



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

Unreviewed Mixed Matters Article:

Interview: the Association of Historical Studies Koryvantes

Persistent Identifier: <https://exarc.net/ark:/88735/10171>

EXARC Journal Issue 2014/4 | Publication Date: 2014-11-15

Author(s): Márta Pócza ¹ ✉

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



“The Koryvantes Association was founded in 2009 by people with a background in the study of ancient Greek warfare who were not satisfied by the level of reconstructions undertaken so far in Greece and internationally and who wished to ultimately adopt a framework based on experimental archaeological methodology and test established and new theories in ancient and medieval warfare. The Association, comprising of amateurs from various professional and academic backgrounds, undertakes painstaking studies of academic archaeology papers and the latest archaeological research, implementing deductions in the construction of 'battle-ready/museum quality' replicas, fully tested for validation of functionality/performance.

A key direction for the Association is the development of a unique intellectual property focusing on ancient/medieval Greek warfare, shared among all interested parties and for all types of activities: academic, experimental, educational, technical and athletic.”

KLEISIARIS, N., BAKAS, S. & SKARMINTZOS, S. (in print): The Development Steps of Experimental Archaeology in Greece Through Key Historical Replicative Experiments and Reconstructions.



A key principle for re-enactment associations in order to get finance from the State is to match their work with the interests and the agenda of the State. If an association promotes areas that match the current political environment of their society, then there is room for financing. It is very difficult in current economies to get finance without an immediate return for them.

Aliadis Antonis discusses “amateurs and archaeology”

(Spyros Bakas cited)

KORYVANTES should be written with capital letters?

We use to write KORYVANTES with capital letters as the Ancient Greek alphabet had only capital letters. According to Greek theology, Koryvantes (or Kourites) were Gods before the Olympian Gods. They protected the God Zeus after his birth using loud sounds, so his father Cronus could not kill him. They are mentioned as the first armed warrior-Gods and are also noted as the inventors of the bow, agriculture and bee cultivation.

Greek theology always presents the Koryvantes Gods as protecting something, such as how they protected Zeus after his birth, how they were protecting Knowledge: Goddess Athena killed one of the Koryvantes to steal the Knowledge, or how they were protecting the Golden Fleece in Colhis: Jason killed one of the Koryvantes to steal it. Koryvantes are presented either as

naked armed young warriors (protecting Zeus) or as huge snakes with wings spitting fire (the one protecting the Golden Fleece) - you can easily assume that dragons from modern Asian religions and the Koryvantes religion may have common grounds).

The association is calling the knowledge you built up by researching Ancient Greek warfare, Intellectual Property. It is an interesting phrase in connection with experimental archaeology (reconstructive archaeology). Do you mean hereby, that the research results you are publishing, are protected exclusively as your invention, like a patent or copyright, or does it mean something else for the association?

Here there are two dimensions to consider.

First, we reconstruct military armour/equipment that spans from 1600 BC (early Mycenaean) to 1600 AD (late Byzantine); we cover thirty three centuries of military technology (we keep alive thirty three centuries of tradition, as we like to say). We avoid buying commercially available re-enactment equipment, where possible.

This means a huge (for our limited resources) investment in studying, documenting, building (error-prone) and testing custom hand-made equipment of museum quality. Building armour is a project that may take six to eight months and many thousands of Euros. If you think that the only evidence we may have is a pottery painting... this is a huge difference from reconstructing Medieval European armour, as there are multiple copies in Museums to study.

Second, we are doing some innovative studies (on Phalanx formation and ancient Greek archery) that we present mainly at academic events and also publish. Our studies are usually based on the custom equipment that we build and our tests/experiments.

We consider both the custom equipment and the studies as Intellectual Property (IP) of the Association. We also build additional IP by using the custom equipment to produce quality digital material (photos, videos, et cetera) to be consumed by various media (press, television, electronic games). In the modern environment, you have no place, unless you can produce quality Intellectual Property.

Our point of view is that each project, such as Classical era Hoplite or Mycenaean warriors is a long process with many steps that involve many people/skills: birth of the concept, - studying /documenting, prototyping, financing, implementation (building), testing assumptions, creating academic material, creating digital material, presenting at academic events and using the digital material. The whole process of a project may

take years to complete. As I said before, this needs many people and skills to complete; the Association is actually the process engine that makes it feasible.

"General public" is a broad term. Are you communicating your research results to museum visitors during special museum events, festivals, or are you having long term joint educational programs with museums? Can you draw a clear line between commercial events with historical re-enactors, and programs organized where the main aim is to disseminate objective facts about the past (Are you taking exclusively, invitations from museums or recognized institutions, documentary filmmakers, artists?)?

