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Volume 7

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The Formation and Transmission of Western Legal Culture

150 Books that Made the Law
in the Age of Printing

In collaboration with Naoko Seriu

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Preface

It was around five years ago that we all first met together in Helsinki and later Ghent to discuss our mutual proposal to edit a volume, the first of its kind on an international scale, introducing a ‘canon’ of legal works that have most influenced Western legal culture and that best represent the legal literature genres of the periods covering its development. We envisaged it providing a resource for researchers working in various fields, such as law, legal history, general history, book history, history of mentalities, communications sciences, and law and literature as well as something that students and practitioners interested in learning about the roots of their trade would equally find stimulating and invaluable.

Since we could not hope to complete such an undertaking on our own we first needed to enlist the support of a scientific committee comprising eleven distinguished European and American legal historians, who together with the editors would form the steering group of the project. Prof. Martin Avenarius (University of Cologne), Prof. Emanuele Conte (University of Roma Tre), Prof. Gero Dolezalek (University of Aberdeen), Prof. Thomas Duve (University of Frankfurt, Director of the *Max-Planck-Institut für europäische Rechtsgeschichte*), Prof. Jean-Louis Halpérin (*École Normale Supérieure*, Paris), Prof. em. António Manuel Hespanha (New University of Lisbon), Prof. Dirk Heirbaut (Ghent University), Prof Michael Lobban (London School of Economics), Prof. Aniceto Masferrer (University of Valencia), Prof. Dag Michalsen (University of Oslo), Prof. Matthew Mirow (Florida International University, Miami) and Prof. Peter Oestmann (University of Münster) kindly agreed to serve and we are sincerely grateful for their generous time and input. Convening in Lille, the committee was responsible for drawing up a long list of key books that made the law and for suggesting a bank of potential contributors who could write the individual entries. The criteria for the entries were themselves the subject of much debate and suitably honed to provide a template for each contributor to write to.

While recognising the cosmopolitan and multilingual background of both legal book authors and contributors, we considered it crucial for the volume to be in English and for the focus not to be on the legal authors as such (other than a brief biography), but their prime contribution to the field. The significance of each book

was to be measured not only from today's point of view (influenced by hindsight and posterity) but also its contemporary significance. We also wanted the project to be more than a compilation of book entries: so in addition to individual articles on the works chosen, the tome includes general introductory articles on the different genres of legal literature, treating their subject not from a national but a more global angle, including not only Europe but also the Americas and other colonial outposts of former imperial powers.

As the completed entries emerged so too did further editorial headaches, but we soldiered on and refined the volume during successive plenary meetings in Ghent, Exeter, Oslo and Oxford and via that invaluable tool of the modern communications revolution, email, and working closely with our publishers, Springer, have finally brought this massive undertaking to fruition. In addition to our dedicated team of 119 contributors, we are indebted to a number of institutions for their financial support and administrative assistance which we gratefully acknowledge here: the Academy of Finland, CNRS France, the Finnish Cultural Foundation, Ghent University, University of Exeter, University of Helsinki and University of Lille.

We would also like to thank Dr. Naoko Seriu (formerly University of Lille) for coordinating the first period of our activities, as well as Prof. Anne Simonin of the *Maison Française* in Oxford and Prof. Dag Michalsen of the University of Oslo for hosting one of our meetings.

Summer 2016

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- AKASHI Kinji, *Kyushu University, Fukuoka (Japan)*: 75
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- AMEND-TRAUT Anja, *Universität Würzburg (Germany)*: 113
- ARABEYRE Patrick, *Ecole Nationale des Chartes, Paris (France)*: 45
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- AVENARIUS Martin, *Universität zu Köln (Germany)*: 138
- BALDUS Christian, *Universität Heidelberg (Germany)*: 99
- BARÓ Pazos Juan, *Universidad de Cantabria (Spain)*: 92
- BECK VARELA Laura, *Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (Spain)*: 58, 111
- BEHRENDTS Okko, *Georg-August-Universität Göttingen (Germany)*: 121
- BERCOVICI, Gilberto, *Universidade de São Paulo (Brazil)*: 140
- BIROCCHI Italo, *Università Sapienza di Roma (Italy)*: 69, 82
- BJÖRNE Lars, *Turun yliopisto (University of Turku) (Finland)*: 137
- BRIESKORN Norbert, *Hochschule für Philosophie München (Germany)*: 48
- BRYSON William Hamilton, *University of Richmond (United States)*: 49, 135
- CAÑIZARES NAVARRO Juan, *Universidad CEU Cardenal Herrera, Elche (Spain)*: 80
- CAPDEFERRO Josep, *Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona (Spain)*: 47
- CASAGRANDE Agustín, *Universidad Nacional de La Plata (Argentina)*: 44
- CAZALS Géraldine, *Université de Rouen (France)*: 30
- CHALMERS James, *University of Glasgow (United Kingdom)*: 97
- COCKS Ray, *Keele University (United Kingdom)*: 115
- CONDORELLI Orazio, *Università degli Studi di Catania (Italy)*: 11
- CONETTI Mario, *Università degli Studi dell’Insubria (Italy)*: 9
- CONTE Emanuele, *Università degli Studi Roma Tre (Italy)*: 2, 77
- CORDES Albrecht, *Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität Frankfurt am Main (Germany)*: 148

