I thank the dean for introducing me and for sketching, in a nutshell, the role of George Sarton for the history of sciences, and the objectives of the Ghent University Sarton Committee. For our Legal History Institute, each occasion to present a candidate for the Sarton medal is a delightful way to honour an esteemed colleague in the international research field of legal history, and especially the history of jurisprudence. As every jurist who has ever attended any course of legal history commonly knows, the development of both Roman and canon law has been of paramount importance for the legal science. In continental Europe, one could not imagine legal science without the learned foundations, laid by the professors of the medieval *ius commune*. Starting in Northern Italy in the late 11th century, these scholars studied, annotated and commented on the texts of the old Roman Empire, as well as those of the Catholic church, which also has Rome as its centre. This in itself could already be reason enough to single out an excellent scholar of this *ius commune* in Italy, and in its capital in particular. However, there are many more reasons why my colleagues Dirk Heirbaut, Rik Opsomer, and myself, did not hesitate to present Emanuele Conte as a candidate for the Sarton medal.

Professor Conte is an internationally respected specialist of medieval law and medieval doctrine in particular. He is professor of legal history at the Facoltà di Giurisprudenza of Roma Tre University, where, as Director, he is the head of the Department of legal history and legal theory. The members of the Ghent Legal History Institute are happy to welcome professor Conte, as well as three of his most dynamic and charming...
collaborators. I thank Stefania Gialdroni, Sara Menzinger and Silvia Di Paolo, as well as Antonia Fiori from La Sapienza, for having presented their recent research this afternoon. I hope that the connections that have been formed today between the young legal historians of both our Roman and Ghent research groups, may be the fruitful base for future scientific collaboration. I wish all of them a splendid career, to the example of their director, professor Conte, with whom they have the privilege of working.

Emanuele Conte, born in Rome in the late summer of 1959, obtained his law degree cum laude at the famous La Sapienza di Roma in 1983. His thesis, written under the direction of the well known professor Cortese, was rewarded a special university prize. It was certainly a unique honour for him as a student to be able to follow in the footsteps of a great scholar as Ennio Cortese, one of the biggest names in the Italian tradition of medieval legal history.

From 1986 to 1988, Emanuele Conte followed a doctoral school programme in the research field of Italian Legal History at the Università Statale di Milano, and he defended his thesis in 1988. Meanwhile, he had enjoyed several stays in the beating heart of research into European legal history, the Max Planck Institut für Europäische Rechtsgeschichte in Frankfurt am Main, where he especially appreciated working with professor Gero Dolezalek, a retired professor of the universities of Aberdeen and Leipzig, and an internationally renowned ius commune specialist. Also in the following years, the Frankfurt Max Planck Institute would remain a frequently visited study centre. But Emanuele Conte also had many other inspiring contacts, of which the French scholar Yan Thomas deserves special mention. Another legal history laboratory repeatedly visited by Emanuele Conte is the famous Robbins Collection at the University of California in Berkeley. As professore Conte entrusted me a while ago, his collaboration with the famous Stephan Kuttner in Berkeley was decisive for his own research plans.

In more than fifty scientific publications, Emanuele Conte has developed insights and ideas on medieval and early modern law, as well as the recent developments of legal history itself. His profile as a writer is a perfect fit for the Sarton Medal. Many of his publications deal with the history of the science of law, for instance with the study of Roman law at the late medieval universities (and here I would particularly like to refer to his Accademie
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studentesche a Roma... De modis docendi et discendi in iure. On the modes of learning and teaching law). In several contributions, he especially focuses on the way learned law and everyday practice interact, for example in his ‘Diritto comune. Storia e storiografia di un sistema dinamico’, ‘Servi medievali’ or his recent ‘Roman law vs. Customs in a changing society’, describing Italian society in the 12th and 13th centuries. The way learned lawyers, trained and teaching at university, evaluated the customary rules of feudal society will also be the subject of his Sarton lecture in a few minutes.

Emanuele Conte has a thorough knowledge of the works of the earliest professors of law in Bologna, their scholastic methods and their writings. He studied these works, both at the material level, interpreting their contents, and at a more formal level, as far as their bibliographical form is concerned.

Professor Conte paid special attention to the formation and the roles of jurists throughout the centuries, not only as academics, but also as servants of the political system and as defenders of private interests. He is acquainted with the classical theories of property, possession and prescription, but also studied more specific statuses in depth, such as the exact status of the coloni. In a 1997 article on this subject, he concludes: Observée sur la longue période, la législation justinienne sur le colonat révèle donc une curieuse histoire: plus ou moins oubliée pendant cinq siècles, elle a subi une interprétation énergique de la part des romanistes médiévaux, influencés par des soucis plus pratiques qu’on ne pourrait l’imaginer d’emblée. It is these kinds of ‘curious histories’, in-depth investigations into generations of jurisprudence revealing renaissances and re-interpretations of old rules, that make up the research field in which Emanuele Conte is a fully skilled artisan.

And he is not only an expert at the texts of the Justinian corpus, but he also published on themes in canon law, like ecclesiastical property. For instance, I enjoyed reading his contribution to an Ecole française de Rome volume on the papal bull Unam Sanctam. In this text, he argues that pope Innocent III’s 1209 compilation of canonical texts was the first real authentic code of the Middle Ages, and that popes like Gregory IX and Boniface VIII were the first real sovereign lawmakers, at a much earlier time than all temporal rulers. The church copied the Justinian example long
before kings did so. And the popes built their power on both legal and theological grounds.

In his writings, professor Conte does not only analyse the learned texts in detail, but he also has a full grasp of the social and political context, which he describes in detail. Medieval law texts are not just skins of dead animals (parchment), but colourful pictures of a living culture. Canon law and roman law are not separated fields of study, just like learned law and customary law are not unconnected bodies either. It is for this shaded and colourful, panoramic view on the living law, that we want to honour Emanuele Conte by offering him the Sarton Medal. Although most of his works were initially written in Italian, more and more articles have been published in English, French, Spanish and German in the last decade. The solidity of this research made him a welcome teacher and researcher all over Europe. He was frequently guest at Peterhouse College in Cambridge, director of the *Weeks of doctoral studies in the frame of the European Doctorate on History, Theory, Sociology and Anthropology of European Legal Cultures*, director of the *International School of Ius Commune del Centro di Cultura Scientifica di Erice*, director of a research unit *Manoscritti giuridici medievali*, and guest lecturer at the *Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales* in Paris, as well as at the universities of Barcelona, Lyon, Nanterre, Paris II Panthéon-Sorbonne and Toulouse.

After his doctorate and some study periods abroad, Emanuele Conte started his academic career as researcher at Rome’s *La Sapienza*, more particularly in the school for archivists and librarians. In the 1990’s, he was associate professor of legal history at the universities of Roma Tre and Catania, Sicily. Meanwhile, he became substitute professor in Cagliari, Sardinia, and since 2000, he has been working as *professore ordinario di Storia del Diritto Medievale e Moderno* at the Law Faculty of Roma Tre.

Living, studying and teaching in *la città eterna*, an inexhaustible source of the Western legal tradition, must surely be a privilege, especially for a charismatic and enthusiastic teacher, who also boasts a charming wife and a loving daughter and son. I welcome madam Conte and thank her for honouring us with her presence, and I join her in my sincere congratulations to her husband.

Dear professor Conte, as an expression of our appreciation of your scientific work, we are glad to present you the Sarton Medal. To use a medieval
feudal term, my colleagues and I are honoured to seize this opportunity to render *hommagium* to professor Conte as an exceptional scholar. Thank you for being with us today. May I now invite you to deliver your Sarton Lecture.