Notes

THE PARENTAGE OF SIR JUSTUS BECK

A note in the present journal for 1940 describes the parentage of the ill-fated Sir Justus Beck (1679–1722), 1st Baronet, as ‘unknown’.1 The brief solution to this problem is that he was baptized 8 November 1679 in the Zuider Kerk, Amsterdam, as Joost, son of Jacob George Beck and Margaretha de Smeth, with sponsors Joost de Smeth and Catharina Crayen.2 The index to Amsterdam baptisms is one of the first places one would look for the record of a Dutch person of unknown origin who was born in the modern era.3 But what would otherwise have motivated such a search, and how can we be sure this is the right entry?

Before addressing that question, we shall briefly review what is known of Beck from English sources.4 Beck, who besides being a prominent merchant was a director of the bank of England, is said to have been for a time one of the wealthiest men of his day.5 A few years after Beck’s death Daniel Defoe, in A Tour thro’ the Whole Island of Great Britain, wrote under a description of the county of Surrey: ‘It would also take up a large chapter in this book, to but mention the overthrow, and catastrophe of innumerable wealthy city families, who after they have thought their houses establish’d, and have built their magnificent country seats, have sunk under the misfortunes of business, and the disasters of trade such as Sir Joseph Hodges, Sir Justus Beck, and many others.’6 An astute nineteenth-century editor, detecting an innuendo here, investigated these names and discovered that Hodges and Beck both died in 1722 under suspicion of suicide, following financial collapse.7 A London newspaper reported: ‘On Sunday last died Sir Justus Beck, Bart. (the first Baronet of his present Majesty’s Creation), and also his second daughter [Mary], within half an hour of each other. The said gentleman always bore a fair character; but having had the misfortune to lose a plentiful estate through the late calamity of the times, it is believ’d the same was too much laid to heart both by himself and numerous family’.8 Beck was buried in the parish church of St Nicholas Cole Abbey, London,9 where, it is understood, his monument was destroyed by the fire of 1941.

Sir Justus Beck married 2 May 1701 in the parish church of St Peter Cornhill, London,10 Rachel Chamberlayne, who died 1 October 1734, her will being dated 4 June 1731 and proved 8 October 1734,11 daughter of Charles Chamberlayne, sometime (1687–88) alderman of London.12 Of their family of fourteen children, eleven survived infancy, but all appear to have died unmarried or without issue.13 There are several clues to Beck’s parentage in English sources. ‘Jacob George Beck’ and ‘Joost Bek’ (sic) were received into the congregation of the Dutch Reformed Church, Austin Friars, London with recommendation from the

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2 Amsterdam DTB 97:53.
3 This index is available at https://stadsarchief.amsterdam.nl/archieven/archiefbank/indexen/doopregisters/zoeek/index.nl.html.
4 See generally G. E. Cokayne, Complete Baronetage, 5 vols. (Exeter, 1900–6), V, 20–21, where he is described as ‘of foreign extraction, but an eminent merchant of London’.
8 Daily Post, 19 December 1722, as printed in Lee, Daniel Defoe.
13 At least, no one came forth to claim the baronetcy after the death of our subject’s second son Sir Justus Dennis Beck in 1764. Death notices and wills of several of the children have been found, but we pass over these as they throw no light on the family’s origins.
Finally, the will of Raymond de Smeth, dated May 1715, leaves ‘To Sr. Justus Beck £__ [blank] for mourning’, and appoints him as the administrator of an annuity devised to one of the other legatees. This will also mentions ‘my . . . brother Joost de Smeth of Breman Merchant’. Papers filed with the will on account of a resulting lawsuit explain that ‘Raymond De Smeth a Batchelor died upon the 7th December 1724 without Parents . . . . The said Raymond de Smeth was very rich and left behind him a clear personal Estate of £140,000.’

