TRUST

Catching up with Professor Dominic Abrams FBA to discuss

Trust – why we lack it, why we need it and how we can
use it to build a stronger and more resilient society

Foreword

Two years have passed since the previous issue of the *British Academy Review* but it feels like several lifetimes. COVID has of course turned everyone's life upside down, wreaking economic havoc and forcing people to sacrifice freedoms on a scale not seen for many years. In the UK we've also gone through Britain's withdrawal from the European Union, the political, economic and social consequences of which will take many years to understand.

Another notable change has occurred within the British Academy. In summer 2021 I took over the role of President and it has been a great pleasure meeting the staff, working more closely with our Fellows and getting to grips with the huge variety of work the Academy does, from funding new research and hosting events to weighing in on the most pressing higher education and public policy issues of the day.

I was particularly honoured to take over from Professor Sir David Cannadine. David was an exceptional President and the Academy emerged from his term a more outward looking, effective and influential organisation. I'm very grateful to have taken on an organisation in such great form.

As David highlighted in his final speech to the AGM, the need for the social sciences, humanities and the arts – the SHAPE subjects – has never been greater. It is only with the insights from subjects as diverse as anthropology, psychology, history, law, economics and geography that we will ensure the health, wellbeing and prosperity of the UK and provide the cultural and societal enrichment that has sustained us during the pandemic, which is far from over.

Despite the progress that many countries have made in tackling the spread of COVID-19 with the vaccine, there is a long way to go when it comes to dealing with the consequences of this pandemic. Indeed, as the British Academy highlighted earlier this year, the societal impacts of the virus are so vast and far-reaching that the global recovery could take a decade or more. Thankfully, the social sciences, the humanities and the arts are on hand to help guide this recovery and help decision-makers face up effectively to the challenges facing us all.

Indeed, experts in these fields have a special role to play in fashioning a bright, exciting and equitable future. This doesn't just apply to our recovery from the pandemic but to tackling climate change, to refreshing the business world with an added sense of purpose and to solving some of society's smaller – yet no less important – challenges.   We also want to celebrate our disciplines for their intrinsic value in enabling us to understand people and societies across time and space, and to explore deeply what it is to be human.

**Professor Julia Black,
President of the British Academy**

British Academy Review

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Academy news

Social costs of the pandemic will be felt for a decade, says the British Academy

Society will continue to feel the impacts of COVID-19 for a decade or more without an urgent public policy overhaul, warned the British Academy in an independent research report published in Spring. In its multi-disciplinary evidence review, *The COVID decade: understanding the long-term societal impacts of COVID-19*, the Academy forecasts that significant intervention will be needed to avoid an acceleration towards poorer health, social and economic outcomes and a more extreme pattern of inequality.

The report attracted significant attention with the *Guardian* running the story on its front page, BBC *Newsnight* interviewing British Academy Chief Executive Hetan Shah, *Sky News* speaking to the Academy's Director of Policy, Dr Molly Morgan Jones, and Sir Patrick Vallance praising the report during one of No 10 Downing Street's daily briefings.

From publishing two landmark policy reports on the societal impacts of COVID-19 to launching a pioneering new initiative for Early Career Researchers in the SHAPE disciplines (Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts for People and the Economy), 2021 has been a productive year for the British Academy.

Directors should be held to account for their companies' purposes, concludes long-running British Academy programme

Directors of boards of companies should be held accountable for determining and implementing the purposes of their companies, according to a report published by the British Academy which concludes one of the longest-running programmes of research into the role of business in society. The work builds on the Academy's 2019 Future of the Corporation programme report, *Principles for Purposeful Business*, which highlighted how putting purpose at the heart of business transforms its potential to enhance wellbeing, benefits the natural world and avoids detrimental activities.

Fortune magazine, the *Financial Times*, *City AM* and the *Spectator* all covered the report, with the latter's Martin Vander Weyer hailing the Academy for bringing 'real-world focus' to the debate over purposeful business.

The British Academy chooses Midlands as first hub for Early Career Researcher Network

In autumn the Academy announced the University of Birmingham as the first regional hub of its Early Career Researcher Network, a pilot programme aimed at UK-based postdoctoral researchers in the humanities and social sciences.

As the regional hub, the University of Birmingham will lead a consortium with 12 other universities located across the region in this first stage of an inclusive and researcher-led Network to support the needs and interests of Early Career Researchers. Further hubs will be announced in other regions and nations of the UK as the programme expands.

British Academy launches Strategic Committee for Languages

In July, the British Academy and the University Council of Modern Languages convened a new Strategic Committee for Languages in Higher Education. The Committee will track trends in the provision of languages in the UK as yet more evidence emerges of the need for close monitoring of the sector, and will propose solutions to enable greater modern languages uptake at university. The Committee followed the publication in 2020 of a proposal by the British Academy and others for a national strategy to revive language learning.

Analysis of data highlights the 'unprecedented challenges' facing UK Higher Education following the changed UK-EU relationship

The latest data on EU staff and students in Higher Education in the UK highlight the 'unprecedented challenge' ahead if we are to continue to attract and retain such numbers in future as a non-EU member state, found the British Academy.

EU higher education staff and students in the UK looked at the latest available data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and found that in 2019–2020, on average 17% of all HE staff and around 6% of all students in the UK were EU nationals. The Academy highlights that changes to the immigration system, to tuition fee status and to eligibility for student loans as a result of Brexit amount to an unprecedented challenge for UK universities.
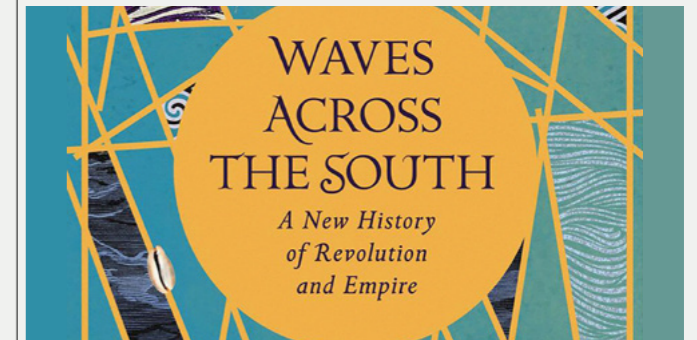
Waves Across the South wins the £25,000 British Academy Book Prize for Global Cultural Understanding 2021

In October, *Waves Across the South: A New History of Revolution and Empire* by Cambridge historian Professor Sujit Sivasundaram won the ninth British Academy Book Prize for Global Cultural Understanding.

The announcement was made by Chair of the jury, Professor Patrick Wright FBA, during an online celebration hosted by the Academy. In *Waves Across the South*, Professor Sivasundaram re-imagines the history of the British Empire with the southern seas at the heart of the story.

The Big Interview

with Professor
Dominic Abrams

Trust: why we lack it, why we need
it and how we can use it to build a
stronger and more resilient society

From serving as the academic lead on the British Academy's landmark COVID & Society work to appearing on panels at political party conferences up and down the country, 2021 has been a productive year for social psychologist Professor Dominic Abrams FBA. Here, he discusses his latest research findings on trust, explains why we need to rethink the role of social relationships in our economy and presents a vision of a stronger, more resilient society.

What have you been working on over the last year or so and how have you found the time to fit everything in?

Most of the last two years has been occupied working with the British Academy and with the Nuffield Foundation on research, policy or both. I've been academic lead on the Academy's Covid & Society work, where the two *COVID Decade* reports were the culmination of a phenomenally intensive process of consultation and writing. Meanwhile, developing the Cohesive Societies programme, we now have a £1m collaboration between the British Academy and the Nuffield Foundation on Understanding Communities, which I co-chair with Professor Ash Amin. I've lost track of how many meetings and events we've done with different parts of government, civil service and media systems. Across all of these areas the policy and communications teams at the Academy have been incredibly focused, productive and skilled. It is a huge pleasure and privilege to work with them and with Hetan Shah and David Cannadine's outstanding leadership.

Meanwhile, working with Belong, I'm also co-directing the Nuffield funded 'Beyond Us and Them' project, an eight-timepoint exploration of social cohesion in different parts of Britain across 2020 and the first half of 2021. My experimental research on intergroup relations, leadership and environmental behaviour, and my teaching also continued and three of my PhD students completed their theses and moved to postdoc research positions. Three more are about to submit theirs.

A lot of your research has focused on the issue of trust. How would you define 'trust' in the context of social psychology?

As a social psychologist, I'd define trust as the confidence that things that other people do and say reflect their genuine beliefs and intentions. And so, whether that's scientific evidence coming from scientists or statements from government about policy, or justifications by local authorities about their bin collections, or if it's just a person you know who is telling you something, it's the belief that they're being honest and their intentions are as they seem. Trust is different from confidence or agreement of course.

And why is trust important in a nation?

I think it's important to distinguish between average levels of trust across society from the question of in whom or what people place their trust. For instance, it might be that one can live quite happily with not trusting specific politicians to always tell the truth – after all, lots of politicians have broken promises at some point – while nonetheless trusting them to put the country's interests first, or the political system to pursue its stated objectives. So, it may not matter that there are certain things we don't trust as long as we have sufficient trust in the things or agents that provide the certainty and stability that allow us to carry on our social, business and other lives.

Trust in science, for example, is pretty fundamental. If people believe that the science behind vaccines or the behavioural restrictions to deal with COVID is solid and sound, that's really important because then they are much more likely to follow advice, to reflect on the evidence and come to sensible conclusions about it. The difficulty comes, I think, when people don't know who to trust. Do they trust the government who might be saying it's time to relax and not worry too much about the spread of the virus because we can manage it with the rollout of vaccines? Or is it more important to trust expert voices that urge continued caution and vigilance? So, which voice one listens to becomes a critical question. One of the difficulties comes when there is an ambiguity between who has authority to speak on particular matters. Once government begins to question the science, and vice-versa, potentially trust in either direction can be undermined.

What is critical from the public's point of view is that the relationship between the research evidence and the science on the one hand, and the government's own choices and decisions on the other, is clear – that it's absolutely clear where the responsibility lies for decisions.

You've written before about how the UK went into the pandemic with historically low levels of trust. Why is that?

Well, I think most governments aren't trusted well by their populations but it got pretty dire in the UK following Brexit and the 2019 General Election. At that time, our own evidence and other national surveys indicated that around 60% of people expressed distrust and only around 20% expressed trust in the government. There was so much ideological conflict primarily around Brexit but also around the meaning of British identity, the value of British identity, and all kinds of other issues, that the country was extremely divided – in fact, we found that

'66% of respondents felt the country was becoming more divided and only 12% felt that it was becoming more united'

66% of respondents felt it was becoming more divided and only 12% that it was becoming more united. And it didn't really matter which types of groups you asked about – younger or older people, wealthy or poorer people, Remainers or Leavers, Scots and English – all of these groups were perceived as being strongly divided, with over 70% of respondents perceiving UK-EU, Scotland-England and Remainer-Leaver divides to be growing.

