MEDIEVAL STUDIES 119:
CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL HISTORY OF MEDIEVAL CONTINENTAL EUROPE
Tentative Syllabus and Assignments
Spring, 2013

Prof. Donahue
Ms. Schlozman

Requirements. There are four requirements for credit in the course: (1) a one-paragraph summary of the readings for each section turned in at the beginning of each section; (2) a short paper (no more than five double-spaced typed pages exclusive of notes); (3) an hour exam (Fri., Mar. 15); (4) a final exam (‘take-home’). (We will consider allowing students to write a term paper in lieu of taking the final exam. More about this below under “papers.”)

Meeting times. This course is also listed as Law 42100A. The FAS students will meet together with the law students for lectures on Mondays and Wednesdays from 11:10 to 12:00 (Room Sever 102). The law students and FAS graduate students will meet for “Section” on Tuesdays from 10:40 to 12:00 in the Law School (Room WCC 3018). There is a separate section for the undergraduates (time and place to be arranged; it’s listed below as if it were on Thursdays) and a separate “discussion class” for the undergraduates on Fridays from 11:10 to 12:00 (Room Sever 102). By and large, Ms. Schlozman will lead the section and Prof. Donahue the discussion class, but in some weeks the reverse will be the case.

Prerequisites. None. See below under “Background.”

Work load. For a history course, the reading load is fairly light, but much of it is documentary material, and is thus relatively slow going. Give priority to the documentary materials. Almost all classes have documentary assignments, and those which do will devote a considerable amount of time to the documents. You’ll be lost if haven’t read them in advance. This is why we have both a section (Thursdays) and a “discussion class” on Fridays, both without the law students. You should bring the multilithed Documents (see below under “Readings”) with you to every class.

The key to keeping up with this course is preparation for each class, particularly with the documents, and attendance at classes and sections. Much of our time in class will be spent discussing the documents. When we have previously given this course, we have noted that students who read the documents and attended classes did well, even if they hadn’t done all the secondary reading.

The Course. This course is an attempt to discover how the distinctive features of the “civil” law of the European Continent arose and why these distinctions persisted. It is also an attempt to discover how the legal systems of Continental Europe developed and were influenced by a group of ideas about politics and public order that are frequently invoked today when we speak of the “Western legal tradition.” In order to do this we have to conduct a “Cook’s tour” of European legal history, to survey the sources and literature of the law from the fall of Rome (roughly 500 A.D.) to the emergence of the “natural law school” in the 17th century. That gives the course something of the quality of “if-this-is-Tuesday-it-must-be-Belgium.” We have attempted to give focus to the course by emphasizing three topics, the capture of wild animals as the foundation of “property,” the formation of marriage, and the rules about the use of witnesses in criminal and civil procedure. We wish there were a more strictly public-law topic that we could use as well, but no public-law topic has deep enough roots to allow us to trace it over this long period of time. Hence our examination of public law will have to come about as we unfold the history of institutions within which the law operated. We focus on France. We will also deal with Germany, Italy, Spain and the Low Countries, but France give us the backbone, while the other areas give us examples (as does England by way both of comparison and contrast). The rest of the European Continent will get only an occasional mention.
We will proceed largely by way of lecture, interspersed with examination of documents that are contained in *Documents*. These documents will largely carry the story of wild animals, marriage and witnesses. In each period we will ask two questions: (1) how does the way people were thinking about law in this period proceed from what had gone before and lead to what was to come next (a largely diachronic question)? And (2) how was the way that people were thinking about law in this period relate to the broader political, social and intellectual developments in the period (a largely synchronic question)? The ultimate question is comparative: why did Continental law develop its distinctive features?

**Background.** No one (including the instructors) comes to a course like this with all the necessary background information. We will try to say everything that we think you need to know to make sense out of what is going on, and so, we will assume that you do not have any of the relevant background. On the other hand, in a survey course as broad as this one, we can say things only once. For this reason, we would suggest, particularly if you have not taken a course in medieval and/or early modern European history, that you read a good textbook on one or both of these topics. In the past we have asked the Coop to stock H. G. Koenigsberger’s, *Medieval Europe, 400–1500* (1987) and the same author’s, *Early Modern Europe, 1500–1789* (1987). The books are now out of print, but second hand copies are readily available. Both books are a relatively quick read, particularly if you’re not trying to memorize kings and battles and dates. We have included the page numbers below at the relevant spots enclosed in square brackets at the end of the assignment.

