

ISSUE 6 - JULY 2025

# GLOBAL HUMANITIES INITIATIVE

Official Newsletter of the Global Humanities Initiative

## Director's Welcome

BY HANS VAN DE VEN

Welcome to the sixth edition of the Global Humanities Initiative Newsletter, as usual packed with information on our activities during the past half year. To pick out just two items, we celebrate the publication of our first Global Humanities Element, Mandakini Dubley's Esoteric Orientalism on Victorian Orientalism as a framework for engaging with global cultures. You will also find a report on Pratap Mehta's four lectures on global thought in the twentieth century held at Trinity College last May. They ranged widely and deeply over how we are to act and live politically in today's perturbed world. We recorded the lectures. You will find a link to them in Carlos Fonseca's report about them.

The Global Humanities Initiative is now in its fifth year of existence. This June we welcomed delegates from all partner universities to Cambridge to review what we have done so far and, more importantly, to explore new projects we might develop over the next five years. We brainstormed topics such as speculative fiction around the world, global cultures structured around the moon, and global histories of republicanism. Each partner university will lead on one of these topics. There was so much excitement that participants were reluctant to go home and insisted that we come together again next year rather than two years from now. The Global Humanities Initiative is alive and well; there is much to come.



Hans van de Ven

Professor of Modern Chinese History  
(Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies)

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# GHI - Trinity Lecture Series 2025

BY DR CARLOS FONSECA

'Our Unborn World: Global Political Thought in the Twentieth Century' with Prof Pratap Bhanu Mehta




Trinity hosted the distinguished Indian political scientist Pratap Bhanu Mehta, Laurence S. Rockefeller Visiting Professor at Princeton, for the second lecture series. His four-part series, 'Our Unborn World: Global Political Thought in the Twentieth Century', examined the conceptual tensions and legacies of global political thought. The first lecture traced historiographical debates and proposed new narratives of modernity. The second explored Gandhi and Ambedkar's ideas within global discourses of sovereignty and pluralism. The third probed theological residues in secular politics, questioning divine sovereignty's persistence. The final lecture addressed the dilemmas of representation, focusing on political parties' role in shaping and distorting democratic agency. It was a wonderful lectures series that led to many engaging discussions.



**TRINITY GLOBAL HUMANITIES  
LECTURE Series**

**OUR UNBORN WORLD:**  
Global Political Thought in the Twentieth Century



**May 14th, 21st, 28th & June 4th**  
17:30 - 18:30 (followed by Q&A)

**Lectures by**  
**PRATAP BHANU MEHTA**

Indian political scientist, Laurence S. Rockefeller Visiting Professor at Princeton University and former Vice Chancellor of Ashoka University.

[Click here to  
access the series](#)



**"Democracy is not just a political system but a way of life that depends on the constant engagement of its citizens"**

~ Prof Pratap Mehta ~



Prof John Dunn & Prof Pratap Mehta



Prof Shruti Kapila & Prof Pratap Mehta



Prof Pratap Mehta - Lecture II





# GHI - Elements Series

BY ALEX WRIGHT

Senior Executive Publisher & Head of Humanities at CUP

In my last bulletin, I expressed the hope that the Global Humanities Network summer forum (25-27 June, Cambridge) would be a great place to review just what Elements could achieve for all those of us presently engaged in global humanities work. And so, happily, it proved. I was glad to be there to summarise progress made on the 'Elements in Global Humanities' series for our assembled attendees from China (Nanjing and Fudan Universities), Turkey (Sabanci University), Chile (Diego Portales University), India (Ashoka University) and West Africa (the University of Ghana). The consensus among delegates seemed to be that the series is developing most promisingly; and it was especially pleasing, moreover, that the forum coincided almost exactly with publication online of Mandakini Dubey's 'Esoteric Orientalism' (our first published Element), followed fourteen days later by the release of a print version (promulgated in both hardback and paperback iterations). For the first fortnight, Mandakini's Element was available for gratis download on Cambridge Core by anyone anywhere in the world with access to a computer (underlining CUP's unshakeable commitment to open research).

