MEDIEVAL STUDIES
119:
CONSTITUTIONAL AND
LEGAL
HISTORY OF
MEDIEVAL
CONTINENTAL EUROPE

Tentative Syllabus: Introduction

Professor Donahue
Mr. Straus

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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. 11); (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 6125. The FAS students will meet together with the law students for lectures on Mondays and Wednesdays from 11:10 to 12:00 (Room Sever 202). The law students and FAS graduate students will meet for “Section” on Tuesdays from 10:15 to 11:45 in the Law School (Room WCC 3007). 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 202). By and large, Mr. Straus will lead the section and Prof. Donahue the discussion class, but in some weeks the reverse may 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. Not all classes have documentary assignments, but those which do will devote a considerable amount of time to the documents, and 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 (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.) 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.

1 Another textbook, Randall Lesaffer, *European Legal History: A Cultural and Political Perspective* (2009), is also available 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.

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 textbook, and none of the books extracted is a textbook, 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* contains 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 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 lectures are posted on this website under Lectures.
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.

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.

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 Fri., Mar. 25. You should turn in your first draft no later than Thu., Apr. 21. We will comment on it and return it to you. The final draft should be turned in before the beginning of exam period (Fri., May 6).

There will be an hour exam for the undergraduates on Fri., Mar. 11. (We will exempt from the hour exam seniors who are writing bachelor’s essays.) Basically, the hour exam will cover material in the first 23 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 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 Thu., Apr. 14. 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 503, 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. Mr. Straus, who will be teaching most of the sections, will announce his office hours later.

Tentative Syllabus: Assignments

A calendar follows the syllabus, which allows you to see at a glance the date, title of the class, and the assignment number. To navigate from the syllabus to the calendar click on the lecture, section, or discussion number. To navigate from the calendar to the syllabus click on the assignment number.

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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mon., Jan. 25</td>
<td>Lecture: Introduction to the course. A basic chronology of three legal traditions: Roman, Continental European and English. Introduction to Roman law</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed., Jan. 27</td>
<td>Lecture: The legacy of the ancient world: Roman law. How the story came out. Reflections on what we mean by the “Western legal tradition.” Assignment: Justinian’s Institutes (<em>Documents</em>, 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).] Extracts from 19th century European codes. (<em>Documents</em>, 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?]</td>
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<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Secondary reading: K1500 1–66; RFG2 10–23; RFG3 11–25; van Caenegem, 16–29; Vinogradoff 11–42.</td>
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<td>Mon., Feb. 1</td>
<td>Lecture: Two “Barbarian” Law Codes. Assignment: Aethelberht</td>
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(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?]

Wed., Feb. 3  
Lecture: Two “Barbarian” Law Codes. Assignment: Gundobad (compared with the Lex romana burgundionum) (Documents, Part III.B). [Same questions as Assignment 4.]

Thu., Feb. 4  
Section: The “barbarian” invasions. Aethelberht and Gundobad compared. Assignment: Documents, Part III.

Fri., Feb. 5  
Discussion: 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). Assignment: Justinian’s Institutes (Documents, Part I.A).

Week 3  
Secondary reading: Bellomo, 27–43; RFG2 6–70; Berman 85–119, 273–332; K1500 67–212; RFG3 11–41; van Caenegem, 16–29; Vinogradoff 11–42.

Mon., Feb. 8  
Lecture: Carolingian institutions and “feudalism.” Assignment: Documents on Continental feudalism (Documents, Part IV).

Wed., Feb. 10  
Lecture: Eleventh-century reforms and a glimpse at regnum and sacerdotium, to the end of the 13th century. Assignment: Documents on the investiture controversy (Documents, Part V). The Collection in 74 Titles. (Documents, Part VI). [The key question here is what is the relationship between the basically political arguments that are found in the literature surrounding the investiture controversy and the legal rules (most of which are derived from forged documents) found in the Collection in 74 Titles?]

