letters

War in Europe

On February 24, shortly after the last magazine was published, Russia invaded Ukraine. As we go to press the largest military conflict in Europe since World War Two is underway, with thousands killed and millions fleeing Ukraine, and events changing daily. Here we print two letters as received, one from Ukraine and one from Russia, which throw light on the terrible decisions faced by people whose working lives have been dedicated to researching and protecting cultural heritage.

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Right: Ukrainian civilians and soldiers gather under a bridge in Irpin in March

As I write it has been ten days since Russia invaded Ukraine. I would like to share some experiences and observations I have made about the impact of this event on my work and duty as director-general for the National Museum of the History of Ukraine.

First, don't expect any clear instruction or guidance from your chiefs. Things happen much faster than they are able to deliver a decision. On the eve of the war, very few regular people, as well as politicians, believe that war will actually happen. Panic is the worst thing at this time: that is why any signals of worry from museum directors could be ignored by the Ministry of Culture. Even if there is an elaborate plan showing how museums should act during military conflicts, there are a lot of practical obstacles that make its implementation unrealistic.

The Russian attack on Ukraine was launched about 5 o'clock in the morning. I was awakened by a colleague telling me that Zhulyany and Boryspil city airports were being bombed. How many of my museum colleagues were expecting to see this day? Many have families, parents, kids, pets. They are all terrified of the sounds of sirens, shells and the roar of aircraft. Even those who are obliged to be there (administration, the chief-keeper), can't be available because of logistic and/or communication problems, or because they are simply afraid. So, in such circumstances, the only stuff you can rely on is devoted people. We don't find "devotion" listed in job specifications: it can be revealed only in unexpected emergencies like this. Now, it is difficult to believe but on that grey morning, I found at the museum about 20 devoted people – collection keepers, technical workers, carpenters, guides, researchers, librarians and law experts. They all contributed to disassembling exhibitions and packing exhibits.

The experience of the Second World War shows that looting and aircraft strikes are typical dangers museums can face. Evacuation can make sense if you have at least a couple of weeks before military operations are activated in your area. The ideal solution is the evacuation of exhibits by air. Evacuation by trains has its bad sides – the railway can be demolished; the train can be damaged by bombs or rockets from the air. Facing eventual occupation of the city, the Ministry of Culture (if it is still active and not on the move) or museum administration need to make a decision about the collection and exhibits on display. If you are certain that the army of occupants will respect the international law of protecting heritage, you may skip the dismantling of exhibitions. However, this is not the Ukrainian case.

During the time of the Russian Empire and then Soviet Union, many archaeological, numismatic and other objects of Ukrainian culture were moved to Russia and found their place in the showcases of such Russian museums as the Hermitage and the State Historical Museum. There is no guarantee that in line with Putin's denial of Ukrainian statehood and identity, Ukrainian cultural heritage will not be a subject of mass robbery. So, I have made a decision to remove and hide all exhibits. If you have a large collection and very limited time, it is necessary to establish an order of priority.

In 1970 in the Soviet Union, "Instruction concerning the protection of museum and artworks from the means of mass damage" was issued. It is still pretty much in use in most post-Soviet countries. According to it, objects should be classified into two categories. The first comprises items of national and world importance, unique relics as well as rare objects of natural history, of great importance in terms of the history of science. The second group includes similar categories of objects which have primarily national significance. Both

Below: Scythian artefacts in the National Museum of the History of Ukraine

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groups have special distinguishing marks that enable easy location in showcases and museum stores.

Timely evacuation or placing of exhibits in specially prepared underground stores are recommended for objects of the first group. Items in the second group need to be evacuated after the security of the first group is completed. The selection of both groups needs to be undertaken by competent teams of experts. They compile a list of objects of both groups specifying their number, size, weight and volume, and finally orientation for the planning of packing materials and transport. Irremovable objects should be listed in a special catalogue and need to be protected on the spot. This is basically the main principle according to which we have undertaken work in our museum.

Once all exhibits have been removed and hidden, the museum turns into a huge storage. Its public work is limited to online activity. This means you need to have a good competent team of writers able to deliver good quality texts adapted to a wide public, focusing on museum items. People can't visit the museum, but they are still interested in watching and interpreting the museum's objects.

