

Byron
and
Trinity
Memorials,
Marbles
and Ruins



Edited
by
Adrian
Poole



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5. Byron, Stephens and the Future of Ruins¹

Adrian Poole

Byron has shaped the way we think about ruins.² In the early years of the nineteenth century he was writing about ruins of two different kinds: most immediately, the recent ruins created by years of war across a shattered Europe; and then the ancient ruins of Rome, Athens, Egypt. What was the relation between them? Not just of the distant past to the present—but also to the future? For ruins can be all too new, like the ruins created by the seismic upheavals of the previous twenty-five years across Europe, from 1789 to 1815 and beyond. What happens next, ‘the day after’? A question all too urgent as we witness, from distances of varying safety and peril, the ruination being perpetrated as I write these words, in Ukraine and in Gaza, and elsewhere.

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- 1 This is a revised version of an essay entitled ‘Byron in Yucatán: War and Ruins’, published in *The Influence and Legacy of Alexander von Humboldt in the Americas*, ed. by María Fernanda Valencia Suárez and Carolina Depetris (Mérida: UNAM, 2022), pp. 119–31. Reprinted by permission of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.
 - 2 See James Buzard, *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to ‘Culture’, 1800–1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 14–30. Andrew Elfenbein comments further that ‘As James Buzard has documented, Byron’s invention of his experience of European greatness as unique, privileged, and profoundly individual proved to be a boom to the Victorian tourist industry. Early Victorian guidebooks included substantial quotations from Byron’s poems, especially *Childe Harold*, to guide tourists to develop themselves by copying Byron.’ (*Byron and the Victorians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 32–33). For discussion of Byron’s complex investment in ‘ruins’, see William Keach, ‘Romantic Writing and the Determinations of Cultural Property’, *European Romantic Review*, 30.2 (2019), 223–37.

When the protagonist of Byron's poem *Childe Harold* (1812–18) encounters the ruins of Athens, his first question is 'Where are thy men of might? thy grand in soul?'³ And Byron has an extensive, eloquent note to this effect:

We can all feel, or imagine, the regret with which the ruins of cities, once the capitals of empires, are beheld; [...] But never did the littleness of man, and the vanity of his very best virtues, of patriotism to exalt, and of valour to defend his country, appear more conspicuous in the record of what Athens was, and the certainty of what she now is.⁴

The modern Greeks were degraded, so Byron (and others) considered, unworthy of the great ancestors who fought at Marathon and built the Parthenon.⁵ But the fall was not complete. The contrast between past glory and present degradation was unfinished, an ongoing process to which the modern world was viciously contributing. Byron continues:

This theatre of contention between mighty factions, of the struggles of orators, the exaltation and deposition of tyrants, the triumph and punishment of generals, is now become a scene of petty intrigue and perpetual disturbance, between the bickering agents of certain British nobility and gentry. 'The wild foxes, the owls and serpents in the ruins of Babylon', were surely less degrading than such inhabitants.⁶

So much may be conspicuous and certain, but what of the future? What can those ancient ruins tell us about what lies ahead? They can tell us that the past is not locked away; they can remind us that what is now past was once future. Look at the Parthenon: it has been 'a temple, a church, and a mosque'. It has been partly destroyed, rebuilt, re-purposed. It has served as a sacred place to different religions, and now it is suffering, as Byron sees it, a new kind of a violation, 'a triple sacrilege'.⁷ Is this what the future holds, a world from which the idea of the sacred has been erased, its vestiges reduced to objects for sale? Perhaps. But who can know, for certain? The ancient Athenians could not have known that

3 *Childe Harold*, Canto II, 2, in *Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. by Jerome J. McGann, 7 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980–93), II, 44. All subsequent references to Byron's poetry are to this edition, hereafter CPW.

4 CPW II, 189.

5 William St Clair makes the same points more extensively in the previous chapter.

6 Ibid.

7 CPW II, 190.

their temple would go on to serve as a church and a mosque, nor the even more ancient Babylonians that their great city would be razed to the ground, even as they had themselves razed Jerusalem. Those Old Testament images of wilderness to which Byron gestures—the wild foxes, the owls and the serpents—these serve as prophetic emblems of the future no less than of the past.

