

Here comes the SUN | EXARC

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Guests

Aimee Little (UK) and Yarema Ivantsiv (UA)

Introduction

In this very special edition of #FinallyFriday, we chatted with two of the main instigators of the new Save Ukraine Network (SUN). The aim of this network is to provide support for open-air museums as well as individual experimental archaeologists and traditional craft practitioners, many of whom are currently struggling to access resources or profit from research networks due to the ongoing war. EXARC have teamed up with Ukraine based ancient craft expert and EXARC member Yarema Ivantsiv, and the YEAR Centre (York Experimental Archaeological Research, UK), directed by Dr Aimee Little. Tune in to this episode of the EXARC Show to hear a discussion from these two inspiring individuals as they talk about their own experiences, aims, and dreams in relation to this new initiative.

Transcript

It's the first Friday of the month, which means that it's time for the next episode of #FinallyFriday, bringing you insights and discussions from around the world focussing on experimental archaeology, ancient technology, archaeological open-air museums and interpretation.

Matilda: Hello and welcome to #FinallyFriday. My name is Matilda Siebrecht, and today I am joined by two specialists from our EXARC community who'll be talking to us about the brand new Support Ukraine Network initiative founded by EXARC and the YEAR Centre.

Dr. Aimée Little is a senior lecturer in early pre-history material culture and experimental archaeology at the University of York in the UK and Director of the York Experimental Archaeology Research Centre, or YEAR. Alongside her archaeological research she has always been an advocate for diversity and inclusivity, and it was her who first approached EXARC with an initial idea for the Support Ukraine Network.

Yarema Ivantsiv is a Ukrainian reenactor with a background in tourism and historic preservation. He's the director of the NGO Chorna Halych, which is an organisation uniting reenactors, historians and artists through museums, historic sites, and organised events. Through his work he aims to inspire interest in national history, the preservation and restoration of historical and cultural monuments, the revival of crafts, folk crafts and national culture.

Welcome to you both. Thank you so so much for joining me. I have just a very quick question to start you off. Both of you, of course, are very heavily involved with experimental archaeology, and as this is a podcast about experimental archaeology, I just wanted to ask, how big of an impact do you think experimental archaeology has on concepts like, for example, cultural identity? So perhaps, Yarema, do you want to start us off?

Yarema: Yes, of course, thank you for inviting me to the podcast. About this question, I think that experimental archaeology has a very big potential to influence cultural identity but it depends who interprets information and submits it. The opportunity to touch the process that took place hundreds, or even thousands of years ago gives empathy and a very strong emotional feeling, I think. When you receive the history of your region, you feel like you touch something very close, but unknown, your identity. The gained empirical experience allows you to convey emotions to other people and also influence their attitude to cultural heritage and history. I took part in a few exciting experiments. As example, I want to recall the moment when I spent the night with my wife and four children in a reconstructed Slavic dwelling from the 10th century in Plisnesko Skansen. We cooked dinner on a stone stove, just like the inhabitants of the settlement a thousand years ago. After that, we went to sleep on a sunbed made of hay. And during the night there was very heavy rain. I was worried that the reed roof that had just been completed would leak. Everything went well, all remained dry. Such an experience strongly affects the psyche and leaves interesting memories. After such an experience, you feel that the life around you changed. The technologies of ancestors are primitive, but such that required a lot of specialised knowledge and skills that actually are very useful.

Matilda: I liked that you were saying that indeed it creates that emotional connection. I think that that's very important. Would you agree with that, Aimée?

