was similar for the territories east of Komárom (Komárno): the French argued for a Danube border, while the US delegates, historian Charles Seymour and Alan Dulles, argued for an ethnic border. Two days later, however, after the hearing of the all-wanting Czechoslovak Foreign Minister Edvard Beneš (1884–1948) and against the other two pro-French British members of the committee, the half-German, yet Germanophobe Sir Eyre Crowe, and the fundamentally ignorant Australian Sir Joseph Cook, Nicolson changed his mind. “I am sure they are wrong”, he recorded in his diary, “it is heart-breaking to have to support a claim with which I disagree. I am anxious about the future political complexion of the Czech State if they have to digest solid enemy electorates.”¹⁸

As for the eastern frontiers of Hungary, in 1910, 31% of the more than five million people, or 1.664 million declared themselves to be of Hungarian nationality. However, they were to be annexed to Romania: the importance of rail transport was inestimable until WW2, and the Temesvár (Timișoara)-Arad-Nagyvárad (Oradea)-Máramarossziget (Sighet) line was to be incorporated into a whole Romanian “circular railway”, which would connect to the Czechoslovak main line at Királyháza (Korolevo-Koroleve) in the north and to the Yugoslav main line at Temesvár (Timișoara) in the south.

Leeper was often present at the meetings on the Yugoslav commission, too, because of Romania’s involvement. With knowledgeable persuasion he argued there for the annexation of the Szabadka (Subotica)-Zombor (Sombor) railway line and the surrounding areas to the South Slav state, virtually the whole of the Bácska region, because of the transport aspect, acknowledging that this would affect 461,000 Hungarians and Germans as opposed to 185,000 Slavs. On the other hand, he did not support the ideas of the South Slavic envoys who constantly besieged him from the summer of 1919 until January 1920 (!) to hand over Pécs and the surrounding coal fields or Baja.¹⁹

The hard-working diplomat attended every meeting of the respective Boundary Commissions set up to finalise the borders, and usually managed to convince the American delegates who originally proposed a more favourable settlement for Hungary. His close and continuous cooperation with, among others, the Romanian Minister in London, later Foreign Secretary Nicolae Mișu, in co-ordinating action would be far from acceptable for a civil servant today. So effective was the young Leeper in representing Romanian interests that it is likely that he did more for Romania than the country’s celebrated leader, Ion Brătianu. Brătianu made

¹⁸ NICOLSON: *Peacemaking*, 279. See also Géza JESZENSZKY: “The British Role in Assigning Csallóköz (Zitny Ostrov, Grosse Schütt) to Czechoslovakia”. In László PÉTER – Martyn RADY (eds.): *British-Hungarian Relations Since 1848*, London, Hungarian Cultural Centre and School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London, 2004, 123–138.

¹⁹ Leeper to Rex Leeper, February 21, 1919. Leeper Papers, 3/8.

vehement attacks on the minority treaties that were to protect the minorities in Romania, threatening the Council to resign, among other things. The indignant Lloyd George noted: “This damned fellow; he cannot even get coats for his soldiers without us.”²⁰

But the activities of Leeper and Nicolson were by no means confined to the drawing of borders: in April 1919, authorised by the Council of the Four, that is David Lloyd George of Britain, Vittorio Emanuele Orlando of Italy, Georges Clemenceau of France, and Woodrow Wilson of the U.S, they were assigned to accompany the former Boer General, Jan Christiaan Smuts (1870–1950) to his negotiations with the Hungarian government in Budapest. The Bolshevik Béla Kun made an extremely negative impact on both Smuts and the young Britons as “one of the most hideous creatures, [...] a rather bad edition of a small pig and more Mongol than Jewish in type”²¹ (Leeper) with “a face of a sulky and uncertain criminal” (Nicolson).²²

After the negotiations broke down in Budapest, the delegation travelled to Prague. According to his diary, Nicolson then begged Smuts to persuade President Masaryk (1850–1934) to give up the territorial claims regarding Csallóköz who seemed to comply. However, Beneš later claimed to the French that Smuts had misunderstood the aging Masaryk and thus the pure Hungarian territory south-east of Pozsony-Pressburg-Bratislava was assigned to Czechoslovakia. Nicolson’s summary, recorded in his diary, is telling: “At the eleventh hour, an effort was made on my part to redress a flagrant injustice.”²³ None of the British delegates present in the border commission felt like him, and in no small part due to the cheering crowds on his May 1919 trip to Czechoslovakia, Seton-Watson also changed his mind about the status of Csallóköz, (Grosse Schütt, Velký Žitný ostrov), which had been originally a grey area the future of which was to be decided by on-the-spot investigation.²⁴