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- DAUCHY Serge, *CNRS – Université de Lille* (France): 84
- DEBAENST Bruno, *Universiteit Gent* (Belgium): 134
- DE BRUIJN Niels, *Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam* (The Netherlands): 38
- DE CHAMPS Emmanuelle, *Université de Cergy-Pontoise* (France): 95
- DECOCK Wim, *Katholieke Universiteit Leuven* (Belgium): 24, 40
- DE RUYSSCHER Dave, *Vrije Universiteit Brussel* (Belgium): 31
- DESCAMPS Olivier, *Université Paris II Panthéon-Assas* (France): 101
- DHONDT Frederik, *Vrije Universiteit Brussel - Universiteit Gent - FWO* (Belgium): 88
- DILCHER Gerhard, *Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität Frankfurt am Main* (Germany): 118
- DOZHDEV Dmitry, *Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences* (Russia): 123
- DU PLESSIS Paul, *University of Edinburgh* (United Kingdom): 62
- DURELLE-MARC Yann-Arzel, *Université Paris 13 – Sorbonne Paris Cité* (France): 136
- DYSON Matthew, *University of Oxford and Corpus Christi College, Oxford* (United Kingdom): 127
- FIORAVANTI Maurizio, *Università degli Studi di Firenze* (Italy): 139
- FIORI Antonia, *Università Sapienza di Roma* (Italy): 1
- FORD John, *University of Aberdeen* (United Kingdom): 68
- FREDA Dolores, *Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II* (Italy): 74
- GARLATI Loredana, *Università degli Studi di Milano Bicocca* (Italy): 39
- GIALDRONI Stefania, *University of Helsinki* (Finland): 25, 116
- GIARO Tomasz, *Uniwersytet Warszawski* (Poland): 129
- GIULIANI Adolfo, *Università degli Studi di Perugia* (Italy): 22, 37
- HAFERKAMP Hans-Peter, *Universität zu Köln* (Germany): 110
- HALPÉRIN Jean-Louis, *École Normale Supérieure, Paris* (France): 124, 132, 142, 146
- HARMS Andreas, *SWKH Rechtsanwälte, Berlin* (Germany): 143
- HEIRBAUT Dirk, *Universiteit Gent* (Belgium): 4, 119
- HESPANHA António, *Universidade Nova de Lisboa* (Portugal): 60, 96
- HEWETT Margaret, *University of Cape Town* (South-Africa): 65
- HOEFLICH Michael, *University of Kansas* (United States): 93, 107
- HUGHES Jula, *University of New Brunswick, Fredericton* (Canada): 125
- IBBETSON David, *University of Cambridge* (United Kingdom): 76, 83
- JONES Neil, *University of Cambridge* (United Kingdom): 13, 16
- KIM Marie Seong-Hak, *St. Cloud State University* (United States): 20
- KOCH Arnd, *Universität Augsburg* (Germany): 98
- KOCH Sören, *Universitetet i Bergen* (Norway): 78, 81
- LEPSIUS Susanne, *Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München* (Germany): 18
- LESAFFER Randall, *Tilburg University* (The Netherlands) and *University of Leuven* (Belgium): 56

