

Materiality and Historical Research

With the support of the

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Schedule

13:00-13:15 Opening Miriam Müller (Leiden-Birmingham Collaboration Project) & organizers Cameron Heagney (Leiden-Birmingham Fellow) and Geert Ham (Ancient History)

13:15-13:40 Cameron Heagney – Beyond Reading: Psalms and Things in Byzantine Egypt

13:40-14:05 Geert Ham – The Material is the Message: Stone in a Ptolemaic Inscription from Thebes

14:05-14:30 Anisa Nuranisa – Gift-exchange between Javanese and Dutch in Colonial Indonesia

14:30-15:00 Coffee & Refreshments

15:00-15:25 Mink van IJzendorp – Why Things End: Studies on the Disappearance of the Amphora Phenomenon

15:25-15:50 Arnau Lario Devesa – “Let Me See this Scale!”: Market Related Objects as a Source for the Understanding of Commercial Interactions in Roman Cities from Hispania

15:50-16:15 Despina Borcea – Materiality in Papyrology: An Overview

16:15-17:00 Final discussion of themes and materials

17:00-18:00 Reception

Participants' abstracts

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Fund**

Leiden University

Monday 20th April 2026, 13:00-17:00

Herta Mohr

HMO 1.30 (KITLV seminar room)



**Universiteit
Leiden**



**UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM**

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Cameron Heagney Leiden-Birmingham Fellow	cjh546@student.bham.ac.uk	Centre for Byzantine, Ottoman, and Modern Greek Studies (University of Birmingham)

Beyond Reading: Psalms and Things in Byzantine Egypt

The biblical Psalms form a corpus of hymns that Christians read, and continue to read, across different contexts in Egypt. Like we may be most familiar with them, the Psalms were read from psalters and sung during services in liturgical contexts in Byzantine Egypt. However, the Psalms were also engaged with outside of settings that we, as literate and Protestant-normative moderns, might have initially considered.

This presentation considers the present, intimate, and personal encounters with Psalms that Egyptians had in Byzantine Egypt through material objects. Papyri amulets, ostraca, and textiles, when removed from traditional art-historical and philological discourses, have the potential to reveal more about how materiality played a part in the Christian lives of the Egyptian laity. Interpretation of these objects—in particular, their material properties—can illuminate the specific, embodied ways in which Egyptians chose to encounter biblical figures, allegories, and ideas.

Geert Ham	g.a.ham@hum.leidenuniv.nl	Institute for History (Leiden University)
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The Material is the Message: Stone in a Ptolemaic Inscription from Thebes

In this paper, I will discuss *CPI* II 383, a fragmented second-century BCE Greek inscription which once belonged to a trilingual decree set up in Egyptian Thebes. Although previous scholars have mainly been interested in dating the text, or in linking it to a specific Ptolemaic king, I instead mean to take a closer look at the final lines of the text, where it gives stipulations for the erection of statues of the ruling couple. The specification that these were to be made from “black stone” is intriguing and unique in Greek epigraphy. I will argue that this specification served to construct and reinforce a connection between the ruling couple and the positive associations of the colour black in Pharaonic Egypt, namely with natural renewal and the god Osiris; and that this connection was likely inspired by political and religious conditions in Upper Egypt at that time.

Anisa Nuranisa

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Gift-exchange between Javanese and Dutch in Colonial Indonesia

Diplomatic connections between the Javanese court and the Dutch colonial government, and to an extent the Dutch monarchy, during colonial Indonesia was displayed, among other ways, through the practice of gift-exchange. Such a practice was already apparent from their initial relations in the early seventeenth century. Despite the shifting balance of power that became prominent following the Java War (1825-30), during which deep-seated colonial interference increasingly penetrated into the Javanese courts, this practice of exchanging gifts continued to exist.

One could expect, for example, the presentation of *krises* (stabbing knives), from Javanese kings and princes as a customary gift on occasions such as life-cycle rituals and court visits. During the voyage of Prince Hendry, the grandson of King William I, to the Archipelago in 1837, he was presented with four *krises*, among other luxurious objects, by the Sultan of Yogyakarta. Fast-forward six decades later, at the investiture of Queen Wilhelmina in 1898, Prince Ario Mataram, on behalf of the Sunan of Surakarta, personally presented to the Dutch queen two beautifully crafted *krises* alongside the life-size portraits of the Susuhunan and his queen consort. The gifting of portraits became apparent only towards the end of the nineteenth century, with the advent of photography innovations.

It is evident that the selections of objects as gifts conveys to us not only the value of the gifts themselves but, more importantly, the symbolic meanings embedded in those objects. This talk specifically centers on gift-giving and objects used as gifts against the backdrop of Javanese-Dutch relations in the nineteenth century, a period in which Javanese kings and princes increasingly found themselves needing to continue legitimizing their authority vis-à-vis the Dutch colonial government.

Mink van IJendoorn

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Why Things End: Studies on the Disappearance of the Amphora Phenomenon

This research concerns the disappearance of transport amphorae. I investigate modes of containerisation, which were immensely consequential. The exchange and consumption of foodstuffs are strongly influenced by the material properties of their containers. Containers affect the possibilities for preserving, packaging and shipping goods. Whether people stick with familiar containers or accept new ones is a vital economic trade-off.

In the long history of amphorae, there is consistency within diversity: amphorae from different periods and regions do not seem alike. Yet all share core morphological features, revealing remarkable coherence in ergonomic

affordance, content protection and communicating value. This problematises strict chronological, geographical and cultural boundaries prevalent in amphora studies, hindering long-term, global understandings of what, in essence, was one persistent and distinctive phenomenon in Mediterranean containerisation.

I examine why some communities continued to use amphorae, whereas others innovated (e.g. adopting barrels). My approach goes beyond fixed typologies and explores relationships between containers and humans as co-constituting economic realities.

Arnau Lario Devesa

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“Let Me See this Scale!”: Market Related Objects as a Source for the Understanding of Commercial Interactions in Roman Cities from Hispania

In archaeology, material culture is everything. This is particularly true in the field of urban economy, a subject which seldom attracted the interest of ancient authors, more focused in other subjects such as philosophy, agriculture, or the great deeds of their aristocratic ancestors. In this presentation, focusing mainly on the case studies of Baelo Claudia, Complutum, and Ituci, I will show how objects, paired with literary references, can tell intimate stories of average people, the ones that are often invisible due to the lack of written evidence: a scale weight that does not follow official regulations speaks of a fraudulent merchant; animal bones in a gutter show a nearby busy butcher’s shop; and some serrated bones underscore the close, symbiotic collaboration among professionals. Together, they paint the image of a busy local market, full of workers and clients moving around, in a city long dead but brought back to life by looking closely at the material record.

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Materiality in Papyrology: An Overview

Materiality in the sphere of papyrology has received increasing scholarly attention in the past decade, not least with the discovery and improvement of new digital ways of engaging with the recovery of papyri as illustrated, for example, by the advanced imaging techniques used in the virtual unravelling of the Herculaneum scrolls. This paper will offer an overview of these recent digital techniques, as well as traditional papyrological reconstruction methods applied to both literary and documentary examples to illustrate how engaging with the materiality of papyri may aid in the reconstruction and deeper understanding of texts.