Aimée: Yeah, I would agree with that, I think the emotional link is a really important part of thinking about and connecting with the past and people who walked before us. I think though perhaps we need to be careful around calling what we're talking about experimental archaeology necessarily, because I think it's probably more experiential. I think what Yarema is discussing is more about reenactment than experimental archaeology per se. So, coming back to your question, Matilda, I think they're equally important for different reasons. And actually the reasons that Yarema has said is hugely important. The way that people can relate to people in the past and have that experience of what life might have been like by actually dressing and living in the types of conditions that people did in different historical and prehistorical times. But if you're asking about experimental archaeology and cultural identity, I think that's probably a different type of question. Because when I think about experimental archaeology, I think about an actual sort of hypothesis where you're testing that hypothesis. So I think that also is really an interesting way into thinking about cultural identity, but perhaps not in that same immediate sensory way that Yarema described just now, which I think is really what these open-air museums allow for and why they're so important.

Matilda: Which I think is an interesting point as well, though, to discuss a bit, that difference between what we consider experimental archaeology and reenactment, because, am I correct, Yarema, you are heavily involved with reenactment, of course, in your work. Are there also, like, experiments that take place on your site, for example?

Yarema: Yes. When I speak about this night, I speak about the emotions. But the house when we were at the reconstruction, we make it like a process of discovery. And also when we built this stone cave and all these things that we make, it was like after archaeological excavations and like a scientists' process. People in Ukraine don't understand when you show them part of this house or part of the horse house, they don't understand the whole picture. When you make the reconstructed dwelling the picture is bigger and people better understand why you make these excavations and why the scientist is interesting for kids and people and history. You understand better the ancestors and why they used such technologies. It's like a chain of experiments and work that can tell people what you mean. And this is important.

Aimée: That's a really powerful connection between, I guess, people who you would describe more as scientists perhaps working in the universities and then people like yourself and the people that work at your centre who have a lot of knowledge about traditional crafting, et cetera. How does it work at your centre? Do you work with local universities? The scientists you talk about, where are they coming from?

Yarema: Experimental archaeology in Ukraine, it's not like science. There is no lectures or people who can speak about this. Only reenactment and the people who are volunteers, they make it. I have experience when I go to the University of Ivan Franko, to the Department of Archaeology and History and tell students about all this thing that we make. Also, it's not like Europe experimental archaeology. It's like reenactment and part of experimental archaeology. In Ukraine, it's like a hobby for most people, it's not like science, for now. But in future it will be science and I want to work with students and involve them to this theme. We live in the Stone Age if we speak about experimental archaeology, I think, but we can develop.

Aimée: I'm not saying that what you have to do has to be more scientific. But what I think is important is that people like yourself that are really heavily involved in reenactment with these open-air museums have a massive amount of knowledge, from the types of activities and work that you do. You are able to demonstrate a whole range of different technologies and skill sets. But normally that is limited to the people who come and visit or stay in these centres and open-air museums. And it would be fantastic if more of the work that you were doing was reaching a bigger audience. It would be great if some of that work could get published in, you know, more sort of scientific or general kind of book articles. So that's why I think it'd be a really important thing to progress that side of things and for perhaps universities and open-air museums to have more interaction because I think we could both learn from each other more.

Yarema: Yes, of course. We plan that and for now, after we make this initiative, SUN, my colleague, Oleksander Zaremba, he is the director of the open-air museum, and we plan to have a conference and discuss all these questions. We put it in our plan for the conference and speak about that. I know a lot of friends that have information, they have knowledge, but like you say, they didn't put it to the public. We haven't some journals or video, even for YouTube. We have a lot of work, but it's not the modern way. We want to use technology and knowledge that you have. Thank you that you want to help and support us in this opportunity and initiative.

Aimée: I'm interested in where you got all your knowledge from. Who taught you and how long did it take you and how did you learn all these amazing skills and the people around you who are also clearly excellent craft specialists. Are you learning it from each other? Where do you get your skills from?

Yarema: Some skills I learned in the village or from my grandpas and some people learned about it when they read books. Some of my friends are from the Academy of Arts and they have some knowledge about the work with wood or stone. I learned about it and hear in the internet. Also I find the site of EXARC and see how people in Western Europe work in open-air museums, how they show this to the public and we work with it and want to develop and make it better. We understand that this is not only a hobby when you do reenactment. It's your history, history of your nation and it's very important. Some people, when I speak with them, also scientists or cultural experts, they say that this is an interesting way to express thoughts and to make history...

