In memoriam: Philippe Godding (1926–2013)

Philippe Godding was a member of the *Tijdschrift’s* Editorial Committee from 1970 until 1995; he then became a member of the journal’s Board of Editors. He was born in Ekeren (north of Antwerp) on 10 January 1926. He died at Bierges (near Louvain-la-Neuve) on 11 July 2013. Upon his retirement as a university professor, in 1991, he made an appeal in support of the library of the history department at Louvain-la-Neuve. As a token of gratitude to the donors and benefactors, he published a short autobiography, in which he endeavoured to explain how he had become a legal historian, and how his specific scholarly interests in legal history had been shaped by various circumstances and persons. Although in that text, he left all leeway and freedom to anyone who in the future would write his obituary, to assess his work and career, the present obituary will to some extent draw on Godding’s own reflections on his life. Those reflections, which were continued in a workshop at Louvain-la-Neuve and published in 2012, were highly personal and are therefore in their own way irreplaceable as a source of information about the scholar and the person.

3 The author of the present obituary first met Philippe Godding in 1976, when he attended the latter’s seminar in legal history as a law student at the Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL), at that time still housed in Leuven; a few years later, he attended again Godding’s seminar, this time as a student in medieval history, while the move of the Arts faculty from Leuven to Louvain-la-Neuve (the last French-speaking faculty which was still in Leuven) was under way. In 1990, he was appointed at UCL, as Godding’s successor, to teach the courses on legal history in the law faculty. By then, Philippe Godding had moved with his wife from their large family house in Brussels to a flat in Louvain-la-Neuve, which greatly facilitated regular contacts over the years until Godding’s death. A more personal tribute by the same author, read at the funeral in Louvain-la-Neuve on 16 July 2014, was published in the *Annales de droit de Louvain*, 73/3 (2013), p. 341 and p. 345–348.
Goddning attended school in Antwerp until the outbreak of the war. Except for the last two years, he was exclusively educated in French; only during those last two years, due to statutory changes in Belgium, did he switch to a Dutch-speaking school. When Belgium was invaded, his family – his father was a senior liberal politician – fled the country, eventually settling in the Belgian Congo\(^4\). Due to his family’s political and cultural background, Godding had until then always been educated at state schools (avoiding the prevailing ‘network’ in Flanders of Roman-Catholic schools). In 1940, no state schools were available in the Congo, and he was enrolled at the Jesuits’ school for the last three years of his school education, attending the classical Greek-Latin curriculum. That was when Philippe Goddning became more interested in intellectual achievements, and at the same time developed a deeply religious commitment which sustained him throughout his later life. During the last years of the war, he served in the army in the Belgian Congo. On his return to Belgium in 1945, he read law and history at the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB). In those days, the undergraduate programme for law students and Arts students was largely shared, so that both subjects could be easily combined. The graduate programmes, however, were distinct: three years were required to obtain the doctor’s degree in law (entirely based on taught courses), and two years for a licentiate’s degree in history. Goddning attended both programmes concomitantly and obtained the two degrees in 1950. For the three years of the doctorate’s degree in law, he took the programme taught in Dutch, while for the two-year graduate course in history, he enrolled for the French programme. Among his fellow students in history, he met his future wife, Françoise Ganshof (a daughter of the Ghent historian F.-L. Ganshof), whom he married in 1950. Throughout their marriage, Françoise was extraordinarily supportive of her husband’s scholarly work, to which she was able to give a critical look as a historian in her own right. Many years after he had retired, Philippe Goddning would emphasise how, as he felt that his concentration was diminishing, he could still rely on his wife to keep watch over his writings\(^5\).

\(^4\) Goddning’s parents had travelled in Africa before the war. During his retirement, Philippe Goddning collected the source-material of those journeys and published Les voyages en Afrique de Robert et Hélène Goddning (1924–1927), Louvain-la-Neuve 2002. His father Robert Goddning (1883–1953) was a senator of the Liberal Party in Antwerp (1932–1949), and a Minister of the Colonies after the war (1945–1947); cf. his extensive biographical entry by E. Krings in the Belgian Nouvelle biographie nationale (website of the Belgian Royal Academy).

\(^5\) At least one work in which his wife appears as co-editor should be mentioned: Ph. Goddning, with P. Lefèvre and Fr. Goddning-Ganshof, Chartes du Chapitre de Saint-Gudule à Bruxelles 1047–1300, Louvain-la-Neuve and Brussels 1993. The other co-editor, Lefèvre, a canon and pro-