

Workshop Program

International Workshop: Wills and Succession in the Ancient World: Comparative Approaches to Testamentary Law

Ulrike Babusiaux (Zurich)
6th–8th of October 2026 in Zurich Zentrum

General description:

The workshop aims to create new insights in the law of succession in the ancient world by bringing together experts of Hellenistic and rabbinic Judaism, ancient Near Eastern, Greek and Roman law. As the field of testamentary succession has attracted renewed scholarly interest in recent years, original research of the researchers involved has begun to challenge long-held assumptions about the absence of meaningful connections between these traditions.

The workshop is thus intended as an opportunity to bring together experts working on the intersection of these traditions to explore this emerging line of inquiry and to promote innovative insights in the field of ancient inheritance law. The following key questions will be examined through direct engagement with primary sources:

- (1) What is the significance of the terminological and conceptual overlap between the Greek *diatheke* and the Roman *testamentum*, and the notions of testamentary succession in the various traditions of the Roman world? What is the relationship between these terms as religious concepts and the legal institution of testamentary inheritance?
- (2) What role does testamentary law play in relation to statutory succession? Is testamentary disposition of inheritance permitted and, if so, under what conditions and limitations – for instance, rules on disinheritance or compulsory portions? How is the testament (or any other means of private, autonomous disposition over the estate) structured? Is it conceived as a specific type of legal act? Are there particular formal requirements, the observance of which is necessary for the testament to have legal effect?
- (3) How can the testament be situated within the broader framework of private law? What connections exist between the testament and *inter vivos* legal transactions (such as purpose-specific dispositions, contracts, or family law acts like adoption and kinship)? Is the testator's freedom of disposition conceptualized or otherwise discernible? What forms of legal bypasses (of norms or restrictions) can be identified in testamentary law? What do such practices reveal about the origins, conceptual understanding, and legal significance of the testament?

A total of 20 participants will attend the workshop, including the organizer and eight junior researchers. The role of each participant is twofold: they will first contribute to a general introduction to notions of testamentary succession in the different legal traditions under analysis (question 1 above), before presenting a specific paper intended to address one of the key questions (2 and 3 above).

The workshop is intended to be open to researchers from all fields willing to participate as discussants.

If you intend to participate in the workshop or in some parts of it, please contact:

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Tuesday, 6th of October 2026

Room: KOL-E-13 (Senatszimmer)

Timeslot	Participant	Title/Content of Presentation
12:00	All	Gathering and Reception with Lunch Buffet in Room: KOL-E-12
Introduction to Ancient Legal Traditions (with Source Texts)		
13:00–13:30	Ulrike Babusiaux	Comparative remarks and Introduction
13:30–14:00	Sophie Démare-Lafont/ Guido Pfeifer	The Ancient Near Eastern Tradition
14:00–14:30	Luuk De Boer/ Lene Rubinstein	Oratory and Non-Legal Sources of Antiquity
14:30–15:00	Philipp Scheibelreiter	Ancient Greek Legal Traditions
15:00–15:30	<i>Coffee Break</i>	
15:30–16:00	Lisa Isola/ Constantin Willems	Roman Law
16:00–16:30	Orit Malka/ Yakir Paz	Rabbinic Law
16:30–17:30	Noémie Benchimol	Using Comparative Anthropology to Map Inheritance and Testamentary Strategies in Antiquity
17:30–18:30	Orit Malka	Legal Bypasses as a Common Feature of Ancient Inheritance Law

KOL-E-13/KOL-E-12:

The rooms are located in the Main Building of the University (Kollegiengebäude), Rämistrasse 71, 8006 Zurich.

KOL = building, E = level/floor, 13/12 = room numbers

Link to room: [KOL-E-13](#)

Wednesday, 7th of October 2026

Room: KOL-E-13 (Senatszimmer)

Timeslot	Participant	Title/Content of Presentation
Wills and Inter Vivos Transactions		
09:00–10:00	Sophie Démare-La-font	Jacob and Inanna-mansum. A Comparative Approach to Testamentary Law and Birthright
10:00–11:00	Lene Rubinstein	Bequest Through Consecration: Complements and Alternatives to Testaments in the Hellenistic Greek World
11:00–11:30	<i>Coffee Break</i>	
11:30–12:30	Guido Pfeifer	The Sale Adoption Texts from Nuzi and Their References to the Law of Succession
12:30–13:30	<i>Lunch in Room: KOL-E-12</i>	
13:30–14:30	Jules Jallet-Martini	Care and Inheritance: Maintenance Clauses in the 2nd Millennium Mesopotamia
14:30–15:30	Ulrike Babusiaux	Donations and Legacies in Roman Law – Two Sides of the Same Coin?
15:30–16:00	<i>Coffee Break</i>	
16:00–17:00	Yakir Paz	The Sages of the Gentiles: The Inheritance of the Daughter in the Collatio and Rabbinic Literature
17:00–18:00	Shlomo Zemach	Archiving Wills and Manumissions in Roman Palestine: Contextualizing Tosefta Bava Batra 8:2-3

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Link to room: [KOL-E-13](#)

Thursday, 8th of October 2026

Room: KOL-G-212

Timeslot	Participant	Title/Content of Presentation
Testamentary Law and Statutory Succession		
08:30–09:30	Luuk De Boer	The Abstract King: Hellenistic Royal Wills and the Immortal State
09:30–10:30	Philipp Scheibelreiter	The Wills of Demosthenes the Elder and Pasion
10:30–11:00	<i>Coffee Break</i>	
11:00–12:00	Lisa Isola	The <i>querela inofficiosi testamenti</i> in the Context of Wills Made by Women
12:00–13:00	Constantin Willems	<i>Testamenti factio</i> and Christian Orthodoxy in Late Antique Roman Imperial Legislation
13:00–14:00	<i>Lunch in Lichthof Süd (KOL-D-49)</i>	
14:00–14:30	All	Final Discussion and Closing Remarks

KOL-G-212:

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KOL = building, G = level/floor, 212= room number

Link to room: [KOL-G-212](#)

Lichthof Süd (KOL-D-49):

The room is located in the Main Building of the University (Kollegiengebäude), Rämistrasse 71, 8006 Zurich.

KOL = building, D = level/floor, 49 = room number

Link to Lichthof: [Lichthof KOL-D-49](#)