The failure of the Smuts-mission was greeted by Leeper with barely concealed joy. Not surprisingly, he also supported the Romanian advance that began at the end of July 1919, believing that Hungarian nationalism and Bolshevism went hand in hand, threatening Central Europe. As for the reports of Romanian troops’ pillaging and looting the country, he largely dismissed them as fabrications of Hungarian propaganda.²⁵

When in September 1919 the British diplomat Sir George Russel Clerk (1874–1951) was sent by the Peace Conference first to Bucharest to issue a warning to the occupying Romanian troops to withdraw, and then to Budapest to facilitate the formation of a coalition Hungarian government, Leeper also joined him. He made

²⁰ James HEADLAM-MORLEY: *A Memoir of the Paris Peace Conference 1919*, London, Methuen, 1972, 136.

²¹ Leeper to Rex Leeper, April 10, 1919. Leeper Papers, 3/8.

²² NICOLSON: *Peacemaking*, 298.

²³ NICOLSON: *op. cit.* 324.

²⁴ “Tell Nicolson that in the question of the Schütt I made up my mind”. Seton-Watson to Headlam-Morley. May 26, 1919. Qtd in JESZENSZKY: “The British Role”. 133.

²⁵ FO 608/15, 182.: Foreign Office: Peace Conference; British Delegation, Correspondence and Papers.

sure that the ultimatum was “couched in friendly terms”²⁶ and while in Romania, he took delight in travelling, meeting Ionescu and other opposition leaders: “I had already so many friends here that it was not like coming to a strange place” – he recalled in a private letter.²⁷ In the American major-general Harry Hill Bandholtz’s opinion, the unabashedly pro-Romanian Leeper and initially Clerk, too, were so ineffective that “a cooing dove would make a better ultimatum bearer.”²⁸ Nevertheless, Clerk’s mission was finally crowned with some success: a coalition government led by Károly Huszár was formed on November 24 in Budapest, which was acknowledged by the Entente. In the meantime, owing to Leeper’s leniency, the ultimatum to Romania was issued as late as November 12, 1919, and the Romanian troops did not retreat behind the designated border until March 1920, and were not reprimanded for the delay.

In February and March 1920, when, among others, David Lloyd George and the Italian Prime Minister, Francesco Nitti demanded a revision of the Hungarian peace treaty so that two million seven hundred and fifty thousand Hungarians would not have to be put under foreign rule as a “herd of cattle” (Lloyd George), the pro-Romanian expert again took action. His memorandum was circulated to all delegates before the meeting of March 8, 1920, in which he explained that if the conference backed down from their “publicly announced” decisions, they would be interpreted in Romania, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia as they were “no longer bound” by the minority clauses of the peace treaties. Moreover, they might invade Budapest again.²⁹

Leeper’s memorandum effectively refuted the arguments put forward by the Apponyi-led Hungarian peace delegation in January 1920, too: he tried to counter some of the “outdated” economic, geographical, historical and cultural aspects put forward in favour of Hungary’s integrity, as well as considered the referendum requested by the Hungarian delegation not only impossible but also unnecessary, referring, for example, to the December 1918 declaration of Transylvanian Union. The annexation of the ethnically Hungarian border areas, which the Hungarian delegation objected to on the grounds of the ethnographic principle, was justified by Leeper assuming that the town-dwellers, although having declared themselves Hungarian in 1910, were in fact of Romanian, Serbian or Slovakian nationality as victims of former Magyarization. Finally, he dismissed the Hungarian proposal to link the land of Szeklers to Hungary by a territorial strip through Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca) with the blatant lie that the Szeklers were a people completely different from the Hungarians, and would therefore surely be content with autonomous status within Romania. If, despite all these facts, the Peace Conference favoured

²⁶ Leeper to Alexander Leeper, September 7, 1919. Leeper Papers, 3/9.

²⁷ Leeper to Mary Elizabeth Leeper, September 19, 1919. Leeper Papers, 3/9.

