

Editorial: ISIS and the Destruction of Culture

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It is with the greatest of pleasure that I sit down to write my first editorial as editor-in-chief of *The Post Hole*. It has taken more time than I intended to gather together a new team and to find our collective feet, but we are finally ready to publish Issue 49! I would very much like to thank the previous team for their excellent work on the journal, and to offer my appreciation both to those old members who have stayed on, and to our new members for their patient enthusiasm!

Before discussing the articles included in this issue, I wish, if I may, to address the [recent reports](#) that ISIS (or Daesh, if one wishes to play the pedant) has severely damaged the Roman amphitheatre and tetrapylon monument in the ancient Syrian city of Palmyra. When Syrian forces retook the city in March, supported by Shia militia and air strikes out of Russia, the discovery that much of the site had escaped harm was a source of great relief to many archaeologists. Hearts sank when Palmyra fell out of governmental control for a second time in December, and fears for the surviving architecture have since, to my great distress, been realised. Everyone should mourn this loss, and yet those who do invariably find themselves faced with the sanctimonious platitude that 'the loss of a few stones is nothing compared to the death of a single living person'. Respectfully, and with all the sympathy in my heart for the victims of ISIS, I must disagree. For full disclosure, the following is modified from an [article](#) I wrote for the University of York student newspaper in June. It remains, I feel, quite pertinent:

To claim that every life is 'sacred' is an act of self-delusion, indicative of moral laziness. It is a prosaic byword used by the naïve and the conceited, and it should be contemplated only that it may be thrown away. Monuments, history and heritage; all of these things are more important than any single individual, or any group of individuals whose death falls short of populicide. It is not people, but rather a people which matters here. The determiner makes all the difference. As long as there are survivors (and what civilisation has ever been truly extinguished?), then monuments stand for everything. Without culture and without heritage, any survivors of the conflict in Syria would hardly be survivors at all. Under the pretence of religious devotion (a pretext entirely undermined by the destruction of the secular Roman amphitheatre), ISIS are systematically

effacing Syrian identity. This is nothing less than an attempt at subjugation via cultural genocide. To dismiss this in favour of 'the Syrian people' is to abandon those very people to oblivion.

With that out of the way, here is a summary of the articles published in this issue. It is worth noting that from now on one article from each issue will be singled out as my 'Editor's Choice'. There will be a small badge next to the article title on the contents page, and my reasons for choosing the featured paper will be outlined in each issue's editorial.

The 'Editor's Choice' for this issue is a deeply engaging piece of work by Alison Waller, whose article takes an exceptionally balanced and thoughtful approach to the question of violence and warfare in Mesolithic Europe. As the two terms are often used interchangeably, or rather without any clarity of definition, Waller takes the time early on to differentiate the former from the latter. In the subsequent discussion of skeletal trauma, similar care is taken to expound the difficulties of interpretation. The line between accidental damage and deliberate harm is particularly problematic, for example, but is navigated with aplomb. The proposition that organised, large-scale violence was far from endemic is competently argued, and the implications that this conclusion has for notions of prehistoric social cohesion are well-reasoned. All in all, Waller's paper makes for fascinating reading.

However, that is not to say that the other three papers are not worth your time! Sam Heijnen has written an interesting article on Roman coinage and Corinthian cultural identity. Robert Barratt's piece on photogrammetry and its increasingly important role in archaeology is beautifully written, and Heather Barrass's examination of the achievements and shortcomings of Flinders Petrie is a pleasing reappraisal of the great man.

As always, if you would like to share any of your thoughts, research or experiences with the archaeology community, then please submit your work to submissions@theposthole.org. We are always looking for interesting articles to publish, and accept pieces on a wide range of archaeological topics, from prehistory to the present day. For guidance on submission, please visit our website at www.theposthole.org/authors.

Kindest regards,

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