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Sumptuous Memories, Studies in seventeenth-century Dutch tomb sculpture
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In 1658, Hendrick van Vliet painted the interior of the Oude Kerk in Delft, with the tomb of Maarten Tromp in the foreground and a glimpse of Piet Hein’s in the background (fig. 187). Standing in front of Tromp’s tomb, which had been completed that year, is a small group of spectators: an elegantly clad couple with a greyhound on the left, and on the right four adults and two children. The dress and moustache of one of the men identify him as a Turk.¹ The figure staffage is equally varied in the church interiors of Emanuel de Witte and Gerard Houckgeest, and a recurrent theme in their paintings, too, is people’s interest in the country’s most important tombs (fig. 188).² These artists focused on the best-known monuments, first that of William the Silent, followed by those of De Ruyter, Piet Hein and Van Wassenaer Obdam. The bystanders in their paintings are also strikingly diverse: children playing, mothers or nurses with babies in their arms, and smartly dressed couples (figs. 161, 162).

Van Vliet’s painting may have been commissioned by Tromp’s widow, Cornelia Teding van Berkhout, who lived in Delft.³ Most of the purchasers and patrons of paintings showing the tomb of William the Silent would have been Orangists for whom it had become a symbol of the princely dynasty: the rise of this specific genre of painting in Delft around 1650 coincided with the start of the First Stadholderless Period. Even so, Van Vliet, De Witte and Houckgeest were not idealising public interest in the tombs of naval heroes, as they could easily have done if they had wished to please their patrons. There is plenty of evidence that people were very curious about such tombs, and it is possible that Van Vliet deliberately added the Turk in order to illustrate the foreign fascination with Dutch sepulchral art.
Its popularity can be measured from the many travel accounts left by tourists who visited the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These show that the tombs of national heroes were an essential part of the sightseeing programmes of many travellers. Moreover, several churches were opened especially for these ‘tomb tourists’ – for a fee. There was one such modernistic tourist organisation in Delft, which was a prime destination for travellers, mainly because of the tombs in its two principal churches. The following two quotations will give an idea of this kind of tourism. "The Oude kerk, or Old Church, is in another part of the town, and is not remarkable except for the tombs of Leuwenhoek, Pieter Heine and Van Tromp [...] The tombs of Heine and Van Tromp are very handsome. There are effigies of both in white marble, and one of the victories gained by the latter is represented in alto rilievo. On account of the tombs, both churches are open during certain hours in the day."4 “In another church are the two famous tombs of the Prince of Orange and
of Admiral Tromp, the praises of which are sung by all travellers.”

That tomb tourism was flourishing in the Republic at an early date is demonstrated by one of the first travel guides, Jean-Nicolas de Parival’s *Les délices de la Hollande* of 1651. On visiting Delft he noted that “there is no lack of foreigners who come to view the tombs.” This is confirmed by Dirck van Bleyswijck in his *Beschryvinge der Stadt Delft* of 1667. “This work [the tomb of William the Silent] is as beautiful and elegant as is to be found anywhere, and many people come every day from far-flung foreign parts to view the same, being amazed not only by the elegance of the same, for those with an understanding of art are also astounded by the most excellent art employed therein.” Even a century later, little had changed. As it was put in *A new travellers companion through the Netherlands* of 1753, “There are several other brass and marble statues round the tomb, that serve to adorn it [...] which are visited by travellers as extraordinary pieces.” Sir James Thornhill, in his travel journal of 1711, also recommended a visit to the Delft tomb: “At the new Church we saw Prince Nassaw’s Tomb which is indeed worth any traveller’s trouble.” The German Johann Beckmann said in 1762 that the churches in Delft were open all day long to accommodate the tomb tourists. “Immediately upon our arrival we visited the churches which are so famed for their tombs. [...] They are visited daily by foreigners, which is why they are constantly open.”

