

# Guillermo Floris Margadant Law Scholar

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Photos courtesy of Nahim Margadant

Guillermo Floris Margadant was born in The Hague, Holland, in February 1924. His father, mathematician by profession and philologist by choice, was, according to his son, “a typical *Privatgelehrter*, a scholar without an official job, happily dedicated to his own research.” Margadant died in Toluca, in the State of Mexico, in March 2002, professor emeritus of the National Autonomous University of Mexico. He had received innumerable honors, prizes and decorations as the result of being, like his father, a scholar happily dedicated to research and teaching, except, in his case, with the highest possible university position and multiple acknowledgments. To

what was all this owed? To having produced a broad and constant body of work, to having had a professional attitude that coincided with the motto on his *Ex Libris*: “It is the task that preserves our vitality.” And by God, Guillermo F. Margadant —attacks of gout and other physical ailments notwithstanding— was an example of vitality in the human endeavor as long as he lived. And also an example of intelligence, a sense of humor and dedication to the intellectual tasks he carried out day to day, supporting himself with a cane toward the end, and always in a dozen languages (“little windows to the world” he called them) that allowed him to delve into a multitude of branches of human knowledge, his instruments for satisfying his insatiable curiosity for understanding the cosmos.

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I met Margadant 36 years ago. I was his student in the courses on Roman law for teachers at the UNAM Law School in 1965. From that time on I shared with him different types of relationships. From being his student, I went to being his collaborator, then an editor of some of his works, a co-author of others, a joint lecturer and organizer of colloquia, symposia, seminars and congresses on this side and that of the ocean, to having one of his last books dedicated to me (*Los sistemas jurídicos contemporáneos* [Contemporary Legal Systems]), and accompanying him on many academic and pleasure trips. And above all, I became a friend. That is why I write these lines dedicated to the work he, my teacher and friend, did at the UNAM (both in the Law School and the Institute for Legal Research) in the area of teaching and legal research in general, and particularly in the specialties of Roman law, the history of law and comparative law.

In the field of Roman law, it is to Margadant that we owe the most important book published in Mexico in the last half century: *Derecho Romano Privado* (Private Roman Law), first published in 1960 and reprinted more than 25 times since then. I also think

Margadant has enriched the tradition of Roman law with two other outstanding works: *El significado del derecho romano dentro de la enseñanza jurídica contemporánea* (The Meaning of Roman Law in Contemporary Legal Teaching), his doctoral thesis, and *Segunda vida del derecho romano* (The Second Life of Roman Law). Both these volumes are dedicated to the reception of Roman law in the West. With regard to the history of law, he penned a *Historia universal del derecho* (Universal History of Law) and *Historia del derecho mexicano* (History of Mexican Law), both of which when published filled vacuums in the existing literature on these topics in our country's law schools. He also wrote historical-legal monographs, such as those dedicated to colonial law and the relationship between state and Church from the colonial period to the Salinas administration. With regard to comparative law, his books on the historical evolution of Japanese and Soviet law—the result of sabbaticals spent in those countries—are fundamental. His last book, published posthumously, was about the law after Russia's 1991 revolution following the collapse