Once we went into the pandemic and the first lockdown, our research project saw a massive acceleration of general trust in government and general unity to the point where, in May 2020, for the first time more people expressed trust (nearly 50%) than distrust (about 25%), so there was a sort of common purpose and a common threat that we were all dealing with, and people pulled together and perceived unity around that shared situation. Following the Dominic Cummings debacle, but not necessarily entirely because of it, unity and trust started to dissipate again. It seems likely that this reflected the growing complexity and uncertainty about the pandemic, not just outrage about Dominic Cummings as, for example, we saw a temporary slight recovery in trust and unity in the early part of 2021. We say more about all of these issues in the 'Beyond Us and Them' report covering the period up to June 2021, which has just come out.

What was really interesting from the research we were doing – we were tracking levels of trust and levels of unity every couple of months all the way through with quite large samples across the country – was that levels of national unity declined again and by October 2020 they had almost returned down to the levels they'd been at in 2019. Indeed, by March 2021 78% perceived national division to be growing and only 10% perceived unity to be growing. But in stark contrast, unity and trust at the local level tended to remain relatively high and stable over time. In March 2021 at the local level more people felt trusting (generally around 43%) than distrusting (21%) and more perceived either stable or growing unity at the local level (75%) than perceived growing division (25%).

How do you make sense of those statistics?

Two different things appear to be happening, and that echoes my point about whom we trust rather than how much we trust being the critical thing. What happened possibly – it's difficult to be absolutely certain – is that the grassroots movements, the self-help groups, the mobilisation within communities, helped to cement and reinforce the sense of trust and unity at the start of the pandemic and a lot of that has persisted and people found that there was consistency in their local communities and local authorities' actions, and that their local common fate – as it were – had more in common than the national common fate. And remember, there were periods where there were very salient contrasts between different regions of the country in terms of the levels of infection but also in the types of lockdown and the restrictions on people and their lives. so I think because of that people came to feel what was happening locally was most meaningful and trustworthy.

The difficulty we had is that whilst

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communication from national government tended to be clear and easy to understand – the daily briefings on the news media, for example – and although there was plenty of evidence and information coming from the government, it didn't really relate very well to these peoples' personal circumstances. So, people felt it was fine and accessible but it wasn't very useful and didn't really show any sensitivity to what was happening to them. Conversely, the communications they had been getting more locally did have that quality – of responding to their individual situation and needs, to the problems facing the local context – but often the information was difficult to access, so they couldn't get the same levels of detail or quality of information easily about what was happening locally as they could nationally. So, in a way that was an opportunity missed during the pandemic. We had the potential to mobilise and help organise peoples' behaviour and choices at a local level. It was mobilised but not as thoroughly and not as effectively as it might have been, and I think there have been lessons learned from that.

Do you think then that we need a big cataclysmic event like a pandemic to galvanise people at a local level and that we need another disaster to mobilise people further?

Certainly not, although we do have another disaster – it's called climate change! What we've learned is that if we want to engage people to deal with these large scale and complicated events, whether it's flooding or heatwaves or diseases, they need to be able to understand what to do in their immediate context,

in their own setting, their own situation. And managing to do that requires an infrastructure and a sensitivity at a reasonably local level, so that these things can be managed effectively. It's not just a question of government money. It's also a question of having the right people in the right places, the right information available in the right places, and the right networks mobilised and enabled.

We're going to have to rethink how economies work, to make them much more sustainable at producing, selling and exchanging things at a local level rather than transporting them all the way across the country all the time. The supply chain crisis shows this quite well. We need to rethink the kinds of work people do, the amount of time they spend working versus doing other things, understanding the importance of the time they spend with one another rather than just producing things. That social mesh and network is as critical as the economic strength of the country for enabling us to survive all kinds of pressures and threats as well as to seize opportunities.

It sounds like you're advocating for a comprehensive ideological review. Do you think we need wholesale change across the nation before we can rebuild trust?

No, not particularly (laughs). We need a refocusing of government strategies. I think it's really about the way things are done rather than how much we spend or who spends it. What are we making our priorities? My sense of the way things work is to think of society as a big mesh and the mesh has multiple dimensions so that any particular part of society can be connected to another either horizontally or vertically but in multiple directions and the more ways that they are connected, the more that any particular problem or event or opportunity can be dealt with, and the less they are connected, the more vulnerable they are. Now, at the moment, we have a situation where resources are hugely concentrated in particular geographical areas, in particular economic sectors, in the hands of particular subsets of the population. That is a great strength for them but it's a great weakness for the country as a whole, so trying to better connect those areas of strength with other areas is going to be part of the solution. But also building the mesh, building the web within areas, is also part of building up strength and resilience, enabling people to support one another, to recognise vulnerabilities, to respond to them quickly and all the rest.

So, I think it's about rethinking the way we meet peoples' needs and invest in their needs, whether those are social needs, health needs or other types of needs. And probably the same goes for areas such as education, which at the moment we've largely partitioned into pre-school, school, university or college, finish. This is a slightly strange way to go about things really as we now have people working to a much greater age. We need a much more diversified economy. We need people to be able to adapt and upskill all the time, so a much more lifelong education and gradual education approach, for example, would help everybody. But we can't deliver that just by funnelling yet more money into the major universities. Certainly, they need money but we need to think about how we're going to provide that education across society for people of all ages. These things require some thinking but they are not unachievable.

'We need people to be able to adapt and upskill all the time. A lifelong education would help everybody'

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'It would be great if every local authority had a chief scientific adviser and a chief social scientist working together to assemble, gather and disseminate evidence'

Are you confident that as a nation we will be able to meet this challenge successfully?

It's very difficult to be confident about anything (laughs)! But one of the difficulties we face is that governments of all sorts tend to focus on visible concrete things as their achievements – building a new motorway, or a bridge or a big new building. Investing in major technical infrastructure projects offers visible quick wins for governments. Investing in social infrastructure and the social fabric, which underpins society's ability to work well, is much more difficult to pin down either as an objective or its specific outcomes. That type of investment can make a huge difference for people who are most vulnerable or most in need but the effects are less directly tangible in the immediate economic picture. So, we need to constantly explain why social investment is so important. Unless you get people better connected with better access to education and information, they're not going to be able to regenerate their economies or diversify and all the other things we need to happen on the economic front.

One of the things the pandemic showed is that we do have two very strong frameworks that can support the country going ahead. One is its science, humanities and social science academic research community, which showed remarkable capacity to draw together, to debate, to reach conclusions, to understand issues, to identify where evidence is needed and all the rest – and likewise the existence of the NHS and

the structure it provided to enable us to roll out the vaccines [was important]. But the other thing that shouldn't be underestimated is the ability of the civil service to coordinate between government and science and the NHS. That has been a massive undertaking. I know civil servants have been working really hard during the pandemic and making huge efforts to try and embrace all of the evidence and resources we have. Now if we could build on and embed that kind of capacity as much at the local level as we have at the national level, I think the country would be in a really good position. That would really help us with levelling up. So, for example, I think it would be great if every local authority had a chief scientific adviser and a chief social scientist, working together, somebody whose primary role is to assemble, gather and disseminate evidence and to interpret that evidence and enable people to understand it. That needs to be done equally strongly on the social side as on the technical side. Then local authorities can also combine and coordinate their efforts and we'd have a much better national data structure that would enable us to really understand what's happening and respond much more quickly when needs arise.

Dominic Abrams is Professor of Social Psychology and the Director of the Centre for the Study of Group Processes in the School of Psychology at the University of Kent.

Dominic Abrams was speaking to Joe Christmas
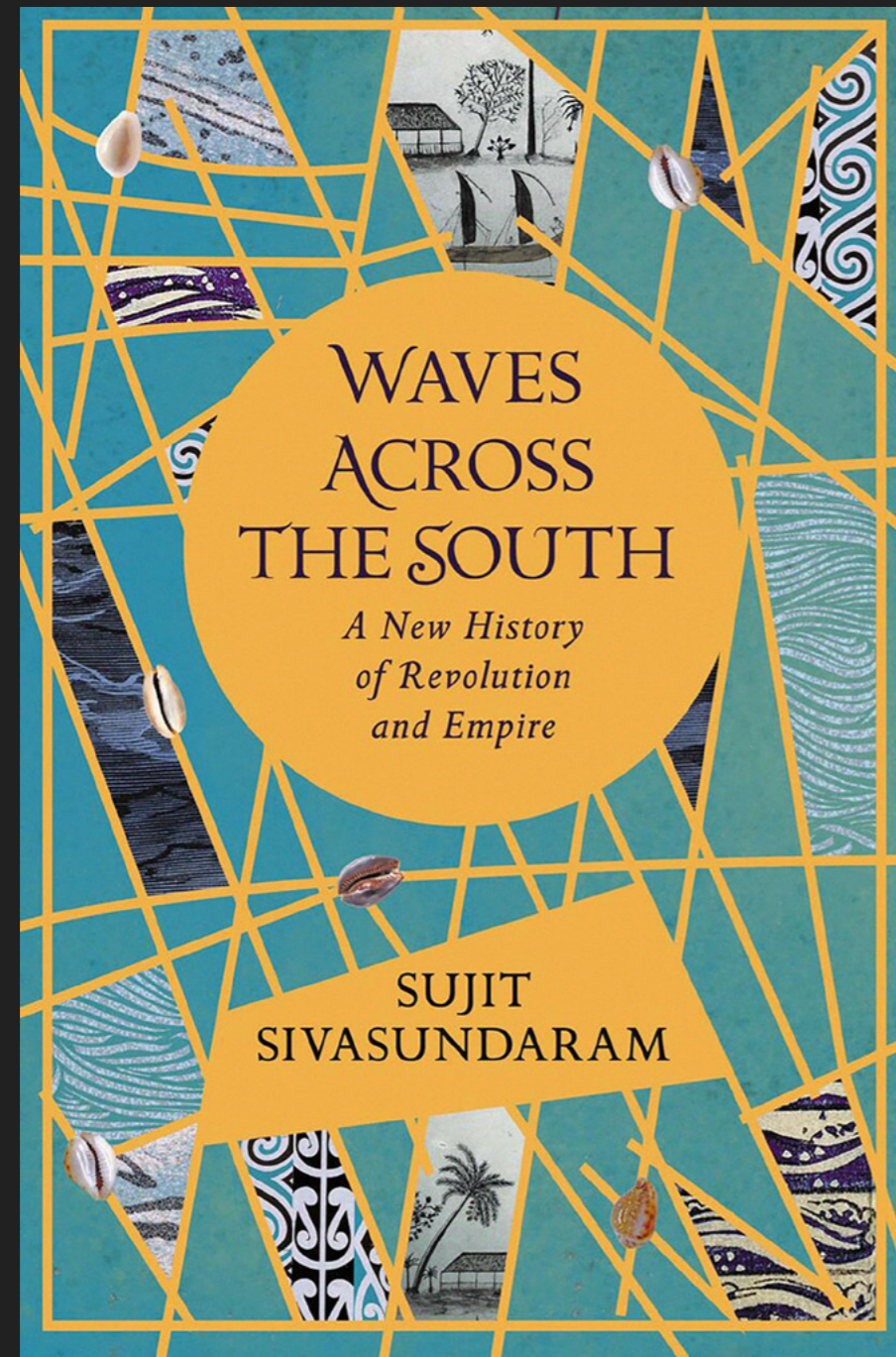
Waves Across the South: A New History of Revolution and Empire

by Professor Sujit Sivasundaram

In this extract from *Waves Across the South,* the winner of the British Academy's Book Prize for Global Cultural Understanding 2021, Professor Sujit Sivasundaram explores how indigenous Asian regimes in the late 18th and early 19th centuries actively responded to and withstood European colonial advances.