²⁸ Harry Hill BANDHOLTZ: *An Undiplomatic Diary by The American Member of the Inter-Allied Military Mission. to Hungary, 1919–1920*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1933. <https://mek.oszk.hu/08200/08202/08202.htm> Accessed April 28, 2023.

²⁹ Leeper’s Diary, March 8, 1920. Allen Leeper Papers, 1/3.

rectification(s), he argued, the signing of the Hungarian peace treaty would be postponed into the unforeseeable future, which would seriously endanger peace in the region. Leeper therefore called for the peace treaty to be signed as soon as possible, but to calm his readers, he suggested that in the event of ethnically disputed border sections, the border demarcation committees should make a proposal to the League of Nations, under whose supervision the peaceful border change could later be implemented.

Also at the March 8 meeting, when Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon requested Leeper to express his views on the two most problematic areas, the Szekler land and the Hungarian Csallóköz, Leeper stressed that for economic and strategic reasons Czechoslovakia absolutely needed the southern branch of the Danube, without which the population of Pozsony (Bratislava) and Révkomárom (Komárno) would be exposed to famine (!).³⁰

As is well known, Leeper achieved his goal and the borders remained unchanged: in Nicolson's words, Romania obtained "all and more than all."³¹ Leeper's own and his colleagues' Romanophilia left their mark on the Treaty of Trianon after which his career took a steep upward turn: from 1920 to 1924 he served as private secretary to Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon, then first secretary at the Viennese embassy for five years, before being recalled to London in 1928 to work again in the Foreign Office. After 1931, he was mainly concerned with the questions related to disarmament and grew bitterly disappointed.

A great friend of the Romanians until his death, Leeper never acknowledged that the peace treaty could not provide effective protection for any minority in Romania; between 1920 and 1934, the League of Nations received forty-seven petitions on the subject of grievances against Hungarians in Transylvania, more than from any other ethnic group except the Upper Silesian Germans. Nor did his attitude towards Hungarians change; he confessed in a private letter that "there is hardly a nation in the world for which I feel less affection than the Magyars."³²

In 1934, Leeper's health collapsed, and after a long, agonising illness, he died in January 1935. Countless British obituaries praised him for his devotion or brilliant foreign office-work. However, unlike Seton-Watson, he has largely been forgotten in the Successor States, Romania included. Only one Bessarabian Romanian, Ion Pelivan paid him a visit and assured him that in exchange for obtaining the Council's recognition of Bessarabian reunion with Romania, his photograph would be hung up in all schools.³³ As well-known, in 1944 the region became one of Stalin's first preys, and Pelivan survived the dictator by only a few months in the notorious Sighet (Máramarossziget)-prison.

³⁰ J.P.T. BURY – ROHAN BUTLER (eds.): *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919–1939*, Vol VII., London, 1958, 440–449.

³¹ NICOLSON: *Peacemaking*, 137.

³² Allen Leeper to Seton-Watson, January 29, 1924. Seton-Watson Papers/17/14/5.

³³ Leeper's Diary Entry: April 12, 1920. Leeper Papers, 1/3.

After the conclusion of the Peace Conference, Harold Nicolson became Private Secretary to Sir Eric Drummond, the first Secretary-General of the League of Nations. In 1925 he was transferred to Tehran as an embassy counsellor. It is a little-known fact that when his excellent sourcebook, *Peacemaking 1919*, was published in 1934, Miksa Fenyő, president of the National Association of Industrialists requested the author to delete some of the sentences (Turanian tribe) in the next edition which were so offensive to Hungarians. Nicolson replied: “I am ashamed that I felt the way I felt in 1919. But we all did. I can’t take it back, because then I wouldn’t be honest.”³⁴

Although diplomatic work kept him busy, he always found time to compile literary biographies, including Tennyson’s (1923), Byron’s (1924) or Swinburne’s (1926). “He probably never wrote a boring line” – sounded his critics’ acclaim and his diplomatic abilities were in fact side-lined by his focus on literary achievements. In July 1938, in a letter to his wife, Vita Sackville-West,³⁵ he confessed: “It is true that I would rather you finished a long poem than I became Secretary of State.”³⁶

Despite his growing distance from politics, in 1939, right after the outbreak of WW2 Nicolson published a polemical book on the origins of the new war. He put forward the idea that back in 1919 war-torn Paris had obviously been an inappropriate location for a peace conference, with its people screaming for retaliation. Furthermore, in light of the Congress of Vienna (1815) he also maintained the view that it had been a major error to have treated Germany as a pariah state, and her invitation to the conference would have served the stability of Europe better: “The peace which emerged was unjust enough to cause resentment, but not forcible enough to render such resentment impotent”³⁷ – he opined.