Other travel guides worth mentioning are Misson’s, which stresses the importance of visiting De Ruyter’s tomb, and the popular description by Jean Baptiste Christyn, *Les délices des Pais Bas* of 1697, which was constantly being reprinted until late in the eighteenth century. Christyn was a Flemish antiquary who published works on such varied topics as the history of Brabant, the noble families of Antwerp and the tombs in the cathedral in Brussels. In 1674 he also wrote a small book about the tombs of illustrious men in the Catholic Netherlands. As will be seen, tomb tourism and an interest in history often went hand in hand.

In addition to books, travellers in the main towns of the Republic could also hire a personal guide or *valet de place*, who naturally took great pride in praising local heroes to the skies, at the same time giving an exaggerated account of their deeds and derring-do. Unfortunately, there is little mention of these guides in the travel accounts. One possible exception comes in the travel expenses recorded by the Englishman Richard Holford, who toured the Republic in the summer of 1671 and noted that he paid three stuivers “to the boy at the church to see Obdam’s tomb,” although it is not clear whether the boy regaled...
Holford with the details of Obdam’s life for that sum. Holford also paid four and six stuivers respectively to gain admission to the Oude Kerk and the Nieuwe Kerk in Delft.14

Almost all the foreigners who mention the tombs in their journals were unstinting in their praise. The most important and most visited of the Dutch monuments, for William the Silent in Delft, elicited such phrases as “superbe mausolée,” “nobile mausoleo” or “structura superbam.” Others found it “curious” or “pompuo,” “extremely fine in the whole,” “very costly,” “excellently well adorned, and the whole
executed with a masterly Taste" or "d'UNE grande magnificence." An anonymous Francophone tourist in 1770 went so far as to describe it as "a masterpiece, it is the only thing worthy of mention in Delft."\(^{15}\)

Travellers felt that the beauty of the tombs lay mainly in their costly materials and exalted nature, and far less in the artistic qualities of the sculpture.\(^{16}\) The artistic value of the monuments left most tourists unmoved, but they did often mention the type of stone or the bronze, and sometimes even the veining in the marble.\(^{17}\) In 1736, an anonymous French tourist actually thought that the marble for the columns of William the Silent's tomb came from Brazilian quarries where gold was also mined. "It is supported by 20 or 24 columns of Brazilian marble taken from quarries where gold is found; one sees the veins in the columns, of which I will speak later."\(^{18}\) In fact it is portoro marble from Italy, and the gold-coloured veins are pyrite. In 1705, the traveller Blainville described De Ruyter's tomb in Amsterdam's Nieuwe Kerk with the same emphasis on the marble. "The whole is of exceeding fine black and white marble except the pillars and pilasters, which are of a charming red marble, with white veins running through it."\(^{19}\)

Only occasionally was there criticism. In 1687, for instance, the Swedish architect Nicodemus Tessin had the following to say about the tomb of William the Silent: "The sculpting is quite good [...], but the design of the architecture is poor."\(^{20}\) This, though, was no ordinary tourist but a professional architect on a study tour. The fact that as an architect Tessin championed a fairly restrained form of Classicism explains why he failed to appreciate the exuberant architecture of the tomb, with its broken pediments, paired columns and lavish sculpted details. Tessin also took a dim view of the monuments for Tromp and De Ruyter: "His [Verhulst's] work is really very poor, as evidenced by his tombs of De Ruyter and Tromp in Delft."\(^{21}\)

A few decades later, the German architect Leonhard Christoph Sturm was equally dismissive of the Republic's tombs, with the single exception of the one Eggers made for Van Wassenaer Obdam (fig. 133). None of the others could hold a candle to the funerary art to be found in Paris.\(^{22}\) The opinion of another German a century later was entirely in line with the spirit of his day. When Georg Forster visited Delft in 1790, the noble simplicity of Neo-Classicism dictated taste throughout Europe, so it is hardly surprising that he had little complimentary to say about William the Silent's tomb. Only De Keyser's masterpiece, the light-footed bronze Fame, charmed him: "It is a tasteless work, but adorned with much pomp; Victoria floats most beautifully on the point
of one foot.” Disparaging remarks like those of Tessin, Sturm and Forster were few and far between, however.