A further exciting development consisted in the participation of Professor Nicholas Dirks: author of CUP's City of Intellect (2023), formerly tenth Chancellor of the University of California, Berkeley, and current CEO of the New York Academy of Sciences. On the second evening, Nick delivered a masterfully constructed plenary lecture on the pertinent topic of 'Pasts and Futures of the Global Humanities' which, at my and Saul's urging, he has promised to repurpose and enlarge into an Element. His gripping overview of the development – and geopolitical and security agendas – of modern area studies, together with the many insightful perspectives he offered into the future of the humanities more generally (set against a backdrop of increasingly turbulent transcontinental circumstances) will surely be essential reading for all of us.

We have several proposals now in the offing, and we are hopeful that we will soon be able to follow up Mandakini's Element with further Global Humanities submissions and publications. Topics being considered encompass, among others: the Chinese path to modernisation and its wider impact; the worldwide reception of the Ottoman constitution; and how one might set about conceptualising global material and environmental legacies. So do watch this space!



Alex Wright

Senior Executive Publisher & Head of Humanities  
(Cambridge University Press)



## Elements Main Editors



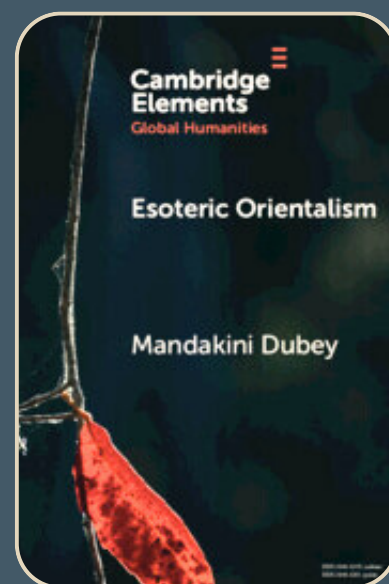
Frisbee Sheffield  
Ancient Philosophy



Malvika Maheshwari  
Political Science



Saul Dubow  
Commonwealth  
History



'Esoteric Orientalism studies Victorian esotericism and academic Orientalism as the nineteenth century's most significant comparative frameworks for understanding global religions, languages, and cultures'

(Cambridge University Press)

[Click here to  
access the series](#)





# GHN - SUMMER FORUM 2025

This year's forum brought together delegates from across the Global Humanities Network and members of the GHI Cambridge Steering Group. Hosted across some of Cambridge's iconic academic venues, the three-day forum provided an opportunity to reflect on our achievements and to shape the future direction of global humanities collaboration.



The event opened with a series of structured group discussions, fostering collaboration and critical exchange. We were also joined by Dr Tristram Hunt, and Prof Nicholas Dirks, both of whom delighted the audiences with their well-attended public lectures.



Session II at the "Garden Room" St Edmunds College



Ms Sadarangani, Dr Alarcón, Prof Vicuña and Ms Mijares



Prof Aparna Vaidik & Prof Nicholas Dirks



Dr Tristram Hunt & Prof Shruti Kapila

Delegates also enjoyed a valuable visit to Cambridge University Library, where they were privately introduced to key archival materials and special collections, including Darwin's journey notes through the Andes and the world famous Gutenberg Bible.



Darwin's journey book through the Andes



Group selfie outside UL



Close look at the Gutenberg Bible

## Key Speakers

### DR TRISTRAM HUNT

Historian, Journalist and former Labour MP  
Director of the V&A Museum in London



[WATCH THE FULL LECTURE HERE](#)

### PROF NICHOLAS DIRKS

Professor of History and Anthropology  
President and CEO of the New York Academy of Sciences



[WATCH THE FULL LECTURE HERE](#)



# GHI - RESEARCH & ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMMES

## Awaleed Cultural Network & Centre of Islamic Studies (CIS)

BY PROF AMIRA K BENNISON

Director of the Centre of Islamic Studies (CIS)

A few years ago Alwaleed Philanthropies under its current CEO, Princess Lamia, decided to launch a public engagement and cultural enrichment hub known as the Alwaleed Cultural Network (ACN) to bring together the public-facing educational production of the six international HRH Alwaleed Bin Talal centres, one of which is the Centre of Islamic Studies at the University of Cambridge, and other cultural partners 'across three continents to change lives through culture.' This has involved innovative events at museums in Oxford and Berlin and the hosting of exhibitions, seminars, courses, and teaching materials on the ACN website.



