

EAC: A Meeting of Minds

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Guests

Linda Hurcombe (UK) and Grzegorz Osipowicz (PL)

Introduction

Only one month to go until our **2023 EXARC conference**, and to celebrate we chatted with **Linda Hurcombe, organiser of EAC12**, and **Grzegorz Osipowicz, organiser of the upcoming EAC13**. Together, they shared their experience in what it takes to organise an international archaeology conference and how conferences have changed since the start of the COVID pandemic. We also chatted with them about their own experiences in experimental archaeology, and how the research field has changed since its first explorations. Professor Grzegorz Osipowicz is the head of the Department of Prehistory at the Institute of Archaeology at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland. Professor Linda Hurcombe is the founder and director of the MSC in Experimental Archaeology at Exeter University and President of the Prehistoric Society.

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 will be chatting with me all about our international conferences. So who are our guests?

Professor Grzegorz Osipowicz is the head of the Department of Prehistory at the Institute of Archaeology at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland. His research focuses on traceology and residue studies, and he is particularly interested in the Mesolithic period and spatial studies. He is also the main organiser for this year's EXARC Conference.

Professor Linda Hurcombe is the founder and director of the MSC in Experimental Archaeology at Exeter University and President of the Prehistoric Society. Her research is wide-ranging, but was originally also based in use-wear studies and has since expanded to include ethnographies of craft traditions, perishable material culture, and the sensory experiences of prehistory. She was also the main organiser for our previous EXARC conference.

Welcome to both of our guests today, and I have a very quick and simple question to start you off. Both of you are, of course, experienced in the field of experimental archaeology, but how did you first get into this topic?

Linda: Oh, that's such a good question, Matilda. I first got involved in doing experiments because I did a PhD in use-wear analysis, and I learned to make stone tools and I knew that I had to create a reference collection and so I had to use them. But actually the biggest question was: what do you need a stone tool to do? It made me realise that I had to understand what other material culture and subsistence activities were going on and how a stone tool would be used within them. So, ugh, I had so many different little arms of research going out into different kinds of techniques, technologies, ways of processing for food, all kinds of things at a very practical level. That just meant that I felt like I was doing a lot of very practical experiments in order to answer the research question that I'd set myself for the PhD. So it was almost not experimental archaeology as a thing. It was just, this is what I need to do. But having started in that place, it was also an interesting way to proceed because I really felt like, so now I know these very practical things, but almost nobody else in the academic world at the time also knew them and I think for me it was the other use-wear specialists, it was the other... if you like, practically informed academics that I had as my contemporaries and we were all tackling these sorts of issues together.

Grzegorz: Hello Matilda, hello Linda, greetings for our listeners! First of all, thank you for the invitation. I am very happy to participate in #FinallyFriday and talk a bit about the conference that we, as the Nicolaus Copernicus University, organise together with EXARC in my beautiful city of Toruń. As for your question, in my case the adventure with experimental archaeology began after my first year of studies when I went on an excavation for the first time. They were supervised by Stanisław Kukawka from my University and we were excavating an Early Neolithic site. It was not only a key moment for my journey in experimental archaeology, but also for my deep love for prehistory that will simply never die, so I need to thank Professor Kukawka and the great excavation team! It was an amazing time for me, indeed! But returning to your question... In the excavations participated also Jolanta Małecka-Kukawka from our Institute, and professor Galina Korobkova from the Russian Academy of Science. Both ladies just began the construction of the Traceological Laboratory at the Nicolaus Copernicus University. As our listeners probably know use-wear studies require the creation of the reference base of experimental tools used for various activities, Linda mentioned about it a few minutes ago. They are used as a comparative material during the analysis of prehistoric artefacts. During the aforementioned excavation, we, as the students, were involved in the first wider works aiming at creating such a base in our Institute. Our task was to perform as many experiments as possible involving processing various types of raw material and using tools made of flint types available in Poland and of course, we had to create these tools ourselves first. So, it was a great time; the time of cut fingers, a natural result of the first attempts at flint knapping, but also the time when I started to understand what can be done with the use of flint tools and what