There was also a fair measure of astonishment. Francophone, Catholic travellers regularly reported with amazement about all kinds of Protestant practices in the Republic. One anonymous Frenchman who visited in 1681 was full of admiration for the tomb, but could not refrain from pointing out that it had been erected on the spot where the high altar had stood before the Reformation (fig. 189). In 1719, Pierre Sartre considered the ‘Protestant’ location on the site of the high altar as the tomb’s only blemish. “The tomb is certainly a work that deserves to be seen, and the only defect one could find in it, although it is no defect in Protestant eyes, is that it is situated at the back of the choir of the great church, on the precise site of the high altar.” This also surprised Marc-Antoine Laugier in 1766: “Inside the church, on the site of the former high altar, one sees a magnificent tomb of the famous William, Prince of Orange.”

Needless to say, the local guides trotted out anecdotes to entertain travellers, some of which were very long-lived, remaining in circulation for more than two centuries. The best known, variants of which crop up in several travel journals, first appeared in 1667 in Van Bleyswijck’s description of Delft, and concerns the small marble dog at the feet of William the Silent (fig. 76). “[...] an artfully carved dog, the fidelity of which is worthy of commemoration, for when its master died it did not wish to part from him and would not eat nor drink, so that eventually it too exchanged life for death through cold, hunger and thirst.” William Mountague reported in 1696 that “the Prince lies at length in Marble, with a Dog (having had his Life once saved by a Dog) at his Feet.” The author of A Description of Holland: or, the present State of the United Provinces of 1743 informed his readers that “At his Feet lies the Figure of a Dog, which is said to have died of Grief, when he was murdered.” According to Pierre Sartre in his Voyage en Hollande, fait en 1719, the animal was interred in the tomb with the prince: “[... lying] by his side was his dog, which had absolutely no wish to continue living after its master’s death, and was buried with him.” In 1783, the German H. Sanders believed that the vigilant dog had vainly tried to warn William of the approach of his murderer, Balthasar Gerards: “On this tomb one also sees the dog which was so faithful to the prince, and which is said to have barked at the murderer and to have died of sorrow.” Finally, the earliest, 1667 version of the tale was resurrected in a printed Dutch and French description of the tomb from the middle of the nineteenth century. People probably knew that the little
dog was a traditional funerary motif, but that of course did not tug at travellers’ heart-strings. Undoubtedly, too, De Keyser’s lively representation of the animal helped give rise to such anecdotes and keep them alive.

Unfortunately, there are few sources which would tell us whether this tomb tourism was also a popular pastime for the Dutch. The paintings of De Witte, Houckgeest and Van Vliet are the clearest evidence of this phenomenon. One possible indicator is the request which the city council made to the cathedral chapter in Utrecht upon completion of the tomb of Willem van Gendt in 1676, that “a box be placed in the cathedral church for the benefit of the poor to receive the liberal alms of those who come to see the tomb of the noble, late Lord Admiral Van Gendt.” The tomb was evidently attracting so many visitors that it was worth installing a collection box. The same practice is mentioned by an English tourist who went to see William the Silent’s tomb in Delft in 1710: “You give no money to see it, only what you please to put into the poors’ box.” This charitable adjunct also gave the tombs an added raison d’être, should anyone doubt the point of erecting them. A French account of the Netherlands pithily sums up the categories of visitors to the churches in Delft in the eighteenth century, and also mentions that patriotic citizens came to view the tombs. “The churches of Delft are objects of interest to foreigners, and in fact the great men who lie buried there and the tombs that have been erected to their glory make those churches interesting not only for artists and for the lovers of sculpture but also for those who love their country and who like to recall courage, virtue and service.”