Such conscious destruction of the exhibitions is a preventive measure to keep the museum collections safe from possible looting. At the same time, this dramatic moment can be considered as a crucial point for the beginning of a new museum. It is a time for rethinking the narrative of previous exhibitions, and considering possible new roles for the museum.

Fedir Androshchuk, director-general of The National Museum of the History of Ukraine, Kyiv

WIKIMEDIA/SERGEY UA KIEV

Above: National Museum of the History of Ukraine, Kyiv, in 2015

A sense of disorientation

I am about to leave Russia where I had arrived 48 hours after the beginning of the "special military operation" against Ukraine – I have good reasons to be here, and I never really felt personally threatened. Our Ukrainian colleagues are facing risks on a totally different scale. I know of two archaeologists participating in the defence of Kyiv, while another one is being evacuated west to Lviv. The north Ukrainian town of Chernihiv (Chernigov on older maps), where the oldest Orthodox cathedral of Ukraine and one of the most famous archaeological monuments of the country, the Black Barrow (Chernaya Mogila, a burial mound of the 10th century AD) are located, has been the target of sustained rocket and air attacks. I have heard speculation that part of the reason for this attack may be the ideological significance of Varangian sites for the origins of the Rus state (one of Putin's stated motives for intervention in Ukraine is his own concept of Russian history); and while specific reports are still lacking, there are understandable fears that other historical and archaeological monuments may be damaged, too.

But there are also consequences for Russian archaeology and archaeologists which are gradually becoming clearer. I was asked last week by a British colleague to do a local payment for a publication license for an image supplied by a Moscow museum, because such payments are no longer possible from abroad. A small thing, but hot on the heels came the press statement from the German funding body which supports my project in Central Asia: they will discontinue all joint projects with Russian institutions. That embargo is bound to hit the Russian experts and laboratories doing contract work for my project – I will not be allowed to pay them from German government funds (and even if I were allowed, I could not transfer the money to their Russian accounts).

Such cooperation bans will be bad for Russian institutions which have tried to become more international, but they will have a devastating effect on exactly the people who deserve it least: the next generation of archaeologists. Last week, one of our students, a very good and highly motivated girl, phoned with the news that her foreign scholarship and research trip had been suspended by the Polish hosts – she was crying while talking to us on the phone. Other students have been arrested for attending anti-war demonstrations or writing for opposition papers (the last of which has just been closed down). There

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Left: Black Barrow, an exceptional early medieval burial mound, a possible military target in Chernihiv, Ukraine?

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Above: A street near Bucha, north-west of Kyiv, on March 1, said to show Russian armaments seized by the Armed Forces of Ukraine

Below: Large flint core from West Kennet – and originally Grime's Graves?

appears to be a sense of disorientation spreading among our students here. The fear of general mobilisation with a call-up of former conscripts (the Kremlin publicly admitted a couple of days ago that conscripts had been with the Russian army in Ukraine) is leading quite a few to contemplate "trips abroad". Russian archaeology may well face another brain drain on the scale it experienced after the collapse of the Soviet regime.

And it is not only young archaeologists losing opportunities and perspectives at home and abroad: a senior colleague has cancelled her planned and firmly arranged papers in the UK because – even if she should get a UK visa, which is now out of the question – she tells me that she could not possibly face a foreign audience now; in addition, she would have no money of her own because she would be unable to use her credit and account cards while outside Russia. At the same time, in at least one case I know of, an official has attended a staff meeting in the Academy of Sciences, openly pointing out the consequences of the new Fake Information Law (passed by the Duma, the Russian parliament, on March 4 2022): all research staff are state employees, so if anybody disagrees with government opinions, they should look for employment in the private sector! Last week, some 100 university and high-school rectors signed a letter of support for Putin and his policies. One suspects that they were not given much of a choice, and some may just have wanted to protect their institutions.

