

# British Academy Review · 14

**November 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall**



**Military interventions since the end of the Cold War**



BRITISH  
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# British Academy Review

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The *British Academy Review* contains articles illustrating the wide range of scholarship which the British Academy promotes in its role as the UK's national academy for the humanities and social sciences.

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Suggestions for articles by current and former British Academy grant- and post-holders, as well as by Fellows of the British Academy, are very welcome. Suggestions may be sent to the Editor, James Rivington, at [pubs@britac.ac.uk](mailto:pubs@britac.ac.uk)

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This issue of the *British Academy Review* displays a wide range of scholarship supported by the British Academy.

The opening articles illustrate the stronger role that the British Academy is playing in public debates and policy-making – through its Forums, through the research it funds, and now through its recently launched Policy Centre.

Then there are articles offering different perceptions of late 20th-century history – including the dramatic events that changed Eastern Europe twenty years ago.

The remaining articles reflect the work that the Academy supports in the study of different aspects of culture, whether of another time and place, or closer to home.

# Rising to the Challenge

*In these extracts from his address to the Annual General Meeting on 16 July 2009, the incoming President of the British Academy, Professor Sir Adam Roberts, reveals the Academy's plans to play a stronger role in future public debates and policy-making.*

IT IS AN HONOUR and a challenge to take up the position to which you have elected me. Thanks to Onora O'Neill, my presidency begins with the British Academy in robust health internally, and responding intelligently and thoughtfully to the many changes in the external environment. Our great strength, to be prized above all others, is that we are an autonomous self-governing association of leading scholars and social scientists. It is because of this independence that we are widely seen – including by the relevant research councils – as able to play a significant part in public debate, not least with government. Further strength to our public role comes from the fact that our 900 Fellows represent a remarkable range of disciplines and subject-areas. We also have leadership within the Fellowship. We have had Alan Wilson's report *Punching Our Weight*, and major contributions from Albert Weale, chair of the Research Committee, and the Treasurer, Roger Kain, as well as many Fellows in prominent public positions.



Figure 1. Professor Sir Adam Roberts, who became President of the British Academy in July 2009.

In developing an enhanced public role, we need to take into account one positive factor – the UK's standing in the humanities and social sciences; and also a more cautionary one – the hazards of the pursuit of policy relevance.

## UK standing in humanities and social sciences

The standing of UK research in the humanities and social sciences is by any measure world-class (I promise you that this will be my one and only use of this over-worked term). Whether we think of improved results in the Research Assessment Exercise, or British or international

league tables, UK research in the humanities and social sciences can stand comparison with any other subject or country. The prizes and honours won by the Fellows of this Academy are a further indication.

To put the whole matter in a broader perspective and a cruder form, Britain has had a particularly high reputation internationally in two fields in recent years – financial services on the one hand, and knowledge and culture on the other. The former has taken a knock, but Britain has maintained a consistently high profile in the latter. Our serious media, our major cultural bodies, our creative flair – all are highly regarded internationally. The world still wants to come to the UK for its vibrant culture – and for its higher education. The social sciences and humanities, in all their wonderful variety, have contributed to the UK's high profile in the fields of knowledge and culture. They have a major role within our society, and in the standing of the UK internationally.

## Three hazards

There is a need for caution in the pursuit of policy relevance. It is a complex, interactive and sometimes risky process. There are three obvious hazards.

First, the over-eager pursuit of policy relevance can easily lead to superficiality or worse. As Timothy Garton Ash has put it in his latest book, 'Prediction and prescription are both recipes for the dustbin. Description and analysis may last a little longer.' I well recall the acid words of my predecessor at Oxford and Fellow of this Academy, Hedley Bull, in commenting on a student's highly prescriptive essay on 'The Future of NATO': 'This essay tells me a great deal about your mind and nothing at all about the world.'

If we are to be engaged, it cannot be by expecting every written output to conclude with executive summaries and policy recommendations. It must rather be by conveying a deep understanding of human society in all its complexity, and strengthening public life socially, economically and culturally.

Second, preoccupation with policy advice can mean that other crucial aspects of the work that we do risk being ignored. The social sciences and humanities exist in part to create civic awareness, to assist the growth of an informed and critical community, and to provide many key elements of a cultured society in which, among other things, clever and intelligent people will want to live – be they students, doctors, poets, businessmen or scientists – and be they from the UK or overseas. In short, the many and various subjects on which the Fellows of the Academy and its awardholders work are part of the warp and the weft of this country, and of the wider world with which the UK engages in so many ways.

Third, although the Academy is a broad and capacious tent, there is a risk that a campaign to advance the causes of the humanities and social sciences will be seen as yet another case of academics defending their own cabbage patches and missing the larger picture. That is why it is crucial that we maintain the closest links with our counterparts in Universities UK, the Royal Society, the Royal Academy of Engineering, and other bodies. Speaking as a proud possessor of physics and chemistry 'O' levels, I intend to continue on that course. Indeed, there are substantive issues on which we can co-operate with the other learned societies – including, for example, the urgent and multi-faceted problem of climate change.

These three hazards that could arise in the narrow pursuit of policy relevance are simply hazards – of which we need to have a lively awareness: they are not insuperable objections to public engagement on a range of policy issues.

### Public engagement – with partners

A significant part of the case for humanities and social sciences will consist in showing the value of these disciplines and subject-areas in shedding light on issues of the day. The British Academy is currently in discussion with a range of bodies that share an interest in the health of the humanities and social sciences, examining ways in which, severally and together, we can make the case for our disciplines and subject-areas as valuable in their own right and for the varied contributions they make to many aspects of public life. We will insist that the humanities and social sciences are not luxuries, but crucial contributors to the richness of society, to prosperity and wellbeing. The major problems that face us today, nationally and internationally, will not be solved by science and technology alone. Indeed the most intractable challenges are likely to rely for their solution on an understanding of human behaviour, of social and political change, and of intercultural understanding – all of which depend on the humanities and social sciences.

By strengthening the policy engagement capacity located at the Academy, we can give leadership and develop a powerful voice on behalf of our disciplines. I know that there is a great appetite for this from our stakeholders. Recent meetings with Government chief scientific advisers, representatives of universities, research councils, foundations and learned societies have helped to shape our thinking.

Therefore as part of a step change in the British Academy's policy engagement, I can announce today that, with support from ESRC (the Economic and Social Research Council), we plan to set up a Policy Centre at the Academy. Its concerns will include –

- **Substantive policy reports** including contributions not only to technical matters such as research assessment and funding, but also to more general topics of public interest, on which expertise in humanities and social sciences can shed light. Topics under consideration include Family/Household Patterns and Public Policy; Understanding and Influencing Behavioural Change; Constitutional Renewal; and Threats to Cultural Heritage.
- **Facilitating policy discussions:** as well as strengthening its own programme of policy relevant meetings and publications, the Academy will henceforth be convening and hosting the UK Strategic

Forum for the Social Sciences, which brings together major funders and users of research; and will develop networking opportunities for learned societies in the humanities and social sciences

A policy centre does not mean that the Academy will be seeking to take sides on controversies – although we will speak out where necessary, as we have done recently on the parlous state of foreign language learning in this country. It will not be politically partisan, not a think tank or a lobbying organisation. Nor is policy work a substitute for the other valuable activities of the Academy. Indeed, it is precisely because we are seen as an independent, and independent-minded, organisation that we are an appropriate place for a policy centre.

### Changes within the Academy

What such developments do reflect is an aim for the Academy to be recognised as a source of independent, expert and authoritative advice. This has implications for how we organise our relations with the outside world. Sometimes the Academy will issue a report (as our recent paper on languages) or wish to take a view (and we have the Policy Advisory Committee, informed by input from relevant Fellows, Group and Section chairs, to oversee that); sometimes it will provide a forum where views can be exchanged; sometimes it will invite a group of Fellows to form a working group to prepare a contribution.

### My approach

It may or may not be an advantage in this regard that you have elected as your President someone whose areas of academic specialism, international organisations and the laws of war, are both hideously topical. I started writing on these subjects in the 1980s when they were unfashionable, being seen by many so-called 'realists' as largely irrelevant to the conduct of international relations. Nowadays these subjects are seen as less peripheral. I find I have been in demand not just to write about them and lecture on them, but also to give evidence to parliamentary committees and to advise decision-makers of one kind or another. I've also done two stints supervising and observing elections in Kosovo and Bosnia. I often find myself in Geneva, the home of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the second home of the United Nations, and have given *pro bono* advice to both bodies.

Are such activities mainly for social sciences? I do not think so. My undergraduate training was in Modern History. The need for historical awareness in decision-making is of crucial importance, and has been sadly diminished in recent years, including in relation to Iraq and Afghanistan. Likewise, ethical issues need to remain central to decision-making.

I know that I am not alone in this Academy in having experience in advising policy-makers. A survey of Fellows earlier this year found that many had such experience. Through its funding role, the Academy also supports many more scholars whose work has similar relevance. In its conferences, workshops and forums, the Academy regularly brings together policy-makers and academics.

A British Academy Forum held on 10 July is a case in point. These Forums bring together a group, say 20–30, of invited guests from universities, Westminster, Whitehall, the media and other interested bodies, to discuss under Chatham House rules an issue of public



Figure 2. The British Academy Policy Centre was formally launched on the occasion of the British Academy Forum on ‘‘The New British Constitution’’: Democracy and Participation’ on 26 October 2009. Left: Dr Robin Jackson (Chief Executive and Secretary of the British Academy) announces the establishment of the Policy Centre. Right: Participants at the Forum included Dr Tony Wright MP, Professor Vernon Bogdanor FBA, Professor Conor Gearty (Chairman), Rt Hon Nick Clegg MP. (An edited transcript of the Forum discussion is available via [www.britac.ac.uk/medialibrary/](http://www.britac.ac.uk/medialibrary/)). Photos: M. Crossick/British Academy.

interest. On this occasion we discussed ‘Two Decades of Military Interventions’. The meeting exposed some different views, but there was one clear conclusion: the need for understanding of the culture, languages and history of countries in which we intervene – and yet it is precisely this that has been in short supply in much decision-making, policy execution and public debate.

**Conclusion**

Last year, at the AGM, Onora O’Neill master-minded the adoption by the Academy of the *Strategic Framework 2008–13*. Although I am not an unqualified enthusiast for mission statements, and nor indeed is she, this document put real substance into its central vision of the Academy’s role:

to inspire, recognise and support excellence and high achievement in the humanities and social sciences, throughout the UK and internationally, and to champion their role and value.

That remains the Academy’s role. It is the purpose for which we work together.

Although the waters are distinctly choppy, and although we face multiple challenges, I find myself now skipping a ship that is in remarkably good shape, has weathered recent storms, and is set on a course that I commend to you.

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In September 2009, the British Academy established a Policy Centre, with generous matching funding from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). The Centre will oversee a programme of work, drawing on the expertise of Fellows of the British Academy and the wider academic community in the humanities and social sciences, to shed light on policy issues.

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Outputs from the Centre will include authoritative policy studies (alone and in partnership with our sister academies), topical research overviews, and policy briefings. Forthcoming work includes projects on families and electoral reform. The Centre will also carry out a range of activities, including the organisation of events, liaison with learned societies and Higher Education Institutions, and work on the impact and profile of the humanities and social sciences.

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For more information, please see the Policy pages on the British Academy website ([www.britac.ac.uk](http://www.britac.ac.uk)).

Dr Simon Griffiths (Senior Policy Adviser) and Vivienne Hurley (Head of Policy Development) may be contacted at [policy@britac.ac.uk](mailto:policy@britac.ac.uk)

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# Two Decades of Military Interventions: Questions of Law, Morality, and Effectiveness

*In the past two decades, the UK has been involved, along with other countries, in many military interventions. There have also been cases in which states have failed to intervene. These actions, and failures to act, have raised a range of questions. In July 2009, a British Academy Forum explored the underlying factors that have led to these interventions, the lawfulness of the use of force, the adequacy of existing international rules and institutions, and the capacity of intervening forces to achieve change. One of the participants, Dr Dominik Zaum, discusses the issues.*

In a now famous speech in Chicago in April 1999, at the height of the Kosovo war, Prime Minister Tony Blair set out a strong defence of the principle of humanitarian intervention. In a globalised and interdependent world, he suggested, states could not turn their back on major human rights violations, and common values should under certain circumstances be upheld by the use of force. His call was shaped by the experience of a decade of military interventions since the end of the Cold War, mostly under the auspices of the United Nations (UN). This had demonstrated the potential for states to collectively address challenges to international order, for example after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990; but it had also revealed the failure of states to respond effectively to atrocities and genocide, as in Somalia, Rwanda, and Srebrenica. The speech set the scene for extensive British military involvement in different conflicts over the next decade. While interventions in Sierra Leone or East Timor seem to have confirmed the effectiveness of outside interventions to provide peace and stability, the experience of apparently open-ended conflicts such as in Iraq and Afghanistan has led to protracted debates about the ability of outsiders to transform so-called 'failed states' and to promote peace and

development through the use of military force. Looking back at the record of two decades of military intervention since the end of the Cold War, a British Academy Forum on 10 July 2009 brought together academics, politicians, senior military officers and civil servants, diplomats, and journalists to examine the legal and ethical questions that have been raised, and to evaluate the utility and consequences of the use of force in the early 21st century. Both the tone of the forum, and its findings, struck a sober note that contrasted with the optimism of the Chicago speech.

## Legality and legitimacy

Questions about the legality and the legitimacy of the use of military force have often dominated debates about particular military interventions, especially Kosovo in 1999 and Iraq in 2003. Those two operations were controversial because they were neither explicitly authorised by the UN Security Council nor conducted in defence against an actual or imminent attack, the only conditions under which the UN Charter allows the use of military force by individual states. In particular, the case of Kosovo raised the question as to whether force used for humanitarian purposes could be 'illegal, but legitimate', whether it is a question of international morality rather than international law.

The legality of such humanitarian interventions remains contested. For example, the Attorney General's memorandum on the legality of the use of force in Iraq has argued that, exceptionally, the use of military force can be lawful to avert overwhelming humanitarian catastrophes, but concedes that this interpretation of international law remains

controversial. However, the moral principle that states have a responsibility to protect their citizens has gained traction in recent years, and has been adopted by states at the 2005 UN World Summit. While this 'Responsibility to Protect' (or 'R2P') primarily falls onto the state to which citizens belong, states have in principle recognised that the international community, acting through the UN Security Council, has a residual responsibility if states are unable or unwilling to protect their citizens.



Figure 1. Warrior Armoured Personnel Carriers of the Irish Guards, cheered on by refugees from the Brazda Camp on the Macedonian/Kosovo Border, as they advanced towards Pristina, June 1999. Photo: Captain Jim Gallagher, © Crown Copyright/MOD.

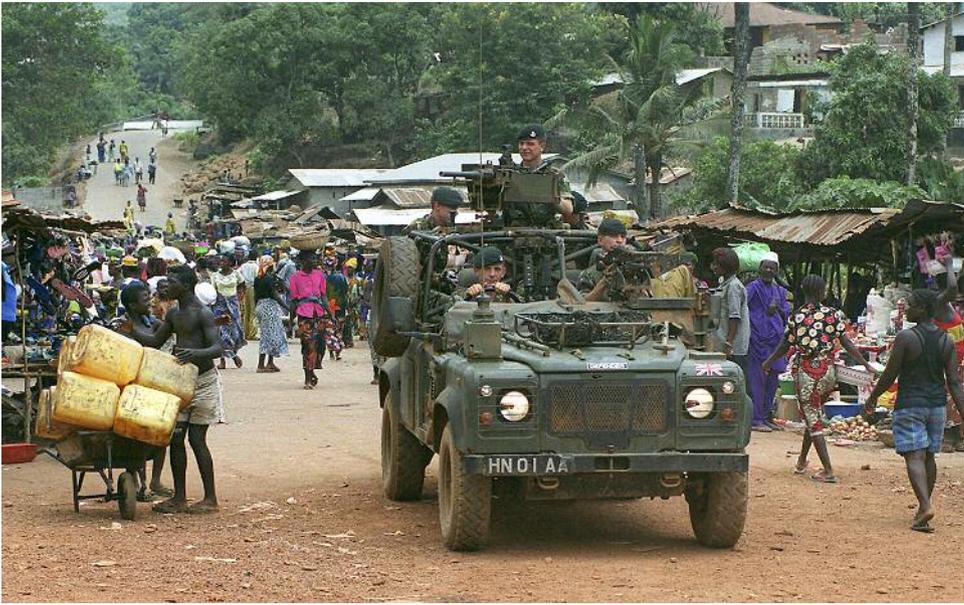


Figure 2. British soldiers on a local protection patrol in Sierra Leone, April 2001. Photo: Kevin Capon, © Crown Copyright/MOD.

substantial local support and have faced few violent challenges. As both the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were motivated by regime change rather than ending a civil war, there was no consensus among the local political elites as to the nature of the post-war political settlement and distribution of power. As a result, the new political order established with the help of outsiders was met with violent resistance by those groups who had lost or were actively excluded from power, such as Sunni groups in Iraq and the Taliban in Afghanistan.

R2P has moved the discussion away from the conditions under which one might legitimately intervene militarily to protect vulnerable populations, towards the question of how to prevent such abuses from taking place in the first place through conflict resolution and capacity building, and considers only as a last resort the use of military force for humanitarian purposes.

This multifaceted approach to the R2P is also a consequence of the fear of many developing countries that powerful states might abuse the principle to justify military interventions for narrow national interests, suspicions that were nourished by British and American attempts to justify the Iraq war in humanitarian terms, and Russia's invocation of the R2P to defend its military action in Georgia in 2008. Regrettably, this environment has also made it easier for governments presiding over major humanitarian emergencies, such as the Sudanese government in Darfur, to rally support against substantial international military interventions to address these conflicts; and for governments to avoid international scrutiny and censure of the humanitarian consequences of their actions in conflict, as highlighted by the resistance of many developing countries to discuss the plight of Tamil civilians in the aftermath of the Sri Lankan government's war against the Tamil Tigers in 2009.

### Local consent

While questions about the international legality and legitimacy of the use force remain pertinent, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have highlighted the importance of local legitimacy if the use force is to be effective. Without local buy-in and support, outside interveners rarely have the capacity to achieve their objectives. Forcing change on unwilling or even hostile political elites requires resources that intervening states are unlikely to be willing to commit, or repressive measures that especially democratic states will find difficult to employ. Hence, such interventions require a degree of local consent. Interventions to end a civil war or in support of a peace agreement, such as NATO's robust peacekeeping presence in Bosnia and Kosovo or the British intervention in Sierra Leone in 2000, have generally had

Efforts to engineer a particular political outcome, and supporting certain local elites and leaders seen as sympathetic to an intervention's objectives, are fraught with risks and difficulties. Local actors have their own priorities and objectives, and while they may overlap with those of international interveners, they may at times conflict. This was highlighted most starkly by the recent presidential elections in Afghanistan, which returned the West's partner, President Hamid Karzai, to power, but because of pervasive electoral fraud fundamentally undermined the local and international legitimacy of the intervention. In the worst case, such a policy can deepen divisions within the country and lead to conflict – as in Iraq. Here, the attempts of the US and its allies to entrench a pliant exiled elite in government through elections exacerbated the political and social dynamics that contributed to civil war after 2005. The electoral system contributed to the polarisation of Iraqi politics along ethnic and sectarian lines, and



Figure 3. Time to leave: an Iraqi boy celebrates the withdrawal of U.S. troops, in Mosul, 30 June 2009. Photo: Reuters/Khalid al-Mousuly.

the instrumentalisation of sectarian resentment and fear to maximise electoral gain.

### Operational complexities

The experience of military interventions in the post-Cold War period highlights the fact that the 'post-conflict' phase is often more complex, long-lasting, and expensive than the original intervention. In Bosnia and Kosovo, the international military presences established after the end of the conflict have so far lasted more than 13 and 10 years respectively, while in Afghanistan violence is if anything increasing eight years after the fall of the Taliban. While military force can play an important role in providing a reasonably secure environment to engage in reconstruction, statebuilding, and development, these are conflicts that defy a military solution and ultimately require a joined-up effort of all parts of government. The recent emphasis on a 'comprehensive approach' in Afghanistan – both bringing together all the levers of state power, and comprehensively addressing challenges to security and development in the country, ranging from the absence of the rule of law and poor public services, to the drug economy and a violent insurgency – shows that there is good understanding of what needs to be done to succeed. However, translating this into practice has proven far more difficult, for several reasons.

Firstly, in some societies, the idea of 'the state' has very little meaning, instead social ties are defined by loyalty to the tribe or family. Rather than as a protector and provider of public goods, such societies often experience the state as exploitative and coercive. Strengthening the state without appropriate consideration for these alternative ways of organising social and political life can undermine the efforts of outside interveners to improve security.

Secondly, greater effectiveness has been hindered by co-ordination problems, both within the military, and between military and civilian actors in the theatre of operations. Most contemporary military interventions are conducted by multinational forces, often under the leadership of an international or regional organisation such as NATO (as in Kosovo in 1999), or as so-called 'coalitions of the willing' led by a global or regional hegemon (as the US in the 2003 Iraq war, or Australia in East Timor in 1999). Different national contingents of such forces not only often have specific 'caveats' that limit the ways in which they can be deployed, but their capitals might also not share the same understanding of the character of a conflict and prioritise different strategies, making it difficult to achieve unity of purpose. Co-ordination between civilian and military actors is even more difficult, not least because they often don't share a common command structure. In addition, civilian actors tend to be far more diverse, including not only civilian representatives of intervening states such as diplomats and development workers, but also international organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), with different cultures, different perceptions of a conflict, and often a certain distrust of the military. Humanitarian NGOs in particular have been reluctant to co-operate directly with the military, to underline their impartiality in a conflict, and to protect them against attacks from the conflict parties. Such fragmentation stands in strong contrast to interventions such as the Malayan emergency after 1948, where the British military leadership had much greater control over the different

branches of the British state in Malaya, and could direct them in a more co-ordinated fashion in its counterinsurgency efforts, or even some UN operations, such as the international administration of Eastern Slavonia from 1996 to 1998, where both civilian and military command were exercised by a single person.



Figure 4. Afghan President Hamid Karzai holds up his inked stained finger after voting in the presidential election in Kabul, 20 August 2009 – an election marred by electoral fraud which led to the invalidation of votes from over 200 polling stations. Photo: Reuters/Lucy Nicholson.

Thirdly, an effective implementation of a comprehensive approach to military interventions has been inhibited by a lack of political will in the capitals of intervening states. As several participants of the British Academy Forum observed with regard to the British participation in the intervention in Afghanistan, politicians have wanted 'the benefits of taking the decision on intervention ... [wanting] the rewards from the ends, but ... do not really want to understand the ways that will be necessary'; and decide to intervene before being 'really prepared to recognise what it might have to take to get those ends.' The result of this has not only been uncertainty about the political objectives of ongoing military interventions in particular in Afghanistan, but also concerns about insufficient planning for the 'post-conflict' period, and about the implications this has for the resources required for and available to the operation. As the public controversies over casualties and equipment shortages among British troops in Afghanistan show, such uncertainty about the political objectives of the intervention are likely to undermine the public support for the use of force at a time where the cost in lives and treasure of the intervention in Afghanistan continues to rise.

### Lessons

What then is the legacy of two decades of military interventions since the end of the Cold War, and in particular of the two most recent major interventions, in Afghanistan and Iraq? Perhaps the clearest lesson of the post-Cold War era is that when states decide to intervene militarily, it is important that they understand the history, culture, and in particular the language of the societies they are intervening in – criteria that are notably absent from those enunciated in the Chicago speech,

but which have undoubtedly affected the efficacy of the interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Unfortunately, at a time where command of languages and understanding of other cultures is increasingly important, language learning at schools and universities in the UK continues to decline.

More generally, despite the undoubted successes of a range of military interventions, for example in Namibia, Kosovo, Macedonia, or Sierra Leone, to name just a few, it seems that ten years after Tony Blair's vision of an international community collectively responding to threats to its core values, the mood has somewhat turned against interventionism, not least because of the experience of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. In the wake of the 2003 Iraq war there has been a greater reluctance in particular among developing countries (led by Russia and China) to sanction military interventions such as in Darfur. There has also been a backlash amongst many developing countries against the R2P concept, most notably in the recent debate on the concept in the UN General Assembly, where the President of the General Assembly compared it to earlier justifications for colonialism. In addition, those states that have most actively supported military interventions over the last two decades have in light of the costs of their engagements in Afghanistan and Iraq been more reluctant to support in particular interventions in civil conflicts where their own security interests are not directly at stake, such as the Congo or Somalia. While powerful states will undoubtedly continue to use force to promote their immediate national interests – most vividly demonstrated by the Russian-Georgian war in 2008 – their willingness to use force to improve the plight of others, be it through peacekeeping or humanitarian interventions, has markedly declined. Both concerns about the legitimacy of military intervention, and concerns about the utility and cost of using armed force have dampened the enthusiasm for military responses to conflicts and humanitarian crises. Not only the lessons from two decades of military intervention, but also the outlook for future interventions, are sobering.



Figure 5. *The lead participants at the British Academy Forum on 10 July 2009. Back row: Dominik Zaum, David Hannay, Malcolm Rifkind, David Omand, Mark Malloch-Brown. Front row: Adam Roberts, James Mayall, Charles Guthrie, Tom Bingham.*

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Dr Dominik Zaum is a Reader in International Relations, at the University of Reading.

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### Full list of participants:

Sir Mark Allen (formerly of HM Diplomatic Service and the Foreign Office)  
 Rt Hon Lord Bingham of Cornhill FBA (former Lord of Appeal in Ordinary)  
 Dr Alia Brahim (University of Oxford)  
 Professor Chris Brown (London School of Economics)  
 Professor Barry Buzan FBA (London School of Economics)  
 Professor Richard Caplan (University of Oxford)  
 Professor Rosemary Foot FBA (University of Oxford)  
 David Goodhart (*Prospect Magazine*)  
 Nik Gowing (BBC)  
 General Lord Guthrie (Chief of the Defence Staff 1997–2001)  
 Dr Catherine Haddon (Institute for Government)  
 Lord Hannay (United Nations Association of the UK)  
 Professor Peter Hennessy FBA (Queen Mary University of London)  
 Professor Christopher Hill FBA (University of Cambridge)  
 Sir Michael Howard FBA (University of Oxford)  
 Sir Simon Jenkins (*Guardian*)  
 Rt Hon Lord Malloch-Brown (then Minister for Africa, Asia and the UN)  
 Professor James Mayall FBA (University of Cambridge)  
 Barney Mayhew (independent consultant)  
 Sir David Omand (King's College London)  
 General Sir David Richards (then Commander-in-Chief, Land Forces)  
 Rt Hon Sir Malcolm Rifkind MP (Foreign Secretary 1995–1997)  
 Sir Adam Roberts FBA (University of Oxford)  
 Dr Claire Spencer (Chatham House)  
 Adam Thomson (Foreign and Commonwealth Office)  
 Professor Charles Townshend FBA (Keele University)  
 Professor Chris Whitty (Department for International Development)  
 Dr Ralph Wilde (University College London)  
 Professor Elizabeth Wilmshurst (Chatham House)  
 Dr Dominik Zaum (University of Reading)

IN AUGUST 2009, the British Academy joined forces with a number of leading cultural heritage organisations to call on the Committee of Inquiry into Iraq to include in their investigation the problems faced by British forces in safeguarding cultural heritage in Iraq. In a letter to the Chair of the Inquiry, Sir John Chilcot, the organisations expressed their concern over the damage and loss inflicted on museums, libraries, archives and archaeological sites within the country.