is not possible. It was also a time when I started to appreciate the enormous importance of experimental archaeology in understanding the past. After that, things moved relatively fast for me, because in the third year of the studies, together with my friends, I created a student Society for Prehistoric Experimental Archaeology, which is still operating. Together with people from the society we started organising experimental camps, to which we also invited people from other Polish Universities. Over the next few years, I performed most of my important experiments like, for example, the ones focussing on method of drilling holes in stone axes, methods of softening the osseous raw materials or method of birch tar production without using pottery. Yeah, really loved the experiments that I did those days...., and more or less this is how it started for me.

Matilda: And so it sounds a little bit like both of you had to learn as you went, so to speak, with experimental archaeology. Does this mean it was not an established discipline already at your respective universities? Perhaps Linda, you want to go first?

Linda: No, not as such. In Britain there were two tracks, really. There was the first one, which was the academic experimental archaeology field, which the two books by John Coles had really established. So John set the tone for an academic understanding of experimental archaeology, and if you go back and reread his Cambridge University Press book, it's really obvious to me that he understood that there was both a public engagement aspect, which was worthwhile and also a very academic hypothesis-testing way of thinking about archaeological research. However, in the eyes of the word experimental archaeology in the general public... no, what they thought that meant was you go to a museum and you see stuff being done and you maybe make a few things yourself and take home a little bit. So experimental archaeology in common English understanding was a rather different thing than experimental archaeology in the academic world, and I was working in the academic world, so I did feel like there were some tensions there between the standing of academic respect for experimental archaeology.

Matilda: Do you think this has improved over time? Do you think there is now a greater understanding of the more scientific background, shall we say, of experimental archaeology?

Linda: Yes, I do. It's become much more of a common theme within many different academic archaeological research questions and approaches. I think as well, people are more concerned to communicate their results to the public. The internet has really increased that way of thinking about, I've done this piece of research, this might be the research, I don't come from a scientific perspective, but let's also have something that is promoting the science and explaining it to a general audience. And that is where I think a lot of people are operating that twin track, they're using it for both academic research and also explaining to the public what it is that they have done and how their results match up.

Grzegorz: In general, I can say the same as Linda here. The situation in Poland looked quite similar to Britain. Of course, we didn't have a person like John Coles, who I respect very much, so acceptance for experimental archaeology in my country was probably a bit more limited. When I joined the University in Toruń, we had almost no researchers working seriously in experimental archaeology. Apart from Professor Małeczka-Kukawka, who mentioned before, who used this method for use-wear studies, only a few from our Institute occasionally, very occasionally, used experimental archaeology in their studies. However, such a situation prevailed not only at our University. Most Polish archaeologists from the end of the 20th century combined experimental archaeology only with the reconstruction groups, not treating it as a valuable research method. We had to work very hard to change it, and I think we've been successful, because today our university standards are experimental archaeology classes conducted in Polish, but also in English. We also have lessons on, for example, traceology and other methods that require experimental archaeology

studies. We hope to develop even more in this field. So, the progress is huge, looking of course from the point of view of the times that I started. We can observe such changes also at other Polish universities, so for sure we are going in the right direction. Let's hope it'll stay this way.

Matilda: Would you say that you've indeed seen quite an increase in interest in experimental archaeology at academic institutions in Poland and outside in the wider community?