- LEUWERS Hervé, *Université de Lille* (France): 100
- LITZINGER Heike Kathrin, formerly *Max-Planck-Institut für europäische Rechtsgeschichte, Frankfurt am Main* (Germany): 130
- LOBBAN Michael, *London School of Economics and Political Science* (United Kingdom): 106, 109, 126
- MACMILLAN Catharine, *King's College London* (United Kingdom): 122
- MACNAIR Mike, *University of Oxford* (United Kingdom): 87
- MAIHOLD Harald, formerly *Universität Basel* (Switzerland): 26
- MARTYN Georges, *Universiteit Gent* (Belgium): 10, 61
- MARZAL Pascual, *Universitat de València* (Spain): 85
- MASFERRER Aniceto, *Universitat de València* (Spain): 28
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- MAZZACANE Aldo, *Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II* (Italy): 64
- McGLYNN Margaret, *Western University, London-Ontario* (Canada): 34
- MEYER Christoph H.F., *Max-Planck-Institut für europäische Rechtsgeschichte, Frankfurt am Main* (Germany): 73
- MEYER-PRITZL Rudolf, *Christian-Albrechts-Universität Kiel* (Germany): 89
- MICHALSEN Dag, *Universitetet i Oslo* (Norway): 103
- MILETTI Marco Nicola, *Università degli Studi di Foggia* (Italy): 21
- MILLARD Eric, *Université Paris-Ouest, Nanterre – La Défense* (France): 149
- MINNUCCI Giovanni, *Università degli Studi di Siena* (Italy): 42
- MIROW Matthew, *Florida International University, Miami* (United States): 112
- MODÉER Kjell, *Lunds Universitet* (Sweden): 66
- MUSSON Anthony, *University of Exeter* (United Kingdom): 52
- OBARRIO Juan, *Universitat de València* (Spain): 67, 70
- OESTMANN Peter, *Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster* (Germany): 36, 43
- OOSTERHUIS Janwillem, *Universiteit Maastricht* (The Netherlands): 117
- PADOVANI Andrea, *Università di Bologna* (Italy): 12
- PARISE Agustín, *Universiteit Maastricht* (The Netherlands): 105
- PASCIUTA Beatrice, *Università degli Studi di Palermo* (Italy): 7
- PÉREZ MARTÍN Antonio, *Universidad de Murcia* (Spain): 54
- PIHLAJAMÄKI Heikki, *University of Helsinki* (Finland): 55, 120, 147
- POLDNIKOV Dmitry, *National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow* (Russia): 114
- PORWANCHER Andrew, *University of Oklahoma, Norman* (United States): 133
- PREST Wilfrid, *University of Adelaide* (Australia): 91
- PRÉVOST Xavier, *Université de Bordeaux* (France): 29, 46
- QUAGLIONI Diego, *Università degli Studi di Trento* (Italy): 35
- RAMOS VÁZQUEZ Isabel, *Universidad de Jaén* (Spain): 90
- RAMSAY Nigel, *University College London* (United Kingdom): 5
- REID Charles, *University of St. Thomas, Minneapolis* (United States): 104
- ROWAN Steven, *University of Missouri, St. Louis* (United States): 15
- RUDOKVAS Anton, *St. Petersburg State University* (Russia): 128