Thu., Feb. 11  
Section: Eclectic sources of law: the Bible, Æthelberht and Gundobad, the Collection in 74 Titles. Assignment: Documents, Parts II.B, III, VI. [Same questions as Lecture 3.]

Fri., Feb. 12  

Week 4  

Mon., Feb. 15  
Holiday, President’s Day.

Wed., Feb. 17  
Lecture: The revival of academic law study: Roman Law. Assignment: Roman law glossators on wild animals (J.I.2.1.12–13, D.41.1.55) (Documents, Part VII). [We move here from the rather obvious politics of the investiture controversy to something that looks like ‘apolitical’ law. The question is ‘is it’? Try to see how Accursius twisting the Roman text to make it say things that it probably does not say or, at least, does not say so clearly as he does.]

Thu., Feb. 18  
Section: Wild animals in the glossators. Assignment: Documents, Part VII.

Fri., Feb. 19  
Discussion: Marriage in the glossators. Assignment: Documents, Part VIII.
Week 5  Secondary reading: RFG2 122–152; RFG3 72–90; van Caenegem, 30–114 (this is a good overview for the hour exam, though it takes us quite a bit further in time).

Mon., Feb. 22  Lecture: The institutions of canon law. Substantive canon law. Marriage. Assignment: J.I.1.10, D.23.2.5–6; Gratian C.27 q.2; Peter Lombard; selected decretals on marriage (Documents, Part VIII). [Many have seen in these decretals a development in Alexander III’s thought on the topic of the formation of marriage. Do you see such a development here?]


Thu., Feb. 25  Section: How do we design a procedural system? Assignment: Documents, Parts VI and IX.


Wed., Mar. 2  Lecture: Coutumiers and fueros. Assignment: Extracts from the Usatges de Barcelona on witnesses, marriage, and wild animals (Documents Part X.A).

Thu., Mar. 3  Section: How to read a case. Assignment: Documents, Part XIV.A–B.

Fri., Mar. 4  Discussion: The institutional history of the 12th and 13th centuries. Assignment: This will be more a lecture than a discussion class about documents, but it will be based on a reaction to and expansion of some of the secondary reading for this week.


Mon., Mar. 7  Lecture: Courts and coutumiers in France. Assignment: Extracts from the coutume of Touraine-Anjou and from Beaumanoir on witnesses, marriage and marital property, and wild animals (Documents Part X.B, C).

Wed., Mar. 9  Lecture: Political ideas of the 12th and 13th centuries. Assignment: Extracts from Bracton on kingship and from the glossators on sovereignty (Documents Part XI).

Thu., Feb. 11  Section: Usatges and Beaumanoir. Assignment: Documents, Part X.

Fri., Mar. 11  Hour Exam. (Will cover Assignments 1–25.)


**Mon., Mar. 21**  
**Lecture**: The 14th and 15th Centuries—political and constitutional developments. The commentators. **Assignment**: Extracts from the commentators (*Documents*, Parts XII and XIII).

**Wed., Mar. 23**  

**Thu., Mar. 24**  
**Section**: Law and politics in the 13th century. **Assignment**: *Documents*, Part XI.

**Fri., Mar. 25**  

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**Week 9**

**Mon., Mar. 28**  
**Lecture**: Commentators on wild animals. **Assignment**: Bartolus on D.41.1.1, 5 (*Documents*, Part XIII.A–B); Portius and Faber on J.1.2.2.11–13 (*Documents*, Part XIII.C–E).

**Wed., Mar. 30**  
**Lecture**: Commentators on marriage. **Assignment**: *Decisio S.R.R.* (1574) (*Documents*, Part XIV.C); Panormitanus, *Consilia* (15th c) (*Documents* Part XIV.D).

**Thu., Mar. 31**  
**Section**: Marriage in legal theory and legal practice. **Assignment**: *Documents*, Part XIV. Pay particular attention to Panormitanus, *Consilium* (15th c.) (*Documents* Part XIV.C).