Byron was attracted by the seductive charm of ruins in a spirit of rumination and nostalgia for the past: he thinks of himself as ‘a ruin amidst ruins’.⁸ The stories he makes of these ruins are *myths*, in various senses. But we also hear in him a strong line of critical thought about the *history* embodied in those ruins, as an unfinished process into the future. Between these two attitudes there is a dynamic dialogue, played out in his writings, between myth (which is fixed) and history (which is not).

We can see this distinction between myth and history in a certain inconsistency in Byron’s own attitude towards relics. Where the great Parthenon marbles were concerned, he was happy to denounce the depredations of his compatriots Lord Elgin and Lord Aberdeen. The latter, George Hamilton Gordon, fourth Earl of Aberdeen (1784–1860), was in fact his cousin. Though less notorious than Elgin, Aberdeen played a key role in shipping reliefs from the amphitheatre on the Pnyx in Athens back to London and securing the Parthenon marbles in 1806; he served as a Trustee of the British Museum and president of the Society of Antiquaries, before going on to a distinguished political career that culminated in terms as Foreign Secretary (1841–46) and Prime Minister (1852–55). Byron expressed his uninhibited scorn for them both in his early work, *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809):

8 *Childe Harold*, IV, 25; CPW II, 132. Amongst the many fine critical writings about the significance of ‘ruins’ and ‘ruinology’ for Byron and his contemporaries, see Clara Tuite, *Lord Byron and Scandalous Celebrity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), especially her discussion of ‘*Childe Harold* IV and the pageant of his bleeding heart’, pp. 139–67, where she argues for ‘Byron’s conjunction of the historical ruin poem and the melodrama of celebrity’ (p. 144), and for the role of the poet’s heart as both ‘broken’ and ‘bleeding’: ‘Byron transforms the ruin genre by presenting the broken heart as a ruin and the experience of heartbreak through the topos of memory. The broken heart is a monument of ruin and the bleeding heart is corporeal, alive and present; the two figures intersect. [...] The poem joins topographical ruin affect with the affect of the broken heart, reverberating after lost love.’ (p. 146)

Let ABERDEEN and ELGIN still pursue
 The shade of fame through regions of Virtu;
 Waste useless thousands on their Phidian freaks,
 Mis-shapen monuments, and maimed antiques;
 And make their grand saloons a general mart
 For all the mutilated blocks of art:⁹

He displayed a similarly righteous indignation at Marathon, site of the famous battle between the Greeks and the Persians in 490 BCE. By contrast with the Parthenon, there was little remaining there to be seen, let alone purloined and shipped off. When the main funeral barrow was excavated, few or no relics were to be found. Instead, in the absence of any material signs of commemoration, the very plain of Marathon itself was offered to the poet for sale, he tells us, for a mere 'sixteen thousand piasters, about nine hundred pounds! Alas!', he exclaims, 'was the dust of Miltiades [the heroic Athenian general] worth no more? It could scarcely have fetched less if sold by *weight*!' ¹⁰

Athens and Marathon carry—for Western readers—the aura of myth. But Byron could take a different view when the relics were less hallowed by myth than the sacred Athenian marbles or the tale of the battle of Marathon. The name of 'Morat' is far more deeply buried in history. In Canto III of *Childe Harold*, Byron writes about the bones of the Burgundian forces defeated at Morat by the Swiss in 1476, and in a note (to line 607) he confesses to having himself taken away some of these bones 'as much as may have made the quarter of a hero'.¹¹ Such humble human remains as these old bones lacked the charisma of those ancient Greek stories and artefacts; the very chapel that housed them had been destroyed. It is true that Byron aligns Morat and Marathon as sites where men fought for their liberty, in contrast to Waterloo and Cannae where states fought for dominion over each other (lines 608–9).¹² Yet the bones of those Burgundian soldiers are frail and exposed, both literally and figuratively. Byron's note betrays an anxiety about discriminating between theft and salvage, when he admits that his 'sole excuse is, that if I had not [taken the bones of the quarter of a hero], the next passer by

9 *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, lines 1027–32; CPW I, 261.