- SCHMOECKEL Mathias, *Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn* (Germany): 17, 27
- SCHRÖDER Jan, *Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen* (Germany): 71, 79, 102
- SEIPP David J., *Boston University* (United States): 19
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- STEBBINGS Chantal, *University of Exeter* (United Kingdom): 108
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- TAU ANZOÁTEGUI Victor, *Academia Nacional de la Historia de la República Argentina*: 33
- THOMAS Philip, *University of Pretoria* (South-Africa): 72
- TREGGIARI Ferdinando, *Università degli Studi di Perugia* (Italy): 8
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- VALLEJO GARCÍA-HEVIA José María, *Universidad de Castilla – La Mancha* (Spain): 86
- VAN NIFTERIK Gustaaf, *Universiteit van Amsterdam* (The Netherlands): 32
- VAN RHEE C.H. (Remco), *Universiteit Maastricht* (The Netherlands): 63
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Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| Preface | v |
| List of Contributors | vii |
| Chapter 1: General Introduction | 1 |
| Chapter 2: Law Books During the Transition from Late-Medieval to Early-Modern Legal Scholarship | 9 |
| 1 GRATIAN, <i>Decretum</i> (<i>Antonia Fiori</i>) | 20 |
| 2 AZO, <i>Summa Aurea</i> (<i>Emanuele Conte</i>) | 22 |
| 3 ACCURSIUS, <i>Standard Gloss</i> (<i>Alain Wijffels</i>) | 24 |
| 4 VON REPGOW, <i>Saxon Mirror</i> (<i>Dirk Heirbaut</i>) | 28 |
| 5 BRACTON, <i>Of the Laws and Customs of England</i> (<i>Nigel Ramsay</i>) | 31 |
| 6 HOSTIENSIS, <i>Summa Aurea</i> (<i>Laurent Waelkens</i>) | 34 |
| 7 DURANTIS, <i>Speculum iudiciale</i> (<i>Beatrice Pasciuta</i>) | 37 |
| 8 BARTOLUS, <i>Commentaries</i> (<i>Ferdinando Treggiari</i>) | 40 |
| 9 BALDUS, <i>Commentary on the Code</i> (<i>Mario Conetti</i>) | 44 |
| 10 BOUTILLIER, <i>Rural summary</i> (<i>Georges Martyn</i>) | 47 |
| 11 PANORMITANUS, <i>Commentaries on the Decretals</i> (<i>Orazio Condorelli</i>) | 49 |
| 12 TARTAGNI, <i>Consilia</i> (<i>Andrea Padovani</i>) | 53 |
| 13 LITTLETON, <i>On tenures</i> (<i>Neil Jones</i>) | 55 |
| Chapter 3: Legal Books in the Early Modern Western World | 59 |
| 14 EVERARDUS, <i>A Book on Topics</i> (<i>Alain Wijffels</i>) | 65 |
| 15 ZASIUS, <i>Individual and New Analyses of Several Passages of Civil Law</i> (<i>Steven Rowan</i>) | 68 |
| 16 ST GERMAN, <i>Doctor and Student</i> (<i>Neil Jones</i>) | 70 |
| 17 OLDENDORP, <i>On Law and Equity</i> (<i>Mathias Schmoeckel</i>) | 73 |
| 18 ALCIATO, <i>Four Books on the Significance of Words</i> (<i>Susanne Lepsius</i>) | 76 |

| | | |
|----|--|-----|
| 19 | FITZHERBERT, <i>The New Natura Brevium</i> (David J. Seipp) | 80 |
| 20 | DUMOULIN, <i>Commentaries on the Custom of Paris</i> (Marie Seong-Hak Kim) | 82 |
| 21 | MARANTA, <i>Speculum aureum</i> (Marco Nicola Miletta) | 85 |
| 22 | COVARRUBIAS Y LEYVA, <i>Various Solutions</i> (Adolfo Giuliani) | 88 |
| 23 | GÓMEZ, <i>Comments on the Laws of Toro</i> (María Paz Alonso Romero) | 91 |
| 24 | SOTO, <i>On Justice and Right</i> (Wim Decock) | 94 |
| 25 | STRACCA, <i>Treatise on Commerce</i> (Stefania Gialdroni) | 96 |
| 26 | DAMHOUDER, <i>Practical Handbook on Criminal Matters</i> (Harald Maihold) | 99 |
| 27 | VITORIA, <i>On the Law of War of the Spanish against</i> <i>the Barbarians</i> (Mathias Schmoeckel) | 102 |
| 28 | LÓPEZ, <i>The Siete Partidas</i> (Aniceto Masferrer) | 106 |
| 29 | CUJAS, <i>Observations and Emendations</i> (Xavier Prévost) | 110 |
| 30 | PAPON, <i>Collection of Important Cases</i> (Géraldine Cazals) | 113 |
| 31 | PECK, <i>On Maritime Affairs</i> (Dave De ruyscher) | 115 |
| 32 | VÁZQUEZ DE MENCHACA, <i>Controversies</i> (Gustaaf van Nifterik) | 118 |
| 33 | MATIENZO, <i>Government of Peru</i> (Víctor Tau Anzoátegui) | 121 |
| 34 | BROOKE, <i>La Graunde Abridgement</i> (Margaret McGlynn) | 124 |
| 35 | BODIN, <i>The Six Books of Commonwealth</i> (Diego Quaglioni) | 126 |
| 36 | GAIL, <i>Observations</i> (Peter Oestmann) | 129 |
| 37 | MENOCHIO, <i>Commentary on Presumptions, Conjectures,</i> <i>Signs and Indications</i> (Adolfo Giuliani) | 132 |
| 38 | DONEAU, <i>Commentaries on Civil Law</i> (Niels de Bruijn) | 136 |
| 39 | DECIANI, <i>Criminal Treatise</i> (Loredana Garlati) | 139 |
| 40 | MOLINA, <i>On Justice and Right</i> (Wim Decock) | 142 |
| 41 | CASTILLO DE BOBADILLA, <i>Politics for Corregidores</i> (Otto Danwerth) | 144 |
| 42 | GENTILI, <i>On the Law of War</i> (Giovanni Minnucci) | 149 |
| 43 | DELRIO, <i>Six Books of Investigation into Magic</i> (Peter Oestmann) | 152 |
| 44 | HEVIA BOLAÑOS, <i>Philippic Court</i> (Agustín Casagrande) | 156 |
| 45 | FAVRE, <i>Codex Fabrianus</i> (Patrick Arabeyre) | 158 |
| 46 | LOISEL, <i>Customary Institutes</i> (Xavier Prévost) | 162 |
| 47 | FONTANELLA, <i>Treatise on Nuptial Pacts</i> (Josep Capdeferro) | 164 |
| 48 | SUÁREZ, <i>On Laws and God the Legislator</i> (Norbert Brieskorn) | 167 |