Grzegorz: Well Matilda, the significant increase in interest in experimental archaeology in Poland in recent years is illustrated mostly by the rapid increase in the number of centres conducting research using this method, including here universities, various types of research clubs, societies, open-air museums, places like this. Also, the number of various types of reconstruction groups treating experimental archaeology in a more or less professional manner has clearly increased in our country. New open-air museums are opened almost every year, so we can see very clearly how the interest in experimental archaeology grows. In addition, the measurable result of the increased interest in experimental archaeology is the emergence of dedicated classes at Polish universities and a growing number of various scientific projects in which this method is used. More and more often such projects receive also funding from the National Science Centre, which is the main state institution awarding scientific grants in Poland. As for my research area in traceology it is quite difficult to talk about the increase in interest in experimental archaeology here, because traceological research would simply not be possible without it. However, I can see a huge increase in interest in experimental archaeology among colleagues - prehistorians - who use it much more often than before to study various aspects of prehistoric reality. I see it every day, being invited to participate in many different research projects. Let's say that 25 years ago, when I started research in the field of experimental archaeology, my experimental work was subordinated to traceological studies almost only, or focused on other problems related to the Stone Age. Currently, I participate in experimental archaeology projects relating to the Bronze Age, ancient Greece, and even to the Middle Ages. When I started work with experimental archaeology, I didn't even think it would ever be possible. So I can only say again, yes, everything has changed in this regard and the progress in this area is in Poland simply huge.

Linda: That's really interesting because what John Coles did in Britain was very much rooted in prehistory because although he's been interested in very many periods, he's best known as a prehistorian.

Matilda: So indeed different approaches in the two different parts of the world it seems. Linda, to get back to the first question. Do you think in general and in terms of academia as well, there has been more of an increase in interest in experimental archaeology as a research method for academics? Because you were saying at the beginning, it wasn't necessarily seen as its own method. It was just something you did to get your research done. Do you see that there's been a change in this over the last five to ten years?

Linda: Yes, actually the changes go further back. When I set up the Experimental Archaeology Master's programme in Exeter back in 2000 and I was doing the paperwork for it about a year and a half before that, it was the first one in the world. We very much thought, yes, we want to put together the academic and the practical knowledge and give students from all over the world a chance to develop this approach. And that has been tremendously successful and it has been picked up by others and it has also snowballed. The last five to 10 years that's really picked up speed. So the whole process has developed over time and the subject now is absolutely transformed as an academic issue compared to how it was in 2000 when I set things up.

Grzegorz: As I said before I fully agree with Linda that experimental archaeology developed much faster in recent years than before. However, I think that experimental archaeology has not changed much in its methodological basis in recent years. This is mainly due to the fact that, in my opinion, it's a quite mature method. Of course you can constantly improve the experimental protocols used, but I believe that the general principles of conducting archaeological experiments have not changed and will not change for a long time, if at all. The development of experimental archaeology as a method of scientific research in recent years was contained, in my opinion, in something completely different. I can see it in the changes taking place in archaeology itself. What I mean here is a significant increase of the importance of various types of physical, chemical, and biological methods in archaeological research. Their mass application has opened new possibilities in the study of archaeological sources and allowed us to reach previously unavailable information. Of course, these methods are also adopted to studies in the field of experimental archaeology. Here they allow us, for example, for exceptionally precise and at the same time extremely reliable comparing of the result of experimental research with the results of archaeological material analysis. This allows us to verify the correctness of the conclusions drawn, based on the experiments, so something very important. Examples could be multiplied indefinitely, so I will use only a few from my own studies. A few years ago, it wouldn't have occurred to me that soon I will consider natural the use of microCT, so Microcomputed tomography to study the use-wear traces on bone tools, or, for example, OCT, so Optical coherence tomography to study the engravings on experimental products and artefacts from this raw material. It has become a standard to conduct the various chemical, physical and biological analyses of residues present on experimental and prehistoric stone tools to supplement and - what is the most important - verify traceological interpretation relating to their functions. We also constantly use chemical methods such as, for example, GS-MS, making possible the analysis of organic substances elemental composition for experimental studies on the methods of tar production in the prehistory. All of these were not possible ten years ago, or at least were not available to researchers like me. This is what I consider the most important in the development of experimental archaeology in recent years and I hope that our method will keep this direction of progress.

Linda: Yes, Grzegorz, that's a really excellent point. I've certainly noticed that in the field of traceology or use-wear studies as it's sometimes called, you do get a lot more of the microscopic and analytical techniques being brought to bear and also backed up by things like residue analysis. All of the things that you are mentioning about the scientific aspects I think are there in other studies on temperature of fires, on how ostrich egg shell behaves, those sorts of issues. And I think that's part of the growing trend to see experiments that are very practical as raising possibilities for all kinds of really quite high minded science aspects.