Many people clearly felt that visiting the tombs of prominent figures was a mandatory part of their itinerary, but this tomb tourism was also prompted by curiositas, by a thirst for knowledge and a desire for firsthand experience. In his book on tombs of 1631, the Englishman John Weever devoted a passage to “the ardent desire most men have, and ever had, to visit the Tombs and Sepulchres of eminent worthy persons.” According to him, everyone wished “to view the sacred Sepulchres of worthie, famous personages, yea and the very places, where such have beene interred, although no Funerall at all bee there remaining, to continue their memories.” He believed that seeing the places where memorable people lived stirs up more in a person than hearing or reading about their noble deeds. Weever’s tomb travellers were part of an honourable tradition stretching back to antiquity. The classic example of someone admiring the tomb of a hero was Julius Caesar, who visited that of Alexander the Great, but there are more
exemplary visits of that kind (fig. 8). Emperor Augustus was also moved by a visit to Alexander’s tomb, so much so that he accidentally broke part of the corpse’s nose. Alexander in his turn had been deeply affected by the sight of the tomb of Achilles. A visit to a tomb could thus become a moment when history was made, with the dead hero posthumously spurring the next generation on to new, great and memorable deeds. Seventeenth and eighteenth-century authors like Van Bleyswijck and Boitet referred at length to these classical models. “The example that is related of Julius Caesar is worthy of mention, of how upon entering the Temple of Hercules and seeing there the effigy of Alexander the Great he began sighing mightily, bemoaning his idleness that at the age when Alexander had already conquered the entire world he himself had not achieved anything memorable, which made such a strong impression on him and planted such force in his spirit that from that day on he aspired unceasingly to loftier matters, and neglected no opportunity to garner honour; and that pious or courageous men have always had an especial desire to visit
monuments of honour, to view them and to reflect.” With the realisation that visiting tombs could have an instructive and moral purpose, it was but a small step to the romantic fervour that gripped Stendhal when he was confronted with the tombs of great men during his Italian journey of 1817. Such a funerary fever, though, never swept through the Netherlands.

It is clear from the hefty chronicles and historical topographies that were published with increasing frequency in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that the tombs of famous people and heroes played a significant role in the growth and expression of local, civic pride. This form of urban glorification dealt with stock subjects like a city’s great age, its principal public buildings and monuments, trade and industry, and its famous sons. It was only natural that tombs were described at length, particularly when they had been erected at public expense. In every case they were discussed as an integral part of the churches in which they stood.

Johannes Pontanus supplies an early example of this in his description of Amsterdam of 1614, in which he goes into detail about the epitaph for the naval hero Jacob van Heemskerck in the Oude Kerk, and even includes an illustration of it. The latter might have something to do with pride at such a new and unusual initiative, for the Heemskerck epitaph was the first tomb in the Republic to be built with public funds. Pontanus accordingly calls the erection of the epitaph “no mean distinction and commendation.” He also transcribed the funerary inscription in order to make it better known. “The inscription which we said was placed by the States-General to his memory in a prominent position at the back of the church, is also included here so that it is not only there that it can be read.” When Olfert Dapper’s description of Amsterdam appeared almost 50 years later, the city had gained some more tombs. In the Oude Kerk, apart from the Heemskerck epitaph, he could mention the wooden memorial of 1633 for the naval hero Cornelis Jansz de Haan, nicknamed Het Haantje (The Cockerel), and the private mortuary chapel of Burgomaster Cornelis de Graeff (fig. at p. 8). In the Nieuwe Kerk, Dapper reported at length about the tomb of Jan van Galen, complete with extensive quotations of the inscriptions.

The Delft chronicler Dirck van Bleyswijck, writing in 1667, had more reason than any Dutch author to discuss tombs, for his city had William the Silent’s, which was the most important of all. He devoted 14 pages to it, citing other writers at length, and took the opportunity to
meditate on mortality. He also mentioned with pride that there were more monuments erected at public expense in Delft than in other cities of the Republic.

