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NICOLAUS COPERNICUS - INTERESTING

GENERALL



fot. Sebastian Stawiński

1. About the family

The Copernicus family originally came from Silesia. In older biographies the origin of Kopernik's name was derived from the name of Koperniki village (Germ. Köppernigk) near Otmuchów. That assumption, however, does not seem correct. Actually both the family name "Kopernik" and the village's name were derived from the job name used in the past in Silesia. A 'kopernik" was either a steel worker, extracting and smelting copper, or a copper trader. The name was observed in Silesia. This name might as well have originated from the area of today's Slovakia, where the biggest deposits of copper were located in the Middle Ages. People of the name Kopernik appeared relatively early in Cracow. The first person using this name was observed in a borough under Wawel in 1367. Those people, however, were not actually related to the astronomer's family. What they had in common was the name and their ancestors' profession. There is no doubt this name has Slavic origin, with the Polish suffix "-nik" added to craft names. Nicolaus Copernicus, the astronomer's father appears as a tradesman in the records of Cracow from 1447. In 1458 Nicolaus Copernicus was a legal citizen of Toruń. He most probably married Barbara Watzenrode at that time. The bride was then about 20, the groom must have been at least 35.

The family of Nicolaus' mother – the Watzenrodes – had been connected with Toruń for much longer. The Watzenrodes came from Hesse, and they moved to Silesia in the 13. century. The first record of the Watzenrodes in Toruń dates from 1369. (*Krzysztof Mikulski – Nicolaus Copernicus Life and Work*).

2. Copernicus used Latin in his daily life. He knew Italian, German and it is assumed that he knew Polish. We have in the Archives of the Diocese of Warmia documents prepared by him in Latin and German, none in Polish. Unable to conclusively resolve the issue of Copernicus' knowledge of Polish, Polish historians have paid more attention to declarations which testify his loyalty to Poland. What is more, the Latin was the language of the royal chancellery at that time. More recently, it has been pointed out that during the convention of the Prussian states in Elbląg in the autumn of 1530, Copernicus found himself in the role of a translator from Polish to German, due to an appearance by the royal envoy Jan Baliński, who did not speak German.

3 There has been a dispute over Copernicus' nationality between Polish and German historians for almost two centuries. Polish researchers stressed that the astronomer was born in Toruń, which had been within the borders of the Polish state for 19 years and, apart from his studies in Italy, he lived in Poland all his life. Hence, he was a Polish citizen. His uncle chose Cracow for him as his place of study, rather than the German universities. Both his family and himself showed a pro-Polish attitude during Poland's conflicts with the Teutonic Order. German scholars have found the crowning argument for their theses in the absence of Copernicus' correspondence in Polish and the presence of letters in German besides Latin that were written by him. However, they have failed to take into account the fact that Latin was the language of the chancellery in Poland at that time. Let us recall that in the year of Copernicus' death, i.e. 1543, Mikołaj Rej's "Krótka rozprawa między panem, wójtem i plebanem" (A short discussion between a lord, a village man and a parson) appeared in print and is considered to be the beginning of the literary Polish language. (*Janusz Malłek - Mikołaj Kopernik - Szkice do portretu – Draft to the portrait*).

4. It is an open question where he went to the "secondary school". Copernicus studied in Cracow and Italy (Bologna, Padua, Ferrara- 1495-1503). In Italy, he studied law and medicine, and also dealt with astronomy and mathematics. These were graduated with a doctorate in canon law at the University of Ferrara on 31 May 1503.

5. Nicolaus Copernicus was a canon of Warmia. In all probability he had the lowest ordination - the subdeaconate, hence he was not a priest. The canonry provided a prosperous livelihood, but was associated with a number of duties. The most important of these related to divine service and included choir prayers and liturgical service. Since canons were often not ordained priests at this time, the duties of divine service were performed for them by vicars. However, canons had to be celibate. There is still a dispute among the astronomer's biographers as to whether he was a priest, or whether he confined himself to taking lower ordination, which would have been sufficient to take up a Warmian canonry.

6. As a canon of Warmia he performed various functions for the chapter, was its chancellor, commissioner. When Bishop Fabian Łuzjanski died in 1523, Nicholas was General Administrator until the next bishop was elected.