Plentiful as these clues are, they only coalesce into a firm identification of Justus Beck when supplemented with Dutch sources. For the sake of historiographical interest we shall describe these in the order in which they became known to modern scholarship. First, an old register of the Orsoy family, rediscovered in the late nineteenth century, describes him as ‘Justus Beckx, who was a knight in England, and was married there, and is survived by numerous sons and daughters’ (Justus Beckx, deese is Ridder in England, en aldaar getrou in geweest, en heeft diverse zoons en dochters nagelaaten). This record, which is quite sketchy in places and contains many blanks, shows him as the only child of ____ Becks and ____ de Smeth, daughter of Joost de Smeth and ____ Fassin, and granddaughter of Joost de Smeth, of Amsterdam, merchant, by Margaretha Engels, etc. Second, an old register of the Leonards family by the antiquary Simon Emtinck (1676–1752), rediscovered in the 1950s, describes our subject as ‘Justus Beck, knight [and] baronet, married in England at London to ____ Chamberlayne’ (Justus Beck, Ridder baronet, is getrou in Engeland tot Londen met ____ Chamberlayne) and shows him as a son of George Beck and ____ de Smedt, daughter of Joost de Smedt by his first wife Maria Fassin, daughter of Pieter Fassin and Geertruyd Wolters, etc. Finally, a recent digitization project supplies an item in which Joost de Smeth of Bremen and his late wife Catharina Crayen, and (their godson) Justus Beck of London, merchant and banker, are mentioned together in a document concerning Catharina’s estate dated 15 March 1706.

So, the Jacob George Beck who accompanied the 22-year-old Justus Beck to London in 1702 and died soon after turns out, not surprisingly, to have been the latter’s father; and the Orsoy family register establishes that the Joost de Smeth who served in 1679 as a baptismal sponsor to Justus Beck was a first

14 Register of the Attestations, Certificates of Membership, Confessions of Guilt, Certificates of marriages, Betrothals, Publications of Banns, &c., &c., preserved in the Dutch Reformed Church, Austin Friars, London, 1568 to 1872, ed. J. H. Hessels (London & Amsterdam, 1892), 151, entries nos. 2183, 2182.
18 Ecclesiae Londino-Batavae Archivum (note 17), III, 2, pp. 2811–17, at p. 2817.
19 W. P. Veeren, ‘Aanteekeningen omtrent de familie van Orsoy en enige aanverwante familiën’, De Nederlandsche Leew, xx (1903), cols. 193–204; xxi (1903), cols. 8–12, cols. 44–45 (correction), 159 (addendum), at xxi, col. 8. This source contains an attempted expansion of the Fassin ancestry, but it is erroneous. If our apprehension of the source as printed is correct, blanks represent actual blanks, not illegible passages.
20 Simon Emtinck, ‘Registro containent des copies authentiques . . . de fragments généalogiques de la famille Emtinck’, MS. City Archives of Brussels, accession no. 3401, fols 14–44 (for Leonards genealogy), at fol. 22. Names shown here as blank are actually blank, not merely illegible. This manuscript is a nineteenth-century copy of an original in the Amsterdam Stadsarchief, series 5015, Collectie Stadsarchief Amsterdam: genealogie-handschriften (http://stadsarchief.amsterdam.nl/archieven/archiefbank/overzicht/5015.nl.html), presently inaccessible due to recataloguing of the collection.
cousin of the child’s mother, Margaretha de Smeth.\textsuperscript{22} These facts confirm the pertinence of the baptismal record attributed to Justus Beck at the outset of this note. It will be observed, however, that none of the materials so far quoted sheds any ray of light on the identity of Jacob George Beck, a problem that might perhaps benefit from inquiries at Frankfurt-am-Main, where he is said by Strype to have been born.\textsuperscript{23} Prior to his arrival in England, the only other verifiable fact of his life seems to be his marriage on 8 March 1678 at Amsterdam,\textsuperscript{24} to Margareta de Smeth, baptized 4 March 1654 in the Nieuwezijds Kapel, Amsterdam,\textsuperscript{25} daughter of Joost de Smeth, the younger, of Amsterdam, by the latter’s wife Maria Fassin (also spelled Fassijn).\textsuperscript{26} The last date at which his wife was definitely still alive was at the birth of their son in 1679, and she does not appear to have accompanied her husband and son to London in 1702. Possibly, therefore, she was the Margarita de Smeth, residing on the Oude Turfmarkt, who was buried 16 November 1680 from the Westerkerk, Amsterdam; but the record does not state her age or marital status, or name any relative.\textsuperscript{27} If she was actually buried in the church, hers was not among the very few old tombstones at that location still legible in the 1920s.\textsuperscript{28}

