

Johannes Creyghton, his origins and background in East Prussia

According to *Nederlands Patriciaat*, a noted heraldic yearbook in the Netherlands, Johannes Creyghton was baptized in 1660, 25th of January in Tilsit, East Prussia. However, in the baptismal records of Tilsit, which presently are preserved at the Evangelical Central Archive in Berlin (EZAB), no mention is made of any Creyghton/Crichton baptism in 1660. On 1665, January 19th, however a Johannes was baptized, in Tilsit as the second child of Alexander Krechthon and his wife Maria. Further proof that 1665 was the year of his birth is provided by a testimony of Johannes himself before the Magistrate of the Court of Friesland on October 24th, 1704, where he declares that his age is 39 years. This clearly fits in with January 1665, not 1660, as his date of birth. We therefore may assume that his father was Alexander Krechthon, or Krichthon, as the name Crichton was spelled in Germany. His mother's first name was Maria, her surname is not given in the records. The same source provides us with the names and baptismal dates of Johannes' five brothers and three sisters:

Anna, baptized on June 3th, 1663;

Anna Maria (1666, 28 June);

Andreas (1668, 27 Junij);

Alexander, (1670, February 18th); he died early, for six years later another child was baptized Alexander;

Fridrich, 1672, 4 & 7 April (4 is probably the date of birth);

Wilhelmus, anno 1674, March 20th;

Alexander, anno 1676, July 21th;

Elisabeth, anno 1678.

All the baptismal records include a number of sponsors or witnesses, which gives us a clue to the social environment of Alexander and his wife Maria. One of the sponsors of his first child Anna was Gorg Swenner, Consul. Having the Consul of Scotland or England as a friend of the family meant that Alexander still entertained relations with his homeland, perhaps as a merchant. A certain Albrecht Ritsch is mentioned twice among the sponsors of resp. Anna (born 166) and Anna Maria (born 1666). Among the sponsors of the other children of Alexander's and Maria's children the name Ritsch/Ritschie/Ritsche is mentioned another four times at least, which makes it probable that Alexander's wife Maria was deriving from that family as well. Another surname mentioned several times as sponsor is Barclays.

Moreover, in the book "The Scots of Germany" Alexander Krichton of Tilsit is mentioned as the treasurer of the Scottish "Poor Fund" of the Scottish Brotherhood. He must have played an important part in the formation of the Reformed congregation at Tilsit as well. This union of the Calvinistic settlers from Scotland took place some time before 1667, as a Scottish Poor Fund is mentioned in that year. Although Alexander Krichton was the treasurer, the general supervision laid with the whole "Brotherhood." The Poor Fund amounted then to 230 gulden, lent out to three members: Albrecht Ritsch (Ritchie), Peter Kerligkeit (?) and William Schamer (Chalmers).

We have reasons to assume that Crichtons already established in the region of Königsberg, Tilsit and Insterburg before 1600. A certain Alexander Crichton is mentioned in a letter George Frederick, Markgraf of Brandenburg, wrote from Königsberg in 1601 to his magistrates in the country concerning the tax on the inheritance of a recently killed Scot among his subjects: "His Majesty of Scotland has also written requesting us to give up whatever may be left of the dead man's goods in our Duchy to the bearer Alexander Crichton, who has arranged with the representative of our treasury concerning the "fourth;" we command all our governors and magistrates to deliver the said inheritance to him without fail". This Alexander Crichton may have been the father or an uncle of the forementioned Alexander Krechthon, as they were both acting as treasurers and financial brokers. Assuming that all the Crichtons derived from the same family branch, which cannot be taken for granted, this would imply that the Crichtons had migrated to East Prussia already at the end of the 16th century.

