

## **Andreas Dominicus SASSENUM**

Born: 12<sup>th</sup> of August 1672, Leuven (Belgium)

Died: 19<sup>th</sup> of July 1756, Leuven

A.D. Sassenus is the second child of Andreas (1641-1724) and Anna Jacoba Van Sint Huybrecht. In 1696 he establishes himself in Leuven as a pharmacist, but pursues his studies and obtains the degree of licentiate in medicine in 1712. On the 7<sup>th</sup> May 1717 he is appointed professor of botany at the University of Leuven and director of the botanical garden, which he enriches with numerous indigenous and exotic plants of his own collection. The next year he succeeds H.J. Rega (1690-1754) as professor of chemistry at the medical faculty, a chair which he holds till 1756.

### **A famous descendant**

As far as we can track down Andreas' ancestors, one Servaes Van Sassen is the forefather of the Sassenus family. He is born in Diest (around 1500) and dies in Leuven, probably in 1560.

However, his first wife Barbara Martens is the youngest daughter of Dirk Martens (1446 or 1447 – 1534) the famous printer of Aalst, who has his printing-office in Leuven from 1512 till 1529. He is well-known for his low-priced and carefully edited textbooks. In 1529 Servaes and Barbara take over the printing business. This is the start of six generations of printers who dominate the book-market of Leuven during two centuries.

### **Medicine, pharmacy and chemistry**

Academics holding a medical degree are allowed to keep a pharmacy where future pharmacists are usually trained according to the established methods. From 1665 on, the candidates request an academic schooling and later on the university provides this academic training to evade the paying of local taxes. This leads to pharmacists becoming a privileged target group for the chair of chemistry. But being at the same time professor of chemistry and keeping a dispensary on the *Grootmerckt* prove too much of a burden for Sassenus. Two months after his appointment he disposes of his dispensary which he had bought from one of his predecessors, professor Jan Raymaekers (1653 -1716).

The royal chair of chemistry is financially unrewarding. A professor of anatomy is paid six times more! The equality in stipend is reached in 1788 by decree of the Emperor Joseph II.

Sassenus probably contributed to the establishment of a chemical laboratory near the entrance of the botanical garden. He owes this to the perseverance of the government-commissioner count Patrice François de Neny (1716-1784), who persuades the in chemistry dabbling governor Charles

of Lorraine. The laboratory is expanded by Sassenus' successor Jan Josef De Smedt ( ca.1730-1777).

As a professor Sassenus has not left an overwhelming impression and the number of students dwindle with the years. N.F.J. Eloy later writes “...*in the days of this professor, the lessons of chemistry were not brilliant at the schools of Louvain...*”

### **Startling publications**

When Sassenus was still a pharmacist, he writes caustic comments on the third edition of the Brussels pharmacopoeia and points out a number of errors. The corrections are reprinted in 1759 and remain for a while popular, even outside Brussels (like Mons).

His criticisms are poorly received by the authors of the pharmacopoeia who attack him by way of an anonymous writing. Filip Verheyen (1648-1710), at that time the dean of the university and famous professor of anatomy, takes Sassenus under his wings. In appreciation of this, Sassenus translates the best known work of Verheyen “*Corporis Humani Anatomia*” transcribing as many foreign words as possible into Dutch and sticking as close as possible to the original text. This purism leads to a stiff prose unlike the writings of Jan Palfijn (1650-1730).

In 1712 he publishes a book in Latin on descriptive anatomy “*Anatomica Descriptio Vrachi*”, which is only known due to an article published in 1852 by C. Broeckx. In 1740, together with his colleagues H.J. Rega and S.A. de Villers (1701-1759), he is entrusted with the analysis of the mineral water from the land of the governess Maria-Elisabeth. The analysis shows that the purity is equal to the water from the wells of Spa which are situated in the principality of Liege.

Andreas Dominicus Sassenus marries Anna Maria Van Wijngaerden in 1696. Of their 10 children, 5 die at an early age.

Sassenus dies in Leuven on the 19<sup>th</sup> of July 1756.