



In June 2016, a conference was held in London to address the challenges of Greek-language teaching.

## FROM GORILLAS TO TALKING VASES

**Arlene Holmes-Henderson**

*looks at the diverse range of initiatives being used to help Classical Greek flourish in schools*

There are approximately 4,000 state-funded secondary schools in the UK. Fewer than 20 currently offer students the opportunity to learn Classical Greek. The majority of the 1,300 students who sit GCSE Greek each year come from independent schools. Of the 250 students who sit AS- and A2-level Greek, 99% come from fee-paying schools. These tiny numbers give cause for concern regarding the future viability of Greek qualifications in the UK – so what can be done?

In June, the Ambassador of the Hellenic Republic to the UK, Konstantinos Bikas, and the Classics in Communities project (a partnership between the University of Oxford, University of Cambridge and the Iris Project) hosted a conference at the Hellenic Centre in London. The aim was to address some of the challenges facing the

teaching of Greek language and culture in the UK. Supported by the A.G. Leventis Foundation and the National Network for Collaborative Outreach, the conference brought together a variety of teachers, committees and associations to discuss the current availability of Greek across education sectors, with the mission to develop an action plan for its survival and growth.

### **Policy support for Greek in primary schools**

We have reason to be hopeful. Since September 2014, ancient Greek has been listed in the primary national curriculum as a language suitable for study by children aged 7–11 years old. This means that primary schools in England can now teach ancient Greek as their 'foreign language'. This curricular reform offers an unrivalled (policy-supported) oppor-

tunity to enthuse pupils at a young age. Progress is hindered, however, by a lack of specialist teachers and age-appropriate resources. The Classics in Communities project is working hard to deliver teacher training and, in collaboration with others, provide appropriately stimulating classroom materials.

### **The study of Greek culture in schools**

The teaching of Greek culture, however, is stronger. Within the primary national curriculum for history in England, all pupils are taught about 'the Greeks' and subjects such as classical civilisation and ancient history are available at GCSE and A-level. Around 3,000 students every year sit exams in ancient history (this number may grow, as ancient history now counts towards the English Baccalaureate

qualification) and around 13,500 choose to do so for classical civilisation. Although the numbers taking these individual subjects fluctuate, the overall picture is positive. There are four exam boards which offer assessment in classical Greek culture: OCR, AQA, the Scottish Qualifications Authority and the International Baccalaureate. With more effective and supported transition between the study of the Greeks in primary schools and the teaching of history/drama/philosophy/citizenship in secondary schools, there exists an opportunity to expand access to the study of the Greeks in translation. Edith Hall at King's College London and I are currently working on a new project which aims to do just this.

#### Uniting stakeholders

The conference allowed diversely positioned individuals and organizations to share experiences and ideas.

I summarized the research (into what impact learning Classical Greek has on children's cognitive development) and teacher training being undertaken by the Classics in Communities project. Caroline Bristow outlined what the exam board OCR is doing, and can do in the future, to support teachers and learners in schools. Cressida Ryan, lecturer in Theology at the University of Oxford, considered the learning and teaching landscape of New Testament Greek in higher education. Rachel and Roger Larkinson from the Methodist Church UK provided an update on Greek courses in theological colleges. Kathryn Tempest, senior lecturer at the University of Roehampton, and Outreach Officer for the Classical Association, spoke of the support the Classical Association is giving to teachers in schools through conference bursaries, reading competitions and INSET days.