Aimée: ... sort of come alive, isn't it?

Yarema: Yes. This is not a simple way, but I know that this is the right way and only this can give us a visualisation of our culture.

Aimée: This has always been important in Ukraine, hasn't it? So how do you think that this is going to change or become even more important perhaps, with the war and after the war? How is it affecting you and the way that people reenact and the way that people perhaps are more attracted to open-air museums and making that connection with Ukrainian history?

Yarema: When Russia invaded Ukraine eight years ago, many people think about why it is so. After the invasion of 24 February, almost the whole country think that war with Russia is not normal. After all these cruel, cruel things that they did on the east of our country and south, people understand that, first, when the Russian army came to the city, they killed militaries. After militaries they killed people who work in schools, in universities, they killed workers from museums and stole museum artefacts. We have a lot of problems with the Russians in our history. One hundred or two hundred years ago they did the same, they stole artefacts from Ukraine. These cruel acts and actions of the Russians make people understand what is important. When they demolish the museum, people understand that this is important, the language is important and the culture.

Aimée: Yes, I understand... it sort of strengthens that link to heritage and identity and history and thinking about who you are as Ukrainians.

Matilda: I'm curious... and I suppose you'll know more about this than me now, Aimée, because you're heavily involved in, for example, British cultural heritage, archaeology et cetera. Famously it's sort of almost perceived as something that's not necessarily important or it's not something high on the list of priorities, for government funding opportunities or for allocation of resources. I don't know if you want to talk a bit more about that as well, but then Yarema, I'm wondering, was the catalyst for this kind of increase in how people saw that cultural heritage was valuable, linked to the terrible things that were happening because of the war? Or was it something that already existed and it was just strengthened? I suppose in a very peaceful society or a passive society, maybe things like that are not given as much importance and it's only when you are put in these situations that suddenly you realise how important they are. Would you agree with that, Yarema, or do you think it was always important in Ukraine?

Yarema: It was always important in Ukraine, not for all society, but part of society understand this. But we have this problem that this part of society, in the 20th century, was killed. Also Russians killed, and we have the First World War, Second World War. My ancestors from my family were scientists, good people who want to develop Ukraine, but also they have problems with a totalitarian regime. We want to live peacefully and make our country nice for us and we want to live good. Now it's a very important moment of our history. If we will have victory it will change a lot for our nation. We have this problem with Russia. If we haven't this problem, it will be easier and I think we will be in European society, our whole country, not like a part and we didn't know what you do in the UK or in the Netherlands, you know?

Aimée: It's interesting thinking about reenactment and what people reenact and who they reenact, because often I find that reenactment, or reenactors, are quite selective about what parts of history they're reenacting and the kind of figures they're reenacting. So I'm just wondering whether or not the conflict in Ukraine... how that might play out as part of future reenactments. And do you think that reenactment is an important way of also facing some of the traumas experienced through war?

Yarema: In Ukraine, there is reenactment only 20 years. It's not like a big society of these people. Mostly they do reenactment of the Viking Age England, France, sometimes Italy, and some of them do reenactment of Slavic or Kievan Rus, or Cossacks, 16th/17th century. If we can develop the reenactment with experimental archaeology on the basis of our museums and open-air museums, it will have a future. If we don't work with that and don't make it better and more understandable for us and for Ukrainian society, they don't have a future, this reenactment.

Aimée: Something that amazed me and I think probably will be of interest to listeners as well was, you've said that you have school children that have been relocated from the war zone who are coming to your open-air museum and I guess other places as well, similar. Could you talk about what sorts of places are still open in Ukraine and who are visiting them? How busy are these places and how important are they within the current war climate?

Yarema: This event was organised in the Tustan Historical Reserve near the Carpathian mountains. In the central and western part of Ukraine museums are open and they have people and tourists come, not all, maybe 30 percent of people that came another year. But they work and people come to them. Museums in Lviv also have visitors and castles that work also have visitors.

