

Netherlandic Mennonite Historical Genealogy

The Maraun Family in the Administrative Records of the Teutonic Order (1512-1523)

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Introduction

Typical genealogical research consisting of the collection of names and dates often provides only a one-dimensional view of a family tree. On the other hand, documentary evidence of historical events experienced by ancestors can provide a much deeper and more contoured understanding of these people and their lives. This is particularly true when events can be situated in the context of the social and political circumstances at that time. This article delves into administrative records from Teutonic Prussia to offer a glimpse of the life and experiences of the Maraun family living in the early sixteenth century.

The Genealogy

Genealogical research published by Joachim von Roy [1] describes a merchant from Königsberg who moved to Danzig around the same time that Netherlandic Mennonites were first settling in the area. This merchant was Georg Maraun. His daughter, Gertrud, married Anthonius von Roy on 3 May 1587. Gertrud and Anthonius had three grandchildren who married grandchildren of Gysbert de Veer (1556-1615). Gysbert is recognized as the patriarch of a branch of the de Veer family who participated in the settlement of Chortitza Colony in the late eighteenth century. Many people of Mennonite descent in Canada can trace one line of their family through Gysbert's descendant, Benjamin de Veer (1733-1822), who moved to Chortitza in 1789.

There are two online sources of genealogical research that offer additional information about Georg Maraun. Gerd von Piwowski has published research online and cited Danzig and Frankfurt State Archives as his sources [2]. Holger Lilienthal has published research online and cited Prussian Family Archives (dated 1940) and a genealogical history of the Maraun family published by Hans Mahraun in 1926 [3].

Their work describes Mattheus Maraun who lived in Königsberg-Kneiphof in the latter part of the fifteenth century and died there around 1521. He was an important merchant in the town of Kneiphof, a town that belonged to the economically significant Hanseatic League. Mattheus married Katharina (her family name is uncertain) and they had at least three children: Conrad, Georg, and Regina. It seems very likely that Mattheus' son Georg is the same man documented by Joachim von Roy, although there are no records that prove this with certainty.

The Teutonic Order

From 1230 until 1466 the territory generally associated with the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was a crusader state established by the Knights of the Teutonic Order and called

the State of the Teutonic Order. The State was ruled by the Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights.

Years later in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries when the Netherlandic Mennonites migrated eastward, many settled in regions around the Polish cities of Danzig, Elbing and Marienburg. These cities were situated in Royal Prussia (also known as Polish Prussia) a province of the Crown of the Kingdom of Poland. This province was established around 1466, having been carved out of the State of the Teutonic Order following the Thirteen Years' War. This war was a conflict over control of territory, fought between the Knights of the Teutonic Order and the Polish Crown. The Polish Crown won decisively and removed the western territories from the grasp of the Teutonic Order.

While the Teutonic Order lost their western lands in the aftermath of the war, they were permitted to retain their eastern territories, although only as a reluctant protectorate of the Polish Crown. With Königsberg as the capital city, Teutonic Prussia flourished for many years. In 1525 continuous aggravated resistance from the Teutonic Order and pressure for social change arising from the Reformation caused the Polish Crown to secularize Teutonic Prussia. The Catholic Teutonic Order was forced to relinquish control of its territory and was replaced by a series of Protestant Dukes drawn from the royal dynasty. The land became known as Ducal Prussia. In a masterful triumph of politics over principle, the last Teutonic Grand Master, Albrecht, cast off the mantle of Grand Master, rejected the Teutonic Order, converted to Lutheranism, and became the first Duke to rule the territory.

In 1569 Royal Prussia and Ducal Prussia formalized their political relationship and became the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The Commonwealth survived until 1772 when a series of political maneuvers by the Russian, Prussian and Austrian empires led to its partitioning and assimilation.

The Records [4]

Records exist of the administrative proceedings of Teutonic Prussia before it became Ducal Prussia. The Maraun family is mentioned numerous times. Listed below is a chronicle of the events concerning the family.

1512: In Königsberg Matthaus Maraun makes a request to the governing council to permit the payout of the salvage value of goods on a ship owned by Paul Goltbeck. It appears that the ship, laden with goods from Danzig, became stranded in Balga, midway between Elbing and Königsberg. Maraun, as guarantor of the shipment, wishes to have the salvage paid out so he can be released from the guarantee.

1516: There is a discussion about negotiation protocols with the city of Danzig in respect of a shipment of wood lost en route from Danzig to Königsberg. It seems that Matthaus Maraun had arranged to raft the wood to Königsberg, but the shipment was intercepted and stolen.