**Fri., Apr. 1**  
**Discussion**: Courts and case reports (cont’d). **Assignment**: *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)

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**Week 10**

**Mon., Apr. 4**  
**Lecture**: “Renaissance” Europe—political, intellectual and constitutional developments. Humanists, humanism and the law. **Assignment**: Pithou on the *Collatio*; Bodin on Political Theory (*Documents*, Part XV).

**Wed., Apr. 6**  
**Lecture**: Compilations, proto-codification, codification. The *Grandes Ordonnances*. **Assignment**: Decree, Tametsi; *Ordonnance* of Blois; *Ordonnance pour la procédure civile* (*Documents*, Part XVI.A, B, D (pp. 2–4, 5–6).

**Thu., Apr. 7**  
**Section**: Legal humanism. **Assignment**: Pithou on the *Collatio*; Bodin on political theory (*Documents*, Part XV).

**Fri., Apr. 8**  

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**Week 11**

**Secondary reading**: Bellomo 162–73; RFG2 280—352; RFG3 169–212; K1789 1–94; Watson 53–82.

**Mon., Apr. 8**  
**Lecture**: “Renaissance” Europe—political, intellectual and constitutional developments. Humanists, humanism and the law. **Assignment**: Pithou on the *Collatio*; Bodin on Political Theory (*Documents*, Part XV).

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**Week 11**

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Lecture/Section/Discussion</th>
<th>Assignment/Notes</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mon., Apr. 11</strong></td>
<td>Lecture: The 17th and 18th centuries—political, constitutional and intellectual developments.</td>
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<td><strong>Thu., Apr. 14</strong></td>
<td>Section: Compilations, proto-codification, codification. Assignment: <em>Documents</em>, Parts XVI and XVII.</td>
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<td><strong>Mon., Apr. 18</strong></td>
<td>Lecture: The academics in action. Pufendorf on wild animals (cont’d) (<em>Documents</em>, Part XVIII).</td>
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<td><strong>Wed., Apr. 20</strong></td>
<td>Lecture: The Napoleonic codes, the pandectists, the historical school and the making of the BGB. The road away from codification? Assignment: Windscheid (<em>Documents</em>, Part XX [Windscheid extracts]).</td>
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<td><strong>Thu., Apr. 21</strong></td>
<td>Section: The relation between abstract ideas and legal results. Assignment: <em>Documents</em>, Part XVII.</td>
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<td><strong>Fri., Apr. 22</strong></td>
<td>Discussion: Domat and Pothier. Assignment: Domat on marriage, wild animals, and witnesses; Pothier on marriage and wild animals (<em>Documents</em>, Part XIX).</td>
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<td><strong>Week 13</strong></td>
<td>Secondary reading: van Caenegem, 170–97</td>
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<td><strong>Mon., Apr. 25</strong></td>
<td>Final Lecture: The achievements and failures of the <em>ancien régime</em>. Take-home exam passed out.</td>
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<td>Section: Review. No specific assignment. (Note this section will take place at the time and place for regular Wed. lecture.)</td>
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**Calendar**

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<tr>
<td>Mon., Jan. 25</td>
<td>Assignment 1</td>
<td>Introduction to the course. Basic chronology. Introduction to Roman law.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed., Jan. 27</td>
<td>Assignment 2</td>
<td>The legacy of the ancient world: Roman law. How the story came out</td>
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<td>Fri., Jan. 29</td>
<td>Assignment 3</td>
<td>The legacy of the ancient world: Christianity</td>
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<td>Mon., Feb. 1</td>
<td>Assignment 4</td>
<td>Two “barbarian” law codes—Aethelberht</td>
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<td>Wed., Feb. 3</td>
<td>Assignment 5</td>
<td>Two “barbarian” law codes—Gundobad</td>
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<td>Thu., Feb. 4</td>
<td>Assignment 6</td>
<td>The “barbarian” invasions; Aethelberht and Gundobad compared</td>
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<td>Fri., Feb. 5</td>
<td>Assignment 7</td>
<td>Reflections on “fundamental legal categories”</td>
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<td>Mon., Feb. 8</td>
<td>Assignment 8</td>
<td>Carolingian institutions and “feudalism”</td>
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<td>Wed., Feb. 10</td>
<td>Assignment 9</td>
<td>Eleventh-century reforms and a glimpse at <em>regnum</em> and <em>sacerdotium</em>, to the end</td>
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of the 13th century. The Collection in 74 Titles.