Sir Adam Roberts, President of the British Academy said: 'The Iraq Inquiry must not neglect the damage, destruction and looting of Iraq's archaeological sites and ancient artefacts. In this, as in other matters, it will need to look at the adequacy of plans made in the run-up to the war, the particular problems faced by UK forces in their areas of responsibility in the occupation and post-occupation phases, and the extent to which the UK acted in accord with its existing legal obligations. Fifty-four years after the UK signed the text of the Hague Cultural Property Convention, it is time that we took the key step of ratifying it, as the United States finally did earlier this year.'

# The Global Financial Crisis – Why Didn't Anybody Notice?

On 17 June 2009, a group of leading academics, economics journalists, politicians, civil servants, and other practitioners met at the British Academy for a round-table discussion of the current financial crisis. The question under discussion in this British Academy Forum had been framed by Her Majesty The Queen on a visit to the London School of Economics in November 2008, when she had asked: if these things were so large, how come everyone missed them? A purpose of the Forum was to provide the basis of an 'unofficial command paper' that attempted to answer this question. The discussion inevitably ranged more widely – touching on the social fall-out of the crisis, and including a plea for a greater emphasis on the teaching of economic history in universities. But it was with The Queen's question in mind that the two convenors of the meeting, **Professor Tim Besley FBA** and **Professor Peter Hennessy FBA**, subsequently drafted a letter summarising the discussion: it was sent to Buckingham Palace on 22 July.

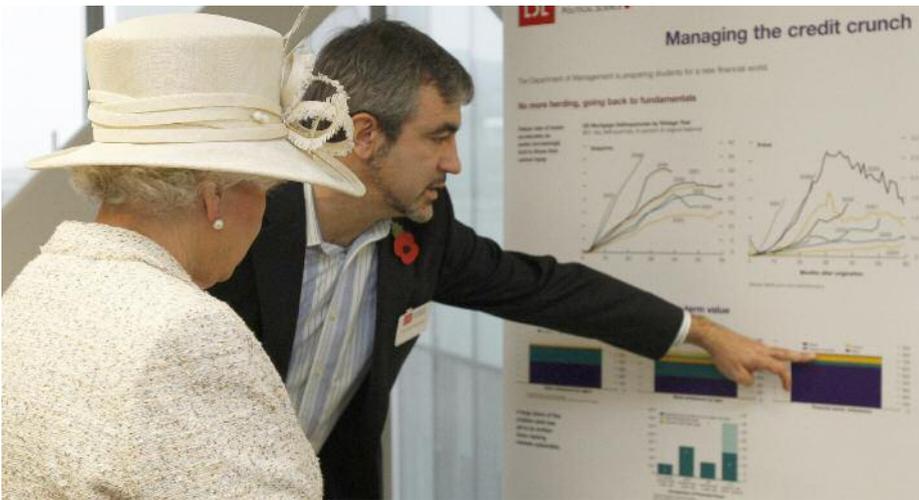


Figure 1. Queen Elizabeth II is shown a display about the credit crunch by Professor Luis Garicano, during a visit to the London School of Economics and Political Science on 5 November 2008. Photo: Wigglesworth/PA Wire URN:6524464 (Press Association via AP Images).



Figure 2. The British Academy Forum on 17 June 2009.

**MADAM,**

When Your Majesty visited the London School of Economics last November, you quite rightly asked: why had nobody noticed that the credit crunch was on its way? The British Academy convened a forum on 17 June 2009 to debate your question, with contributions from a range of experts from business, the City, its regulators, academia, and government. This letter summarises the views of the participants and the factors that they cited in our discussion, and we hope that it offers an answer to your question.

Many people did foresee the crisis. However, the exact form that it would take and the timing of its onset and ferocity were foreseen by nobody. What matters in such circumstances is not just to predict the nature of the problem but also its timing. And there is also finding the will to act and being sure that authorities have as part of their powers the right instruments to bring to bear on the problem.

There were many warnings about imbalances in financial markets and in the global economy. For example, the Bank for International Settlements expressed repeated concerns that risks did not seem to be properly reflected in financial markets. Our own Bank of England issued many warnings about this in their bi-annual Financial Stability Reports. Risk management was considered an important part of financial markets. One of our major banks, now mainly in public ownership, reputedly had 4000 risk managers. But the difficulty was seeing the risk to the system as a whole rather than to any specific financial instrument or loan. Risk calculations were most often



Figure 3. Sir Nicholas Macpherson (Permanent Secretary, HM Treasury), Professor Tim Besley FBA (then member of the Bank of England Monetary Policy Committee), Professor Peter Hennessy FBA, Professor Charles Goodhart FBA, Sir Gus O'Donnell (Secretary of the Cabinet), at the British Academy on 17 June 2009.

confined to slices of financial activity, using some of the best mathematical minds in our country and abroad. But they frequently lost sight of the bigger picture.

Many were also concerned about imbalances in the global economy. We had enjoyed a period of unprecedented global expansion which had seen many people in poor countries, particularly China and India, improving their living standards. But this prosperity had led to what is now known as the 'global savings glut'. This led to very low returns on safer long-term investments which, in turn, led many investors to seek higher returns at the expense of greater risk. Countries like the UK and the USA benefited from the rise of China which lowered the cost of many goods that we buy, and through ready access to capital in the financial system it was easy for UK households and businesses to borrow. This in turn fuelled the increase in house prices both here and in the USA. There were many who warned of the dangers of this.

But against those who warned, most were convinced that banks knew what they were doing. They believed that the financial wizards had found new and clever ways of managing risks. Indeed, some claimed to have so dispersed them through an array of novel financial instruments that they had virtually removed them. It is difficult to recall a greater example of wishful thinking combined with hubris. There was a firm belief, too, that financial markets had changed. And politicians of all types were charmed by the market. These views were abetted by financial and economic models that were good at predicting the short-term and small risks, but few were equipped to say what would happen when things went wrong as they have. People trusted the banks whose boards and senior

executives were packed with globally recruited talent and their non-executive directors included those with proven track records in public life. Nobody wanted to believe that their judgement could be faulty or that they were unable competently to scrutinise the risks in the organisations that they managed. A generation of bankers and financiers deceived themselves and those who thought that they were the pace-making engineers of advanced economies.

All this exposed the difficulties of slowing the progression of such developments in the presence of a general 'feel-good' factor. Households benefited from low unemployment, cheap consumer goods and ready credit. Businesses benefited from lower borrowing costs. Bankers were earning bumper bonuses and expanding their business around the world. The government benefited from high tax revenues enabling them to increase public spending on schools

and hospitals. This was bound to create a psychology of denial. It was a cycle fuelled, in significant measure, not by virtue but by delusion.

Among the authorities charged with managing these risks, there were difficulties too. Some say that their job should have been 'to take away the punch bowl when the party was in full swing'. But that assumes that they had the instruments needed to do this. General pressure was for more lax regulation – a light touch. The City of London (and the Financial Services Authority) was praised as a paragon of global financial regulation for this reason.

There was a broad consensus that it was better to deal with the aftermath of bubbles in stock markets and housing markets than to try to head them off in advance. Credence was given to this view by the experience, especially in the USA, after the turn of the millennium when a recession was more or less avoided after the 'dot com' bubble burst. This fuelled the view that we could bail out the economy after the event.

Inflation remained low and created no warning sign of an economy that was overheating. The Bank of England Monetary Policy Committee had helped to deliver an unprecedented period of low and stable inflation in line with its mandate. But this meant that interest rates were low by historical standards. And some said that policy was therefore not sufficiently geared towards heading off the risks. Some countries did raise interest rates to 'lean against the wind'. But on the whole, the prevailing view was that monetary policy was best used to prevent inflation and not to control wider imbalances in the economy.



Figure 4. Paul Tucker (Deputy Governor of the Bank of England) and Dr Thomas Huertas (Director, Banking Sector, Financial Services Authority), at the British Academy on 17 June 2009.

So where was the problem? Everyone seemed to be doing their own job properly on its own merit. And according to standard measures of success, they were often doing it well. The failure was to see how collectively this added up to a series of interconnected imbalances over which no single authority had jurisdiction. This, combined with the psychology of herding and the mantra of financial and policy gurus, lead to a dangerous recipe. Individual risks may rightly have been viewed as small, but the risk to the system as a whole was vast.

So in summary, Your Majesty, the failure to foresee the timing, extent and severity of the crisis and to head it off, while it had many causes, was principally a failure of the collective imagination of many bright people, both in this country and internationally, to understand the risks to the system as a whole.

Given the forecasting failure at the heart of your enquiry, the British Academy is giving

some thought to how your Crown servants in the Treasury, the Cabinet Office and the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, as well as the Bank of England and the Financial Services Authority might develop a new, shared horizon-scanning capability so that you never need to ask your question again. The Academy will be hosting another seminar to examine the 'never again' question more widely. We will report the findings to Your Majesty. The events of the past year have delivered a salutary shock. Whether it will turn out to have been a beneficial one will depend on the candour with which we dissect the lessons and apply them in future.

*We have the honour to remain, Madam,  
Your Majesty's most humble and obedient  
servants*

Professor Tim Besley, FBA

Professor Peter Hennessy, FBA

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The letter attracted considerable attention in the broadcast and print media – across the globe. By October, a newspaper in India was able to refer to it as 'the famous letter written by the British Academy to the Queen'. It prompted much debate, including a number of rival 'letters' with alternative viewpoints.

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British Academy Forums are regular lunchtime workshops, at which senior academics, policy makers, civil servants and other practitioners, politicians, and journalists can engage in frank, informed debate – without the point scoring. They provide a neutral forum for argument based on research and evidence, to help frame the terms of public debates and clarify policy options. It gives those immersed in current issues the opportunity to exchange views with others who can bring historical perspectives or other contextual insights.

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## British Academy 'Global Financial Crisis' Forum

### Full list of participants

Professor Tim Besley, FBA (then Bank of England Monetary Policy Committee; London School of Economics)

Professor Christopher Bliss, FBA (University of Oxford)

Professor Vernon Bogdanor, FBA (University of Oxford)

Sir Samuel Brittan (*Financial Times*)

Sir Alan Budd

Dr Jenny Corbett (University of Oxford)

Professor Andrew Gamble, FBA (University of Cambridge)

Sir John Gieve (Harvard Kennedy School)

Professor Charles Goodhart, FBA (London School of Economics)

Dr David Halpern (Institute for Government)

Professor José Harris, FBA (University of Oxford)

Mr Rupert Harrison (Economic Adviser to the Shadow Chancellor)

Professor Peter Hennessy, FBA (Queen Mary, University of London)

Professor Geoffrey Hosking, FBA (University College London)

Dr Thomas Huertas (Financial Services Authority)

Mr William Keegan (*Observer*)

Mr Stephen King (HSBC)

Professor Michael Lipton, FBA (University of Sussex)

Rt Hon John McFall, MP (Commons Treasury Committee)

Sir Nicholas Macpherson (HM Treasury)

Mr Bill Martin (University of Cambridge)

Mr David Miles (Bank of England Monetary Policy Committee)

Sir Gus O'Donnell (Secretary of the Cabinet)

Mr Jim O'Neill (Goldman Sachs)

Sir James Sassoon

Rt Hon Clare Short, MP

Mr Paul Tucker (Bank of England)

Dr Sushil Wadhvani (Wadhvani Asset Management LLP)

Professor Ken Wallis, FBA (University of Warwick)

Sir Douglas Wass

Mr James Watson (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills)

Mr Martin Weale (National Institute of Economic and Social Research)

Professor Shujie Yao (University of Nottingham)

# TOWARDS POLARISED DIFFERENTIATION: *Changing Configurations of European Integration*

The last few weeks have witnessed the final steps in the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, which aims to smooth the workings of the European Union project. A year ago, the British Academy sponsored a research workshop at Cardiff University on 'differentiated' integration in Europe – that is, integration in which not all European partners participate. The workshop brought together over 20 researchers from across Europe to examine the relevance of different theoretical frameworks for explaining the extent of differentiated integration in Europe. Professor Kenneth Dyson FBA, the organiser of the conference, reflects on some of the issues.

## Differentiated integration

The Euro Area, the Schengen Area, the Bologna process in Higher Education, Airbus and Ariane represent just a few of a proliferating set of European policy projects that fall into the category of 'differentiated' integration. They represent different ways of building cross-national policy communities.

In addition, various territorial forms of differentiated integration have evolved. They include the 'special' Franco-German relationship, the Baltic, the Benelux, central Europe, the Mediterranean and the Nordic areas, and cross-national regional co-operation in Alpine Europe. These are associated with the building of regional identities.



Figure 1. Lord Mandelson poses with a model of an Airbus A350, 14 August 2009. Airbus has production sites across Britain, France, Germany and Spain. Photo: Reuters/Stephen Hird.

'Differentiation' – in both its functional and its territorial forms – has been an elite-led process, in the classic Community method of integration. Indeed, it might be said to be a symptom of more general problems that beset the European integration process. Differentiated integration illustrates the institutional 'fuzziness', the lack of transparency and accountability in a process

of 'integration by stealth', and the lack of broad mass political ownership of that process. In consequence, it contributes to the general sense that elections and party competition are an irrelevance, in that they have little effect on how institutions develop and policies evolve. Moreover, the various forms of differentiated integration have not been associated with clear evidence that they are producing more effective problem solving – for instance, in stemming Europe's relative economic decline or improving the quality of social provision. In these ways, it has contributed to the weakening of the permissive public consensus on which the larger integration process depends. Though a useful tool for elites, differentiated integration has been part of the 'democratic deficit' problem rather than part of the solution.

## New theoretical challenges in Integration Studies

Analysing this phenomenon of differentiated integration offers an interdisciplinary challenge to social scientists working on European integration. The changing face of integration theory reflects changes in practice, with a time lag. From the 1950s to the 1990s, the search to evolve general theories dominated the field – from 'federalism', through 'neo-functionalism' and 'inter-governmentalism', to 'historical institutionalism' and 'governance'. From the 1990s, the emphasis shifted to Europeanisation studies, which focused on the domestic effects of the integration process, and which above all imported theory from the study of institutions.

The British Academy-supported workshop sought to make sense of the changing patterns in the practice of integration by

assessing the value of competing theories to *explain* differentiated integration. It examined theories drawn from the 'public choice' literature, as well as from the literature on 'political space' and on 'political time'. Past work on differentiated integration has tended to focus less on explanation and more on analysis of its various forms – proliferating such concepts as 'à la carte', 'variable geometry', 'multi-tier' and 'multi-speed' integration, alongside 'core' Europe. Building adequate theories of differentiated integration is arguably one of the central challenges in European integration studies.

## Questioning traditional assumptions

The Cardiff workshop questioned the general assumption that the unitary principle – with participating states taking on shared rights and obligations in the process – is the norm in European integration. In the traditional view, the customs union, the single European market and competition policy provide not just the core of the European integration process. They are also seen as the model for how it proceeds. This model rests on two premises. The first is technical, namely that there are mutual gains from enhanced trade in a large Europe; and correspondingly, the costs of exclusion outweigh the benefits of 'free riding'. The second is political, namely that European integration must avoid creating division and conflict. 'Differentiated' integration has been typically viewed as the exception and temporary – a useful tool to allow a 'pioneering' group to move ahead of the rest, but open to later membership by 'outsiders' and compatible with the existing *acquis communautaire*. This conception of

differentiation is built into the Amsterdam, Nice and Lisbon Treaty provisions for differentiated integration.

### *Public choice theory*

However, the auditing of differentiated integration in the workshop showed that EU member states had been reluctant to invoke the Amsterdam and Nice treaty provisions. The widening scale and variety of forms of differentiated integration placed in question the two traditional premises. In many new policy sectors, the distribution of gains and costs from integration were asymmetrical in ways that made it rational for some states to prefer non-commitment.



Figure 2. Preparations in Paris for the launch of the euro in January 1999. Both Britain and Denmark have an opt-out from the euro, but Denmark is in the Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM II). Recent members of the European Union Photo: Reuters/Philippe Wojazer.

For example, asynchronous business cycles have shaped attitudes to euro entry. Lack of economic alignment led states as various as the Czech Republic and the UK to defer entry. In addition, the opportunity to free-ride on the Euro Area proved a powerful incentive to remain an 'outsider'. One could still reap some gains from the trade-creation effects of the euro through the single market, as the City of London did in financial services. Like Denmark, one could combine membership of the Exchange Rate

Mechanism II (ERM II) with the implicit understanding that one could enjoy the benefits of *de facto* monetary union, whilst retaining the right to leave and devalue in a crisis.

Public choice theory offers some useful explanatory tools for understanding differentiated integration in these terms. Financial stability is a good that promotes global-level integration as the best instrument for closing down the risks from injurious 'free riding'. The single market offers gains across the EU (and the wider European Economic Area), and hence encourages unitary integration. However, price stability is a good that can be provided by appropriate domestic arrangements rather than solely via monetary union. Hence differentiated integration had a functional basis in the different properties of policy areas.

### *Political theories*

The political rationale for remaining an outsider gained in attraction as the political threat from exclusion lost some of its power to encourage unitary integration. Giovanni Sartori's work on party systems offers a better insight into two political factors that have caused differentiated integration to proliferate: fragmentation and greater ideological distance. As the EU has grown (from 12 member states when the Maastricht Treaty was negotiated, to 27 in 2009), it is becoming more fragmented, with a greater diversity of interests represented in policy structures. However, numbers do not fully capture what is changing. The EU is increasingly characterised by divergent and intense ideological differences on questions of integration versus sovereignty, and 'market' versus 'social' Europe. Indeed, as the failed French and Dutch referenda on the EU Constitutional Treaty and then the failed first Irish referendum on the Lisbon Treaty revealed, these polarising tendencies reached deep into the political heart of the Euro Area. This development highlighted three factors: the *widening* of the EU's membership, especially the prospects of Turkish entry; the *broadening* of the policy scope of the Union into such areas as money, social policy, internal security, migration, and defence; and the *deepening* of

decision-making structures and procedures through more qualified majority voting in Council and strengthened powers of the European Parliament. These are 'politicising' the EU, dividing political elites and public opinion on its open-market and social-protection functions, and also around issues about sovereignty. Differentiation is therefore more than a technical phenomenon to be explained in functional terms. It is deeply bound up with the politicisation of the EU and needs political explanations.

### **Hybrid integration: towards polarised differentiation**

The Cardiff workshop provided a picture of a dynamically evolving structure of European integration in which unitary and differentiated integration are ever more closely interwoven. On the one hand, long-term 'broadening' of the policy scope, 'deepening' and 'widening' have accelerated the pace and increased the incidence of differentiated integration within the EU. On the other, differentiated integration provides a mechanism for creating centripetal processes around a 'vanguard' group so that the unitary principle is strengthened over time. However, contrary to traditional assumptions, differentiated integration imparts an independent dynamic that has been strengthened by the political and technical factors mentioned above. The hybrid character of European integration is the product of the varying combinations of these centrifugal and centripetal tendencies. The interplay of unitary and differentiated integration depends on the differing characteristics of policy areas: policy drives the politics of integration. It also depends on the ideological distance and intensity that domestic elites display: politics drives policy. In short, both functional and ideological specificities colour the way in which the unitary and differentiation principles change their configuration over space and time. What emerges is a paradoxical picture in which differentiated integration reflects both the prevalence of centripetal drives (in some cases), the prevalence of centrifugal drives (in other cases), and often the uneasy and uncertain balance between the two.



Figure 3. *France and Germany remain a driving force at the heart of European integration. On 16 May 2007, within hours of formally assuming office, President Nicolas Sarkozy met Chancellor Angela Merkel in Berlin, to underscore the importance of Franco-German ties. Photo: Reuters/Fabrizio Bensch.*

The shift from a functional type of explanation for differentiated integration towards political explanation suggests that the EU is shifting from a predominant pattern of ‘moderate’ differentiation, essentially exceptional and temporary, towards more examples of ‘polarised’ and entrenched differentiation. This shift reflects the expansion of ideological space in the politics of European integration on the two dimensions of market/social and of integration/sovereignty. In the process Euro-sceptic opinion has hardened at the extremes. In this changing context, some states become less ‘coalitionable’ as their political elites seek to exploit or contain electoral threats from Euro-sceptic opinion. The UK is a prime example, but far from being a lone one.

### Redefining the role of the traditional drivers of integration

In this changing context of more ‘polarised’ differentiation, the two traditional drivers of the European integration process – the Monnet method of functionalist integration by elites, and the Franco-German ‘motor’ – have had to take on new roles. The European Commission has been the guardian of the Monnet method, embodying the Treaty commitment to ‘ever closer union’, and exploiting opportunities to push the integration agenda into new areas. In this respect it could afford to take a partisan position, secure in a passive public

consensus. Similarly, the Franco-German relationship saw itself as the agenda-setter in European integration, confident in the supposition that no other Member State would wish to be excluded from a Franco-German-based ‘core’ Europe. When the Commission and the French and German governments were pushing together, integration seemed to have an unstoppable momentum. However, changes on the dimensions of function, size and ideology have undermined these traditional drivers. Instead, the Commission and the Franco-German relationship have had to absorb (with difficulty and a time lag) the lesson that, as differentiation becomes more polarised, their role is to perform a ‘mediating’ or brokerage role. This equilibrating function means that they seek out a ‘centre positioning’. The Commission

and the Franco-German tandem wish to remain at the heart of projects of differentiated integration, but avoid taking strongly partisan positions for fear of contributing to an escalation of conflicts. There is of course another more negative consequence. This role redefinition suggests a more passive role for these central players and the risk of inertia and *immobilisme* in the integration process.

For this reason the traditional drivers have retreated from talking about institutionalising a formal ‘core’ Europe, a topic that gained high profile in the mid-1990s (over EMU), in 1999–2001 (over eastern enlargement), and in 2003 (over the second Iraq War). Pressing ahead with such ideas, typically using the Euro Area as its nucleus, threatened their capacity to retain their ‘centre positioning’ in the integration process. The problem was not just an escalation of conflicts with outsiders. It also involved enormous differences amongst euro insiders over such matters as defence, social policy and business taxation. Instead, an informal ‘core’ of states was emerging. They shared membership across a range of

Figure 4. *A press conference in Vienna in December 2007 to mark the expansion of the Schengen Area to include nine new European countries – including Austria’s neighbours the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary. The poster reads: ‘Schengen new from 21.12.2007. Borders fall. Freedom wins. Security remains.’ Photo: Reuters/Heinz-Peter Bader.*



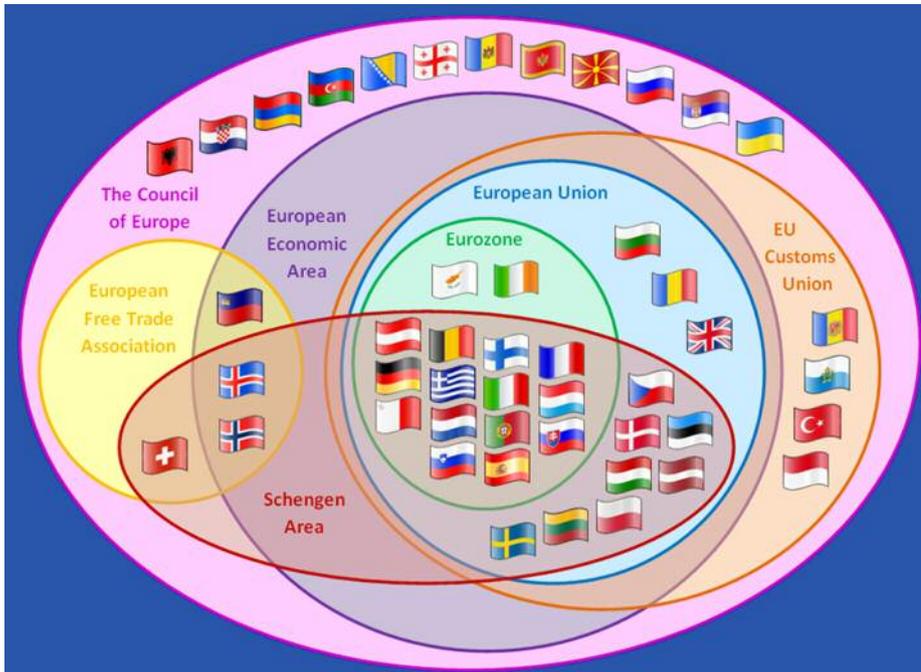


Figure 5. Diagram of supranational European bodies. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

## Conclusion

The British Academy-supported workshop served to map out the broad direction in which research on European integration should proceed – from theories of unitary integration and of Europeanisation towards theories of differentiation. In the process, theory can remain close to practice. In theoretical terms its conclusions suggested that the level of analysis mattered and that politics mattered. The broad configurations of differentiated and unitary integration seemed to differ at pan-European and EU levels. More importantly, in explaining EU-level differentiation, both function and politics seemed to matter. Theory needs to pay attention to the specific attributes of policy sectors. Additionally, it needs to recognise that fragmentation caused by increased numbers and, above all, ideological distance points to a shift from ‘moderate’ to ‘polarised’ differentiation.

differentiated integration projects, from the euro, through Schengen and European Security and Defence Policy initiatives, to aerospace and industry projects. It was a core that preferred not to speak its name too loudly or to formally organise itself in these terms.

### The paradox of integration at macro- and EU-levels

In seeking to unravel and explain the patterns at work in differentiated integration, the Cardiff workshop highlighted a paradox. The shift from moderate towards polarised differentiation within the EU coexisted with a different pattern at the Europe-wide level. In other words, the broad configuration of unitary and differentiated integration changed with the level of analysis.

On a macro-European level, differentiation continued but at the same time seemed to have diminished since the end of the Cold War. EU enlargement – alongside Council of Europe and NATO enlargements – gave greater unity to the continent in terms of shared rights and obligations. The EU was in effect an expanding ‘core’ Europe which exhibited powerful gravitational attraction on non-members, exhibited in the

lengthening queue of those seeking entry by compliance with the EU’s *acquis communautaire*. NATO enlargement played a similar role in the sphere of ‘hard’ power; the Council of Europe in rights and culture. Thus in 2009 France returned to full NATO membership, not least to secure stronger influence on wider debates about European defence and security arrangements. Larger geo-strategic and political economy factors underpinned this process of unitary unification around the EU, the Council of Europe and NATO. They offered secure anchors for newly liberal democratic societies that sought to combine open-market economies with generous social welfare.

This greater geographical spread of unitary integration went hand in hand with more pronounced internal differentiation as the EU, like NATO, had to accommodate more pronounced diversity with a broadened policy scope and institutional deepening. Within this macro-level context, patterns of internal differentiation became more polarised on the ideological dimension of distance and intensity, whilst differentiation also exhibited itself in a complex variety of trade and accession relationships with outsiders.

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The workshop held at Cardiff University on 10–12 September 2009 was supported by a British Academy Small Research Grant. With Angelos Sepos (Manchester University), Professor Dyson is editing the workshop proceedings as *Which Europe? The Politics of Differentiated Integration*, to be published by Palgrave in 2010.

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*The Euro at Ten: Europeanization, Power, and Convergence*, edited by Kenneth Dyson (Oxford University Press, 2008), and *Central Banks in the Age of the Euro: Europeanization, Convergence and Power*, edited by Kenneth Dyson & Martin Marcussen (Oxford University Press, 2009), arose from British Academy conferences held in May and November 2007, respectively.