Van Bleyswijck dwelt lovingly on the Delft tombs, and his detailed lists of materials and inscriptions read a bit like specifications. The luxury building materials evidently contributed to the lustre of the tombs and thus to the glory of the city. The book also contains engravings of the tombs of William the Silent, Tromp and Piet Hein. Following in Van Bleyswijck's footsteps, Reinier Boitet wrote an account of Delft in which tombs are once again described in great detail and illustrated. He opens his discussion with the proud words: "This ancient city of Delft, in which various peerless and artistic tombs are to be found, assuredly far surpasses in glory other cities in such funerary jewels." He later sings the praises of William the Silent's tomb: "[...] that one will barely find a tomb in the whole of Europe that is grander and more excellent than this one."

Civic pride in a tomb is also reflected in an exceptional engraving of the memorial for the legendary Leiden burgomaster, Pieter Adriaensz van der Werff (fig. 190). Rombout Verhulst made it for the Hooglandse Kerk in 1661 on commission from Van der Werff's descendants and the
The historical topographies were written partly out of inter-city rivalry, and the tombs themselves can be regarded as tokens of the competition for prestige that went on between neighbouring towns. When Michiel de Ruyter’s body arrived in the Netherlands, Rotterdam and Amsterdam vied for the honour of burying the hero’s remains in their soil, for having such a celebrity within its gates bestowed extra glory on a city. Although De Ruyter was born in Vlissingen, it could be suggested that, at the very least, he had greater ties to Rotterdam or Amsterdam. His tomb, which was eventually erected in Amsterdam’s Nieuwe Kerk, took advantage of the public interest in and veneration of the naval hero in a very unusual way. The rear of the tomb can also be seen from the ambulatory, and there is an opening in the wall with doors that could permit viewing of the coffin (fig. 192). This appears to be a secular perpetuation of the display of the body or remains of a saint beneath or near an altar common in Roman Catholic countries. There is not a trace to be found, interestingly enough, of any Protestant objections to this form of ‘display of relics.’ It was not until 1923 that a related issue caused offence. Queen Wilhelmina refused permission for a ‘viewing panel’ through which the coffin of William the Silent could be seen beneath the tomb in the Nieuwe Kerk in Delft. “I have obviously rejected this, giving as my reason that it would be Romish and contrary to the view of the Silent, who wished to be buried in utter tranquility as a forgotten citizen.”

One specific group of people who made a point of visiting tombs were antiquaries – collectors of archaeological remains, coins, inscriptions, heraldic information and other relics and fragments of the past. They put together collections of artefacts, writings and drawings as the raw material for a more narrative form of history, or historia. One important consideration was the preservation of valuable historical sources. Weever, the English antiquary, is very explicit on this point. “[...] out of the respect I bore to venerable Antiquity, and the due regard to continue the remembrance of the defunct to future posteritie; I determined with my selfe to collect such memorials of the deceased, as were remaining as yet undefaced; as also to revive the memories of eminent worthy persons entombed or interred.”

The Utrecht antiquary Aernout van Buchel (1565-1641), also known as Arnoldus
Buchelius, had the same motives, as he wrote in the foreword to his *Monumenta*: "I shall endeavour to portray those monuments not only in words, but as to their form with drawings and colours as well, in so far as it is possible. For I have seen with sorrow that only recently numerous tombs and other public and private edifices have been lost throughout the Netherlands owing to the troubles of the civil wars, and have been destroyed with irreparable loss."  

Monuments, and tombs in particular, could obviously be important sources of information for antiquaries, for they contained a great deal of factual material, such as inscriptions with biographies of the deceased, and often a portrait as well. As the number of specialisations within antiquarianism increased, so its practitioners began concentrating more on specific aspects of their field of study. It was thus that in the course of the seventeenth century the first collections of drawn and copied inscriptions, heraldic devices and tombs were formed, and it was in this period that the antiquarian study of tombs truly got under way in the Low Countries. For example, in 1613 the Antwerp merchant and amateur scholar Franciscus Sweertius published a book on southern Netherlands tombs and inscriptions.  