7. From his early years Nicolas' path in life led along the trail blazed by his uncle, Bishop of Warmia Łukasz Watzenrode. The nephew owed to him everything he had acquired after the death of his parents: a comprehensive education and a secure bread for life. And the opportunity to "practise philosophy". However, the bishop's intentions concealed a profound idea. After all, the crowning achievement of Nicolas' studies was a doctorate in canon law, and his bread was the Warmia canonry. He "got" not only the Warmia canonry, he got also the scholastery at Holy Cross, traditionally belonging to the Watzenrods. His uncle's intentions, therefore, were obvious: he was steering him towards a spiritual career. He wanted to make him his successor on the episcopal capital! Did Nicholas have a chance to take over the bishopric after his uncle's death? It was a perfectly simple matter. The bishopric was directly subordinate to the Holy See, and although the Polish king had some influence on its staff, it was sufficient for the uncle to apply to Rome for his nephew's coadjutorship, i.e. a formal replacement, with the right of succession after the bishop's death. (*dr Jerzy Sikorski - "The private life of Nicolaus Copernicus"*).

8. Nicolaus Copernicus lived 70 years. Forty of them, i.e. more than the half of his life, he spent in Warmia. After returning from his studies in Italy, he lived and worked in Lidzbark Warmiński at the court of his uncle, Bishop of Warmia Łukasz Watzenrode for seven years (1503-1510). During the next thirty-three years (until his death in 1543) he stayed and worked in Frombork. During this period, however, he moved twice to Olsztyn for longer periods (1516-1520, 1520-1521).(*Nicolaus Copernicus War and Diplomacy - Wojciech Krzysztof Szalkiewicz*).

9. Researchers into the life and work of Nicolaus Copernicus agree that he had completed his work on the manuscript of *De revolutionibus* around 1530, but did not intend to publish it in print. He explained his reluctance to send the finished work to print by his "fear of ridicule". During his stay in Frombork, he actively participated in the life of the chapter. In 1539, he was visited by George Joachim Rheticus, a famous professor from the University of Wittenberg. Some researchers believe that without Rheticus' visit, the knowledge of the heliocentric theory would have been delayed by a whole century, wrote Austrian scholar Karl Heinz Burmeister in his book on this Wittenberg mathematician. The young man inspired the old man with courage. After the stay of more than two years in Prussia, Rheticus returned to Nuremberg, where he had Copernicus' work printed.

10. Copernicus as a doctor. He studied at the University of Padua, which was considered the best university of its kind. It seems he has taken his medical studies seriously, since he wrote in the margin of one of his medical works: "Remember this doctor!" Copernicus took care of successive Warmia bishops, and he also treated fellow Warmia canons. Copernicus did not make any breakthrough in medicine. He was a child of his time, and he fought illnesses with the means available at the time, often with good results. For us, he is first and foremost a brilliant astronomer, but for his contemporaries he was a canon and a doctor. This is illustrated by his portraits with a lily in a hand - the symbol of the medical art. The Strasbourg portrait is particularly famous. (*Janusz Mallek - Nicolaus Copernicus - Sketches to a Portrait*).

11. Copernicus made maps of his own country on his own. The first of these depicted Warmia and the western borders of Royal Prussia, and was commissioned by Lucas Watzenrode in connection with the forthcoming convention in Poznań in 1510, at which the Teutonic

Knights aimed to revindicate the borders of 1466. Nicolaus accompanied the uncle and took the map with him. The astronomer's rooms were searched for by Fabian Luzjański in vain, a canon from Warmia, who intended to steal it secretly and give it to the Order. However, the original of this map was lost, as was another map by Copernicus from 1519 showing the western part of the Vistula Lagoon. This map was to be used by the Bishop of Warmia in a border dispute with the city of Elbląg. It is also known that in July 1529, at the request of Bishop Maurice Ferber, Nicolaus Copernicus, together with his friend, the Frombork canon Aleksander Sculteti, was to prepare a map of the whole Prussia. Unfortunately, we do not know its fate, but it was probably lost irretrievably, like the astronomer's other maps.

12. He dealt with the reform of the monetary system in Royal Prussia. We know these writings written between 1517 and 1528 only from copies and translations, often in abbreviated form. They are most often referred to as Copernicus's treatises on coinage. The later and the most eloquent dates from 1528. Copernicus formulated the law of bad money. A good coin is displaced by a bad coin. For a long time, however, this law was named not after Copernicus, but after Gresham, an economic writer from the second half of the 16th century who, moreover, did not speak of the law so directly. It is only thanks to the work of Polish scholars, who have demonstrably established the precedence of Copernicus in formulating this law, that it is increasingly commonly referred to as the Copernicus-Gresham law. (*Nicolaus Copernicus and His Times - Scientific Publishing House of the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń*).

