

Letter by Anna Scharnschlager to Her Brother in Tyrol (c. 1535)

Abstract

Anna Scharnschlager was an Anabaptist woman from Tyrol. She and her husband, Leupold joined the Anabaptist movements around 1530 and were forced to flee their estate. They became part of the circle around the Anabaptist leader Pilgrim Marpeck and became religious refugees in the city of Strasbourg. They were eventually forced to leave even that relatively tolerant city. This letter from Anna to her brother, very business-like in its pleas for the return of her belongings after her family's expulsion from their home, reveals the precarious nature of Anabaptist life in exile, even for those from relatively prosperous families.

Source

To my kind, beloved brother, my friendly greeting first and always. I would always be glad to hear that you, as well as your wife and my other friends, are well in soul and body.

Beloved brother. After I moved away some years ago with my husband, who was warned of imminent persecution, torture, and oppression for the sake of the faith, caused and urged to flee and go away, for the preservation of his flesh, life, and conscience. Since my departure along with my husband I have written several times to my dear brother-in-law and executor Hans Steger concerning some household effects and clothes that I left in the care of him and my sister and executrix. But I have not to date received a response from either of them on that account. Thence I do not know the reason for this. I suspect that perhaps until now he has not found a courier. For this reason I have kindly asked you, my dear brother, that you would be so good as to present yourself to my brother-in-law and executor as the occasion permits, that he might give you an answer to my letters, and especially concerning that about which I recently wrote him, just a month or two ago, and asked him to faithfully hold on to my household effects, until I can bring them back into my own possession, when I have need of them, and that he should write me back concerning his will and intentions on this account, so that I can make preparations, as I hope that his brotherly goodwill, faithfulness, and friendship toward me and my husband has not faded, his response to this effect would bring me joy, especially for the sake of Fronica, my late sister, and of Galgus, my late first husband and his brother.

My dear brother, if you would then as soon as you can find a messenger send me this letter in the care of Pilgram Marpeck. He will then know to answer me. But if the letters from me did not arrive, would you please tell him or write him the chief substance of these letters, that I have asked him to hold on faithfully to my household effects and clothing until I can send for it myself. I also ask him whether, when I send for it, I should send to Hopfgarten or Kitzbühel, that he should let me know. This is my wish along with Leopold, my husband, who along with me greets you faithfully and kindly, in order to kindly earn and be indebted to you as my beloved brother. About two years ago I married off my daughter Ursula to a watchmaker, they are now in Mähren. They have already had children. Greet your wife faithfully for me as well, and my cousin, the Kelbin daughter, who is living with you. Beloved brother, I also ask you that you write to me yourself how you and your wife are doing, as well as our other friends, so that I can learn and be comforted to still see natural brotherly faithfulness in you, as I unquestionably hope. Amen.

Further reading:

C. Arnold Snyder, Linda A. Huebert Hecht, eds. *Profiles of Anabaptist Women: Sixteenth-Century Reforming Pioneers*. Waterloo, Ontario: Published for the Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion by Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1996. See especially pages 58-63.

Gerhard Hein and William Klassen. "Scharnschlager, Leupold (d. 1563)." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*.

[https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Scharnschlager,_Leupold_\(d._1563\)&oldid=166260](https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Scharnschlager,_Leupold_(d._1563)&oldid=166260).

Päivi Räisänen-Schröder, "Anna Scharnschlager (d. 1564) and Margarethe Endris: Anabaptist Women and Their Letters." In *Women Reformers of Early Modern Europe: Profiles, Texts, and Contexts*, ed. Kirsi I. Stjerna, 1517 Media, 2022, pp. 209–22.

Source of original German text: Leonhard von Muralt und Walter Schmid, eds., *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer in der Schweiz, Band 2: Ostschweiz*, Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1973, pp. 511-513.

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