Indeed, "general public" is a generic term, and the reality is that what we are doing is not in the interest of the "general public". There is a certain community of people worldwide that have a real interest and we target them directly, through specialized press and academic events. To address a broader audience we selectively participate in quality history documentaries or participate in archaeology festivals or museum events (usually once a year).

Unfortunately, we do not have the resources or the structure to support long term educational projects - we run on an opportunistic mode.

De-commercialization of historical re-enactment is an idealistic objective, or are there practical results justifying your intention: to free historical re-enactment from misuse for commercial reasons and for political goals? Does the association have a conscious system to find sponsors who agree with your goals and support your experiments for the sake of knowledge mediation (is it a question of correct networking)?

We are a cultural association whose main target is to keep alive the long tradition (thirty three centuries) of the heavy armoured warriors of the Greek world. In this way, what we are executing cannot be commercialized; it is not economically feasible. The whole concept is purely mental, not pragmatic.

We run all the processes only on private funding and small donations (television documentaries, private corporate events et cetera) without any state (or other organization) support. We understand that the military nature of the subject may discourage or prohibit some potential sponsors. We are also aware that our work may be used for the wrong purposes and we want to protect it from this.

You are calling the members "amateurs", despite the fact that researchers and academics are involved in your projects. Historical re-enactors are mostly stamped as "amateurs", but I don't believe in this sense Koryvantes can be called "amateur". Do you think that historical re-enactment is in a certain professionalization progress, where the level of research is playing a key role of recognition and evaluation?

A key parameter is to have a clear understanding of the role you want to play and your capabilities.

Even though we do have an archaeologist in our ranks we do not position our work as a pure scientific research, we are not in the "business" of archaeology or history science. We use the work of archaeologists and historians to produce digital media or other IP, thus we are the ones that "market" the findings of archaeologists.

What is true is that most re-enactment associations, including KORYVANTES, lack the structure, the resources, and the depth of established organizations like the universities or museums. So in this sense, yes they are amateur, when comparing to established organizations.

What is also true is that many re-enactment associations can contribute to specific areas, if they have some deep expertise, which may be valuable or not. Our Association has decided to contribute to the way archaeology can be communicated effectively to larger audiences. This, many times, brings us into conflict with archaeologists, as they feel that we take the credits, as we are capable of manipulating and controlling the "image" or they simply do not agree with the way we interpret the findings and the scientific data. To solve

these arguments and smooth out the objections, we have decided that all our work will first be presented at academic events and after will be published to the general public; as we say we "baptize" our work academically. This has helped a lot.

Since the publication of Freeman Tilden's Interpreting Our Heritage (1957), there exists a gap between historical re-enactors practicing experimental archaeology and between the academic community. Does Koryvantes aim to bridge this gap?

If I try to visualize our position, I would say that archaeology is a huge fenced circle and re-enactors are small circles around touching the big circle. Re-enactment associations should include people from the academic track, so as to insure that their work meets some minimum quality standards.

The association was taking part in several documentary films for BBC2, BBC4 and for History Channel to disseminate knowledge about Ancient Greek warfare. The "general public" through several forms of media, mainly through television, is influenced by the ideas of documentary filmmakers who are driven by divergent goals, motivations or missions, and who sometimes approach the same historical period from total different point of view. Do you think that the public can tell the difference between objective facts presented according to accurate research and reconstructions, and between unjustified subjective assumptions of the documentary filmmaker?

Dealing with documentaries is extremely sensitive and tricky, as they are used to efficiently shape the modern point of view on history.

Documentary producers have a clear view on what they want to show to meet their organization's (political or social) goals. On the other side, we do have our own agenda and goals. So we must adapt our position and image to the context that the producers have defined. We have again decided to work with documentaries that employ academics (like BBC), and have discussions with them to understand their motivation before any collaboration.

The movie industry falls into another category, but the question remains: how far can history be distorted for the sake of amusement (industry)? Do you see the occurrence of false information mediated for example by Hollywood movies for the younger generations? Is there a danger that the media takes over knowledge mediation and real facts will be used to serve other goals, or is that exactly the point you are planning to influence for the better?

Movies are consumer products, and again the producers know how they have to shape their product to push it to the consumers. We have not been involved in any movie filming; I would say that our experience with History Channel is in more this category (than documentary). It is very funny (if not embarrassing) to realize that the whole filming and shooting is to persuade the (American) audience that Hoplite warfare was similar to modern American Football.

