

ISSUE 8 - FEBRUARY 2026

GLOBAL HUMANITIES INITIATIVE

Official Newsletter of the Global Humanities Initiative

Director's Welcome

BY HANS VAN DE VEN

On 17 February, China will begin the Year of the Horse, an animal associated with independence, high spirits, vitality and energy. The Global Humanities programme for the Year of the Horse is fittingly busy, as this newsletter will indicate. From an unavoidably slow start during Covid, our [Mobility Scheme](#) is rapidly gaining pace. This academic year no less than 16 visits involving all partner universities are taking place. In collaboration with Peking University and the [Beijing Forum](#), in April 15 early career historians from China working on Chinese, European, Middle Eastern, American, and South and Southeast Asian history will come to Cambridge to discuss with Cambridge colleagues 'The Making and the Remaking of States' – an appropriate theme given the turbulent times in which we live. In May, [Cristina Rivera Garza](#) will spend a month in Cambridge as the [Trinity Global Humanities](#) lecturer. Cristina is the author of 'Liliana's Invincible Summer', which was awarded the Pulitzer Prize, and 'No One Will See Me Cry', among other books. We are grateful to Trinity College's support for this lecture series, which has been renewed for a further three years. Finally, academics and students from all Global Humanities network partners will gather in Cambridge in July for a summer school on '[Global Plant Lives: Exploring Plant-Human Connections Across Cultures](#)'. No doubt, in the Year of the Horse, Global Humanities is galloping toward success!



Hans van de Ven

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

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GHI - Mobility Scheme

Before the Christmas break, we welcomed [Prof Wang Tao](#) (Fudan University, China) and [Dr Alejandro Martínez](#) (Universidad Diego Portales, Chile) to Cambridge through the GHN Mobility Scheme. Professor Wang described his stay as “truly inspiring,” with memorable exchanges that will lead to future collaboration. Dr Martínez delivered a lecture at CLAS and worked on plans for joint teaching and archival projects, strengthening ties between Cambridge and Santiago de Chile.

Looking Ahead: AUB in Focus

This month, [Dr Sura Qadiri](#) and [Prof Charles Forsdick](#) will visit the American University of Beirut (AUB) to enhance relationships in world literature studies. Their two-week stay will include research presentations and postgraduate workshops on Francophone literature from North Africa and the Caribbean, alongside discussions on the future of literary studies and the humanities. This exchange builds on ongoing collaborations with [Dr Sonja Mejcher-Atassi](#) and reflects GHN’s commitment to fostering multilingual and global perspectives.

MOBILITY SCHEME AWARDEES 2025-26



[Dr Anna Corrigan](#) (MMLL - Latin American Studies)
[Dr Emily Senior](#) & [Dr Clare Pettitt](#) (Faculty of English)
[Prof Miranda Griffin](#) (MMLL - Department of French)
[Prof Máire Ní Mhaonaigh](#) (MMLL - Department of ASNC)



[Dr M Amir Parsa](#) (Department of History)
[Prof Sumana Roy](#) (Department of English)



[Dr Pingping Jia](#) (Dept of International Chinese Education)
[Dr Nie Fei](#) (School of Liberal Arts)
[Dr Tianyi Zhang](#) (School of Frontier Sciences)



[Dr Devan Ard-Keyser](#) (Faculty of Arts & Science)
[Dr Varak Ketsamian](#) (Dept of History and Archaeology)



[Prof Han Zhaoqing](#) (Institute of Chinese Historical Geography)
[Prof Ning Sun](#) (Department of Philosophy)



[Dr Abraham Lincoln Nutsugah](#) (Dept of Philosophy & Classics)
[Dr Nana Yaw Boampong Sapon](#) (Dept of History)



[Prof Carolina Gainza Cortés](#) (Faculty of Communication and Humanities)

“The world is a book, and those who do not travel read only one page”

~ Saint Augustine ~



Prof Wang Tao & Prof Romain Graziani



Prof Wang Tao (Fudan University)
Visiting Cambridge 2025

“My two weeks in Cambridge were truly inspiring. The highlight was my exchange with Prof Roel Sterckx. We discussed my research on ancient Chinese knowledge classification, and also he shared his upcoming projects and showed me Clare College’s ancient books—the scent of those parchment-covered volumes was unforgettable. I am grateful to the GHN Mobility Scheme and to Professor Sterckx for this opportunity”

- Prof Wang Tao -

GHI - Elements Series

BY ALEX WRIGHT

Since my last bulletin, which appeared in the October 2025 newsletter, our editors have acquired – I am delighted to be able to report – no fewer than five new Elements proposals.