13. In 1616, the Congregation of the Index placed Copernicus' work on the Index of Prohibited Books. Why so late? The first edition of *De revolutionibus* was prefaced by the publisher with a statement that it was a collection of hypotheses that were not necessarily true and unlikely. The work was not deleted from the index until 1822. The work had been officially branded by the Church for over 200 years.

14. Astronomy was his pastime. He took interest in it during his studies in Cracow. He already had the outline of his theory in Italy.

NIKOLAUS COPERNICUS IN HEILSBURG (LIDZBARK WARMIŃSKI)



arch, Pracownia Wydawnicza ELSET

1. Copernicus stayed at the Warmia residence several times; in the years 1495 - 1496 and 1503 - 1510 he lived here permanently.

2. In Lidzbark Warmiński, with his uncle, Nicolaus found time for himself. And then he was absorbed in writing. He wrote his own thoughts down. This is how Commentary on the hypotheses of celestial motions (Little Commentary) was written - the first outline of a grand theory. This study was not intended for print, but circulated in many copies, which the author sent to his friends and acquaintances for their comments and preliminary assessments of his discoveries and their conclusions. In this study, Copernicus included a description of the heliocentric structure of the world, without detailed mathematical deductions, which he set aside for the main work of his life, which he was about to write.

3 He certainly made a map of Warmia and the western border of Royal Prussia, that is, that part of the country belonging to Poland, before the middle of 1510. The map is now lost. The later Bishop Fabian Lujanski, then working on behalf of the Order, tried to steal it from him.

4 The aged bishop drew his nephew into a whirlwind of public activity. Copernicus accompanied his uncle on numerous journeys and diplomatic missions.

5. He translated for his uncle from Greek into Latin the moral, idyllic and love letters of the Byzantine writer Theophylact Symokatta. He dedicated a dedication to his uncle - it was his

farewell. He did not want to be a bishop. He left his uncle and moved to Frombork. He didn't want to be his successor as a bishop.

6 He often returned to Heilsberg (Lidzbark), mainly as the bishops' physician.

7 After the death of Bishop Fabian Luzjański, from 30 January to 13 October 1523 - after his appointment by the cathedral chapter - he held the most important office in Warmia - that is, the office of general administrator of the bishopric. His official residence was the castle in Heilsberg.

However, Krzysztof Mikulski in his book *Nicolaus Copernicus Life and Work* has written: "Despite various speculations that Nicolaus left his uncle and Heilsberg before 1510, it must be assumed that he cared for Luke and was with him until his death on 29 March 1512 in his hometown of Toruń".

NICOLAUS COPERNICUS IN OLSZTYN



fot. Marcin Kierul

1 Copernicus managed land; this activity is evidenced by the document: "Lokacja łańów opuszczonych" (The location of abandoned lans), in which the acquisition of lands belonging to the cathedral chapter, for which peasants had to pay rent, is attested. The notes kept by Copernicus show that during his term he visited forty-three villages, in which he recorded a total of seventy-two transfers to the peasants.

2.He took stock of the archives of the cathedral chapter in Allenstein (Olsztyn).

3. Here, within the walls of Allenstein Castle, he also wrote down the text of the first book of "De revolutionibus..." - the work of his life that "stopped the sun and pushed the earth from its foundations".

4. An astronomical table made by Copernicus has been preserved in the Olsztyn castle. It was used to determine the spring equinox, which was needed for the calendar reform. Despite the fact that Nicolaus Copernicus determined the spring equinox on the plaque in Olsztyn, the calendar reform was not carried out immediately. In Poland, it was carried out after the death of Nicolaus Copernicus in 1582. The reform was carried out by Pope Gregory XIII, which is why there was a switch from the Julian to Gregorian calendar.

5. Nicolaus Copernicus is known as a defender of Olsztyn Castle and the town against the Teutonic Knights during the last Polish-Teutonic war. He organised defences, sought help and brought ammunition. On 16 November 1520, he wrote a letter to the Polish king Sigismund the Old asking for armed assistance and declaring his loyalty "even though we die". The letter did not reach the king as it was intercepted by the Teutonic knights. The Grand Master learned from the intercepted letter that the castle was very well prepared for an attack and bypassed it on 15 January 1521. A much more dangerous attempt by the Order to capture the city took place on 26 January. The Order's commander from neighbouring Guttstadt (Dobre Miasto), the Order's brother Wilhelm von Schauburg, launched a night assault on the defensive walls near the Mill Gate. A side gate was breached, where fighting broke out. Two days later, the commander reported to the Grand Master that the assault had failed because there were no ladders to climb the walls.