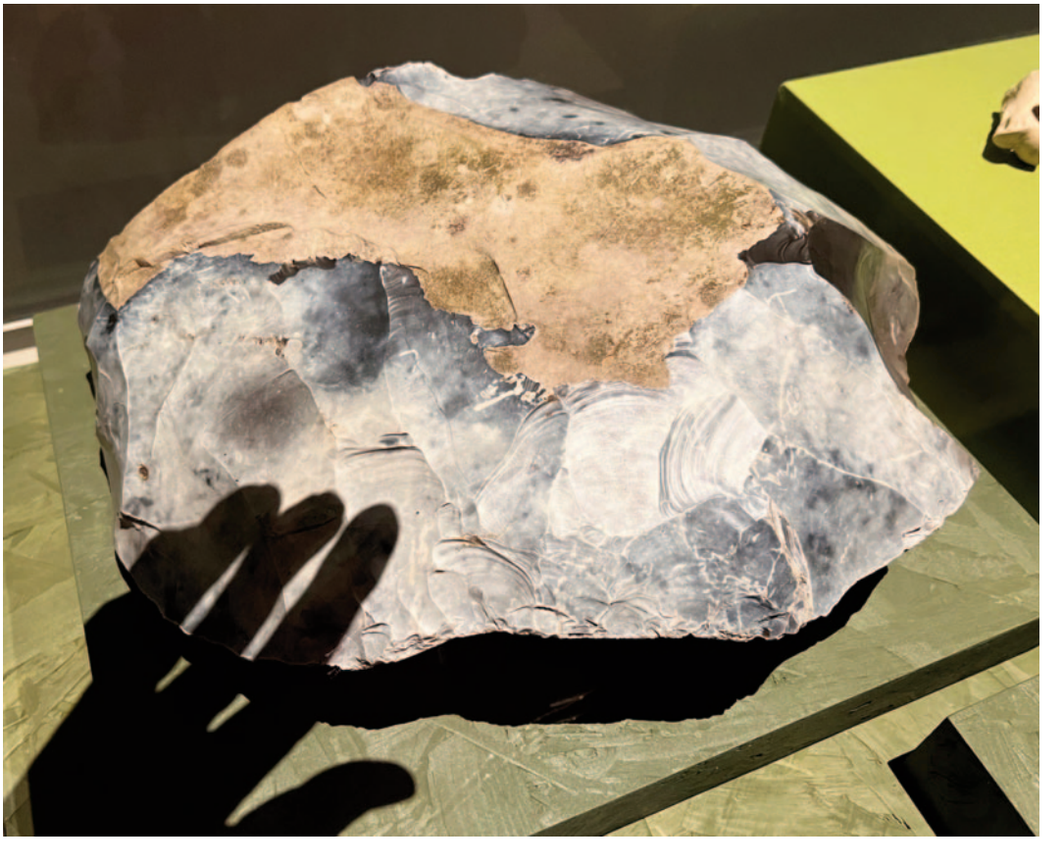
In this way, political, financial, social and psychological barriers are going up within and around Russia, barriers which will damage archaeology, and scholarship in general, across the continent. It is a small (?) tragedy accompanying the big tragedy of Ukraine.

From an archaeologist known to the editor who wishes to remain anonymous

Support archaeologists

University Archaeology UK (UAUK) is appalled by the current situation in Ukraine. Above all, we write to condemn the loss of human life in this region, and the displacement of millions of innocent civilians. We stand with colleagues in Ukraine and the wider area who are suffering the effects of this terrible conflict, including Russian colleagues opposed to the war. We are also dismayed by the impact this war will have on the archaeological record and cultural heritage assets. Ukraine is home to six World Heritage Sites with another 17 sites on the tentative list, and multiple museums housing rare collections of international importance. We highlight the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict to ensure the prevention of the destruction of all forms of cultural heritage. UAUK urges all colleagues to explore options to support Ukrainian archaeologists through their own institutions and networks, and particularly through Cara, the Council for At-Risk Academics.