In the mid 1820s, the waters of the Bay of Bengal created a new danger for the kingdom of Ava in upper Burma.[1] Invaluable and unusual letters written by a Buddhist monk called Kyi-gan shin gyi, or "The Elderly Novice of the village of Kyeegan [Kyi-gan] Lake" are indicators of what was afoot.[2]

This monk's real name was Maung Nu. He did not rise above the status of a novice monk. Instead, he led an itinerant life and moved in the circles of trade and the law. When his fame as a scholar spread, he was invited by King Bo-daw-hpaya to take up residence at his capital in Amarapura, now within reach of Mandalay in northern Burma/Myanmar. Kyi-gan shin gyi's epistles were written on palm leaf. They are Myit-taza or letters of loving kindness, cast in a language which was meant to seem familiar to the Burmese villager. They were probably written on behalf of people who could not write to their relatives. They point to the plight of people caught up in the changes brought about by the centralisation of the Burmese kingdom of Ava and greater European trade. These changes led to migration from the north to the coasts to participate in this trade.

"The Elderly Novice" wrote for a young man, "Lotus Leaf ", who had travelled down the Irrawaddy to Rangoon: "I should have written before I sailed. But in such trifling matters, the only important thing is love and affection."[3] For "Lotus Leaf ", Rangoon was a city to which people came from across the Bay of Bengal: "all sorts of sailors, strangers and aliens in habit and custom, and belonging to many races all of which I cannot name". Among the people listed were Armenians, Roman Catholics, Portuguese, Africans, Arabs, all kinds of Indians including "Hindu Sardhus [holy men], Muslim crewmen and Bombay merchants".

"They are hairy people with moustaches, side-whiskers, beards and shaggy legs. Energetic and alert, they hustle and bustle from place to place, round and round and up and down, in and out and to and fro, winding and curving, to all nooks and corners, east and north and west and south."

Particularly interesting is how this giddiness was contrasted with the steadiness of the people up the Irrawaddy in the north: "I hope that my dear people at home remain constant and true to me, like that silver lizard, undisturbed by the scandalous and untrue accounts of what I did and what I do". The silver lizard referred to the mariner's compass, which in the words of the letter, "remains quietly constant always pointing to the north".

According to one explanation which circulated at the time, in these years before the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824–6), Burma was a regime conceited with the certainty of victory against the British.[4] Such a characterisation of indigenous rulers and kings as "oriental despots" was common across Asia. The European idea came to influence other conflicts which we will turn to shortly, including in Java, Sri Lanka and China. But Maung Nu's letters demonstrate instead a sensitive perception of danger, which is mapped on the land. The regions in the south along the coast and also the frontiers with British India are seen to be rife with turbulence. This was not then a kingdom uninformed of the wider world. In another epistle written by this monk, for an anxious father addressing his son, new and troubling songs are said to be sung in the heart of the kingdom. The stars are lined up against King Bo-daw-hpaya:

"Both the astrologers and the general public are agreed that times are bad, the planets are unfavourable and dangers are ahead for both the King and kingdom... Unfortunately for you, my son, you are in the path of his mighty army of destruction, as your business takes you to the great towns on the seaboard, for example, Dallah, Syriam, Martaban, Sittang, Thaton, Moulmein, Pegu, Hmawbi. These maritime regions of our country shall be the scene of our King's greatest victory, but they will also be the scene of disaster and destruction wrought by his might."[5]

Kingdoms like Ava and Kandy, the latter being the interior highland kingdom of what is now Sri Lanka, and the island's last remaining independent foothold, are often presented as landlocked. Asian regimes of the period are traditionally seen to have not had the skills to engage the technological and military capacities of maritime Europeans. This applies especially to their response to the advance of the British who invaded these territories during and after the Napoleonic wars and across the seas. Yet contrary to such an interpretation, there was a stand-off on the Irrawaddy River in the midst of the First Anglo-Burmese War. In Sri Lanka, the British, coming from the coast again, first lost rather spectacularly to the interior kingdom of Kandy in 1803, before defeating Kandy in 1815.

During the late 18th and early 19th centuries, a critical technical gap opened up between European armies and navies and non-European forces. Yet this did not give rise to automatic success to colonisers. In Asian environments, logistics, terrain and transport continued to be difficult. One might add that this was particularly so in sea-facing places, where the terrain could change rapidly, ranging across coastal territories, highlands, rivers and swamps. Asian regimes responded actively, finding their path in the midst of European advance. Meanwhile, in these theatres, the fact that Europeans could not be certain of victory meant that they turned to extensive looting.

The next Book Prize opens for entries at the end of January 2022. For more information, visit thebritishacademy.ac.uk/ prizes-medals/british-academy-book-prize-global-cultural-understanding

1   I use Burma and Burmese as terms current in the period for the nation now called Myanmar.
2   Epistles Written on the Eve of the Anglo-Burmese War, trans. and ed. Maung Htin Aung (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968).
3   'Epistle from the courtier Son' in Epistles, 31–3, citations from 32.
4   See, for instance, Maung Htin Aung, The Stricken Peacock: Anglo-Burmese Relations, 1752–1948 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965), vii. For the earlier view that the Burmese were certain of victory see, for instance, G. E. Harvey, History of Burma: From the Earliest Times to 10 March 1824 (London: Frank Cass, 1967, reprint Yangon, n.d.), 303–4.
5   'Epistle from an anxious Father to his Son', in Epistles, 45.

The final address

Brexit, COVID and why the 2020s can be the decade of the humanities and social sciences: Professor Sir David Cannadine's final speech as President of the British Academy

In this, my final address to what is our 119th Annual General Meeting, I shall provide a broad and panoramic survey of the years during which it has been my privilege to have served as your president – years when a great deal has been happening, within the British Academy itself and also in the wider world beyond, both domestically and internationally. I begin with the summer of 2016, when two electorates, albeit of very different size, took two decisions: the voters of the United Kingdom determined in favour of leaving the European Union, and the Fellows of the Academy resolved that I should become their 30th president. I am not for one moment suggesting that these were events of equivalent historical significance or public importance. But I was certainly correct in observing, on taking office in the summer of the following year, that I would be the Academy's one and only Brexit President.

But in terms of disruptive public events, the Brexit referendum was merely the beginning. In November 2016, Donald Trump became president of the United States, one general election was held in Britain in June 2017 – the month before I assumed the presidency – and another took place in December 2019. Since I became President, there have been two Prime Ministers, four Secretaries of State at BEIS, our sponsoring department in Whitehall, and six junior ministers to whom the Academy has been answerable. And in March 2020 came the COVID lockdown, when the Academy went virtual: hence my virtual presidency, to add to my Brexit presidency.

No Academy President, and least of all one who is an historian, should complain about what Harold Macmillan once called 'events, dear boy, events', whether they be good or bad, since without them, there would be far less history for people like me to write about. But the Academy has certainly had more than its fair share of challenges these last four years, which makes it all the more impressive that it has not only endured, but has thrived and flourished in many ways as never before.

During the last four years, we have elected the most diverse range of Fellows in terms of their subjects, their methodologies, their geographical location, their institutional affiliation, their gender and their ethnicity. Since 2017, we have given out more research grants than ever before, amounting to £110 million, to scholars working in the United Kingdom at all stages of their careers, and many of them located beyond the Golden Triangle, from Bolton to Belfast, Bournemouth to Bangor. Across the same period, our conference program has doubled in size, with a corresponding increase in the publications derived from them, our journal has been transformed in scale and scope, and we are putting on more public events than we have ever done. Among those who have appeared, either for real or virtually, over the past four years are David Attenborough, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Margaret Atwood and Mary Robinson; and our book prize in global cultural understanding has become an established fixture among literary awards.

But as I anticipated on assuming the presidency, there has also been a great deal of extra, reactive work, much of it in response to Brexit. Our Brexit briefings on the vexed matter of the Irish border were avidly and appreciatively read by civil servants in Belfast, Dublin, London and Brussels. I long ago lost count of the number of additional meetings Fellows and staff have attended across Whitehall, working with the three other national academies to push for continuing association with Horizon Europe – and in the end doing so successfully. I hope our subjects will continue to benefit disproportionally, as they did in pre-Brexit times. from this important source of European funding.

The extra reactive work, in turn, makes even more

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remarkable the amount of new and highly proactive work the Academy has initiated and driven forward at the same time. We have become much better at raising money, having secured more than £20 million in terms of gifts and pledges across the last four years. This includes £10 million from the Wolfson Foundation to establish a new Fellowship Programme, to fund our new Early Career Researcher network and provide the lead gift for the transformation of our building, and also £4 million from the Wellcome Trust for a major research program in medical humanities.

Before COVID obliged us to shut our doors, more people than ever came to Carlton House Terrace, for our conferences, seminars and events, numbering an estimated 40,000, and we also put on more events in collaboration with universities across the United Kingdom than we had ever done. We established the Summer Showcase as a highly successful annual occurrence. Before COVID struck, we had also established a significant presence at summer literary festivals, such as Hay, Buxton and Edinburgh. And despite what might seem the constraints of our virtual existence, we have been reaching out and drawing in as never before, as tens of thousands of people the world over have regularly engaged with the Academy online, tuning into our events and podcasts, and reading our blogs.

Our policy work has also prospered and blossomed in new and exciting ways. The publications and gatherings that form part of 'The Future of the Corporation' project have attracted world-wide attention, bringing together leading figures in industry and finance, public policy and academe, to help formulate principles for purposeful business, and securing the support of luminaries such as Mark Carney and Al Gore. We have worked closely with the Royal Society on issues such as Artificial Intelligence, Big Data and climate change, and we are fully engaged with official preparations for COP26. And COVID has made repeatedly plain that the health of society is more than a medical issue, exposing deep economic inequalities, social fissures and cultural anxieties that need to be dealt with if we are to build back better. The Academy was asked by the Chief Scientific Advisor, Sir Patrick Vallance, to undertake a report on COVID and Society that has been vigorously ventilated and widely acclaimed in the media and across government. And we provided special grants to support researchers looking into the impact of the virus, and their work, like our report, will be of indispensable value as we try to navigate our way through the current 'COVID decade'.

All this helps explain how and why the Academy's public profile has never been higher: with MPs, with journalists, with the BBC and with the public. But the need to keep speaking up for the value and importance of our subjects remains as great as ever. Hence our work in developing the acronym SHAPE – standing for the Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts for People and the Economy – to sit alongside STEM, which has been well received in Britain and around the world, and which got its first mention in the House of Commons just a few weeks ago. Hence our work on the importance of teaching languages in collaboration with the British Council, and the closer relations we have formed with the AHRC, the ESRC and UKRI. And hence our continued monitoring of the regrettable closures of university departments in our subjects, and the behind the scenes lobbying that we vigorously undertake.

