



The content is published under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0 License.

Unreviewed Mixed Matters Article:

Interview: Ancient Hoplitikon, "Poorer Cousin" to History Academia or alternative XXI Century Interpretation of History?

Persistent Identifier: <https://exarc.net/ark:/88735/10169>

[EXARC Journal Issue 2014/3](#) | Publication Date: 2014-08-15

Author(s): Márta Póczy ¹ ✉

¹ Independent researcher, address withheld by the editors (GDPR), Hungary.



I liaise with a number of living history groups globally, which all share the same aims and objectives of researching and actively pursuing experimental archaeology related to Ancient Greece and Rome. By networking, we create a foundation of knowledge that meets our

framework for understanding the past, whether it be military martial arts, polytheism, metallurgy, clothing, food and wine or even ancient dialects.

A few living history groups do an enormous variety of research and set the standards and benchmarks for the rest to follow! Other groups try to keep up, but are set back due to their budgets and members stagnating in this endeavour. In general the ancient re-enactment movement continues methodically to move forward and bares fruit through recognition from academic institutions and museums. Indeed while we are at the antipodes to Europe and in Australia we are separated by distance, we have a unique style and hope to introduce it to our European colleges! Our website <http://www.ancienthoplitikon.com/> (accessed on the 8th of August 2014) only shows a small portion of what we have achieved so far. Each year we update it to show a proactive approach to ancient living history. At the moment, our group, is investing a lot in infrastructure and equipment for our members; it is currently about growth and achieving those objectives of showcasing what is displayed in museums and providing a platform for history enthusiasts and historical academics to understand how they were used in the past. This endeavour is still in its infancy, and in years to come living history re-enactors will attract archaeologists, enthusiasts, academics and other highly educated persons of interest to the field. At present we are still considered the "poor cousin" to history academia.

Athanasios Porporis



I agree, that historical re-enactment "can provide awareness" in a multicultural society, in a nation that has an historical heritage or not.

Academic publications often characterize historical re-enactment as a leisure time activity, or an escapist movement from post-modern society. This simplification of the phenomenon underestimates the goal of raising historical consciousness and an expression of cultural roots. What would you describe as the motivating factors of the Ancient Hoplitikon members in becoming re-enactors, - as you call it "in a gigantic Frog Pond", in a melting pot of nations?

It is unfortunate, but well within the spectrum of academic publications to criticize historical re-enactment activity as

nothing more than a pursuit in ignorance and folly. Regrettably there is some degree of merit to this argument. However, a minority of historical re-enactors do engage in experimental archaeology that compliments academic pursuits on many levels. Historical academia is correct in many of the assertions it makes about living history re-enactment.

The majority of historical re-enactors fall within this academic bias and so all of us are painted with the same brush, so to speak. Those of us in the 'minority' are hard pressed to labour more intensely than ever to legitimize our endeavours. Networking with established groups, creating awareness through research, collating and disseminating academic/archaeological findings, helps to create benchmarks and standards for historical re-enactment. The Ancient Hoplitikon has become a reluctant motivator in its

endeavour to establish a mind-set and set of standards which other groups from the 'gigantic frog pond' of nations can emulate or excel.

What does the activity of the Ancient Hoplitikon mean to the Greek community in Melbourne, and vice versa?

As for the Greek Community in Melbourne, Victoria, the Ancient Hoplitikon is a member of the ALHF (Australian Living History Federation). We are not recognized like most cultural groups, organizations or institutions affiliated with the Greek Community. The main issue stems from an ethnic and cultural heritage associated with the Greek Orthodox Church, which has a religious bias against any attempt to revive the Ancient Greek pre-Christian past. In Greece or amongst the Greek diaspora, living history re-enactment is a relatively unknown phenomenon, unlike the rest of Europe, which have a vibrant attachment to the historical past!

Most groups globally are not ethnically Greek, but are considered more as devout 'Philhellenes' (friends of Hellenes). This indicates that Greeks generally are demographically less inclined to pursue their cultural heritage due to political and religious bias.

How important is it-in your opinion - for the professional development of the Ancient Hoplitikon, the constructive critique and the presence of a specialized museum (archaeologist, historian, craftsman knowing the materials and techniques used in the period), or do you think, that with global communication networks you can reach all the information needed for the experimental testing of ideas and the proving of theories?