According to Dawid Kobińska, re-enactment is deeply political. Globalism is probably triggering or provoking manifestations of national heritage. Re-enactment and living history is, in my opinion, a complex phenomenon: besides criticizing contemporary society (escaping the present days is an obvious sign of it), reviving national history is a protest against globalist tendencies (among other reasons to participate). Re-enactors are frightened to express their political opinion, despite the fact that indirectly they do manifest it, otherwise they are doomed from public appearances. Is the political actuality (post-modern society critique) of re-enactment recognized in Greece or is it more like taboo there?

Yes, re-enactment is deeply political in most of its forms. We see re-enactment as political in these forms: state-supported, non state-supported but tolerated, non state-supported and not tolerated, we also have religious re-enactment. An example of state-supported re-enactment is the Presidential Guard; each country has one, with soldiers dressed in uniforms and performing drills of 1800 era, a religious litany in Greece or

Italy that in reality represent a Byzantine military unit of the 10th century AD, or universities keeping the traditions in graduating ceremonies, all these are re-enactment acts.

An example of non state-supported but tolerated re-enactment is what associations like Koryvantes do; without any state support, re-enact various eras of military history, focusing mainly in nationalist/military style.

Non state-supported and not tolerated re-enactment is when on 1st of May, striking unions fight with police units, exchanging tear gas and -cocktail bombs. An example of religious re-enactment is a litany (mentioned before), or a church mass with the priest dressed like the first Christians.

So, we agree that re-enactment is deeply political, it is used to support various parts of our social life (I would say most); Dawid Kobińska is correct, but refers only to the second and third categories (non state-supported but tolerated re-enactment/non state-supported and not tolerated re-enactment), he chooses (?) not to refer to the first category of state-supported re-enactment that represents 90% of all the cases.

The KORYVANTES Association is not willing to be involved in commercial events. We are also not willing to allow our Intellectual Property be misused by political parties or religious organizations, in the hope of avoiding superfluous provocations.

The KORYVANTES Association's point of view on living history/re-enactment is that it must be held within strict academic boundaries with deep respect for history and science; of course, we have not escaped from various scholars' comments who consider us simply as a nationalistic group.

We have chosen to stay away from the general public to protect our work; the image of Ancient Greece was used by Governments of the western world over the last two centuries to promote their political agendas, so our message can easily be misinterpreted. Our communication channels with the public are mainly through history magazines and museum festivals.

The Association seems to work like a perfect engine by executing complex tasks effectively. Would you talk more about the structure of the association: how do you share the tasks, how can you coordinate work with 45 active members (obviously, communicating research results needs other abilities, than executing experiments as a blacksmith, or working with leather and textile, and testing, which needs more physical efforts)? Assumedly, acting in documentary films and taking part in photo shoots (being in the spotlight) is also dependant on the personality of the member. Participating in traditional archery competitions needs again other qualities, ambitions. Also, finding appropriate locations for executing certain tasks is a logistical question. How do you manage to successfully coordinating tasks and communicating within the association, while concrete, tangible results are presented to outside world?

We are far from a perfect machine; I would say that we are a dedicated team with a clear vision and targets. Our structure consists of three circles: the core, the broader and the extended team.

The actual "core" team is very small, mainly six people with skills in different areas (management, sports, archaeology, theatre) and geographically dispersed throughout Europe: two people with PhDs (Chemistry, Engineering), two MSc (Archaeology, Veterinarian) on track to obtain their PhDs, one MSc in Business Administration /Information Technology) and one member of the Tae Kwon Do (TKD) Greek National Team.

The "broader" team (around 25 people) is what we would call "re-enactors" in the more traditional sense, or traditional archery practitioners.

The core team is dedicated to producing the Association's Intellectual Property (mainly running the process and preparing studies) as well as handling the Association's participation in events. For all the other activities we utilize what we call an "extended team" or you may call it networking. So building the armour/clothing, publishing, distribution and the creation of digital material is all done by third parties that we collaborate with.

What we have found is that if you are capable of producing a unique quality Intellectual Property, then there is a "market" to consume it (I am speaking in market terms, as I am a sales person). In all cases we are contacted by writers, publishers, film makers, museums, universities, et cetera to use our material or services. This means that we do not have to spend resources to access our target audience. What is crucial in this model of operation is the ability to select the correct persons for the core team, as well as to make quality collaborations with third parties. The concept of the "extended team" means that you are so strong, as strong are the people you collaborate with.