Although we are the British Academy, we are also active and engaged in more than 100 countries around the world, and during my presidency we have overseen the distribution of £100 million in global grants and funding. We remain a strong supporter of our International Research Institutes in Europe, Africa and the Middle East and we collaborate closely with many organizations around the world. Our overseas programme of research collaborations makes possible work in subjects as diverse as risks and forecasting, nature and technology, and cities and infrastructure. And I am particularly proud of our recent work to create partnerships in the Global South, using our experience and expertise to build capacity and provide support to researchers in developing countries on subjects ranging from access to energy in Mozambique to the improvement of kindergarten education in Ghana.

To whom, then, is the credit due for this outstanding work, accomplished in what may have been the most challenging and demanding years the Academy has faced in peacetime? Once again, I express my heartfelt gratitude to all the staff for their exemplary professionalism and dedication. No thanks or praise of mine can be adequate or do them appropriate justice, and it has been a pleasure and a privilege to have worked so closely with so many of them.

During the course of my presidency, I have also come to appreciate just how much the Academy depends on the pro bono labour of its Fellows. In earlier decades, election to the fellowship meant little

'Since 2017, we have given out more research grants than ever before, amounting to £110 million'

Professor Sir David Cannadine with newly-elected Fellows, 2019

more than putting FBA after your name, with the only obligation being to turn up to Section meetings, the AGM and the annual dinner. But while those three post-nominal letters remain the unchallenged gold standard of scholarly distinction and recognition in our subjects, they now carry with them an increasing expectation of reciprocal obligation: to be chairs of Sections or members of Academy committees, to act as evaluators of the many grants and fellowships we assess and award, and to support the overseas research projects that we fund. This is a very high level of involvement, and many Fellows are also generous givers, sometimes on an annual basis, sometimes via legacies, and sometimes both. I thank them all, and I do so with abiding appreciation and unstinted gratitude.

I turn, finally, to the impending transfer of presidential power and authority that will take place in Carlton House Terrace. Six months ago, the transition which occurred in Washington DC from Donald Trump to Joe Biden was, at least on one side, a Gothic horror show of inefficiency, obstruction, bad-temper, petulance, malevolence, unreality and ill-will. I am eager to reassure Fellows that, by contrast, our more recent and soon-to-be completed transition in London has been a model of cordiality, co-operation and thoughtfulness, as a result of which my successor will take office exceptionally well-prepared, well-briefed and well-informed about the Academy's current business and future work. And that is only one of many reasons why I look forward to Julia's presidency with (am I allowed to admit this?) even greater enthusiasm than I looked forward to my own, and I hope it will be launched in appropriately festive style during Sections Week in September, by which time such joyous and purposeful gatherings may once again become possible.

Meanwhile, it only remains for me to bring these valedictory remarks to an end, and thus my presidency to a close – abidingly grateful, as I am, to the Fellowship for having done me the honour of electing me to preside over the Academy's affairs these last four years, and consoling myself, as I make ready to depart, with these wise and comforting words of John Dryden: 'what has been has been, and I have had my hour.' So, it has, so I have, and so it is time for the Academy to move forward and onward – in what remains, to be sure, a challenging and testing world, but one which also holds out the possibility that the 2020s may be pre-eminently the decade of the humanities and the social sciences. If anyone can make that happen, it is our next President. I am sure she will lead us brilliantly, and it is with the greatest pleasure that I am able to say 'she', not 'he'. Julia, I hereby give the British Academy into your care, your keeping and your charge.

Professor Sir David Cannadine FBA, 30th President of the British Academy Speaking to Fellows at the Academy's Annual General Meeting in July 2021

How new diseases were investigated in the 16th century

by Professor Vivian Nutton FBA

Even with the wonders of modern technology, the exact origins of COVID-19 remain uncertain almost two years after the virus was first discovered. But if it's tricky now to trace a new disease, how much more difficult was it for our ancestors? Vivian Nutton FBA, Emeritus Professor of the History of Medicine at University College London, explains

The 16th century saw an unprecedented number of new epidemic diseases. They ranged from syphilis and the English Sweat, a viral disease that affected largely Britain, to others more exotic, such as the scherbock, a form of land scurvy found in Scandinavia and the Netherlands, and the Hungarian disease, probably typhoid, which affected armies quartered in late spring of 1577 on the Hungarian plains facing the Turks. Bubonic plague was also endemic throughout Europe, with major outbreaks causing thousands of deaths almost everywhere at least once in a generation.

As today, doctors initially assumed that any new epidemic disease would have a similar explanation to those with which they were most familiar: a combination of individual receptivity with some harmful change in the air, whether brought about by an astral conjunction or divine wrath at human sins. But they also noted that some diseases appeared to change over time: syphilis became less virulent and was spread almost entirely by sexual contact and bubonic plague was viewed largely as a disease of the poor. Hence the surprise at the English Sweat or 'Stop-gallant', which attacked the rich and the young.

Medieval quarantine

In 1546 a doctor from Verona in Italy, Girolamo Fracastoro (1483–1553) published a treatise on contagion and contagious diseases in which he argued that contagious diseases, such as measles, plague and syphilis, were spread by seeds or 'seedbeds' of disease that could be passed on at a distance by fomites (contaminated objects) such as clothing and furnishings, as well as in corrupted air and by touch. This theory was not entirely new. The Roman poet Lucretius had spoken of seeds of disease, the ancient Greek physician Galen had briefly toyed with the notion and Fracastoro discussed contagion in the context of ancient ideas about sympathy and antipathy. The seeds were attracted to suitable recipients and repelled by appropriate precautions.

Health officials in Italy had long believed in imposing quarantine, segregating sufferers from both leprosy and plague, and in burning the belongings of the infected, so Fracastoro provided them with a theoretical justification for their existing procedures. Some cities, such as Milan, went further and set up a complex network of information posts that would allow early precautions to be taken against traders and travellers coming from infected regions.

Britain lagged behind most of Europe. It had no health boards and almost no town physicians before 1600. It was not until 1518 that arrangements were made for doing more than cleaning the streets and occasionally segregating the sick. There were no plague hospitals, or lazaretti, such as were found in Florence or Venice, and administration was left to individual parishes. How effective the continental system was at combatting epidemic disease is debatable. What is clear is that major outbreaks of plague, as in Venice in 1576, were often the result of the authorities' failure to take action in time or, as in the Tuscan town of Montelupo in 1633, of the breakdown of trust between sections of the community.

Effective action preventing widespread infection

One occasion when effective action prevented widespread infection occurred during the so-called Moravian Plague in 1577. An unknown disease broke out in the city of Brno in present-day Czech Republic and was associated with a large influx of visitors who came to take the waters at a bath complex just outside the city gate. They had come over the festal holiday of St Lucy on 13 December 1577 to enjoy themselves and many also to be bled at the baths to prepare for the Christmas festivities. Over 150 fell ill in the city and its suburbs, as well as an unknown number back in the countryside.

At first people suspected a mass poisoning, threatening the owner of the baths and causing his assistant, who had carried out the procedures for bleeding, to flee. The regional medical officer, Thomas Jordanus, strongly argued against poison, on the grounds that the oozing sores, painful limbs and long-term prostration were typical of some form of infection. He equally rejected syphilis as the cause, although its symptoms were similar, since that was, in his view, a sexually transmitted disease and his patients included old women, young girls and the wives of highly respectable burghers who could not have been infected in this way. Instead, he argued that some harmful material had been brought in from the countryside by dirty peasants and was transmitted during venesection, when knives and cupping glasses had not been thoroughly cleaned between each use (unknown to him, syphilis could also have been transmitted in this way.) Jordanus was particularly struck by the fact that many of those who fell ill had been subjected to several bleedings from different sites in the body, thus allowing the seeds of the disease greater opportunity to penetrate beneath the skin. He ordered the baths to be thoroughly cleaned and the rooms where he suspected the disease was most active to be demolished and rebuilt. He treated his patients as if they were suffering from syphilis, particularly with sweating regimes, and by Easter he was convinced that all those in the town were now recovered. Those in the countryside he knew and could do little about.

Coping with an outbreak of a new disease

Jordanus wrote up his experiences in a tract on the Moravian plague that was intended to be a guide to how to cope with an outbreak of a new disease. The first task was to gain as much information as possible and then to decide whether this was something new, endemic or the return of a sporadic infection. If it was widespread, then one needed appropriate methods of containment, as well as ways to identify the initial cause. Above all, his book is a plea for the reasoned use of information, even in the face of competing explanations. It is a good example of how a 16th-century doctor, aided by new ideas about contagious diseases, could deal successfully with a localised epidemic.

Vivian Nutton is Emeritus Professor of the History of Medicine at University College London. He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 2008. He has written extensively on the history of medicine, including Galen: A Thinking Doctor in Imperial Rome and Ancient Medicine.

Young people and conspiracy theories in the digital age

by Myra Mansoor

From QAnon believers rioting on Capitol Hill to the ongoing paranoia about the power and purpose of 5G technology, in recent years it seems as if there has been an explosion in dangerous conspiracy theories. But, explains British Academy-funded researcher Dr Daniel Jolley, conspiracy theories have always existed and although the way they spread has changed, research is unveiling new insights into the development of such beliefs and offering vital clues on how to respond

'Belief in conspiracy theories has always been around,' says social psychologist Dr Daniel Jolley. 'Arguably they go back to the start of human existence – it is just the way we talk about them that has changed. Back in the JFK era, people talked on the radio about conspiracy theories, circulating them through word of mouth. The theory that JFK was assassinated by the US government is still believed by 60–70% of the US population today. That belief was popular before the Internet, so the Internet has not necessarily increased belief in conspiracy theories, it has just enabled people who are already susceptible to find that information.'

Multiple factors contribute to how and why people come to believe in conspiracy theories, but previous research has focused on belief in adults. 'We know nothing at all about young peoples' conspiracy theorising,' explains Dr Jolley, 'because we had no real measure of belief in conspiracies that were suitable for young people. Often the questions that we would ask adults were just not suitable – questions about events that they did not know about or events that were traumatic, or things that were not suitable for 11-year-olds.'

To address this, the Senior Lecturer from the Northumbria University received a British Academy/Leverhulme Small Research Grant to explore belief in conspiracies among adolescents and develop a research model that can be used to examine the prevalence and causes of such beliefs. The award also involved the expertise of Professor Karen Douglas (University of Kent) and Dr Yvonne Skipper (University of Glasgow).

'The project was very much about developing a measure – a questionnaire – that was suitable for children as young as 11, that still tapped into the construct of conspiracy theorising that we measure in adults,' says Dr Jolley. 'The project involved a series of studies, developing these questions, working with young people so that they provide an accurate measure of belief in conspiracy theories, which can then can also be compared with adult populations.'

