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PREFACE

Countless books detail the development of Roman law and explain the laws of the ancient Romans. Similarly, many scholars have traced the law of ancient Athens. I wrote *THE ESSENTIALS OF GREEK AND ROMAN LAW* with students and educated lay readers in mind. The chapters dealing with ancient Greece focus primarily on the law of ancient Athens in the 5th and 4th centuries B.C.E. But material relating to other Greek colonies and city states also plays a significant role in the development of ancient Greek law. The Roman law chapters explore both law and legal institutions and emphasize the growth and expansion of legal principles. Roman law still serves as the foundation for the civil laws of many nations today. And given the importance of globalization, Roman law is likely to continue to influence the modern world for the foreseeable future.

Each unit begins with a “Background and Beginnings” chapter that establishes the historical context in which law developed and introduces relevant principles of jurisprudence (*i.e.*, legal philosophy). The second chapter in each unit covers procedural aspects of the law, such as court structure, judges, trial procedure, evidence, and legislation. The remaining chapters examine substantive legal topics such as property, contracts, family law, criminal law, and the like. The text also maintains a focus on the connections and influences of social, cultural, economic, philosophical, and political forces as they have affected law and its development.

In addition, I have included several sections that are intended to add another dimension. These sections, entitled “Law in Literature,” use works of ancient literature to explore aspects of law as seen through the eyes of poets, dramatists, orators, and historians. In theory, modern readers can learn a great deal about law through literature because literature often lacks the “official filter” of many traditional legal sources. Of course each individual author brings his own biases about law and the legal system to his writing. But as long as we acknowledge the potential for such bias, these sections can offer completely different perspectives and insights.

Several years ago I wrote *LAW IN THE ANCIENT WORLD*. That book surveyed law in ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece and Rome. I used the chapters on Greek and Roman law in that book as a starting point for writing *THE ESSENTIALS OF GREEK AND ROMAN LAW*. But I significantly rewrote, restructured, and/or revised virtually everything.

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Russ VerSteeg
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