The fact that the University of Leiden was a major European centre of humanist philology certainly played a part in the development of Netherlandish antiquarianism.

In a sense, Van Buchel represents the old-fashioned, quite wide-ranging antiquary, who was interested in both classical antiquity and local archaeological discoveries of a much later date. On his travels in France, Germany and Italy, and also back home in his native Utrecht, he described all kinds of antiquities, such as manuscripts, buildings and monuments. In the basilica of St Denis, for instance, he made drawings of the principal graves of the French kings from the Middle Ages on. He also drew and described the tomb and epitaph of the painter Jan van Scorel in Utrecht's Mariakerk. It was not until the late seventeenth century that more specialist studies of tombs began appearing in the Netherlands. The Leiden professor of rhetoric and historian Marcus Zuerius Boxhorn (1612-1653), for instance, published a book of prints (actually a reprint of a book of 1574) of 127 tombs and funerary inscriptions for famous scholars. Each illustration had the inscription on the facing page. The last two pages, which were added by Boxhorn himself, dealt with Roman gravestones which had been excavated in Utrecht and belonged to the university. The book was intended primarily as a collection of funerary inscriptions for classical scholars and historians.
The seventeenth century produced only one publication dealing solely with contemporary Dutch tombs. Added at the back of the *Medalische historie der Republyk van Holland*, the 1690 Dutch translation of the *Histoire métallique de la Republique de Hollande* by the French abbot Pierre Bizot, was an appendix gathering together the “Grafsteden ter eere der Dappere Helden opgerecht” (Sepulchres erected in honour of the valiant heroes). The book came out under the imprint of the well-known Amsterdam publisher Pieter Mortier (1661-1711), whose French descent undoubtedly helped him obtain Bizot’s work. It was not Mortier, however, who was responsible for the appendix, but the versatile translator and editor of Bizot’s book, Joachim Oudaan (1628-1692).

Oudaan, even more than Van Buchel, combined the study of national and classical antiquities with funerary sculpture. He worked as a faience-maker in Rotterdam, but devoted his free time to *belles lettres* and theology. He made a particular name for himself as industrious and creditable poet and pamphleteer, but he had a less well-known and thus underrated side as an antiquary. In 1644, Oudaan published *Roomse mogentheyt*, a history of the Romans based on illustrations of Roman coins and antiquities. The book is a fount of information, and the lavish illustrations made it both remarkably accessible and useful. That explains why it was so well received, with reprints well into the eighteenth century. Towards the end of that century Cornelis Ploos van Amstel even toyed with the idea of producing a new edition supplemented with illustrations of classical art from his own collection. Oudaan must have been in touch with many Dutch antiquarians and collectors of antiquities in order to write *Roomse mogentheyt*, some of whom he mentions in his foreword. It is known, for instance, that he was familiar with the collection of Reinier van der Wolff in Rotterdam, whose Roman marble cinerary urn is included in the book. Oudaan’s interest in and knowledge of classical coins and medals made him especially qualified to edit Bizot’s *Histoire métallique*. The fact that he added an appendix on tombs on his own initiative illustrates the breadth of his scholarship. It also demonstrates that the study of tombs in the seventeenth century was an extension of classical epigraphy and numismatics, for like coins and medals, tombs and their inscriptions were an important source of historical information. It is not impossible, incidentally, that there was a political dimension to Oudaan’s appendix in the form of an implicit glorification of the Republic. He was an enthusiastic pamphleteer who repeatedly displayed his sympathies for Johan de Witt and republican ideals.
In 1713, Oudaan's work was followed by a more wide-ranging publication on funeral customs by the Rotterdam antiquary Cornelis van Alkemade (1654-1737). He dedicated his book to the "fatherland's lovers of antiquities," and speaks in his foreword about "all true fatherlanders and amateurs of Dutch history," thereby ranking himself among the antiquaries. By way of a study of historical funerary practices starting with the Romans and the Batavians (the Germanic tribe described in Tacitus from which the Dutch believed they were descended), Van Alkemade tried to arrive at a better understanding of the funeral ceremonies of his own day. He devotes only one chapter to seventeenth-century tombs, in which his accurate interpretation of the iconography of the tomb of Jacob van Wassenaer Obdam is particularly noteworthy.

