

# History beneath our feet

## Medieval tomb monuments in Sint-Maartensdijk (Zeeland, Netherlands)

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We tend to walk all over them in churches without paying much attention, yet the inscribed stone slabs beneath our feet are an important part of our (art-)historical heritage. Many old churches in the Netherlands are still paved with these commemorative stones from the time when burial inside churches was customary. We can see the evidence of this in the painted church interiors by such Dutch seventeenth-century artists as Pieter Saenredam, Gerard Houckgeest and Emanuel de Witte, which sometimes show a grave-digger actually at work in an open grave within the church floor, a wheelbarrow with sand standing nearby (*e.g.* De Witte's *Interior of a Protestant Gothic Church with a Gravedigger in the Choir* of 1669 in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam: <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/SK-A-4054>).

Tomb monuments can teach us much about the ways in which people in the past dealt with death, with the deceased themselves, and with the commemoration of the dead. The province of Zeeland still has a wealth of medieval memorials. Particularly impressive are the slabs featuring incised representations of the deceased, of which the church of St Martin in the medieval town of Sint-Maartensdijk boasts some fine examples. This church also houses another rare survival, *viz.* the remains of a late-medieval noble tomb monument with finely sculpted effigies.

Unfortunately, these monuments have suffered greatly over the centuries: not just the wear and tear from countless footsteps but also deliberate damage. Fortunately a collection of antiquarian drawings in the *Zeeuws Archief* in Middelburg can offer us an idea of their former appearance.

In 2012 the medieval tomb monuments in Sint-Maartensdijk were photographed by the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands on behalf of the MeMO (Medieval Memoria Online) project. MeMO aims to study and record the medieval *memoria* culture in Dutch texts and objects up to c.1580. For this purpose, a database was compiled that can be freely accessed at <http://memo.hum.uu.nl/>.



1.

Floor slabs in the church of Brouwershaven (Zeeland) (photo: Sophie Oosterwijk).

## Care for the here and the hereafter

Intramural burial was customary until the nineteenth century: it was officially abolished by royal decree in 1829. However, intramural burial was reserved for select social groups only. Originally it was just the clergy who were buried inside churches, usually in the choir, but inevitably the laity also desired to be laid to rest as close as possible to the church and its altars, relics and images of the saints. The privilege of intramural burial was first extended to church benefactors and gradually to other lay people, at least those who could afford it. Consequently tomb monuments and commemorative floor slabs came to be a common feature of church interiors.

Commemoration of the dead was crucial in medieval Christian thinking. With an identifiable grave inside the church the dead remained part of the community, as it were: a name and often their heraldry or mark, and sometimes also an effigial representation, along with the date of death, served as visual reminders of those departed. By their very presence inside the church the dead were believed to profit even more from the masses that were celebrated there and from prayers for their souls: according to medieval belief, masses and prayers could shorten one's time in purgatory. This also explains why many Dutch inscriptions on medieval monuments include not only the name and date of death of the deceased, but also the exhortation *Bidt voer die siel* ('Pray for the soul'), which was sometimes abbreviated to just *b.v.d.s.*

### *Status and practice*

Intramural burial was obviously much more expensive than a simple grave in the churchyard. The cost mounted still further if the grave were covered with a stone slab to mark one's last resting place. A large decorated slab in a prominent position was thus also an indication of status and wealth. In addition, there was the cost of perpetual maintenance: if one's family or descendants failed in this obligation, the church was entitled to reappropriate the grave and sell it on. In such cases, the original slab might be re-used, *e.g.* by erasing earlier inscriptions or adding new ones in the available empty spaces, or by just turning the stone over and using the back.

Alongside the original inscriptions, many floor slabs may thus feature epitaphs to people who were interred in the same grave at a much later date. However, these could be members of the same family as it was customary for graves to serve later generations. Couples often purchased a large family grave which they intended to share eventually, perhaps even envisaging that their offspring would in due course be interred with them, as often happened. In such cases, the children's names and dates of death would be inserted alongside their parents' epitaphs.

Medieval people were taught to be always prepared for death and the hereafter. It thus made sense to choose a final resting place during one's lifetime and even to commission a commemorative slab at the same time, complete with an inscribed epitaph. The date of death could be inserted later, albeit this did not always happen; perhaps because the executors failed to organise this final task, but in some cases because the deceased was actually buried elsewhere. An example is Jozijne van Domburch, who chose to be buried alongside her mother in Tholen instead of with her late husband in Sint-Maartensdijk (see below).