Matilda: Perhaps we can lead now onto the subject of EXARC, which is of course the experimental archaeology society, so a nice little segue here. Out of curiosity, what were your first experiences of EXARC or, for example, the EXARC conference? Perhaps Grzegorz, you would like to go first?

Grzegorz: Well, my first experiences with EXARC are related to establishing contacts with Roeland Paardekooper. It was probably in 1998 when I managed to invite him to give a guest lecture in Toruń and he agreed. I was very happy about this, of course. Less than a year later, at his invitation, I went to Leiden in the Netherlands where I spent a week expanding my knowledge in experimental archaeology and visiting such beautiful places as Archeon. Thanks to Roeland I also got a lot of very good Western publications relating to experimental archaeology, which helped me and my colleagues to develop and do our studies. For this, I'm of course very grateful to him. Later I started

to publish in the EXARC Journal and became an EXARC member. A few years have passed and together with EXARC we are organizing a huge conference in Toruń, so our cooperation can be considered very successful!

Matilda: Yes, definitely. And we'll be talking more about the upcoming conference a little bit later but indeed for now, Linda, can you remember your first EXARC experience or first EXARC conference?

Linda: That's a good question because it's back in the mist of time! There was a meeting in Exeter. It was very small because I remember us all fitting inside a room that would probably hold about 30 to 40 people. And there was a delegation from Calafell in Spain that was coming to the conference as well. It was only really one full day of lecture style content and then a follow-up, which was a little less formal the following day. So it was very small, and I compare it to what we are doing now, and you just think, wow, that's really grown. So it must have been sometime before 2010, but I can't remember exactly!

Matilda: Fair enough, what about you, Grzegorz?

Grzegorz: Linda is much better than me, Matilda because, and it is a bit embarrassing to me, the first EXARC conference that I attended personally was Trento in 2019. Fortunately to me I know that my colleague, Justyna Orłowska, who is organizing the conference in Toruń with me, participated also in the conference in Dublin in 2015. Undoubtedly, attending conferences abroad is nice, very nice, but financial resources do not always allow it, especially if you're a young researcher.

Matilda: Today we have here two guests, one who was the organiser of our last EXARC conference and one who is currently frantically involved in organising the current EXARC conference. So I wanted to ask you both for those listeners who are interested or just curious at what stage EXARC is now as an organisation? What actually is involved in organising a large-scale conference such as the EXARC conference? Perhaps we can start with you, Linda, as our Exeter organiser...

Linda: Well, these days any large EXARC conference is going to be an international event, so you're going to have some of the logistics that goes with that. And you are also going to have to think through the intellectual content. So for me it was very much the twin track approach. On the one hand, yes, I wanted originally to be able to welcome the world to Exeter and to feel like, yes, this is really taking our subject forward and have a set of people brought together and that requires the right kinds of social settings, the right kinds of putting together themed sessions within the conference so that there is a moment in time when people who are thinking about a topic in a particular way or have a set of issues in common can really get together, hear what each other are saying, and then the conversations spill into discussions. And then into over-lunch conversations or evening conversations. So for me, providing the right setting for all of those things was crucial. That means the rooms, the layout of how people flow through the space, how the sessions are organised, is crucial to getting that large meeting of people in person together. You can guess what I'm thinking next, because of course that all had to change!

Matilda: I remember when it was all being discussed and people were going, ah, mmm, yes...

Linda: Yeah, and so you just think, okay, how do we try and get that idea of bringing people together, the good intellectual discussions, into a virtual conference? We can still make it worldwide. And in fact, in some respects, the nature of having to go online for that conference actually improved the number of people from across the globe who could participate by being speakers and who could listen in and be part of the discussions. It was in that way a very egalitarian conference,

where the kinds of money that it costs to get a person across space and time and to give them accommodation and travel, then that was a barrier in the way it can be for some people trying to go to a conference internationally, if they're going in person. So that was really quite a refreshing and positive thing. But I have to say, I am not one of those people who is computer literate and very techy about those things. So I also felt like I was learning to do an awful lot of different things, both for my own teaching, but also for the conference. So it was quite a sharp learning curve.