The first project is by [Ingo Gildenhard](#), who is Professor of Classics and Classical Tradition at our own University here in Cambridge. Ingo's Element is titled '[Justice: A Romance Concept in the Global Village](#)'. In offering a novel account of the history of justice/iustitia, and thinking globally about its cross-cultural equivalents, Prof Gildenhard wishes to explain why justice has emerged as one of the key themes of contemporary politics.

Our second new Element is to be authored by [Anna Hartnell](#), a Senior Lecturer in the Creative Arts at Birkbeck in the University of London. Dr Hartnell's project – entitled '[Population Boom or Bust: Doppelgänger Discourses](#)' – explores the anxiety about dwindling birth rates in some parts of the world, and tries to situate this angst against a backdrop of the history of booming postwar birth rates and of environmentalist fears, in the 1960s and 1970s, of a 'population bomb'. Dr Hartnell asks how these 'doppelgänger discourses' reflect on the ethical and political frameworks by which the contemporary category of the human is now understood.

The third Element is to be written by [Nicholas B Dirks](#) (author of CUP's 'City of Intellect', 2023, and CEO of the New York Academy of Sciences), and it comprises a significantly expanded and developed version of the ideas explored in his Cambridge plenary lecture delivered in June 2025 at our Global Humanities Summer Forum. '[Worldly Knowledge: Past and Futures of the Global Humanities](#)' is a major piece of Global Humanities writing by one of the foremost intellectuals of our times. Nick's project will offer some fundamental rethinking of how liberalism might still constitute a plausible global theory of social life and governance in the twenty-first century.

New Element number four is authored by [Lewis Wynn](#), who is a Stipendiary Lecturer in English in the University of Oxford. Dr Wynn's 'On Fire: Combustion, Aesthetics, and the Global Environmental Crisis' uses tropes and motifs of burning as a way to explore the worldwide climate emergency, concentrating here on current literary expressions. In so doing, his booklet focuses on the notion of the 'Pyrocene' – a term proposed by the environmental historian Stephen J Pyne – which redefines the Anthropocene in terms of humanity's primary ecological signature: our ability above all to manipulate fire.

Finally, our fifth Element is titled 'Art After Democracy' and will be co-written (with several collaborators) by one of our series editors, [Malvika Maheshwari](#), and [Joanna Page](#), who is Director of CRASSH and Professor of Latin American Studies in our own University. It turns a critical eye on the political agency of art at a time when the democratic health of many regions of the world looks increasingly fragile. It also argues, however, that art can play a significant role in revealing the weaknesses and contradictions inherent in contemporary democracies, and in highlighting the need for new transnational forms of democratic governance.

I hope that the range and calibre of all five of these projects – which, despite their varied subject matter, are relentlessly and universally focused on the global fate and future of the humanities – indicate to our readers just how promising the series is turning out to be.



Alex Wright

Senior Executive Publisher & Head of Humanities

(Cambridge University Press)



Elements Main Editors



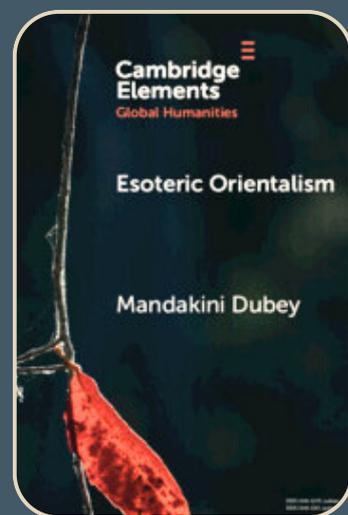
Frisbee Sheffield
Ancient Philosophy



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](#)



GHI - EVENTS 2026

As the academic year moves forward, the GHI is preparing a dynamic series of events that welcome distinguished speakers and promote global collaboration. The [Beijing Sub Forum-Cambridge](#) in April, the [Trinity Global Humanities Lectures](#) in May, followed by the [GHI Summer School 2026](#) in July, offer a chance for learning, networking, and global dialogue.

Trinity Global Humanities Lectures 2026: Memory, Language and Feminist Justice

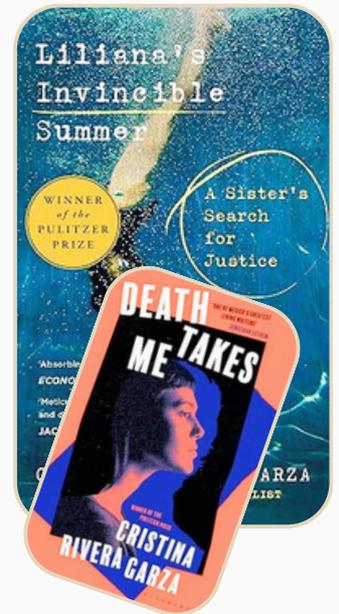
This year we are thrilled to welcome [Cristina Rivera Garza](#)— Pulitzer prize-winning Mexican author and professor known for her fiction and memoir. These lectures, taking place on the 29th April, 6th, 13th and 20th of May, will reflect on her commitment to memory, language and feminist justice. Tickets are now on sale. [REGISTER HERE](#)



PROF CRISTINA RIVERA GARZA
PULITZER PRIZE-WINNING AUTHOR AND
MACARTHUR FELLOW.



