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## INSIGHTS FROM THE INTERNATIONAL LEGAL HISTORY MEETING OF PHD STUDENTS (BRNO, 11 - 12 SEPTEMBER 2024) / Frederika Vešelényiová

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On September 11-12, 2024, the Department of the History of the State and Law at the Faculty of Law, Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic, organised an International Legal History Meeting for PhD students. This distinguished event brought together doctoral candidates specialising in legal history and roman law from multiple countries, offering them a platform to engage in meaningful scholarly dialogue, share insights from their research, and foster international collaboration.

The primary aim of this conference was to facilitate cooperation among early-career researchers and PhD students who are at the forefront of historical and legal scholarship. In an increasingly globalised academic environment, the opportunity for young scholars to interact and network is crucial for the development of their careers and the establishment of lasting academic networks. By offering a venue where doctoral students could present partial results from their theses, the event enabled participants to obtain valuable feedback and engage in critical discussions that would enrich their research projects.

Beyond the exchange of research ideas, the conference emphasised the importance of international academic cooperation in building a robust support system for PhD students. The fostering of academic ties at this stage is critical not only for the development of individual research projects but also for enhancing the overall quality and diversity of scholarship in legal history. The broad and inclusive nature of the conference's thematic scope—encompassing everything from Roman law to the evolution of legal systems across different European states—further contributed to this goal by encouraging a diverse range of scholarly contributions.

The two-day program was organised into multiple thematic sections based on the research topics submitted by the participants. With twenty-five scholars from countries including the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria, Hungary, and non-European states, the event showcased a rich variety of perspectives and legal traditions. This diversity was central to the conference's success, as it allowed for an interdisciplinary approach to legal history and enriched the discussions that followed each presentation.

In addition to academic presentations, the conference organisers offered an engaging accompanying program. Sightseeing tours of Brno, along with a lecture on the city's unique architectural and cultural heritage, provided participants with a deeper understanding of the local context and history. These cultural exchanges further strengthened the community-building aspect of the conference, which was one of the event's key features.

The conference officially began with a welcoming speech by doc. JUDr. Bc. Jaromír Tauchen, PhD, LL.M. Eur. Int., Head of the Department of the History of the State and Law at the Faculty of Law, Masaryk University. His opening remarks highlighted the significance of holding such international meetings, particularly for PhD students, as essential for promoting intellectual exchange and enhancing the quality of doctoral research.

Following this, the first academic session commenced with a notable contribution from Michael Binder of the University of Vienna. His presentation, titled *Premature Debt Repayment: Then and Now*, offered a comparative analysis between the legal formulation of premature debt repayment in the Roman Digest and similar provisions in the Allgemeines bürgerliches Gesetzbuch (ABGB). His work exemplified how historical legal research could illuminate modern legal debates, enriching the ongoing discussions about codification and the enduring influence of Roman law in contemporary European legal systems.

Similarly, Mateusz Utamowicz from the University of Bialystok explored the topic of legal reception, focusing on the influence of French civil law in Polish territories during the 19th century. Supported by detailed archival sources, his presentation centred on the secret will of Karol Brzostowski and the legal impact of Napoleonic legal codes in the region. This session underscored the enduring relevance of historical codifications and their cross-border impact on modern legal systems.

A highly engaging session was presented by PhD student Radosław Miśkiewicz from the University of Warsaw, who analysed the issue of legal validity in Classical Athens. His examination of the Athenian legal system offered participants a comprehensive overview of the challenges related to interpreting ancient legal principles, raising questions about the applicability and evolution of laws in early democratic societies.

The afternoon sessions provided ample time for discussion, with the organisers allowing for extensive Q&A periods. This structure enabled participants to actively engage with the presenters, offering comments and alternative perspectives, which greatly contributed to the collaborative nature of the conference.

The second segment of the conference featured a variety of research topics, reflecting the diverse academic interests of the participants. Ivona Encheva from South-West University in Sofia examined legal interpretation in Roman law, particularly focusing on the application of the *exceptio*. Her research shed new light on the complex mechanisms of ancient legal disputes, illustrating how historical concepts like *exceptio* continue to influence modern legal interpretation.

Rida Zulfiqar from the University of Szeged presented an important paper on judicial independence and its role in safeguarding human rights. Her global perspective

on the judiciary's autonomy highlighted the need for an independent legal system to ensure the protection of fundamental rights, especially in an era where political interference threatens judicial impartiality.

Noteworthy as well was the presentation by Cristian-Codrin Botu from Babeş-Bolyai University in Romania, who analysed the evolution of objective and subjective theories of contractual interpretation. His thorough historical analysis traced the development of these theories across different legal traditions, offering insight into how they have shaped contemporary contract law.

Another fascinating contribution came from Jakub Jankovič from Comenius University Bratislava, whose analysis of anti-Hungarian laws in interwar Slovakia demonstrated how law can be used as an instrument of political control and suppression. His paper sparked lively debate among the participants, leading to a broader discussion on the relationship between law, politics, and nationalism.

One of the more unique aspects of the conference was the intersection of legal history and art, highlighted by presentations from Igor Hron and Zuzana Löbbling. Hron's paper explored the intellectual property legacy of Jan Löwenbach and his influence on both the art world and legal regulations. Löbbling's presentation, which examined the restitution of Richard Morawetz's art collection after World War II, offered a poignant example of how legal mechanisms can be employed to address historical injustices.

The day concluded with discussions of continental legal traditions, where Eva Bažantová from Charles University addressed the 19th-century efforts to reform property law in England, with a focus on the property rights of married women. Her research emphasised the slow yet crucial development of women's rights in property law, providing a historical context for the broader movement toward gender equality in the legal field.

The final sessions of the conference, held on the second day, were particularly focused on 20th-century legal history. Presenters examined the interwar legal developments in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, focusing on economic crimes, fraudulent bankruptcy, and social care provided for minors during the first half of the last century. A standout presentation by Borisz Bendegúz Burger delved into the prosecution of political crimes during the communist era in Hungary, raising important ethical questions about state violence and justice in the postwar period.

The International Legal History Meeting for PhD students at Masaryk University successfully accomplished its goals of fostering academic dialogue, promoting international cooperation, and building a supportive community for young scholars. The inclusion of diverse research topics and the high quality of presentations ensured that the event was intellectually stimulating for all participants. The accompanying social program, including sightseeing tours and networking opportunities, further strengthened the connections between the participants, creating a lasting impact beyond the conference itself.

As the conference concluded, the importance of such international forums became evident. For PhD students, presenting their work in a professional setting not only boosts their confidence but also prepares them for future academic endeavours. The event underscored the necessity of continued academic exchange and collaboration in the field of legal history. Furthermore, the planned publication of conference proceedings will provide international recognition for the participants, offering them a vital platform for disseminating their research.

This annual meeting remains a cornerstone in the academic development of early-career legal historians, providing them with both the academic and social support they need to succeed in their scholarly careers.