If you have taken a medieval and/or early modern European legal history course someplace else or if you have had a European history course that devoted some time to legal development in the same periods, you probably should not take this course. There is a graduate reading course this semester (History 2080, formerly History 2126) for which you may be ready.

**Readings.** There is, unfortunately, no really good textbook in English of European legal history. In the past we asked the students to buy either Manlio Bellomo’s, *The Common Legal Past of Europe: 1000–1800* or Raoul van Caenegem’s *An Historical Introduction to Private Law*. Previous course evaluations suggested that the students found van Caenegem more helpful than Bellomo. Hence, that is the book that we are asking you buy this year. Neither Bellomo nor van Caenegem is really a textbook. Probably the best textbook in English is Robinson, Fergus and Gordon, *An Introduction to European Legal History* (2d ed., 1994) [RFG2]. (There’s a third edition of RFG2 [RFG3], which is shorter and focuses more on the later period. It is available only in the Law School, where it’s on permanent reserve.1) As an alternative, we have also listed below readings in three other books. One of them is a classic: Paul Vinogradoff’s, *Roman Law in Medieval Europe*. Two others are relatively new and controversial, Alan Watson’s, *The Making of the Civil Law* and Harold Berman’s *Law and Revolution*. Pdf copies of the extracts from Bellomo, van Caenegem, Vinogradoff, Watson, and Berman are found under ‘lectures’ on the website. They are also available in ‘course-pack’ form on reserve in the Law School.

By and large, we think that the books other than RFG do a better job of covering the topics to which they refer than does RFG. On the other hand, some people really like a text book, and none of the books extracted is a text book, though Bellomo and van Caenegem come close. You should read either RFG or the extracts from the other books for class, and you might want to read what you haven’t read when you’re reviewing the course for the exam.

The multilithed *Documents*2 contains, as the name implies, a number of documents, legal sources in translation. These vary greatly in the length of their extracts. When they are long, we want you to get a sense

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1 Another textbook, Randall Lesaffer, *European Legal History: A Cultural and Political Perspective* (2009), is also on reserve for the course in the Law School. If you read it, let us know what you think of it. Our initial impression is that it is interesting, but that it doesn’t say enough about the law.

2 Previous editions of this have been called *Outlines and Documents*. We did not include the outlines this year, because they change constantly and are better served up on the web.
for the overall structure; when they are short, you should focus on the detail. The Syllabus contains some
notes as to what is important.

Outlines for most of the classes are posted on the course’s website:
http://www.law.harvard.edu/faculty/cdonahue/courses/CLH/. We will probably be revising these as we go
along, but you should bring them with you to class either in your computer or in paper form. Having this
kind of material already written down saves you time in taking lecture notes.

Papers and Exams. There will be a short paper required for the course. It should be no more than
five double-spaced typed pages exclusive of notes. It may analyze one or a couple of the documents in the
Documents. The basic idea is to present an idea supported by evidence (primary sources please). You may
do the paper any time during the semester. You should have chosen a topic no later than Thursday, March
28. You should turn in your first draft no later than Thursday, April 25. The final draft should be turned in
before the beginning of exam period (Fri., May. 10).

There will be an hour exam for the undergraduates on Friday, March 15. (We will exempt from the
hour exam seniors who are writing bachelor’s essays.) Basically, the hour exam will cover material in the
first 25 assignments. There will be one question, which will almost certainly involve analysis of a document
in Documents.

The final exam (‘take-home’) will be an “open book” exam and will contain two or three questions.
The first will give you a document drawn from the Documents and will ask you to comment on the
document and its significance. The second will call for a more wide-ranging essay. A possible initial
question will ask for some identifications.

If you wish to write a term paper in lieu of the final exam, you must take the hour exam and get our
approval of your term paper topic. The term paper should cover material in at least two of major time
periods of the course (e.g., early medieval and late medieval, or late medieval and early modern). It may
trace the history of a particular idea or institution from one period to another or it may compare ideas and
institutions in two different periods. In order to get our approval of a term-paper topic, you will need to have
completed your short paper and to turn in a one-page statement or outline of what you plan to write about by
Thursday, April 18. Students in the past who have taken the paper option in the past thought that it was fun
but that it involved more work than taking an exam.