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# Reassessing the seventies: the benighted decade

On 23 September 2009, the British Academy hosted a workshop to take a fresh look at the 1970s – a watershed in post-war British history. It was followed in the evening by a public panel discussion, chaired by Professor Laurie Taylor (presenter of Radio 4's 'Thinking Allowed'). Dr Lawrence Black and Dr Hugh Pemberton introduce the issues that need to be tackled when studying a decade that continues to resonate strongly in our recollections of the recent past.

In the past year Britain (and the rest of the world) has grappled with the worst financial crisis since 1929. In Britain's case, this has both invoked and reinforced memories of

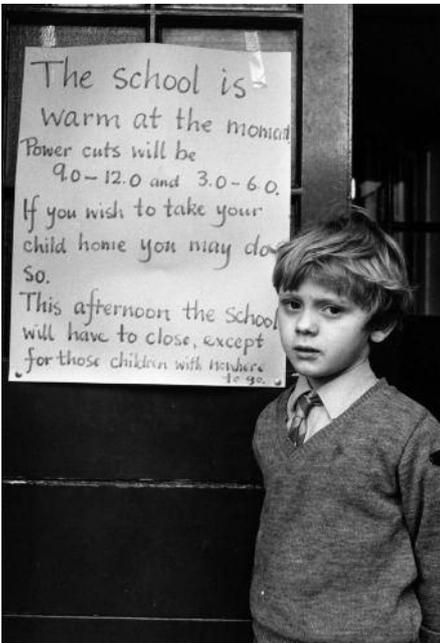


Figure 1. In February 1972, power cuts during a miner's strike forced schools to close. Photo: Chris Djukanovic/Evening Standard/Getty Images.

the seventies. These conjure up an image of a dismal, benighted decade, with unemployment and inflation at levels not experienced since the 1930s and Napoleonic Wars respectively. Energy was rationed, shop windows fell dark, and candles (which had been removed from the Retail Price Index in 1956 and thus apparently consigned to history) sold out during the three-day week.

Racial conflict and terrorist bombings and assassinations became commonplace. To many Britons, Britain's entry into the Common Market seemed emblematic of its declining importance in the world. In 1976 the government was forced to go 'cap-in-hand' to the IMF to secure a \$3.9 billion loan (the largest ever made by that institution). Strikes seemed endemic and work-to-rules, go-slows, demarcation, flying and secondary pickets became common parlance. Also endemic, in assorted moral panics, were muggers, scroungers, streakers, punks and hooligans. The country seemed to some to be becoming ungovernable. As nationalism advanced in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, the very future of the United Kingdom could be doubted.

All this easily elided into apocalyptic talk of crisis. In 1973, as the three-day week approached, the *Daily Mirror* wondered, 'Is everyone going mad?' By 1979, the Sun was warning '3 MILLION FACE THE DOLE QUEUE' (ironically in the light of developments in the early-1980s).

The titles of influential contemporary studies impute what the seventies meant: *Is Britain Dying?*, *Britain against itself* (two American studies), *Britain's Economic Problem*, *The Break-up of Britain*, *Policing the Crisis*, *The End of Britain* (Figure 2). The hegemonic memories and representations of Britain's 'decline' in the seventies have become a byword for all that was worst about post-war Britain. The reasons why these have persisted for so long are complex. We would like here to highlight four reasons in particular.

First, the economic difficulties came as a considerable shock to contemporaries after a quarter of a century of continuous economic growth and rising affluence.

Second, the seventies were portrayed by the British media, not least by newspapers, in a way that created an impression of a country uniquely challenged by the difficult economic conditions in the world.

Third, if journalists writing the 'first draft of history' were responsible for a particular, and partial, view of Britain in the seventies, the second draft was largely written by social scientists in the 1970s and 1980s. On the whole, they were negative – assuming Britain was in decline, for example, and surprisingly unaware of developments elsewhere in the world.

Fourth, we would emphasise the way in which the politics of the ensuing 30 years saw both Thatcher and Blair hardwire such negative memories and representations of the decade into the national and popular consciousness – the quintessential image of failure in this vision being the winter of discontent.

The result is such that the memory of the 1970s is often as intense for those who weren't there as for those that were.

Nor has the decade enjoyed the best of reputations amongst historians. For economic historians it marked the end of the post-war boom; for political historians it is the time the post-war consensus fractured; for cultural historians the bright lights of the 1960s cast a long shadow.

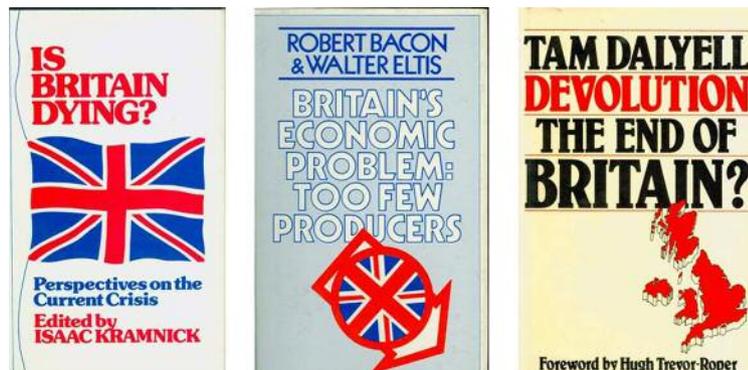


Figure 2. Portrayals of crisis published in the 1970s.

Recent perspectives have reinforced a strong sense that the 1970s were a more grounded, visceral experience than the utopias of the 1960s, the consumerist 1980s, or the years of the long-boom after 1992. This is firmly apparent in BBC TV's hit retro-science fiction drama *Life on Mars*. The nineties and noughties saw a spate of films with a similar sensibility – *The Full Monty*, *Billy Elliot*, *Brassed Off*. Nostalgia for harsh, unpleasant, but certain realities can also be detected in Mark Garnett's history, plotting Britons' drift *From anger to apathy* after 1975. With the recent recession, the media has drawn ready parallels with the 1970s – 'make-do-and-mend' (last aired during the 1970s' three-day week) is back in fashion. So are cooking, sewing, DIY, and allotment gardening (reawakening memories of *The Good Life*). Commentators saw in Brown's failure to call the expected election in the autumn of 2007 uncanny echoes of Callaghan's unexpected decision not to go to the country in 1978.

#### Four representations of the 1970s

In four key representations of the seventies – punks, hooligans, strikers, and failed politicians – can be seen evidence and causes of decline but, in longer-term context and taking into account in-depth studies, also some grounds and terms for rehabilitating the 1970s.

**Punks.** Dick Hebdidge's *Subculture* explained how 'punks were ... *dramatizing* what had come to be called "Britain's decline"' and had 'appropriated the rhetoric of crisis which filled the airwaves and editorials throughout the period.' Like Thatcherism, the likes of Malcolm McLaren were pitching themselves against consensus, liberals, and hippies (Figure 3).

**Hooligans.** Football hooliganism provided (like punk) a popular and rich vein of media moral panics/folk devils, a cause for authoritarian populists and a rich vein of sociological research – analysed variously in terms of declining behavioural standards, the fracturing of working-class social cohesion, race, masculinity, and was held to be fed by popular irreverence, alienation and nationalism.

**Strikers.** If there was a certain affection for Wolfie Smith (of BBC TV sit-com *Citizen Smith*), then Derek Robinson – an AEU shop steward at Longbridge responsible for more

than 500 stoppages between 1977 and 1979 which, British Leyland management estimated, cost the plant production of 113,000 engines – became an emblem of all that was wrong with the unions. Trade union membership grew in the seventies, but their public popularity fell. Though most establishments were actually unaffected by strikes, the unions were widely seen to have brought down governments in 1970 and particularly in 1974 and 1979. Unions, in short, were given little political credit for the sacrifices made by union members, particularly in the public sector, to see off inflation via the acceptance of reductions in real wages. They were ripe for political and media pillorying, and the winter of discontent was constituted by both as the epitome of their faults – an interpretation relied upon by Thatcher, Blair and the media thereafter.

'*Useless politicians*'. Closely linked with the perception that unions were 'out of control' was the perceived failure of incompetent and pusillanimous politicians to govern effectively. Paradoxically, there was much to be gained by politicians of both the left and the right by playing up this 'political failure'.

If these are key representations of the decade,



Figure 3. An icon of the later 1970s. Johnny Rotten (John Lydon) of the Sex Pistols, performing live in January 1978. Photo: Richard E. Aaron/Redferns.

how well do they fit the facts? To date, the seventies have been comparatively ill-served by historians (as is the case for the USA). Thatcherism and New Labour are much better served by academic literature. Other disciplines and journalists (most recently Andy Beckett and Francis Wheen) have seemed keener to delve into the seventies. Yet the 1970s, despite this historical neglect, was the fulcrum around which the post-war period moved in virtually all the sub-fields of history.

#### Were the seventies so different, so bad?

There are other perspectives on offer, in a recent cultural history, for instance, Howard Sounes, who largely blots out economic problems, sees it as a 'brilliant' decade.

Some familiar trends were recognizable: feminism, sexual liberation. Trends associated with affluence continued – such as domestication and overseas holidays. Culturally it is hard to argue that the 1970s were less vibrant than the 1960s. Winston Fletcher's history of advertising, for instance, sees the seventies as 'golden years' which saw 'more creativity, more innovations and more attainments ... than any others'. Of *Campaign's* 100 best ads of the century, the most came from the 1970s (Figure 4). There were continuing advances on 'sixties issues': radical theatre; nationalism (the 'break-up' of Britain was a democratic cause for many); and important legislative measures – on equal pay, domestic violence, race relations, consumer rights and pensions – that belie the decade's image of austerity and conflict.

Some myths can easily be burst. Nick Tiratsoo has effectively argued that the political and economic travails were global. Strikes, fabled as the British 'disease', turn out to have been more virulent in Italy and the USA. Nor were deficiencies in British management hard to locate.

An alternative way of thinking about this was that Britain was transitioning into the first post-industrial nation. This was a decade of new environmental preoccupations, of ruralist cultural tendencies (from *Small is Beautiful* to *The Country Diary of an Edwardian Lady*). These were boom years for the heritage industry – Hewison noted in 1987 that half of Britain's museums were founded after 1971.



Figure 4. The creativity of the 1970s ... and nostalgia. The 'Martians' advertisement for Cadbury's Smash is still voted to be one of the most popular of all time.

Even in political economy, there is a more positive story to be told. Britain did relatively badly for much of the decade, with living standards actually falling between 1975 and 1976. Thereafter, however, there was a rapid recovery and, by 1980 Britain's growth in nominal GDP per head since 1970 was considerably better than the OECD average.

### New ways of thinking about the 1970s

The enduring image of a benighted seventies in thrall both to a bankrupt politics and to excessively powerful trade unions fitted both Thatcherite and Blair visions and was burnished by both. As Thatcher battled the unions with a strong state, so Blair distanced New Labour from 'old' Labour in the 1970s, vilifying the unions, embracing the market and a more inclusive, liberal, and individualistic culture. This construction of the seventies has to be grasped before it can be first de-constructed and then re-constructed.

Britain's crisis was not unique and several recent studies have suggested parallels with the US experience. US historians have sometimes seen the seventies as an 'in-between' decade, but interest in it has recently boomed. In particular they have looked to explain why the political and social legacy of the 1960s was the rise of the right. Works by Schulman and Zelizer contend that the tactics and language of the 1960s' left-liberals (grassroots mobilisation, civil rights, identity politics) were mobilised by the right. They

aver reformers made more ground in affirmative action and rights than social and economic differences. This helps explain a similar paradox in Britain. Likewise, as Curran has hinted, the primary political battleground in Britain from the seventies was more cultural than economic (where neo-liberalism's supplanting of Keynesianism was hegemonic).

The reasons for the relative neglect of the 1970s by historians are not clear, since the papers are now virtually completely open. One reason may be that contemporary historians are still mining possibilities presented by the wealth of archival material available for earlier decades – or that the 'golden age', and particularly the 1960s, provides more congenial research topics. We wonder, however, if a key issue might be the centrality of political economy to the experience of the decade and a certain disconnection between this and other social science and historical analyses.

For those seeking to rethink the history of the seventies, we would highlight the following key questions for contemporary historians:

- Was the 'crisis' of the 1970s as bad as it has been (and was at the time) painted?
- Why did the decade see such a polarisation of British politics and such social and cultural discord? And why has it continued to resonate as such?
- How significant was the decade in the broad sweep of post-war British history?

However, to answer these questions we must confront some key issues:

#### *How should we periodise the seventies?*

This is difficult for political, economic and cultural historians to agree on yet, we would argue, plainly in many areas of British life something fundamental did change during the decade.

*How should we deal with the issue of politicisation?* Since memories of the decade have, to a large degree, been politically constructed (and continually reinforced) by both right and left and 'spin' and continue to be so, historians must both explore and be wary of this.

*How best can we deal with the problem of economics?* Economic problems and perceptions of absolute and relative performance lie at the heart of the 1970s. Thus historians of all stripes must necessarily engage with the decade's economics if they are to provide the necessary context for their research. Plainly, there is ample scope for sub-disciplinary co-operation with economic history. Yet the discipline of economic history is in marked decline by contrast with more dynamic social science analyses or cultural history. Where does this leave us?

In conclusion, therefore, the seventies have come to be understood through the prism of later events and the decade's politically motivated construction by both left and right, but historians must seek to go beyond that. Here Peter Hall's 'marketplace for ideas' may prove a powerful tool for thinking about the decade. It is surely time, indeed a particularly apt moment, to rethink the seventies in such light.

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The panel discussion is available as a podcast from [www.britac.ac.uk/medialibrary/](http://www.britac.ac.uk/medialibrary/)

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# Explaining the Fall of European Communism in 1989

On 15–16 October 2009, the British Academy held a symposium on ‘The Collapse of Communism in Europe: A Re-examination Twenty Years After’. The convenor, **Professor Archie Brown FBA**, here offers his own reflections.

**I**N EARLY 1991, as tensions rose within the Soviet Union, one of my Russian friends said to a colleague: ‘We need a Bismarck.’ ‘Why Bismarck?’ his friend replied. ‘We’ve got Gorbachev. He also united Germany.’

The fall of Communism in Eastern Europe, the end of the Cold War, the unification of Germany, and the disintegration of the Soviet Union are all interconnected developments. The reasons for these dramatic changes, including the great symbolic moment of the fall of the Berlin wall on 9 November 1989, are many and varied. Yet, the jocular remark of the Russian scholar in 1991 points to one factor crucial to all these transformations of the political landscape – the changes in Moscow which saw not only a liberalisation and partial democratisation of the Soviet system but also the transformation of Soviet foreign policy.

## Reagan and Gorbachev

Mikhail Gorbachev was determined to end the Cold War, and he found a much readier negotiating partner in Ronald Reagan than either Reagan’s most fervent supporters or fiercest opponents expected. Indeed, it is worth recalling that, in addition to Reagan’s conservative Republican allies, American politicians who thought of themselves as ‘realists’ – among them, Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger, Alexander Haig and Brent Scowcroft – were highly critical of Reagan’s readiness to sign the INF Treaty, authorising the removal of all intermediate-range nuclear missiles from Europe. The Treaty was signed during Gorbachev’s visit to Washington in December 1987 (with the exact timing of the ceremony determined by the advice of Nancy Reagan’s astrologer in California).

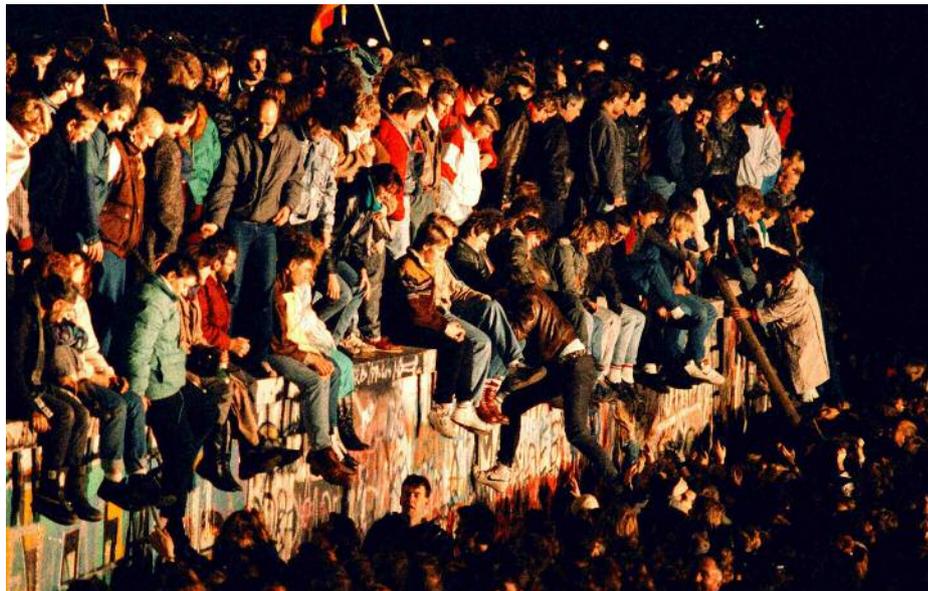


Figure 1. People on top of the Berlin Wall, on the night of 9–10 November 1989. Photo: Ullstein Bild/TopFoto.

Reagan’s critics thought he had been seduced by Gorbachev’s charm and had gone soft. Yet the Treaty meant that the Soviet Union would have to destroy more nuclear weapons than did the United States. The Soviet side also accepted for the first time intrusive on-site inspections. Moreover, this was the ‘zero option’ which Reagan had proposed early in his first term – dismissed out of hand at that time by the pre-perestroika Soviet leadership. As the American Ambassador to Moscow (1987–1991) Jack Matlock noted, many of the people objecting to the INF Treaty had been among the zero option’s most enthusiastic original supporters, but that was only because they were convinced that the Soviet Union would never accept it.

By distancing himself from former allies and supporters, and preferring the advice of Secretary of State George Shultz to that of the Pentagon and the CIA, Reagan made a serious contribution to qualitative improvement in East-West relations during his second term. However, his presidency had overlapped with no fewer than four Soviet leaders – Brezhnev, Andropov, Chernenko and Gorbachev – and nothing changed for the better in East-West

relations or throughout Eastern Europe until the last leader of the Soviet Union emerged. Even before his first term ended, Reagan had concluded that it was high time the two sides began talking to each other, but, as he complained: ‘These guys keep dying on me!’ However, it was not only rigor mortis but the rigid policies and mindsets of the pre-perestroika Soviet leadership which prevented any progress.

Contrary to quite widespread belief, it was not Reagan’s massive increase in military expenditure, his Strategic Defence Initiative (on anti-missile defence), or his rhetorical belligerence (referring, for example, to the Soviet Union as an ‘evil empire’ in 1983, the same year in which he announced SDI) that produced a change of heart in Moscow. The colder the Cold War became – and it turned very cold in 1983 – the stronger was the position of hard-liners in Moscow. It was the Ronald Reagan who was prepared for dialogue, and who shared with Gorbachev a desire to rid the world of nuclear weapons, who helped make substantial progress in East-West relations possible. His hard-line credentials, when accompanied by a growing

belief that the Soviet Union was changing significantly for the better, were an asset. Given that even Reagan came under severe criticism in Washington for his willingness to negotiate with his Soviet counterpart, it is easy to imagine how difficult it would have been for a president without such ironclad anti-Communist credentials to pursue exactly the same policy.

Easing of the Cold War tensions helped Gorbachev domestically. It is a widespread myth that he was popular only in the West. Removing the fear of world war mattered in the Soviet Union – even more than it did in the United States, given the devastation wreaked in the USSR by the Second World War, with 27 million people killed. At the midway point of his less than seven years as Soviet leader, the fruits of his foreign policy helped Gorbachev substantially. He was, in fact, the most highly esteemed person in the Soviet Union for his first five years in office. It was as late as May 1990 that Boris Yeltsin overtook him (as we know from the most professional survey research). By that time the new freedom of speech, publication and assembly had brought to the surface all manner of grievances and had given rise to expectations which were not being met, especially in the economy. But transition from a Communist system, in the Soviet Union as well as in Eastern Europe, had taken place one year earlier – in 1989.

The easing of international tension in 1987 and 1988, when Reagan made his first-ever visit to Moscow (and, strolling in Red Square with Gorbachev, told a reporter that he no longer regarded the Soviet Union as an ‘evil empire’ – that was ‘another time, another era’), weakened the military-industrial complex, the KGB and party conservatives within the Soviet establishment. Gorbachev and his allies, among whom Alexander Yakovlev was particularly important, were able to push a programme of radical change through the Nineteenth Conference of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in the summer of 1988. This included plans for the pluralisation of the Soviet political system, involving contested elections for a legislature with real power. The elections took place in March 1989, the first really significant electoral contest in the entire Soviet bloc.



Figure 2. Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev during their walk in Red Square which symbolised a new Soviet-American relationship, Moscow, 31 May 1988. Photo: AP Photo/Ira Schwartz.

## Growing freedom

More dramatic elections were to be held in Poland less than three months later when Solidarity won an overwhelming victory in all the seats they were allowed to contest, following round-table talks with the Polish party-state authorities. The Soviet Union did not have an organised oppositional group remotely comparable to Solidarity, but party members had competed against one another in March 1989 on fundamentally different policy platforms. Yeltsin (still a nominal member of the party's Central Committee) was victorious in a constituency which embraced the whole of Moscow, faced by an opponent who had the backing of the party apparatus. This abandonment of 'democratic centralism' went a long way to vitiating also the 'leading role' (a euphemism for monopoly of power) of the Communist Party. The two major pillars of a Communist system had been undermined by the reformist wing of the party leadership itself.

The growing freedom within the Soviet Union – astonishingly, even Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* was serialised in the large-circulation journal *Novy mir* in 1989 – did much to raise expectations throughout Eastern Europe. The change in Soviet foreign policy was, however, the ultimate facilitator of all that happened in 1989. At the Nineteenth Party Conference and again at the United Nations in December 1988, Gorbachev declared that the people of every state had the right to decide for themselves what kind of system they wished to live in. This, he added, was a 'universal principle', allowing no exceptions,

and applied both to socialist and capitalist countries. The UN speech was consciously designed to be a 'Fulton in reverse' – to bring to an end the division of Europe and the wider world which had been dramatised by Winston Churchill in his 'iron curtain' speech at Fulton, Missouri, in March 1946.

This definitive rejection of the 'Brezhnev doctrine', whereby the Soviet leadership had accorded itself the right to intervene in any Warsaw Pact country in order to 'defend socialism', was, then, the decisive facilitating condition for regime-change in 1989. Important as Ronald Reagan was, and as indeed Pope John Paul II was (his triumphal return to his native Poland in 1979 was pivotal in the rise of Solidarity), neither Reagan's military power nor the Pope's moral authority could bring Communism down. It was the occupants of the Kremlin, not those of the White House or Vatican, who had locked the doors to change in Eastern Europe. It was they who held the keys that could open them.

## Longer-term pressures

There were, of course, longer-term reasons for the demise of Communism, although they did not determine why it ended when it did. While command economies could have notable successes in particular areas – including, in the Soviet case, the space programme and weaponry – they were less successful than regulated market economies. China's remarkable economic progress of recent decades is not an exception to the generalisation. It has been achieved by the party leadership's jettisoning of the essential

features of a Communist economic system and their embrace of the market and a substantial private sector. However, an authoritarian regime prepared to use the full panoply of coercive power at its disposal, and with a sophisticated system of rewards for conformist behaviour and a hierarchy of sanctions for political deviance, is not doomed to collapse merely by a slowdown in the rate of economic growth or the poor quality of its consumer goods.

Communist systems would have come to an end throughout most of East Europe decades earlier but for the perfectly valid perception of the peoples of Poland, Hungary, East Germany and post-1968 Czechoslovakia that behind their local party bosses stood a Soviet military superpower willing to use whatever means they found necessary to retain what they saw as their legitimate geopolitical gains from the Second World War. This reality had been amply demonstrated in East Germany in 1953, Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968. Poland was the most consistently obstreperous barracks in the camp, but there, too, leading oppositionists could not wholly rule out the possibility of a Soviet invasion.

Politburo minutes show that the Kremlin seriously contemplated military intervention in Poland in August 1980, only to decide that this would create more problems than it resolved. Throughout 1981 the Brezhnev leadership put pressure on their Polish counterparts to institute their own crackdown. With the imposition of martial law in December 1981, this happened. Polish workers had shaken the foundations of their supposed 'workers' state', yet Solidarity was reduced to a shadow of its former self in the years between 1982 and 1987, living an underground existence and holding meetings clandestinely in church halls. It was transformative change in Moscow in 1987–88 which enabled Solidarity to re-emerge and play a decisive role in Poland's transition to democratic rule.



Figure 3. Speakers at the evening panel discussion on 15 October 2009: Professor Ferenc Miszlivetz, Professor Timothy Garton Ash, Professor Robert Legvold, Professor Archie Brown FBA (Chairman), Dr Lilia Shevtsova, Dr Andrei Grachev, Bridget Kendall. The occasion produced a fascinating range of perspectives from the contributors, whether as western observers, or as key participants at the heart of events in 1989. The presentations are available as a podcast from [www.britac.ac.uk/medialibrary/](http://www.britac.ac.uk/medialibrary/)



Figure 4. Vaclav Havel waves from a balcony in Prague's Wenceslas Square, on 10 December 1989, after the constitution of the new Czechoslovak government. Photo: Lubomir Kotek/AFP/Getty Images.

Over the long run it was not only the failures of Communist systems which eroded their authority. Some of the successes did so as well. Karl Marx argued that capitalism contained the seeds of its own destruction. By nurturing a highly educated population, Communism planted the seeds of *its* destruction. The more educated the population were and the larger the higher education sector, the more dissatisfied the recipients of that education became with the censorship and with their inability to enjoy the same rights of foreign travel as their professional counterparts in Western countries. Of those who *were* allowed to travel abroad, party intellectuals from research institutes made up a disproportionately large number, in addition to party and government officials.

Travel does not automatically broaden the mind. Former Soviet Foreign Ministers Vyacheslav Molotov and Andrei Gromyko offered in their time ample evidence to the contrary. Yet foreign travel in many cases did play an important part in changing mindsets. Groucho Marx, not Karl, once asked: 'Who are you going to believe? Me, or your own eyes?' Gorbachev was an especially important example of an official who preferred the evidence of his own eyes to Soviet propaganda about life in the West when he made a number of short visits to Western Europe in the 1970s. Alexander Yakovlev spent an entire decade as Soviet Ambassador to Canada. He returned to Moscow in 1983 much more critical of the Soviet system than he had been ten years earlier.

In the course of 1989 the pace of change in Eastern Europe was driven by a combination of massive popular discontent, emerging oppositional associations, remarkable individuals such as Lech Wałesa and Václav Havel, and in at least the case of Hungary (especially in the person of Imre Pozsgay) by serious reformists within the Communist leadership. Massive street demonstrations, whether in Budapest (for the reburial of Imre Nagy), Warsaw, Leipzig or Prague, played a large part in hastening the end of Communist rule. Yet that end would have come far earlier had the peoples of East-Central Europe not believed that overt resistance would merely make a bad situation worse. In this anniversary year, the pictures from 1989 tell an important part of the story, but far from all that matters. The key decisions that made the events of that year possible were taken not in 1989, but in 1988, and they were made not in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin or Prague, but in Moscow.

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Archival research for Professor Archie Brown's book, *The Rise and Fall of Communism* (Bodley Head, London, 2009), was supported by a British Academy Small Research Grant.

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## Did Civil Resistance End the Soviet Empire?