Aimée: So there are still several heritage sites which are open for visitors?

Yarema: Yes, yes.

Aimée: And of course these are local Ukrainian people. But actually you're also having school groups and children who have been relocated from the East.

Yarema: Yes. These people from Mariupol and Severodonetsk were in Tustan. These kids have some psychological problems after all this horror in the war zone and they came to Tustan a few times. They love to spend time there and also with us, and we speak with them, play also, speak about history. Give them motivation to know their cultural identity. Also, they do some crafts, wood, clay or cook medieval dishes with us, and they love it. And I think it's important for them, for their health.

Aimée: ... for their wellbeing. Yeah, I have a project on that as well, and I can see that there is real human value in those sorts of interactions, and that craft is a very powerful tool for talking through some difficult situations and for breaking down social barriers and for engaging people. Getting

people to think about their history and their heritage. I can very much see that that is a very positive thing to do.

Matilda: There are many projects I think that use, for example, reenactment, experimental archaeology, just playing around with materials as well, not even necessarily experimental archaeology as a scientific kind of pursuit, to indeed engage with trauma to force people to open up. Do you think that this is something that could be used, for example, in the future in Ukraine, some form of community healing for the greater culture. Is this something that is planned, Yarema, with any groups? Is that something already in the works or...?

Yarema: Yes, I think it's important to do this, and also not only for kids, for veterans or for people who have physical or psychological trauma. It's important for them and also that they are needed for society to understand them and to understand us because I have experience with reenactment in sword fighting and tournaments. And sometimes I speak with the militaries and we speak about war history, war now and in medieval times. And it is interesting because there are same things. Also we can make like, mind bridges, in the past and now and in the future, and speak about themes that are important for people about history, about cultural identity like food, crafts, war, [games], different kinds of toys even. It's a perspective of the future in Ukraine.

Aimée: I think you made an important point there. It's not just talking about, but it's about action, isn't it? It's about making or doing, which is perhaps a bit different to, for example, more conventional therapy, which is more related to just conversation - obviously conversation is extremely important, but I think there's something which happens when people use their hands or they get involved and they make or they create in some way, as well as have those conversations. There's something that happens between the talking and the doing, which is quite a powerful part of this process, which can have quite a positive impact on wellbeing.

Yarema: Yes, I mean that, we make it by hands and speak.

Aimée: The project that I've just got funded isn't specifically intended to be for Ukraine but obviously if we are successful with the project - and I am not a health scientist, so I don't claim to have any kind of insights or knowledge what the results of this are going to be and we actually have to run the experiments before we get any data. But, if it is successful, then certainly I would love to talk to Yarema more and perhaps collaborate in the future, thinking about how we can work and tackle some of the things that Yarema has just talked about. We haven't really talked about what is going to happen after the war and Yarema's point about the returned servicemen and women and how they will be profoundly affected, I think, is a really important one and perhaps there is scope there and is another reason that we are looking to support Ukrainian experimental archaeologists, open-air museums and craft specialists because I think that they do play a really important role in the post-war recovery of society in Ukraine. So if we can get support and infrastructure there now then that will help for post-war reopening and continued service of the open-air museums that already have opened their doors to school children and the general public alike.

Matilda: This initiative that you have both worked on, I think is a really fantastic one - that's why we're doing an episode on it - but for people who might be listening who maybe are thinking 'well, I want to do something as well, help in some way'. What are the plans for the network? What first inspired the creation? What's kind of the aim of SUN, of the Support Ukraine Network?