Matilda: And of course, I believe what we did last time, Linda, if I remember correctly, was that everything was recorded and then made available online to watch later, right?

Linda: Yes, that's right. So actually that's been a terrific resource. I've used it in some of my teaching and have put down particular lectures for students to access. It's all up on YouTube. So not only was the conference a virtual event at the time with discussion, but now there is still all of those gems of presentations on topics. It's a real strength of having that as a body of work, a set of ideas, a moment in time for people to go back to. So do take a look at that, because I think there's lots of interesting things there.

Matilda: Of course, Grzegorz, you are having a slightly different experience because you are organising a hybrid conference. So you do have to take into account a lot of things related to people being there in person as well. What are some of the issues or the points or the main concerns that you are experiencing while organising the conference this year?

Grzegorz: Well Matilda, this task is challenging and stressful and takes up most of your time. That is for sure. It also requires good coordination of a large group of people and considering the roles adopted by the universities or societies cooperating in the organisation of such an event. And believe me, these roles can differ greatly so we must work very hard, but in the same moment, very gently to reconcile them. It's also a difficult task to raise funds that are necessary for the implementation of such conferences. And it does not matter whether they're held in person, online or have a hybrid character. Sometimes it is also quite a thankless task because you have to be able to look in the eyes of the colleagues whose presentations have been rejected... However, I think that all of this does not matter much compared to the joy that overwhelms you when you see that the conference was successful and the participants are satisfied. At least, that's what I am thinking at the moment because I haven't yet organised an event as big as the Experimental Archaeology Conference. We are talking about it today, so it will be clear - if I am right - in less than two months, we keep our fingers crossed.

Matilda: And how would you say that EXARC conferences might differ from other large scale international conferences?

Grzegorz: I don't think EXARC conferences are very different from other major archaeological conferences I've attended, such as EAA or UISPP. The main difference lies, in my opinion, in the increasing share of online presentations in EXARC conferences since the pandemic. I used to think this was not a good idea and that online deliberations killed the scientific meeting's essence, however, I don't think so anymore. Participation in the scientific committee of our conference and its previous edition, which was held entirely online, made me realise how important these type of sessions are, especially if participation in them is exempt from conference fees. At a time when you have to pay almost gold for participation in large archaeological congresses, sessions of this kind enable active and full participation in the conference for people who, for example, do not have grants and for people who live in poorer countries or simply on other continents, from which arrival for a two or three day session is not always financially justified. However, we as the organisers also benefit from this type of deliberations. The cultural diversity that we gain thanks to online

participants definitely enriches our conference and allows its participants to gain more comprehensive knowledge. This is undoubtedly a big plus for the EXARC conferences. The second difference is how the research presented reaches their recipient. All presentations are prepared in the form of movies and published on social media after the event. This definitely increases their reach. They can reach an infinite number of recipients simply. It is also important that access to them is permanent, so it enables their detailed analysis and return to them any time. The last thing is that I just love the people attending EXARC conferences. First of all I love the reconstructors who participate in them, who present their products with a great, really great passion and talk about it with great commitment. This creates a very unique microclimate that I have not experienced in any other conference.

Matilda: Linda, do you have anything that you would like to add on your experiences of EXARC conferences and how they might differ from other large conferences?

Linda: I think some of the ways it differs are because it's an approach rather than a period or a region. Everybody who come has an interest in a practical way of tackling archaeological issues. Many conferences don't have that. They're themed around a period, a region, or perhaps a particular technology or branch of archaeology. So it's very eclectic and I think that is both a strength, but it can also be a little bit diffuse. But often when you are sat in the room, something which you might not have thought has direct relevance to something you are tackling. Suddenly you think about it, they've said something, you've seen something on the screen, perhaps you just think, oh, okay, yes, I could use that. It's one of those welcome surprises where people come at the same sorts of issues, but from completely different directions, but they're all bound by this experimental archaeology theme. That's both a strength and also a potential weakness which actually turns into a strength.

