Library of Charles Areskine (1680-1763): Scottish lawyers and book collecting, 1700-1760

Abstract
The thesis uses the study of an individual’s book collection to examine wider themes in eighteenth century Scottish legal, social, political, and intellectual history. Charles Areskine’s library was made up of the books he needed as an advocate and judge, the texts he wanted to use to better understand the law and its history, and the books he used to enhance his ability to participate in the intellectual milieu of early eighteenth century Britain. Charles Areskine of Alva, Lord Tinwald (1680-1763) was an important Scottish lawyer and judge. Following a legal education in the Netherlands, he became an advocate and was called to the Bar in 1711. Areskine’s legal career was very successful and he attained high positions in the Scottish legal establishment becoming Lord Advocate (1737-1742) and Lord Justice Clerk (1748-1763). He was appointed to the bench as Lord Tinwald in 1744. He served in parliament and developed his country estates at Tinwald in Dumfriesshire and at Alva in Clackmannanshire. Areskine is an interesting figure in the early Scottish Enlightenment not least because he began his career not in legal but in academic circles. He was a regent at the University of Edinburgh when he was barely out of his teens and from 1707 to 1734 he was the first Professor of the Law of Nature and Nations at Edinburgh. Areskine was also a traveller, a client of the earl of Ilay, a friend to philosophers, a patron of the arts, and a book collector. A manuscript which lists of the contents of Areskine’s library survives in the National Library of Scotland as NLS MS 3283. ‘Catalogŭs Librorŭm D. Dni. Caroli Areskine de Barjarg, Regiarŭm Causarum Procŭratoris. 1731’ lists 1290 titles divided into books on legal topics, which are not given any specific headings, and ‘Libri Miscellanei’. Although it is clearly dated as 1731, the manuscript was continuously added to and acted as a library catalogue throughout Areskine’s life. The list provides important evidence about Areskine’s participation in the legal, intellectual, and cultural concerns of the early Scottish Enlightenment. Areskine’s law books provide evidence for his scholarly interest in the history of law while showing the types of books lawyers turned to in order to fashion their arguments in the courts. His ‘miscellaneous’ books demonstrate his engagement with the wider cultural concerns of the first half of the eighteenth century. The books that eighteenth century Scottish lawyers owned provide evidence for their interests and influence. Areskine was not unique: his book collecting was part of a wider tradition among Scottish lawyers. Areskine’s legally educated patron, Archibald Campbell, had one of the largest private libraries in Britain and his colleagues on the Bench, Lord Arniston and Lord Hailes, created collections which they stored in specially built rooms in their houses. Because so many of them survive in the Alva Collections of the Advocates Library and the National Library of Scotland, it has been possible to examine Areskine’s books for clues about who owned them before he did and what happened to them after his death. Several inscriptions and bookplates survive in the Alva books which give evidence for a lively book market which was centred on the Scottish legal community. Advocates bought and sold many of their books at auctions. This study shows that books on topics of interest to Scottish lawyers changed hands and stayed in use for decades.

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"This book is about much more than one man and his books. It is a profoundly scholarly study of the intellectual context of Areskine's library that reflects the impact of Enlightenment culture on the life of a busy lawyer and judge. [...] The British and European aspects of Areskine's career that emerge from this thoughtful book demonstrate the importance of the painstaking research on which it is based, as well as what we might learn from future projects which could benefit from its example." Alexander Murdoch, University of Edinburgh. In: Reviews in History (review no. 20 Charles Erskine also spelled Areskine (1680 – 5 April 1763), of Tinwald and Barjarg, Dumfries, and Alva, Clackmannan was Lord Advocate, a Scottish judge, and a politician who sat in the House of Commons from 1722 to 1742. Erskine was the third son of Sir Charles Erskine, 1st Baronet, of Alva, Clackmannanshire and his wife Christian Dundas, daughter of Sir James Dundas, Lord Arniston. He was educated at Edinburgh in 1693. At the age of 20 he was a candidate for the office of one of the four Regents of In Charles Areskine's Library, Karen Baston uses a detailed study of an eighteenth-century Scottish advocate's private book collection to explore key themes of the Scottish Enlightenment including secularisation, modernisation, internationalisation, and the development of legal literature in Scotland.… (more). Sign up for LibraryThing to find out whether you’ll like this book. ▼Conversations (About links). No current Talk conversations about this book.