International Transactions in Goods

GLOBAL SALES IN
COMPARATIVE CONTEXT

Martin Davies
David V. Snyder



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To Jane
With whom all is not only possible but good
D.V.S.

And to all the unseen men and women who risk their lives carrying goods by sea M.D.

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Acknowledgments

This book has been long in the making, and our debts have grown as the years have gone by and the pages have stacked higher.

First, we want to acknowledge what we see as a deep intellectual debt. Despite our generally minimalistic approach to citations, we want to make clear that we have relied on gifted scholars whose work has influenced our views. Even from the Preface, the reader will see the influence of the great comparatists René David, Konrad Zweigert, and Hein Kötz, and we have made frequent use of their work not only for their grand visions but, particularly with respect to the latter two scholars, for their detailed work on the doctrines we explore, made accessible with great learning and insight by the late Tony Weir. See Konrad Zweigert & HEIN KÖTZ, INTRODUCTION TO COMPARATIVE LAW (Tony Weir trans., 3d rev. ed. 1998). On German law we have usually looked to THE GERMAN LAW OF CONTRACT by SIR Basil Markesinis, Hannes Unberath, and Angus Johnston (2d ed. 2006) and to REINHARD ZIMMERMANN'S THE NEW GERMAN LAW OF OBLIGATIONS: HISTORICAL AND COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES (2005). Our constant sources on French law have been PRINCIPLES OF FRENCH LAW (2d ed. 2008) by JOHN BELL, SOPHIE BOYRON, and SIMON WHITTAKER, as well as other works by them and their coauthors, in addition to the less up-to-date but concise and penetrating classic by BARRY NICHOLAS, THE FRENCH LAW OF CONTRACT (1992). In addition, for French law itself, we have used standard references like the annotated Code civil and Philippe le Tourneau's Droit de la responsabilité et des contrats in their most recent Dalloz editions.

As to the CISG, we wish to acknowledge the historic work of John O. Honnold and Peter Schlechtriem, scholars who were there before the treaty and who not only witnessed but made much of the international law of sales. They have gone during the writing of this book, but their works have been with us—piled on our desks, usually—as is the work by their intellectual fellow travelers, Harry Flechtner and Ingeborg Schwenzer. See John O. Honnold, Uniform Law for International Sales under the 1980 United Nations Convention (Harry Flechtner ed., 4th ed. 2009); Schlechtriem & Schwenzer, Commentary on the UN Convention on the International Sale of Goods

(CISG) (Ingeborg Schwenzer ed., 3d ed. 2010). Aside from these works, we have often looked to the recent UN Convention on Contracts for the International Sale of Goods (CISG) edited by Stefan Kröll, Loukas Mistelis, and Pilar Perales Viscasillas (2011).

We also acknowledge the assistance we have gained from the work of Michael Bridge, whose scholarship covers both of the sometimes warring worlds of English law and the CISG, his The International Sale of Goods: Law and Practice (2d ed. 2007), being the preeminent example.

As will be apparent, these are hardly all of our main sources, but these have been so prominent as to influence our thinking in ways we perhaps barely recognize. We can only hope to tread the same path behind these scholars whom we acknowledge and follow.

Teachers and scholars have not been our only guides. Both of us have taught the law of international sales for a number of years, and countless colleagues and students have taught us even as we have taught them; some have helped with research, and many have helped with discussion, debate, and questions. Not all can be named, but we wish to acknowledge in particular the help of Rémi Auba Bresson, Sârra-Tilila Bounfour, Michael Tyler Brown, Shaleen Brunsdale, Bénédicte Fauvarque-Cosson, Robert Force, Michael Francel, Janette Hays, Jessica Marrero, Adeen Postar, Matthew Ribe, Benjamin Ross, David J. and Justin Snyder (amazingly, no relation to each other or to us), Lisa Spagnolo, and Diana Verm. These good friends and colleagues have saved us from many errors. We have no doubt that many remain, which are of course our own responsibility, and we would be grateful to readers who call them to our attention (gently, we hope). Both of us can easily be reached by e-mail.

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Our time belongs to our families as well as to our work, and our families have been an indispensable support through this project. Our debt to them goes beyond what we can say, and we will not try to bound the boundless by hedging it about with words. On this score, we can only give our thanks.

In addition to these many debts, we gratefully acknowledge permission to use the excerpts and translations that appear in the text. In this regard, we wish to acknowledge these copyright holders for permission to use extracts from the following works:

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Pace CISG Database at http://www.cisg.law.pace.edu/.