A second panel discussion, held at the British Academy on 27 October 2009, provided another perspective on the events leading up to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The new book *Civil Resistance and Power Politics*, edited by Sir Adam Roberts FBA and Professor Timothy Garton Ash, examines the experience of non-violent action from Gandhi to the present. To discuss the specific role of civil resistance in ending the Soviet Empire, the two editors were joined on the panel by Dr Janusz Onyszkiewicz (a leading figure in Solidarity in Poland in the 1980s, and Polish defence minister in the 1990s) and General Lord Guthrie (who was a British army commander in Germany at the time the Wall

fell). The discussion identified the significance of the 10 years of resistance by the Solidarity movement, which set an early example for other East Europeans, and the dramatic events at the Wall on 9 November 1989, when the huge crowds of East Berliners turned a planned concession by the regime into a victory for people power. A recording can be heard via [www.britac.ac.uk/medialibrary/](http://www.britac.ac.uk/medialibrary/)

Speakers at the evening panel discussion on 27 October 2009: Timothy Garton Ash, Adam Roberts (President of the British Academy), Janusz Onyszkiewicz, and Charles Guthrie.



# A Humanist's Conversation with the 20th Century

## (Isaiah Berlin, 1909–1997)

*On 6 June 2009, Wolfson College, Oxford held a day of celebrations to mark the centenary of the birth of Isaiah Berlin, the eminent philosopher who had played such an important part in its foundation. As part of the occasion, Dr James H. Billington, the Librarian of Congress, delivered the British Academy's Isaiah Berlin lecture, and provided his listeners with some personal reflections on the great man himself.*

READING THE WRITINGS of and about Isaiah Berlin, I find myself drawn into reliving the experience of what we so valued in this uniquely wonderful man: listening to him talk.



Figure 1. Sir Isaiah Berlin, *President of the British Academy (1974–78)*, and his wife Aline, in 1974. Photo: Alice Kelikian.

Underlying almost everything he said was a pervasive humanism in the fullest sense of the word. He loved to talk about how people living and dead both reflected and affected consequential aspects of the human experience. Isaiah did not merely describe, he recreated and led us into the thought world of revolutionary young Hegelians in his early work on Marx and then of the reactionary ultramontanist, Joseph de Maistre, in his famed essay on Tolstoy.

Isaiah himself was neither revolutionary nor reactionary. What he did, and continued to do, in a variety of lectures, conversations, and writings was to widen the range of thinkers with whom the analytical and empirical British philosophical tradition needed to converse. He was a respected, even beloved, participant in the professional internal dialogue within that

tradition. I remember how something Isaiah had written about the very different tradition of phenomenology precipitated a lively and lengthy late evening conversation at Oxford in the early 1950s, with all sides citing Berlin as their authority.

As a brilliant student of the classics – both ancient and modern – he had an historically proven basis for beginning his capacious, humanistic conversation with the modern and postmodern world. He used the magic and momentum of speech to bring the thoughts of many largely-forgotten seminal figures from continental Europe across the channel and the Atlantic.

### Circles

I have suggested elsewhere how Isaiah's interests and influence radiated out in concentric circles from Headington and Oxford, to all of Britain, much of Western Europe and on to the continent-wide eastern and western frontiers of European civilisation in Russia and the United States.

He could converse with all of that world in all of its major languages. And his voice radiated out in what could be described as another set of concentric circles, that was oral rather than cartographic. At the innermost circle was Isaiah speaking one-on-one, something I had the enormous privilege of experiencing when he was my doctoral thesis adviser from 1950 to 1953 and on a number of occasions thereafter. Somewhat broader was the second circle of his friends, colleagues, and admirers with whom he shared his wit and wisdom as generously as he did in one-on-one settings.

The next two even wider concentric circles were those in which he publicly engaged his broadening popular audience. First were his Oxford lectures, in which he invited thinking people into trains of thought that he developed as he spoke. Then came the

widest circle of all, when he reached out to people of all kinds on radio to affirm and reinforce the values and decencies of the civilisation that he not only enriched but exemplified.

### Philosophy, history, and the 20th century

His friend Bernard Williams commended him for practising 'a form of philosophy that did not ignore history'. He examined a host of European thinkers from the 17th to the 19th centuries in the relative tranquility of Oxford where he worked, relating them to both the horrors and the hopes of the tumultuous 20th century. He eloquently defended freedom of the individual against authoritarianisms of all kinds, and against deceptive modern appeals to sacrifice freedom now in order to achieve some remote future goal. Sustaining and expanding human creativity seemed to depend for him more on the real conditions of freedom than on the formal structure of government.

He was concerned with what Michael Ignatieff called the 'human horizon without which societies could scarcely survive' – a horizon Isaiah found in Britain's 'civilized sense of human reality'.

Isaiah said his decision to move beyond the technical philosophy in which he had excelled into broader concerns came during a long, lonely wartime flight in a darkened airplane across the Atlantic.

In the early post-war years, Isaiah saw on the human horizon a real danger emerging in Stalin's USSR to the survival of the freedom he deeply cherished in Britain. He had experienced first hand the Soviet system at its birth, seeing a revolutionary mob lynch a helpless man in St. Petersburg – and then watching from abroad how Stalin expanded power and repressed freedom.

In the fall of 1945, shortly after allied forces had brought an end to German Nazism, he wrote an extraordinary memorandum to the British Foreign Office suggesting that a very different kind of force would also ultimately bring an end to Soviet Communism. The Cold War had not yet begun then, and the Western world still has not fully grasped – even now, 18 years after the collapse of the USSR – what he had to say.

Isaiah separated the Russian from the Soviet elements, and concluded in his 1945 memorandum:

The principal hope of a new flowering of the liberated Russian genius lies in the still unexhausted vitality, the omnivorous curiosity, the astonishingly undiminished moral and intellectual appetite of this most imaginative and least narrow of peoples, which in the long – perhaps very long – run, and despite the appalling damage done to it by the chains which bind it at present, still shows greater promise of gigantic achievement in the use of its vast material resources, and, by the same token, *pari passu*, in the arts and sciences, than any other contemporary society.

Those steeped in Russian culture and with a humanistic perspective like Berlin saw more clearly than behaviourist social scientists that internal moral forces within the Russian people themselves could ultimately prevail against the unprecedented power and manipulative genius of the Stalinist state.

### Inspirational teacher

I first met Isaiah Berlin through a student's transcription of his spoken words. He had given a series of lectures on the 19th-century Russian intelligentsia at Harvard in the early post-war years. I read the extensive notes in a single sitting and shortly thereafter was dazzled by his magisterial article in *Foreign Affairs*: 'Political Ideas in the 20th century'. I knew well before graduating from Princeton that this was a voice I wanted to hear and learn from. And, when I was fortunate enough to get to Oxford, I had the added good fortune of having him as my doctoral supervisor during the last days of Stalin and one of the most creative periods of Isaiah's remarkable life.

I deliberately chose as my thesis topic Nicholas Mikhailovsky, the leading radical journalist in Russia in the late 19th century,

who came closest to continuing the anti-authoritarian and westernising tradition of Alexander Herzen, for whom Isaiah had a special affection. It was a happy choice in that it enabled me to hear Isaiah's searching commentary on almost all the important thinkers and enduring issues that Mikhailovsky had to deal with, including the first group in human history to proudly call themselves terrorists, the earliest Russian Marxists, and a flood of largely forgotten figures in both Russia and the West, who offered alternative theories of history and human development. But my choice of thesis topic was otherwise an unhappy one in that Mikhailovsky's writings were interminably verbose and irredeemably boring. Here again Isaiah came to my rescue, probably without realising it, since it was more by his example than by prescription.

I had first become interested in Russia as a schoolboy and taken Russian lessons as a result of reading *War and Peace* with a Russian dictionary while Hitler was repeating Napoleon's mistakes about Russia during World War II. When I first met him, Isaiah was talking about Tolstoy as he prepared *The Hedgehog and the Fox*, translating Turgenev's *First Love*, and speaking in the limpid, pre-revolutionary language of high Russian culture rather than the cliché-ridden polemics of popular journalism. Slogging on with my work on Mikhailovsky, I concurrently found myself reading almost all of Turgenev, more of

Tolstoy, Chekhov and others who wrote in clear Russian and in the realist tradition like Isaiah himself.

Isaiah was a perceptive and precise critic of the written word and a very conscientious thesis supervisor. I will never forget the time I discovered him in the dingy downstairs entryway of my walk-up digs on the outskirts of Oxford, writing me an apologetic note that he would not be able to see me that day because of a sudden need to go to London. I later found out it had something to do with the royal family. But even so (and with the motor running in a waiting limousine) he stopped for a minute or so to convey the essence of the comments on my writing that he had planned to make at our scheduled meeting.

I was, figuratively speaking, soon to hear his voice again in an unexpected way towards the end of my subsequent time in the American army. I had for a time the responsibility for providing high government officials with non-classified think pieces about the Soviet Union, and I found among the very best several personal letters written by Isaiah to American friends. They had the unmistakable flavour of having been dictated from an uncommonly rich speaking voice, and they represented the most penetrating description of the inner dynamics of Stalinism that I have ever heard then or since. I do not remember the dates and have never been able to recover them, but some of the analysis that I remember

was already suggested in 'Generalissimo Stalin and the Art of Government', an article that he published in 1952 in *Foreign Affairs* under the pseudonym O. Utis.

### Humanist

In his later years he was less focused on Russia and more on the humanistic enterprise in general. He was also intent on creating and animating for his beloved Oxford the innovative new college, Wolfson.



Figure 2. Isaiah Berlin 'topping out' the new Wolfson College buildings, December 1972. Photo: Shepherd Building Group Ltd.

Out of his continuing conversation with the waning 20th century emerged a set of core values that he articulated with humour and nuanced reasoning. He became for a widening number of admirers a role model for what a humanist can and should be in our often dehumanised and intellectually fragmented world.

He was first and foremost a friend of freedom through which alone humanity could survive and creativity thrive. He stressed the negative concept of freedom *from* outside oppression, but he also recognised the continuing human search for some positive ideal of freedom *for* some higher purpose. Ever the realist, he saw that there were often conflicts between equally noble, but inherently irreconcilable values between societies, and even within individual leaders. He had a deep scepticism about what might be called the unintended consequences of human engineering, exemplified in his favourite citation from Kant that 'Out of the crooked timber of humanity no straight thing was ever made.'

However, he opposed vigorously the powerful currents in modern thinking that suggest that impersonal forces basically control the human experience. He argued against historical determinism, distinguished pluralism from relativism, and gave us colourful but balanced portraits of a wide variety of active thinkers and leaders who made indisputably positive contributions in the ongoing struggle to understand and improve the human condition.

Isaiah saw weaknesses as well as strengths in almost everyone; and wrote about them with originality and humour. He tells us how he grew to like the critic Edmund Wilson even more after Wilson visited him in bad humour and insulted almost everyone he met. Isaiah generally liked Americans, but described Hollywood after visiting it in the 1940s as an 'accumulation of European decay in a series of rock pools'. He added that 'the only agreeable thought is that, since all these people are accumulated there, they cannot also be somewhere else, which is a great source of relief.'

Some of the happiest expressions on Isaiah's face came when I happened to see him holding a book. He did not just read them, he conversed with books, with authors and with librarians like John Simmons, who found him Russian books even when they were misplaced or miscatalogued.

When I created a major international prize for lifetime achievement in the study of humanity within the world's largest and most multi-lingual collection of books, the Library of Congress, I had in mind the example of Isaiah. He is, alas, no longer with us: this rich and ranging modern Jewish sensibility, this perpetuator of the best in Russian culture, this sunny son of Britain, this generous friend and tutor of so many Americans.

He represented the kind of humanist needed in our gloomy time. Harold Macmillan asked rhetorically at the dedication of Wolfson College: 'If you happened to be in a mood of melancholy or frustration, who would you rather see come into your room than Isaiah Berlin?'

### Epilogue

At the end of his evocative memoir of his only two return trips to Russia (in the mid-1940s and the mid-1950s), he focused on the two great poets that he had seen the most of and whom he most admired, Anna Akhmatova and Boris Pasternak.

Here, as in his moving epilogue in the same volume about his Jewish forebears in Eastern Europe, Isaiah speaks with heartfelt humility about those who suffered in the 20th century. At the very end, he says of these two great poets:

My meetings and conversations with Boris Pasternak and Anna Akhmatova, my realization of the conditions, hardly describable, under which they lived and worked, and the treatment to which they were subjected, and the fact that I was allowed to enter into a personal relationship with them both, indeed friendship with them both, affected me profoundly and permanently changed my outlook. When I see their names in print, or hear them mentioned, I remember vividly the expressions on their faces, their gestures and their words. When I read their writings, I can, to this day, hear the sounds of their voices.

This is the way we remember Isaiah Berlin. If Helen of Troy had the face that launched a thousand ships, Isaiah of Oxford had a voice that launched a thousand thoughts. His conversation with the 20th century has – and will continue to have in both style and substance – growing importance for a humanistic dialogue with the 21st.

Figure 3. *Isaiah Berlin, Isaac Wolfson and Harold Macmillan at the opening of the new Wolfson College buildings, November 1974. Photo: The Times.*



# Scientific Approaches to the Study of Roman Ports

Professor Simon Keay explains the latest work being done to study the ports of the Roman Empire – in particular the massive site of Portus, the port of ancient Rome itself.

ONE OF THE defining features of the Roman Empire was that it was primarily an institution based on the Mediterranean. Its success was defined, in part at least, by the centrality of the sea to the movement of armies, ideas and trade, between Rome and its subject communities. Ports and their changing relationships to one another played key roles in these pan-Mediterranean exchanges. In the Roman Ports Project, archaeologists based at the British School at Rome (BSR) – in collaboration with colleagues at a range of UK and European universities and research institutions, and with the support of the British Academy and the Society for Libyan Studies – are using innovative scientific approaches to further our understanding of Roman ports across the Mediterranean. It is a project that is key to the BSR's strategic objective to extend its reach from its traditional focus of research in Italy to the western Mediterranean at large.

## The Portus Project

The Roman Ports Project consists of two interrelated initiatives. The first of these is the Portus Project, which is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, and undertaken in conjunction with the Universities of Southampton and Cambridge. It aims to enhance our understanding of the development of Portus, the maritime port of Imperial Rome.

Portus was one of the largest pre-industrial ports of the Mediterranean. It covered some 3.5 km<sup>2</sup> and consisted of two large harbour basins (200 hectares and 32 hectares), which were connected to each other, the Tiber and the Tyrrhenian Sea by a network of canals. There was also a large dock, and a myriad of quays, warehouses, temples and administrative buildings. In conjunction with the neighbouring river port of Ostia, Portus supplied Imperial Rome with key foodstuffs from across the Mediterranean, such as grain,

olive oil and wine. It was also the main conduit for the decorative stone that adorned buildings and monuments in the City, together with other luxuries, as well as many of the traders, travellers and slaves known to have moved between Rome and the Mediterranean at large.

Inevitably the great size of the port presents the archaeologist with the challenge of developing a methodology that will enable meaningful answers to research questions to be provided within a reasonable period of time – in this case five years. The main focus of the Portus Project has been directed towards the *Palazzo Imperiale*, or 'Imperial Palace'. This is a three-storey complex covering 3 hectares, which lies at the centre of Portus and holds the key to understanding the development of the port between the mid-1st and mid-6th centuries AD (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Aerial photograph of the 2009 excavations of Portus. Photo: Portus Project.

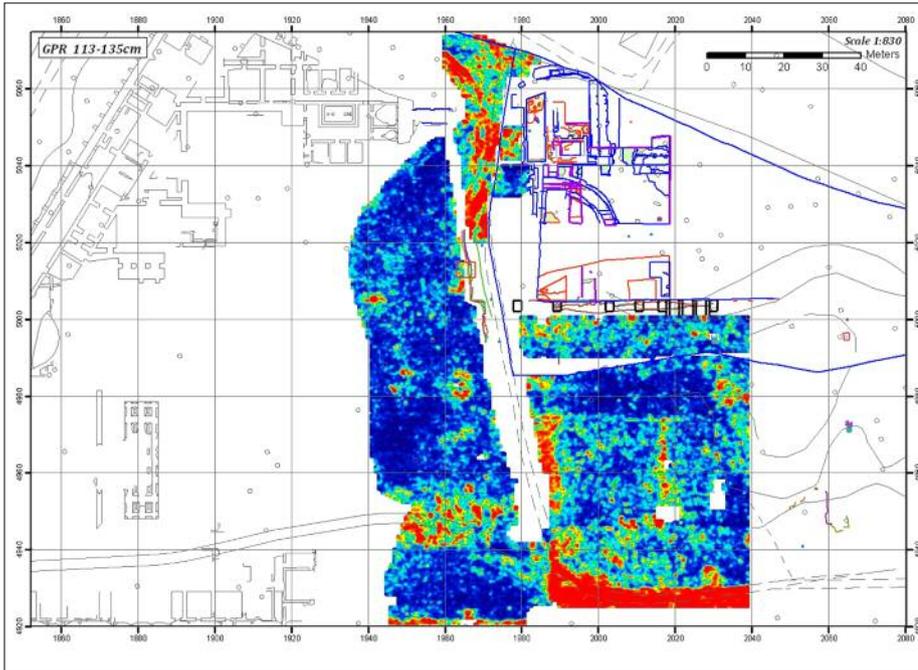
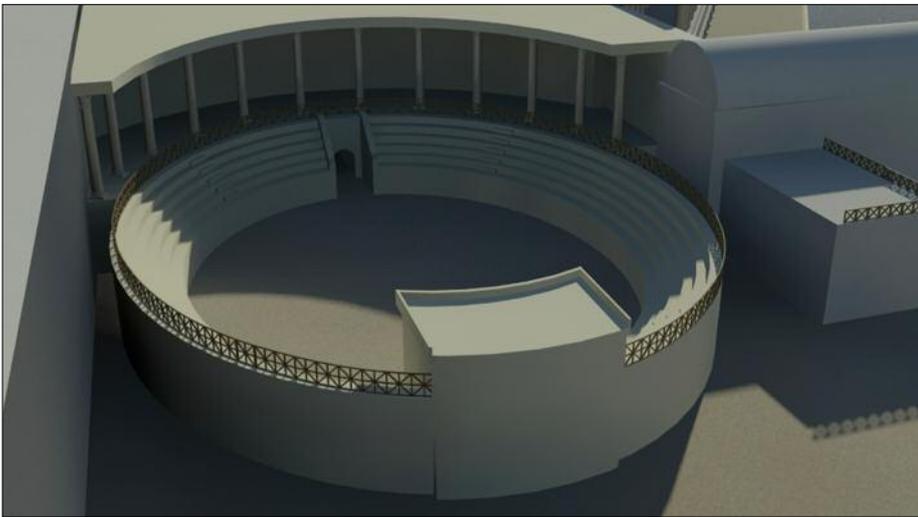


Figure 2. Image showing the results of Ground Penetrating Radar work at Portus. Source: Portus Project.

Figure 3. Computer-based visualisation of the amphitheatre discovered at Portus. Source: Portus Project.



### New techniques

The approach adopted is one that draws heavily upon a suite of scientific approaches that are not often used in concert upon large Classical archaeological sites of this kind. These include topographical and geophysical survey, focused open-area excavation and environmental coring, with the results being integrated and visualised through computer graphic reconstructions. The topography of the complex was recorded by means of combined Total Station, GPS (Global Positioning Systems) and most recently laser

scanning survey, which enabled the layout and morphology of standing remains to be plotted together with an indication of those that lay close to the surface. These results formed the backdrop against which to understand more fully the layout of structures lying at differing depths below the surface. Those lying in the first metre or so immediately below the topsoil were mapped by means of magnetometry, a technique that detects alignments of buildings and other buried materials on the basis of variable magnetic signatures. Other techniques were

used to detect buildings to a greater depth, down to 3 metres and more. These included Resistance Tomography, which measures changes in electrical resistance in deep 'slices' through the ground, and Ground Penetrating Radar, which uses the speed and form of the response of electromagnetic waves transmitted from the surface from buried structures and voids as an indication of their depth and layout (Figure 2). These techniques were used in concert across the site, employing innovative methods for combining multiple datasets. They proved indispensable in deciding where to excavate, and in helping to interpret features that would have been simply too massive to interpret from excavation alone.

Equally important was the involvement of computer graphics to visualise buried buildings revealed by geophysics, to integrate these with structures revealed by excavation, and to reconstruct both sets of data as a range of postulated standing buildings. Here the objective was not to produce a definitive model of how a particular structure might have appeared in antiquity, but rather to test hypotheses through digital visuals. These short-lived models were part of an interpretative dialogue amongst archaeologists working at the site, whose conclusions were fed back into the excavation process.

In this way we have been able to define and explore an amphitheatre (Figure 3) and one side of an adjacent colonnaded garden in the eastern part of the 'Imperial Palace', and we have gone some way towards understanding the layout and function of a massive (250 m × 80 m) building adjacent to east of it. Furthermore, in conjunction with the Université de Lyon, we have drilled cores in excess of 8 metres in depth in association with excavated quays from the time of Claudius and Trajan: this has enabled us to understand the local marine and coastal environment for the first time.

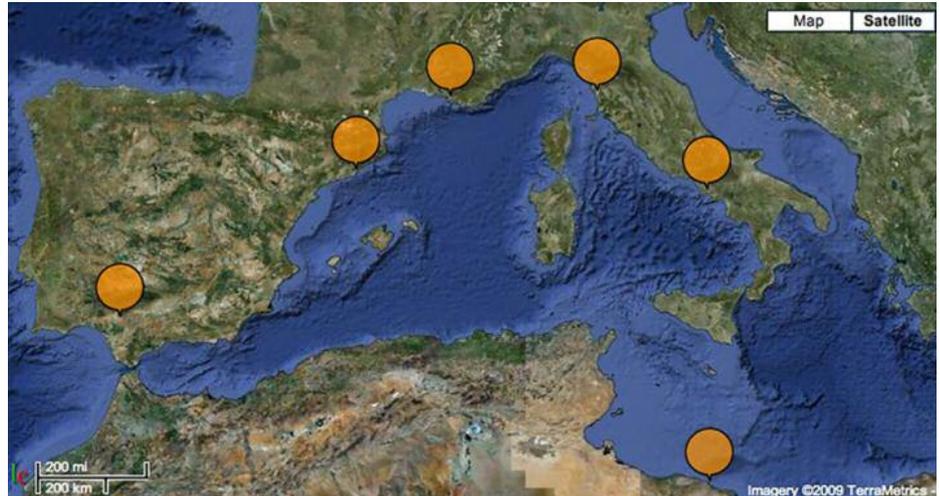
### Imperial works

The use of these techniques in an integrated manner has enabled us to make major contributions to our understanding of the port as a whole. For example it gives us a much clearer idea about the lagoonal nature of the Claudian basin, and how this was

Figure 4. Sites covered by the Roman Port Networks Project.

completely transformed by the engineering works undertaken by Trajan in the early 2nd century AD. The discovery in 2009 that the original alignment of the Claudian mole ran beneath the Trajanic 'Imperial Palace' makes it clear that this complex was built upon reclaimed land – probably created by the huge quantities of sand generated during the excavation of his great 32-hectare water-filled hexagonal harbour basin. This seems symptomatic of how Trajan's architects created the dry land necessary for the urbanisation of the early Claudian port. Indeed it lends substance to Pliny the Younger's panegyric (29.2) to Trajan, in which he remarks that in building the new harbour the emperor Trajan had 'let the sea into the shore and moved the shore out to sea.' The same colossal scale of engineering works has also been witnessed by the results of a geophysical survey of the *Isola Sacra*, an island which lies between Portus and Ostia to the south, defined by the Tiber and the Claudian Canal. It has revealed the existence of a massive new canal some 90 metres wide that ran from Portus in the direction of Ostia, in the middle of which there was a small island and which was traversed by a large bridge.

These results illustrate the degree to which emperors were prepared to invest in the key infrastructure necessary to ensure that Rome had a stable and rapid supply of food from its Mediterranean provinces. Geophysical work by the BSR in conjunction with the University of Southampton, at a number of other key Mediterranean port sites is attempting to gather comparative information in an attempt to better understand the nature of their hinterlands. Recent work at Tarraco, Leptis Magna (in conjunction with the Society for Libyan Studies), Ardea and Italica, has started to make significant contributions here too, and new research at Utica in Tunisia is anticipated soon in collaboration with the University of Oxford.



### Roman Port Networks Project

The second element of the Roman Ports Project, the Roman Port Networks Project has focused specifically upon relationships between Portus and ports across the Mediterranean (Figure 4). This initiative analyses the co-presence of amphorae and marble as a means of exploring changing connections between Portus, Rome and selected ports in the Mediterranean throughout the imperial period. It involves colleagues working on material from such ports as Marseille, Forum Iulii, Ardele, Barcino, Tarraco, Gades, Hispalis, Leptis Magna, Naples, Pisa and Seville in the west, as well as a selection of ports in the east.

Here too an important methodological initiative lies at its heart. The development of a range of innovative computational techniques (loosely termed the 'semantic web') allows ready communication between diverse datasets, as well as a Geographic Information System (GIS) of the Mediterranean, in order to explore the spatial relationship between networks of ports, and the changing distribution of amphorae. In particular it attempts to establish how far there may have been networks of ports dependent in some way upon Portus, and the degree to which these may have changed through time. As with the Portus Project, the computational components flow from and into the wider archaeological work and we

believe lead to innovative archaeological analyses, with a potential for significant new interpretations.

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The success of both of these projects is due in no small measure due to the long-standing international reputation of the BSR as a leading centre of international research, and the results of the kind outlined above will enable it to further enhance and develop its reputation as the place where innovative research in the humanities can prosper.

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More information can be found at [www.portusproject.org](http://www.portusproject.org) and at [www.romanportnetworks.org](http://www.romanportnetworks.org)

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The British Academy is the sponsor and principal funder of the British School at Rome. A full list of the organisations sponsored by the Academy can be found at [www.britac.ac.uk/institutes/orgs.cfm](http://www.britac.ac.uk/institutes/orgs.cfm)

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# New Greek Texts from Oxyrhynchus

In June 2009, the British Academy hosted a workshop to discuss some of the exciting new texts pieced together by the *Oxyrhynchus Papyri* project – followed in the evening by a public presentation. Professor Peter Parsons FBA describes how these fragmentary documents give a unique insight into Greco-Roman civilisation.

Between 1897 and 1907 excavators from the Egypt Exploration Society dug around the village of el-Behnesa, some 100 miles south of Cairo (Figure 1). They found the accumulated waste paper of an entire city, anciently called Oxyrhynchus: 50,000 fragments of papyrus, books and papers alike, written and read by the Greek-speaking colonials who ruled Egypt for the millennium between Alexander the Great and the Arab Conquest. The sorting, decipherment and publication of these papyri (now housed in the Sackler Library in Oxford) began in 1898; the work was adopted as a Major Research Project by the British Academy in 1966, and reached volume LXXIV in 2009.

Figure 1. Excavating at Oxyrhynchus, c. 1900.  
Photo: Egypt Exploration Society.



## Patterns of scholarship

The Oxyrhynchus papyri span about 700 years; they track the literary tastes and the bureaucratic regimes of a Roman and Byzantine province. The work on the papyri similarly tracks, over more than a century, the changing tastes and focuses of scholarship. At the beginning, Christian texts took a leading role: the late Victorians relied on archaeology to reinforce the superstructure of faith while geology was mining its foundations. Later, Greek literary texts took pride of place: as the co-ordinating scholarship of *Altertums-wissenschaft* revealed the empty shelves, the classics of the Classical world that had perished in the Middle Ages, papyrology began to recover, in fragments, parts of the lost inheritance – songs of Sappho, comedies of Menander, elegies by Callimachus. Alongside these, a growing archive of documentary texts (90% of the total) offered Roman historians, or at least the less blinkered of them, the opportunity to study in detail the economics and social structure of a Roman province.