1516: Later this year Grand Master Albrecht of the Teutonic Order approves a request by Matthaues Maraun of Kneiphof to harvest wood from the forests around Insterburg. [Ed. Insterburg, established by the Teutonic Knights in 1337 is a town located 90 km. east of Kneiphof.]

1517: In this year there are a couple of discussions concerning a report filed by Matthaues Maraun describing a clash with Lithuanians. There are no further details available. [Ed. It is difficult to know what this clash refers to. The most significant political event in the region in 1517 was an alliance formed by the Teutonic Order and the Russians with a view to wresting control of Teutonic Order territory from the Polish Crown. Whether this event incited a clash with defenders of the Crown in the area is speculative.]

1519: Grand Master Albrecht makes a ruling in the case of debt repayment by debtor Maths Rosche to his debt holder, Matthaues Maraun of Kneiphof. Rosche appears to be in debt to many different lenders, some of whom have been putting undue pressure on him to give their loan repayments priority over others. As an interim measure it seems that Rosche's assets, both fixed and moveable, have been confiscated awaiting settlement. Maraun seems to have made a persuasive argument that the freeze on Rosche's assets should be lifted and used to repay his lenders in equal measure. Albrecht appears to agree with this approach.

1521: This is the first record where we learn that Matthaues Maraun has died. His widow, Katharina, has appealed to the Grand Master requesting that he enforce her financial demands on certain people. It is not clear what these demands were or what the outcome of the case was, but later in 1521 she is mentioned once more.

1522: Katharina Maraun asks Bishop George to arrange an escort for her guardian (or possibly trustee), the Canon of Frauenburg. [Ed. This entry is interesting for two reasons. First, Frauenburg was the home of Nicholas Copernicus at this time. Second, the reference to Bishop George relates to George of Polentz, who was brought to Konigsberg by Grand Master Albrecht. For a brief period from 1522 to 1525 he was nominated Regent of Teutonic Prussia during the absence of Grand Master Albrecht.] [5]

1522 and 1523: There are nine more entries concerning Katharina Maraun, each of which contains sparse details. However, when the entries are viewed together the meaning becomes clear. In 1522 Katharina appeals for assistance in settling the estate of her sister, the widow of Bernt Pyning. In connection with this Hans Farenheid is mentioned, and then in 1523 the record is more explicit in mentioning the Farenheid children. It is unclear from the extant records whether this case was resolved.

[Ed. The background of the story is this. Katharina's sister was Ursula. She married Bernt Pyning, a large-scale merchant, Councillor, and Magistrate in Kneiphof. They had a daughter who married Hans Farenheid and the couple had children. We can see from the records that Ursula and Bernt were deceased by 1522 and Katharina was looking to settle Ursula's estate because of the Farenheid children. I interpret this to mean that Hans and his wife must have died earlier and

left orphan children who became homeless after the death of their grandparents, Ursula and Bernt. Therefore, Katharina was left with an obligation to care for the children.]

1523: In this entry Bishop George addresses the Grand Master to report a judicial ruling in the case of Conrad Maraun vs. Andres Boltz. The record does not indicate the nature of the case. This entry is of interest because Conrad Maraun is the son of Matthaues and Katharina Maraun.

Conclusion

The frequent references to the Maraun family in these records indicate the significant role the family played in the Königsberg sphere and the comfortable familiarity the family members had with the leadership of Teutonic Prussia at this time. We see the active business interests of Matthaues Maraun and the influence he had on the governing body. We also see the assertive position his widow, Katharina, took on matters that concerned her, attesting to the power held at that time by women from influential families.

Notes.

[1] Joachim von Roy, Beiträge zur Genealogie der westpreussischen Herren von Roy, Bonn and Luneberg, Johanni, 1998, pp. 11-16.

[2] Gerd P. v. Piwowski, Genealogische Datenbank der Familien von Piw(f)kowski (<https://stammbaum.piwkowski.org/index.php>).

[3] Holger Lilienthal, Lilienthal Ost Preussen, 2012 (<https://gedbas.de/person/database/42619?begin=M>).

[4] Jürgen Sarnowsky, Universität Hamburg, 1999-2023 (<https://www.spaetmittelalter.uni-hamburg.de/Urkundenbuch/>), Reference nos. DH47, JH20829, JH3985, JH21315, JH21317, JH21349, JH22006, JH22559, DH11, JH25244, JH23268, JH25535, JH25586, JH25599, JH25646, JH25793, JH26619, JH25937, JH25947, JH25953, JH25976, JH26136. This is an online transcription of Teutonic Order records published by the University of Hamburg as part of a project entitled "The Virtual Prussian Document Book".

[5] Information about George of Polentz was gathered from online sources at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_of_Polentz.