CRISTINA INTRODUCES HERSELF AND SPEAKS ABOUT SOME OF
HER PUBLISHED BOOKS
(VIDEO FROM MACARTHUR FOUNDATION, VIA YOUTUBE)



GHI Summer School 2026: “Global Plant Lives”

Following the Trinity Lectures, we will host the inaugural [GHI Summer School 2026](#) in Cambridge, scheduled from 5th until 17th July. The two-week summer school will focus on the emerging, interdisciplinary field of plant humanities, seeking to highlight the enduring significance of plants to human cultures and advancing the understanding of plant-human relationships through the methods and perspectives of arts and humanities scholarship.



GHI - Research & Engagement Programmes

ART AND POLITICS GROUP - Writing Workshop

Six members of last year's Art and Politics online reading group held a workshop in Cambridge in December 2025. Hailing from Europe, North America, South America, East Asia and South Asia, and with backgrounds in art history, literature, cultural studies, anthropology, and political science, they came together to take the first steps in writing a book on art and democracy. Rather than bringing together a series of separate essays, they decided to take on the challenge of writing the book collaboratively between them, as an experiment in living out the principles of global humanities.



The team includes [Malvika Maheshwari](#) (Ashoka University), [Joanna Page](#) and [Anna Corrigan](#) (University of Cambridge), [Weiyi Wu](#) (Nanjing University), and [Erika Teichert](#) and [Paul Merchant](#) (University of Bristol), with support from the Global Humanities Initiative.

UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC PROGRAMME - CSMVS MUMBAI

The University Academic Programme in Mumbai, developed through the partnership between the [Fitzwilliam Museum](#) and [CSMVS](#), is moving into Phase 2 following a successful pilot delivered between December 2023 and November 2024. The initial phase used a display of antiquities from the Berlin State Museums, the Getty Museum and the British Museum, alongside Indian collections, at CSMVS to explore new models for Masters-level teaching in India. Led by [Dr Neal Spencer](#), the pilot convened an international faculty and delivered programmes for university staff and Masters students in February and June 2024 respectively.



The evaluation of the pilot phase, and ongoing demand from partner universities, has led to the design of University Academic Programme phase 2. This builds on the pilot model, but will leverage a much broader set of objects displayed in the new [Networks of the Past](#) gallery, open for 3 years from December 2025. This gallery extends the geographic range to include Mesopotamia and Persia, China and Britain. In 2026 and 2027, both a faculty and student programme will be run, structured around three themes: Living with the natural world; Creating the built world; Power made tangible and Networks of things.

MEET THE TEAM: American University of Beirut (Lebanon)

At the [American University of Beirut](#), the Global Humanities Initiative is housed in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. Part of AUB since its founding in 1866, FAS aspires to be at the heart of free inquiry in the Middle East and to serve the peoples of Lebanon, the region and the wider world through excellence in teaching, research, and creative endeavour. FAS also houses the [Centre for Arts and Humanities](#), the AUB Theatre Initiative, and departments offering MA programs in Anthropology, Arabic, Archaeology, Art History and Curating, English, History, and Philosophy, and PhD programs in Arabic language and literature and in Arab and Middle Eastern History. Comparative and intercultural research and artistic practice characterizes the diverse international faculty's work and teaching and will inform AUB's developing role as the Arab world's global university, with the inauguration of twin campuses in the Mediterranean and the Arabian Gulf.



In the Spotlight . . .



Sonja Mejcher-Atassi

Prof of Arabic and Comparative Literature
(American University of Beirut)



Damascus (Syria)



Travelling, Reading
and Swimming



"The Arab Apocalypse"
(Etel Adnan)

- What is your Alma Matter?
University of Oxford (DPhil) and Free University Berlin (MA)
- What is your main area of research?
Arabic and comparative literature, cultural history
- What do you enjoy most about being part of the Global Humanities Network?
The people, connecting with colleagues from across the world



Rita Bassil

Programme Manager
(American University of Beirut)



Istanbul (Turkey)



Reading and Travelling



"The Hobbit" (JRR Tolkien)

- What is your Alma Matter?
American University of Beirut, AUB (BA, Philosophy and MA Public Administration)
- What is your main area of research?
Organizations, Higher Education, Corruption, Ombudsman, Mental Health at work, Non Profit
- What do you enjoy most about being part of the Global Humanities Network?
Connecting with people who have similar interests in the Arts and Humanities fields