From the Global Humanities perspective, the ACN provides engagement with Arab Muslim partners and brings them into the conversation alongside core Global Humanities partners. Countries in the Arabian Peninsula are seeking ways to promote more positive views of Islam globally and to create new academic partnerships. They are also interested in capacity building, public education and Arabic literacy. The ACN has the potential to give a space and a voice to artists, creatives and cultural brokers from across the Middle East, including refugees from conflict, assisted by the network of Alwaleed Centres. The most recent project is 'Storylands: Objects, Voices and Global Journeys' which launched on July 10 and is accompanied by an exhibition at Sotheby's. The first collection presents stories contributed by individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Each story highlights an object of personal significance, offering insight into how memory, movement, and material culture shape one's sense of self.



StoryLands: Objects, Voices and Global Journeys



"Mbira" Contributed by Thabo



“

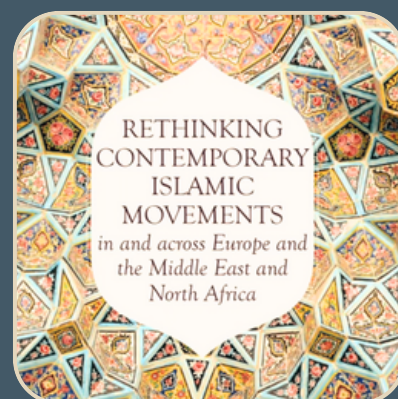
*The Alwaleed Cultural Network connects leading universities, museums and cultural institutions across three continents to change lives through culture.*

”



**"Botanical Wisdom"**

Research project created by Dr Zahra Kazani



**"Rethinking – Podcast Series"**

Hosted by The Alwaleed Centre (University of Edinburgh) & The Centre of Islamic Studies (University of Cambridge)

# WELCOMES & FOND FAREWELLS at GHI - Cambridge



As we continue to grow and evolve, we take a moment to recognize the changes within our team. We bid a heartfelt farewell to colleagues who are moving on to new opportunities and extend a warm welcome to the new members who have recently joined us.

## Farewells ...

We extend our sincere thanks and best wishes to the following team members whose contributions have made a lasting impact. We wish you every success in your future endeavours.



### Prof Esra Özyürek

**Sultan Qaboos Professor of Abrahamic Faiths and Shared Values & CIP Academic Director**

We bid farewell to Professor Esra Özyürek, one of the founding Directors of the GHI since its launch in 2020. Over the past five years, she has played a key role in shaping the initiative's direction and growth. As the Cambridge Interfaith Programme, which she now leads, continues to expand, Prof Özyürek will be stepping down from her role as a director to dedicate more time to her project. She will continue supporting GHI as a valued member of the steering committee.



### Prof Christine van Ruymbeke

**Ali Reza & Mohamed Soudavar Professor of Persian Studies**

We also extend our heartfelt thanks to Professor Christine van Ruymbeke, who will be stepping down as a GHI steering group member at the end of September 2025. After several years of dedication and valued contribution within the initiative, she will be taking a well-deserved sabbatical during the academic years 2025–26 and 2026–27.

## Welcomes ...

We are delighted to welcome new colleagues to the team. Each brings valuable experience and fresh energy, and we look forward to the journey ahead together.



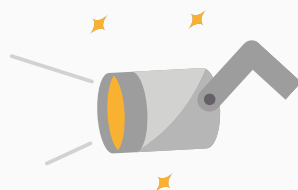
Professor of Early  
Modern Japanese  
Literature and Culture  
(FAMES)

### Prof Laura Moretti



Lecturer in Visual Arts  
and BA Global Professor  
(Fitzwilliam Museum)

### Dr Marsha Pearce



Professor of  
Renaissance and  
Early Modern Art  
(History of Art)

### Prof Alexander Marr



Associate Professor of  
Sustainable Built  
Environment  
(Architecture)

### Dr Ronita Bardhan

## New GHI Deputy Directors



### Dr May Hawas

Associate Professor in  
World Literature  
(English)  
GHI - Deputy Director



### Dr Emily Senior

Associate Professor in the  
Literature of 18th Century  
(English)  
GHI - Deputy Director