



Call for Papers:

***Family Matters - Family Letters.
Latin Epistolography between literary readings and social
history***

International Early Career Workshop,
organised by Katharina Blaas (Tübingen) & Dr. Lisa Eberle (Tübingen/Edinburgh)
Tübingen, July 2-3, 2026

In the last two decades, ancient letters, Latin *epistulae* in particular, have been the subject of a rising number of studies, many of them focussing on their literary qualities, both as self-contained texts and in the context of larger letter collections. One of the distinct features of letters as literary genres is the prominent role that the author's family members play in them. Just consider Cicero's affectionate letters to his wife and daughters in ad fam. 14, his intense exchanges with Tiro in ad fam. 16, or Pliny's letter to his father-in-law about his wife's miscarriage (8.10). And yet, scholars of ancient epistolography have so far failed to undertake sustained treatments of the interrelation of family and epistolography in the extant body of ancient letters, and while historians of families in the Roman world do use letters in their analyses, they do so without much awareness of the specificities of letter writing and collections as genre and cultural tradition in the Roman world.

The aim of this conference is to bridge this gap. We propose to investigate concepts and representations of family in Latin letter collections in ways that contribute to the fruitful field of studies in epistolography while also tying our discussion to broader questions of social history. From a literary point of view, we will investigate literary representations and narrativisations of familial relations in letters and ask how concepts of family shaped their production, collection, edition and publication. From a historical angle, we will discuss the peculiarities of the genre as regards its value as a source for social history and explore conclusions that might (or might not) be drawn from them.

We invite mainly PhD students and early career researchers in the relevant fields to explore these dynamics regarding all Latin letter collections extant from antiquity; questions may include, but are certainly not limited to the following:

- How are familial relations portrayed in letter collections from a literary and/or linguistic point of view?
- How conventional and/or individual are these portrayals?
- What do representations of enslaved household members look like and how do they specifically differ from others?
- Is there a distinct tone, style, or terminology authors apply when writing to/about their family members as opposed to non-related correspondents?
- What position and function do letters to (or about) family members have in the collections?
- To what extent is there a "tradition" of family letters in Latin epistolography?
- What do specific qualities of letter collections and their conditions of production mean for their value as a source for family history?
- What might literary perspectives on letters add to our understanding of family dynamics in the Roman world?

Since this workshop is conceived as a first step in the exploration of specific interrelations of familial relations and letter collections, we would like to keep the discussion as open as possible and aim to bring together a broad range of subjects, methods, periods and authors, to get as broad an overview as possible. Correspondingly, we understand 'family' as a broad concept that includes kinship (biological as well as adoptive relations), but also other types of relationships subsumed under a typical Roman household, especially slaves.

We invite abstracts of around 300 words and an additional short biography for each researcher by September 12 2025 (please address to katharina.blaas@uni-tuebingen.de and lisa.eberle@uni-tuebingen.de). We envision 30 minute papers + 15 minutes of discussion each. If you are unsure if you still count as an 'early career academic' from the German perspective, do get in touch! We are in the process of applying for funding to cover the cost of travel and accommodation for speakers. Confirmed speakers include Catharine Edwards (Birkbeck), Angela Ganter (Regensburg), Roy K. Gibson (Durham).

Feel free to contact us if you have any questions!

Kind regards,
Katharina & Lisa