## ***Material and design***

The favoured material for Dutch floor slabs was a ‘blue’ limestone, which had to be imported from abroad, in particular from modern-day Belgium. Transport naturally added to the cost. Zeeland was especially well situated for the transport by water of such slabs from the south.

The cost of a tomb slab depended not just on size and transport, but also on the quality and amount of decoration applied to it. A small slab with a simple inscription was obviously less expensive than a large and richly decorated slab that featured heraldry or even an effigy or another custom-made design. Some small memorial stones bear nothing but initials or a house mark, which makes them difficult to identify or date.

A favourite design was an incised marginal inscription along all four sides of the slab, often in Gothic textualis: a script that can be hard to read for the uninitiated. Later inscriptions were often added in the centre, sometimes in Roman majuscules. The corners often feature quatrefoils with the four evangelist symbols: the eagle of St John, the angel of St Matthew, the ox for St Luke and the lion of St Mark (see fig. 2). Another frequently used device is that of the chalice (with or without a host) on priests’ slabs (see fig. 24).



2.  
Quatrefoil  
medallions  
showing on the  
left an eagle  
(symbol of the  
evangelist St  
John) and on the  
right an angel  
(symbol of the  
evangelist St  
Matthew)  
(photo: Chris  
Booms, RCE).

## ***Colour***

Colour was important to medieval people. Churches were once full of brightly coloured altarpieces and statues, wall paintings and stained-glass windows. Medieval tomb effigies were almost always polychromed. Memorial slabs may now strike us as dull and grey, but many were once richly inlaid with marble, alabaster, or engraved brass plates; even the incised lines and inscriptions in the stone could be filled with coloured mastic to provide a striking visual contrast.

Especially brasses must have been eye-catching features within the stone church floors. These copper-alloy plates were sometimes decorated with enamel, *e.g.* heraldic devices. Unfortunately few of these inlaid brass plates survive in Dutch churches: most were removed, melted down or otherwise re-used (occasionally as palimpsests). In such cases, all that remains is the indent that still shows the shape of the lost brass plate, and sometimes the holes or even the brass plugs with which the plate was affixed to the slab (Fig. 3). It is fortunate that we still have antiquarian drawings of three lost brasses in Sint-Maartensdijk to show us what was once there (see below).





3. Unidentified late-medieval stone slab in Sint-Maartensdijk with indents for the lost brass plate and marginal inscription: the plug holes for the fixings are clearly visible (photo: Chris Booms, RCE).

## The *smalstad* of Sint-Maartensdijk

Sint-Maartensdijk (which became part of the municipality of Tholen in 1971) was a flourishing settlement in the medieval period, as is evident from its large parish church. There was also a castle nearby (Fig. 4 and 6). The village became a *smalstad*, a term used for seven smaller towns in Zeeland that had received town privileges and enjoyed the official status of a town, but were not represented in the States of Zeeland until the nineteenth century.



4. View of the *smalstad* of Sint-Maartensdijk and its castle, copper engraving of 1670-74 (Zeeuws Archief Middelburg, Collection Zeeuws Genootschap, *Zelandia Illustrata*).

## *The castle*

To the north of Sint-Maartensdijk lay the main castle of Frank van Borssele (c.1395-1470), stadtholder of Holland and Zeeland. It was here in 1434 that he officially wedded Jacoba van Beieren (Jacqueline), countess of Holland, Zeeland and Hainaut (1401-1436) (Fig. 5): they may have already been married in secret. Frank was Jacoba's fourth husband: her previous husband had been Humphrey, duke of Gloucester, although the validity of that marriage is often contested due to the questionable annulment of her second marriage to John IV, duke of Brabant.



5.  
Anonymous,  
Portraits of Jacoba van  
Beieren (1401-1436),  
countess of Holland,  
Zeeland and Hainaut,  
and (right)  
Frank van Borssele  
(c. 1395-1470), lord of  
Sint Maartensdijk  
(after c.1480),  
oil on panel,  
64 x 50 cm each,  
Rijksmuseum,  
Amsterdam.

Jacoba evidently felt a great affinity for Sint-Maartensdijk: she planned to have her final resting place there, but upon her death at the castle of Teylingen she was buried instead among her ancestors in the *Hofkapel* (court chapel) in The Hague. Frank continued to serve the dukes of Burgundy and became a Knight of the Order of the Golden Fleece, but he never remarried: he was also the last of his line of the Van Borssele family. The castle of Sint-Maartensdijk was demolished in 1819 (Fig. 6).