Matilda: That's one of those classic interview questions, what are your strengths and weaknesses and turning your weakness into a strength... I wanted to, just return a little bit, to something that you mentioned earlier in terms of the online aspects and the opportunities that presents for different conferences. What have your experiences been of digital, versus hybrid, versus in-person conferences? Do you think that the future of conferences has been changed?

Grzegorz: In my opinion, many conferences will be moving towards conducting proceedings at least partially online. This will happen primarily due to the organisations' ever-increasing cost, but technology development also favours it. I think that only in-person remain primarily large congresses organised by people that simply wants to earn money from them. Or, the second possibility, local conferences bringing together specialists and friends. Researchers who know each other well and like to meet. In such a case the conference is only a pretext for this.

Linda: I think the future of conferences has changed, and there will always be a role for in-person contact. For myself I find it easier to do the virtual exchanges of information if you also have met the person. But it is possible to establish those links from a distance and you are reaching a wider audience than you would be able to do by simply having only the people who are able to be physically present. It's broadening things out, which is always a good thing, but it's also a question of how you make that hybrid work. So, although it was really a huge challenge at the time, the Exeter conference was only online. And I'm thinking, how would we have coped if we'd also had it as an in-person event? I can see that that is going to be another challenge that my wonderful colleagues in Toruń are, I'm sure, dealing with right now, along with the EXARC secretariat and organisers all over the world because some of the organisation can also happen virtually but, oh my

word, just making sure that you've got the right physical spaces and actions and also the right virtual interactions in place. I think that's going to add another layer to the role of the organiser. So I wish them lots of luck!

Matilda: Well, and on that note, I also had a question here, as you were of course the main organiser of the last conference and as we've said, it will be a different format, of course, so there will be some changes in how the organisation takes place. But, what in your opinion, were the highlights of the last conference, and do you have any sort of tips or suggestions based on your experience for the organisers of this year's conference, as they frantically try to get things ready.

Linda: Running up to any conference - physically or virtually - as the organiser, you are just tearing your hair out a little bit, but then it starts to run and then suddenly it's this wonderful firework of different ideas, explosions, lots of different colours. There's ideas just exploding around you as you listen to the papers and that is something that I still got from the Exeter conference. But what I really liked about it was the global reach. I really remember enjoying the South American sessions that we ran and the fact that, okay, the globe has turned, so the experimental archaeology focus is now on this area of the world, as daylight happens somewhere. And I felt like we were really opening up the subject. The way you can organise something in the virtual world has got advantages and I could never have predicted quite how that would work. So I really commend EXARC for having the vision to think through that idea of a global reach, because that to me was one of the best highlights. And in terms of sessions, I think sustainability, modern world issues, the role archaeology can play. Showing how our subject has a deep time perspective on some of the challenges of the present. I found that really a strength of those different papers. I also feel like EXARC creates a conference that is very easy, relaxed, and very open to people giving presentations for the first time, or early career researchers or people who don't normally have that as their focus in an academic sense. It's a very welcoming, very open group, and that happens in person and also online. So to me, that's the key thing. You also asked me about tips for the organisers. Once it starts enjoy it and up until then, just remember to breathe and keep telling yourself, yes, this will be fine. Each day, each hour, sometimes, is presenting different problems. But yes, once it all starts rolling, it'll be good and I'm sure it'll be a wonderful conference.

Matilda: Very good tips, I think, I'm sure Grzegorz will agree. And indeed as the main organiser of this year's conference, what are you most looking forward to in terms of sessions or anything else? And what can we expect from this conference? What sort of venue or excursions or different sessions are being planned?