Vicki Cummings & Andy Gardner, chairs, on behalf of UAUK



MIKE PITTS

Exotic stones

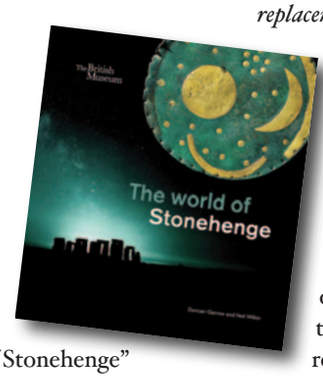
The report on the remarkable granite "grus" from West Kennet (feature Mar/Apr 2022/183) raised the issue of exotic stones in the Neolithic. Large distinctive flint cores similar to some found in East Anglia were mentioned: one is now on display in "The world of Stonehenge" exhibition, with the label suggesting that it was likely to have come from the Grime's Graves flint mines in Norfolk. Once again physical appearance was cited as evidence for this, but there is another approach that could with more certainty confirm or dispel this hypothesis, namely their chemical trace-element composition.

Many years ago the British Museum tried to "fingerprint" the major Neolithic flint mines, and hundreds of polished flint axe blades that were believed to be of mined flint. Unfortunately the analytical separation of the mines was not really significant,

apart from Grime's Graves where the preferred "floorstone" had a very distinctive composition. The problem was that the huge majority of the axes were Early and Middle Neolithic, but Grime's Graves was Late Neolithic. However, later extensive fieldwork in Norfolk uncovered many Late Neolithic sites, and there our analysis showed that a good proportion of the flint was of the Grime's Graves floorstone (see feature Nov 2004/79). That flint layer extends beneath much of East Anglia, but as far as is known was only exploited at Grime's Graves. Thus analysis of these distinctive flints found in Wiltshire could definitely show whether whether they were of floorstone, and thus likely to have come from that Norfolk mine.
Paul Craddock, London

I noted with great interest the most unusual "grus" boulders in the West Kennet excavation. Given the apparent connection of ideas and the widespread travelling of Neolithic peoples, it would appear that these rocks are an example of community connections with a common culture located some way away. A reason for transporting the many small boulders great distances could possibly be that a community north of Avebury was making a connection with this great religious centre.

They had a stake in the area. The excavated Structure 5, where the stones were found, stands by itself among other similar structures and was owned and built by this as yet unknown group living to the north, even as far as the Cheviots. Other structures around West Kennet could "belong" to other communities. It was not different geology that was important, only that the stones would be of their locality – "their" limestones and sandstones – transported to make a religious connection. The bluestones at Stonehenge themselves may be a big ownership gesture by the peoples of Pembrokeshire.
John Sorrell, Caerleon



Gold & chalk

It was lovely to read the feature on "The world of Stonehenge" exhibition at the British Museum (Mar/Apr 2022/183), but why did the authors (and caption writer) say of the Nebra Sky Disk: "Some of the gold is probably from south-west England"? It has been proved that the gold (and the tin) used in the manufacture of the disk came from Cornwall, and has even been located precisely to the Carnon River near Truro. Proof of this can be found in "Provenance of the gold of the Early Bronze Age Nebra Sky Disk, central Germany: geochemical characterisation of natural gold from Cornwall", by Anja Ehser & two others, *European Journal of Mineralogy* 23 (2011), 895–910.
Cheryl Straffon, Pendeen, Cornwall

• The scientists concluded that the first phase of gold on the disk (the apparent sun, moon and stars) was "likely" to have come from Cornwall; a separate study suggested the tin in the bronze also came from Cornwall. The gold in the side-strips, "boat" and a replacement "star" were sourced in Romania, and the copper has been matched to Mitterberg mine ores in Salzburg, Austria. Ed

The Neolithic chalk drum from Burton Agnes (*News*, Mar/Apr 2022/183) with striking similarities to the Folkton drums, has a crossed wheel on the top – usually interpreted as representing the sun. The concentric, incomplete lines appear similar to those on the Nebra Sky Disc on a gold arc motif between the solstitial alignment markers. That element is often interpreted as a solar ship, so the chalk drum may bear a solar ship carrying the sun through the underworld at night. Megalithic/Grooved Ware people had a visual language, and with enough decorated objects from well-understood contexts we might identify the meanings of motifs and reconstruct personal narratives, such as the life and death of those three children at Burton Agnes.
Graham E Hill, Penzance ■

Solar ships? The Nebra Sky Disc (left, 1600BC) and the Burton Agnes chalk drum (below, 3000–2900BC)

STATE OFFICE FOR HERITAGE MANAGEMENT & ARCHAEOLOGY SAXONY-ANHALT/JURAJ LIPTÁK, TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

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