As well as producing the questionnaire, Dr Jolley's research revealed fascinating evidence around how belief in these theories can change through the various stages of adolescence, with age 14 appearing to be a tipping point – the age at which belief in conspiracy theories becomes more likely. 'It seemed to be more heightened in that age group,' says Dr Jolley, 'which does fit in with developmental patterns in general so it certainly makes sense why that age group would be more susceptible.'

'Anxiety, threat, uncertainty are big predictors in belief in conspiracies and we know that people around that age group in adolescence rely less on emotional regulation, which has in turn been associated with heightened anxiety.'

Dr Jolley also notes that age 14 is when adolescents around the world are legally allowed access to social media. 'If anxiety is a predictor in a belief in conspiracies and we find that heightened during adolescence, and with the Internet being such a breeding ground for conspiracy narratives – could it be all those things coming together at that particular age?'

So how dangerous are conspiracy theories to an individual at that age?

'They are dangerous both for the individual and for wider society,' says Dr Jolley. 'For the individual, we know that people are drawn to conspiracy theories to explain the world, to try and feel less anxious, to stop whatever it is from happening – for instance, a virus outbreak – when in actual fact it makes you feel more anxious because you then think, "oh ok, what else have they done?" And that's not actually that reassuring at all, to think there's a world government out to get you. That does not make you feel any better! This can impact your wellbeing by making you feel worse. And then your belief that others are conspiring means you are more likely to disengage because why else would you vaccinate or reduce your carbon footprint?'

This problem becomes more difficult to manage, explains Dr Jolley, as people form identities around their beliefs.

'People say that they feel like they're part of a community when they believe in these theories. And often people feel ostracised or alienated and that's what draws them into the conspiracy theory in the first place. That gives them a sense of identity and a purpose which can actually be really beneficial. I can imagine that going to a protest with people who believe the same things as you can be really empowering, which means they may hold on to that a bit more than they'd like to. And, of course, in that moment they probably don't see themselves as needing help. That can be hard to navigate.'

Fortunately, Dr Jolley explains, evidence suggests that there are ways to help conspiracy theorists to think twice about their beliefs. Providing young people with a thorough digital education, nurturing their analytical skills, encouraging them to fact-check, ensuring robust evidence is easily accessible and engaging with believers in a respectful way can all help to dismantle beliefs in conspiracy theories and pave the way for new ideas.

'For me,' says Dr Jolley, 'it's important to humanise those people and see that it's their true belief. The question is, how do we get them out of those rabbit holes? It's not always about tackling their beliefs head on but thinking about the landscape on which they develop those beliefs. It can sometimes be more productive to create a supportive space to help people discuss these issues. But, of course, it's not overnight. This happens over a long period of time.'

The Future of the Corporation – why business needs the SHAPE disciplines

by Henry Richards,
Senior Futures Lead at
the British Academy

Henry Richards, Senior Futures Lead at the British Academy, looks back at the Academy's recently completed Future of the Corporation programme and explains how the world of business can benefit from expertise in the SHAPE disciplines.

'The laws of morality are the same everywhere, and there is no action which would pass for an act of extortion, of peculation, of bribery and oppression in England which would not be an act of extortion, peculation, of bribery, and oppression in Europe, Asia, Africa and the world over.'

This quotation is an extract from the opening speech of Edmund Burke on 13 February 1788 at the impeachment trial of Warren Hastings, the English East India Company's de-facto Governor General of Bengal. The story of 'the Company', laid out brilliantly by William Dalrymple in his recent book, *The Anarchy*, shone a clear light on the extremes of corporate behaviour in the past, but also on the efforts – limited but evident – to control that behaviour. Despite the rhetoric, the trial acquitted Hastings, but this moment highlights the fact that for all those willing to pursue wealth at all costs, there have always been those whose concern for the underlying impacts of that pursuit compel them to intervene to curtail the excesses that often result. The East India Company was subject to increasing scrutiny by

Parliament and eventual nationalisation in 1858.

With this and other examples, over four years working on the Future of the Corporation programme, I have been reminded by many contributors to that programme that we've been here before. Corporate governance reform isn't a new idea. Nearly 200 years after the trial of Warren Hastings in the 1960s and 70s, the debate still rages on. The economist Milton Friedman argued that the social responsibility of business was 'to increase its profits, so long as it stays within the rules of the game'. Today, more than 50 years after Friedman's influential ideas took root, they have been shown to fall short and reform is again on the agenda.

The first phase of Future of the Corporation research highlighted some of the challenges: technology moving so fast that the 'rules of the game' can't keep up; business profiting from creating problems and leaving society to clean up; scandal after scandal with no-one held to account; human rights abuses, fraud and bribery still a problem despite clear laws; and challenges like COVID-19 or the climate crisis that need every part of society to play a part – including business. The most telling issue with Friedman's idea, though, is when it fails in its own terms. Shareholders in 2021 are often passive observers (e.g pension savers) holding shares in a tracker fund, not the engaged owners Friedman wrote about. And business executives are paid vast sums, often linked to short-term share price gains, the pursuit of which can undermine the long-term success of the company. Now it is often the companies thinking most clearly about their role in society that attract capital and deliver returns.

In 2017, as the Future of the Corporation programme launched, we found no shortage of individuals and institutions – including businesses – looking to diagnose this problem and we benefited enormously from building on their work. Our initial phase of research and engagement brought together research on the history, culture and purpose of companies, the challenges they are facing in terms of technology and trust, the expectations of society, and some of the ownership, governance, regulatory, tax and investment levers available. This provided a basis for a departure from Friedman's proposition, to a new idea that describes the purpose of business in a way that is fit for the 21st century: 'The purpose of the corporation is to produce profitable solutions for the problems of people and planet... not to profit from producing problems for people and planet.' This is an answer to the questions: what is the reason for business to exist and why should society continue to give a licence – explicit or implicit – for business to operate? This way of framing the purpose of business has four advantages. It puts people and planet at the centre of the equation. It places the focus on solving problems (rather than pursuit of profits, which are a consequence of business activities, not the reason for them). It sets a boundary on business behaviour by explicitly denying the right to profit from creating problems. And finally, it is just clear enough to settle the question of what the purpose of business is, without attempting to prescribe a purpose for individual businesses or business sectors.

Throughout the programme, we were privileged to have access to the insight of a Corporate Advisory Group – composed of practitioners from business and finance as well as academics and experts. Their clear challenge on completion of this first phase of research was to articulate how it would all work in practice. Responding to this challenge, we entered a phase of close consultation with a range of practitioners and stakeholders, and further academic examination of four areas arising from initial deliberations. These were: law and regulation, ownership and governance, measurement and performance, and finance and investment.

Based on this consultation and further research, the programme developed eight principles for purposeful business, published in November 2019. These principles are aimed at business leaders and policymakers. Rather than prescribing specific actions they set out the features of an operating environment that can enable the implementation of purpose, while remaining flexible to a diversity of business models, cultures and jurisdictions.

The final phase of the programme took on two objectives. First, to build up engagement around these principles and the notion of purpose put forward by the programme. The huge convening power of the British Academy helped to create a platform for nearly 70 high-profile figures, including Al Gore, Mark Carney, Minouche Shafik, Satya Nadella, Jim Snabe, Victor Adebowale, Ed Miliband, Jesse Norman, Arunma Oteh, Alan Jope, Julia Hoggett, Karan Bilimoria, Jonathan Geldart, Raghuram

1. Corporate law
2. Regulation
3. Ownership
4. Corporate governance
5. Measurement
6. Performance
7. Corporate financing
8. Corporate investment

The eight principles of purposeful business

Policy & Practice for Purposeful Business

The final report of the Future of the Corporation programme

The British Academy
Future of the Corporation

Rajan, Roula Khalaf and others. These speakers spoke about purposeful business based on their experience in leading businesses, investment organisations, policy making bodies and civil society groups. Though each person brought their own perspective, cutting across all of the contributions was a strong level of support for both the importance of a change in business policy and practice, and the underlying ideas set out by the programme around the purpose of business.

Complementing this major public platform for engagement, our second objective was to consider in more depth how the principles could be applied, starting with the UK. A series of purpose labs provided opportunities for practitioners, experts and academics to put forward, evaluate and debate proposals – both new and existing – for the application of the principles. What emerged was a set of policy and practice proposals that were then subjected to scrutiny and review to refine them into a coherent set.

The programme's final publication brought all of this together: *Policy and Practice for Purposeful Business* set out 17 proposals addressing gaps in accountability for and implementation of purpose within business. Accountability mechanisms include using legal, regulatory, governance and reporting frameworks to put purpose at the heart of company law, and hold directors and controlling owners to account for purposes they commit to. Implementation mechanisms use ownership, measurement, finance, innovation and investment to harness the potential of markets to deliver purposes that solve problems for people and planet.

Critically, this mix of mechanisms balances the potential of companies to deliver solutions, with the checks and balances of clear accountability to make sure commitments are authentic and ultimately delivered. One of the strengths of this approach is that there is no judgement in this framework on the purpose itself other than that it should be about solving problems for people and planet, and that it should not involve profiting from creating problems. That leaves scope for innovation and diversity, as well as scope for society to continuously evolve and raise standards and expectations as it has always done.

In fact, this is where the humanities and social sciences reman vitally important. Returning to the example at the start, the fact is that society, in the form of the Crown, did give licence to the English East India Company and its Directors enjoyed

great acclaim (and wealth). That is until society withdrew its consent by nationalising the company after it was seen to have exceeded its licence. Society cannot ignore business in the same way that business cannot ignore society. We must apply the lessons of history, philosophy, sociology, psychology, language, anthropology and geography, as well as economics, law and management studies, to the decisions being made by boards, their governance processes and practices, how they measure success, what they promise and whether they deliver, and the ethical standards they set and whether they meet them.

The Future of the Corporation programme has brought together an extraordinary array of academics, thought-leaders, business and policy experts, leaders and practitioners who have all offered their insights. We have put these together in a way which is coherent and we have gone to some lengths to draw attention to and discuss these ideas. It is now time to pass the baton to the business leaders to change

the way business operates, to the policy makers to set the 'rules of the game' in a way which puts purpose – and people and planet – at the heart of business policy, and to the communities around business – shareholders, employees, customers, communities, future generations, academics and others – to engage, engage, engage – so that businesses make and then deliver on audacious commitments to solve problems for people and planet.

Henry Richards, Senior Futures Lead at the British Academy

'Policy and Practice for Purposeful Business set out 17 proposals addressing gaps in accountability and implementation within business'

Who watches the watchmen?

How does news coverage of local crime affect policing in the United States? British Academy-funded researchers Dr Arianna Ornaghi and Dr Nicola Mastrorocco investigate

Law enforcement is one of the most important functions of US local governments, but we still have a limited understanding of how the police respond to the broader civil society. In our research, we investigate whether local media might have a role to play in this respect. Focusing on municipal police departments in the United States, we ask how local TV news coverage of a municipality's crime impacts policing.

The outcome that we study are clearance rates: crimes for which an offender is identified, over total number of crimes. Clearance rates are highly sensitive to what resources are allocated to investigations. As a result, they have often been used to study policing and are especially interesting in our setting, as they allow us to consider whether the types of crimes that get prioritised by the police department are affected by news coverage.