The Oxyrhynchus Project still serves these audiences; and as scholarly focuses shift, it

seeks to adapt. An extensive codex of Acts (forthcoming) will raise questions about textual flexibility in the early transmission of scripture. At the same time, we publish more amulets, hymns and prayers, which materialise the grass-roots faith of early Christians. Archilochus and Simonides were great names among Greek poets, whose greatness had not saved them from extinction: papyri from Oxyrhynchus, recently published, restore elegies by them which rewrite the history of the genre. At the same time, we have material to meet the current interest in the Greek literary culture of the Roman period: novels, declamations, experiments in hexameter poetry. Published documents illustrate the beginnings of the census, the shifts in the gold/silver ratio, the administration of the imperial post, in the high days of Empire. At the same time we can respond to the modern preoccupation with Late Antiquity, where the Egyptian experience presents a vivid picture of the Byzantine province and its development under the Caliphate.

Scholarship progresses, and so do its technical resources. The last thirty years have provided us with now indispensable tools: in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* we can search the whole of Greek literature up to 800 AD; in the Duke Databank of Documentary Papyri we can search all but the most recently published documents. More and more collections of papyri have posted digital images of their published holdings. Two local enterprises, designed and directed by Dirk Obbink, compound these advances. One refines the technique of multispectral imaging, by which papyri can be scanned at different wave-lengths and the most legible image produced by superimposing the best results.<sup>1</sup> Another develops the computerisation of the card catalogue: this makes a database, which can be searched (by script, date, genre) in such a way as to bring together scattered fragments of the same text.

The British Academy workshop discussed a selection of texts from different genres, prepared by different contributors (Professor Bowman, Dr Colomo, Dr Gonis, Professor

Handley, Dr Obbink, Professor Rathbone).<sup>2</sup> Politics and governance and bureaucracy, literary composition and philosophical study all had their place.

### Regulations and edicts

Egypt had been a Greek kingdom, before it fell to Rome in 30 BC. One document contains regulations issued (probably) by king Ptolemy XII, father of Cleopatra, about inheritance tax: if you die intestate, two-thirds of your estate will go to the Privy Purse. The script suggests the early Roman period. So the rulings of the old kings remained in force under the new emperors; and in fact contributed by accumulation to the comprehensive Tax Code, of which a copy survives in Berlin. We cannot be sure whether Ptolemy's code represents a concession or a supertax. But the date (63 BC) places it in political context. This is a time when the king needs all the support he can get; but also all the revenue he can raise, since (as we know from Cicero) he needs to pay gigantic bribes to the noble Romans whose support alone keeps him in power.

Under Roman rule, the emperor appoints a viceroy, the Prefect, whose major pronouncements take the form of edicts. Another document presented contains an edict of the prefect Vestinus (AD 59–62), with its formal prescript, 'Lucius Julius Vestinus speaks'. A certain Sarapion, it seems, had been head of the weavers' collective at Oxyrhynchus; and he has been publicly denounced for collecting unauthorised contributions. The prefect condemns him and his rebellious colleagues and accomplices, perhaps to a fine. 'And if they disobey in any way, I shall employ the appropriate punishment against them.' We may wonder why it takes an edict to deal with an episode of local malpractice. But weaving was a major industry, and linen one of Egypt's major exports; and extorting money is the prerogative of government. The prefect cannot afford to let a corrupt and contumacious union-boss get away with it.

### Legal bureaucracy

The prefect speaks, and the citizens obey. Lower down the heap, private letters give a view of the resourceful struggling with the bureaucratic. In one such letter Thonios

writes to Alexander, a priest of Demeter: neat professional script, impeccable spelling, style literate and in places pompous (Figure 2). By contrast the content comes down to earth. Under Roman rule, priestly offices were sold by auction, and the price paid to the state: Alexander, it seems, had bought a priesthood, but his payment is in arrears. That is important, since a priesthood may entitle you to exemption from certain 'liturgies', that is, unpaid bureaucratic jobs imposed by the state. But even if the priesthood is secure, the holder will still need to argue the case for exemption, and here too Thonios has been active in tracking down relevant case-law. Precedent plays a large part in Greco-Egyptian courts, and this letter even tells us the technical name for the procedure, the argument 'by similitude'.

Another letter refers to the perennial problem of the defaulting debtor. The legal procedure was simple if burdensome. The creditor applied, with a summary of the contract, to the Chief Justice; the Chief Justice added an instruction to the local governor; the creditor sent the document thus endorsed to that governor; and the governor instructed one of his assistants to serve the whole notice on the debtor. However, the debtor may create a diversion by claiming that the contract is forged: this initiates a criminal charge against the creditor, and the creditor may then be scared or impatient enough to give up or to reduce the sum owing. Prefects, and even Emperors, legislated against this manoeuvre, frequently enough to show how it persisted. In our



Figure 2. Avoiding government service: letter from Thonios, 3rd century AD. Image: Egypt Exploration Society/University of Oxford Imaging Papyri Project.

letter, the creditors believe that they have a contract in Cephalon the debtor's own hand. They can therefore call his bluff. Once notice has been served, the debtor must pay up or commit to the charge of forgery: so the

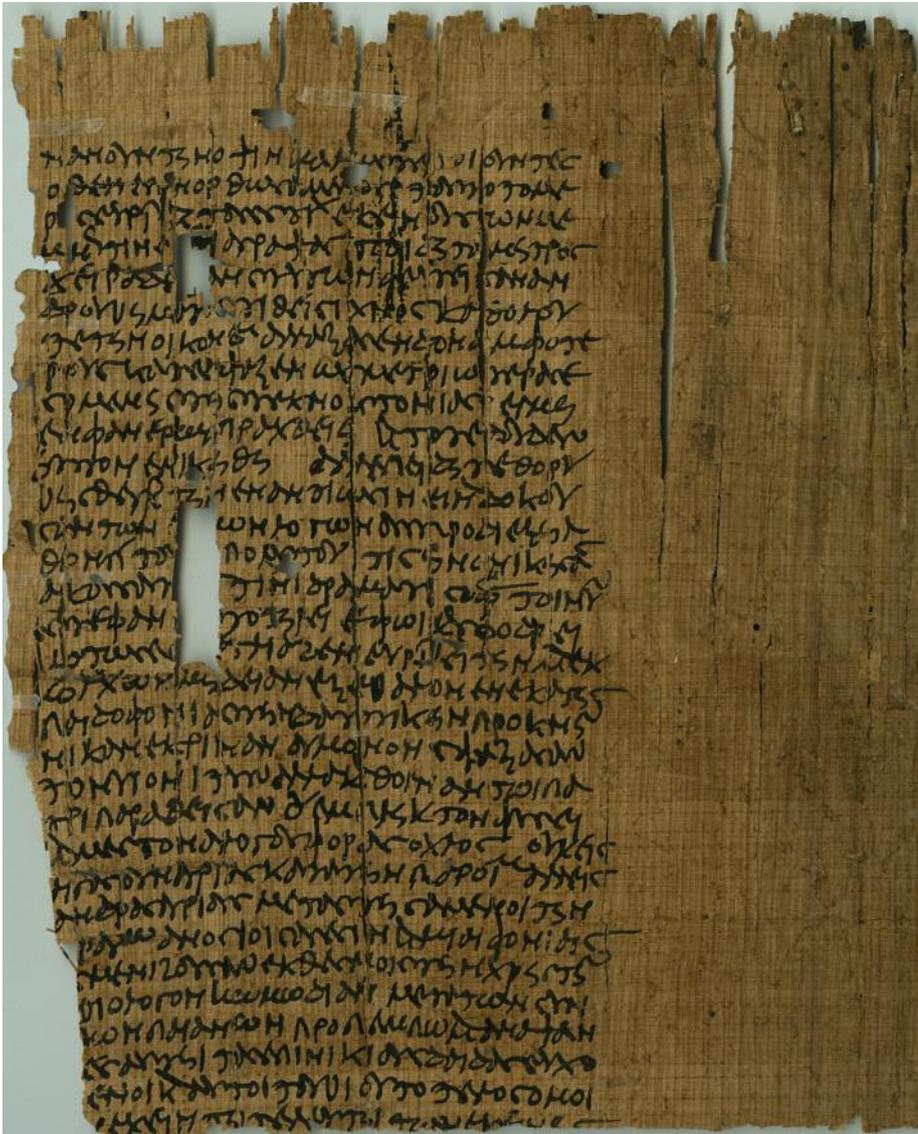


Figure 3. *Killing children on stage: rhetorical declamation, 3rd century AD. Image: Egypt Exploration Society/University of Oxford Imaging Papyri Project.*

sooner it is served, the better. Service rests with the governor’s assistant; but they make fall-back arrangements, in case he proves negligent. There is a book to be written about ‘negligence’ (*ameleia*) and her sister ‘administrative error’ (*planē*) in ancient bureaucracies.

**Literature and philosophy**

Amid such distractions, Oxyrhynchites of means participated in a literate culture typical of the panhellenic world. In the heyday of the Roman empire, within what is loosely called the Second Sophistic, the study of classical literature, and the practice of public declamation, combine to delight an audience which thus finds its heritage revived. A long papyrus contains probably an author’s

draft, written in a rapid, cursive and abbreviated script, whose decipherment represents a triumph of mind over scribble (Figure 3). In one short speech the author asserts the paradox that Comedy is more moral than Tragedy, and invites his audience to join in a torch-lit procession to honour Comedy, in the hope that their own lives may have so happy an ending – an ingenious borrowing from the several comedies by Menander which equally end with torches and revelry on stage. As part of the argument, he dwells on the immorality of tragedy. Euripides, he says, was forced by public outrage to rewrite his *Hippolytus*; similarly he had to rewrite his *Medea*, because in the original version he made her kill her children on stage. The first ‘fact’ we find in other

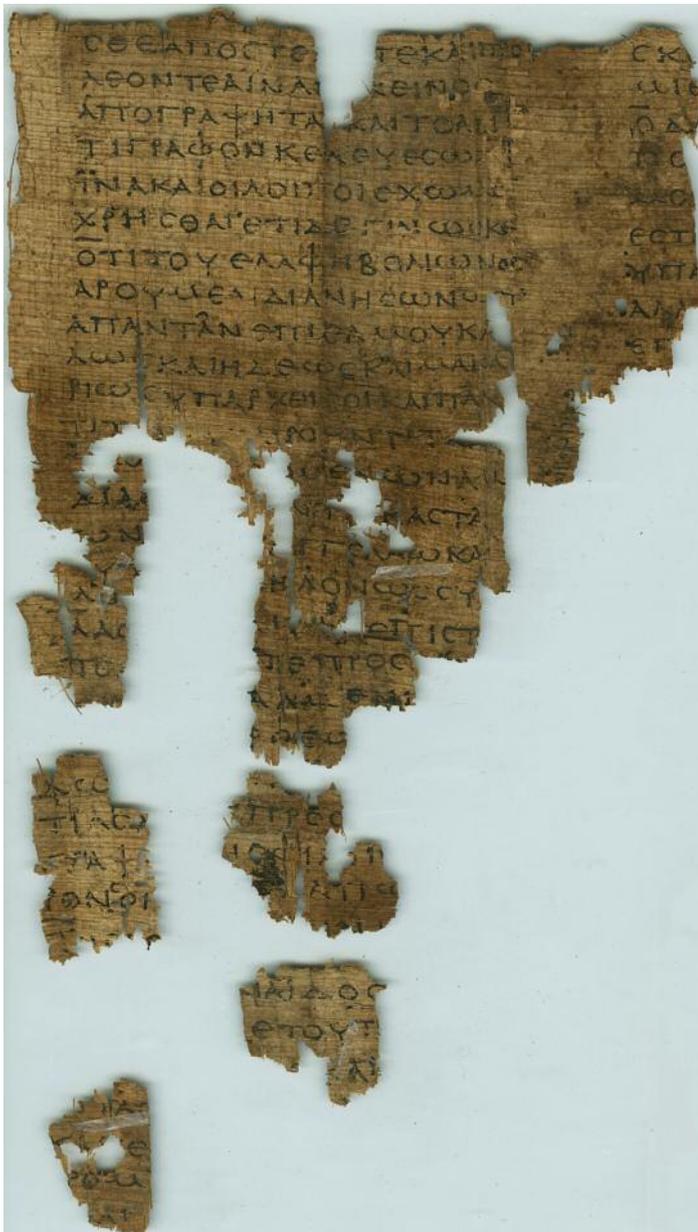
sources, which allege that the first audience resented the portrayal of Phaedra as a shameless seductress. The second is entirely new, and the author seeks to validate it by quoting two unknown verses which (he says) the poet deleted from his second version – verses which (he thinks) imply a murder on stage. *Ne pueros coram populo Medea trucidet* is one of those tragic rules that descend through Horace to Boileau: so the claim is sensational – and no doubt incredible. The author is a stylist, not a scholar, and his insouciance may serve as a warning. How many of the literary ‘facts’ we inherit from antiquity derive from such swampy couplings of malignant gossip, bibliographic muddle and rhetorical manipulation? Shakespearian scholars may recognise the genre.

In the literate culture, intellectuals need a philosophical allegiance. Oxyrhynchites, to judge from their salvage, read Plato in bulk, Stoics and Epicureans more rarely, Aristotle hardly at all. One of our new texts comes from a work well-known but long-lost, the collected Letters of Epicurus. In a first fragment (Figure 4), Epicurus writes about his plan to travel from Athens to his native Samos, ‘from island to island’ (that is, avoiding the dangers of the open sea; Epicurus had already experienced one near-fatal shipwreck), there to meet any friends who have leisure for the journey. In a second, he attacks the number-mysticism of the Pythagoreans, in which a square represents justice (equal sides = equity) – ‘the wisdom of fools’. If both fragments belong to the same letter, the union of travel and polemic may remind the reader of St Paul. More perhaps emerges from the first piece about the propagation of doctrine. Epicurus, say, writes a letter to one disciple, who copies it and passes it on to a second, and so along the chain. There follows a damaged passage, where the words ‘collection’ and ‘letter’ can be seen: should we infer that our new letter is organising precisely that collection of Epicurus’ letters in which it will itself appear – and in which scholars can now read it for the first time since the Fall of Rome?

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At Oxyrhynchus, life and literature have enjoyed a chance longevity under the protecting sand. Sarapion the extortionist, Alexander the simoniac, Cephalon the recalcitrant debtor now resurface, along with the amateur rhetorician who celebrated Comedy and the amateur philosopher who studied Epicurus. They add their own fragments to the incremental mosaic that constitutes our knowledge of the Greek and Roman world.

Figure 4. *Sailing to Samos: a new letter of Epicurus, in a copy of the 1st century AD. Image: Egypt Exploration Society/University of Oxford Imaging Papyri Project.*



#### Note

- 1 For more on the process, and a demonstration of the results, go to the Oxyrhynchus Online website ([www.papyrology.ox.ac.uk/POxy/](http://www.papyrology.ox.ac.uk/POxy/)), and see under 'Recent imaging developments'.
- 2 The British Academy workshop on 24 June 2009 was convened by Professor Eric Handley FBA and Dr Dirk Obbink. The main contributions were (in the order that this article reports them): 'Ruling of Ptolemy XII (?)' by Professor D.W. Rathbone (King's College London); 'Edict of Vestinus', by Professor A.K. Bowman FBA (University of Oxford); 'Letter of Thonius' and 'Letter of Ammonius', by Dr N. Gonis (University College London); 'Rhetorical Declamation', by Dr D. Colomo (University of Oxford); 'New Letter of Epicurus', by Dr D. Obbink (University of Oxford).

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The Oxyrhynchus Papyri project is one of approximately 40 major research projects that are designated 'British Academy Research Projects'. Each organised and run by its own committee, these projects aim to make available fundamental research tools of benefit to a wide range of scholars. The full list of Academy Research Projects can be found at [www.britac.ac.uk/arp/](http://www.britac.ac.uk/arp/)

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# Ancient Ethiopian Churches in Historical Perspective

**Professor David W. Phillipson FBA** has published a comprehensive account of Ethiopian Christian civilisation and its churches between the 4th and the 14th centuries, offering a fresh view of the processes that gave rise to this unique African culture. He describes the different styles and affinities of these striking religious structures.

The Aksumite civilisation flourished in the highlands of Africa's northern Horn (modern Eritrea and northern Ethiopia; Figure 1) during the first seven centuries AD, being known through archaeology – including numismatics and epigraphy – as well as from written Greco-Roman and Arabic sources. During the second quarter of the 4th century, the then king of Aksum adopted Christianity as the state religion, making his realm apparently the second country in the world – after Armenia – to take this step. Although Aksum itself declined in economic and political significance after the 7th century, its religious eminence continued, albeit the spread of Islam hindered communication with co-religionists elsewhere.

The first thousand years of Ethiopian Christianity remain difficult to interpret. Much of the written Ethiopian evidence survives only in much later versions that may have been subject to modification during

times long after those to which it ostensibly relates. Archaeology has so far contributed little; indeed sites subsequent to the decline of Aksum itself have received remarkably little attention. Virtually the only known sites are churches, the majority of them still in use and subject to repeated ill-recorded modification. Intrusive investigations or destructive analyses are very rarely permissible, while traditions and – as noted above – written accounts are both open to varying interpretation; the churches themselves are thus prime foci of investigation. These factors have imposed a potentially misleading dichotomy on our understanding, with the result that Aksumite and so-called 'medieval' periods have received attention from different scholars and have often been viewed as distinct.

A detailed study of the principal Ethiopian and Eritrean churches dating between the 4th and the 14th centuries has recently been undertaken, with support from several sources, including the British Academy's Small Research Grant scheme. It attempts to establish the ages of individual churches, to evaluate regional as well as chronological variation, and to interpret these results in the context of broader history – whether political, technological, social, economic or liturgical. It detects strong continuity from ancient Aksum into the 'medieval' period, recognises links between ecclesiastical developments and those in other fields, and concludes that such trends within the

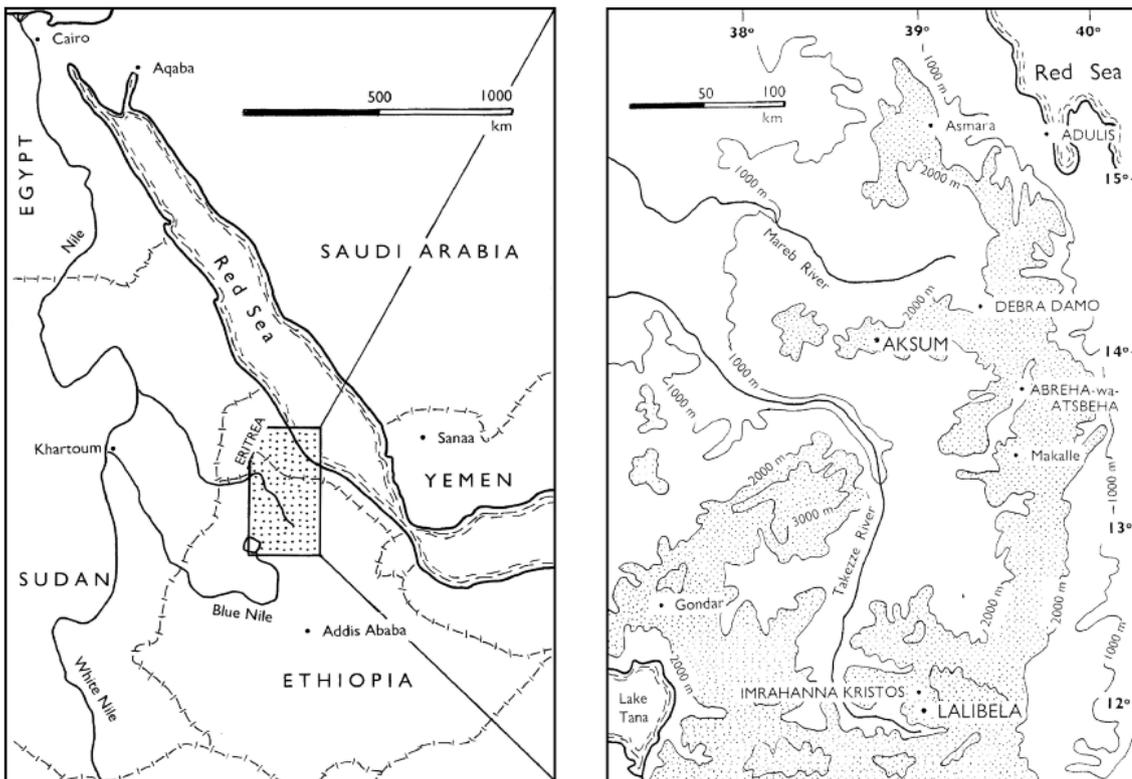


Figure 1. Maps showing general location and sites discussed.

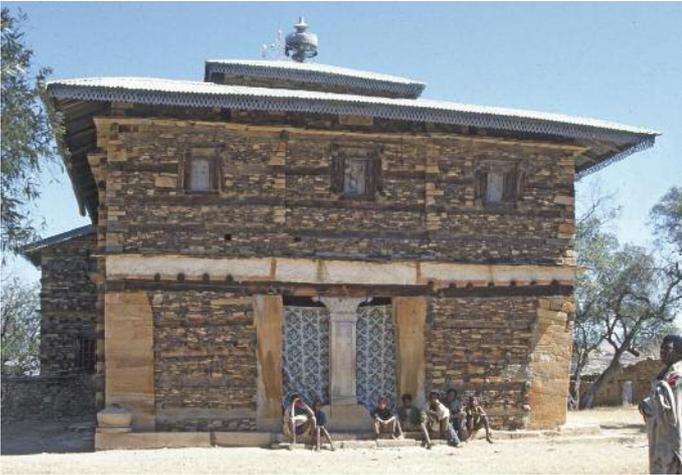


Figure 2. The mountain-top monastery church at Debra Damo in northernmost Tigray. Despite extensive alteration, this building retains a plan and other architectural features from its origin in the Late Aksumite period.

northern Horn formed a strong local tradition which foreign contacts influenced but did not control.

### Built and rock-hewn churches

This study incorporates evidence from two types of church that have in the past often been considered separately: conventional buildings, whether erected in the open or in caves, and those – which I designate ‘hypogean’ – that were hewn from solid rock. Although care must be taken to avoid use of inappropriate terminology, it is remarkable how often the architectural forms of the two types are visually identical, the hypogea mimicking features that have structural rationale only in a true building. In local ecclesiastical terminology, built and hypogean churches are not regularly distinguished from each other.



Figure 3. The elaborate rock-hewn funerary church of Abreha-wa-Atsbeha in eastern Tigray, believed to be the burial place of two Aksumite rulers.

Physical remains of churches dating from the Aksumite period – before the mid-7th century – are not numerous, being largely restricted to ruins that are poorly preserved or inadequately recorded, often – as in the case of Aksum’s Maryam TSION cathedral – obscured by subsequent replacement or large-scale modification. One ruin apparently dating from the 6th century, that of twin churches erected at Aksum over elaborate underground tombs, shows a plan remarkably similar in many details to that of the still-used church at Debra Damo monastery (Figure 2) some 70 km to the northeast, providing confirmation that the latter – although repeatedly modified – is, in origin, of similar Late Aksumite age. Although no hypogean churches are attributed to the Aksumite period, other rock-hewn features – notably tombs – show that the techniques required for their creation were already practised. In plan, all the known Aksumite-period churches are basilican; despite implied connections with the paleochristian circum-Mediterranean world, this is a building form that can be traced back a thousand years earlier within northern Ethiopia. At Adulis, on the Red-Sea coast of Eritrea, at least one basilica of 6th- or 7th-century date was adorned with a marble screen imported as pre-fabricated components from quarries in the vicinity of Constantinople.

### Eastern Tigray

In the highlands of eastern Tigray, significant numbers of both built and rock-hewn churches survive. The earliest, apparently of Late Aksumite age, include hypogea which were initially funerary monuments. Later developments were marked by dramatic proliferation, in which Aksumite-period styles and features were retained and elaborated (Figure 3). In contrast with the Aksumite heartland further west, it seems that this part of Tigray was less affected by 7th-century decline: although overseas contacts were reduced, what was by then an essentially local tradition showed remarkable development. This conclusion is in accord with statements by Arabic writers – albeit recorded several centuries afterwards – which suggest that, after the decline of Aksum, the area’s political capital was transferred southeastwards to an as-yet unidentified location.

Earlier research had indicated that the eastern Tigray churches fall into two basic groups: the earlier ones were relatively accessible, but their often monastic successors tended to be sited in mountainous locations. The mural paintings, for which Tigray churches are justly famous, are largely restricted to the later group. It is now suggested that the two groups were separated by a hiatus, in about the eleventh century, when creation of churches in Tigray effectively ceased. As will be explained below, this conclusion is of major historical significance.

### Amhara Region

To the south, in the area formerly known as Lasta but now subsumed within Amhara Region, further ancient churches are preserved (Figure 4). There is a marked geographical gap between the Tigray churches and those of Amhara Region. Although some churches in the latter may date back to the closing centuries of the 1st millennium, most hypogea of this period seem originally to have served some other function and were only subsequently converted to ecclesiastical use. Significantly, the florescence of church-creation in Amhara Region seems to have coincided with the 11th-century hiatus in that activity in Tigray.



Figure 4. Built in a huge cave not far to the north of Lalibela, in Amhara Region, the well-preserved church of Imrahanna Kristos probably dates from the 11th century, while retaining many architectural features of Aksumite origin. The building in the right foreground is of similar age.

### Lalibela

These observations are particularly apparent at the famous hypogean complexes at the place now generally known as Lalibela, after the king to whom their creation is widely attributed. Lalibela remains a major place of pilgrimage whilst attracting ever-increasing numbers of tourists. Many features of the Lalibela landscape, including some of the hypogea, bear names linking them to places at and near Jerusalem that would have been visited by Ethiopian pilgrims. Because the Lalibela hypogea form interconnecting complexes, it is possible to establish their chronological relationships. It is clear that two of them, significantly older than the others, were not originally churches, but served a basically defensive function and were connected by an underground tunnel. Later, the tunnel having been interrupted, these hypogea were converted to ecclesiastical use by the addition of architecturally distinct chambers that served as sanctuaries (Figure 5). These developments may have been somewhat earlier than – or broadly contemporary with – the creation of the great rock-hewn churches including Beta Maryam (St Mary) and Beta Madhane Alem (the Saviour of the World) which are rightly regarded as representing the finest development of Ethiopian hypogean architecture (Figure 6). Later still are churches, some of them hewn – apparently in haste and with less careful planning – at a lower level, including those to which the greatest sanctity is attributed, and one of which is held to be the burial place of King Lalibela himself. The ecclesiastical traditions notwithstanding, it is clear that creation of the Lalibela hypogea extended over a lengthy period, probably lasting several centuries; the last major phase of this process may be attributed to the reign of King Lalibela. Significantly, it is this phase that also includes elements – the Tomb of Adam (Figure 7) and the Church of Golgotha, for example – which bear names indicating correlation with features that would have been familiar to pilgrims visiting Jerusalem. The traditions are thus correct in attributing to King Lalibela the creation of the hypogean complex in its present form and symbolism; they do not, when literally interpreted, take account of the fact that much of the complex had originated in earlier times. This interpretation is strengthened by noting that during Lalibela's reign Jerusalem was conquered by Salah ad-Din, an event which may have given rise to the fear – unjustified, as it actually transpired – that visits by Christian pilgrims would be curtailed, thus prompting the need for an Ethiopian alternative.

