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Roman Law: Connections and Perspectives – Symposium Amicorum 12-13 December 2013, in honour of Olga Tellegen-Couperus

Posted on 06/01/2014 by John Cairns

Olga Tellegen-Couperus is a distinguished Dutch scholar of Roman Law. To mark her retirement, the University of Tilburg organised a symposium in her honour in December. Over two frosty days in Tilburg, a number of papers were heard. Many picked up themes from Olga's research, notably her interests in Cicero and in rhetoric and Roman law.

The event opened with an introduction to Olga and her achievements by the Dean of the Tilburg Faculty, Corein Prins. There then followed a session on Roman law divided by a coffee break. The first paper was given jointly by Olga's husband, Jan Willem Tellegen, and Tessa Leesen on "Cicero's Topica and Trebatius Testa". Jan Willem also chaired the morning session. The paper challenged the traditional view that Trebatius could not make use of *topoi* and demonstrated the problems with a dogmatic approach to Roman law. Willem Witteveen then gave a paper "On Reading *De legibus*", dealing with its fragmentary nature, narrative structure, and the possibility of multiple readings. The next paper was delivered by Ernest Metzger under the title "slave Litigant?" He considered the correct interpretation of "cum serv[o] agere" in the Lex Irinitana. Olivia Robinson then reflected on "Undesirables" in Roman law, ranging over all forms of conduct that was disapproved of, such as witchcraft, certain forms of religion and the like. The final morning paper was "Roman Law in the Regal Period: A Reappraisal" by Leon ter Beek, considering the nature of the surviving material. After lunch, Paul Nève chaired a session on Roman law and Rhetoric. The first paper, "Return to the Wood" by Paul du Plessis explored the significance of a document preserved from Roman Britain, arguing as to its meaning and context. Dr David Janssens then talked of "The Second Sun: Cicero's Philosophic Rhetoric in *De republica*", exploring the tensions between politics and philosophy. Dr Maria Ijzermans' lively and expressive multi-media presentation, "Pleiten met Pathos" explored the use of the rules of classical rhetoric in modern Dutch pleading. Ending the session was Jan Hendrik Valgaeren, who showed how art could be a form of rhetoric in his paper "Rhetoric and Modern Art".



There then followed a reception, the centre of which was a wonderful improvisational performance by the Troeba Trio (<http://www.troeba.nl/>), who, among other delights, composed *ex tempore* a song on *infamia*, as well as giving a short performance on the return of Betty Marlboro' to Sumatra! After a formal address by Randall Lesaffer, her colleagues performed a comic song in her honour. An excellent dinner followed in the Faculty Club, at which a toast to Olga was given by Paul Nève.



The first session the next morning “On Common Law” was chaired by Trix van Erp-Jacobs. The first paper was given by Mieke van der Linden under the title “How Common Law remained Loyal to Roman Law or Not? The History of Landownership”. This was followed by Sief van Erp’s presentation entitled “Two-Tier Systems of Private Law” considering the impact of technology on property in modern life. Dr Gerhard van der Schyff then talked on “Parliamentary Sovereignty and the Common Law in the United Kingdom”, reviewing among others the views of Dicey and Wade. This was followed by “The Expedition of Betty Marlborough: Slavery, Commerce, and Sentiment in the British Empire”, in which John W. Cairns reflected on some of the emotional costs of slavery and empire. Returning to the theme of Roman Law, and in particular to Olga’s interest in Quintilian, Vera Isabella Langer addressed the symposium on “Law in the Declamations of the Principate? The Repayment of the Debt in the Novae Tabulae.” Frits Barndsma then talked on “The Privy Council and Roman Law”, a rich paper exploring the revocation of gifts. Jean-Francois Gerkens then gave a fascinating paper, “Some Considerations about Hannibal’s Elephants”, in which he discussed both sculpture and the great Belgian scholar, Fernand de Visscher. Finally, Randall Lesaffer talked of “Roman Law in the Intellectual History of International Law.” Olga herself finished the conference with some remarks, before a concluding reception.



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