Between 1729 and 1768 the Delft lawyer, city councillor and burgomaster Willem van der Lelij (1698-1772) assembled a sizable collection of drawings of Dutch tombs and their inscriptions. He drew most of them on loose sheets on the spot, adding a wash of grey ink later. The other drawings are by artists commissioned by him, among them Pieter Snijders and Matthijs van Nooijen for the tombs in Zeeland. A more important role was reserved for Taco Jelgersma of Haarlem (1702-1795), who drew several tombs in the province of Holland, and in 1730 supplied the design for the allegorical title page (fig. 194). This shows that Van der Lelij was probably planning to publish a book of engravings titled *Monumenta Sepulchralia Belgica*. Seated in the middle of the title design is a female personification of Truth offering a snake biting its tail to the symbol of Wisdom – a two-headed, female variant of Janus. Father Time is lurking behind them with his death-dealing scythe at the ready. In the background is the tomb of William the Silent, doubtless in reference to Van der Lelij's Delft origins. His family coat of arms is displayed above Lady Truth seated before an obelisk.

The printed edition of the *Monumenta Sepulchralia Belgica* never materialised, and after Van der Lelij's death in 1772 the sheets were pasted into three albums, complete with an index. Included in the first one, which deals with The Hague, is a print from De Riemer's book in which several gentlemen are studying Van Assendelft's tomb. The presence of this, the only engraving in the book, suggests that Van der Lelij saw a reflection of himself in these genteel tomb scholars (fig. 195). The way in which he set about his work is revealed by jottings made in 1767 on a small sheet that was inserted in one of the albums (fig. 196). It is the cut-off corner of a letter with a rather crude pen
Title page of the ms Van der Lelij, c. 1740, pen and ink on an engraved blank title page, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague

Taco Jelgersma, Monumenta Sepulchralia Belgica, frontispiece of the ms Van der Lelij, 1739, pen and ink with wash, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague

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The little sketch was probably meant as a memorandum, because it is too primitive to have served as a preliminary study for the final drawing. It does show that Van der Lelij was interested not just in the appearance of tombs but in heraldry and epigraphy as well. Nothing is known, unfortunately, about the reasons for his project, although it can be inferred from the title page that his prime purpose was to preserve historical information which would otherwise have been destroyed by Father Time (fig. 194). That his fears were well-grounded is clear from the fact that a remarkable number of tombs in his collection no longer exist, and have not even survived in some other form.