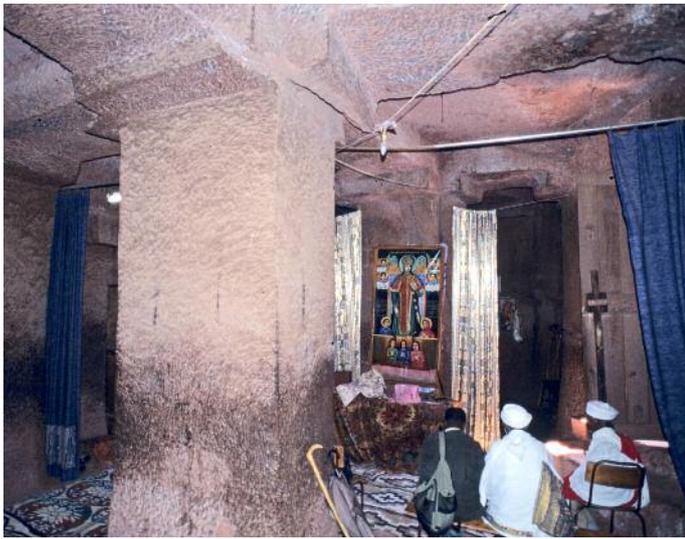
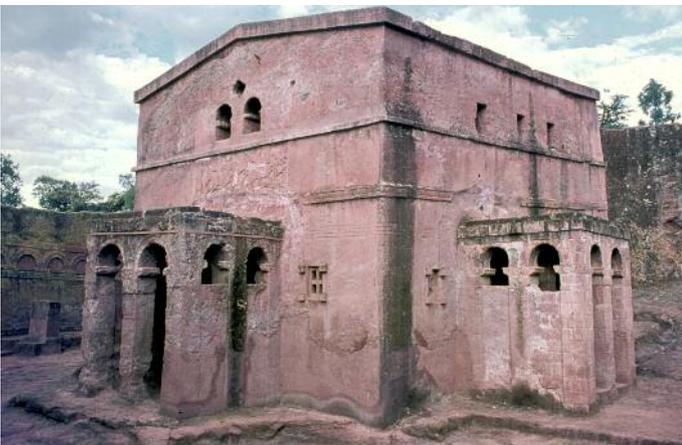


Figure 5. Beta Gabriel (the church of the Archangel Gabriel) is one of the oldest hypogea at Lalibela. Several phases of modification may be recognised. Initially defensive, its subsequent conversion to ecclesiastical use involved the excavation of an additional chamber (reached through the curtained doorway seen behind the priests in this photograph) to serve as the sanctuary. At about the same time the previously flat ceiling was re-carved to represent capitals and beams.

Figure 6. Beta Maryam (the church of St Mary) is one of the most elaborate of the Lalibela hypogea. Carved from bedrock (a volcanic tuff), it rises 10 metres from the floor of a large sub-rectangular court. Internally, it follows a basilican plan and bears fine carved and painted decoration.



### Historical context

These observations require interpretation in terms of what is known from other sources about historical developments during this period (Figure 8). The borders of the Aksum kingdom are poorly known and may never have been clearly defined; its hegemony probably did not extend significantly to the south of the modern Tigray. The well-documented decline of Aksum around the mid-7th century severely curtailed overseas contacts and led to an eastward shift of the political and economic centre; such a movement is reflected in the distribution of churches attributable to that period. Later, this southward shift continued, a process that apparently involved the transfer of authority

to a different ethnic group recalled in historical writings and tradition as the Zagwe or Agau dynasty. It is well established that Zagwe rule came to an end c. 1270, but evidence for its start is difficult to interpret. Most historians have retained the view that it began early in the 12th century, thus lasting for about 150 years, but my research leads me to support the alternative of an inception in the 10th century and a 300-year duration. This being the case, it would neatly follow that the shift in church-creation activity from Tigray to what is now Amhara Region coincided with the rise of the Zagwe. The matter is of some relevance to modern politics in Ethiopia, since Lalibela is increasingly seen as a focus for Agau nationalism.

On a broader historic front, the distinction between ancient Aksum and ‘medieval’ Ethiopia is now seen as significantly less fundamental than was previously believed. Continuity, by no means restricted to the isolated architectural idioms that have long been recognised, extended long after the period with which this investigation was primarily concerned; indeed, the creation of hypogean churches continues in the 21st century. This research also serves to emphasise the urgent need



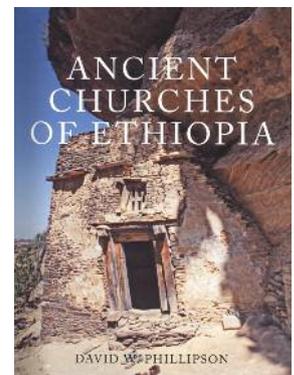
Figure 7. The 5.5-metre-high block of carved rock surrounded here by white-clad worshippers is the ‘Tomb of Adam’, one of the most recent features of the Lalibela hypogean complex. It extends far below the level of the earlier hypogea: the rectangular doorway seen at the top of this photograph, high above the top of the ‘Tomb of Adam’, leads horizontally to the court surrounding Beta Maryam (Fig. 6).

for conservation at Ethiopia’s ancient churches, and for management of the rapidly increasing numbers of visitors, including the need to combine tourist access – with its resultant income-generation – with continuing religious use.

| DATE AD | Historical events | Tigray churches | Lalibela phases |     |    |   |
|---------|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----|----|---|
|         |                   |                 | I-II            | III | IV | V |
| 500     |                   | *               |                 |     |    |   |
| 600     |                   | *               |                 |     |    |   |
| 700     | Decline of Aksum  | *               |                 |     |    |   |
| 800     |                   | *               | ?               |     |    |   |
| 900     |                   | *               | *               | *   |    |   |
| 1000    |                   | *               |                 | *   | *  |   |
| 1100    | +                 |                 |                 | *   | *  |   |
| 1200    | Zagwe             | *               |                 | *   | *  | * |
| 1300    | Dynasty           | *               |                 |     |    | * |
| 1400    |                   | *               |                 |     |    | * |

Figure 8. Summary chronological chart of ancient churches in Tigray and of hypogea at Lalibela. During phases I-II at Lalibela, the hypogea were defensive, subsequently converted for use as churches.

David Phillipson is Emeritus Professor of African Archaeology, University of Cambridge, and a Fellow of the British Academy. *Ancient Churches of Ethiopia, fourth–fourteenth centuries*, by David W. Phillipson, is published by Yale University Press.



In 2005 Professor Phillipson received a British Academy Small Research Grant and funding from the Neville Chittick Fund to support his research work. Dr Chittick, a former Director of the British Institute in Eastern Africa, bequeathed to the British Academy one-tenth of the residue of his estate on trust, to apply the income to the provision of grants to individual scholars selected by the Academy for archaeological exploration and study.

# ISLAM, TRADE AND POLITICS ACROSS THE INDIAN OCEAN

In 2008, the British Academy adopted a three-year collaborative project to look at how Southeast Asia had long been connected to the wider world across the Indian Ocean – in particular, to the Middle East through the faith of Islam. Dr İsmail Hakkı Kadı, Dr Annabel Teh Gallop and Dr Andrew Peacock report on the preliminary results of research in the Ottoman archives.

Despite the vast distances across the Indian Ocean, Southeast Asia and the Middle East have been linked since antiquity by trade. Muslim merchants from Persia and the Arab lands first brought Islam to what is now Malaysia and Indonesia, while Southeast Asians came to the Middle East on pilgrimage to the Holy Cities of Islam, Mecca and Medina, or in search of learning. These Middle Eastern connections played a crucial part in the formation of Southeast Asia's identity, both culturally and religiously, and scholarship has concentrated on their Arab aspect. Yet for the Muslims of Southeast Asia, the Ottoman Empire was the great Islamic power which, they hoped, might protect them from European colonialism. Even in the 20th century Turkish influence remained strong, with the founder of modern Turkey, Atatürk, regarded as a model by independence leaders like Sukarno in Indonesia, and even in Burma. Despite growing interest in the Ottomans and their relations with the world beyond (as witnessed by the British Academy-sponsored conference of 2007, *The Frontiers of the Ottoman World*),<sup>1</sup> little work has yet examined the Turkish connection with this furthest frontier of the Ottoman world.

The new British Academy-funded collaborative research project, *Islam, Trade and Politics across the Indian Ocean*, explores these links, which date back to the 16th century. The earliest attested contacts were through ambassadors sent from Aceh to request Ottoman assistance against the Portuguese, the first Europeans to attempt to assert political and economic control in the region. The Ottomans responded by sending cannon and some men on the perilous journey across the Portuguese-controlled Indian Ocean, but for the following two centuries the Ottoman government was preoccupied by problems nearer to home. Nonetheless, links continued through trade – Southeast Asian ceramics have been found in excavations of Ottoman sites, as well as at the Imperial Palace, the

Topkapı – and through religion, with Southeast Asian scholars coming to study in Ottoman cities like Mecca, Medina, Cairo and even Istanbul. The Turkish connection remained potent in Southeast Asia as local rulers sought to bolster their legitimacy by claiming ancestors from 'Rum' – i.e. the Ottoman lands. Memories of these Turkish contacts are preserved in Malay literature, while Ottoman influences also appeared in the material culture. Furthermore, Sufis and Sufism also appeared in the material culture. Furthermore, Sufis and Sufism also appeared in the material culture. Furthermore, Sufis and Sufism also appeared in the material culture.

## 19th-century links

The political links between Southeast Asia and the Ottomans were revived in the mid-19th century, again as local rulers sought protection

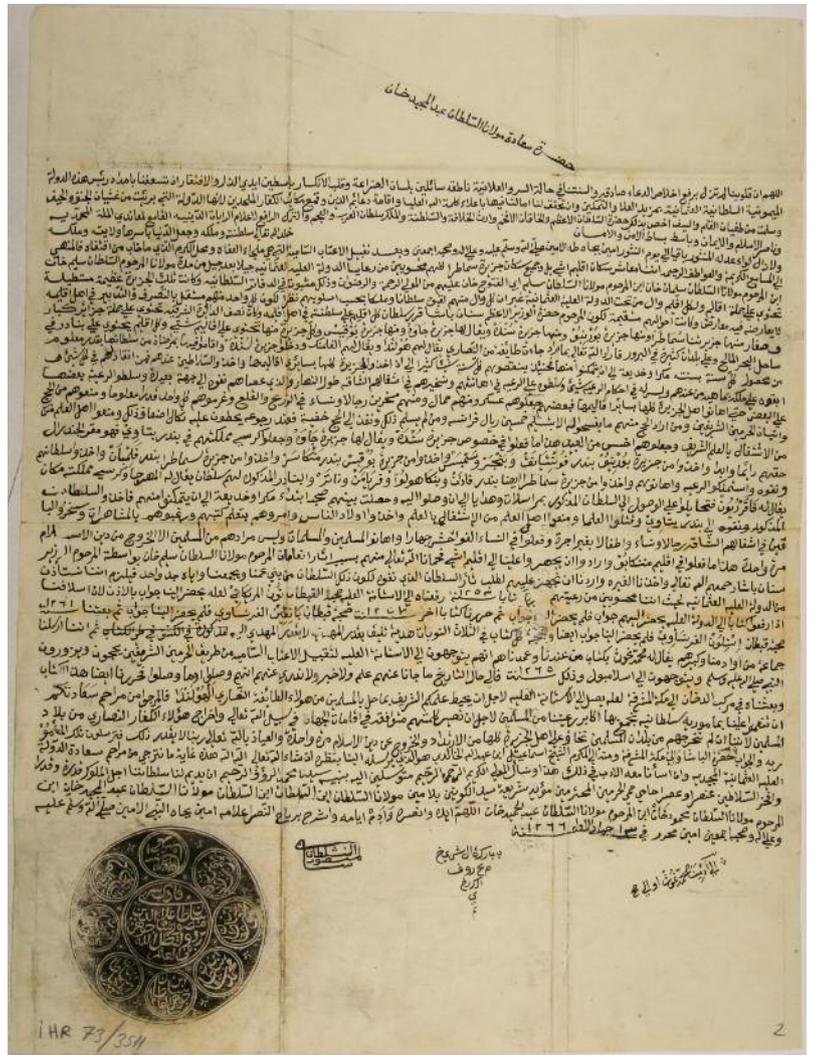


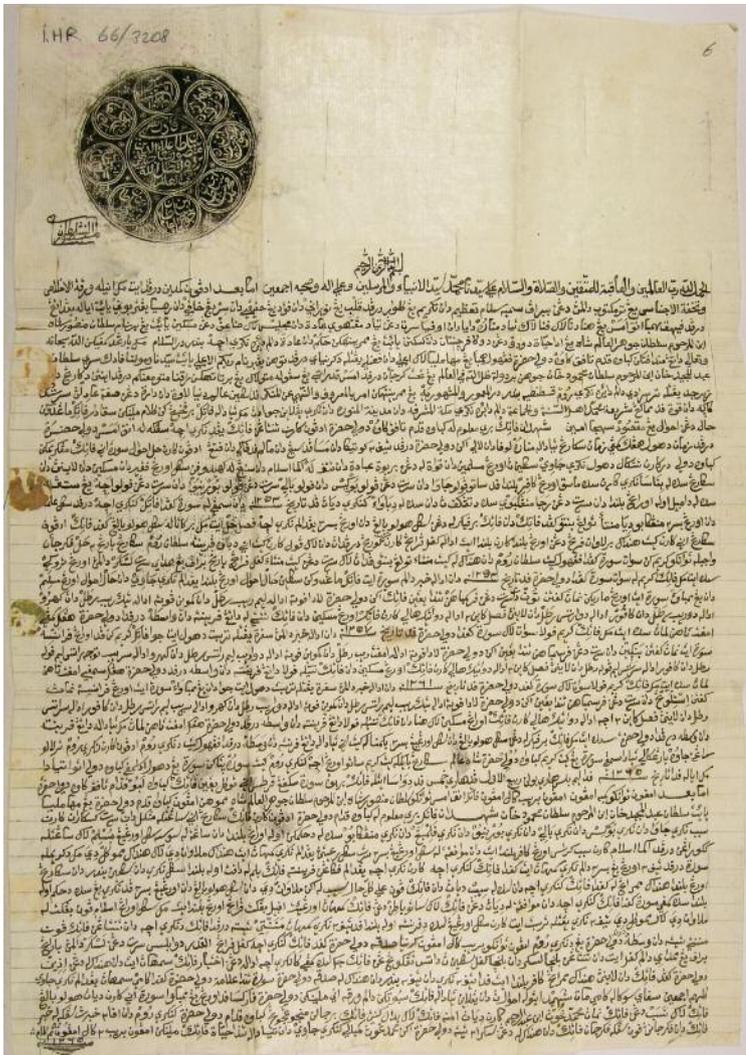
Figure 1. The Arabic letter of Mansur Shah of Aceh to the Ottoman Sultan Abdülmejid. Prime Ministry Ottoman Archive, Istanbul, I.HR. 73/23511.

from colonialism, this time Dutch and British. Although the Ottoman government was wary of acceding outright the requests of Southeast Asian sultanates like Aceh to be recognized as Ottoman subjects, it maintained close interest in the region, demonstrated through its establishment of consulates in cities such as Jakarta (Batavia), Rangoon, Manila and Singapore. Ottoman involvement in the region was prompted not just by normal diplomatic considerations but also by their policy of Pan-Islamism, of trying to strengthen the Empire, now beset by threats in Europe, by promoting the Sultan-Caliph as protector and leader of all Muslims. This is by far the best documented and most complex phase of Ottoman-Southeast Asian relations. Although the *Islam, Trade and Politics* project will also examine cultural links through material culture (which will be the subject of a public exhibition in 2011–12), in its first phases we have concentrated on unearthing Ottoman archival material concerning these interactions in this period. The work requires in-depth research in the catalogues of the Ottoman Archives in Istanbul, which to date has yielded around 800 entries. These correspond to more than 10,000 pages of documents, which have been partly copied for further research. Although it is too early to make definitive remarks about the content of all the material, we may nevertheless share some preliminary observations.

The documents are characterised by great diversity, both in language and contents. As one would expect, the bulk of the material is written in Ottoman Turkish, but there is also material in French, Arabic, Dutch, English, Malay, Burmese and even Tausug (a language of the Philippines). Perhaps the most striking documents, both visually and in terms of contents, are the letters sent by Southeast Asian rulers to Istanbul.

**Mansur Shah of Aceh**

Of special interest is the correspondence from Mansur Shah of Aceh. Most of the surviving Malay letters held in libraries and archives worldwide were sent from the Islamic kingdoms of maritime Southeast Asia to European sovereigns or trading officials. Therefore what we know about the art of the Malay letter should more properly be termed ‘the art of Malay letter-writing to Europeans’, for almost no letters between Malay rulers, or addressed to other Muslim powers, are known. Thus the recent discovery in Istanbul of original royal epistles from the Malay world is of critical importance, not just for the historical value of their contents, but also for the new light they shed on Malay diplomacies.



Two letters from Sultan Mansur Shah of Aceh, on the northern tip of Sumatra, addressed to the Ottoman Sultan Abdülmecid, illustrate this perfectly. Both contain the same appeal for aid, but the letter in Malay of 1849 and that in Arabic of 1850 look quite different, for each was crafted in the chancery of Aceh according to the epistolary protocol appropriate for that language. In the Arabic letter (Figure 1), the seal is placed in a supplicatory position right at the bottom, while the name and title of Sultan Abdülmecid have been removed from the fourth line, leaving a blank space, and placed diagonally above the text as a mark of respect, showing that the chancery practice of *elevatio* – introduced at the Ottoman court of Süleyman the Magnificent in the 16th century – was still understood at the court of Aceh in the 19th century.

The Malay letter (Figure 2) is unprecedented in its humility of tone, with the royal seal placed at the top of the letter but on the extreme left, for in Aceh the relative rank of correspondents was indicated by the placement of the seal on a sliding horizontal scale from left (from an inferior to a superior), through the middle (between equals), to right (from a superior to one of inferior rank). In this letter Sultan Mansur Shah indicated the Ottoman ruler rather than himself the uniquely Acehnese royal title *Johan Berdalau*, ‘the champion endowed with sovereign power’, and the letter is not addressed to the visage of the emperor, but to ‘beneath the soles of our lord’s feet’. Never before have any of the three self-abasing epistolary features highlighted here in any other royal letter from Aceh, renowned as one of the greatest Malay kingdoms in the world, renowned as the most powerful of our lord’s feet’.

Figure 2. The Malay letter of Mansur Shah of Aceh to the Ottoman Sultan Abdülmecid. Prime Ministry Ottoman Archive, Istanbul, I.H.R. 66/3208.

Figure 3. A map of Southeast Asia, annotated in Ottoman, presented to the Ottoman court together with the letter sent by Mansur Shah to Abdülmecid. At the centre is the island of Sumatra, several times larger than Java, with Aceh prominently marked at its northern tip. Prime Ministry Ottoman Archive, Istanbul, I.HR. 73/23511.

to send twelve fully-armed warships to expel the ‘infidel’ Dutch from the southeastern ‘frontiers of the Ottoman world’. The letter was accompanied by a map of Sumatra (Figure 3) which attempted to grossly inflate the island’s size and importance compared to Java and even India.

**Other links across the ocean**

Other documents provide valuable information about Ottoman Pan-Islamist policies, for these required the Ottoman court to interact continuously with political and religious authorities and ordinary people in Southeast Asia. For example, the Ottoman chancery documented the donation of the holy Qur’an and other religious books to ensure that the name of the Ottoman sultan was mentioned at prayers as the Caliph. And there are also documents concerning the Ottoman declaration of Holy War during the First World War: the Ottomans sought to capitalise on Pan-Islamic sentiment in order to stir up trouble for Britain which ruled over substantial Muslim populations in India and the Malay Peninsula.

The Ottoman authorities were also alert to foreigners’ perception of Ottoman policies. Consequently Ottoman diplomatic representatives in Europe and Southeast Asia sent samples of local newspaper articles to Istanbul together with their translations to inform the home authorities. One example is an article published in *Presse Nouvelle de Rotterdam* in 1899 concerning Javanese students in Istanbul. The Ottoman documents reveal the reason behind the Dutch interest. It seems that several Southeast Asian students (Dutch colonial subjects) had enrolled in western-style educational institutions. The Dutch aimed to control tightly the education of their colonial subjects, with the aim of producing a local elite that would contribute to the administration of the Dutch Indies while supporting the continued colonial presence. The prospect of Indonesian students receiving a western education in Istanbul, the capital of the Pan-Islamist movement, threatened to undermine not just Dutch education policy in the Indies but the very foundations of colonial rule.



The presence of Southeast Asians in the Ottoman Empire was not limited to these students in Istanbul. In particular, a large numbers of pilgrims made their ways from various parts of Southeast Asia to the Hijaz every year, and much paperwork was required to arrange their transportation and quarantine.

The travel was not all one way: there were also Ottoman subjects in Southeast Asia, especially in Jakarta (Figure 4). Disputes over the legal status of Ottoman subjects there necessitated lengthy negotiations between the Dutch and Ottoman authorities. Particularly problematic were the Hadhramis originating from southern Yemen, many of whom were merchants residing in Southeast Asia and who claimed Ottoman nationality despite the fact the Ottomans had never ruled the Hadhramaut. And the First World War brought an unprecedented number of Ottoman subjects to Southeast Asia – as prisoners of war. More than 4,000 were held in Thayetmo in Burma. The British and

Ottoman authorities corresponded about these prisoners, their circumstances and the rations they were granted via the diplomatic missions of third countries.

**Resource**

The documents from the Ottoman archives – which the project is collecting and will in due course publish, accompanied by translations – are thus remarkable for the range of issues they touch on, as well as their linguistic diversity. Making this resource available will assist not just scholars of Ottoman and Southeast Asian history, but will be of interest more generally to anyone interested in the history of European colonialism and the reactions it inspired – reactions which have not fully played themselves out to this day.

**Note**

1 Papers from this conference have just been published as *The Frontiers of the Ottoman World*, edited by A.C.S. Peacock (*Proceedings of the British Academy*, volume 156). A summary report of the conference by Dr Peacock was published in *British Academy Review*, issue 10 (2007). For more information, see [www.britac.ac.uk/pubs](http://www.britac.ac.uk/pubs)

Dr İsmail Hakkı Kadı is Research Fellow in Ottoman Studies at the British Institute at Ankara. Dr Annabel Teh Gallop is Head of the South and Southeast Asia Section at the British Library. Dr Andrew Peacock is Assistant Director of the British Institute at Ankara and is co-director (with Professor Mike Hitchcock, University of Chichester and ASEASUK) of the *Islam, Trade and Politics across the Indian Ocean* research project.

The *Islam, Trade and Politics across the Indian Ocean* project, funded by the British Academy, is administered by the British Institute at Ankara ([www.biaa.ac.uk](http://www.biaa.ac.uk)) and the Association of South-East Asian Studies in the United Kingdom ([www.aseasuk.org.uk](http://www.aseasuk.org.uk)).

Both organisations are sponsored by the British Academy. A full list of the organisations sponsored by the Academy can be found at [www.britac.ac.uk/institutes/orgs.cfm](http://www.britac.ac.uk/institutes/orgs.cfm)



Figure 4. Passport granted by the Ottoman authorities to an Ottoman merchant resident in Batavia (modern Jakarta), dated 1911. Prime Ministry Ottoman Archive, Istanbul, HR.SYS. 563/1.

# Celebrating excellence

In September and October 2009, the British Academy held ceremonies to honour individual scholars for the excellence of their work in the humanities and social sciences.

At the Annual General Meeting in July 2009, 48 distinguished scholars were elected to be Fellows of the British Academy; and on 21 September 2009, a ceremony was held at the Academy to admit them to the Fellowship.



Left: Professor Theodore R. Marmor (Yale University), elected to the Corresponding Fellowship, was one of six Fellows invited to speak about their work. He lamented the poor quality of the healthcare debate in the United States, saying it did not pay enough attention to the large amount of serious scholarship conducted on the subject. Photos: David Graeme-Baker.

Left: Sir Adam Roberts (President of the British Academy) and some of the new Fellows of the British Academy. The full list of new Fellows may be found at [www.britac.ac.uk/fellowship/elections/2009/](http://www.britac.ac.uk/fellowship/elections/2009/)

On 30 September 2009, the British Academy held its annual Medals and Prizes Ceremony, to bestow awards on outstanding researchers in psychology, law, literature, classics, archaeology and history.



Above: Dr Robin Jackson (Chief Executive of the British Academy) addresses the gathering. More information on the Academy's medals and prizes can be found via [www.britac.ac.uk/misc/medals/](http://www.britac.ac.uk/misc/medals/)



Photos: Tracey Croggan.

Above: Professor Martin Seligman (University of Pennsylvania) receives the inaugural Wiley Prize in Psychology from Sarah Phibbs (Publishing Director, Social Science & Humanities, Wiley-Blackwell). On the previous day, Professor Seligman had delivered the Joint British Academy/British Psychological Society Lecture, on 'Positive Psychology and Positive Education'.



British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowships enable outstanding early-career researchers to strengthen their experience of research and teaching in a university environment. The latest intake of Postdoctoral Fellows was welcomed at the Academy on 28 October 2009.

Left: The class of 2009.

Right: Professor Ian Clark FBA (Chairman, Posts Committee) presents a certificate to Dr Sonia Exley (Institute of Education, University of London).



More information about the Postdoctoral Fellowships scheme can be found at [www.britac.ac.uk/funding/guide/pdfells.cfm](http://www.britac.ac.uk/funding/guide/pdfells.cfm)

# The Marriage of Philology and Informatics

As part of the British Academy Literature Week in October 2009, Sir Brian Vickers FBA discussed 'The Authors of King Edward III', in conversation with Professor Laurie Macguire. Here he describes how information technology can be harnessed to the literary study of authorship attribution.

IN THE LATE 5th century AD, Martianus Capella wrote a book in prose and verse called *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, an allegory of the seven liberal arts, which had a considerable influence on medieval culture. It begins with two books describing the ascent to heaven, apotheosis, and marriage of Philology and Mercury, based on Neoplatonic doctrines on the ascent of the soul. Then follow seven books describing each subject by an elaborately described female personification, three books being given to Philology's word-based arts, *Grammatica*, *Dialectica*, *Rhetorica*, and four to Mercury, dealing with mathematical concepts: *Geometria*, *Arithmetica*, *Astronomia*, and *Harmonia*. For centuries in the West, education began with Philology's *trivium* and was completed by the *quadrivium* of Mercury, the whole forming a complete curriculum.

The word *philology* briefly entered the English language in about 1386 (thanks to a jocular reference in Chaucer's *Merchant's Tale*), and when it re-appeared in the 17th century it meant the love of learning and literature. It was not until the 18th century that *philology* established itself to describe 'the study of the structure and development of language', as the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it. The same authority dates the introduction of *informatics* to 1967 (from the Russian *informátika*, 1966), and cites a definition of it as 'the discipline of science which investigates the structure and properties (not specific content) of scientific information', also known as 'information science'.

