

# Antonius Sanderus' Views on the Political and Cultural Contours of *Flandria*

## Part 1

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Antonius Sanderus (Antwerp 1586 – Affligem 1664), canon, historian, poet

Pupil of the Jesuit college in Ghent, student at the university of Douai (MA 1609, Lic. in Theology 1619), ordained priest in Ghent 1611, various ecclesiastical functions in the county of Flanders

Numerous writings:

- poems
- religious tracts
- occasional writings
- collective biographies and bibliographies
- historical-geographical treatises

The collective bio-bibliographies and historical-geographical treatises

- are the most important group
- need to be seen in close conjunction

See for instance his writings on Ghent:

- *Gandavum seu de antiquitatibus eiusdem urbis libri sex* (Antwerp 1624), only Books 1 and 2

*Gandavum sive Gandavensium rerum libri sex* (Brussels 1627-1628), first Books 1 and 2 again, then Books 3 to 6

- *De Gandavensibus eruditionis fama claris libri tres* (Antwerp 1624)

- *Hagiologium Flandriae sive De Sanctis eius provinciae liber unus* (Antwerp 1625), originally focussed on Ghent, in its published form encompassing all of Flanders (Ghent still occupies one third of the entire work!)

Presented in the preface of *De Gandavensibus* as a trilogy on Ghent

Not a mere combination of history and geography in the ancient and medieval tradition of 'chorography' (Strabo, *Geographica*, 1, 1, 16)

Rather a more specific interlocking of space and history along the lines of Biondo Flavio's pioneering historical-geographical-antiquarian work, governed by

- the creation of 'Rome' and 'Italy' as paradigmatic cultural spaces
- a consistent focus on 'civitates', cities as organized communities, shaped by institutions and persons

Culminating in Biondo's *Italia illustrata*: the 'illustratio' of Italy embodies

- elucidation (in commentary mode)
- glorification (in the manner of a *laus urbis*)

Sanderus' work on the county of Flanders is crowned by his *Flandria illustrata sive descriptio comitatus istius per totum terrarum orbem celeberrimi* in two volumes ('Cologne' [actually Amsterdam] 1641-1644); a third volume was never printed, but its illustrations survive in manuscript; a fourth volume never materialized, only some illustrations survive in manuscript

- Vol. 1: Flandria Quadrimembris (Ghent, Bruges, the Franc of Bruges, Ieper/Ypres)
- Vol. 2: Flandria subalterna (smaller towns)
- Vol. 3: Flandria Gallicana (Walloon Flanders)

The *Flandria illustrata* partly resumes and expands Sanderus' earlier work: see e.g. the substantial opening section on Ghent

- repeats his *Gandavum*, rearranged into 4 Books
- is complemented by a new chapter on the newly founded bishopric of Ghent
- includes a summary of his *De Gandavensibus* (1624)

Modular structure and hierarchical order: series of self-contained units on several levels, from a 'descriptio generalis' of the entire county down to individual buildings and persons

'illustratio' as explication and celebration:

- epideictic quality (*laus urbis!*) underlined by the lavish plates
- designed to display a Counter-Reformation view of Flanders as a stable and prosperous region, firmly grounded in age-old Catholic traditions and solidly incorporated into the Habsburg lands: dedicated to the Spanish King Philip IV and the States of Flanders
- suggesting a model status of Flanders and, in particular, of Ghent as its leading city, worthy of imitation and patriotic attachment: addressed "Lectori candido ΚΑΙ ΦΙΛΟΠΑΤΡΙ"

Focus on noble houses, religious institutions, administrative structures

Hardly any references to political and confessional conflicts of the recent past

Territorial instability downplayed, cultural continuity (ideally from ancient Rome and early Christianity onwards) emphasized