6. Nicolaus Copernicus is the author of the Bread Charge (*Ratio panaria Allensteinsis*), which was probably created at the end of 1531. It regulated the price and weight of bread in Olsztyn and other towns in Warmia, referring to the medieval assumption of the "just price". Its principle was to set the price according to the cost of production in relation to the price of grain. In those times the bakers and merchants had a monopoly. They dictated the price. In such a way Copernicus defended the ordinary people.

7. The Olsztyn period in Copernicus' life also marked the beginning of the realisation of his other interests, which he later developed. First and foremost was the first outline of his 1517 treatise on coins. Two years later, while still in Allenstein (Olsztyn), he edited a more extensive version of this work. In 1528, he edited the final version of his treatise on the economic law according to which bad money always outweighs good money by pushing it out of circulation (Copernicus-Gresham law).

NICOLAUS COPERNICUS IN FROMBORK



fot. Sebastian Stawiński

1 Canons should have had two houses - one outside and the other inside the walls – according to the charter. They preferred to live outside very modest, while inside the fortress they wanted to live comfortably. Nicolaus Copernicus did the opposite. No house in the courtyard responded to his astronomical needs, and each cost a lot. So he bought one of the defence towers for a small sum on the cathedral hill inside the wall and thus he met the demands of the charter. The house he bought outside was suitable for his astronomical research. He erected a pavement there. On Monday, 23 January 1520, the Teutonic Knights appeared in Frombork and set fire to everything that stood outside the fortress walls. After the war, the majority of the canons had their houses by the cathedral whereas he had to look for accommodation elsewhere.

2 Copernicus had a housekeeper - Anna Schilling. At the time of her arrival in Frauenburg, in 1537 or 1538, she was 47 or 48 years old, 15 years younger than the astronomer. Anna was a beautiful woman, which may have been one of the reasons for the reluctance of the bishop and canons hostile to Copernicus. It is also possible that Copernicus was the victim of another conflict the bishop was having with his friend Alexander Sculteti at the time. Nicolaus and Alexander were united by their interest in cartography. Sculteti produced a map of Livonia and consulted his senior colleague in the chapter. When Alexander was in Livonia (as a canon in Dorpat), he came under the influence of Lutheran preachers. He did not resign his position in the chapter, but became permanently involved with Miss Suchten from Danzig, whom he

brought with him to Frauenburg. The bishop was perhaps not so much shocked by the fact that Sculteti had a physical relationship with a woman as by the fact that he was officially living with her in the curia in Frauenburg. In a sense, this conflict also hit Copernicus. In the end, Sculteti did not succumb to the bishop's pressure, converted to Lutheranism and married his partner. It should be added, however, that Bishop Dantiscus was known for his loving nature and was also a touchingly concerned father. He worried about the fate of his daughter, who was born in faraway Spain, until she was well married. The astronomer remained under the bishop's close watch until the end of his days. Dantiscus admonished him twice in person: in September and October 1538, and again in January 1539. However, he did not limit himself to this by letter; he asked first the gravely ill canon Felix Reich and then Tiedemann Giese to intervene in the matter. Copernicus had to dismiss her. Whether Anna Schilling was connected to her relative only by a deep friendship or by other feelings remains a mystery. (*Krzysztof Mikulski - Life and work of Nicolaus Copernicus*).

3 Copernicus soon took care of another visitor to Frombork. In May 1539, Georg Joachim Rheticus, a professor at Wittenberg University, arrived there. He wanted to learn about the teachings of the famous astronomer and announce to the world the truth about such an important discovery. Rheticus, although coming from the capital of Lutheranism, did not have the full support of this denomination. Martin Luther had just expressed his opinion of Copernicus in June 1539: "This fool wants to throw overboard the whole art of astronomy". Another well-known theologian of Luther's doctrine, Philipp Melanchthon, spoke equally negatively of the founder of the heliocentric theory. (*Krzysztof Mikulski - The Life and Work of Nicolaus Copernicus*)

4. Copernicus became seriously ill around 8 December 1542, a year after Rheticus' departure. Even earlier, they had both decided that the last three chapters of Book I should be printed separately under Rheticus' supervision. The beautifully edited little work reached its readers and Copernicus himself just at the beginning of the second half of 1542. Thus Nicolaus could still rejoice that the effort of his life had not been wasted.