## Authorship attribution

My research interests in recent years have been in the discipline of authorship attribution study, traditionally the domain of philology. Many of its practitioners have used their remarkable linguistic knowledge to reject spurious attributions, as did Varro and Aulus Gellius with the canon of Plautus,

Valla with the 'Donation of Constantine', Erasmus with works attributed falsely to Jerome, Isaac Casaubon with the supposedly Mosaic corpus of Hermes Trismegistus, or Richard Bentley with the Epistles of Phalaris. These scholars were able to expose forgeries and falsely-attributed works by drawing on historical knowledge and a sensitivity to language and style, attributes that are still essential in authorship studies.<sup>1</sup> But when the problems involve not texts written centuries after their supposed date but anonymously-published or pseudonymous works written in the same epoch and in the same genre, appropriate analytical techniques must be devised.

In the 19th century several Shakespeare scholars, wanting to identify his share of the two plays he co-authored with John Fletcher (*King Henry VIII*, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*), developed some simple quantitative methods for analysing verse style, counting the proportion of lines having more than ten syllables, or having 'light' or 'weak endings'. Although the mathematics was elementary, the method successfully distinguished the two authors, and their assignment of individual shares is still accepted.<sup>2</sup> In the 20th century another problem in identifying co-authors' shares was solved with a far more advanced Mercurial discipline, statistics. In 1787–8 three New York newspapers carried *The Federalist*, a series of articles advocating the ratification of the United States Constitution. The initiator and main author was Alexander Hamilton, who in 1789 became the first Secretary of the Treasury, assisted by James Madison, who in 1808 became the fourth President. Subsequent collected editions of the *Federalist* papers identified the authors of individual essays from notes left by Hamilton and Madison, but their lists diverged, both claiming authorship of a dozen essays. Two American statisticians, Frederick Mosteller and David L. Wallace, chose as authorship markers a set

of 90 'grammatical' or 'function' words (such as prepositions, conjunctions, definite and indefinite articles), and 60 'content' words. They manually computed the rates of relative occurrence in all 146 essays, and subjected the results to a Bayesian statistical analysis which computed the relative odds of assigning authorship.<sup>3</sup> The majority of the disputed papers were ascribed to Hamilton.

## Elizabethan and Jacobean drama

Given machine-readable texts of *The Federalist*, the labours of Mosteller and Wallace in compiling this list of word occurrences could be performed today in a few seconds, and several statistics packages could instantly calculate probabilities. But the problem they faced was relatively simple, in that only two authors were involved, and they had adequately long text samples of each (also, Madison seldom used the preposition 'upon'). In the field in which I mostly work, drama written and performed in London between 1580 and 1642, issues are more complex. First, the high demand for new plays among the competing theatre companies meant that in about half the recorded instances two or more authors collaborated in supplying playbooks, which then belonged to the companies. Secondly, when the companies sold plays to a printer, either to raise cash or publicise an imminent revival, the title-pages advertised themselves rather than the authors. Marlowe was not credited with *Tamburlaine the Great*, nor Shakespeare and Peele with *Titus Andronicus*. Thirdly, the plays' language was restricted by the audience's ability to understand a play at first hearing, and by the dramatists' use of unrhymed decasyllabic verse. The unfettered medium of prose allowed a Nashe or a Burton to develop highly individual styles, but the more limited scope of the iambic pentameter, and the nature of the audience, were stylistic levellers. Finally,

since dramatists worked intensely in such a small theatrical world, some of them acting in their own or other people's plays, mutual linguistic influence was unavoidable. Identifying the perhaps two or three authors of an anonymously published play is a far harder problem than deciding which of two known authors wrote a *Federalist* essay.

In authorship studies, as in all rational enquiries, it is vital to design a properly structured method, based on a sound theory, and using procedures that can be replicated by other researchers. The most important 'philological' decision is to identify those aspects of language that will best reveal individuality. Given the speed with which computers can search, count, and sort machine-readable texts, quantities of data are quickly supplied. But it is no use moving from language to the computational level, producing columns of numbers, if you cannot show any organic connection with the words of the text. Elizabethan drama is a genre in which authors are not immediately visible: they speak through their characters, who are individualised according to gender, age, social class, and dramatic function. A simple

computation of function words, however elaborately sifted by statistical procedures, may tell you something about the characters but cannot reliably indicate authorship.<sup>4</sup> Searching by content words suffers from the liability that plays dramatising the prolonged battles of medieval English history, say, will share a vocabulary of swords, armour, horses, combat, blood, wounds, death, victory. It may be fruitful to use atomistic approaches, based on single words, in studying non-fictional works, or even prose fiction written by single authors, but for drama we need a method which will respect what Saussure described as the linearity of language, the distinctive feature by which we add word to word in order to form our utterances.

### Corpus linguistics

To find a method that respects the sequential or 'joined up' nature of language, I have turned to a field in which the marriage of Philology and Informatics has been extremely fruitful, the new discipline of corpus linguistics. In 1964 the *Brown University Corpus of Present Day American English* appeared, the first machine-readable

corpus, consisting of texts published in 1961 and amounting to a million words. In the four decades since then, dozens of corpora have appeared, greater in scale (the 'Bank of English', produced by Birmingham University in association with the dictionary publisher, Collins, had grown to 524 million words by 2004), and wider in scope (now covering all varieties of present-day English, and gradually reaching back into the past). The provision of these vast databases has stimulated the empirical study of language use, a field long neglected during the ascendancy of linguistic theory. In addition to providing a new method for studying language as a system, corpus linguistics, being based on actual language use, can indicate the probability that certain structural patterns will appear. With automatic concordancing and other data-mining tools, corpus linguistics can reveal facts about language use never previously suspected.<sup>5</sup>

For authorship studies the major issue is its confirmation of a linguistic phenomenon noted by J.R. Firth in the 1950s, that we tend to use words in groups, not singly. Where Chomskyan theory holds that



Figure 1. In the opening session of the British Academy Literature Week, Sir Brian Vickers FBA argued that the play 'The Reign of King Edward the Third' was jointly written by Thomas Kyd and William Shakespeare. Photo: M. Crossick/British Academy.

sentences are generated purely syntactically, based on grammatical rules and individual lexical items, corpus linguistics shows that in many cases sentences come partially lexicalised. That is, the human brain may process language one word at a time, but it also deals with word-strings, ready-made phrases or collocations in which some words frequently recur in regular combinations. The late John Sinclair, an admirer of Firth and a major force in the creation and exploitation of linguistic corpora, acknowledged the 'open-choice principle', by which the brain generates unique sentences, but defined a complementary 'idiom principle', by which 'a language user has available ... a large number of semi-constructed phrases that constitute single choices, even though they might appear to be analyzable into segments'.<sup>6</sup> Other researchers using corpora have shown that 'formulaicity [is] all-pervasive in language data'.<sup>7</sup> Strangely enough, it needed modern informatics to show philology how language actually works. We are surprised to learn that in any lexicon the set phrase (or 'phraseme') is the numerically predominant lexical unit, outnumbering single words roughly ten to one, and that in one corpus about 70 per cent of its half a million words of running text are part of recurrent word combinations.

The most famous instance of such phrasal repetitions in world literature are the so-called epic formulae in Homer, 'swift-footed Achilles', 'the wine-dark sea', and so on, which are given central importance in a remarkable new database, 'The Chicago Homer'.<sup>8</sup> Edited by Ahavia Kahane (Royal Holloway) and Martin Mueller (Northwestern University), this multilingual database uses the search and display capabilities of electronic texts to make the distinctive features of Early Greek epic accessible to readers with and without Greek. Significantly, the editors quote John Sinclair's definition of the 'idiom principle', and argue that 'the Homeric Question is a question about phrasal repetition'. Accordingly, they have compiled a database consisting of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the poems of Hesiod and the Homeric Hymns, and subjected it to skilled pre-processing. Users can easily pick out any sequence of two or more words that is repeated at least

once in the corpus of Early Greek epic, 'whether the repeated sequence is a mere bit of syntactic glue such as "but he", a noun-epithet formula such as "rosy-fingered Dawn", or an extended narrative stretch, such as the story of the shroud Penelope wove for Laertes.' An extraordinary amount of sharply focused knowledge and experience has gone into creating this resource, which could well revolutionise Homeric studies. From the viewpoint of authorship attribution the most interesting findings are that 'phrasal repetition is a very pervasive phenomenon', no less than 36,000 lemma strings being repeated in this corpus, ranging in length from 2 to 123 words and in frequency from 2 to 3,152 repetitions. A search for repeated phrases longer than 40 words will produce a list with 31 hits. These figures are remarkable in themselves, and carry considerable significance for literary analysis, as one of the editors has recently shown.<sup>9</sup> But their cultural implications are far greater, for the marked up text of this database allows users to follow the links of repeated passages as a way of navigating 'the neural networks of bardic memory', thus simulating the competence of the ancient listener.

### Repeated phrases in Elizabethan plays

Phrasal repetition may play a greater role in Homeric epic than elsewhere, but it occurs in everyday language and in written texts, including Elizabethan drama. So we need a tool that can automatically analyse the continuous text of these plays and pick out repeated collocations. We then need to check each collocation against the corpus of plays performed up to a given point, to establish whether dramatists had favourite phrasemes, and if so, whether they occur in sufficient quantities in anonymously published or co-authored texts for us to be able to identify the hands, brains, or 'neural networks' which composed them. The whole process should be automatic and replicable, to evade the longstanding objection against authorship attributions based on 'parallel passages' that the parallels were only visible to the scholar who claimed them, and could not be tested against the work of other dramatists.

An effective way of measuring an Elizabethan author's tendency to repeat his favourite

phrasemes is to use one of the tools that now exist to detect students' cribbing, such as 'Pl@giarism'.<sup>10</sup> This program compares two machine-readable texts in parallel and automatically highlights every instance where they share identical three-word sequences. If we compile a database of all the plays staged in a dramatist's lifetime, by using a data-mining program, such as 'InfoRapid Search & Replace',<sup>11</sup> we can ascertain in a fraction of a second whether a collocation is widely shared or rare. Having established an author's regular stock of collocations, as found in authenticated plays, we can then turn to the anonymously-published or co-authored plays in which his hand has been suspected, and check how many times his favourite collocations occur there.

### Thomas Kyd

With the help of Dr Marcus Dahl, who devised this method, I have been studying the canon of Thomas Kyd, which currently consists of only three plays, *The Spanish Tragedy* (c. 1587), *Solyman and Perseda* (c. 1590), and *Cornelia* (c. 1594), together with a prose work, *The Householders Philosophie* (1588). Having compared the canonical works with each other, two at a time, I was able to establish Kyd's frequent self-repetition (his Spanish and Turkish tragedies share over 80 collocations of three words or more). I then compared each of those works with three plays I had good reason to think were by him, with striking results. The bourgeois tragedy *Arden of Faversham* (c. 1592) has 95 unique matches with the canonical works – matches not found anywhere else in the 64 plays performed on the London stage before 1596. *The True Chronicle of King Leir and his three daughters* (c. 1590), shares no less than 125 unique matches with the accepted Kyd canon. Ben Jonson referred to 'sporting Kyd', suggesting that he had written comedies, and I can now attribute to him the badly-abridged romance (half the length of a normal play), *Fair Em, the Millers daughter of Manchester: with the love of William the Conqueror* (c. 1590), which shares 42 unique matches with the four accepted works. The number of unique matches in each case far exceeds coincidence, imitation, or plagiarism. Moreover, I can support these findings by traditional literary analysis, all three plays

sharing many elements of narrative technique and dramatic structure with the accepted canon.<sup>12</sup>

Whereas the use of parallel passages as an authorship test has, in the past, been criticised as subjective and unreliable, these Kyd collocations have been picked out automatically, with no prior input from me. I have had to manually check each against the corpus of 64 plays produced in the London theatres between 1580 and 1596, a tedious process but with the advantage that – as the editors of the Chicago Homer have also noted – the reader's eye can detect discontinuous collocations, larger patterns invisible to the machine. With practice anyone would achieve the same results, so that this method can be granted scientific status, being both objective and replicable. I have recently been applying it to two plays whose presence in the Shakespeare canon has long been debated; my work in progress suggests that the Kyd canon will soon be enlarged further. The proper marriage of philology and informatics has the power to solve many problems yet.

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Sir Brian Vickers is Distinguished Senior Fellow at the School of Advanced Study, University of London, and a Fellow of the British Academy.

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An audio recording of the discussion is available as a podcast from [www.britac.ac.uk/medialibrary/](http://www.britac.ac.uk/medialibrary/)

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### British Academy Literature Week

Leading academics, writers and practitioners came together in a series of linked events which made up the British Academy's highly successful Literature Week. Audio recordings of all the events are available as podcasts from [www.britac.ac.uk/medialibrary/](http://www.britac.ac.uk/medialibrary/)

- Monday 19 October:* (A) Sir Brian Vickers FBA preparing with Professor Laurie Maguire for their conversation on 'The Authors of King Edward III'; (B) Dr Tom Lockwood delivering the Chatterton Lecture on 'Donne, by hand'.
- Tuesday 20 October:* (C) Sir Christopher Ricks FBA in conversation with Professor Hermione Lee FBA on T.S. Eliot ('and others'); (D) Professor Marina Warner FBA introducing (E) Professor Robert Crawford, who gave the Warton Lecture on 'T.S. Eliot's daughter'.
- Wednesday 21 October:* (F) Michael Lesslie, Professor Jonathan Bate FBA and Lindsay Posner discuss 'American writers on the English stage'; (G) Professor Christopher Bigsby delivering the Sarah Tryphena Phillips Lecture on 'Arthur Miller: poet of the theatre'.
- Thursday 22 October:* (H) Josephine Hart, Kenneth Cranham, Elizabeth McGovern and Charles Dance perform in the Josephine Hart Poetry Hour; (I) Professor Frank McGuinness discussing poetic theatre – 'Beyond verse?'

### Notes

- 1 See Harold Love, *Attributing Authorship: An Introduction* (Cambridge, 2002).
- 2 See Brian Vickers, *Shakespeare, Co-Author: A Historical Study of Five Collaborative Plays* (Oxford, 2002).
- 3 See F. Mosteller & D.L. Wallace, *Inference and Disputed Authorship: The Federalist* (Ithaca, NY, 1964; Stanford, CA, 2008).
- 4 The sensitive study by John Burrows, *Computation into Criticism: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels and an Experiment in Method* (Oxford, 1987), differentiates characters on the basis of the function words they use.
- 5 See the excellent survey by Graeme Kennedy, *An Introduction to Corpus Linguistics* (London 1998).
- 6 See John Sinclair, *Corpus, Concordance, Collocation* (Oxford, 1991), p. 109.
- 7 Alison Wray, *Formulaic Language and the Lexicon* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 13.
- 8 See [www.library.northwestern.edu/homer/understandinghomepage.html](http://www.library.northwestern.edu/homer/understandinghomepage.html)
- 9 See Martin Mueller, *The Iliad*, second edition (London, 2009), especially chapter 6.
- 10 See [www.personeel.unimaas.nl/georges.span/Plagiarism](http://www.personeel.unimaas.nl/georges.span/Plagiarism)
- 11 See [www.inforapid.de](http://www.inforapid.de)
- 12 For a preliminary account of these researches, see Brian Vickers, 'Thomas Kyd, Secret Sharer', *Times Literary Supplement* (18 April 2008), pp. 13–15; and for an independent validation of the results, see <[data.at.northwestern.edu.mht](http://data.at.northwestern.edu.mht)> postings of 18 and 23 August 2009.

BRITISH ACADEMY LITERATURE WEEK,  
OCTOBER 2009



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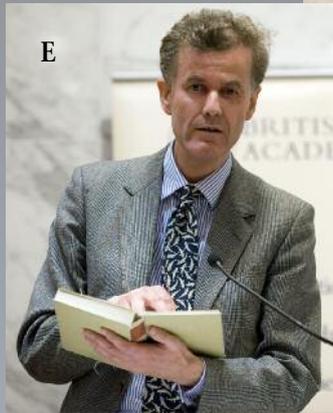
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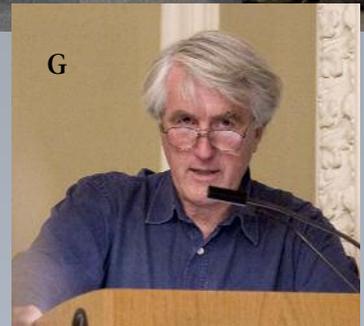
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Photos: M. Crossick/British Academy

# Darwinism, Creative Evolution, and Popular Narratives of 'Life's Splendid Drama'

2009 has been the bicentenary of Charles Darwin's birth, and the 150th anniversary of the publication of 'On the Origin of Species'. On 29-30 June, the British Academy, the Royal Society, and the American Philosophical Society held a joint conference in Cambridge to celebrate. One of the participants, **Professor Peter Bowler FBA**, here discusses the extent to which early accounts of evolution portrayed it as one big adventure story.

**I**N HER *Darwin's Plots*, Gillian Beer explored the role played by narratives linked to evolutionary themes in 19th-century literature. Many people have looked to stories about the key steps in evolution as one way of reading a deeper meaning into the process – episodes in what the palaeontologist William Diller Matthew called 'Life's Splendid Drama'. Misa Landau's *Narratives of Human Evolution* (1990) sparked controversy by claiming that many theories of how humans emerged had the same structure as adventure stories in which the hero (our ancestor) underwent trials to demonstrate his ability to conquer a new world and was rewarded with the prize of a big brain. This claim was deeply disturbing for modern paleoanthropologists, who thought they would seem unscientific if they were found to be only 'telling stories'. But postulating 'adaptive scenarios' to explain particular steps in evolution is standard practice within the modern Darwinian paradigm, and one can tell stories about every episode in the drama, not just the final emergence of humankind.

There is another way of reading a wider purpose into evolutionism, which is to suppose that the mechanism of evolution itself is directed toward the production of higher types. Darwin's theory of natural selection isn't very appropriate here, because it's hard to read a moral direction into a process of trial and error driven by struggle and local adaptation. The preference of many 19th-century thinkers for a model of directed evolution accounts for much of the effort devoted to creating alternatives to natural selection during what Julian Huxley later called the 'eclipse of Darwinism'. To work at this level, evolution had to generate inevitable progress, or at least predictable developmental trends. But such theories do not offer a suitable framework within which to construct narratives – it's hard to tell an interesting story about a process whose outcome is obvious from the very beginning. Landau's analysis worked well for Darwin himself: *The Descent of Man* does indeed tell a story in which our ancestors adventured out onto the open plains and were rewarded with tools and bigger brains. But her efforts to see a narrative structure in other early theories of human origins were less convincing.

Some evolution theories provide an open-ended framework within which one can tell adventure stories, while others generate meaning through their own law-like structure. In this article, I try to identify the key features which permit the creation of narratives, and draw on my own recent work on popular science to argue that, in the sort of literature widely available to the general public, this mode of discourse about evolution only became widespread in the early 20th century. Given the prevalence of non-Darwinian theories based on rigid trends during the 'eclipse of Darwinism', I argue that the role of narrative was actually quite limited in descriptions of evolution up

to that point. Various factors account for the eventual appearance of adventure stories in the popular science literature, including, somewhat paradoxically, the general enthusiasm for Henri Bergson's ostensibly anti-Darwinian philosophy of 'creative evolution'.

## The unpredictability of evolution

It is far more difficult to create meaningful narratives about particular episodes if the evolutionary process itself is supposed to be governed by built-in trends aimed in a particular direction. Even if the end-product is a meaningful goal, it's that goal which creates the meaning – each event in the sequence is just one more entirely predictable step toward it. To make the kind of narrative that Landau was talking about, there has to be an element of unpredictability or open-endedness about evolution. Other outcomes must be possible, at least at some critical points in the process. With this degree of freedom, one can hope to tell a story about why one particular direction worked while others led to failure.

This level of open-endedness is provided most obviously by theories which present evolution largely as a process by which species adapt to changes in their local environment, especially when those changes are brought about by unpredictable opportunities opened up by geological and geographical change. Darwin's theory certainly fits the bill, as in his account of the early hominids modifying their posture as they began to move out onto the African plains, while their cousins, the apes, remained in the forests. Underlying this open-endedness was Darwin's insistence that individual variation is essentially undirected, and hence cannot by itself shape the course of evolution. Natural selection is opportunistic and its results are thus often unpredictable, especially in a world of ever-changing environments and habitats.

## Herbert Spencer and Lamarckism

Any theory which supposes that adaptation to the local environment is the main driving force of evolution will have similar implications. This is certainly true for the Lamarckian theory of the inheritance of acquired characteristics, an alternative that became widely popular in the later decades of the 19th century. Lamarckism was favoured by the philosopher Herbert Spencer, who saw the struggle for existence as the driving force which encouraged individuals to improve themselves when challenged, on the assumption that these improvements would be transmitted to their offspring. There is not much narrative in Spencer's accounts of evolutionary progress – if anyone typifies the 19th-century's passion for explanations based on natural law it is he.

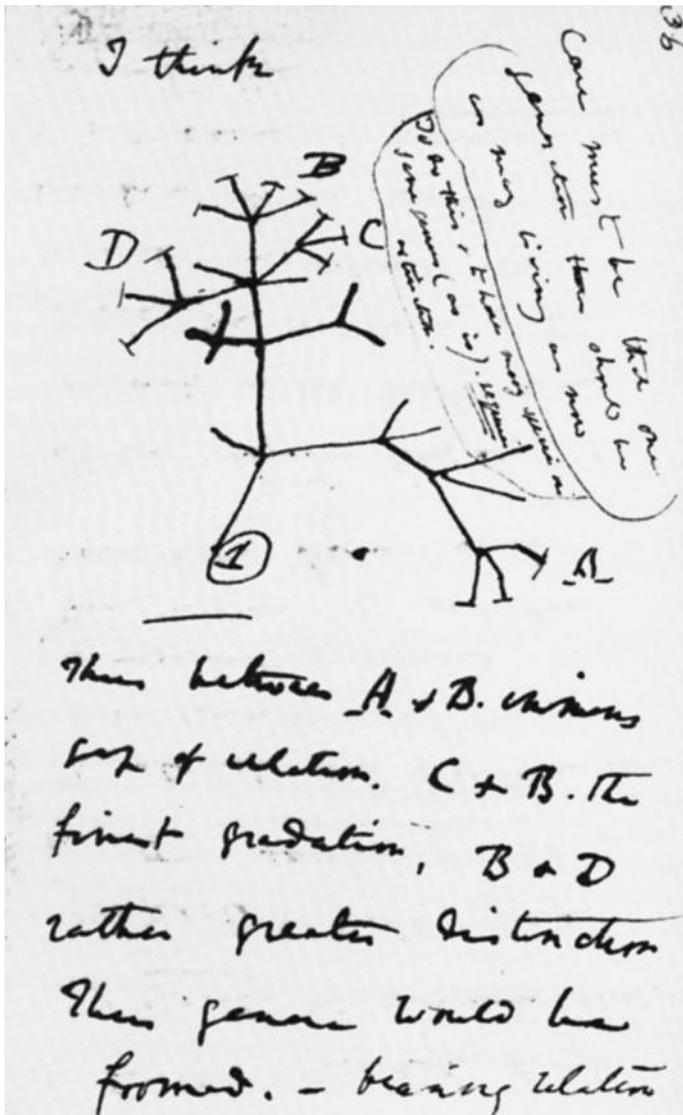


Figure 1. A page from Charles Darwin's notebooks around July 1837 showing his first sketch of an evolutionary tree. It illustrates that evolution was undirected. © Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

But a very similar model of evolution lies at the heart of Charles Kingsley's evolutionism, and *The Water Babies* offers one of the earliest attempts to popularise the idea of evolution by turning it into a story of success and failure. Here individuals, like species, are offered a choice of whether to respond actively to the world around them, and progress to higher levels, or to take the lazy way out and degenerate. This may look like Darwinian natural selection, but it is in fact Lamarckism because it depends on individual self-improvement. Kingsley's narrative is effective because it stresses the choices faced by Tom, the water baby, and the evolutionary models he is offered. Spencer did not like to think in those terms, and his more necessitarian vision of Lamarckism dominated the early phases of the Darwinian revolution.

Spencer doesn't use narrative because he wasn't looking for crucial turning points in evolution – for him it was all the working out of

inexorable laws. Darwin too wanted the rule of law, but the fact that he could tell a story about our ancestors venturing out onto the plains shows that he was more attuned to the unpredictability of evolution. But Darwin was unusual in this respect. If one looks at the literature, including the popular scientific literature, of his time, Spencer's more necessitarian vision of evolution seems to dominate (whatever uses the literary figures were making of the theory). The popular 'evolutionary epics' of the late Victorian period were epic in their indication of the grand sweep of life's development, but they seldom tell adventure stories about individual episodes in the advance.

### The beginnings of the adventure story

To determine when the style of the adventure story did emerge in popular evolutionary texts, I decided to look at a less complex example: the emergence of the amphibians as the first vertebrates adapted to dry land. By the 1920s it was becoming commonplace to describe this as a great adventure, in which innovative creatures took up the challenge of invading or conquering a new environment by inventing a whole series of new functions and structures. But we find no such language in the popular texts of the late 19th century. It doesn't occur, for instance, in the translations of Ernst Haeckel's best-selling *History of Creation* (1876) and *The Evolution of Man* (1879). Popular writers like Grant Allen, Edward Clodd and Joseph McCabe, heavily under the spell of Haeckel or Spencer, saw evolution as an inevitable progress, not as a series of occasional dramatic innovations.

Several developments paved the way for the narrative style of explanation to emerge in the early 20th century. One was the flourishing of research into evolutionary biogeography which followed the publication of Alfred Russel Wallace's *Geographical Distribution of Animals* in 1876. Even Wallace, who was no imperialist, used the language of conquest and colonisation to describe the expansion of successful types into new territories, and such language had become commonplace by 1900.

Another factor was the growing fascination with evolutionary degeneration. Although implicit in Kingsley's *Water Babies*, this did not become fashionable in scientific circles until the publication of E. Ray Lankester's book of 1880. Lankester subsequently became a great friend of H.G. Wells, and it is Lankester's Darwinian take on degeneration that is reflected in the future depicted in *The Time Machine*.

A third important point was the growing recognition by geologists that the geological uniformitarianism which had inspired Darwin was wrong: there *had* been great episodes of relatively abrupt geological change, producing mass extinctions and the sudden opening-up of opportunities for the survivors.