6. Two views of the castle at Sint-Maartensdijk, copper engraving (1743)  
(Zeeuws Archief Middelburg, Collection Zeeuws Genootschap, *Zelandia Illustrata*).



### ***Parish and collegiate church***

The imposing parish church of Sint-Maartensdijk was dedicated to St Martin (Fig. 30). The tower was built around 1350, but the late Gothic nave and choir date from the fifteenth century.

In 1428 Frank van Borssele founded a chapter (*i.e.* a college of canons) at the church, thereby elevating it to a collegiate church. This new foundation increased the wealth and status of the parish, for Sint-Maartensdijk could now boast both a prestigious castle and a collegiate church.

Shortly before his death in 1470 Frank also founded the nearby *Kapoenhof* to house twelve poor old men, evidently an act of generosity intended to benefit his soul in the medieval *memoria* tradition. He was buried in Sint-Maartensdijk. For his parents Floris II van Borssele (d. 1422) and Oede van Bergen (d. 1420) he had already erected a magnificent tomb monument there.

### **A noble tomb monument**

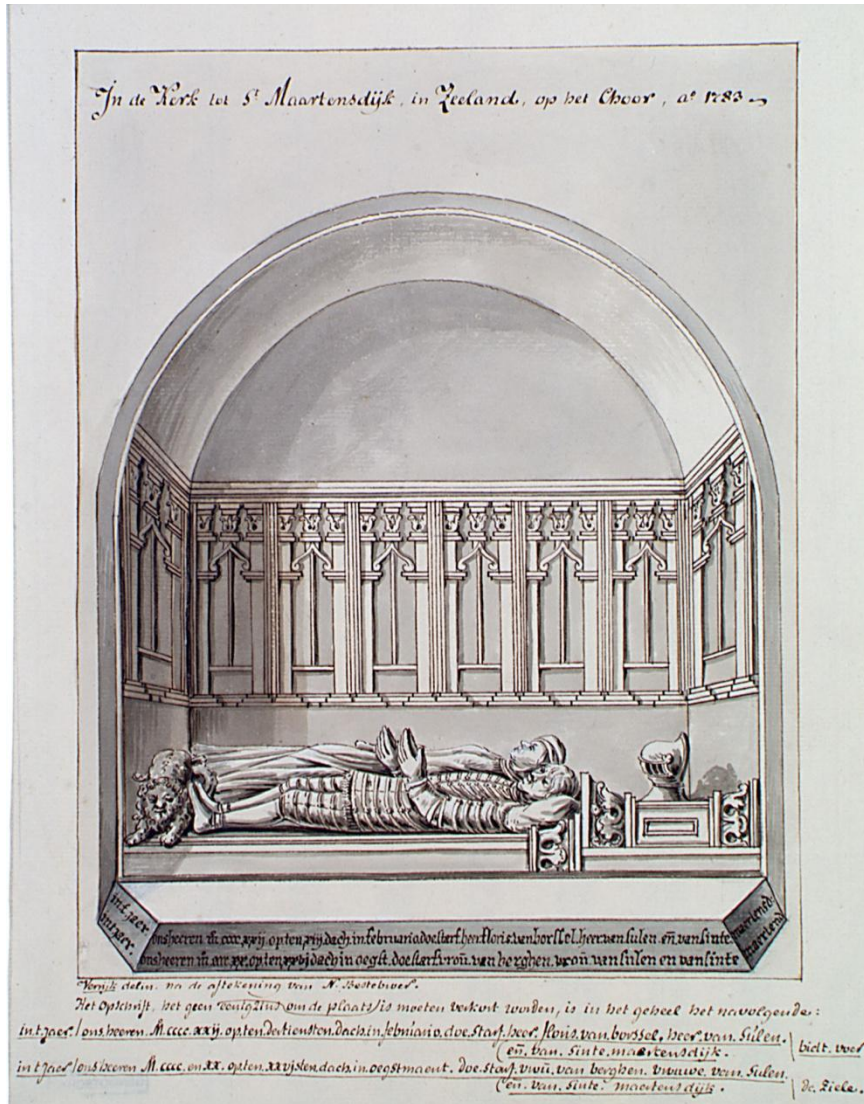
It is likely that Frank van Borssele's foundation of a chapter at Sint-Maartensdijk in 1428 was linked to the burial of his parents in the same church. His father Floris II van Borssele had died in 1422 and his mother Oede van Bergen (or Oda van Boutersem) two years earlier. Oede was a daughter of Hendrik II van Boutersem, Lord of Bergen op Zoom, and his wife Beatrix van Polanen. The castle at Sint-Maartensdijk had been the abode of Floris and Oede.