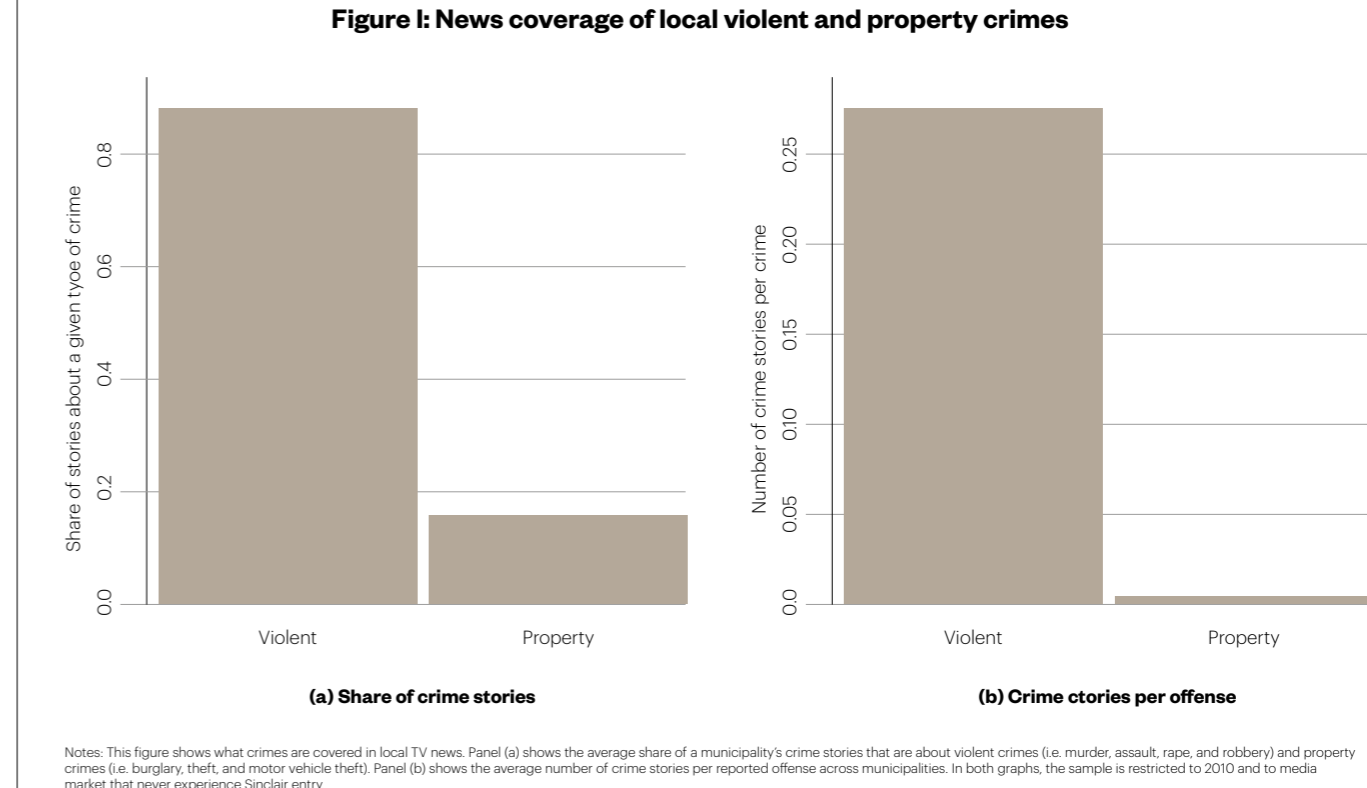## Identifying the relationship between news coverage of local crime and policing

The major challenge to studying the relationship between news coverage of local crime and policing is what economists and statisticians define as a simultaneous causality problem: that is, a situation in which two variables influence each other at the same time in the opposite direction. Is it local crime reporting that affects clearance rates or is it the other way around, with local news reporting causing low clearance rates? By simply estimating the relationship between news coverage of local crime and clearance rates, we would not be able to distinguish between these two distinct stories. In our research, we get around this issue by exploiting changes in content that are unlikely to be related to what is

happening to clearance rates: changes due to acquisitions of local TV stations by a large broadcast group, Sinclair.

Based on anecdotal evidence and existing research, we know that Sinclair acquisitions affect content in two ways. First, Sinclair reduces local news coverage in favour of a national focus. This is the change in content that we are interested in studying. Second, Sinclair – a politically right-leaning media group – also introduces more conservative content overall. To control for this overall change in content and ensure that it is not driving our results, we make use of the fact that, while all municipalities in a media market are exposed to the conservative message of Sinclair, only some municipalities experience changes in the probability of being in the news.

In particular, the decline in coverage

Figure I: News coverage of local violent and property crimes

(a) Share of crime stories

(b) Crime ctories per offense

Notes: This figure shows what crimes are covered in local TV news. Panel (a) shows the average share of a municipality's crime stories that are about violent crimes (i.e. murder, assault, rape, and robbery) and property crimes (i.e. burglary, theft, and motor vehicle theft). Panel (b) shows the average number of crime stories per reported offense across municipalities. In both graphs, the sample is restricted to 2010 and to media market that never experience Sinclair entry.

'91% of local crime stories are about violent crime'

driven by Sinclair acquisitions should only matter for areas that are likely to appear in the news in the first place, which we call covered municipalities. Areas which are never in the news, that we call non-covered municipalities, should not experience a change in the coverage of local crime. As a result, we can estimate the effect of the decline in news coverage of a municipality's crime by focusing on the relative effect of a Sinclair acquisition on covered and non-covered municipalities.

Crimes in the news after acquisitions

We document how Sinclair acquisitions impact news coverage of local crime using a novel dataset that includes the transcripts of 8.5 million stories in 300,000 newscasts. We found that, once acquired by Sinclair, TV stations decrease news coverage of local crime. In particular, covered municipalities experience a large decline in the probability of appearing in the news with a crime story. The probability that a crime happening in a non-covered municipality is talked about in the news is not impacted. Overall, covered munic-

ipalities are 25 per cent less likely to be mentioned in a crime story after a station gets acquired by Sinclair, with respect to non-covered municipalities.

How does the decline in TV news coverage of local crime affect clearance rates?

Our main finding is that after Sinclair enters a media market, covered municipalities experience 3.4 percentage points lower violent crime clearance rates with respect to non-covered municipalities, which corresponds to 7.5 per cent of the baseline mean and approximately three fewer violent clearances.

In contrast, property crime clearance rates do not experience a similar decline. The difference across crime types can be explained by the fact that local TV news has a clear violent crime focus. As Figure I shows, 91 per cent of local crime stories are about a violent crime and only 17 per cent are about a property crime and about 8 per cent are both; a difference that is even starker if we consider that property crimes are more common by orders of magnitude.

Public opinion and political pressure

A possible explanation for our findings is that the decline in news coverage of local crime affects the salience of crime as an issue in public opinion and the political pressure put on the police department. When stories about a municipality's violent crimes are less frequent, crime becomes less salient in the eyes of local citizens. As a result, the police find themselves operating in a political environment where there is less pressure to tackle the problem of violent crime. This might create incentives for the police to reallocate their resources away from clearing these crimes, in favour of other policing activities.

Dr Nicola Mastrorocco is Assistant Professor of Economics at Trinity College Dublin. Dr Arianna Ornaghi was awarded a Postdoctoral Fellowship in 2018 and is now Assistant Professor of Economics at the Hertie School.

This article was first published on the British Academy website.

Gay rights demonstration, NYC 1976

The AIDS epidemic's lasting impact on gay men

by Dr Dana Rosenfeld

As the world continues to grapple with the effects of COVID-19, British Academy-funded researcher Dr Dana Rosenfeld examines the impact of the AIDS epidemic on older gay men and describes the ongoing psychological toll of having experienced multiple losses at the epidemic's height

In the 20th century, the gay community saw such watershed moments as the targeting of gay people by the psychiatric enterprise and the McCarthy era witch-hunts, the birth of gay liberation, lesbian feminism, and queer culture, homosexuality's decriminalisation and demedicalisation, the legalisation of gay marriage, and the overturning of bans on gay people serving in the military.

As with all watersheds, these events' impacts were filtered through such characteristics as gender, ethnicity, class, and age at the time of the event. For gay men and women born before 1930, whom I interviewed in 1995 and who came of age in an era of political, medical, and scientific oppression, the emergence of gay liberation (which, sparked by the 1969 Stonewall and similar uprisings, formed a new celebratory lesbian and gay culture based on the open expression of, and pride in, same-sex relationships) was the most significant event shaping their experience of gay life.

While these older gay people were aged 50–70 in 1980, when HIV / AIDS emerged in the west, gay male 'baby boomers' (born 1946–1964) were

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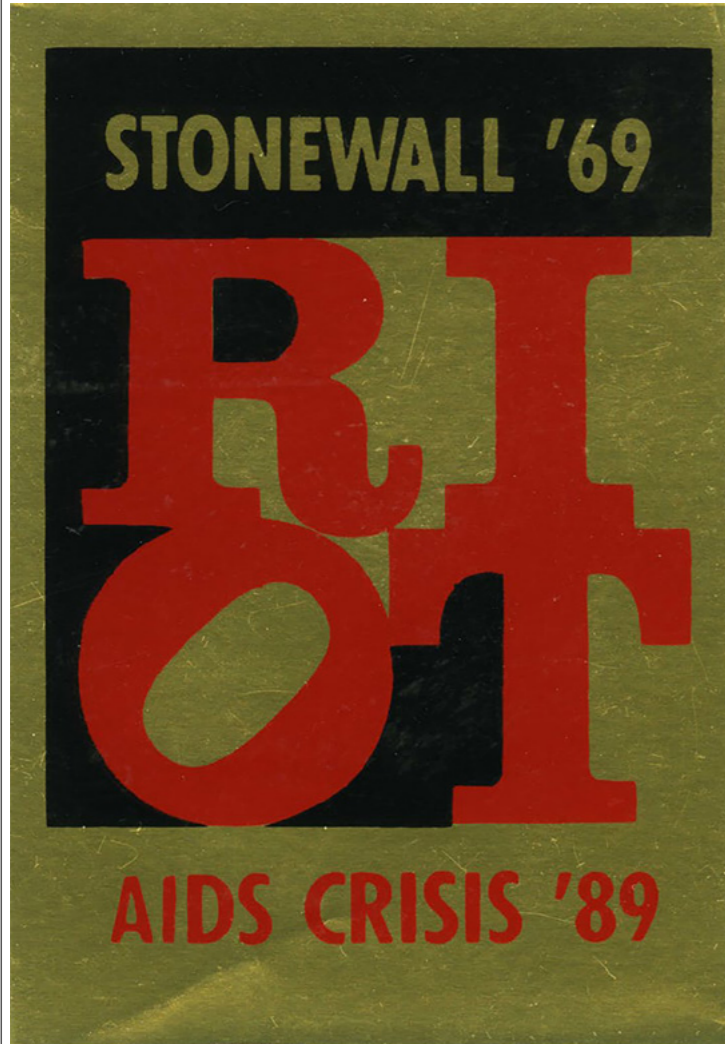
aged 34–16.