10 CPW II, 198.

11 CPW II, 307.

12 See McGann's commentary, CPW II, 307.

might have perverted them to worse uses than the careful preservation which I intend for them'.¹³

It comes as no surprise that Byron was the favourite poet of the American writer credited with uncovering the Maya ruins in Central America less than twenty years after Byron's death in 1824. Born in New Jersey, educated at Columbia College, and trained as a lawyer, John Lloyd Stephens (1805–52) set out for the 'Old World' in 1834, following Byron's footsteps. His first stop was Missolonghi in Greece, where Byron had famously died, fighting for Greek independence. In Odessa he narrowly avoided having his copy of Byron confiscated by Russian border-control.¹⁴ He worked at high speed to publish two accounts of these travels: *Incidents of Travel in Egypt, Arabia Petræa, and the Holy Land* (1837), which went through six printings in its first year and sold some 21,000 copies, and then *Incidents of Travel in Greece, Turkey, Russia and Poland* (1838). The titles of all four of his books feature the word 'Incidents' with a purposive mock-modesty. Then in 1838, hungry for new adventures, Stephens turned his attention to Central America. He read Alexander von Humboldt's 1810 account of his Mexican visit, descriptions by Antonio del Rio and Guillermo Dupaix of the ruins of Palenque, and Juan Galindo's report of his 1835 expedition to Copán.¹⁵ He teamed up with the English artist and architect Frederick Catherwood, who had also had extensive experience of the Old World territories and antiquities, and they set off together. They produced together in due course two best-selling publications, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatán* (1841), and *Incidents of Travel in Yucatán* (1843).¹⁶

13 CPW II, 307. McGann notes that Byron sent the bones back to his publisher John Murray in London, 'where they are still preserved'.

14 Byron was outlawed in Russia because of the scandalous portrayal of Catherine the Great in Cantos VI–X of *Don Juan* (1822). See Anya Taylor, 'Catherine the Great: Coleridge, Byron, and Erotic Politics on the Eastern Front', *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*, 61 (April 2012).

15 Karl Ackerman, introduction to new edition of J. L. Stephens's *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatán* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), pp. 4–5.

16 Important too is Catherwood's independent volume of 1844, *Views of Ancient Monuments*, twenty-five hand-coloured lithographs, 300 copies, dedicated to Stephens. This was a scaled-down version of the more ambitious project for a huge volume (with Stephens) of 100–125 engravings, with texts by Prescott, Humboldt and others, which came to nothing. See Fabio Bourbon's modern edition, *The Lost*

Stephens's travel writings have attracted much interest over the last fifty years. Two dominant stories emerge. One portrays Stephens in a warm light, as a founding father of American archaeology, a heroic or at least admirable figure.¹⁷ In the 1960s Donald Davie concluded his homage like this:

And not that sort of hero, not
Conquistador Aeneas, but a tourist!
Uncoverer of the Maya, John L. Stephens,
Blest after all those beaks and prows and horses.¹⁸

Well, not many tourists risk life and limb as fearlessly as Stephens and Catherwood. In fact it was exactly the risks the two of them ran that make the travel books such compelling reading: the sheer physical labour, the threat of violence and disease, everything from which the tourist industry seeks to protect its clients. Stephens might not be quite up to the epic feats of Stephen Spielberg's Indiana Jones but the movie legend owes something to the trail he blazed.¹⁹ At a more august historical level, there are those for whom Stephens has more in common with the conquistador Aeneas or Cortez than with the tourists for whom he helped to pave the way.²⁰ In fact Stephens was writing only a few years before a traditional form of military intervention in the epoch-making war between the US and Mexico, following the American annexation of Texas in 1845. As for the great cultural artefacts he had 'uncovered',

Cities of the Maya: The Life, Art and Discoveries of Frederick Catherwood (Novara, Italy: De Agostini, 2014), and Victor W. Von Hagen, 'Artist of a Buried World', *American Heritage* 12.4 (June 1961).

- 17 See for example Victor W. Von Hagen, *Search for the Maya: the Story of Stephens and Catherwood* (London: Gordon and Cremonesi, 1978), and Larzer Ziff, *Return Passages: Great American Travel Writing, 1780–1910* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 58–117.
- 18 From 'Homage to John L. Stephens' (1964), *Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1990), p. 125.
- 19 Gesa Mackenthun, 'The Conquest of Antiquity: The Travelling Empire of John Lloyd Stephens', *American Travel and Empire*, ed. by Susan Castillo and David Seed (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), p. 100.
- 20 Stephens was capable of fantasising about the business opportunities represented by a defunct volcano: 'I could not but reflect, what a waste of the bounties of Providence in this favoured but miserable land! At home this volcano would be a fortune; with a good hotel on top, a railing round to keep children from falling in, a zigzag staircase down the sides, and a glass of iced lemonade at the bottom.' (*Incidents of Travel in Central America*, II: 13).