We do not know when the monument was erected nor who created it, but the sculpture was evidently of high quality. The monument is still situated in its round-arched recess in the south-west corner of the secondary choir on the north side of the church (Fig. 7).



7. Tomb monument of Floris van Borssele (d. 1422) and Oede van Bergen (d. 1420) at Sint-Maartensdijk (photo: Chris Booms, RCE).

The tomb monument originally featured the recumbent alabaster effigies of Floris in armour and (on his right) his wife Oede. Unfortunately nothing remains of Oede's effigy while only a fragment of Floris's effigy remains, comprising the torso and upper legs. The details of his armour and his belt show the remarkably high quality of the original sculpture.



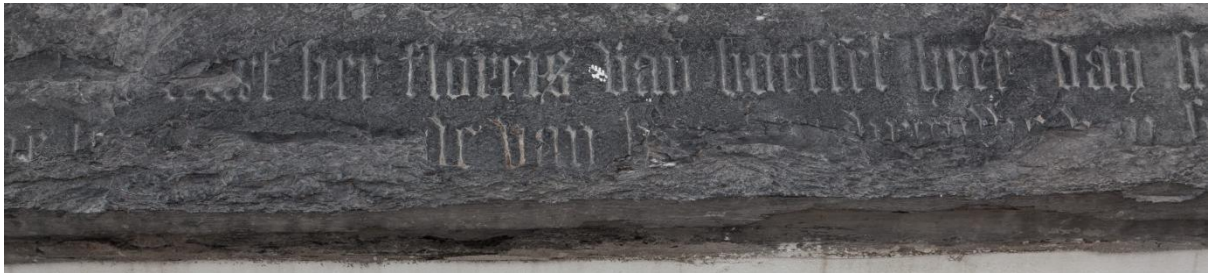
8.  
Tomb monument of Floris van Borsssele (d. 1422) and Oede van Bergen (d. 1420) at Sint-Maartensdijk, as recorded in an antiquarian drawing by Korstiaen Bestebroer (1783) (Zeeuws Archief, Collection Zeeuws Genootschap, *Zelandia Illustrata*).

### ***An important antiquarian drawing***

Fortunately a drawing from 1783 by surveyor and antiquarian Korstiaen Bestebroer, preserved in the *Zeeuws Archief* in Middelburg, can help us obtain a better idea about the tomb (Fig. 8): it shows us how it would have appeared over two centuries ago.

Bestebroer's drawing shows us both effigies with their hands raised in prayer and their eyes open. They are placed with their heads at the west and their feet at the east end of the tomb, as was customary: in this way they would both be facing the right way when Christ appeared in the east at the Resurrection. The feet of Floris's effigy are resting on a lion, while Oede probably once had a dog at her feet. The drawing also shows a helmet on the far right, while the back and side walls of the tomb recess feature eight shallow niches with tracery.

Yet it would seem that Bestebroer's drawing is not reliable in every detail. For example, the niches can now only be found across the back wall of the recess, and not along the sides. Furthermore, we can still observe circular outlines towards the tops of some of these niches, which suggest haloes of saintly figures originally placed there. These statuettes were obviously lost by the time Bestebroer drew the tomb, but he did not include the remaining haloes. His drawing also does not record any heraldry or traces of colour on either the effigies or the niches, even though the monument would originally have been polychromed.



9. Detail of the inscription on the tomb monument of Floris van Borsssele (d. 1422) and Oede van Bergen (d. 1420) at Sint-Maartensdijk (photo: Chris Booms, RCE).

### ***Inscription***

The tomb chest is still covered by a large dark hardstone slab. Inscribed along its rim in Gothic textualis is the couple's epitaph (Fig. 9) and the customary request to pray for their souls:

Int jaer Ons Heeren M<sup>o</sup> CCCC<sup>o</sup> ende XXII opten dertiensten dach in february sterf  
Her Floreis van Borsssele, heer van Sulen ende van Sinte Maertensdijk. Bid voer die  
zielen. Int jaer Ons Heeren M CCCC ende XX opten XXVIsten dach in oegstmaent  
doe sterf juffrou Oede van Bergen, vrouwe van Sulen ende van Sinte Maertensdijk.