There is in fact one clue to the origins of the baronet’s father Jacob George Beck, but unfortunately we have not succeeded in pursuing it to a satisfactory conclusion. This is the highly distinctive coat of arms borne by his son, preserved in a seal—containing no indication of the tinctures—on a letter from Justus Beck to Messrs. David Jeffies & Co., dated 26 January 1716/7 at London, and blazoned in a published description as ‘quarterly, 1st a blackbird, 2nd and 3rd a mullet, 4th a dolphin embowed; crest: within a pair of wings a raven.’\textsuperscript{29} The blazon is confirmed, and the tinctures given, in a book published while Justus Beck was still alive. Samuel Kent, in his Grammar of Heraldry, states: ‘Sir Justus Beck, Bar. Beareth quarterly three coats; viz. 1st Or, a raven proper. 2d. and 3d. sable, a mullet or. 4th. azure, a dolphin hauriant argent, on an inescutcheon [sic], the arms of Ulster’, and the accompanying illustration shows a normal mullet of five points.\textsuperscript{30} These arms also appear in Rietstap, with the tincture of the dolphin given (probably incorrectly) as Or rather than argent; and they are described, as belonging to ‘Becx of Zeeland’.\textsuperscript{31}

There is a striking parallel to these arms in continental heraldry, as has been pointed out by previous writers.\textsuperscript{32} These belonged to Abraham Beck, of London, who according to his own statement was born at Stobbe,
near Aachen, and whose will, dated 18 December 1636, was proved in 1637. These are tricked in the 1633–35 Visitation of London as: 1 Or, a bird sable, 2 & 3 sable, a star of six points Or, 4 Or [recte azure?], a fish proper [i.e. argent?]. This man married before 1611, Catharina, daughter of Jacques de Wael (or de Wale), and had two children who survived childhood, Johannes (1611) and Catharina (1619). The latter became the wife of Daniël de Hochepied, of Haarlem; and the tomb of a grandchild at Abcoude in Utrecht depicts the Beck arms as 1 Or, a bird sable, 2 & 3 sable, a star of six points Or, 4 azure, a fish argent, slanting to the right. Considering that this representation and the blazon of the arms of Justus Beck agree precisely as to the tinctures against the recording made in the Visitation of London, they are probably correct. But whether the distinction between the star and the mullet, and between the fish and the dolphin, is deliberate or accidental, is impossible to say on the basis of the available evidence.

Furthermore, there seems to be unassailable contemporary evidence both that Abraham Beck was a son of Gerlach Beck, of Aachen, by Ida Bertolf von Belven, and that his father’s arms were simpler, having the same coat in quarters 1 & 4 rather than the fish or dolphin variant in the fourth quarter. This would seemingly imply that Abraham Beck was the innovator of the variant, though it is lacking an obvious source; it certainly was not derived from the arms of his mother, which consisted of nothing but a unicorn. Furthermore, it would seem to imply that Justus Beck was descended either from Abraham Beck, or from a brother or other close male relative who made a similar alteration to their father’s arms. And at the very least, it shows that Justus Beck somehow belonged to the Beck family of Aachen.

However, we can show that Abraham Beck cannot himself have been a direct ancestor of Justus Beck. This would be chronologically possible only if Abraham were the father or grandfather of Jacob Georg Beck, and we can immediately dispose of the first case, for Abraham had only one son, Johannes afore-said, as shown in the Visitation of London and as indicated in Abraham’s will. We can also discount the second case, which would depend upon Johannes having been Jacob’s father. Johannes Beck, described as an unmarried man from London, married 19 April 1636 at Middelburg in Zeeland, Catharina de Wael, unmarried woman from Middelburg, daughter of Nicolaes de Wael Rogiersz. and Maria Crommelin. Thanks to the Crommelin connection, there is a detailed account of the immediate descendants of Johannes and his wife, which though not recorded until 1712 was made by a contemporary of their children, and it accords no place to Abraham.


36 In addition to the works mentioned in note 32 see, for documentation of these connections, J. I. D. Nepveu, ‘Geslacht de Hochepied’, De Navorscher, xxvii (1877), 42–44; the untitled and uncredited Momma ancestor table (probably belonging to the multi-part article on the Koenen family) printed in De Wapenheraut, v (1901), 210–11; H. F. Macco, Geschichte und Genealogie der Familien Peltzer (Aachen 1901), 69–70 n. 4, 185 n. 5; R. T. Muschart, ‘Beck-de Wale’, De Nederlandsche Leeuw, i (1932), cols. 122–23.

37 P. C. Bloys van Treslong Prins, Genealogische en heraldische gedenkwaardigheden in en uit de kerken der Provincie Utrecht (Utrecht, 1919), 10–11.


41 As this woman had the same name as his own mother, she was perhaps some kind of cousin.

Through his mother, Sir Justus Beck was related to a vast network of De Smeth, Engels, Fassin, and Wolters kindred. But the affiliations of his father remain an almost total mystery. Further information is welcome.