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Editorial

With great pleasure and a touch of trepidation, the editorial board of the Journal presents to you the maiden issue of the Journal for Digital Legal History (DLH). The idea for the DLH was born in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, when the Digital Methods and Resources in Legal History conference organised by the Max Planck Institute for Legal History and Legal Theory had to be postponed because its progenitors had chosen the unfortunate dates of 19-20th of March 2020 for this event. A few days before, most Western countries had followed China's example and went into lockdown. Little did we know that academic life and the world at large would never be the same again. At present, we are used to online conferences, meetings, remote work, and more. Scientific research no longer takes place solely within the four walls of a distinguished library. With an internet connection - preferably a high-speed one - an academic can work from almost anywhere nowadays. Nevertheless, many journals still hide the fruits of public-funded research behind paywalls, restricting access to a limited few paying customers while sending out expensive paper copies. This model is increasingly under pressure, and the pandemic has only underscored how outdated this model really is.

This first issue online of the Journal for Digital Legal History aims to be a kind of manifesto of the journal's objectives. In an increasingly networked world, at the center of which are debates about the use and future of artificial intelligence, we have created a platform where it is possible to share projects, ongoing or future research, and to critically discuss digital methods and their application to legal history. We offer a new way of thinking about the discipline without spatial and temporal boundaries, and thus, of collaborating on the present and future of legal history.

As an editorial team, we embarked on this venture with a shared vision: to create a space where digital legal history could flourish by providing an appropriate infrastructure for publishing unconventional pieces of digitally informed legal history. The road we traversed was uncharted but fueled by a belief in the transformative power of digital tools for legal history. With a total of eleven contributions, the volume of submissions for our first volume exceeded our expectations.

In our first issue, we find four short notices, varying from a description of two valuable online databases comprising legislation related to enslavement and multicultural relations in the Dutch West Indies colonies, and the launch of a Roman law massive-open online course (MOOC). We also received and published two book reviews on digital history. Ilya Kotlyar furthermore underscores the potential of structural linguistics methodology for studying the Roman *regulae iuris* in a full-length article, and four full-length contributions detailing the design, purpose and results of digital legal history projects ongoing in the United States of America, related to the use of slave cases as a precedent, tribal constitutions, and habeas corpus. All of these contributions highlight the potential of digital databases, new methodological tools, and novel media for the communication of research and education related to legal history.

Despite this initial success, a flutter of anxiety remains. Will the academic community embrace this bold venture? Will the unorthodox methods employed in these articles find a receptive audience? Will we receive as many contributions for our 2024 issue? Only time can tell. For now, we extend our gratitude to the contributors who entrusted us with their scholarship. To our readers, we invite you to embark on this intellectual journey with us, to question, to challenge, and to revel in the possibilities that lie at the intersection of, on the one hand, digital humanities and empirical legal studies, and on the other hand, legal history.

Editorial Team
Journal for Digital Legal History

Acknowledgements

This issue would not have come to be if it were not for the dedicated work of our reviewers. Academic output is a joint process in which we need our reviewers to keep us sharp and closely monitor the quality. This is often taken for granted, yet it takes a whole lot of time to read a text thoroughly and then write a review. We wish to express our sincere gratitude to them for dedicating time and energy to all reviewers. While we pledge to honour the anonymity of our reviewers, we also wish to acknowledge their hard work. As such, we typically offer them the possibility of being acknowledged openly, by name, in the editorial. Due to the limited number of articles and reviewers this year, we would breach the first premises, and thus, we will list the names of our (treasured) reviewers in the following year's issue alongside the reviewers of that year.

We would like to offer a special note of thanks to Paul Bastijns. His unwavering support and dedication have been pivotal in ensuring our publications' smooth operation and success. Furthermore, we thank Ghent University for graciously hosting our journal and ensuring it is Open Access.

Editorial Team
Journal for Digital Legal History