### Bergson's creative *élan*

But the most important change which took place in the decades around 1900 was a growing willingness to see the progress of life as an experimental and hence somewhat haphazard process, dependent on occasional unpredictable successes gained by species forced to innovate in the face of environmental challenge. In science, at least,

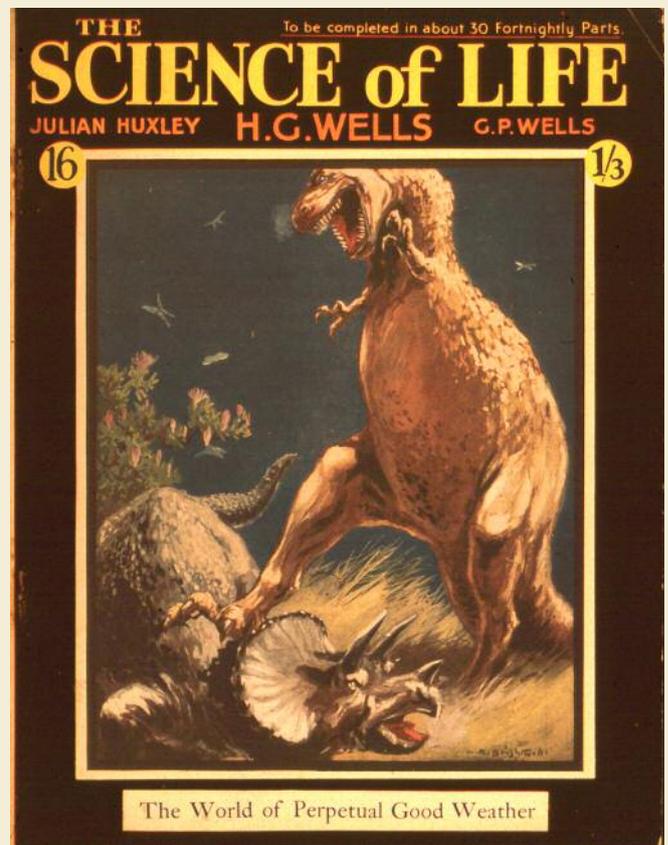
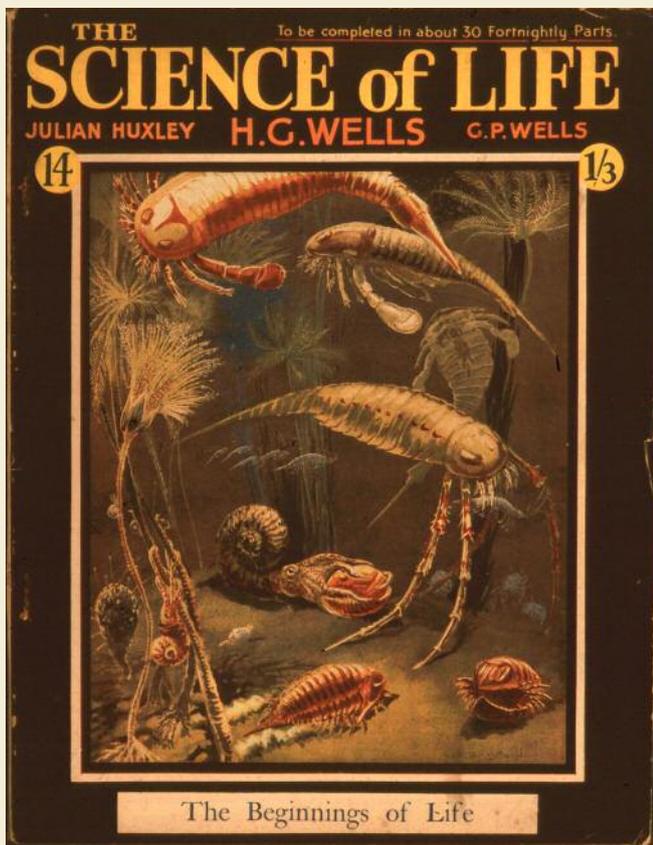
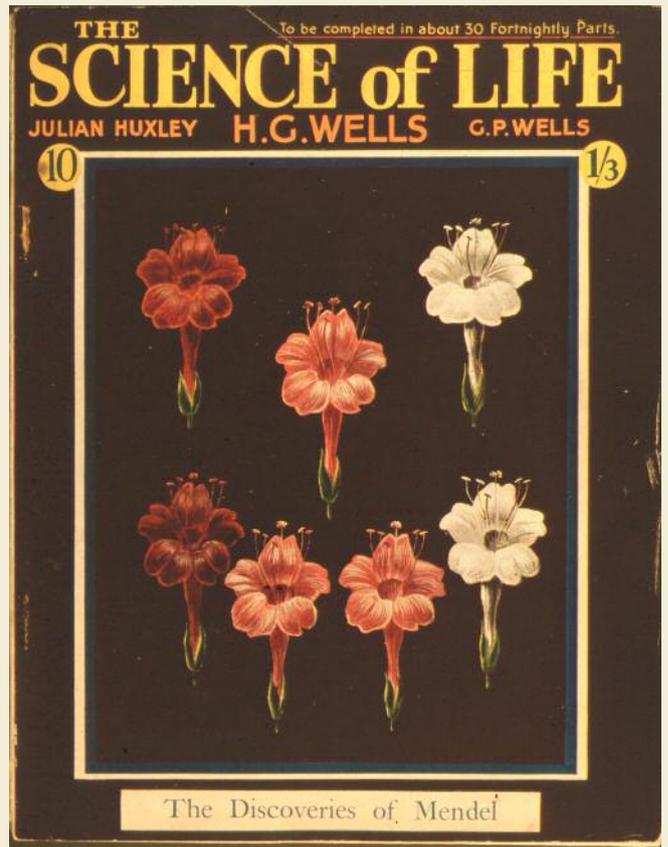
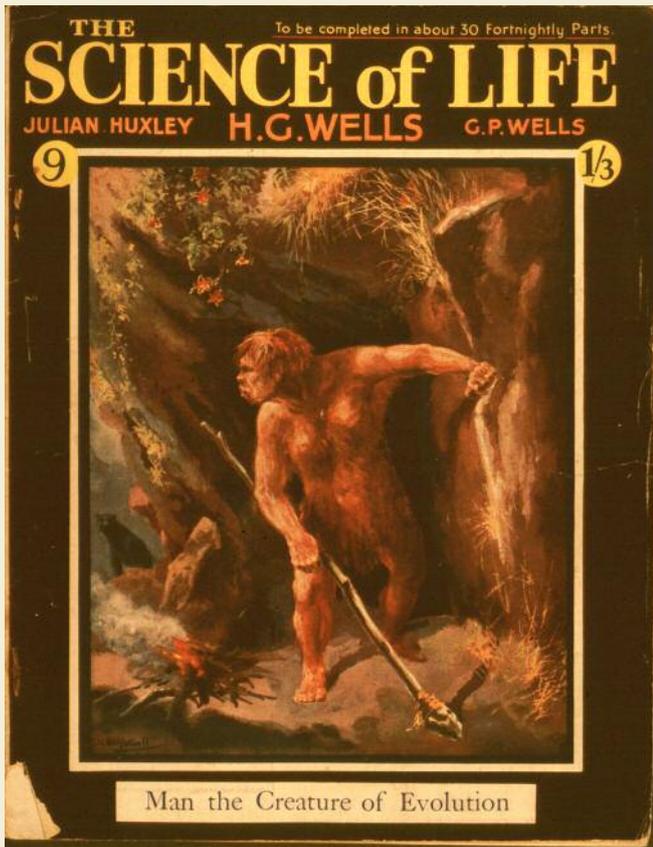


Figure 2. Published fortnightly in 1929–30, 'The Science of Life', by Julian Huxley, H.G. Wells, and his son G.P. Wells, featured episodes from evolution. Images: Dr Peter Broks.

this way of thinking seems to have flourished in response to the publication of Henri Bergson's *Creative Evolution*, translated into English in 1911. Bergson's vision of the creative *élan vital* struggling to overcome the limitations of matter resonated with a whole generation of biologists. This included figures sympathetic to the spirit if not the letter of Lamarckism, including the Aberdeen biologist and prolific popular science writer J. Arthur Thomson. But it also included some of the new generation of Darwinians, including another great populariser, Julian Huxley. Bergson was explicitly writing against Darwinism, but what he meant by the term was the progressionism of Haeckel and Spencer. As Darwin himself had shown, one can see natural selection as opportunistic and innovative, and this was how Huxley now began to understand it. To get a moral from the process, you have to exploit the element of open endedness and tell inspiring stories about particular innovations.

This is precisely what the next generation of biologists proceeded to do in their popular writings. The *Popular Science* series issued by Lord Northcliffe's Amalgamated Press in 1911-13 uses explicitly Bergsonian language to describe the advance of life as an experimental process, but also brings in a Darwinian element by stressing nature's indifference to those who lose out in the race to innovate. J. Arthur Thomson's *New Natural History* of 1926, talks of the 'invasion of the land' by the amphibians and the 'conquest of the air' by the birds. Thomson (who always wrote effectively about animal behaviour) even stressed the innovative mental powers of modern amphibians to suggest that their distant ancestors had the

capacity to press ahead into the new environment. The same language occurs throughout his popular writings, including a book suggesting the moral lessons to be learnt from *The Gospel of Evolution*.

H.G. Wells' *Outline of History* of 1921 has introductory chapters on evolution, written in collaboration with Lankester, which stress the episodic nature of evolutionary innovation following mass extinctions. Here again we have the terminology of the 'invasion of the dry land' coupled with the somewhat less aggressive metaphor of a 'liberation' from the water. In *The Science of Life*, which Wells wrote in collaboration with Julian Huxley later in the decade, there is a whole chapter entitled 'Life Conquers the Dry Land', telling the story of how the amphibians responded to the challenge of a world cursed by drought. There is again a stress on the episodic nature of the great advances in life, all of which arose through response to challenges imposed by geological disturbances.

The use of this kind of dramatic language to describe key episodes in the progress of life represented something quite new in popular descriptions of Darwinism. Unlike most evolutionary epics from the 19th century, it implies that the course of development was not predetermined or predictable, but was contingent on responses to dramatic external challenges. It represents the true flowering of the style of evolutionary narrative used by Kingsley but largely ignored by contemporaries obsessed with the image of inevitable, law-like progress.

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# **Borderline Citizens:**

## **Women, Gender, and Political Culture in Britain, 1815–1867**

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*A new British Academy book provides the most comprehensive analysis to date of women's involvement in British political culture in the first half of the 19th century. In the following extracts, Dr Kathryn Gleadle describes how women often engaged with politics issues through a prominent male relative – in this case, the leading anti-slavery campaigner Thomas Foxwell Buxton.*

**I**T WAS Priscilla Johnston, Anna Gurney, and to a lesser extent Sarah Buxton who were particularly implicated in Buxton's parliamentary endeavours. Prior to her marriage in 1834 to Andrew Johnston (an Evangelical MP who was also closely involved in Buxton's work) Priscilla acted as her father's chief assistant and secretary. After her wedding the role of Buxton's leading coadjutor was taken up for six months by Anna (his cousin), while Priscilla and Andrew spent time on their estate in Scotland. On their return to London in the

spring of 1835 both Andrew and Priscilla resumed their labours for Buxton, along with Anna, Buxton's sister Sarah, and to a lesser extent Buxton's other children, Richenda, Edward, and Charles.

Anna and Priscilla often laboured for twelve-hour days, sometimes to the detriment of their health. They undertook extensive research and composed synopses of documents to facilitate Thomas's political performances. The following request to Anna was typical: 'Will you oblige me by looking over the enclosed papers, & giving

me your opinion as to what I shall do? and telling me the substance of what is in them?' They were not merely playing an auxiliary role. His speeches, for example, were routinely composed by Anna or Priscilla. As Thomas reported to Anna in May 1838, 'Your speech [on abolition], as delivered at Exeter Hall yesterday was very good'. Or, as Priscilla wrote to Anna, 'My father spoke for an hour "out of Miss Gurney" he says'. Thomas Fowell Buxton's signature on reports and letters did not signify an autonomous, individual identity.

'Thomas Fowell Buxton' functioned almost as a 'brand name' that could be utilised by other family members. For example, Priscilla did not merely act as her father's amanuensis, she undertook correspondence in his name. She noted with amusement Thomas's confusion when William Lloyd Garrison, the American abolitionist, thanked him for a letter which he had sent to *The Liberator*. Thomas was unable to recall the letter as it was she who had written it. This appears to have been a common practice within the family. It was the cause which mattered, and individual identities were subordinated to it.

Priscilla and Anna's confidence in writing under Thomas's name (and his acquiescence in this process) suggests that it was perceived by the family not to signify simply his own individuality, but to be rather representative of a corporate political project. Just as the franchise might be regarded as a piece of family property, so too might the career of a politician be viewed as a channel for the furtherance of family political objectives. The Buxtons' assumption of a collective familial identity was integral to this process. As Priscilla put it, 'we are *all* doing good by wholesale'. The subtleties of this phenomenon may be discerned by exploring a particular instance of Buxton family collaboration: the composition of an extensive monograph on the slave trade, *The Remedy*.

Published in 1840 and bearing the authorial signature of 'Thomas Fowell Buxton', *The Remedy* was a sequel to *The African Slave Trade* (1839). The work insisted on the need to augment the British naval presence and for diplomatic initiatives to be undertaken with African chiefs to ensure the cessation of the slave trade. It was an audacious, expansionist vision of imperial rule which included extensive plans for agricultural and

commercial development. Although it represented a reversal of many strands of existing colonial policy, remarkably, many of its arguments were to be accepted.

Whilst Thomas appears to have been responsible for the general scheme of the work and an initial draft, Sarah Buxton and Anna Gurney were both closely involved in its composition. A letter to them from Thomas finds him very pleased with the sections they have sent and especially that on cruelty: 'what an argument it is for Missionaries'. It was Priscilla, however, who bore the brunt of the work. In the winter of 1839 she wearily explained to her sister Richenda that she had been working 'night & day' on the publication, going through the proofs and making extensive alterations so as to render it more accessible. Although she felt a responsibility to adhere to the substance of her father's plans for the work, Priscilla clearly felt she had the authority to substantially rewrite much of it, confessing: 'my only fear & doubt is whether my father & you all knowing it so well, will not feel it strange'.

The authorial signature of 'Thomas Fowell Buxton' thus silenced the fact that this was a work with an intricate history of collaborative composition. This does not mean to say that it was a process devoid of conflict. Thomas charged Priscilla with finishing the work when he was in Italy unwell, yet he found it difficult to relinquish control. He acknowledged that Priscilla's revisions, which had overturned 'the whole existing arrangement of my book', had greatly improved it – although characteristically he claimed he too would have made similar changes. Priscilla wrote to Anna in desperation at her father's refusal to resign command of the project. Her father mocked her anxiety, writing to Edward that she should 'trot along a little

more soberly'. Priscilla's frustration is understandable. Whilst her father reassured her that she should not have paid any attention to his 'nonsensical' suggestions for alteration, he nonetheless requested that his 'brilliant' passage on racial prejudice be reinstated. Her faith in providential destiny provided her with a means of justifying her exasperation. Observing that her father was duty-bound to be in Rome because of her mother's health, she noted: 'I feel for myself the truest faith that all this mighty work is under the closest care of Providence – it seems to me that we are bound to trust the *Master & Doer*. If servants are dismissed for a time (which I firmly believe my Father is providentially) they must bear to be passive – such is the required service.'

The family's firm belief in providential destiny helped to abate somewhat the emotional demands of working with the often imperious Thomas. He could be considered not as a dominant political agent for whom they offered services – but rather as another humble servant working in God's name. Even so, Thomas's gendered self-positioning as paterfamilias was interwoven into the family's identity as a collective political unit.

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Dr Kathryn Gleadle is Fellow and Tutor in Modern History, Mansfield College, University of Oxford. She was a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow 1999-2002.

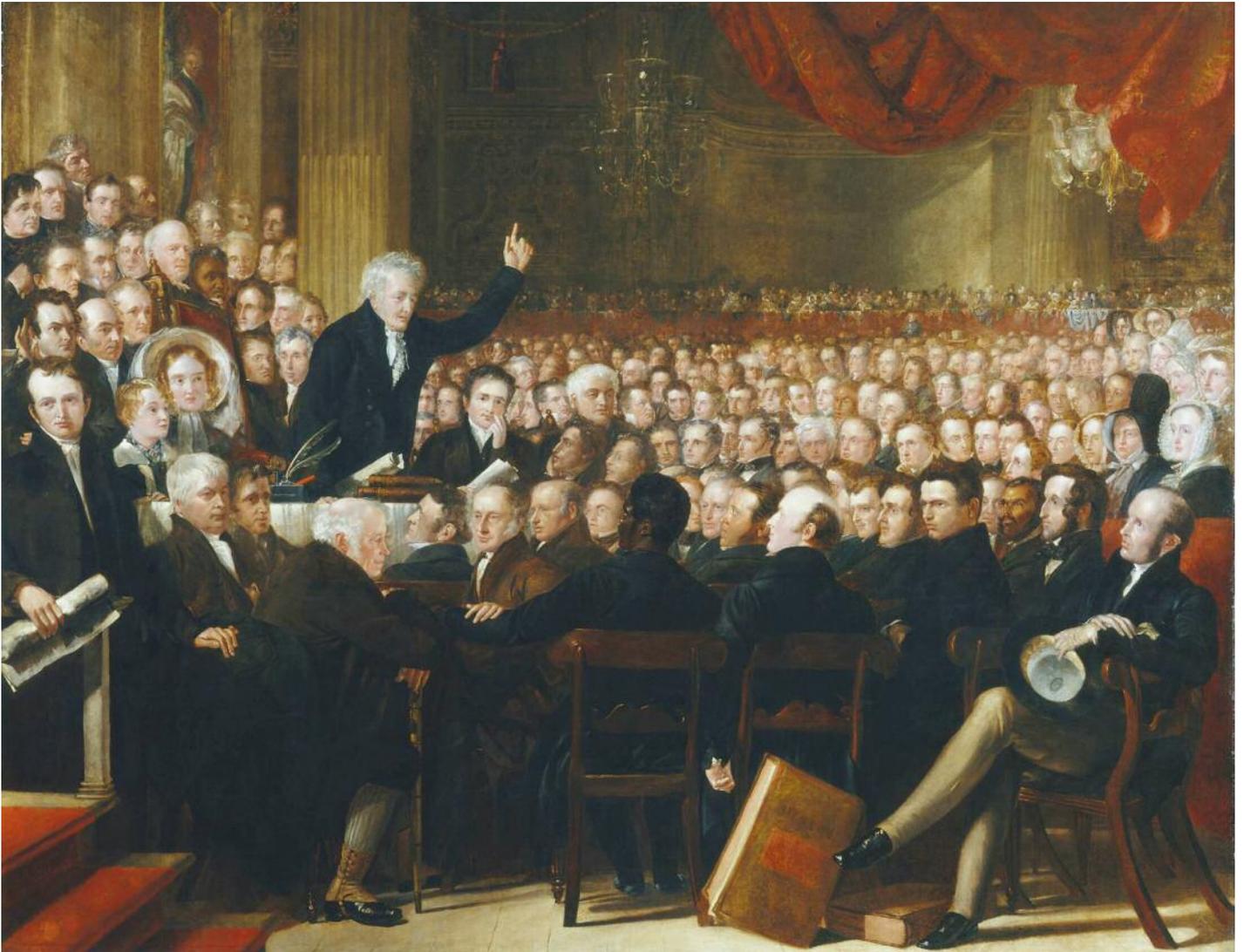
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Her book, *Borderline Citizens: Women, Gender, and Political Culture in Britain, 1815-1867*, was published in September 2009 in the series *British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship Monographs* series. Details may be found at [www.britac.ac.uk/pubs/](http://www.britac.ac.uk/pubs/)

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The Anti-Slavery Society Convention, 1840, by Benjamin Robert Haydon, oil on canvas, 1841. © National Portrait Gallery, London.

WHEN THE painter Benjamin Haydon executed his ambitious study of the world anti-slavery convention which met in London 1840, he was at pains to include women in his portrayal. However, they were situated as – literally – borderline figures. The dramatic centrepiece of the work focused upon the veteran campaigner, Thomas Clarkson, who is surrounded by a host of male anti-slavery crusaders. Women are positioned around the edges of the great painting. Whilst some famous female activists are clearly visible, such as Anne Knight and Elizabeth Pease, the woman who was given the greatest prominence in the work, just to the left of Thomas Clarkson, was Mary Clarkson. Tellingly, she had not achieved prominence due to her grass-roots

campaigning. Rather, her status derived from the fact that she was Clarkson's daughter. Haydon's image encapsulates many of the themes of Dr Gleadle's book. Women occupied an enduring but peripheral location within the contemporary political imagination. Their status within the world of public politics remained problematic throughout this period – even in campaigns apparently deemed suitable for female activism, such as anti-slavery. Family identities, moreover, remained crucial to the representation of women as political subjects even if, as Dr Gleadle demonstrates, there were alternative routes for middle-class women to achieve political status – particularly within their own communities.

# Liter8 Lrnrs: Is Txting Valuable or Vandalism?

Dr Clare Wood, Dr Bev Plester and Samantha Bowyer report some conclusions from their British Academy-funded research project.

THERE EXISTS a technology that costs as little as £10 to buy, and gives children regular (daily) practice at reading and spelling. Moreover, not only do they love to use these devices, but they are also indicators of status, and enable children to become creative users of language. In fact, the more creative they are with this technology, the better their literacy skills at school become. What are these devices? They are mobile phones, and specifically, we are talking about children's use of the text messaging (SMS) feature of them. This surprises most people. But something so counter-intuitive is actually a logical outcome.



Figure 1. Texting is an enjoyable activity which appears to support rather than undermine developing literacy skills in children. Photo: the authors.

## How children learn to read

One of the early developing skills associated with (and believed to underpin) successful reading and spelling development is called 'phonological awareness'. Put simply, this refers to a child's ability to detect, isolate and manipulate patterns of sound in speech. So children who can tell you which words rhyme, or what word is left if you remove the 't' sound from 'stand', have particular levels of phonological awareness. This skill is believed to be necessary if children are to progress to the key stage in learning to read – learning how speech sounds map onto written letters and words. These mappings are taught as 'phonics' programmes in primary classrooms in the UK and elsewhere, following a substantial research literature which has demonstrated their effectiveness. We know that children who struggle with learning to read have deficits in phonological awareness, and that phonological awareness training can improve literacy outcomes.

The relevance of this background becomes apparent when we consider the various forms of text message abbreviation (or 'textism') that are used when sending messages:

- Shortenings: cutting the end off a word, losing more than one letter, e.g. bro = brother.
- Contractions: cutting letters, usually vowels, out of the middle of a word, e.g. txt, plz, hmwrk.
- G Clippings: cutting off only the final g in a word, e.g. goin, comin, workin, swimmin.
- Other Clippings: cutting off other final letters, e.g. I've, hav, wil, com.
- Symbols: using symbols, including emoticons, and x used symbolically, e.g. &, @, ;-), :-p, xxx.
- Initialisms: a word or group of words is represented by its initial letter, e.g. tb = text back, lol = laughing out loud, gf = girlfriend.
- Letter/Number Homophones: a letter or number is used to take the place of a phoneme, syllable, or word of the same sound, e.g. 4, 2, l8r, u, r, c.
- Non-conventional Spellings: a word is spelled according to legitimate English phoneme-grapheme conversion rules, but not the conventional one used to spell the word, e.g. nite, cum, fone, skool.
- Accent Stylisation: a word is spelled as it is pronounced in casual speech, e.g. gonna, wiv = with, av = have, wanna, elp = help, anuva = another.
- Missing Apostrophes: left out either in possessive or traditional contraction form, e.g. dads, Im, Ive, cant.

As you can see, most forms are phonetic in nature and require either a level of phonological skill to produce/decode them, or a

combination of phonological and alphabetic knowledge. Although unconventional, relatively few abbreviations violate the rules of how to spell a word – most just exploit the high degree of alternative ways in which sounds may map onto letters in English. Other forms represent abbreviations that are used already in other contexts, or are often seen in rebus type puzzle books (and we recall no public outcry over giving these to children in years gone by). As for contractions, we can recall seeing courses advertised which promised to teach people how to ‘speed write’ in this way and reap the benefits in terms of time saved during notetaking.

In short, it would seem that the children who are heavy users of these text abbreviations, both in terms of producing them and reading them, are unlikely to be problem readers and spellers, simply because of the levels of phonological skill that they are required to apply whenever they are texting. There is also the additional contribution that reading all those text messages may have on a child’s development: we also know that ‘exposure to text’ contributes to children’s proficiency as readers. Normally this factor is understood in terms of more mundane forms of print exposure, but exposure to text through text messages – whether written in abbreviations or not – is also likely to contribute positively to a child’s development.

However, these are not the arguments that we are presented with via the media. Anecdotes of children who have allegedly written school assignments using text abbreviation are presented in the press as evidence of declining literacy standards. Journalist John Humphrys, writing in the *Daily Mail*, went so far in 2007 to describe texters as ‘vandals who are doing to our language what Genghis Khan did to his neighbours eight hundred years ago’.

So, on the one hand we have the academic, theoretical position, which suggests that perhaps these alternative written forms have inherent value for young children learning to read. On the other, we have the popular idea that textisms are destroying children’s respect for conventional forms of literacy. What we need to inform this debate is some empirical evidence.

### Textisms: the evidence

We began research in this area initially to see whether there was any evidence of association between text abbreviation use and literacy skills at all, and if there were any, whether they were positive or negative. Our initial work found that the density with which children used textisms in their messages was associated positively with spelling performance on standard tests.<sup>1</sup> In other words, children who used a high proportion of textisms in their messages relative to the overall length of the message tended to be better at spelling than children who use more conventional spellings in their messages. We later found that this was also true in terms of children’s reading skills, and that, as suspected, much of this relationship was mediated by the children’s phonological awareness.<sup>2</sup> However, textism use was also contributing to reading ability over and above the performance explained by phonological awareness. We suggested that this might be the contribution of exposure to text, or even a motivational effect of engaging in playful language use.

A limitation of this early work was that it only looked at associations. Having demonstrated that they existed, and that they were positive in nature rather than negative, we now needed to look at the direction of causality. To do this we needed to conduct a longitudinal study, and the British Academy provided the funding for this particular, crucial project.

At the beginning of the academic year we assessed 63 eight- to twelve-year-old children on their verbal IQ, phonological awareness, reading and spelling skills. We also asked them to provide us with a sample of their text messages sent over a two-day period. We coded these messages as before, counting the number of textisms used and dividing this number by the total number of words used in the message. This gave us a number between 0 and 1, which indicated what proportion of their messages were written using textisms (0 = none, 1 = all words used were textisms). We then retested the children at the end of the year on all the same measures (except IQ) and looked at their progress.

The first thing to note was that the proportion of textisms used was observed to increase with age. The Year 4 children were using about 21% textisms, compared to 30% in Year 5 and 47% in Year 6. This observation is in line with the idea that more sophisticated literacy skills are needed for textism use.



Figure 2. *Journalist and broadcaster John Humphrys is not a fan of texting.*  
Photo: Rex Features.

In terms of the key question, we found that textism use at the beginning of the year was able to predict reading ability and phonological awareness at the end of the year, after controlling for individual differences in verbal IQ. However, when we reversed the analysis we found that literacy skills at the beginning of the academic year could not predict textism use. What this suggests is that textism use is driving the development of phonological awareness and reading skill, rather than initial literacy skill explaining the children’s ability to construct or use textisms.

So, what can we conclude from this analysis? It would seem that in a study with a very modest sample, we are detecting a causal effect of textism use on literacy skills. We are currently in the process of collecting data from a second cohort of children to increase the size of our sample which will enable us to conduct further analyses. However, we are confident that at this stage our data suggests that there is no cause for alarm.

We are starting to see a change in attitude to textisms amongst some teachers, who recognise the potential to use textism-based exercises to engage children in phonological awareness activities. In particular, such exercises have the potential to offer older children struggling with alphabetic reading age-appropriate activities for honing their phonological skills. We are also in the process of analysing data from an intervention study which is assessing the educational impact of allowing nine- to ten-year-old children access to mobile phones at the weekend. So far those data are also demonstrating the positive potential of texting to support literacy development.

In short, we suggest that children's use of textisms is far from problematic. If we are seeing a decline in literacy standards amongst young children, it is in spite of text messaging, rather than because of it.

#### Notes

- 1 B. Plester, C. Wood & V. Bell, 'Txt msg n school literacy: does mobile phone use adversely affect children's written language attainment?' *Literacy*, 42:3 (2008), 137-144.
- 2 B. Plester, C. Wood & P. Joshi, 'Exploring the Relationship between Children's Knowledge of Text Message

Abbreviations and School Literacy Outcomes'. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 27:1 (2009), 145-161.

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