Professional development in the Ancient Hoplitikon since 2007, has gained gradual momentum. Recognition from our peers, academia, history enthusiasts, forums and media has uniquely positioned this group to set future benchmarks. Within the Ancient Hoplitikon, we have members who are historical academics, researchers, teachers, craftsmen, metallurgists, experts in European martialarts, ancient linguists and ex-military. Members of this unique group also communicate and network with museums, archaeologists, and academic researchers from universities globally. Experiments, testing ideas and proving theories is a constant pursuit for us in Australia.

How would you describe the difference of practicing hoplite re-enactment in Greece and outside Greece: how important is it for experimental archaeology to see and to touch archaeological findings personally? "Archaeology is also in a transformation period according to a new generation of archaeologists: Twenty First Century archaeology should not be about digging objects, but learning about ancestor's daily life and mentality."

Hoplite re-enactment can vary between groups globally, whether it be on panoply, weapons, shield devices, fighting methods and Hoplomachia (Phalanx drill), even verbal commands in the Ancient Greek dialect. Weight of equipment is of paramount importance, with regard to raw materials in their construction - all is relevant. Artefacts in museums and archaeological sites give greater insight into how and why armour and weapons functioned the way they did, due to styles and improvements with each generation. There is a new archaeological method, the 'German Method', being employed at present, which curators and archaeologists have informed us of. A form or style of archaeology whereby forensic analysis elaborates further on artefacts like swords; the type of metal used and other trace elements involved, weight/length and method of construction, even who made it (makers mark) and location of manufacture.

Validation through experimental archaeology with this new method has opened many doors to understanding crucial aspects in our interpretation of the facts. Such improvements to our knowledge base increases our awareness of how Ancient Greeks lived and what were the thought processes in that period, with regard to the skilled technologies employed by them.

Do you think that being so far from Greece you have more responsibility to be authentic in your presentation, because the general public possibly have less background information about Greek history (enjoyed divergent history education)? Or do you have the same responsibility as hoplite re-enactment groups in Greece?

Indeed living far from Greece can be viewed somewhat as either a negative or a positive. Distance is challenging at best, but the era of internet forums and in particular Facebook, has opened Ancient Greek living history to a much wider audience. A wide variety of Hoplite re-enactors, history enthusiasts, academics and the general public now engage more intently than ever before to share, glean and even promote this living history endeavour. As for living history groups in Greece, the handful continue to develop and those that operate at present are still in their infancy with regard to political, religious and public bias toward them.

In Australia we have no influence with these groups in Greece, which leads to professional standards developing on an independent basis; so research in different areas branches out and can either be accepted or debated depending on how accurate the evidence is. Hoplite re-enactment groups in the UK, Spain, Germany, France, Italy and America have established better outcomes. Quantity and quality of membership and infrastructure determines a solid footing in this endeavour.

Greece, for every Ancient Greek re-enactment group, is the primary location of our focus. Recreating our own Greek environment in Australia takes on a greater importance, in an effort to replicate the same atmosphere. In 2011 a league was

established for member groups to make annual excursions to Greece for ancient historical anniversaries. This happened after the 2,500 years anniversary of the battle of Marathon, which these groups attended in September 2011. To date, this has become a major focus for living history, to make its presence felt in Greece for the first time. But when dealing with the Greek authorities and their lack of knowledge of ancient living history, pressure and anxiety increases dramatically.

Have you experienced a difference in public behaviour towards the re-enactment groups in Australia and outside the country? How far is the average Aussie interested in (or how well informed) Greek cultural history within a multicultural society? (During special events and historical festivals do you experience from the public a deep interest in Greek history, or are these kinds of events to trigger interest and offer amusement?)

Public behaviour in other countries, where living history is established for many years now, have a varied level of understanding. A small percentage showed an increased awareness of ancient history, while others lack any knowledge due to ignorance. The latter prevails as the most common experience. Being the only protagonists in Victoria, Australia, we have an influence on a multi-cultural society, as you indicated, to trigger interest and offer amusement. This has occurred frequently as we developed the group's public interface. Sadly this, in the long term, will bare no fruit if we continue down this path. There is a thin line here, if a living history group 'only' performs for public entertainment, then authenticity is compromised and serious research becomes less of a priority. However, if public displays are exhibited 'correctly' then, they become informative and educational.

Does the state in any way support your activity? How can Ancient Hoplitikon, Melbourne in practice benefit from joining an umbrella organization like The Australasian Living History Federation ALHF (forum for discussions, organizing events, representing-, advising member groups; - is being a member a kind of recognition of authentic interpretation?)?

