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Editorial: Endangered Heritage of the Silk Roads — West Asia

The second issue of *Old World Trade and Interaction* turns its attention to one of the most urgent challenges facing Silk Roads' scholars today: the endangered heritage, with a particular focus on West Asia. This region, long recognised as a crossroads of trade, belief systems, and cultural innovation, is also one of the most vulnerable landscapes for heritage loss. Conflict, climate change, illicit excavation, infrastructural development, and political instability continue to threaten archaeological sites, minority communities, and the fragile material record that underpins our understanding of ancient exchange.

Our mission remains rooted in fostering interdisciplinary dialogue across the humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences. In this issue, we highlight how forensic archaeology, bioarchaeology, and heritage science contribute to documenting, analysing, and safeguarding cultural resources at risk. These approaches allow us to reconstruct past lifeways while also providing evidence for contemporary heritage protection, legal processes, and community advocacy. The Silk Roads were never static; they were dynamic corridors shaped by movement, negotiation, and cultural entanglement. Today, their archaeological signatures demand equally dynamic and collaborative responses.

West Asia's role in Old World trade networks is profound. From the Levantine ports that mediated Mediterranean–Indian Ocean exchange, to the caravan cities of Iran and Mesopotamia, to the mountain passes linking Anatolia with Central Asia, the region's archaeological record reveals centuries of connectivity. Yet many of these landscapes are now endangered. This issue brings together contributions that examine destruction and resilience: forensic analyses of looted sites, studies of displaced or threatened minority communities, assessments of conflict-affected heritage, and bioarchaeological investigations that illuminate how past populations adapted to shifting political and environmental pressures.

Our contributors are encouraged to employ diverse methodologies — fieldwork, laboratory science, archival research, remote sensing, and community-based heritage initiatives. Their work underscores the importance of integrating scientific evidence with cultural, historical, and legal frameworks. As with our first issue, we continue to champion open-access scholarship and collaborative research that supports both academic innovation and practical conservation.

We welcome submissions that address the complexities of heritage management, endangered archaeology, and cultural preservation across the Silk Roads. Whether your work focuses on forensic documentation, trade networks, minority histories, or the bioarchaeology of mobility and identity, we are committed to supporting research that advances understanding and safeguards the past.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.