Offices. Prof. Donahue’s office is in Hauser 512 in the Law School. His assistant is Ms. Reader in
Hauser 518, and his office hours are from 2:00–4:00 on Tuesdays, or by appointment. An appointment is
usually not necessary for the regularly scheduled office hours, but there is a sign-up sheet on the door of his
office. That sheet will also tell you where his office hours will be held. They probably won’t be in his office.
Ms. Schlozman, who will be teaching most of the sections, will announce her office hours later.

Syllabus. In what follows Bellomo=MANLIO BELLOMO, THE COMMON LEGAL PAST OF EUROPE:
1000–1800 (Washington, DC: Catholic U. Press, 1995); Berman = H. BERMAN, LAW AND REVOLUTION:
THE FORMATION OF THE WESTERN LEGAL TRADITION (Cambridge [MA]: Harvard Press, 1983); K1500 =
H.G. KOENIGSBERGER, MEDIEVAL EUROPE, 400–1500 (Harlow: Longman, 1987); K1789 = H.G.
KOENIGSBERGER, EARLY MODERN EUROPE, 1500–1789 (Harlow: Longman, 1987); Documents = C.
DONAHUE, DOCUMENTS ON CONTINENTAL LEGAL HISTORY (unpublished, first installment available in
class or in Room 518 of Hauser Hall); RFG2 = O. F. ROBINSON, T. D. FERGUS and W. M. GORDON, AN
INTRODUCTION TO EUROPEAN LEGAL HISTORY, 2d ed. (London: Butterworths, 1994); RFG3 = O. F.
ROBINSON, T. D. FERGUS and W. M. GORDON, AN INTRODUCTION TO EUROPEAN LEGAL HISTORY, 3d ed.
(London: Butterworths, 2000); van Caenegem = R. C. van Caenegem, AN HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION TO
PRIVATE LAW (Cambridge [Eng]: U. Cambridge, 1988); Vinogradoff = P. VINOGRAODOFF, ROMAN LAW IN

A calendar follows the syllabus, which allows you to see at a glance the date, title of the class, and
the assignment number.
Week 1


Lecture 2. 2. Reflections on the distinction between “common law” and “civil law” and on what we mean by the “Western legal tradition.” The legacy of the ancient world: Roman law. RFG2 1–10; RFG3 1–11; Watson 1–38. Justinian’s Institutes (Documents, Part I.A). [Focus on the overall structure of Justinian’s Institutes and on the specifics about wild animals and marriage (there’s nothing about witnesses).] How the story came out. (Documents, Part XX). [Ask yourself about the overall structure and the rules about wild animals, marriage and witnesses in the 19th century codifications. Are the different codes more notable for their similarities or their differences?]

Discussion 1. 3. The legacy of the ancient world: Christianity. Paul’s letter to the Romans (Documents, Part II.A).

Week 2

Lecture 3. 4. Two “barbarian” law codes—Aethelberht (Documents, Part III.A). [Ask yourself two questions: (1) What is the overall structure of this material? (2) What, if anything, does it have to say about wild animals, marriage and witnesses?] 

Lecture 4. 5. Two “barbarian” law codes—Gundobad (compared with the Lex romana burgundionum) (Documents, Part III.B). [Same questions as Lecture 3.]

Section 1. 6. The “barbarian” invasions. van Caenegem, 16–29; RFG2 10–23; RFG3 11–25; Vinogradoff 11–42. Aethelberht and Gundobad compared. Documents, Part III.

Discussion 2. 7. Reflections on “fundamental legal categories”: ius vs. lex, public vs. private, criminal vs. civil, persons vs. things vs. actions, property vs. contract vs. delict (tort). Justinian’s Institutes (Documents, Part I.A). [K1500 1–66.]

Week 3

Lecture 5. 8. Carolingian institutions and “feudalism”. Bellomo, 27–43; RFG2 23–70; RFG3 26–41; Documents on Continental feudalism (Documents, Part IV). [K1500 67–135.]