For them, the high number of AIDS deaths at the epidemic's peak (1987–1996) shaped their personal, social, psychological, and community lives, during the epidemic, throughout their life course, and into later years. AIDS killed 324,029 men and women in the USA between 1987 and 1998 (death rates began to drop in 1995, with the introduction of effective anti-retroviral medications in 1996 fuelling this decline).

Decimation of gay male baby boomers

As I and colleagues established, the epidemic hit male baby boomers much harder than it did older and younger men, causing high numbers of premature deaths, especially among those aged 25–44 (and, in this age group, among those aged 35–44), with gay men suffering 'the

most AIDS deaths by far at the epidemic's height'. In the USA, by 1995, one gay man in nine had been diagnosed with AIDS, one in fifteen had died, and 10% of the 1,600,000 men aged 25–44 who identified as gay had died – a literal decimation of this cohort of gay men born 1951–1970.

This was unfolding in a political context intensely hostile to gay men and women, with, in the USA, conservative forces condemning people living with HIV / AIDS as 'immoral', and President Reagan notoriously avoiding public mention of AIDS until 1985. Gay men, with others' support, organised around the HIV / AIDS crisis, forming such direct-action groups as ACTUP. They agitated for better responses from the federal government and the scientific communities, drafting an AIDS patients' bill of rights, launching information campaigns, and establishing community-based systems of care for people with HIV / AIDS.

Devastating numbers of AIDS deaths in major cities

Unlike the 404,000 USA combat-related deaths in WWII, which were evenly distributed across the country, AIDS deaths were highest in major cities with thriving gay communities with a far higher proportion of gay male residents than the national average. In 1990, AIDS caused 61% of all deaths of men aged 25–44 (born 1946–1965) in San Francisco, 35% in New York, 51% in Ft. Lauderdale, 32% in Boston, 33% in Washington, DC, 39% in Seattle, 34% in Dallas, 38% in Atlanta, 43% in Miami, and 25% in Portland, Oregon.

Some gay men I interviewed for my British-Academy funded study into the social worlds of older gay men who had lost friends and / or partners to the AIDS epidemic described cities becoming virtual ghost-towns. At the epidemic's height, caring for a partner with AIDS meant spending significant time in hospitals, hospices, or at home when not at work (if they were still working). Returning to 'the world' after a partner's death was often a return to a world in which many if not most of these survivors' gay male friends had 'disappeared'. Recovery from a partner's death occurred in both a vastly shrunken social network and a devastated community.

Impact on survivors of the AIDS epidemic

The AIDS epidemic's impacts on this generation of gay men, now aged 58–75, are still being explored. High mortality within tight gay networks have inspired the term 'multiple loss syndrome' to capture these deaths' psychological toll. But these deaths' impacts vary by, for example, gay men's degree of connectedness to urban gay communities, and when they entered gay life.

In my British Academy study's data, these effects were mediated by whether interviewees were ill with HIV / AIDS when they were losing friends and / or partners to AIDS; were HIV / AIDS and / or gay activists during the epidemic, or, if they had been diagnosed with HIV, still working; and had strong ties to biological family.

Breakthroughs in treatment

In 1996, highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) changed HIV from an almost invariably terminal condition to a chronic, manageable one. Since 2015, studies have

consistently shown that antiretroviral therapy is highly effective at preventing people without HIV from acquiring HIV through sex (pre-exposure Prophylaxis, or PreP) and in 2016, the landmark PARTNER study demonstrated that people living with HIV who are taking HAART regularly and are virally suppressed cannot transmit HIV through sex (treatment as prevention, or TasP). It is therefore no longer accurate to refer to HIV as infectious: HIV is *transmissible*, and then only under specific circumstances. However, HIV continues to affect communities around the world, and living with HIV introduces its own challenges.

Effects of age on the experience of living with HIV for older gay men

For older HIV-positive gay men, age intersects with the experience of living with HIV. Older people living with HIV interviewed for The HIV and Later Life (HALL) study described experiencing 'uncertainties over how HIV, HIV medications, and "normal ageing" intersect to influence physical and mental health; ageism intersecting with HIV stigma to

further stigmatise older people living with HIV; threats posed by the stigmatisation of HIV and, for [gay men], homophobia, specifically in relation to the quality of long-term care' and concerns over 'the consequences of interruptions to professional careers by HIV'.

Ongoing impact of HIV/AIDS

Gay men diagnosed with HIV pre-1996 lived through often-lengthy periods of ill health, with life-long consequences, and of expectations of imminent and / or premature death from AIDS. The 'Lazarus effect' they experienced post-1996 when new medications changed HIV from a fatal to a chronic, manageable condition was itself distressing, as many had left work when diagnosed at the advice of their doctors and found themselves in financial straits due to loss of earnings and limited or no pensions – a situation which, for many, continues today.

Regardless of these internal differences, 'nearly all older gay men alive today, regardless of their HIV status or when they come out, have been impacted in some way' by HIV / AIDS. Many of these men

were (and continue to be) AIDS activists and / or carers, and have played, and continue to play, a central role in the LGBT+ community's history.

Dr. Dana Rosenfeld (University of Westminster), a medical sociologist and social gerontologist, has published on lesbian and gay ageing, the experience of illness and disability, ageing and the life course, and ageing with HIV. She completed a study entitled ''The Lost Generation': The Social Worlds of Older Gay Male Survivors of the AIDS Epidemic', funded by a British Academy / Leverhulme Small Research Grant. In 2011–2013, she led an MRC / ESRC study on ageing with HIV in the UK. She is currently exploring the long-term impacts of being diagnosed with HIV in the epidemic's early days on the social worlds of older people living with HIV in the UK.

This article was first published on the British Academy website.

AIDS Memorial Quilt in front of the Washington Monument

# The rise and fall of the village from Roman to Arab Egypt

by Dr Micaela Langellotti and Professor Dominic Rathbone

With the exciting discovery of 50,000 documents in Middle Egypt, researchers are for the first time able to study village life during the Roman and early Arab period in great detail. Here, Dr Micaela Langellotti and Professor Dominic Rathbone – co-editors of a volume on the subject for Proceedings of the British Academy – detail the once hidden history of village life in Egypt during the first eight centuries AD

The common image of life in the ancient Greek and Roman worlds is of bustling urban centres such as Athens, Alexandria, Rome, Pompeii and Londinium. The remains of many cities of the Roman Empire have been excavated and restored to make tourist attractions. Library shelves are packed with academic and popular studies of individual cities and Roman urbanisation, which draw on the many written accounts of civic life and the inscriptions (dedications, tombstones) which it was the Greek and Roman urban habit to erect. Impressive, however, as the level of urbanisation was by pre-modern standards, the vast majority of the population of the Roman world lived in villages, not cities.

In recent decades there has been far more archaeological study of rural settlements, especially in the western provinces of the empire, but we have very little written evidence, literary or from inscriptions (except in Asia Minor, modern Turkey) for villages. So there are no general books on village life in the Roman Empire, and few studies of particular regions or villages.

Draft petition of AD 50 to governor of Egypt from Nemesion, poll-tax collector for the village of Philadelphia (P.Mich. X 582).
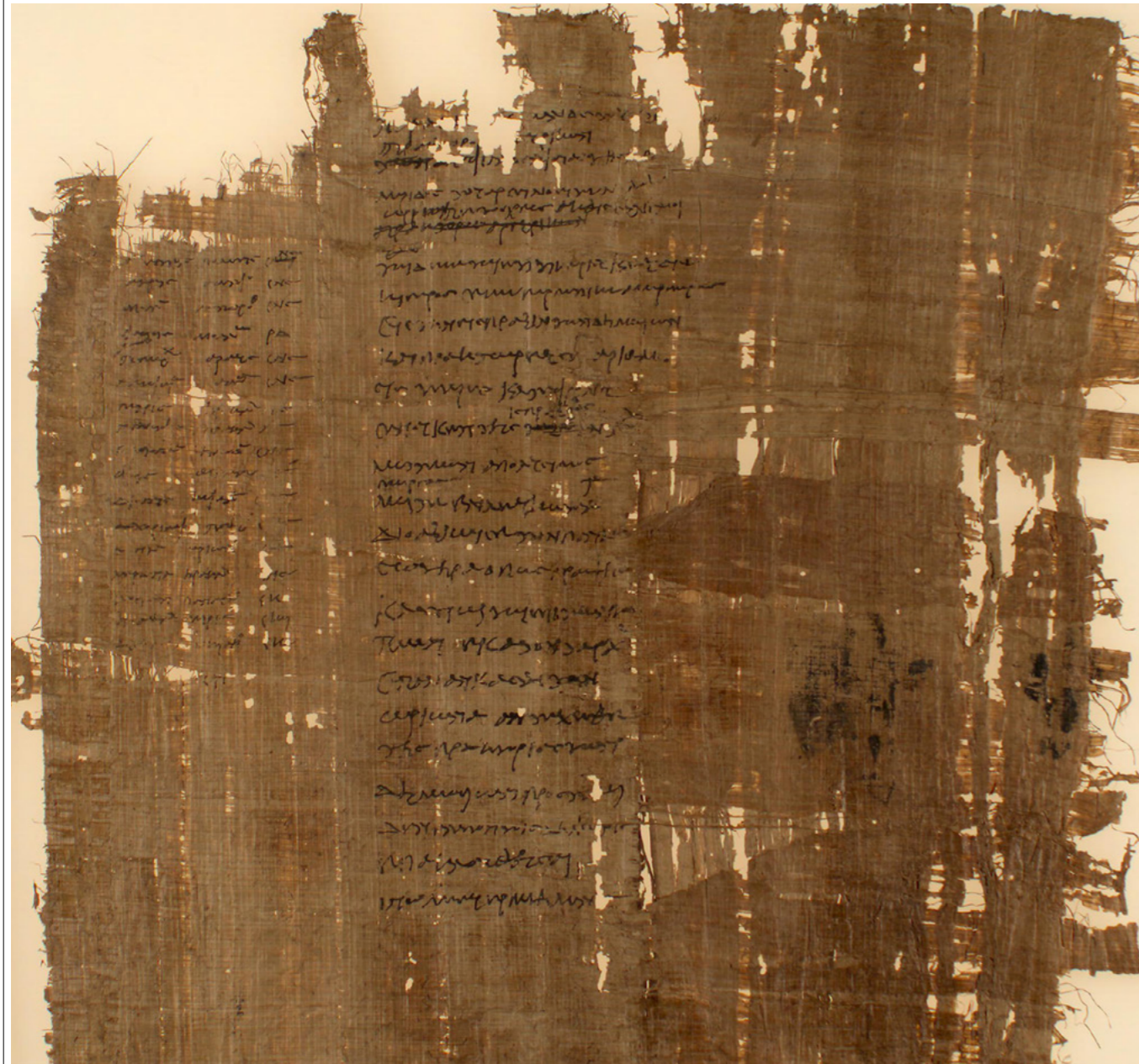
Egypt to the rescue!