5. The astronomer's life was coming to an end at this time. At the beginning of December 1542, Copernicus suffered a stroke and became paralysed on the right side of his body. He spent the last six months of his life in bed - awaiting death and 'without memory or spiritual presence', as Tiedemann Giese later wrote. The astronomer's work 'On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres' was finally published around 21 March 1543. It is highly likely that Copernicus did not see the printed work reach Prussia after his death. Even if the work had arrived in Frauenburg before 21 May 1543, he would not have been able to notice because of his illness. In July, the work was delivered to Tiedemann Giese in Lubawa. At the same time, Prince Albrecht received it in Königsberg. (*Nicolaus Copernicus Life and Works - Krzysztof Mikulski*)

According to the current knowledge, it was probably a blood clot in the left side of the brain, where the speech centre is located. However, this did not necessarily mean unconsciousness. Copernicus remained in this condition for several months. He had to be helped to eat. He may also have moved around on crutches or been supported by his male servants. He was certainly not confined to his bed for the entire six months until his death, otherwise bedsores would have appeared on his body in a short time. He undoubtedly needed care, but he was not completely helpless, nor was he plagued by pain. As a doctor, he was certainly aware of his

condition and acted appropriately towards it. When the printing of his work was completed on 20 March 1543, there was still a chance that he would see the book in its entirety. (*Dr Sikorski*).

6. The actual date of Copernicus' death is not explicitly recorded in the chapter's records and is still not precisely known today. In any case, he must have died before 21 May, because it was on that day that his successor appeared before the chapter and asked to be granted the canonry hitherto belonging to 'the blessed memory of Nicolaus Copernicus'.

7. Soon after the astronomer's death, his final resting place was forgotten. When Martin Kromer, Bishop of Warmia, funded an epitaph for him in 1580, it was placed in a very fortuitous place - at the seventh side altar in the right-hand nave. During the last war, a German scholar proved that Copernicus was assigned not the seventh, but the fourth altar in the right-hand nave. Scientific verification of these views, supported by archival material, made it possible in 2004 to unequivocally establish Copernicus' burial place, namely at the altar that belonged to him. The investigative work then undertaken by archaeologists led to the expected result. The identification of the human remains found at the time was possible thanks to comprehensive specialist research. The digitally reconstructed face of Copernicus, based on his presumed skull, showed the characteristic features of his physiognomy, which were also known from other images of him.

Before Copernicus was solemnly reburied in the basilica (also the archcathedral in Frombork) on 22 May 2010, his mortal remains were placed first in Toruń Cathedral, then in the castle in Olsztyn and finally in Olsztyn Cathedral. On its way from Olsztyn to Frombork, the funeral procession carrying Copernicus' sarcophagus stopped at towns and cities associated with the astronomer: Dobre Miasto, Lidzbark Warmiński, Orneta, Pieniężno and Braniewo. A dignified monument with the hypothetical date of his death was then erected in Frombork Cathedral next to his altar.

NICOLAUS COPERNICUS UND ELBLĄG



ach. Informacji Turystycznej w Elblągu

1 Copernicus received no gratitude for his fourteen years (1517 -1530) of work on monetary reform. The discontent of the cities, deprived of mint revenues, turned against him. Although the reform was carried out on other grounds, Copernicus was regarded, not without reason, as the main perpetrator. This reluctant attitude to him found expression in the ridicule of his person as the zealous proponent of the idea of healing monetary relations. This was done by the townsfolk of Elbląg, who carried a caricatured effigy of the Frombork thinker in a carnival procession in 1531. This was already the time of the reformation, which was spreading among the townsfolk, so this kind of "fun" could also have had religious grounds, especially since other members of the clergy were treated in a similar way. But Copernicus was ridiculed not

only for his Catholicism, but also for his persistent fight for a monetary reform, so unpopular in this city, which usurped the rights to mint his own coins.

2. Wilhelm Gnapheus, the rector of the Gymnasium in Elbląg, published *Morosopus* (The wise Jester) in 1541 in Gdańsk. This play was dedicated to Duke Albrecht and staged a year earlier in Elbląg. It was a satire on an astrologer and, according to many researchers, contained allusions ridiculing Copernicus and his heliocentric theory. Julian Lewański and Józef Lassota, however, reject the thesis that *Morosopus* was targeting Copernicus, and further confirmation of their view is to be found in the fact that a copy of the play with the author's dedication was sent to Copernicus' student and friend Georg Joachim Rheticus.