Aimée: Well, I was contacted through the YEAR Centre Facebook page by a couple of people who, still based in Ukraine, or one was a PhD student who was attempting to continue his studies and was actually just looking for some information, some support because of course, his research

network has been affected deeply by the war, and I thought, hang on a second, I hadn't really even sort of considered this, that in Ukraine there are still people who are continuing to work in this field. People like Yarema, whose open-air museum continues. I wondered what sort of support they have and what the international community is doing to support them. We think about all the obvious things about food, military, weapons and so forth, but are we thinking about how to support our friends and colleagues working in the cultural heritage sector? And I know that many people are, and they are in different ways, and I know there are different organisations and movements out there, but in terms of what EXARC does, I thought that this was a great opportunity for us to reach out and do something as an international community to try and support in whatever way we can the continued running and the future running of open-air museums and to support craft specialists and experimental archaeologists in Ukraine and also those who have escaped Ukraine. So how can we best as an experimental archeological community come together and support colleagues in Ukraine?

Matilda: Like I say, fantastic initiative. Yarema, from then the Ukrainian perspective, what are your thoughts or aims or goals now with this network?

Yarema: For me it's personally important because I work in this field only 15 years. We think that the work with EXARC or West-European open-air museum specialists is very important for us. We have a lot of interesting themes for the future of our open-air museums and we want to find some ways to develop, make it more understandable for Ukrainian people. The goals... I think the first it's knowledge. Speaking with specialists from Europe, from big open-air museums, also share information about Ukraine, translate materials. Do some projects in the future with our open-air museums and institutions from Europe. And develop the network because it's only the start. I work in the SUN, ten people that we involved also, they know about it. We share information in Facebook and in our web pages, but they don't understand what we mean and we must speak with them in Ukraine because they don't understand the whole picture and our motivation and we must work about that.

Aimée: That's an extremely important aspect of what we're trying to do here. So SUN, which again, just stands for Support Ukraine Network as part of this EXARC/YEAR Centre collaboration is not to approach this with the top-down idea of how it's going to work or what we can do for Ukraine. It really is coming from Yarema and the other people who have joined the network and we want, first of all, to find out what their needs are and then think about how we can best support. So actually at the moment it is quite loosely defined, and our first objective is to have a meeting with our partners in Ukraine. Hear what they have to say, talk to them about what their needs are and how we can support them, and then strategise, because until we understand really the types of difficulties and challenges that they have, then I don't think that we can really assume anything. So it is really being driven by our Ukrainian partners.

Yarema: Yes, after we started speaking with Aimée and Roeland, we started to make questions. Also, I ask my colleagues about what we need to develop these open-air museums in this or that way.

Aimée: Yarema is really pushing this forward faster than any of us could have hoped for. So that's really fantastic because if we're going to do this, we need to take it seriously and we need to move quickly. And we are prepared to give as much support as we humanly can. One of the plans is the initial online meeting, but we're also hoping to meet in Poland, perhaps on the border of Poland and Ukraine at the EAC meeting, which is coming up in May. And so this is really a continuous conversation, but it really helps to have Yarema coming at it with so much motivation and drive and pushing things forward because it is important that we get this up and running soon, so that we can

be of most benefit now, but also be prepared for when the war ends and these places really do open up to the public and I think they are going to be extremely important focal points for people to come to and to think about Ukrainian history and prehistory and cultural identity, especially in that post-war period.

Yarema: It's very important to us. People from Ukraine, they need motivation and you give this motivation, I think. They hear that people from Netherlands and from UK want to help support Ukrainians. They think 'Oh, it's something not real, you know. But it motivates, for me also and for my colleagues. I think we can do a lot of nice and interesting work. And after victory, we also want to work in projects and meet offline with people from Europe.

Matilda: Which I think leads us nicely into the final question of the podcast. So we've sort of discussed a bit future plans and ideas, and you both already mentioned this a little bit, but perhaps just to end things off, so how, specifically, can listeners who are listening in now or other members of the EXARC community help, do you think, to make a difference in regards to all of the points that have been discussed today? Aimée, perhaps you'd like to start us off?