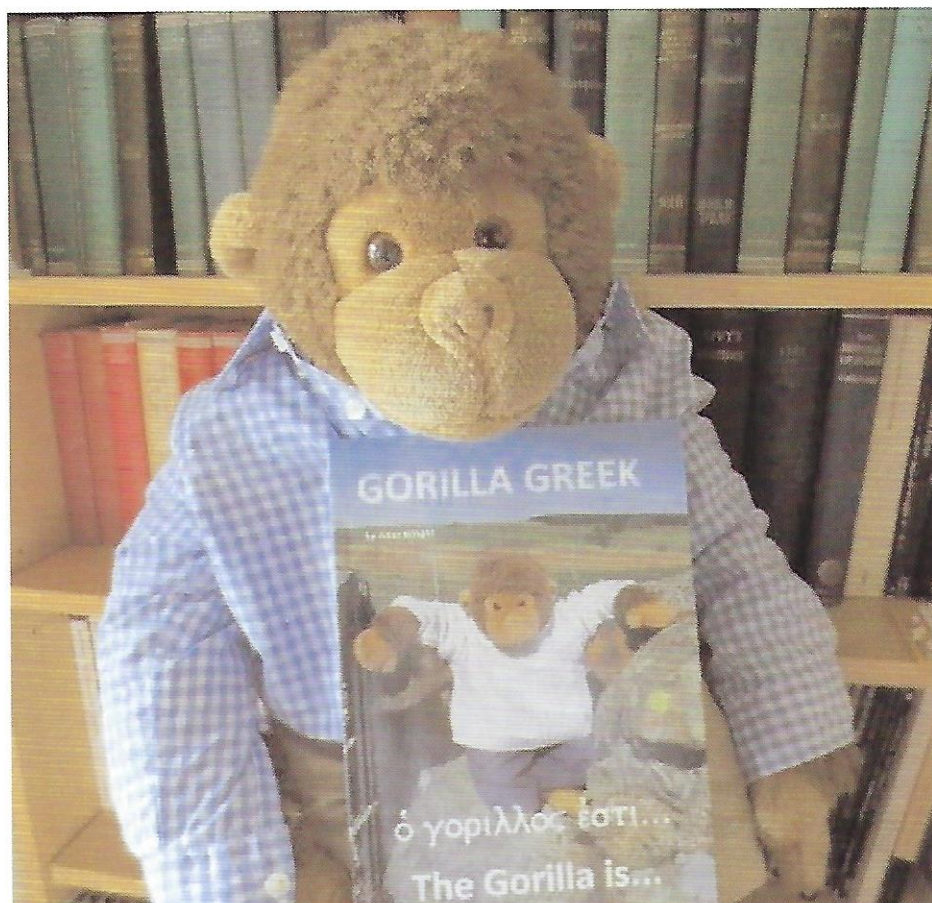
Zetta Theodoropoulou Polychroniadis presented on the involvement of the Greek Archaeological Committee UK, highlighting universities, such as the University of

Sheffield, where pupils can participate in archaeology workshops. She also spoke of the British School at Athens, which has a school-teacher fellowship for research into teaching ancient Greek language and culture, and undergraduate and graduate programmes. Constantine Athanasiadis described the study of modern Greek language at St Sophia's School in London and suggested ways in which members of the Greek community could contribute to educational initiatives in UK schools.

Hilary Hodgson introduced the work of Classics for All, which provides support and funding for teaching ancient Greek in state schools (both primary and secondary). Anne Wright presented *Gorilla Greek*, a book and website that provides an introduction to basic vocabulary and grammar, and points out the strong relationship between ancient Greek and English. Ben Hewitt talked about his teaching of literacy through ancient Greek at Fairstead House Preparatory School in Newmarket.

Henry Cullen spoke about the JACT Greek Summer School at Bryanston, which provides annual courses for beginners, intermediate and advanced learners of ancient Greek. Sarah Brack from Burntwood School in London and Lisa Hay from Hitchin Girls' School in Hertfordshire outlined ways in which Greek can be taught quickly but effectively in state schools. Evelien Bracke gave an update on the Cymru Wales Classics Hub and its efforts to improve access to Greek language and culture education in Wales. Finally, Sonya Nevin presented the Panoply Project, an online animation of ancient Greek vases, which brings ancient history, art and mythology to life.

The sheer number and variety of initiatives showcased at the conference proves how much goodwill and enthusiasm there is for the promotion of ancient Greek language and culture in the UK. Now we must collaborate more effectively to ensure that the efforts of all stakeholders are part of a strategic and collective campaign to widen access to the study of the Greeks.



© Anne Wright

*A key proponent of the Gorilla Greek learning course.*