

## Robert Feenstra, 1920-2013

On the evening of Saturday 2nd March 2013, Robert Feenstra, doyen of Dutch and European legal historians, died at the age of ninety-two years. Until his last days he was still working at his desk, the immaculate accuracy and eye for detail for which his scholarship was celebrated remaining undiminished to the end. The world of legal history has lost an irreplaceable thesaurus of knowledge which spanned the whole spectrum of legal history from ancient Roman law to the European jurists of the Modern Period. But the fruits of a lifetime's pursuit of knowledge will be preserved for future generations of scholars in the extensive and meticulous notes which accompany the books and articles of which he was so prolific.

Born on 5 October 1920 at Batavia in the Dutch East Indies, Robert Feenstra studied at the University of Amsterdam and obtained his doctorate in 1949. He was immediately offered a chair at the University of Utrecht, but just three years later was called to the most ancient and renowned of the Dutch universities, Leiden, where for the next 60 years he burnished its venerable reputation for the study of Roman law and legal history. These decades were to see an unbroken stream of books and articles, a production all the more remarkable in that it was based upon deep scholarship, always emerging from a direct encounter with the sources themselves.

Robert Feenstra was closely bound to the Max Planck Institute, serving as the President of its International Commission for a quarter century after its foundation in 1964. Following his retirement, much of the work on his annotated edition of Grotius' *De iure belli ac pacis*, published in 1993, was undertaken during an extended residence at the Institute. Other academic institutions vied to express their recognition of the quality of his scholarship: over the years he was awarded eleven honorary degrees from various European and South African universities, while his friends and pupils presented him with numerous *Festschriften* and other volumes in homage. He was early a member of the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences, and a corresponding member of the Royal Flemish Academy, the Göttinger Akademie der Wissenschaften, the Accademia dei Lincei and the British Academy. For his services to scholarship he was created a Knight, later a Knight Commander, of the Order of the Netherlands Lion; similar honours in Italy, Belgium and France were to follow. For fully sixty-three years his editorship of the *Tijdschrift voor Rechtsgeschiedenis* ensured its reputation among the leading journals in the field.

Robert Feenstra was equally at home among the manuscripts which preserve the record of medieval legal teaching at the University of Orléans and the printed sources of the classic Roman-Dutch Law of the 17th century; in both fields he was the unrivalled master. But his great passion was legal bibliography, and he was the founder and in large measure the author of a series of bibliographies covering the history of Dutch legal science from the foundation of the Republic to its last representatives at the beginning of the 19th century. Under the aegis of the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences, three volumes, on the law professors of the Universities of Leiden, Franeker and Utrecht, were published during his lifetime. In the last weeks of his life he could inspect the proofs of the fourth volume on Groningen and Harderwijk, and add his observations and corrections to the concluding volume on the Dutch jurists active outside the universities, of which he is co-author. So at the end he could contemplate with serenity a major element of his life's work, a comprehensive bibliography of the illustrious Roman-Dutch school of law, drawing to completion under his tutelage.

His visits to the Institute in Frankfurt were always a great source of pleasure to him, not only to meet his many friends and admirers, but also for the opportunity to consult the ever-growing collection of treasures preserved in its library. The humanist motto *Ad fontes* was always the guiding principle of Robert Feenstra's scholarship. His passing closes an era in the study of European legal history, but his work will live on wherever the writings of the great jurists of the European past are still valued and studied.