

**Buried at the other side of the bay**



# Buried at the other side of the bay

Remains of Dutch funerary heritage in Japan from the  
era 1609-1870

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'Buried at the other side of the bay' is a publication of the Dodenakkers.nl Foundation and has been established with the support of the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, Bureau Funeraire Adviezen en Bureau Funeralia.

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*Cover: Deed of free passage for the Dutch to all Japanese harbors, granted by Shogun Ieyasu to Jacques Groenewegen in 1609.*

ISBN: 9789402175387

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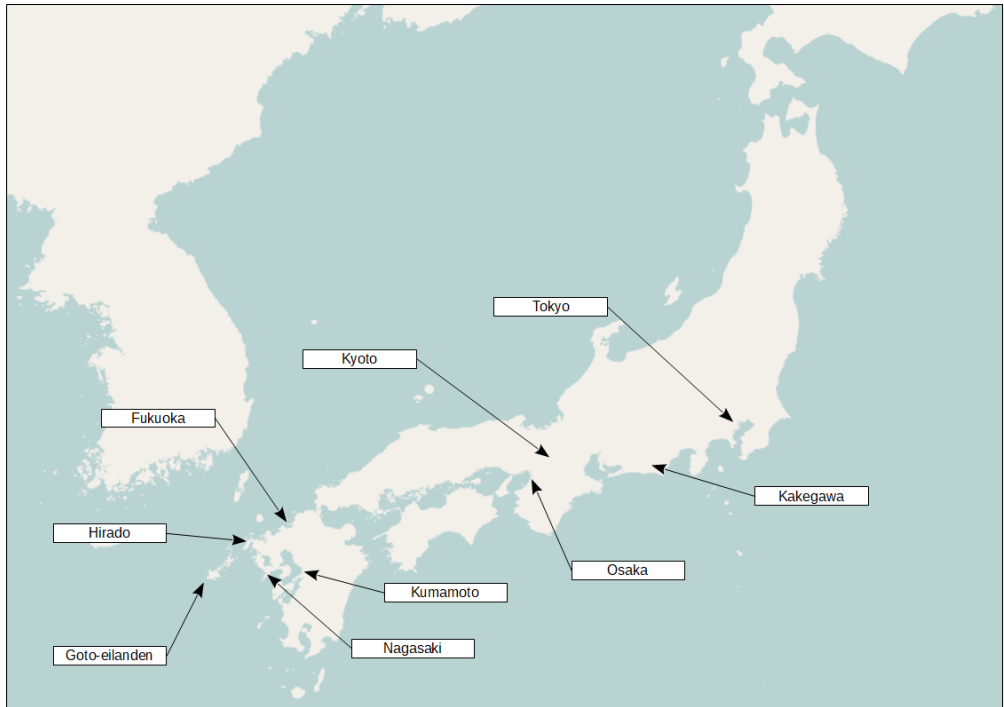


Figure 1: Historic sites in Japan.

# Foreword

Aart Jacobi

Dear reader,

The Hollandsche Begraafplaats (Dutch Cemetery) is a tangible memory of the Dutch presence in Nagasaki and it provides a fascinating insight into the historical relations between Japan and the Netherlands. In 2012, the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Tokyo began intensifying its efforts with regard to the Dutch Cemetery, the objective being to find a lasting solution for its upkeep and monitoring. Since 2013, this has been realised in the context of the Common Cultural Heritage policy, which recognises Japan as a focus country. The embassy asked the Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed (RCE - Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands) for assistance in drawing up a management plan to better safeguard the future of the Dutch Cemetery and the RCE engaged stichting Dodenakkers.nl (the Dodenakkers.nl foundation) to this end.

In the last five years, reconstruction and maintenance activities have been carried out, the abovementioned management plan has been drawn up and an annual commemoration has been initiated at the cemetery. This commemoration, organised by the embassy in cooperation with the Nagasaki Japan-Netherlands Association, is one of the manifestations of the continuity of interest in this exceptional site, where the dead were interred for more than two centuries.

The appearance of this book is linked with the completion of Dejima's Omotemonbashi Bridge in November 2017. On the completion of the bridge, the original connection between Dejima and Nagasaki will be restored. For two centuries, this initially narrow bridge was the only physical connection between Japan and the Netherlands. The symbolic value of the bridge is enormous; it stands for a unique relationship between two countries that may be far apart geographically speaking but, because of this period, became close and are still good friends. The cemetery forms an inextricable part of this history and more research will expand what we know about it still further.

Our common history with Japan still has many secrets worth investigating. In a word, the stone gateway with the chiselled words 'Hollandsche begraafplaats (Dutch Cemetery)' in Nagasaki not only gives access to a very special part of Japan,



but also forms a window to the intriguing history between Japan and the Netherlands.

Aart Jacobi

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## Introduction

René ten Dam

The reasons for this publication lie in the request made to the Dodenakkers.nl foundation by the RCE and the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Japan in 2016 for its advice regarding the 'Dutch Cemetery' in Nagasaki. This was not an everyday request but, during recent years, the foundation's employees have been gathering the requisite expertise to be able to answer questions regarding Dutch funerary heritage in foreign parts. In 2011, for example, the foundation was involved in making recommendations on the Peneleh Cemetery in Surabaya, Indonesia (formerly the Dutch East Indies), and a delegation paid visits to Suriname (formerly Dutch Guiana) and India as recently as the spring of 2017. As a foundation, we are delighted that the appreciation of Dutch funerary heritage extends beyond our national borders.