Till now the team has proved that it is capable of delivering quality results in different areas; the success is driven by the competencies and skills of the core team persons and the passion of the broader team. Personalities are critical, and we have to admit that it is the most difficult and dangerous part as the members have to practice with weapons and there is nothing more tricky and dangerous than managing the egos of an armoured team of men.

"Through the lecture of the Political Scientist and member of our Association, Mr. Spyros Bakas, that was titled "Hoplite Re-enactment through experimental archaeology, in the Modern Educational Field. An insight view of Popularization methods ", alternative channels for popularizing and the externalization of experimental archaeology were accessed, with particular emphasis on multidimensional imaging, international contact, and the use of multimedia. The Lecture was accompanied by presentations from our Association members, thus giving a clear message on the influence of Historical Representation of Experimental Archaeology to the audience."
Quotation from the website of Koryvantes. Would you explain what you mean by multidimensional imaging?

In 1980s, Osprey Publishing launched a very interesting commercial approach with their Military History series books. Based on academic (mainly) work, they continuously publish a series of books on armies of antiquity. Osprey use high quality paintings and drawings to represent ancient warriors and access a worldwide audience that is looking to educate itself in this area.

http://www.ospreypublishing.com/ancient_world/

We fully appreciate this work, we can say that it has tremendously inspired what we call today "amateur re-enactors" worldwide. Their quality work, as well as their methodology, has inspired our directions also.

The Osprey Military History series is based mainly on 2D paintings which represent the technology of the 1980's. Our work advances the same concepts (visualization of archaeological findings, academic accreditation, and historical accuracy) using real-life 3D representations and expands to digital multimedia dimensions. For example, a Classical-Era Hoplite presented to a live audience at archaeology festivals, is used for academic work by our members, creates quality photo assets to be used for museum publishing (the work of Mr Andreas Smaragdis) or decoration, is used by artists to create historically accurate electronic games visualizations and is used to enhance music video clips, et cetera. We call this effect "multi-dimensional imaging", referring both to 3D versus 2D representations, but also to the multi-channelling approach of reaching the "end consumers" by using digital technology.

A key aspect here is the creation of unique Intellectual Property; this is the main difference between our Association and the majority of the "amateur re-enactors" community. Copying the (influential) 2D work of Osprey paintings to 3D real-life is not what most do.

As an example: We have created our own influential "images" on how the Classical Greek Hoplite looked, in contrast to the stereotypes that Osprey had established. The Osprey universe mainly showed Greek Hoplites in white uniform, something with no scientific basis. The white colour may represent the idealistic view of the English scholars in Classical Greece, but not reality. We jokingly call the Osprey white Hoplites "StarWars Storm troopers".

I attach some examples of Osprey work and the stereotypes:

http://www.ospreypublishing.com/store/Greek-Hoplite-480%E2%80%9393323-BC_9781855328679

<http://www.4hoplites.com/Hoplites.htm>

Our work has created a completely different result, as you can see in the work of Mr Smaragdis <https://www.flickr.com/photos/koryvantes/sets/72157632647695845/>

It is also now recognised worldwide as a prime example of the reconstruction of ancient Greek armours and as a unique example of an organization that does a systematic in-depth study by experimentation of equipment and battle tactics.

<http://koryvantes.blogspot.gr/2014/07/reference-of-koryvantes-work-in-book.html>

The Association is engaged in disseminating the knowledge it has researched on the historical period in a form of interactive learning. How did the idea of electronic games come about? In which form can Koryvantes contribute to the production of electronic games (is it more the practical experience in re-enacting, in experiments, or rather historical research results)?

We were approached by electronic games communities that create "skins" (the images of warriors) in games like Total War. We played both a "consulting" role in designing the game roleplaying but also provided them (for free) images of our work on armour and shield emblems. At least now in some electronic games Greek units are represented with correct emblems, armour and tactics.

Do you have a certain target group to address through interactive learning (are you considering offering adult education (for the general public) besides educating the younger generations?)?

There are no resources for adult education for the general public, nor is it one of our targets; we focus on specialized audiences with a real interest in military history.

Anyway, with the internet, people can educate themselves easily. It is a matter of clicks on their PC. I feel that traditional methods of mass education have more to do with State interests than personal interests.

How open or receptive are Greek museums/ cultural organizations to your educational programs? The association has consciously chosen to operate in an international context (participating at archaeological conferences, symposiums, international archery contests). How does your international 'carrier' reflect (influence) upon the national recognition of Koryvantes, and generally on the recognition of historical re-enactment (of ancient warfare)?