In 1679 the Tilsit community of Calvinist Scots had established their own congregation, in that year they acquired the permission to call its first preacher, Alexander Dennis. Born at Königsberg, but of Scottish descent, Alexander Dennis had been trained in Dutch universities, where he registered as a student of divinity at the universities of Utrecht (1675) en Franeker (1676). An important part in his coming to Tilsit was played by William Ritsch, a rich Scottish merchant and a member of that congregation, who had gone to Berlin in order to obtain the requisite permission from the Elector. The young Johannes Krechthon was 14 years old when Alexander Dennis started working as a preacher in Tilsit; it would seem more than plausible that Dennis was personally acquainted with the Krechthon family and that he convinced or advised Johannes as well to pursue his studies of divinity in the Netherlands. In 1686 Johannes matriculated as a student at

both the universities of Groningen and Franeker. In the latter university Johannes van der Waeijen, who would later become his father-in-law, was rector magnificus when Johannes registered for matriculation.

Family ties were clearly important to the Crichtons, and so was theology. This is illustrated by what we know about William Crichton, in all probability a cousin of Johannes'. Wilhelm Crichton from Regiomontanus (Königsberg) in East Prussia matriculated as a student of divinity at the University of Franeker in 1706 Three years later he registered as "Guilielmus Creyghton Interburgensis Borussus" (from Insterburg in East Prussia) as a student of divinity in Leiden, 24 years old. Insterburg belonged to the region of Königsberg, therefore it may be assumed that Wilhelm and Guilielmus are one and the same person. One year later, in 1710, Wilhelmus Creyghton presents his dissertation "Disputatio theologica de Germine Rege Suscitando Davidi et Jehova Justitia Nostra" before a commission of professors at Leiden University. He dedicates his dissertation to four scholars:

Dr. Mel; doctor and professor of Divinity and Ecclesiastical Inspector of the Principality of Hirschfeld.

Dr. Johannes van der Waeijen, son of the well known professor Johannes van der Waeijen at the Academy of Franeker;

Jacobus Perizonius, professor of Ancient Greek, Eloquence and National History in Leiden;

Johannes Creyghton, then in his last year as a reformed preacher in Leeuwarden.

From this it can be concluded that Wilhelmus in his endeavors to become a respected preacher was vigorously supported by his cousin or uncle Johannes Creyghton and his cousin-in-law Johannes van der Waeijen.

As we learn from another book about the Scots in Germany ("The Scots in East and West Prussia"), W. Crichton from Insterburg, after his return to East Prussia, became a preacher in the Royal Orphanage at Königsberg in 1715, and from 1730 to his death in 1749 he was Court Preacher and Consistorialrath in the same city; he died in the age sixty-six years. His son W. Crichton, born 1732 at Königsberg, was for a time professor of Theology in Frankfurt and succeeded his father as Court Preacher in Königsberg in 1772.

Only one Crichton is mentioned in West Prussia, a certain Jacob Crichton who was baptized in Dantzic in 1624, married there 1645 in the St. Elisabeth Church, the second Presbyterian Church in Dantzic, and was buried in this church in 1653. More to the West, there were Crichtons among the most prominent military officers in the Hanoverian Army, alongside with other Scottish names like Graham, Gordon, Ramsay and Stuart. In the Swedish armies, Crichton generals belonged to the prominent leaders and advisers of Gustavus Adolphus during his wars with the Catholic Powers in Germany, the 30-years war, while there were Crichtons fighting at the other side as well! Whether or not these military Crichtons were connected to the burgesses and merchants of that name in Königsberg and Tilsit, is not yet clear.

The Crichtons in Germany contributed equally to the membership of the Merchants, the Military and the Preachers. The Dutch branch produced initially two preachers (Johannes and his son Jacobus Nicolaus) and two men of the law (Johannes' son Jan Alexander and his grandson Johannes). Johannes' second grandson, Jacob, started as a merchant but became eventually an administrator. But even for him theology was never far away, for he married the daughter of a well known preacher in Amsterdam.

Sources

A genealogy of the Dutch branch of the Creyghtons was published in "Nederlands Patriciaat", vol. 4, 1913. The texts of "The Scots in Germany" and "Scots in East Prussia and West Prussia" are integrally available on the Internet (electricscotland).

The testimony of Johannes Creyghton may be consulted in Tresoar, the archives of Friesland, archive nr.14 Hof van Friesland, inv. nr. 318.

The dissertation of Wilhelmus is Creyghton available at Leiden University Library.

For the names and dates of matriculation, see the Albums Studiosorum of Leiden, Franeker, Utrecht en Groningen.