

Biographical Encyclopedia of Astronomers

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Lansbergen, Philip

Born Ghent, (Belgium), 25 August 1561

Died Middelburg, The Netherlands, 8 December 1632

Philip Lansbergen was an early advocate of a moving Earth and Sun-centered system

Born of Protestant parents who left the Netherlands for religious reasons in 1566, young Philip Lansbergen grew up in France and England, where he was educated in mathematics and theology. Upon his return to the Netherlands without a degree in 1579, he accepted employment as a minister in Antwerp, but when this city was conquered by the Spanish in 1585, Lansbergen went to Leiden to apply himself to theology. Shortly after he married Sara Lievaerts in 1586, Lansbergen moved to Goes to be a minister again. Here, alongside his religious activities, he developed his liberal views on astronomy, was engaged in politics, and practiced medicine

In 1613, after a series of minor incidents, Lansbergen ran into serious problems. The death of one of his patients caused a protracted medical controversy, and his opposition to the appointment of a new mayor ended in his dismissal. Thereupon, he moved to Middelburg and, provided with an annuity from "the Staten van Zeeland," Lansbergen devoted himself mainly to astronomy, mathematics, and medicine until his death in 1632. His wife died in 1625; he left six sons and four daughters

A follower of Nicolaus Copernicus, Lansbergen advocated for a moving Earth in his writings. His *De motus solis* (1619) and *Bedenkinghen op den daghelijckschen ende jaerlijckschen loop vanden aerdt-cloot* (1629) in particular presented further evidence supporting Copernicus's system. However, although modern-minded on astronomy, he refused to accept Johannes Kepler's theory of the elliptical motion of the planets. Lansbergen's sharp attacks and fierce criticism of Kepler culminated in the publication of his own astronomical tables based on circular planetary motion instead. Lansbergen thought these *Tabulae motuum coelestium perpetuae* (1632) could rival Kepler's *Tabulae Rudolphinae* (1627). Initially, these tables found a ready market, but interest soon waned when their accuracy proved not to be comparable to Kepler's

Lansbergen's further works on astronomy and mathematics comprised studies on the use of the astronomical quadrant and astrolabe, the sizes and distances of celestial bodies, the design of planar sundials, and problems in spherical trigonometry. In the Netherlands, Lansbergen was one of the first to openly defend Copernicus's theory, and for a long time he was the sole Dutch theologian holding his notion of a moving Earth.

Steven M. van Roode

Alternate name

Van Lansbergen, Philip

Selected References

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