Temple Journal of International and Comparative Law for Lisa Spagnolo, *Opening Pandora's Box: Good Faith and Precontractual Liability in the CISG*, 21 TEMPLE INT'L & COMP. L.J. 261 (2008).



Preface

This is a book for learning in an international and commercial context. It is written with the assumption that students of international sales will come from many backgrounds, with varying knowledge and experience of common law, civil law, international law, and the world of commerce. All four aspects are crucial, but because some students may have no background in one or more of these areas, we try to explain all four. And because students with different backgrounds are often used to different styles of teaching and learning, we have tried to accommodate different habits of thought. The book includes extensive textual explanation (ordinary for many civil law students but unusual for US students) along with case excerpts to show how the law is put into action in the context of litigation (ordinary for US students but unusual for civil law students) and a plethora of problems, the vast majority of which are based on actual cases (to give further knowledge of how the rules work in real life, and to make sure everyone can use what has just been learned). Everyone, including students, teachers, and ordinary readers, should find much that is familiar along with much that will allow expansion into unfamiliar methods of learning, analysis, and thinking—which is of course part of the goal.

Running through all of this is a belief that there is nothing more interesting and nothing more important than what happens in the real world, and that law is itself interesting and important because it must operate in the real world. Although this is a law book, it is meant to be oriented to commercial practice. Understanding the "real world" of business is as much a part of understanding the law as knowing the provisions of a commercial code or the articles of a treaty. This approach is animated by three simple ideas. First is that the reader will want to practice law in the world of international sales. Second, the law is much easier to understand in context. The rules are often designed for particular commercial problems, and even if the rules were not designed that way, they have evolved that way. A similar point is worth making in the international context: the principles and policies underlying the rules are aimed at particular international goals. Once the reasons behind the rules are clear, the rules usually fall neatly into place. (Most of the time. When they do not, then there

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is a problem to be solved, and that is one of the central callings of a successful lawyer.) The international and commercial context of the transactions and disputes makes sense of most of the rules.

Third, putting the law together with commercial and international dynamics—always changing, with different aspects acting on each other, leading to further changes in law, business, and the world—is among the most attractive and exciting parts of law practice in international commerce. This is not abstract stuff. This is about the law needing to resolve problems when goods move from one country to another, which may involve different languages for negotiation and documentation, weeks of ocean carriage, and varying expectations and understandings. This will not be about mere exposition or idle debate ("Oh, isn't it interesting!" or "Let us discuss the role of international institutions!"). In the problems and cases in this book, there will often be winners and losers, and the amount of the win or the loss can generally be measured in money. This is the real world. Helping the client win—a lot—is part of the job. Knowing when a loss is in prospect and that it is time to settle is also part of the job. At the same time, particularly on the transactional rather than the litigation side, there may be winners and winners. That is the idea of the transaction: both parties think that they will be better off for the transaction, and often they will both be right. Helping clients achieve these goals, good for them, good for the economy, and good for society, is also part of the lawyer's job. This book is meant to help the reader become that lawyer in the context of international sales.

This approach has practical and theoretical implications, some of which we have tried to indicate in the title. The book is about international sales, but there is much more to the transaction than the law of sales. Perhaps most apparent are questions of payment and credit. In the international context, transportation of the goods is a close second. We have tried to view a sale as a holistic transaction, addressing all of its commercial aspects, from the negotiation and conclusion of the contract to the arrangements for payment and transport, including legal and commercial sources of leverage, as well as remedies for reaching solutions, or at least resolutions, when the transaction goes wrong. For example, the book covers not only the legal default rules on delivery but also of course the Incoterms. Even so, the Incoterms are just more rules. We also try to explore the dirty (and not coincidentally, interesting) details, like how it works to put the goods into containers (those big metal shipping boxes), how the containers enable multimodal transport (moving the container from truckbed to rail car to container yard to the deck of a ship, perhaps covering hundreds of miles before the goods even leave the country of origin), and how this current practice fits poorly with traditional shipping terms, but how newer ones are designed to solve the problem. In short, our task has been to write a book about the law governing the commercial transaction, not just the law of sales.1

Similarly, although the book is about the law of international sales, the book is not just about the United Nations Convention on Contracts for the International Sale of Goods

^{1.} This approach has limits. Although the book endeavors to cover the law of the "commercial transaction," public law remains outside the scope of this volume. Matters of customs law, free trade agreements, countervailing duties, and so on are a different area of law and often a different area of law practice.

