

Best of Last Week—early cities were violent, using AI to advance science, common herbicide harms adolescent brain

October 16 2023, by Bob Yirka

A cranial trauma bears witness of a violent death. Credit: Joachim Wahl/University of Tübingen

It was an interesting week for human behavior studies, as a team of economists from several institutions in the U.S. found that for most

people, hunting for the cheapest price for a plane ticket [is a waste of time](#), mostly because of the unorthodox way that airlines set their prices. Also, a trio of researchers from Germany, Spain and Poland reported that the earliest cities, in places like the Middle East and Mesopotamia, [were violent](#), as evidenced by the large number of skulls found with cranial traumas. And a large team of researchers affiliated with multiple institutions across Europe found that flipped coin tossing [is not as fair as thought](#)—coins tend to land the same side up as when flipped, almost 1% more often than the other way around.

In technology news, an international team of scientists began building [an AI system for scientific discovery](#) using the technology behind ChatGPT. Called Polymathic AI, the idea behind the initiative is to use the power of AI to advance scientific research efforts. And a team at MIT developed [a new, human-inspired robotic hand](#) based on a modular structure as a way to reduce development time and costs associated with designing new robots. A team with members from institutions across China developed [a new reconfigurable field-effect transistor and memory device](#) based on a 2D heterostructure. And a European consortium conducted the world's first successful test of [a 100% hydrogen-powered gas turbine](#), showing that hydrogen is a flexible way of storing electricity, potentially allowing the decarbonization of conventional energy-intensive industrial sites.

In other news, a team of psychologists at Monash University, working with colleagues from the U.K. and the U.S., conducted what they describe as [the largest study of light exposure and its impact on mental health](#). They found evidence that increased light exposure at night can increase a person's risk of developing psychiatric disorders. Also, via a long-term lizard study, a small team of biologists in the U.S. found evidence that [challenges some of the rules of evolutionary biology](#). And finally, a team of biologists at the University of California, working with colleagues from Ecuador, found evidence that [a commonly used](#)

[herbicide is harmful to adolescent brain function.](#)

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