Grzegorz: Of course I agree and I am very thankful to you, Linda, for all the tips, particularly the ones about keeping breathing and telling myself this will be fine. I try to remember about them when the time will come, because for sure I will need them very very much. As to your question Matilda. The answer is very simple, of course, I am looking forward to the participants, great atmosphere and wonderful discussions. But seriously, I have a few picks, obviously based on my interests. If I had to choose my presentation that interested me the most, I think that the list would include, for example, studies of Lisa Schunk and her colleagues, entitled 'Manual Vs. Mechanised Experiments - Evaluating the Effect of Human Variability on Tool Performance and Use-Wear Formation'. Why? I have pretty mixed feelings about excluding the human factors from experimental work. But on the other hand, I also understand what can be valuable in such experiments. So I will be very happy to hear what the authors' research in this area has brought. Perhaps they will allow me to look at the problem in a completely new way. The second presentation that caught my attention was the study by Jakub Michalik and Kamil Nowak from my Institute of Archaeology that is entitled 'Does Corrosion Matter? Experimental Study of the Influence of Patination on Use-Wear Traces on the

Copper Alloy Metalwork'. This presentation refers to the traceology of metal objects. In general, this is a very young branch of the use-wear method, and when I think about it I always ask myself, is it even possible, if most prehistoric metal artefacts are so heavily patinated and corroded. In the case of flint, we manage patina somehow, however, it's often a very big problem. Metal tools are something completely different. So I will listen to this presentation with great interest. In the third point, I'd like to draw attention to studies that go beyond my specialisation. I think here about the presentation of Timothy Baumann and his colleagues from the United States that is entitled 'Full of Beans: An Experimental Archaeology Project to Identify the Common Bean (and here we have the Latin name [*Phaseolus vulgaris*]) through Absorbed Residue in Pottery'. This is, in my opinion, a perfect example of what I mentioned earlier when talking about the development of experimental archaeology in recent years, research involving the most modern paleo-biological methods. I'm very curious about the results obtained by the authors. Of course the presentations I quoted are only my personal choice. For sure you, Matilda, just like each of our listeners, would choose something completely different. And this is the beauty of our conference. Everybody will find something interesting for themselves here.

As for some more general, but important information about the conference. It will take place in the beautiful Medieval city of Toruń, which is a UNESCO World Heritage site. The meeting is planned for three days. We have two days of sessions and the final day is reserved for optional excursions. We have two proposals here. The first excursion is the Archaeological Museum in Biskupin, which is one of Europe's largest archaeological open-air museums. This site is also one of Poland's official National Historic Monuments. Inside you can find beautiful reconstructions of prehistoric and early Medieval buildings. However, the most famous reconstruction of a fortified settlement from the early Iron Age, which was originally preserved perfectly, named it. Everybody who doesn't know Biskupin and consider themselves a prehistorian, or for example, simply like wetland archaeology, should participate in this trip. The second excursion that we propose is a real treat for fans of the Middle Ages, Malbork Castle, which is the largest Gothic fortress in Europe. This is also a UNESCO World Heritage listed site. During this trip, the participants will learn about the intriguing history of the place and about the Teutonic Order, which was the owner of the castle. Additionally, in the end of the first day of the conference we have also planned a free guided tour in Toruń. If you join us here, you will feel for sure the unique atmosphere of our amazing city. In the evening you'll be able to eat something Polish that will be very tasty. This is something that I can promise. Our conference has a hybrid character and we will have only one completely online evening session, dedicated to our colleagues from across the ocean to give them the comfort of participating in our meeting despite the time difference. In total, we have 18 sessions and topics are very diverse, so I'm sure that everyone will find something interesting here. We have topics related to ancient technologies like flint knapping or boat building. Very interesting seems to be speeches discussing the reconstructions of Viking ships. We have quite a large series of presentations focussing on fire and different kind of firings. There's even one speech about experimental cremation. We have quite a vast amount of speeches related to experimental cooking. One of the sessions will be devoted only to different types of textile spinning and fibre preparations in various cultures and periods. We will hear some words about the new trends and ideas in the methodology of experimental archaeology studies. We also have speeches focussing on education and popularisation of experimental archaeology. Really a lot of topics. We are also trying to be aware of our world. One of the sessions will be devoted to the Support Ukraine Network, SUN, that was established last year by EXARC and the York Experimental Archaeological Research Centre. The programme provides mentorships and resources for the open-air museums, experimental archaeologists and ancient craft experts from Ukraine. It's a great initiative and I'm thrilled that people will have the opportunity to hear about it a little bit more.

