

Mariupol and King's College London

Greek communities have flourished on the northern shore of the Black Sea for more than two millennia. King's academics have been actively involved in studying and publishing the history of the ancient and medieval settlements: see the *Ancient Inscriptions of the Northern Black Sea* project, <https://iospe.kcl.ac.uk/>

In the later 18th century, Catherine the Great invited Greeks from the Crimea to help bring civic life to the newly conquered territories to the north of the Sea of Azov; their main centre was the new city of Μαριόπολις, City of the Virgin Mary, Mariupol, founded in 1778. During the 19th century the region became increasingly industrialised, not least thanks to the initiatives of a Welsh mine owner, John Hughes, who founded the settlement which is now Donetsk. Mariupol grew as the principal port for the industry; it is also the site of important steel works which have been the main source of the city's prosperity. But they are old Soviet installations, and Mariupol claims the worst pollution in Ukraine. The city is on the Sea of Azov, which is shallow and very polluted. City and industry have been trying to work out how to improve the environment without wrecking the economy.

The whole region saw immigration from many countries and ethnic groups. The Mariupol Greeks, the oldest group, retained their sense of identity, and also, with some difficulty, their language. This goal was given new support in 1991 by the foundation of Mariupol State University (MSU). The Faculty of Greek Philology, specializing in modern Greek language and literature, is one of relatively few departments of Modern Greek outside Greece and Cyprus, of which King's is one of the oldest. The development of the Faculty was encouraged by the A. G. Leventis Foundation, which donated the important Dino Leventis Library of Greek literature. The University was also responding to the needs of the local community in building expertise in environmental studies. In 2006 the Leventis Foundation funded an international conference at the University on environmental regulation, and in 2008 they made a gift to the university to support environmental education. Among other resources they donated video-conferencing equipment in order to foster international relationships



In 2011 MSU held a conference to celebrate their 20th anniversary. With the support of the Leventis Foundation, King's College London was represented by Professor Keith Hoggart, Vice Principal for International Relations, and Professor Charlotte Roueché, Director of the Centre for Hellenic Studies. They were received with great generosity and enthusiasm for collaboration, both from the University and also from the mayor. They signed an initial agreement to collaborate further. On returning to the UK, they started to prepare proposals to collaborate in Modern Greek Studies and also in environmental pollution studies—strong areas at King's.



Further progress was stalled by financial problems in the UK, and by the increasingly difficult political situation in Ukraine. Hoggart and Roueché both retired, and the potential collaboration lay dormant. In 2011 Mariupol was not a name recognised throughout the world. It is to be hoped that, when the city and community come to be rebuilt, King's can find ways to contribute to the academic and intellectual restoration of Mariupol and its University.