On June 4, 2020, a high-ranked commemorative speech on the Trianon centenary recalled Harold Nicolson’s involvement in the treaty: he knew “precious little” of all Hungarian past, yet he “fundamentally influenced the future of Hungarians.”³⁸ However, after sketching the British diplomat’s activities at Versailles and his recollections afterwards, it rather seems that, compared to most of his contemporaries, e.g. Allen Leeper, Eyre Crowe or Seton-Watson himself, Nicolson was more a man of “fair play.” His diary entry on March 12, 1919 seems to confirm this: “the Grosse Schütt [...] will be engraved on my heart.”³⁹

³⁴ JUHÁSZ: *op. cit.* 244. In the same book (*Peacemaking 1919*) Nicolson described Leeper as “a man of high ideals, the purest Wilsonism, some philological ambition, intermittent health, unflinching energy, and unashamed curiosity.” *Op. cit.* 105.

³⁵ Unlike Nicolson’s own bisexuality, the rumours surrounding Vita’s long affair with Violet Trefusis almost destroyed his diplomatic career in the early 1920s. On their complex relationship, see Nigel NICOLSON: *Portrait of a Marriage*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1998.

³⁶ DRINKWATER: *op. cit.* 2.

³⁷ Harold NICOLSON: *Why Britain is at War*, London, Penguin Special, 1939, 147.

³⁸ Hungarian President János Áder’s Centennial Speech in the Hungarian Parliament on Day of National Unity, Budapest, June 4, 2020. https://pretoria.mfa.gov.hu/eng/news/Ader_Janos_koztarsasagi_elnok_beszede_a_Nemzeti_Osszetartozas_Napjan Accessed April 28, 2023.

³⁹ NICOLSON: *Peacemaking*, 283.

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Abstract

This paper explores the parallels between the careers of Harold Nicolson and Allen Leeper. Though far away at birth, they were soon linked by their university years and then by their service in the British Foreign Office, which in 1919 saw them both posted to Paris for the Peace Conference: They worked in the office-room 108 of the Astoria Hotel, processing and organising the vast amount of material relating to the Danube and Balkan border disputes, as two of the most valuable and tireless assistants to Sir Eyre Crowe, the British Under-Secretary of State. Drawing on primary sources, this paper examines their influence as Czechoslovak, Romanian and Yugoslav Commissioners on the shaping of future borders, and then highlights their later self-reflections on their activities in 1919. Finally, the present paper seeks to explore whether it is proper to judge their activities, as is otherwise generally accepted in Hungarian historiography, as equally damaging to Hungarian interests.

Keywords: Harold Nicolson, Allen Leeper, peace-making, Paris, 1919–1920

Rezümé

Harold Nicolson (1886–1968) és Allen Leeper (1887–1935) párbuzamos életrajzai

Jelen írás Harold Nicolson és Allen Leeper pályaképeinek párbuzamosságait térképezi fel. Bár születésükkor egy világ választotta el őket, egyetemi éveik után mindkettőn a brit külügyminisztériumi szolgálatába álltak, melynek keretében 1919-ben mindkettőjüket a megnyíló békekonferencia helyszínére, Párizsba küldték: az Astoria Szálló 108-as szobájában kialakított hivatalban dolgoztak a dunai és balkáni határvitákkal kapcsolatos óriási anyag feldolgozásában és rendszerezésében. Elsődleges forrásokra építve a jelen tanulmány azt vizsgálja, hogy a csehszlovák, román és jugoszláv területi igényeket vizsgáló bizottsági munkájuk során mekkora ráhatással rendelkeztek a leendő határok kialakítására, majd felvillantja az 1919-es tevékenységükkel kapcsolatos későbbi önreflexióikat. Végül arra keresi a választ, hogy jogos és helyes-e a tevékenységüket, mint ahogy az a magyar szakirodalomban egyébként alapvetően elfogadott, a magyar szempontok tekintetében egyformán károsnak ítélni.

Kulcsszavak: Harold Nicolson, Allen Leeper, versailles-i békék, 1919–1920