(Trans.: *In the year of Our Lord 1422 on the thirteenth day in February died Lord Floris van Borsssele, lord of Zuilen and of Sint Maartensdijk. Pray for the souls. In the year of Our Lord 1420 on the 26<sup>th</sup> day of the harvest month [i.e. August] died mistress Oede van Bergen, lady of Zuilen and of Sint Maartensdijk.*)

### ***Aftermath***

Frank van Borsssele himself died in Brielle on 19 November 1470 after a long illness. His body was also laid to rest in the parish church of Sint-Maartensdijk, but his heart and liver were buried separately in the church of St Peter in Brielle. Such a division of the body was not unusual among the medieval nobility. No monument to him survives in either location, however. In fact, the tomb monument of his parents Floris and Oede in Sint-Maartensdijk is an important survival, despite the heavy damage it suffered. Few such grand tombs of this period survive in the Netherlands.



## A tomb slab with a story to tell

Among the many medieval slabs in the church of St Martin in Sint-Maartensdijk is the large memorial stone of a married couple, Cornelis Pieterszoon (d. 1532) and Jozijne van Domburch (d. 1557), which is situated towards the east end of the north aisle (Fig. 10). It is engraved with an image of the couple standing side by side on a tiled floor. The slab was evidently commissioned and engraved during their lifetime to cover what was intended to be their last resting place together. However, Jozijne appears to have had a change of mind.



10.  
Tomb slab of Pieter  
Corneliszoon (d. 1532)  
and Jozijne van  
Domburch (d. 1557) at  
Sint-Maartensdijk  
(photo: Chris Booms,  
RCE).

### ***Biographical details***

We know fairly little about the lives of the couple. Cornelis was the local steward for Floris van Egmont (nicknamed 'Fleurken Dunbier [*i.e.* Little Floris Small Beer]', c.1470-1539), count of Buren and Leerdam, stadtholder of Guelder and Friesland, and at that time lord of Sint-Maartensdijk. As Floris's steward, Cornelis was responsible for the government of the castle to the north of Sint-Maartensdijk (see Fig. 6) and for collecting taxes for his lord. Cornelis died in 1532, according to the added inscription on the slab, but Jozijne's date of death is not recorded here.

The inscription originally contained just the customary phrases and the names of the couple whereas their dates of death were left as 'anno XV<sup>c</sup>'. This indicates that they commissioned this slab while they were still alive, which (as noted before) was not an unusual thing to do at that time. Cornelis's date of death was later added on a second, inner text band along the lower edge. The full text reads:

Hier leyt begraven Cornelis / Pieters zoon, rentmeester in zijn leven van Sinte  
Mertensdijck, / sterf anno XV<sup>c</sup> XXXII den XIIten meerte. // Ende joncfrouw  
Jozijne van / Domburch, zijn huysvrouw, sterf anno XV<sup>c</sup> [...]

(Trans.: *Here lies buried Cornelis Pieterszoon, in his lifetime steward of Sint-Maartensdijk, who died in the year 1532 on the 12<sup>th</sup> of March. And mistress Jozijne van Domburch, his wife, who died in the year 15[.....]*)

Jozijne's date of death has thus been left as just 'XV<sup>c</sup>' although we know that she did not die in the year 1500. Was this just an oversight or does the inscription tell us something different?



11. Detail of the tomb slab of Pieter Corneliszoon (d. 1532) and Jozijne van Domburch (d. 1557) at Sint-Maartensdijk (photo: Chris Booms, RCE).



## *The effigies*

The slab features the incised effigies of the couple *au vif* (as if alive), standing upright with their faces turned toward each other and their hands raised as if in prayer. The husband is shown wearing a below-the-knee gown pulled together across his legs; it has wide lapels and what would be a square flat collar at the back of his shoulders. The sleeves of his gown have two horizontal slits edged with a ribbon laid flat as a trimming; the sleeves on his forearms belong to his doublet, which seems to have a square neckline, above which we probably see the gathered edge of his shirt collar. He also wears ‘hammerhead’-toed shoes.