| | | |
|----|---|-----|
| 49 | BACON, <i>Example of a Treatise touching Universal Justice</i> (W. Hamilton Bryson) | 170 |
| 50 | GROTIUS, <i>On the Law of War and Peace</i> (Alain Wijffels) | 173 |
| 51 | CHRISTINAEUS, <i>Decisions</i> (Alain Wijffels) | 177 |
| 52 | COKE, <i>Institutes of the Laws of England</i> (Anthony Musson) | 180 |
| 53 | SOLÓRZANO PEREIRA, <i>On the Laws of the Indies</i> (Ditlev Tamm) | 182 |
| 54 | PÉREZ, <i>Imperial Institutions</i> (António Pérez Martín) | 184 |
| 55 | CARPZOV, <i>New Imperial Saxon Practice of Criminal Law</i> (Heikki Pihlajamäki) | 187 |
| 56 | SELDEN, <i>The Closure of the Sea</i> (Randall Lesaffer) | 190 |
| 57 | MEVIUS, <i>Commentary on the Law of Lübeck</i> (Nils Wurch) | 194 |
| 58 | VINNIUS, <i>Commentary on the Institutes</i> (Laura Beck Varela) | 197 |
| 59 | CONRING, <i>Commentary on the Origin of German Law</i> (Michael Stolleis) | 200 |
| 60 | BARBOSA, <i>Various Legal Dissertations</i> (António Manuel Hespanha) | 202 |
| 61 | MATTHAEUS, <i>On Crimes</i> (Georges Martyn) | 205 |
| 62 | GROENEWEGEN, <i>A Treatise on the Laws abrogated and no longer in Use in Holland and Neighbouring Regions</i> (Paul J. du Plessis) | 208 |
| 63 | VAN LEEUWEN, <i>Abstract of the Roman-Dutch Law</i> (Remco van Rhee) | 210 |
| 64 | DE LUCA, <i>The Theatre of Truth and Justice</i> (Aldo Mazzacane) | 214 |
| 65 | HUBER, <i>On Constitutional Law</i> (Margaret Hewett) | 217 |
| 66 | PUFENDORF, <i>On the Law of Nature and of Nations</i> (Kjell Åke Modéer) | 219 |
| 67 | MATHEU Y SANZ, <i>Treatise on Criminal Matters</i> (Juan Obarrio) | 223 |
| 68 | DALRYMPLE, <i>Institutions of the Law of Scotland</i> (John D. Ford) | 227 |
| 69 | DOMAT, <i>The Civil Laws in their Natural Order</i> (Italo Birocchi) | 230 |
| 70 | BAS Y GALCERÁN, <i>Theatre of Valencian Case Law</i> (Juan Alfredo Obarrio Moreno) | 233 |
| 71 | STRYK, <i>Specimen of the Modern Application of the Pandects</i> (Jan Schröder) | 235 |
| 72 | VOET, <i>Commentary on the Pandects</i> (Philipp J. Thomas) | 239 |

