

Byroads in legal history

by Anne-Sophie Chambost – 27 March 2026

What does an academic journey reveal about us as lecturers and researchers ? Without giving too much away, I hope that the milestones outlined in this profile will offer some guidance to young legal scholars considering venturing down the path of legal history. To begin with, one thing is clear : a career is made up of encounters. There were many of them. From the first lecture that opened the door to a discipline (Ch. Bruschi), to the choice of a thesis topic with a supervisor whose confidence carried me forward (N. Dockès) ; to repeated collaborations, which crystallised in particular in the writing of an important book (J.-L. Halpérin, F. Audren) ; finally, since academics do indeed publish, cannot be ignore the encounters with publishers (S. Doireau, P. Rolin) and librarians (A. Gottely, V. Lacroix) without whom our work would not reach an audience.

My thesis topic was unusual, and remained so for a long time. Having become aware of the



political nature of law, I focused my research on the legal thought of an anarchist (Pierre-Joseph Proudhon). This thesis topic proved to be a stroke of luck, as it opened the door to collaborations far beyond my own discipline (with philosophers, historians and economists). Interest from legal scholars came later, but it eventually materialised, and I had the chance to explain my work in a lecture at the *Société d'histoire du droit* ... an expanded version of which was subsequently published on an anarchist website (<https://www.grand-angle-libertaire.net/?p=4899>) ! Today, I am delighted to see young legal scholars taking up the baton, with some highly stimulating insights.

Whilst the history of ideas struggles to gain recognition as a discipline, it is rich in epistemological insights, that have informed my thinking as a legal historian. Under the guise of defending the place of political ideas in legal studies, I proposed a methodological toolkit in an article published in 2015 in the *Revue d'histoire des facultés de droit*¹. This line of thinking has continued and been enriched through my collaboration with my two co-authors on the book *Histoires contemporaines du droit* (Daloz, 2020). My work on the history of legal thought had already been examining the material and intellectual conditions of the production, dissemination and reception of legal knowledge, with a particular focus on the media through which legal doctrine is conveyed (legal journals, law textbooks, reviews, etc.). With the support of my publishers, I created and developed the collection *Contextes. Culture du droit*, which has been contributing to the renewal of legal thought since 2014 (presentation in *Les Cahiers Portalis* <https://droit.cairn.info/revue-les-cahiers-portal-2024-2-page-75?lang=fr>).

Digital humanities now play a vital role in legal research and the dissemination of legal knowledge. My collaborations with librarians have enabled me to appreciate the full extent of this, and these have led to fruitful outcomes : online exhibitions (first and foremost the one initiated by Florent Garnier, <https://expo-grande-guerre-biu-cujas.univ-paris1.fr>), a website

¹ Anne-Sophie Chambost. 'Ce n'est pas du droit...' Is the history of political ideas useful in law? *Journal of the History of Law Faculties and Legal Culture, the Legal Profession and Legal Literature*, 2015 (35), pp. 497–538.

dedicated to the journal of Critique du droit (<https://data-cercriid.inist.fr/s/proces/ark:/54726/R9GqR5P9k3gG>), and a tool for exploring one of the collections at the Cujas Library (<https://bcujas-hoppe.univ-paris1.fr>).

The milestones in the journey outlined so far have been set with the research community in mind. But I believe it is important, in conclusion, to emphasise the value of engaging in public debate. This is one of the missions of higher education as a public service. In the current climate, it is essential for academics to put their knowledge at the service of the community. To this end, my concern for dissemination has recently found a new form of expression with the publication of a first (semi-)fictional text, *Jusqu'à la garde. L'assassinat de Sadi Carnot* (Libel, 2026). It offers another, more nuanced and sensitive way of reflecting on the scope of certain radical ideas. Once an anarchist, always an anarchist...

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