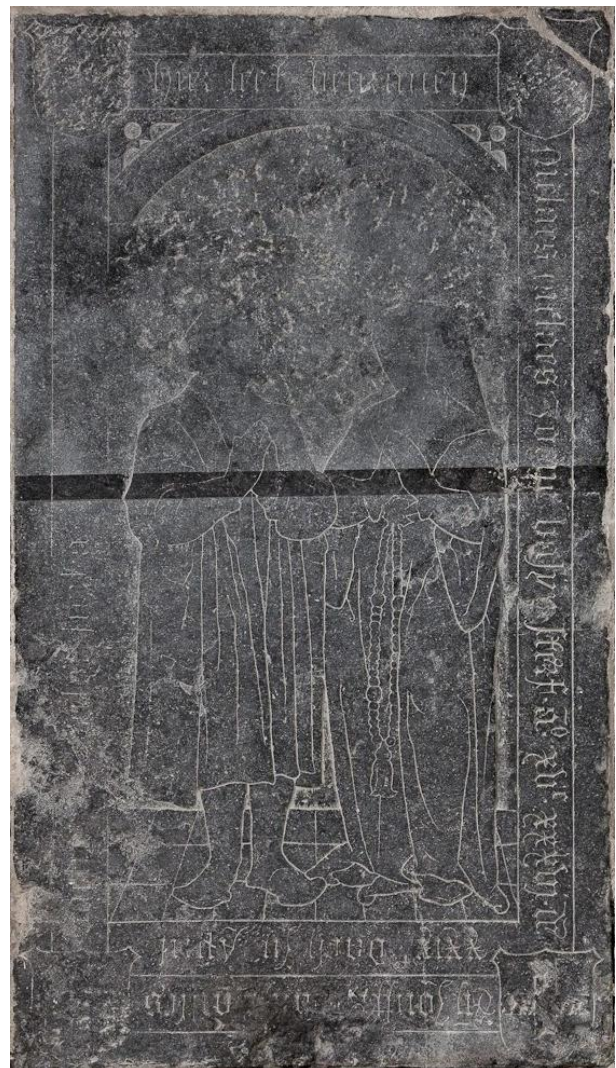
The wife is not dressed as a widow. She wears a gown with a high-set square neckline. Her skirt is lifted somewhat to reveal the kirtle skirt underneath. Netherlandish women appear to have worn cloaks over their heads when out of doors, and probably also for going to church. It seems to have a heart-shaped dip at the centre top, in the way that a starched linen headdress of the period would have had. What appears to be a small flower above her left temple is in fact a mark of the fossilised coral *Michelinia (favosa)*, characteristic of Belgian hardstone; an even larger mark mars the man’s face (Fig. 11). A rosary with a cross hangs down the front of the wife’s skirt as a sign of her piety. The couple’s attitude of prayer and the woman’s cloak and rosary would thus be particularly appropriate for a monument in their local church.

## *Technique and design*

The two elegant figures have been carved in the *taille d’épargne* technique with incised lines for the inner drawing. The design has been confidently executed by highly skilled craftsmen able to meet the local demand for effigial slabs. However, these are not true portraits but rather generic representations of a well-to-do couple. This is evident when we compare these two effigies with those on similar incised slabs of the period. An example is the worn double slab to Nicolaes Nicolaeszoon Basijn (d. 1536) and his wife [...] Gillesdochter nearby in the same church (Fig. 12). The dress of the two women may be different, but the overall composition of both slabs is virtually identical, except that the figures of Nicolaes and Marije are surmounted by a round-headed arch while their slab features heraldic shields in the corners. Yet here, too, the wife’s date of death is missing.

12.

Tomb slab of Nicolaes Nicolaeszoon Basijn (d. 1536) and his wife [...] Gillesdochter at Sint-Maartensdijk (photo: Chris Booms, RCE).





## Heraldry

Considering its age and location, the slab of Cornelis Pieterszoon and Jozijne van Domburch is still in good condition. However, it has suffered the type of vandalism that was symptomatic of the French occupation when marks of heraldry and rank were considered to be at odds with the French Revolution's desire for *égalité*: orders were thus issued in 1798 to remove such offensive marks of status. The heraldic shields in the spandrels of the decorated arch above the figures and the banderole in the centre were thus hacked away completely, while the housemarks on the shields halfway down the lateral text bands were also effaced.