| | | |
|----|---|-----|
| 73 | VAN ESPEN, <i>Universal Ecclesiastical Law</i> (Christoph H.F. Meyer) | 242 |
| 74 | EMERIX DE MATTHIS, <i>Decisions of the Sacred Roman Rota</i> (Dolores Freda) | 244 |
| 75 | BUNKERSHOEK, <i>Dissertation on the Dominion of the Sea</i> (Kinji Akashi) | 248 |
| 76 | HALE, <i>The History and Analysis of the Common Law of England</i> (David Ibbetson) | 250 |
| 77 | BÖHMER, <i>Ecclesiastical Law of the Protestants</i> (Emanuele Conte) | 253 |
| 78 | HOLBERG, <i>The Core of Morality</i> (Sören Koch) | 255 |
| 79 | HEINECCIUS, <i>Fundamentals of Civil Law</i> (Jan Schröder) | 258 |
| 80 | BERNÍ Y CATALÁ, <i>The Instructed Lawyer in Spanish Civil Practice</i> (Juan B. Canizares-Navarro) | 261 |
| 81 | WOLFF, <i>Natural Law considered according to the Scientific Method</i> (Sören Koch) | 264 |
| 82 | MURATORI, <i>Defective Jurisprudence</i> (Italo Birocchi) | 268 |
| 83 | VINER, <i>A General Abridgment of Law and Equity</i> (David Ibbetson) | 271 |
| 84 | MONTESQUIEU, <i>The Spirit of Laws</i> (Serge Dauchy) | 274 |
| 85 | MAYANS Y CISCAR, <i>Legal Discussions</i> (Pascual Parzal) | 277 |
| 86 | CAMPOMANES, <i>Treatise on the Regal Privileges of Spain</i> (José María Vallejo García-Hevia) | 279 |
| 87 | GILBERT, <i>The Law of Evidence</i> (Michael R.T. Macnair) | 283 |
| 88 | VATTEL, <i>The Law of Nations</i> (Frederik Dhondt) | 285 |
| 89 | POTHIER, <i>Treatise on Obligations</i> (Rudolf Meyer-Pritzl) | 288 |
| 90 | BECCARIA, <i>On Crimes and Punishments</i> (Isabel Ramos Vázquez) | 291 |
| 91 | BLACKSTONE, <i>Commentaries on the Laws of England</i> (Wilfrid Prest) | 295 |
| 92 | JORDÁN DE ASSO, <i>Institutes of the Civil Law of Castile</i> (Juan Baró Pazos) | 298 |
| 93 | JONES, <i>An Essay on the Law of Bailments</i> (Michael Hoeflich) | 301 |
| 94 | LARDIZÁBAL Y URIBE, <i>Discourse on Punishments</i> (Alexandro Agüero) | 304 |
| 95 | BENTHAM, <i>An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation</i> (Emmanuelle de Champs) | 307 |
| 96 | MELO FREIRE, <i>Institutions of Portuguese Law</i> (António Manuel Hespanha) | 310 |
| 97 | HUME, <i>Commentaries on the Law of Scotland</i> (James Chalmers) | 314 |

