

LAUDATIO DITLEV TAMM

Dirk Heirbaut

Like many other legal historians Ditlev Tamm (Copenhagen, 1946) is both a lawyer and a historian, but unlike most of his colleagues he even went so far as to write two doctoral theses, one in law and one in history. Apart from that, he has written more than twenty books and numerous articles, both in his native Danish and in other languages, mainly in English and German, but also in Spanish, Italian or French and even in Finnish or Dutch. Likewise, he has given lectures in Danish, English, French, German, Italian and Spanish at several European and Latin American Universities, thus proving that a really great scholar is not constrained by language. His linguistic versatility only mirrors his broad interest for the most diverse subjects. He teaches legal history, comparative law and church law and has published about these subjects, but also about Danish political history, the history of universities and general cultural studies.

His first great research was made for the doctoral thesis in law and concerned the history of private law in nineteenth century Denmark. Already in this work a typical element of Ditlev Tamm's work surfaces: Danish legal history is not seen as an isolated phenomenon, but in a European context, which in this case means the influences of the German criminalist school, the German historical school and the French 1804 Civil Code. His fame as the specialist of nineteenth century private law in the Nordic countries was firmly established when Helmut Coing, director of the Max Planck Institute for Legal history in Frankfurt, the leading institution for legal history in the world, invited him to write the introduction to the volume in his handbook about the Nordic countries, thus making clear that he was the authority about the history of modern private law in the North. However, he has also written about older law, like the *Danske Lov*, the first real codification in Europe.

It would be wrong to conclude from all this that Ditlev Tamm is only a specialist of the history of private law, as he is also a specialist of Danish absolutism and Danish constitutional history. Moreover, nothing could be farther away from these traditional themes of legal history than the subject of his second thesis: collaboration in Denmark during World War II and its repression thereafter.

In the years after this second thesis, Ditlev Tamm became to legal historians 'our man in Copenhagen', writing about Danish variations of several general European themes like notaries public or the French revolution. Sometimes these articles were the product of his lectures for the *Société Jean Bodin pour l'histoire comparative des institutions*, e.g. his study of testaments in the Nordic Countries. That his work always has two faces also becomes clear in his handbooks, of which the main one has two volumes, one about Danish legal history and the other about Roman law and the development of law in Europe (unfortunately only the latter has been translated in English).

As has become clear in this short overview of his bibliography, Ditlev Tamm is a Danish scholar with one eye towards his own country and the other towards Europe. He has been lecturing at several European and Latin American universities and was a guest professor in Kiel. He has spoken at so many international congresses that his foreign colleagues may be forgiven for thinking that Denmark is home to many legal historians, even though for long years Ditlev Tamm was almost alone in researching Danish legal history. Fortunately, thanks to him there will be more Danish legal historians in the future and it is to be hoped that they will follow in his footsteps.

One would do Ditlev Tamm an injustice by thinking he is just a legal historian. He also advises the Danish department of family law, has served as chairman of several official commissions and plays a key role in current debates about church-state relations in Denmark. Needless to say, his academic and social achievements have not gone without recognition. He is a member of the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and many Danish and foreign academic institutions. For example, he was a member of the supervisory board of the Max Planck Institute for

European legal history and he is also a doctor honoris causa of the University of Helsinki.

That Ditlev Tamm, rooted though he is in his Danish heritage, is willing to look critically to it will become clear to readers of the following article, which deals with the question how Nordic the Nordic legal family really is.