Because Egypt was conquered by Alexander the Great in 332 BCE and ruled for 300 years by the Ptolemies (and Cleopatras), then another 650 years by the Roman (later Byzantine) Empire, for over a millennium almost all official and many private documents were written in Greek on papyrus (a form of paper). Several million documents have survived in the rubbish deposits of desiccated sites in Middle Egypt, of which some 50,000 texts of the Roman to Byzantine periods have been deciphered and published, about half of them from village sites in the Fayyum (a semi-oasis south-west of Cairo). Thanks to these texts, we are able to investigate – in detail impossible elsewhere – village life during the Roman and early Arab period. There have been a few studies of individual villages, but our volume 'Village Institutions in Egypt' is the first to attempt a general survey of village institutions across this period, and we hope that it will itself mark a turning point in the study of Roman villages.

Village life

The first thing to note about villages in Roman Egypt is their variety. Villages varied greatly in size and social composition, from tiny agrarian settlements to larger centres with their own socio-economic hierarchies and substantial public and private buildings. Second is the range of formal institutions in the first two centuries CE which contributed to their self-administration, including local officials such as village elders, police officers and tax-collectors; banks; record-offices; associations and festivals. Depending on the size of the village, its location (near the district capital or near the Nile) and the availability of land, each institution played a relatively different role in a particular village.

The most remarkable outcome of our investigation was to discover how high the level of independence of the larger Egyptian villages was in the earlier period of Roman rule. Against the common belief that rural settlements were generally subordinate to urban centres, the Egyptian evidence shows that villages were mainly independent units from an administrative as well as economic point view. For example, villages that were far away from the main city all had a bank which villagers could access for money transfers and credit operations; most villages had a record office which allowed anyone to get a contract drawn up and all villages could rely on a network of local officials for a wide range of activities, from tax collection to land administration.

Villages also offered plenty of occasions for leisure activities, like those provided by associations and festivals, two key institutions in the Egyptian countryside. Associations, which were formal groups of people with a common focus such as an occupation (for example, an association of farmers), regularly held social gatherings for all their members. Festivals were a common feature of Egyptian culture and some villages hosted an incredibly large number of festivals throughout the years. At Soknopaiou Nesos, for instance, situated on the north-shore of the modern Fayyum region, the festival calendar occupied around half of the year. Villagers, therefore, did not need to travel to the city for economic or leisure activities.

Centralisation of power

Another new result of our investigations is to trace how Egyptian villages gradually lost their independence. This process started in the second century CE. Stricter government control over life in the Empire became the main strategy adopted by the state to face various crises, which inevitably caused financial problems and the need for the state to enforce tax collection from its subjects. The most significant of these crises was the Antonine Plague (smallpox) in the late second century, whose effect on two Fayyum villages can be documented, showing a sharp dip in manpower (maybe of 25–30 per cent) and output. As a result, village institutions came under closer control, for example the imposition of compulsory services and taxes on members of associations.

Overall village independence, however, was not scrapped until the fifth century, when the process of centralisation of power by the government, which had started four centuries earlier, reached completion.

Continuous external pressures on the empire – the so-called "barbarian" invasions – had caused the state to increase taxation, hitting those belonging to the lower strata of society badly. Higher taxation caused a reshuffle of society, which became more hierarchical. Only the elite could survive the oppressive fiscal regime and they were the ones who were now in charge of local administration, as can be seen clearly in Egyptian villages, which were now made collectively liable for the payment of taxes. Corruption became increasingly common in village administration and the once diversified economy of the Egyptian villages, and of the East in general, suffered to a point of no return.

The fifth-century turning point was exacerbated by the huge social and economic crisis brought about by the Justinianic Plague (541–49 CE), which may have killed up to half the population of the Mediterranean. The imperial state faced this unprecedented crisis in the only way it knew, with further centralisation of power, which undermined its capacity for defence in depth in the face of external threats.

That political, social and economic tension between local and central powers and populations has continued to run through the history of the lands once part of the Roman Empire and more widely. As European countries face a concatenation of crises – environmental, medical and economic – the attractions and dangers of centralised control over more regional or local responsibility are again becoming a live issue.

'Our volume 'Village Institutions in Egypt' is the first to attempt a general survey of village institutions across the Roman to Byzantine period'

Dr Micaela Langellotti is Lecturer in Ancient History at Newcastle University and Professor Dominic Rathbone is Professor of Ancient History at King's College London.

This article was first published on the British Academy website.

From the Archive

The Fellowship of Learning

The following is an extract from Sir Frederic Kenyon's 1921 Presidential Address on 'The Fellowship of Learning', in which he took as his cue Francis Bacon's Instauratio Magna (1620) and its 'vision of the Kingdom of Knowledge, the ideal of the Fellowship of Learning, which our Academy exists to foster and promote'.

'The prophecy which forms the motto of the great frontispiece of the Instauratio Magna has been realised in fullest measure in these latter days. Multi pertransibunt et augebitur scientia ['Many will travel and knowledge will be increased']. There has been much running to and fro on the face of the earth, and knowledge has been multiplied in a manner which has far exceeded the utmost dreams of Bacon. But the vision of unity, of the Fellowship of Learning, has been imperilled. The tendency has been centrifugal, separatist, specialist. No one can now, like Bacon, take all knowledge for his province. In each subject knowledge has multiplied to such an extent that the subject must be subdivided again and again, and one man will spend his life in settling Hoti's business or in the doctrine of the enclitic De, and another in investigating the parasite of a parasite. Without specialism knowledge cannot now progress, and specialism has its tendencies which break up the family of learning. Separatism may only too easily turn to rivalry and even hostility: and valuable time and energy are wasted while those who should be allies fight one another.

This danger has been amply illustrated in the past, in the fights between the New Learning and the Old, between Theology and Science, between Science and the Classics, between the modern and the ancient humanities.

The fight between Science and Theology has died down; Science is no longer so sure that it knows everything, and Theology realizes that in its sphere Science must be respected. The fight between Science and the Humanities, or more particularly between Science and the Classics, has also, I think, lost its bitterness. The advocates of each are more willing to recognize the value of the other, and to acknowledge that the free development of both is essential to the intellectual culture of the nation. The [First World] war has taught us how greatly we need both, the knowledge of nature which comes from science and the knowledge of man which comes from the humanities. Neither can afford to despise the other. For our defence in war, for our progress in peace, we need to cultivate science, both with the disinterested research which we call pure science, and in its practical applications to industry and commerce. And the problems of government, of economics, of international and internal relations, which bewilder us to-day, impress us with the vital need of the knowledge of man's thought and the history of nations, and of the cultivation of high ideals, which come through the study of the humanities.

Image:

This frontispiece from the Instauratio magna depicts, in Kenyon's words, 'the ship of Learning putting out through the Pillars of Hercules into the uncharted ocean beyond in search of the new world of Knowledge'.
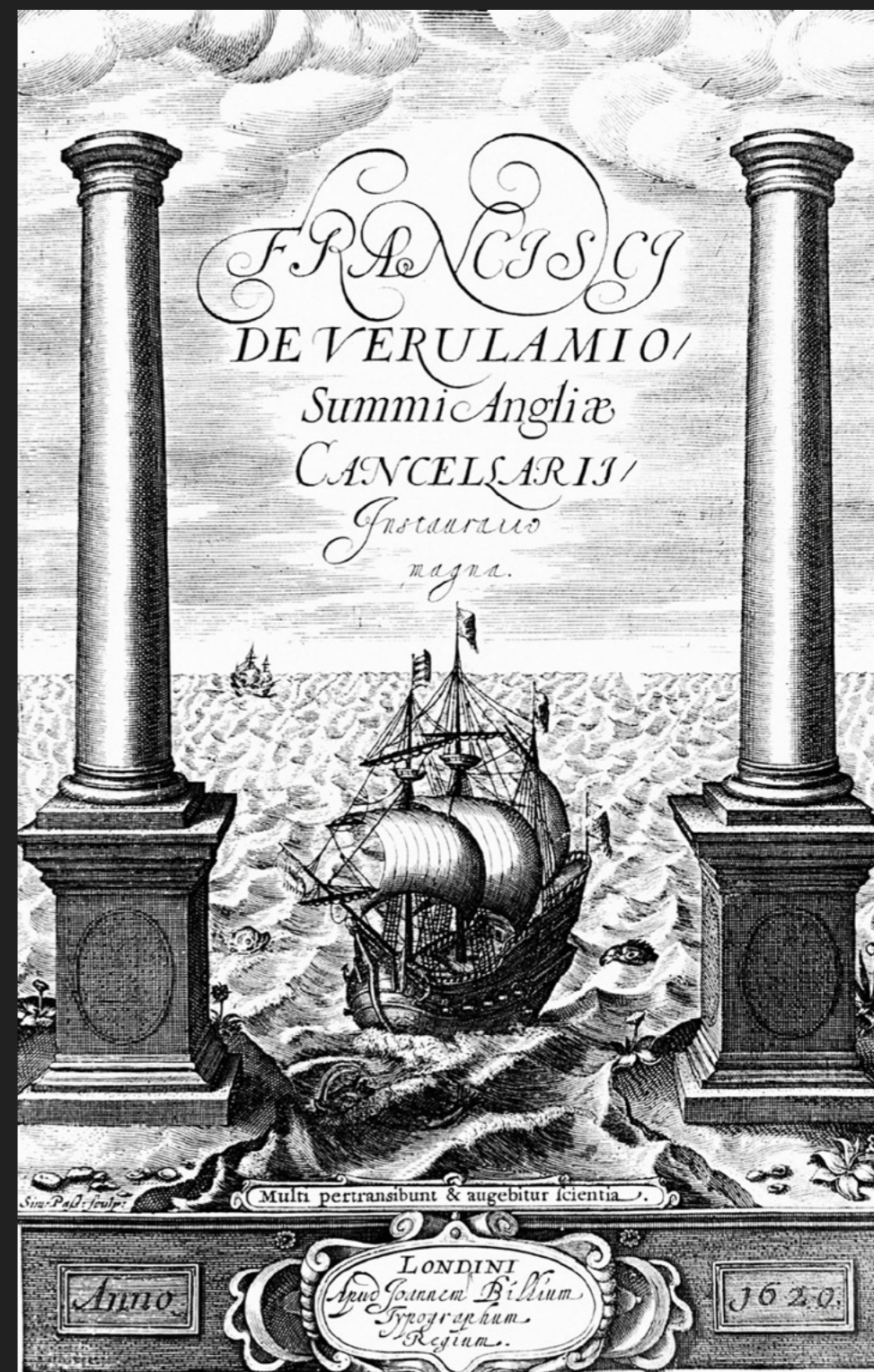
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The British Academy is the UK's national academy for the humanities and social sciences. We mobilise these disciplines to understand the world and shape a brighter future. From artificial intelligence to climate change, from building prosperity to improving well-being – today's complex challenges can only be resolved by deepening our insight into people, cultures and societies. We invest in researchers and projects across the UK and overseas, engage the public with fresh thinking and debates, and bring together scholars, government, business and civil society to influence policy for the benefit of everyone.

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