Matilda: Sounds amazing! You just gave a very wonderful overview, but maybe you can give just a final little concluding pitch for the conference, for those who are perhaps listening in who are still undecided on whether or not to join.

Grzegorz: What can I say, Matilda? I can only one more time invite all of you people, being in love or only interested in experimental archaeology, to participate in the 13th edition of the Experimental Archaeology Conference, which will take place at the beginning of May in Toruń. I'm absolutely sure that all participants will be satisfied with the time spent this way. Whether you join us in person or online... in both cases, you'll experience the extraordinary scientific value of our meeting, resulting from the extremely comprehensive conference programme and the fact that people from all over the world attend it. People who join us in person - which we obviously would like the most - in addition to the scientific advantages of our conference, you will be able to get to know our beautiful country, the wonderful Gothic city of Toruń and, of course, one of our most famous historical monuments, the Castle Malbork and the fortified settlement from the Iron Age in Biskupin. I'm also sure that you will fall in love, simply fall in love with our Polish food! Surely many of you have heard about pirogi and about bigos. You just have to try them. In the evenings, well, the Old Town of Toruń is full of various types of pubs serving countless types of our Polish craft beers. So there will be certainly plenty of good opportunities and a great atmosphere to discuss the papers presented during the day. So once again, join us, join our conference, in person or online, doesn't matter. I simply hope to see all of you in May!

Matilda: Perfect. Well, if that doesn't get more participants, I don't know what will! As a final question, just to round up this episode, I would like to ask you both the same question I always do, but I think this is particularly relevant considering we're talking about the EXARC community and how we come together in these ways. How do you think the EXARC community can help to make a difference in regards to the many different points that have been discussed today? Perhaps, Linda, you'd like to go first?

Linda: Whether or not you can attend in person, go to the online conference, sign up for it, because, if perhaps you've got other commitments, you can always dip in and out if you really need to. But for the last conference, I actually was online the entire time and participating in the Discord discussions. Discord is a computer package that is very simple to use - even I can use it, so believe me, it's simple to use. That way no matter where you are, whether you are present physically or online somewhere, you can be a part of the academic discussions. You can see the presenters listen to the ideas and offer a contribution. That's the key takeaway message from me.

Grzegorz: Exactly, I fully agree with Linda, it is better to participate, even online, than to miss such a great event as our conference. Imagine how much precious information you can lose, all of these amazing studies conducted around the world, useful for your purposes or not, it doesn't even matter. Important is how interesting they are and what knowledge you can gather listening to them. As for your question Matilda. I think that the EXARC community is doing enough to help everybody interested in experimental archaeology. If I could ask for something more it would be to increase cooperation between people using experimental archaeology for scientific research, specialists in ancient crafts and people involved in education and popularisation. For all these groups closer cooperation will certainly be beneficial for many reasons. By the way, this postulate is also one of the leading ideas of our conference. Otherwise, the EXARC community is just amazing, in my opinion.

Matilda: Well, I think that's a lovely note to end on. Thank you very much, to both of you for joining me today and sharing your experience and expertise. I definitely learned a lot about different conference organisation strategies and I'm sure our listeners did too.

Linda: Thanks Matilda, and good luck to my colleagues in Toruń!

Grzegorz: Thank you Linda, thank you Matilda, thank you for the great conversation, and see you in Toruń!

Matilda: And thank you to everyone else for listening to this episode of #FinallyFriday by EXARC. If you would like to become more involved with EXARC, as always, you can become a member, very reasonably priced. Alternatively, you can also make a small PayPal donation through the website to help support EXARC in its many endeavours. And of course, do not forget to register for our upcoming conference, which will be taking place online and in person at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland, from the 1st to the 3rd of May. You can find all the details of the programme and how to register at exarc.net/meetings/eac13. Looking forward to seeing you all there. Bye for now!

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.