

Ancient Studies in the 21st Century:

Challenges and Opportunities

Speaker: Dr James Corke-Webster (King's College London)
Date: Thursday, 1 October 2026
Location: Leiden University, Faculty of Humanities
Huizinga building, Conference room (2.60)
Doelensteeg 16, 2311 VL Leiden

On 1 October 2026, the annual masterclass of the OIKOS research group Late Antiquity and Byzantine Studies will take place, organised by Indira Huliselan (Leiden University) and Kevin Hooegeveen (University of Amsterdam). We are pleased to announce a masterclass by **Dr James Corke-Webster** (King's College London), to be held in Leiden. This event is open to Research Master students and PhD candidates. A theologian and classicist by training, Dr Corke-Webster is a leading scholar in Christian historiography and late antiquity, and currently serves as Head of the Department of Classics at King's College London. He was previously Director of the Centre for Late Antique and Medieval Studies and Director of a broad MA programme in Global Cultures.

What does it mean to study the ancient world in the 21st century – and why does it matter? These are the questions at the heart of this masterclass, which has as subject: **Ancient Studies in the 21st Century: Challenges and Opportunities**. This subject concerns all of us who work with ancient sources, whether texts, inscriptions, coins, art, or landscapes: each speaks a language shaped by power, strategy, and context, and each demands that we reflect on what we bring to it as modern interpreters. Whether your research centres on literary texts or material culture, on the classical world or late antiquity, this day offers a rare opportunity to step back and engage with questions that cut across all of ancient studies: **why does our field matter, how do we work across disciplinary boundaries, and what do ancient sources demand of us as interpreters?**

To guide that reflection, we introduce Dr James Corke-Webster as 'master' for the day. His training and career have taken him through multiple fields, and his research centres on the construction of power through narratives and sources across a wide range of evidence. Moreover, his sustained commitment to the societal relevance of the field, for example through his appearances on BBC Radio 4's *In Our Time*, and the public exhibition *Letters of Refuge* (2022–23), makes him an ideal interlocutor for early-career researchers navigating exactly these challenges.

The day will combine an introductory lecture with interactive small-group workshops centred on thematic prompts: on interdisciplinarity, the societal relevance of ancient studies, and the tension between modern interpretation and ancient rhetoric. In the afternoon, we will visit the National Museum of Antiquities and have a concluding plenary discussion. The programme will culminate in a public lecture by Dr Corke-Webster. Participants can expect an engaging and

thought-provoking experience that explores how narratives and sources function as sites of meaning and power, while also reflecting on the place of the field in wider society.

THREE THEMES FOR THE DAY

- **Theme 1:** Methodology and bias: modern interpretation and ancient rhetoric
- **Theme 2:** Interdisciplinarity: a one-person job or call for cooperation?
- **Theme 3:** Ancient Studies and society: relevance beyond academia

PROGRAMME

10:00–11:00 Introduction by Dr James Corke-Webster

11:00–12:30 Small-group workshop sessions. Participants rotate between themes approximately every thirty minutes.

12:30–13:15 Lunch break (all are free to arrange their own lunches)

13:15–14:15 Visit to the National Museum of Antiquities (5-minute walk from Leiden University), focusing on questions of representation: how is our field presented to wider audiences today? Bring your Museumkaart, ICOM pass, or another means of paying the entrance fee.

14:30–15:30 Plenary session in which groups reflect on and present their assignments.

16:00–17:00 Public lecture by Dr James Corke-Webster (open to the public, in the National Museum of Antiquities)

OIKOS credits

Graduate students and PhD candidates of OIKOS who successfully participate in the masterclass will be awarded 2 ECTS and receive a certificate. Participants can earn an additional credit by submitting a 1000-word essay that reflects on the masterclass and connects it to their research. If you want to acquire this additional credit, please mention this in your registration email.

Registration

All interested members are invited to register by sending an email to Kevin Hoogeveen (k.m.w.hoogeveen@uva.nl), with the subject line: 'OIKOS Masterclass 2026'. Please include if you are a research master's or PhD student, your university, research topic, and, if applicable, if you want to earn extra credit by submitting an essay.

The masterclass is generously sponsored by the OIKOS Research Group Late Antiquity and Byzantine Studies.