The end of the eighteenth century saw the publication of the three-
volume Verzameling van gedenkstukken in Nederland by Theodorus Janssonius ab Almeloveen, who adopted the pseudonym Philelentherum Timareten. It was originally published in Latin in Amsterdam in 1684 under the title Collectio monumentorum, and was written in the classical antiquarian tradition with the object of preserving for posterity all that remained of the most important figures from the days of the Dutch Republic. A. Frese, the editor and translator of Timareten's work, commented almost 100 years later: "One has long been amazed, since the Dutch garden has so often been dug up and ploughed in order to seek and clarify the country's antiquities, histories and curiosities, that among so many writers only a few have set themselves the task of searching out and assembling national monuments of this kind." Frese alludes in passing to the work of Bizot and "the celebrated" Oudaan. The publication mainly gathers together funerary and other inscriptions relating to the leading figures on the historical stage. There are illustrations of a few tombs, as well as a remarkable print of a number of antiquaries attending the excavations carried out in the former Court Chapel on the Binnenhof in The Hague (fig. 197). One of the discoveries made there in 1770 was the still intact body of a man who was identified as Count Willem IV of...
Holland and Hainault (fig. 198). Frese has a lengthy section describing this find and that of an effigy of a knight, which in some respects are treated in a very modern way. There are three different views of the body and the statue, for instance (fig. 199), and Frese tried to date the latter by comparing it to other tombs. This passage is particularly illustrative of his sense of history. "For this statue is not carved from alabaster or polished marble but from white Bentheim stone, and appears to have been painted and varnished, as were so many different tombs in bygone times, among them those of the Brederodes in Vianen, of Assendelft in The Hague and of Marnix in Delft. That it was coloured was also evidenced by some remnants of paint stains on the
Antiquarianism as the collecting of rough historical building blocks as Timareten did in the seventeenth century had made way a century later for a more critical and analytical approach to historical artefacts. After the publication of Frese's edition of Timareten, antiquarian interest in tombs faded in the Netherlands. The demolition of a number of them during the period of the Batavian Republic (1795-1806) may have been the catalyst, although few people took the trouble to record the destruction (fig. 200). There was a brief revival of this branch of study in the work of Reinier Pieter van den Bosch, a retired civil servant who in the closing years of the nineteenth century compiled an almost complete survey of Dutch tombs and their inscriptions in a book of which the present author has made grateful use. The days of 'scholarly tomb tourism' were past, and for the time being no fresh study took its place. The fact that the antiquarian

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198 Three views of a coffin with the intact body of Count Willem IV of Holland and Hainault, 1780, engraving from Timareten's Verzameling van gedenkstukken in Nederland.

199 Three views of the effigy of a knight, discovered in 1770 in the former Court Chapel in The Hague, 1780, engraving from Timareten's Verzameling van gedenkstukken in Nederland.
inspection of tombs was increasingly becoming a dying practice was captured beautifully in a painting of 1843 by Johannes Bosboom (fig. 201) showing some seventeenth-century gentlemen examining the tomb of Engelbrecht II of Nassau in the Grote Kerk in Breda. The purpose of the five historicised figures – two antiquaries, a couple and a young painter or draughtsman – seems to be to demonstrate that funerary antiquarianism was itself becoming history by the middle of nineteenth century.

There were, of course, exceptions. The tomb of William the Silent, and to a lesser extent those of naval heroes, still attract many sightseers. In 1995, for instance, the British painter David Hockney visited Delft, “where we spent a pleasant morning wandering around. We visited the church with the tomb of William of Orange.” He was just one of the approximately 150,000 visitors from home and abroad who still file past the Orange mausoleum each year.

The declining interest in tombs in the past century may be one reason for the neglect of the country’s funerary heritage. The principal heroes’ tombs may still be cleaned regularly or maintained in some way, but many other, less prominent ones have gone into a gradual decline. The Orange tomb in Delft is cleaned once a generation on average, often coupled with a state funeral for the latest incumbent, and it has been extensively restored three times in its 400-year
existence. It is mainly the tombs whose ownership status is unclear which suffer from an acute lack of maintenance. The most poignant example is probably that of the Lord of Waarde. This once splendid private sepulchre, which a drawing in the Van der Lelij collection shows to have been intact in the eighteenth century (fig. 10), has decayed into a shapeless, pulverised lump of stone in the past 100 years (fig. 202). It is sorry evidence of the vulnerability of seemingly indestructible tombs, which were once erected to preserve the memory of the dead for all eternity. Could there be a greater contrast with the care which seventeenth and eighteenth-century antiquaries took over the country’s funerary heritage, aware as they were of the devastating ravages of time and of the importance of tombs for historical research?