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(Vienna 1980), generally called the CISG. To be sure, the CISG is often at the center of each topic in the book, and plenty of space is given to international law. But while the Convention governs many international sales, many are governed by domestic law. For that reason, quite a lot of the book is about domestic law. As one volume hardly can cover the domestic sales laws of the whole world, the book instead includes the most important and exemplary systems. On the common law side, the domestic sales law of the United States and of England receive attention. Both are important commercially, and sales contracts are often governed by the law of England or the law of New York, for instance. London and New York are also frequent venues for litigation and arbitration. On the civil law side, the book covers French and German domestic law, not only because of the commercial and legal markets in those countries but also because most civil law systems around the world are descended from, or based on, one or the other of those systems.

As will be apparent now, this book is as much a work of comparative law as it is of international law. We emphasize, though, that comparative law here is a strategic subject, not an abstract one. Generally the parties will be able to choose which law will govern their transaction. The lawyer must ask, "Which law will be better for my client?" And of course the lawyer for the other party must be asking similar questions. This is an issue of concrete comparison with particular trade-offs in light of negotiating moves by the other party: an intensely strategic decision that must be made with knowledge of multiple legal systems. That knowledge must include not only the differences between alternative rules but also enough nuance to see how those rules may move toward each other under commercial pressure, even as differing cultural and legal attitudes may prevent them from converging entirely. This book aims to expose the differing rules, to explore them in enough depth to see that they are rarely diametrically opposed, to understand the commercial impetus to convergence, and to appreciate the differing outlooks that may keep them apart.

Although it may seem curious, the practical orientation employed here makes theory no less important, particularly in an international context. Most immediately for the reader and the student, the rules are overwhelming without understanding the theories that hold them together. The theories that thread through the rules, like the business realities that instigate those same rules, help to make sense of the rules so they are easier to understand and remember. Further, since the book cannot hope to cover the law of the whole world, knowing the theory behind the exemplary domestic laws (the United States and England on the one hand and France and Germany on the other) will allow a lawyer to grasp the laws of other countries quickly: they will fit within a framework already understood and assimilated, and even where particular rules may differ, those differences can be identified, appreciated, and exploited more readily because of the systematic knowledge already acquired. So we have tried to pay attention to theory at the same time as we retain our commitment to a practical approach.

All of this is a large task. Not everyone will have time for it all. For that reason, the book is designed for adaptation to different scales. A short, quick course may take on only the international law of sales—just the CISG. More time would allow treatment of matters like choice of law or letters of credit or both. A full course in law school can cover the whole

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book. It is a matter of priority and time, left to the interests and desires of the reader or the teacher.

Because this is meant to be a coursebook that makes the law as plain as possible, we have tried to keep citations to a bare minimum. In our explanations of what the law is, we have not included citations to the many treatises discussing each of the issues. Usually only primary sources are cited—the CISG, for example, or the Uniform Commercial Code or the French *Code civil*. The text may occasionally cite a particular secondary work that could prove difficult to find without a citation, but otherwise we generally have not cited secondary sources. Further, in keeping with the convention for casebooks, most citations and footnotes within excerpted materials are omitted without ellipsis. Each excerpt is headed by a citation so a researcher can find the original source with full text and full internal citations. Footnotes that are retained are renumbered to fit within the numbering of the chapter.

Along similar lines, we have not cited in the text the cases on which so many of the problems are based. It is tendentious to suggest that students look up all of those cases. If the problem is posed, students should have from the reading all they need to answer it or, more likely, to make the arguments for both sides and to reach an informed, if not entirely certain, conclusion. Citations to the cases on which the problems are based are given in the Teacher's Manual.

There are two main exceptions to our very light use of citations. When one of us has written on a subject and may for that reason be thought inclined to a particular view, we have tried to include citations to our own work, and where relevant, work by leading opposing scholars. Second, in the section on the performance remedy, we have included fuller citation because we believe some of the ideas and arguments are relatively new, and support for our views is therefore given. Even so, we have foregone the usual lengthy citations that weigh down the page with notes, explanations, and qualifications.

Clarity is our goal. Simplicity aids clarity, but law is not always simple. International law is simple even less often, and comparative law is no simpler. Still, we have thought throughout that if we can be clear about what is clear and can also be clear about what is unclear, then we, and other students of the law of international transactions, can move forward efficiently in ways that will be useful and realistic in a globalizing marketplace permeated by law.

M. D. D. V. S. January 2014

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