The State, does not support our activity financially! What the state allows us to do, is to be registered as an 'Incorporate Association'. Like any other group or organization we are given a platform under law to be recognized and exist within a constitutional framework. The Ancient Hoplitikon of Melbourne Inc. has been a member of the ALHF since 2007. Such membership is paramount in our pursuit to achieve our goals. ALHF gives all living history groups recognition for authentic interpretation and provides guidelines to follow. Without this umbrella organization, we could not acquire weapons or manufacture them. ALHF constitution helps in what we can and can't do, legal terms of reference with regard to member groups under law in each state and most importantly covers us for liability insurance for members.

Does the question ever occur among members of AH with regard to practicing historical live interpretation professionally (I mean hereby not purely the level of professionalism of interpretation, but making it as a profession?)

Only five members of the Hoplitikon practice historical interpretation professionally. They are also multi - re-enactors who enjoy delving into various periods of history! They stem from 14th -17th Century Medieval German, Napoleonic, American Civil War, Roman and various others like Varangian Guard (Byzantium) even LARPING (Live Action Role-Playing) !?!

These members are pro-active in their professional application, whether it be in research or live interpretation. Some even hold classes and workshops for members of the ALHF every year at conferences.

Probably, in Australia (as everywhere else, with some exceptions: Colonial Williamsburg, archaeological open-air museums, certain heritage sites in the UK...) re-enactment, living history, museum theatre, role play are not (entirely) valued by museum specialists as a possible form of interpretation of bygone days and dissemination of knowledge; there is still a long way to go for recognition. What kind of improvement do you see (since 1996) in the academic behaviour towards re-enactment groups (especially towards the ones, providing an authentic interpretation of the past)?

Yes indeed, I see a future for sure. Yes it is a long way to go to achieve recognition and the legacy is an open door for the moment. Since 1996, improvements are measured by 'long term' focus not a short term approach. The longer you develop this endeavour and the passion for it then the more likely there may be a shift in academic bias. The future should be optimistic and there is already evidence to suggest this; we have in our fold a handful of academics and historians (enthusiasts) already heavily involved in Ancient Greek and Roman re-enactment. So in a way, the curiosity has metamorphosed and will continue to evolve to better outcomes.

Do you agree, that historical re-enactment creates more understanding / tolerance in multi-cultural societies for a different culture (in this case for bygone culture)? What I mean is: whether the understanding of aboriginals in Australia, through learning their customs, thoughts about the surrounding world/ nature – does influence the general acceptance of living history? (It is interesting how New Zealand is dealing with implanting Maori traditions in the Twenty First Century, where traditional Anglo-Saxon ideas dominate island cultural policy and media attractions.) In some countries the re-enactment brand name stands for reviving folk culture and also for historical re-enactment.

I agree, that historical re-enactment "can provide awareness" in a multicultural society, in a nation that has an historical heritage or not. In Australia, promoting Aboriginal

culture is paramount among the "First Australians". The Government at present is committed to elevating Aboriginal culture and traditions to a higher level just like New Zealand's Maori cultural traditions. This has become policy for most nations with indigenous populations. In recent decades, there has been an intense focus on indigenous cultural awareness; on folkloric dances, language dialects, tribal / national dress, customs, traditional belief systems and food. They are aspects of cultural identity which is a living history in itself, in the present.

In which form/ forms did living history exist in Australia before the 1990s (from the 1970s) – if you have any information about it? What was your main motivation to re-enact Greek ancient times: strengthening the cultural roots or were you more attracted to the historical background – (Mike Crang is calling historical live interpretation forms, re-enactment and living history, a possible option for Twenty First Century historiography, - differing from the official academic versions)?

As far as I know, living history re-enactment (all periods) in Australia has its roots in the mid 1970's. In 1983 in particular we saw mass gatherings of groups establishing the first living history conference in Australia. My motivation to re-enact Ancient Greek living history comes from my ethnicity and mostly my passion for such a rich historical heritage. In Australia, growing up in a society that was at that time not accustomed to Ancient History, Anglo Saxon history was, and continues to be, the most prominent and dominant in Australian identity. In the 21st century, living history may become a new platform to assist official academic research. There have been many live interpretations that compliment this endeavour and will continue to improve overtime.

Can you describe how your motivation, attitude, knowledge, social connection network has changed in the past 20 years, - in your historical re-enactment career?

The approach to my historical living re-enactment has many levels, I am blessed with a Greek heritage and this is my main driving force in this endeavour; it will continue and I can't foresee a conclusion in later life. Meeting other likeminded re-enactors has been, on a personal level, inspiring to say the least. In my 20 years there have been turning points, good and bad choices, evolving attitudes, increased awareness with new and updated knowledge, even social networking has made the journey worthwhile. I don't consider this a career, but a life commitment to promote, develop and maintain the integrity of the group. Though in that period of time, there have been doubts and setbacks due to a few negative individuals that couldn't comprehend a long term view for living history.

