

## From the *Martyrs' Mirror*: The Execution of Maria van Beckum and Her Sister-in-Law (17<sup>th</sup> century)

### Abstract

---

In the sixteenth century, the emergence of Anabaptist groups disconcerted both Protestant and Catholic authorities across the German speaking lands. Anabaptist groups differed in their theological views and communal structures, but in general, their commitment to adult baptism, idealization of separation from the world, and rejection of the oath made them suspect in their communities. In the seventeenth century, as both Protestant and Catholic authorities turned to violence to control the spread of Anabaptism, stories of Anabaptist martyrs were collected by co-religionists. In 1660, Thieleman J. van Braght published *The Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians who baptized only upon confession of faith, and who suffered and died for the testimony of Jesus, their Saviour, from the time of Christ to the year A.D. 1660* in Dutch, and it appeared in 1685 with etchings by Jan Luyken. It was published in German in 1749. The collection especially highlighted the deaths of Anabaptist martyrs and remains an important touchstone for Mennonites, Amish, and other Anabaptist groups. The text and accompanying images highlight the non-violence of the Anabaptist martyrs and the violence of their pursuers. This excerpt from the *Martyrs' Mirror* describes the burning of Maria van Beckum (c. 1510-1544), a Dutch noblewoman accused of the Anabaptist heresy, and her sister-in-law, Ursula. Stories of the bravery and steadfastness of Anabaptist martyrs, far from discouraging the spread of Anabaptism, may have enhanced the reputation of its believers.

### Source

---

#### **Maria van Beckum, and Ursula, Her Brother's Wife, A. D. 1544**

In the year 1544, there was a sister in the Lord, named Maria van Beckum, whom her mother had driven from home on account of her faith. This, having become known in the Bishopric of Utrecht, and reported to the Stadtholder, he sent one Goossen van Raesveldt with many servants, to apprehend this maiden at her brother's, John van Beckum, whither she had fled: She was compelled to rise from her bed, and accompany them; and when she saw the great number of people who had come on her account, she asked Ursula, her brother's wife, whether she would go with her and keep her company. The latter answered, "If John van Beckum is satisfied, I will gladly go with you, and we will rejoice together in the Lord." When Maria put this request to her brother, he consented, and Ursula went with her. Here love was stronger than death, and firmer than the grave. Cant. 8:6. Her mother and sister had come from Friesland to see her; but this could not move her, she took leave of them, for she chose to suffer affliction, rather than to have worldly joy; hence she went with her sister Maria. They were together brought to Deventer. There blind leaders came to them, who with subtlety sought to win them to human institutions. But they answered, "We hold to the Word of God, and do not regard the dictates of the pope, nor the errors of the whole world." Friar Grouwel also sought to teach them much but was not able to prove his assertions by the Scriptures.

Now as he could not overcome them, he said "The devil speaks through your mouth, away with them to the fire."

They greatly rejoiced that they were worthy to suffer for the name of Christ, and to help bear His reproach. Acts 5:41,

---

They were then brought to the house at Delden; where many efforts were made to cause them to apostatize, yet all in vain. A commissary came from the court of Burgundy, who greatly extolled the mass and all the institutions of the pope; but he could not prevail against the Scriptures which they adduced. He then asked them whether they were rebaptized. They replied, "We have been baptized once according to the command of Christ and the practice of the apostles; for there is but one true baptism, and he who receives it, has put on Christ, and leads an unblameable life through the Holy Ghost; in the answer of a good conscience." Eph. 4:5; Gal. 3:27; I Pet. 3:21. He also asked them, whether they believed that Christ was wholly present in the sacrament. This they considered a blind question, and said, "God will have no likeness or image, neither in heaven nor on earth (Exodus 20:4); for He says through the prophet: 'I, even I am the Lord; and beside me there is no Saviour.' Isa. 43:11. But as regards the Supper, we find that Christ left it as a memorial of His death, with bread and wine; as often as we commemorate it, we are to show forth His death till He come." I Cor. 11: 26.

Now as Maria and Ursula regarded all the institutions of the pope as heresy, they were brought into open court at Delden, on the thirteenth of November, before the children of Pilate and Caiaphas, where they were sentenced to death, in which they rejoiced, praising God. When they were led to the stake, many of the people, seeing their steadfastness, wept. But they sang for joy, and said, "Weep not, on account of what is inflicted upon us." "We do not suffer," said Maria, "as witches or other criminals, but because we adhere to Christ, and will not be separated from God; hence be converted, and it shall be well with you forever."

When the time of suffering drew nigh, Maria said, "Dear sister; heaven is opened for us; for what we now suffer for a little while, we shall forever be happy with our bridegroom." They then gave each other the kiss of peace. Thereupon they prayed together to God; that He would forgive the judges their sins, since they knew not what they were doing; and that as the world was sunk in blindness, God would have compassion on them, and receive their souls into, His eternal kingdom: They first took Maria; who entreated the authorities not to shed any more innocent blood. Then she fervently prayed to God, and also prayed for those who put her to death; whereupon she joyfully arose, and went with such great gladness to the stake, that it cannot be told, saying, "To Thee, O Christ, I have given myself; I know that I shall live with Thee forever. Therefore, O God of heaven, into Thy hands do I commend my spirit." The executioner swore because the chain did not suit him; but she said, "Friend, consider what you are doing; my body is not worthy that you should blaspheme Christ on account of it; repent, lest you burn for it in hell." The preacher, a teacher at Delden, turned Ursula around, but she turned back again, and urgently said, "Let me behold the end of my sister, for I also desire to receive the glory into which she shall enter."

After Maria was burned, they asked Ursula, whether she would not yet apostatize. "No," said she, "not for death; I will not thus forsake the eternal riches." They would also honor her with the sword, but she said, "My flesh is not too good to be burned for the name of Christ." To one of her relatives she said, "Bid John van Beckum good night, and tell him to serve God, to whom I am now about to be offered." When she came to the wood, she clasped her hands, and said, "Our Father which art in heaven." "Yea," said the priest, "there you will find Him." "Because I seek Him there," she said, "I must die this temporal death. If I should confess Him in the bread, I might live longer." When she stepped upon the wood, her foot slipped. "I think I am falling off," she said. "Stop," cried the tyrant; "she means to apostatize." "No," said she, "the block slips from under me; I will not faint in the Word of God, but constantly adhere to Christ." Thus both remained steadfast unto the end, and sealed the Word of God with their death, in great patience and boldness, leaving us a good example.

Source: Thieleman Janszoon Braght, *The Bloody Theater: Or, Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians, who Suffered and and Were Put to Death for the Testimony of Jesus, Their Saviour, from the*

---

*Time of Christ, Until the Year A.D. 1660*, transl. Joseph F. Sohm, Elkhart, IN 1886. Available online at:  
[https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/65855/pg65855-images.html#Page\\_395](https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/65855/pg65855-images.html#Page_395)

Recommended Citation: From the Martyrs' Mirror: The Execution of Maria van Beckum and Her Sister-in-Law (17th century), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/from-the-reformations-to-the-thirty-years-war-1500-1648/ghdi:document-5461>> [April 02, 2025].