Stephens felt few qualms about trying to buy them up and ship them off. The British Museum had the Parthenon marbles, so why couldn't 'we' do the equivalent?

There are two ways of appraising Stephens. He gets credit for recognising that the Maya ruins did not derive from the Old World, from the ancient Greeks or the Egyptians or the Israelites, but from an indigenous culture. On the other hand he promotes the myth of a single indigenous culture that *began* up north and gravitated south. And that therefore all its remains belong as of right to 'us. This confidence depends on a belief that 'we' Americans of the United States are, and will continue to be, as integrated an entity as 'those Central Americans' tearing each other apart in civil strife are not. Stephens did not foresee the Civil War that would rend the United States apart less than ten years after his death in 1852.

The political motives and consequences of Stephens's work may be clear (and 'conspicuous') to us now, but what role does his 'artistry' play? Are there no alternatives to the conquistador and the tourist? Do writers and artists simply collaborate with the politics of which they are servants? Or do they create a residue, a remnant of possibilities that could point in other directions? What of 'his [Stephens's] willingness to consider the monuments of Maya civilization in aesthetic, as well as merely historical or anthropological terms'? asks Nigel Leask. Perhaps this is 'his most enduring achievement, one which, uncommon in its own day, still challenges our contemporary post-colonial *episteme*'.²¹ To this we should add the massive contribution of Catherwood's visual images.

Leask makes another helpful suggestion when he says that 'The books' archaeological interest is counterpointed, and often diluted, by its description of contemporary politics'.²² David Brading says something similar, when he describes the contrast Stephens draws between 'ancient, forgotten, civilizations and contemporary political barbarism, the high aesthetic appeal of Maya sculpture undercut by

21 Nigel Leask, 'A Yankee in Yucatán: John Lloyd Stephens and the Lost Cities of America', in *Travel Writing in the Nineteenth Century: Filling the Blank Spaces*, ed. by Tim Youngs (London: Anthem Press 2012), p. 143.

22 Leask, 'A Yankee in Yucatán', p. 136.

the appalling civil wars of the present era'.²³ 'Diluted' and 'undercut': I would put it more strongly than this. The pressures of contemporary history to which Leask and Brading point are exactly what made the books so readable then and give them continuing value now.

Here I want to introduce a word that plays a significant role in Stephens's writing about the contemporary political situation in Central America: the word 'distracted' and the idea of 'distraction'. We normally now think of being distracted from something of greater importance to something of less, whether the importance is one of value or significance or risk or threat. Matthew Bevis rightly notes that the term 'appears to take on new life in twentieth-century society and culture', and that, as the antonym to 'attention', it has 'tended to get a bad press'.²⁴ It has certainly attracted much attention from writers and thinkers, from T. S. Eliot's memorable line in 'Burnt Norton' (1936) about being 'Distracted from distraction by distraction' to Saul Bellow's Oxford University lecture on 'The Distracted Public' (1990).²⁵ Bellow recognised the political implications of organised distraction and in recent years the word has acquired fresh currency as a way of describing political strategy.²⁶ However the only context in which we normally hear the word in its strongest sense is when we speak of being 'driven to distraction' or of being 'distracted'. To a modern ear the term usually implies something quite mild, unthreatening, whether a matter of irritation or pleasure, a 'diversion'.

When Byron writes of boating on Lake Lemman, however, that 'This quiet sail is as a noiseless wing / To waft me from distraction',²⁷ he is thinking of 'distraction' as a state of violent disturbance, the turbulence of a world set on fire by the French Revolution and the consequent ruins,

23 Quoted by Leask, p. 136, from David Brading, *The First America, The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State, 1492–1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 629.

24 Though Bevis notes the 'bad press', his essay is primarily concerned with the creative potentialities of 'distraction', 'In Search of Distraction', *Poetry*, 211.2 (2017), 171–94 (176, 172).

25 'The Distracted Public', Romanes Lecture, Oxford University, 10 May 1990, in *It All Adds Up: From the Dim Past to the Uncertain Future* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1994), pp. 153–69.

26 E.g. 'Trump is a master of distraction and throwing out shiny objects to divert attention', writes David Smith, the *Guardian*, 25 Jan. 2019.