Curiously the quatrefoils in the corners of the slab have also suffered the same fate, although these contained religious imagery, *viz.* the evangelist symbols commonly found on medieval memorial slabs (compare Fig. 2). It is likely that their meanings were unclear to those executing the order to remove all heraldry: we can observe the same 'mistake' elsewhere (e.g. Fig. 30 and 32).



13.  
Antiquarian drawing of the tomb slab of Cornelis Pieterszoon and Jozijne van Domburch at Sint-Maartensdijk by Korstiaen Bestebroer (1783) (Zeeuws Archief, Collection Zeeuws Genootschap, *Zelandia Illustrata*).



14.  
Antiquarian drawing of the tomb slab of Nicolaes Nicolaeszoon Basijn and Marije Gillesdochter at Sint-Maartensdijk by Korstiaen Bestebroer (1783) (Zeeuws Archief, Collection Zeeuws Genootschap, *Zelandia Illustrata*).

## Antiquarian drawings

An antiquarian drawing by the eighteenth-century surveyor Korstiaen Bestebroer in the collection *Zelandia Illustrata* shows the slab of Cornelis Pieterszoon and Jozijne van Domburch as still intact, including the original heraldry and evangelist symbols (Fig. 13). The artist did misinterpret the two horizontal slits in the man's right sleeve as some kind of buckle, but otherwise the drawing provides a good overall indication of the erstwhile appearance of the slab.

The nearby slab of Nicolaes Nicolaeszoon Basijn and Marije Gillesdochter was also recorded by Bestebroer in a drawing (Fig. 14). It reveals the wife's name, which is now virtually illegible on the worn stone, and also shows the heraldic shields formerly carved between the two figures and in the four corners of the slab.



15 (far left). Tomb slab of Katherijne tsHauwers and her daughter Jozijne van Domburch in the *Grote Kerk* in Tholen (photo: Stichting Kerkelijk Kunstbezit in Nederland).

16 (left). Antiquarian drawing of the slab of Katherijne tsHauwers and Jozijne van Domburch in the *Grote Kerk* in Tholen by Korstiaen Bestebroer (1783) (Zeeuws Archief, Collection Zeeuws Genootschap, *Zelandia Illustrata*).

## A second slab

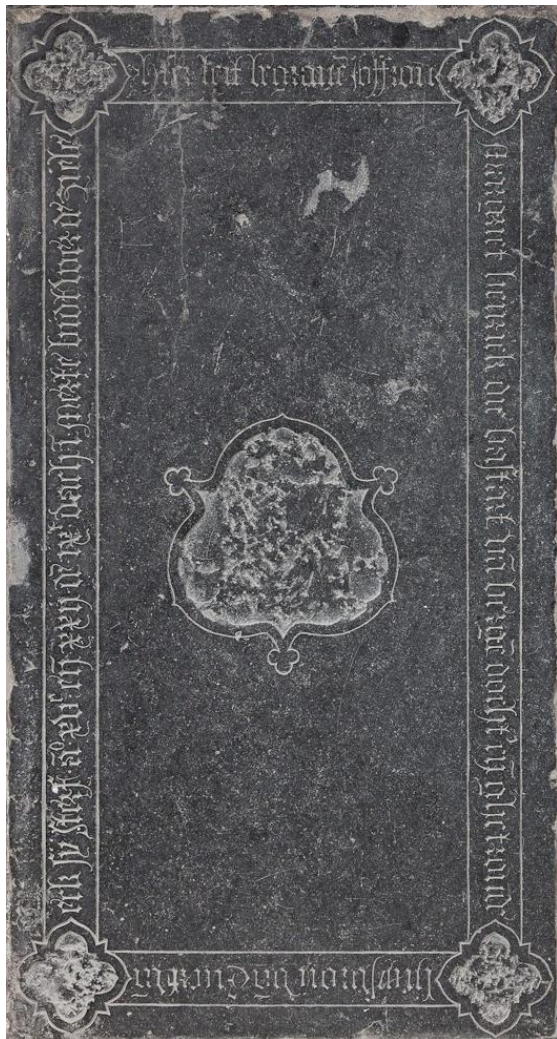
The story of Cornelis Pieterszoon and Jozijne van Domburch has an interesting sequel in another church in Zeeland. It must originally have been the intention for the couple to share the same grave under the church floor at Sint-Maartensdijk, yet this never happened. It would appear that, following her husband's death in 1532, Jozijne returned to her own family. She died on 1 December 1557 and was buried in the *Grote Kerk* or church of Our Lady in Tholen alongside her mother Katherijne tsHauwers, who had predeceased her in 1538.