Do you see a connection between the professionalization of living history and between academic recognition, or do you experience an arrogant academic behaviour not willing to

leave their ivory tower? Do you think that historians, archaeologists participating in living history- may create a bridge between the two parties?

At present, most academic behaviour still embraces the 'ivory tower' mantra. I draw the same comparison with Western medicine that has a dismissive arrogant view toward Oriental medicine. The same applies to the way we conduct ourselves at present with both parties, but a small number of history enthusiasts, historians and academics do collaborate and benefit from involvement, with surprising outcomes.

Do you agree with (or do ALFHAM promote) the evaluation / rating of the professionalism of living history groups, whereby not purely the branch, but the public also should be aware of how authentic the presentation of the past is (with an infirm American categorization example: farbs, mainstream and progressive)? In some countries historical re-enactors aim to separate professional associations from week-end re-enactors who do not care for authenticity, but prefer to socialize far from their everyday work stresses by taking on another social role outside the present society.

As for professionalism in living history, authenticity is a key focus to the serious minority. But the majority lack this approach and they use this opportunity to socialize as a form of escapism which is unfortunate.

How do you see the harmful effects of contemporary Hollywood films dealing with historical themes, or you think that this kind of media promotion can get the broader public closer to history and indeed trigger some people's interest for further research? How much do you think half-fantasy movies are destroying, in the public's mind, an authentic perception of the past and distorting historical knowledge for the future generations through their lack of authenticity, or we can't accept the genre being "perfectly" correct? Does the artistic/ social meaning of historical themed Hollywood films exempt them from the responsibility of showing the past without added creative fantasy?

Hollywood, what can be said? It would take a brave director with foresight to produce a film that compliments all fields of research and living history and with, above all, the blessings of academics, historians and re-enactors. The target audience which is the main stream public, would find it hard to appreciate an authentic historical film, even without the creative fantasy that we are at present accustomed to! It's about marketing and manipulation in an industry that uses the "The bottom Line!" as a mantra. Selling history as a feature film is not good business. In the 1960's European films launched the classic 'sword and sandal' epics. It's revival in the mid 1990's, through films like *Gladiator*, showed a skeptical Hollywood that history genre films are popular again, no matter how historically inaccurate they became. There is an interest from the public and protagonists like us, although we are constantly disappointed by the lack of historical content to showcase or improve the story line on such films. We can only live in hope ...

How would you evaluate documentary films with the participation of historical re-enactment groups? What do you think: what is more important for the producers: help from the specialized knowledge of re-enactors or the low budget visualized documentary adaptation (mostly re-enactment associations participating for self-promotion without being payed for their acting)?

Compared to 20 years ago, documentary films have improved: the academic pursuit to make better content has been a superb achievement. Only some historical re-enactment groups have been selected to give accurate visual credibility, which is what producers are accomplishing now! Unfortunately there have been a few low budget documentary films that lack a standard of worthy educational value, but these should be used as a gauge to critique and look for better films within that industry. Most are improving and will continue to further employ historical re-enactors, married to new computer graphics to enhance a better visual representation.

How difficult is it to meet fellow re-enactors for personal discussion, during historical festivals – because of the long distances within the country?

Meeting other fellow re-enactors can only be looked on as a positive. Today we network via internet to broaden our interest, set benchmarks and standards. So when we meet at festivals or historical anniversaries we have already cemented our love and passions for our lifetime experiences, with the hope to further create a legacy into the future for the generations that will follow us.

PHOTOS BY LYNDA STACEY AND JOSHUA BUTTON

Link(s)

[More Holplitodromos photo's](#)

🔖 Keywords [living history](#)
[army](#)

🔖 Country [Australia](#)
[Hungary](#)

🔗 Share This Page

[f](#) [X](#) [in](#)

| Corresponding Author

Márta Pócza

Independent researcher

Address withheld by the editors (GDPR)

Hungary

[E-mail Contact](#)

| Gallery Image



FIG 1. ROW OF HOPLITIKON REENACTORS WITH SPEARS AND SHIELDS



FIG 2. HELMETS AND METAL ARMOUR



FIG 3. NOTE THE DIFERENT TYPES OF SWORDS



FIG 4. MARCH ON THE BEACH



FIG 5. TRAINING WITH SHIELDS ONLY



FIG 6. SHOOTING WITH BOW & ARROW



FIG 7. NOW IT GETS REAL



FIG 8. BIG DIFFERENCES...