Section 2. 10. Eclectic sources of law: the Bible, Æthelberht and Gundobad, the Collection in 74 Titles (Documents, Parts II.B, III, VI). [Same questions as Lecture 3.]


Week 4

No lecture. Holiday, President’s Day.

(J.I.2.1.12–13, D.41.1.55) (Documents, Part VII).

Section 3.  13. Wild animals in the glossators. (Documents, Part VII).


Week 5

Lecture 9.  16. The revival of academic law study: Romano-canonical procedure. Witnesses (D.22.5, Gratian C.4 q.3, Tancred 3.6) (Documents, Part IX). Read van Caenegem, 30–114 (this is a good overview for the hour exam, though it takes us quite a bit further in time).

Section 4.  17. How do we design a procedural system? Documents, Parts VI and IX.


Week 6

Lecture 11.  20. Coutumiers and fueros. Extracts from the Usatges de Barcelona on witnesses, marriage, and wild animals (Documents Part X.A).

Section 5.  21. How to read a case. Documents, Part XIV.A–B.


Week 7
Lecture 12.  23. Courts and coutumiers in France. Extracts from the coutume of Tourraine-Anjou and from Beaumanoir on witnesses, marriage and marital property, and wild animals (Documents Part X.B, C).

Lecture 13.  24. Political ideas of the 12th and 13th centuries. Extracts from the glossators and early commentators on sovereignty. (Documents Part XI)

Section 6.  25. Usatges and Beaumanoir. Documents, Part X.

Hour exam.  (Will cover Assignments 1–25.)

Spring break.

Week 8

Lecture 15.  27. The commentators. RFG2 100–121; RFG3 59–71, 107–24. Documents, Parts XII and XIII.

Section 7.  28. Law and politics in the 13th century. Documents, Part XI.

Discussion 7.  29. The formation of a persecuting society? Developments in the law of witnesses:
Week 9
Lecture 16. 30. Commentators on wild animals: Bartolus on D.41.1.1, .5 (Documents, Part XIII.A, B); Portius and Faber on J.I.2.2.11–13 (Documents, Part XIII.C–E).

Lecture 17. 31. Courts and case reports—14th through 18th Centuries. Watson 39–52. Decisio S.R.R. (1360 X 1365); Decisio S.R.R. (1574); the Rota Fiorentina (1780) (Gorla article) (Documents, Part XIV.B, C, D, E).

Section 8. 32. Marriage in legal theory and legal practice. Documents, Part XIV. Pay particular attention to Panormitanus, Consilium (15th c.) (Documents Part XIV.C).

Discussion 8. 33. Courts and case reports (cont’d). Decisio S.R.R. (1360 X 1365); Decisio S.R.R. (1574); Panormitanus, Consilia; the Rota Fiorentina (1780) (Gorla article) (Documents, Part XIV.B, D, E).

Week 10
Lecture 18. 34. “Renaissance” Europe—Political, intellectual and constitutional developments. Bellomo 162–73. [K1789 1–94.]


Section 9. 36. Legal humanism. Documents, Part XV. Pithou on the Collatio (Documents, Part XV).


Week 11


Section 10. 40. Compilations, proto-codification, codification. Documents, Parts XVI and XVII.

Discussion 10. 41. The institutes of national law (cont’d). (Documents, Part XVII). Intellectual developments and the law (Lecture outline for Lecture 20)

Week 12

Lecture 23. 43. The academics in action (cont’d). Pufendorf on wild animals (Documents, Part XVIII).

Section 11. 44. The relation between abstract ideas and legal results. Documents, Part XVIII.
Discussion 11. 45. Domat and Pothier. Watson 99–125. Domat on marriage, wild animals, and
witnesses; Pothier on marriage and wild animals (Documents, Part XIX).
(Documents, Part XIX).

Week 13
Lecture 24. 46. Final Lecture. The achievements and failures of the ancien régime. The road to
Section 12. Review. No specific assignment.