Thu., Feb. 11 = Assignment 10 Eclectic sources of law
Fri., Feb. 12 = Assignment 11 New Testament extracts on marriage
Mon., Feb. 15 = Holiday
Wed., Feb. 17 = Assignment 12 The revival of academic law study: Roman law
Thu., Feb. 18 = Assignment 14 Wild animals in the glossators
Fri., Feb. 19 = Assignment 15 Marriage in the glossators
Mon., Feb. 22 = Assignment 13 The institutions of canon law
Wed., Feb. 24 = Assignment 16 The revival of academic law study: Romano-canonical procedure
Thu., Feb. 25 = Assignment 17 How do we design a procedural system?
Fri., Feb. 26 = Assignment 18 Reform and the “twelfth-century renaissance”
Mon., Feb. 29 = Assignment 19 Marriage litigation in the High Middle Ages
Wed., Mar. 2 = Assignment 20 Coutumiers and fueros
Thu., Mar. 3 = Assignment 21 How to read a case
Fri., Mar. 4 = Assignment 22 The institutional history of the 12th and 13th centuries
Mon., Mar. 7 = Assignment 23 Courts and coutumiers in France.
Wed., Mar. 9 = Assignment 24 Political ideas of the 12th and 13th centuries.
Thu., Mar. 10 = Assignment 25 Usatges and Beaumanoir
Fri., Mar. 11 = Hour exam (Will cover Assignments 1–25)
Mon., Mar. 14 — Fri., Mar. 18 Spring Vacation
Mon., Mar. 21 = Assignment 26 The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries—Political and constitutional developments.
Wed., Mar. 23 Assignment 27 The commentators
Thu., Mar. 24 = Assignment 28 Law and politics in the 13th century.
Fri., Mar. 25 Assignment 29 The formation of a persecuting society? (Short paper topics must be chosen by this date.)
Mon., Mar. 28 = Assignment 30 Commentators on wild animals.
Wed., Mar. 30 = Assignment 31 Courts and case reports.
Thu., Mar. 31 = Assignment 32 Marriage in legal theory and legal practice.
Fri., Apr. 1 = Assignment 33 Courts and case reports (cont’d).
Mon., Apr. 4 = Assignment 34 “Renaissance” Europe—Political, intellectual and constitutional developments.
Wed., Apr. 6 = Assignment 35 Compilations, proto-codification, codification
Thu., Apr. 7 = Assignment 36 Legal humanism
Fri., Apr. 8 = Assignment 37 The legal profession. Homologation of custom and reception. (Section will meet in the Root Room of the HLS Library)
Mon., Apr. 11 = Assignment 38 The 17th and centuries—Political, constitutional, and intellectual developments
Thu., Apr. 14 = Assignment 40 Compilations, proto-codification, codification. (Statement of term papers due.)
Fri., Apr. 15 = Assignment 41 The institutes of national law. Intellectual developments and the law (cont’d).
Mon., Apr. 18 = Assignment 42 Pufendorf on wild animals (cont’d).
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<tr>
<td>Wed., Apr. 20</td>
<td>Assignment 43</td>
<td>The Napoleonic codes, the pandectists, the historical school and the making of the BGB. The road away from codification?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thu., Apr. 21</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>Fri., Apr. 22</td>
<td>Assignment 45</td>
<td>Domat and Pothier</td>
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<td>Mon., Apr. 25</td>
<td>Assignment 46</td>
<td>Final Lecture.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed., Apr. 27</td>
<td>No assignment</td>
<td>Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fri., May 6</td>
<td></td>
<td>Final draft of short paper and take-home exam due</td>
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