Greek Museums are generally out of our reach, they are closed for us. They are operated by archaeologists, who serve the scientific part very well, but totally miss the marketing aspect. After many years collaborating with international museums, it is the first time that we have planned some activity on our work in Mycenaean armour this year with the Museum of Lamia.

Please keep in mind that contemporary Greek society prefers to promote a non-militaristic profile, this has to do with the political environment of last few decades, so we do not fit well in this context.

The Association is a 'modern' 21st Century 'prototype' of a self-supporting cultural organization, according to a conscious concept specializing in guaranteed quality work, and communications to outside parties of its (Public Relations; this also concerns communications towards academics) historical studies and re-enactments.

"The country's general public maintains at all times an interest and financially supports projects whenever these are properly communicated."

(Quotation from Koryvantes Association website) Proper communication remains a sensitive point, when seeking financial support for projects (concerning the past), especially in contemporary profit oriented societies. How can you convince the general public about the essence/importance of your work?

A key principle for re-enactment associations in order to get finance from the State is to match their work with the interests and the agenda of the State. If an association promotes areas that match the current political environment of their society, then there is room for financing. It is very difficult in current economies to get finance without an immediate return for them.

If I make an analogy with our society in Greece, Byzantine and contemporary re-enactment (church, national events) is heavily subsidized; Ancient Greece is out of focus for the modern Greek State, thus there is no room for financing.

It is an interesting thought that we do get financing from other countries (Turkey, Poland, France, and Serbia) to show our work, so they see value in collaborating with us.

European Union Institutions do finance cultural activities, but bureaucracy is complex and associated costs to access the finance are extremely high. Small associations like us, lack the necessary means (structure, resources) to pursue and access this funding.

The Hellenic cultural heritage, especially since the second half of the 21st Century, has been considered as a universal cultural heritage of mankind. It seems logical, that a Greek association of historical studies is engaged in clearing up the clichés around hoplite warfare, while also introducing archaic and classic hoplite warfare, and less known periods of Greek history: the Mycenaean weaponry and armour in the 2nd millennium BC, and the Byzantine Bandon.

Yes, we started with Archaic/Classical eras with sound results, now we are currently working on completing our Mycenaean armour collection. The first presentation of our work will be in the Viminacium Museum (Serbia) in September.

Byzantine Bandon is a future project, pending financing and time.

"The suggestion that the Parthenon sculptures be removed from the British Museum and sent to Athens is not new. After the fall of the military dictatorship in 1974, the Parthenon sculptures began to take on a new role as a symbol of the revived democracy and from 1982 were championed by the late Melina Mercouri as Greek Minister of Culture. Ever since, the return of the Parthenon sculptures from London has been a feature of Greek Government policy, both nationally and internationally.

http://www.britishmuseum.org/about_us/news_and_press/statements/parthenon_sculptures/facts_and_figures.aspx

This case is just an example of "conquered" national heritage stationed in museum collections in Vienna, Berlin, Paris or London, but the question still remains very current, and concerning not purely the material form of national heritage, but as you mentioned, the intellectual property as well. National heritage can be best understood in a national context, or are there no boundaries in scientific experiments and the understanding of different cultures? (For a contemporary human being, is understanding the difference between several cultures easier than understanding, from a contemporary point of view cultures from centuries ago?)

Our contemporary society is based on Intellectual Property; this is a key driver of our civilization. Intellectual Property is a form of "natural resource" in the modern globalized economy.

That is why our Association's focus is on creating IP. In the example you give about the Parthenon sculptures, as well as other art which "migrated" to museums worldwide, Intellectual Property control is indeed the key aspect. Let us not forget that the museum that owns the art owns or can sell all digital rights of its content.


From this point of view, the British Museum does control the IP associated with the Parthenon sculptures. Whether this is ethical or not is a huge subject of discussion; it is more a power game than anything else.

The concepts of Nations/National heritage, as well all associated 'isms' are all social structures that appeared in the 19th century. They have nothing to do with the eras we are studying. So in our opinion we only need a pure scientific and cultural approach in re-enactment.

PHOTO BY ANDREAS SMARAGDIS

Link(s)

[Association KORYVANTES Photoshoot by ANDREAS SMARAGDIS at Flickr](#)

 **Keywords** [living history](#)
[war](#)
[army](#)

 **Country** [Greece](#)

Share This Page

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

| Corresponding Author

Márta Pócza

Independent researcher

Address withheld by the editors (GDPR)

Hungary

[E-mail Contact](#)