As a result of the business acumen of the Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (Dutch East India Company, VOC) and its counterpart the West-Indische Compagnie (Dutch West India Company, WIC), in particular, our ancestors travelled all over the globe from the 17th century. Such voyages often took many months and were not without risk. Many lost their lives en route through illness or exhaustion and almost everyone who died during these voyages was buried at sea. The violent tropical storms on the way meant, furthermore, that numerous ships sank with all hands. And even if those on board survived the crossing, there was no guarantee of a long and healthy life. Indeed, the climate, which was often tropical in the regions concerned, with all its diseases and other discomforts, cost many their lives. In general, Europeans did not live to a ripe old age in the tropics. The death rate among women and children was particularly high and men, too, frequently died before they reached middle age. Most of the deceased were buried locally and small cemeteries rapidly arose. In the first instance, this was often in the fort or within the stronghold that had been erected to protect the interests of those involved but it depended on the circumstances. The Dutch were not able to establish a dominant position everywhere, although this misconception has somehow taken root. In Japan, for example, the Dutch did not have a fort or stronghold and were obliged to do what they were told by the Japanese. The presence of the Dutch merchants was bound by stringent rules and interment in Japanese ground did not go without saying – as we will see. Compared to other

Western countries, the Dutch held a privileged position as trading partners in Japan for more than 250 years. Although they were restricted to Dejima, a small artificial island off the coast of Nagasaki, trade flourished greatly, especially in the early decades. To be sure, the climatological conditions in Nagasaki were usually much better than in Indonesia, for example, but many died here anyway, notably those who moored their innumerable commercial vessels in the harbour around August-September every year. After all, the voyage from the Dutch colonies in the then Dutch East Indies was also dangerous and tropical diseases lay waiting to pounce. The Dutch had nowhere to bury their dead on Dejima so initially they committed them to the sea, several miles off the coast. In 1655, however, for the first time they were given permission to bury someone 'on the other side of the bay'. This was to lead to what is now known as the Dutch Cemetery.



Figure 2: Map of the city of Nagasaki showing the artificial island of Dejima in the harbor.

Dejima still exists, albeit no longer in the sea but encapsulated in the Nagasaki suburbs. In 2016, the former island was almost restored to its original state and, in the autumn of 2017, the work was completed on the Omotemonbashi, the only bridge to connect the island with the Nagasaki mainland in the early years. The Royal Netherlands Embassy in Tokyo had already taken the first steps to ensure the lasting management of the 'Dutch Cemetery' in 2012. The embassy also developed a plan to publish a small Japanese-English book about the cemetery, a project on which the foundation was naturally happy to cooperate. The foundation itself simultaneously came up with the idea to bring out a publication in the Dutch

language to generate more attention in the Netherlands for this exceptional distant funerary heritage.

At the request of the Royal Netherlands Embassy and the RCE, funerary expert Leon Bok made two visits to Nagasaki in 2016. The purpose of the first visit in June 2016 was primarily to visit the Dutch Cemetery and make the acquaintance of a large number of interested parties. On the one hand, the visit and the discussions with those involved served to draw up a lasting management plan and, on the other, to pave the way for further research for this publication. During his second visit in December 2016, he primarily gave recommendations on how further to tackle the upkeep of the cemetery in cooperation with the parties involved. Discussions were also held with the municipal archaeologist in Hirado. In the past, Dutch people were buried in Hirado too, though the spot where this took place has still not been found. There may no longer be any remains to be found, given the thorough destruction of the graves when the Dutch were banned to Dejima in 1641. Considering the later activities on the hill at the Dutch lodge and trading post, it is quite possible that the original site has already been disturbed. Leon Bok also visited the island of Yokoshima, which served as the 'companies' island' in the early 17th century. Five Dutch people are supposed to have been buried there, but the location of their graves is not known either. As a follow-up to his first visit, Leon Bok gave two lectures in December and the way in which the management plan for the Dutch Cemetery in Nagasaki is to take shape in the coming period was discussed further.

While practical research was carried out and support offered in Japan, Leon Bok and René ten Dam dived into the books and archives in the Netherlands. There were insufficient funds for a fully-fledged study of the chief factors' original journals<sup>1</sup> but the *Deshima Dagregisters* (Deshima diaries), which have been translated into English and which summarise the original journals, offered an adequate alternative. This is a small reservation we have to make regarding some of the historical data presented in this book. Nevertheless, the translated documents provide sufficient insights to be able to conclude that more than 700 people died on Dejima or on ships waiting in the harbour. This number is many times larger than was thought until now. The big question, however, is where they were all buried.

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<sup>1</sup> The chief factor was the most important merchant representing the VOC. He managed the personnel and undertook the annual official visit to Edo to propitiate the Shogun with expensive gifts. All the chief factors kept journals of the most significant events that took place.