**Chapter 4: Law Books in the Modern Western World:
Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries 319**

98 FEUERBACH, *Textbook of the Common Criminal Law
Applicable in Germany (Arnd Koch)* 327

99 THIBAUT, *System of the Pandects' Law
(Christian Baldus)* 330

100 MERLIN DE DOUAI, *Universal and Reasoned Repertory
of Law (Hervé Leuwers)* 333

101 ZACHARIAE, *Textbook of French Law (Olivier Descamps)* 336

102 SAVIGNY, *Of the Vocation of Our Age for Legislation
and Jurisprudence (Jan Schröder)* 339

103 ØRSTED, *Handbook on Danish and Norwegian Law
(Dag Michalsen)* 342

104 KENT, *Commentaries on American Law
(Charles J. Reid)* 345

105 ESCRICHE Y MARTÍN, *Analytical Dictionary of Legislation
and Jurisprudence (Agustín Parise)* 348

106 AUSTIN, *The Province of Jurisprudence Determined
(Michael Lobban)* 351

107 STORY, *Commentaries on the Constitution
of the United States (Michael Hoeflich)* 354

108 LEWIN, *A Practical Treatise on the Law of Trusts
and Trustees (Chantal Stebbings)* 356

109 SMITH, *A Selection of Leading Cases on Various
Branches of the Law (Michael Lobban)* 359

110 PUCHTA, *Textbook on the Pandects
(Hans-Peter Haferkamp)* 361

111 SALA Y BAÑULS, *Mexican Sala (Laura Beck Varela)* 364

112 ALBERDI, *Bases and Starting Points for the Political
Organisation of the Argentine Republic
(Matthew C. Mirow)* 367

113 WINDSCHEID, *The Actio of the Roman Civil Law
from the Perspective of Modern-Day Law
(Anja Amend-Traut)* 370

114 MEYER, *Russian Civil Law (Dmitry Poldnikov)* 374

115 MAINE, *Ancient Law (Ray Cocks)* 377

116 GOLDSCHMIDT, *Handbook of Commercial Law
(Stefania Gialdroni)* 379

117 BENJAMIN, *Treatise on the Law of Sale of Personal
Property (Janwillem Oosterhuis)* 382

118 GIERKE, *The German Law of Association
(Gerhard Dilcher)* 385

119 LAURENT, *Principles of Private Law (Dirk Heirbaut)* 388

| | | |
|-----|--|-----|
| 120 | LANGDELL, <i>A Selection of Cases on the Law of Contracts</i> (Heikki Pihlajamäki) | 391 |
| 121 | JHERING, <i>Law as a Means to an End</i> (Okko Behrends). | 394 |
| 122 | ANSON, <i>Principles of the English Law of Contract</i> (Catharine MacMillan). | 396 |
| 123 | MUROMTSEV, <i>Definition and Principal Division of Law</i> (Dmitry Dozhdev) | 400 |
| 124 | WENDELL HOLMES, <i>The Common Law</i> (Jean-Louis Halpérin) | 403 |
| 125 | STEPHEN, <i>A History of the Criminal Law of England</i> (Jula Hughes). | 406 |
| 126 | DICEY, <i>Introduction to the Study of the Law of the Constitution</i> (Michael Lobban) | 408 |
| 127 | POLLOCK, <i>The Law of Torts</i> (Matthew Dyson). | 411 |
| 128 | DYUVERNVA, <i>Excerpt of the Course of Lectures on Civil Law</i> (Anton Rudokvas) | 414 |
| 129 | PETRAŻYCKI, <i>The Doctrine of Income</i> (Tomasz Giaro). | 416 |
| 130 | SHERSHENEVICH, <i>Textbook of Russian Private Law</i> (Heike Litzinger) | 420 |
| 131 | GÉNY, <i>Method of Interpretation and Sources of Private Positive Law</i> (Frédéric Audren). | 422 |
| 132 | JELLINEK, <i>General Theory of State</i> (Jean-Louis Halpérin) | 425 |
| 133 | WIGMORE, <i>A Treatise on the System of Evidence in Trials at Common Law</i> (Andrew Porwancher). | 428 |
| 134 | DUGUIT, <i>Social Law, Individual Law and the Transformation of the State</i> (Bruno Debaenst) | 429 |
| 135 | MAITLAND, <i>The Forms of Actions</i> (W. Hamilton Bryson) | 431 |
| 136 | HAURIOU, <i>Principles of Public Law</i> (Yann-Arzel Durelle-Marc). | 433 |
| 137 | HAGERUP, <i>The General Doctrines of Criminal Law</i> (Lars Björne) | 436 |
| 138 | POKROVSKY, <i>Basic Problems of Private Law</i> (Martin Avenarius) | 438 |
| 139 | ROMANO, <i>The Legal Order</i> (Maurizio Fioravanti). | 442 |
| 140 | SCHMITT, <i>Dictatorship</i> (Gilberto Bercovici) | 445 |
| 141 | SINZHEIMER, <i>An Outline of Labour Law</i> (Naoko Matsumoto) | 448 |
| 142 | WEBER, <i>Economy and Society</i> (Jean-Louis Halpérin). | 451 |
| 143 | PASHUKANIS, <i>General Theory of Law and Marxism</i> (Andreas Harms) | 453 |
| 144 | LLEWELLYN, <i>The Bramble Bush</i> (William Twining) | 456 |
| 145 | SÁNCHEZ DE BUSTAMANTE Y SIRVEN, <i>International Public Law</i> (Margarita Serna Vallejo) | 459 |

146 KELSEN, *Pure Theory of Law* (**Jean-Louis Halpérin**) 462

147 LUNDSTEDT, *The Un-Scientific Nature of Legal Science*
(**Heikki Pihlajamäki**) 465

148 RABEL, *The Law of the Sale of Goods*
(**Albrecht Cordes**) 467

149 OLIVECRONA, *Law as Fact* (**Eric Millard**) 471

150 ROSS, *On Law and Justice* (**Ditlev Tamm**) 473

List of Illustrations 477

Index of Names 553

Index by Keywords 567

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