27 Canto III, 85; *CPW* II, 108.

and then the new dungeons and thrones that followed. The Latin roots of the word 'distraction' are about tearing or being torn apart. It is in this sense that Stephens repeatedly writes of the 'distracted state of the country' into which he ventures. It is the word he uses of Greece on his first arrival; it is the word he uses of Central America, a country 'distracted by a sanguinary civil war'; and it is the word he uses at the end of the Yucatán volume, as he laments the volcanic eruption of civil strife, again:

Alas! before these pages were concluded, that country which we had looked upon as a picture of peace, and in which we had met with so much kindness, was torn and distracted by internal dissensions, the blast of civil war [...]²⁸

I have pointed to a contradiction in Byron's attitude towards the ruins of the ancient world. It was not a contradiction by which *he* was torn apart; on the contrary, it was for him a source of creative inspiration and power, a way of expressing his own doubts and uncertainties, a way of asking questions. For all the manifest differences between their literary projects, there is a comparable artistic motive at work in Stephens, a contradiction by which he was moved to write, and to which readers are invited to respond. On the one hand we recognise an indomitability, the sheer sense of physical risk, the determination to 'survive': from one perspective Stephens's writing is 'all about himself', though the self-characterisation is not triumphalist but self-deprecatory. Leask comments perceptively: 'In common with many post-romantic travel writers, Stephens often cultivates a self-parodic narrative voice to deal with this sense of belatedness, an attitude derived from his favourite poet Lord Byron.'²⁹ And on the other, there is at the heart of Stephens's adventure an interminable uncertainty about the history both past *and future* of the indigenous peoples with the ancient remains of whose artefacts he is 'dealing'.

Like Byron, Stephens was dismayed at the contrast between the greatness of the culture that produced these relics and the degradation of those living amidst them. Like Byron, he is sceptical about the

²⁸ Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Greece*, I, 7; *Incidents of Travel in Central America*, I, 3; *Incidents of Travel in Yucatán*, II, 455.

²⁹ Leask, 'A Yankee in Yucatán', pp. 134–35.

possibilities of revival and renewal. Like Byron, he does not rule it out completely.³⁰ Like Byron, Stephens could not know what ruins, whether ancient or modern, portended for the future. But here the similarities break down before the massive difference between the ancient ruins over which Byron was meditating in Athens and Rome and those at which Stephens and Catherwood were staring, uncomprehendingly, in the Maya cities of Central America. Byron knew what his ruins meant, *or thought that he did*, because of all the stories that, for him and his readers, connected the past and the present.

Stephens too, in his travels round the 'Old World', sought and found connexions to shared collective memories. Throughout Greece and the Near East he encountered individuals who extended a welcome to the visitor from the 'New World'. In a convent on Mount Sinai, the Greek superior thanked him for the American support for his compatriots' struggle for independence. It had been the same everywhere, Stephens boasted: 'I remember a ploughman on immortal Marathon sang in my greedy ears the praises of America.'³¹ Deep in the salt-mines of Wielitska in Poland, he could draw for making sense of them on 'Polish annals as early as twelve hundred and thirty-seven', on the legend of a prayer to St Anthony, the patron saint of Cracow.³² From ancient Greece to medieval Poland, the stories abounded. But Central America was different. The Maya ruins at which Stephens and Catherwood stared were by contrast wholly illegible—and remained so until over a century after Catherwood copied all those glyphs so scrupulously.³³

Ruins are not all about the past. They represent a past that once had a future—as we all do, a future that is by definition unknown. As witness the greatest of Romantic poems about ruins, 'Ozymandias' (1817), by Byron's friend Shelley, worth quoting here in full:

30 Towards the end of *Incidents of Travel in Yucatán*, he reflects that 'teaching might again lift up the Indian, might impart to him the skill to sculpture stone and carve wood; and if restored to freedom, and the unshackled exercise of his powers of mind, there might again appear a capacity to originate and construct, equal to that exhibited in the ruined monuments of his ancestors'. (II, 326)

31 Stephens, *Incidents of Travels in Egypt*, I, 277.

32 Stephens, *Incidents of Travels in Egypt*, I, 260–70.

33 See Michael D. Coe, *Breaking the Maya Code*, 3rd edn (London: Thames & Hudson, 2012).

I met a traveller from an antique land,
 Who said—'Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
 Stand in the desert . . . near them, on the sand,
 Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
 And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
 Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
 Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
 The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;
 And on the pedestal, these words appear:
 My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;
 Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!
 Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
 Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
 The lone and level sands stretch far away'.—³⁴

In 1847, Stephens finally met his great predecessor Alexander von Humboldt in Potsdam. Humboldt did not want to talk about the Maya ruins. He was much more interested in the war going on at that very moment between Mexico and the US.³⁵ War is a great distraction from archaeology, and vice-versa. Nothing makes ruins more swiftly than war—in Greece, in Yucatán, in Ukraine, wherever. As Byron knew.