Aimée: Sure. So, as the article on the EXARC website says, we are really specifically looking for people who perhaps have experience of working in an open-air museum, whatever that role might have been. But management is particularly useful, because we're looking to partner up Ukrainian open-air museums with international open-air museums, so that we have a kind of a twinning situation where the mentorship is one-to-one to be most useful. So that the Ukrainian partner has an opportunity to have lots of sorts of informal conversations and to troubleshoot and get best practice support from the non-Ukrainian international twin or partner. So that is one particular way. The other way is if you have a particular craft specialism. Do you work as a reenactor? Are you wanting to provide support that way? Because it sounds like, within Ukraine, this is a thriving community as well. So people who have expertise there, in reenactment and craft specialisation or whether it be historical periods or prehistoric periods, we're interested in hearing from you. We're also interested in people who have more of a sort of a scientific background perhaps - as Yarema described it - who have written about experimental archaeology and the process and what it is. Are prepared to share PDFs about best practice. We are also interested in people who have language skills who can translate from Ukrainian to English and English into Ukrainian and can help us translate during online meetings, but also perhaps contribute to some of the translation of more academic texts and other types of education resources that we are trying to get together for Ukraine. And when I talk about education resources, that is another area that we'd be interested in help with. So if you are in a position where you are able to create education resources, thinking about different age brackets, so from primary age children right through to people studying for PhDs, et cetera, and have the ability to get some of your resources translated into English, from English into Ukrainian or whatever language it is that the primary language is in, into Ukrainian, we would also be interested in hearing from you. So those would be the main areas of support that we are looking for at the moment.

Matilda: That sounds great. I hope people were noting that down, a nice, a very nice list! Yarema, would you like to add anything to that?

Yarema: I think that after the victory, if somebody wants to come to Ukraine, to our open-air museums to meet with us, it will be very good. And in March we will have a conference, the first experimental archaeology conference in Ukraine and maybe somebody wants to participate online, with some theme or speak or give information, it's also appreciated and we will be very glad.

Aimée: I'll definitely be online for that.

Yarema: Thank you.

Matilda: I was about to say, I'll try and be there as well. It sounds great.

Yarema: For now we make an invitation list and want to see who from Ukraine will take part in the conference, we don't know really, but we want to make it good and make it high quality. I speak with Roeland and I want to make it like you make it, with your experience. We'll be glad when you participate. For now, it's the 23rd./24th of March, two days.

Matilda: Once the details are finalised EXARC will definitely be happy to share and participate in helping with organisation as well. Thank you very, very much, both Aimée and Yarema for joining us today and sharing all of your experiences and expertise and feelings on this subject. I think it is a very emotional subject so I really appreciate that you both spent the time to talk to me today. I'm very excited to watch how the network develops and I wish you both all of the best in this amazing initiative. I'm sure we'll see great things emerge. So thank you very much both for joining.

Aimée: Could I just say that I just wanted to acknowledge that it is a very emotional subject and just to send our thoughts to Yarema and his family and everyone in Ukraine because, we're all thinking of you and just wanting to do whatever we can and whatever way we can to support you.

Yarema: Thank you Aimée. I really, really like you all, because I want to say it once more. It's important for me to do this because I am not on the front line and not fighting for now. My friends, colleagues are on the front line and they're on war now. For me this is very important because I think it's my duty to my motherland and to Ukraine. I fight on the cultural front, I think like that.

Matilda: Very well said, I think, from both of you, thank you very much. And thank you to everyone else as well for listening to this episode of #FinallyFriday by EXARC. I hope that it inspired you. If you have any ideas or suggestions or just want to join in with all of the excellent suggestions from our speakers today for the Support Ukraine Network, please do contact us. There's links on our website, www.exarc.net. You will be able to find the network through there. And as always, if you would just like to become more involved with EXARC in general, you can become a member. You can also support EXARC in its endeavors, such as this fantastic network, by making small PayPal donations through the website. All of this information you can find online.

Join us next month for another episode of #FinallyFriday and learn more all about the world of experimental archaeology, ancient technology, archaeological open-air museums and interpretation. Don't forget to follow the show through exarc.net and our associated social media channels. See you soon.