CALENDAR
Mon., Jan. 28 = Assignment 1 Introduction to the course. Introduction to Roman law
Wed., Jan. 30 = Assignment 2 The legacy of the ancient world: Roman law. How the story came out
Fri., Feb. 1 = Assignment 3 The legacy of the ancient world: Christianity
Mon., Feb. 4 = Assignment 4 Two “barbarian” law codes—Aethelberht
Wed., Feb. 6 = Assignment 5 Two “barbarian” law codes—Gundobad
Thu., Feb. 7 = Assignment 6 The “barbarian” invasions; Aethelberht and Gundobad compared
Fri., Feb. 8 = Assignment 7 Reflections on “fundamental legal categories”
Mon., Feb. 11 = Assignment 8 Carolingian institutions and “feudalism”
Wed., Feb. 13 = Assignment 9 Eleventh-century reforms and a glimpse at regnum and sacerdotium, to the end of the 13th century. The Collection in 74 Titles
Thu., Feb. 14 = Assignment 10 Eclectic sources of law
Fri., Feb. 15 = Assignment 11 New Testament extracts on marriage
Mon., Feb. 18 = Holiday
Wed., Feb. 20 = Assignment 12 The revival of academic law study: Roman law
Thu., Feb. 21 = Assignment 13 Wild animals in the glossators.
Fri., Feb. 22 = Assignment 14 Marriage in the glossators.
Mon., Feb. 25 = Assignment 15 The institutions of canon law.
Wed., Feb. 27 = Assignment 16 The revival of academic law study: Romano-canonical procedure
Thu., Feb. 28 = Assignment 17 How do we design a procedural system?
Fri., Mar. 1 = Assignment 18 Reform and the “twelfth-century renaissance.”
Mon., Mar. 4 = Assignment 19 Marriage litigation in the High Middle Ages
Wed., Mar. 6 = Assignment 20 Coutumiers and fueros
Thu., Mar. 7 = Assignment 21 How to read a case
Fri., Mar. 8 = Assignment 22 The institutional history of the 12th and 13th centuries
Mon., Mar. 11 = Assignment 23 Courts and coutumiers in France
Wed., Mar. 13 = Assignment 24 Political ideas of the 12th and 13th centuries
Thu., Mar. 14 = Assignment 25 Usatges and Beaumanoir.
Fri., Mar. 15 = Hour exam (Will cover Assignments 1–25)
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<td>Spring Vacation</td>
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<td>Mon., Mar. 25</td>
<td>Assignment 26</td>
<td>The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries—Political and constitutional developments</td>
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<td>Wed., Mar. 27</td>
<td>Assignment 27</td>
<td>The commentators.</td>
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<td>Law and politics in the 13th century.</td>
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<td>The formation of a persecuting society? (Short paper topics must be chosen by this date.)</td>
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<td>Commentators on wild animals</td>
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<td>Fri., Apr. 5</td>
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<td>Courts and case reports (cont’d)</td>
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<td>“Renaissance” Europe—Political, intellectual and constitutional developments</td>
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<td>Homologation of custom and reception</td>
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<td>Humanists, humanism and the law</td>
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<td>Fri., Apr. 12</td>
<td>Assignment 37</td>
<td>Legal humanism (Section will meet in the Root Room of the HLS Library)</td>
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<td>Mon., Apr. 15</td>
<td>Assignment 38</td>
<td>The 17th and 18th centuries—Political, constitutional, and intellectual developments. The <em>Grandes ordonnances</em>.</td>
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<td>Thu., Apr. 18</td>
<td>Assignment 40</td>
<td>Compilations, proto-codification, codification. (Statement of term papers due.)</td>
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<td>Fri., Apr. 19</td>
<td>Assignment 41</td>
<td>The institutes of national law (cont’d). Intellectual developments and the law (cont’d).</td>
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<td>Mon., Apr. 22</td>
<td>Assignment 42</td>
<td>Spanish scholastics, “elegant jurisprudes,” the natural law school, and the <em>usus modernus pandectarum</em>. Pufendorf on wild animals.</td>
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<td>Wed., Apr. 24</td>
<td>Assignment 43</td>
<td>Pufendorf on wild animals (cont’d).</td>
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<td>Thu., Apr. 25</td>
<td>Assignment 44</td>
<td>The relation between abstract ideas and legal results. (Last date for turning in short paper drafts.)</td>
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<td>Wed., May. 1</td>
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<td>Review.</td>
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