But Byron could not have known the future that lay ahead for the ruins over which he lamented, in Athens and Rome. No more could Stephens and Catherwood as they contemplated the Maya ruins of Central America. The once sacred sites continue to be 'theatres of contention', to borrow Byron's significant phrase, again. How should we honour the past as it continues to occupy space—often precious if no longer sacred space?

In Britain we endure an interminable controversy about Stonehenge. The arguments are all about tourists and traffic, commerce, economy and logistics. How do we preserve these ancient monuments while catering for the pressing needs of the contemporary world, looking ahead to the future? There are so many interested parties: the ministry of defence, the farmers, the local inhabitants, the long-distance travellers,

34 *The Poems of Shelley*, vol. II, 1817–1819, ed. by Kelvin Everest and Geoffrey Matthews (Harlow: Longman, 2000), pp. 310–11.

35 Consider also the Caste War in Yucatán that broke out in 1847, five years after Stephens returned to New York, and would last for fifty years, as Leask points out: 'Stephens could never have guessed the train of events that were about to transform the region.' ('A Yankee in Yucatán', p. 139)

the tourists. 'Over the centuries this site has attracted as many theories about its construction as the Maya pyramids. It has been confidently credited to giants, wizards, Phoenicians, Mycenaeans, Romans, Saxons, Danes and aliens.' It has nothing like the grandeur of many other such ancient constructions, but it has played an extraordinarily powerful role in the collective imagination of 'Britishness'. 'Stonehenge, with the possible exception of Big Ben, is Britain's most recognisable monument. As a symbol of the nation's antiquity, it is our Parthenon, our pyramids—although, admittedly, less impressive.' The writer concludes that 'Stonehenge, then, is not so much about solidity and eternity as confusion and internal contradiction.'³⁶ Or in other words, about living history.

Meanwhile the great pyramid at the Maya ruins of Cobá in the northern Yucatán swarms with intrepid tourists.



Fig. 5.1 Adrian Poole and other tourists at Cobá, Mexico, November 2018.
Photograph by Margaret de Vaux.

36 Charlotte Higgins, 'The Battle for the Future of Stonehenge', the *Guardian* Long Read, 8 February 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/feb/08/the-battle-for-the-future-of-stonehenge>
See also, more recently, Steven Morris, 'Stonehenge campaigners' last-chance bid to save site from road tunnel', the *Guardian*, 11 December 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/dec/11/stonehenge-campaigners-last-chance-bid-to-save-site-from-road-tunnel>

Yet the site is not nearly as infested by the fairground ambience at the more commercially developed sites of Chichén Itzá and Tulúm, where the vendors endlessly tout Maya this and Maya that, including cheap hotel deals on the Maya Riviera. Not so different, after all, from the circus surrounding 'Old World' sites such as Mont St Michel, the Colosseum in Rome or the Acropolis in Athens. Or Stonehenge.

And yet of course the chaos of commerce and tourism is a world away from the violent mayhem that has surrounded, say, the ancient city of Palmyra, in the Syrian desert, north-east of Damascus.³⁷ Endlessly built and ruined, as it seems, only then to be restored and re-ruined. In August 2018 the web-site 'artnet' reported that 'Nearly Destroyed by ISIS, the Ancient City of Palmyra Will Reopen in 2019 After Extensive Renovations'.³⁸ What 'renovations' lie ahead, as I write in January 2024, for the cities of Ukraine and Gaza?

For ruins, there will always be a future.

37 In 1834 Catherwood travelled to Palmyra in native costume and made extensive drawings—which have not survived (Peter O. Koch, *John Lloyd Stephens and Frederick Catherwood: Pioneers of Mayan Archaeology* (Jefferson, NC and London: McFarland & Co., 2013), p. 42). A couple of years later Stephens's plans to go there fell through; he reported that 'the route to Palmyra is now entirely broken up by the atrocities of the Bedouins' (*Incidents of Travel in Egypt*, pp. 192, 193).

38 Sarah Cascone, 'Art World', *ArtNet*, 27 August 2018.
<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/syria-isis-palmyra-restoration-1338257>

