

Anders Winroth: The reception of European canon law in Skara and in Iceland

Canon law as taught at the great universities of Europe began to have an impact on law in Sweden and in Iceland in the thirteenth century. Collections of canon law and university textbooks of law were found in the libraries of, notably, the cathedrals. They influenced not only the bishops' own jurisdiction, but also the way domestic law was formulated in Scandinavia. Rules, concepts, and formulations were picked up from the general law. In addition, snippets from those European books were excerpted and inserted into Scandinavian books, something that may have happened especially often in cathedrals. Such excerpts have often been overlooked. In this presentation, I wish to compare and contrast briefly Stockholm KB B 59 (from Skara cathedral) with Reykjavík AM 347 fol. (Belgsdálssbók, which should derive from an Icelandic ecclesiastical institution, perhaps Hólar cathedral). Both contain local efforts to receive, digest, and make useful in a local context general canon law; both also contain excerpts from university textbooks in law. I will suggest that cathedrals played a key role in introducing, adapting, and translating the Latin learned law for the vernacular legal culture of Scandinavia, naturally so since they were the sites of ecclesiastical law courts.