Now situated against the wall of the church in Tholen we find the joint memorial with effigies of mother and daughter (Fig. 15). The marginal inscription commemorates Katherijne while Jozijne's epitaph is inscribed in a cartouche beneath the two figures. Two winged cherubs above the figures support the arms of the two women, the heraldry still intact. This slab was likewise recorded in a drawing by Korstiaen Bestebroer (Fig. 16).

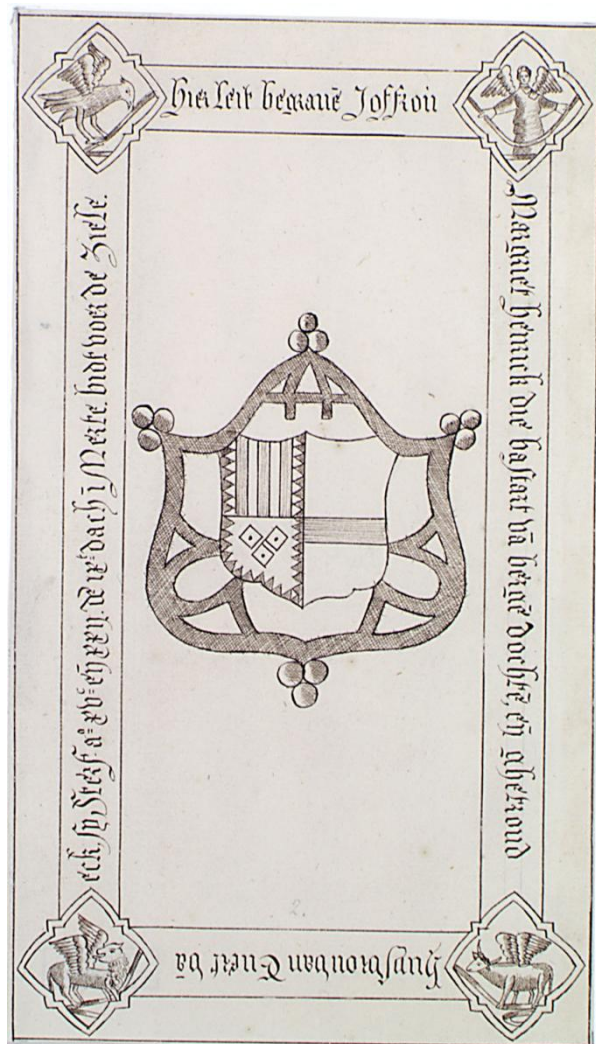


## Odd couples?

As the joint memorials in Sint-Maartensdijk show, some couples evidently intended to share the same grave. Yet others chose to be buried in separate graves, which were not necessarily situated close together, even if we take into account later repositioning of slabs. This leaves researchers to find the connection between separate slabs and separated spouses through the inscriptions.



17.  
Tomb slab of Margriet (d. 1522), daughter of Hendrik 'the Bastard' van Berghen, at Sint-Maartensdijk (photo: Chris Booms, RCE).



18.  
Antiquarian drawing by Korstiaen Bestebroer (1783) of the slab of Margriet, daughter of Hendrik 'the Bastard' van Berghen, at Sint-Maartensdijk (Zeeuws Archief, Collection Zeeuws Genootschap, *Zelandia Illustrata*).

### *A wife's slab*

A large slab, measuring 214 x 114 cm and situated in the northern part of the nave in the church of St Martin at Sint-Maartensdijk once covered the grave of Margriet, daughter of Hendrik 'the Bastard' van Bergen (Fig. 17). The inscription in Gothic textualis gives us her details:



Hier leit begraven Joffrou / Margriet, Henrick die bastart van Bergen dochter ende ghetrouwe / huysvrou van Evert van / Eck; sij sterf anno XV<sup>e</sup> ende XXII den IXten dach in merte. Bidt voer de ziele.

(Trans.: *Here lies buried Margriet, daughter of Henrick the Bastard van Berghen and faithful wife of Evert van Eck. She died in the year 1522 on the 9th day in March. Pray for the soul.*)

Just like the slab of Cornelis Pieterszoon and Jozijne van Domburch, this slab shows signs of later vandalism: the quatrefoils in the corners are damaged and something has been hacked away from the trefoil in the centre.

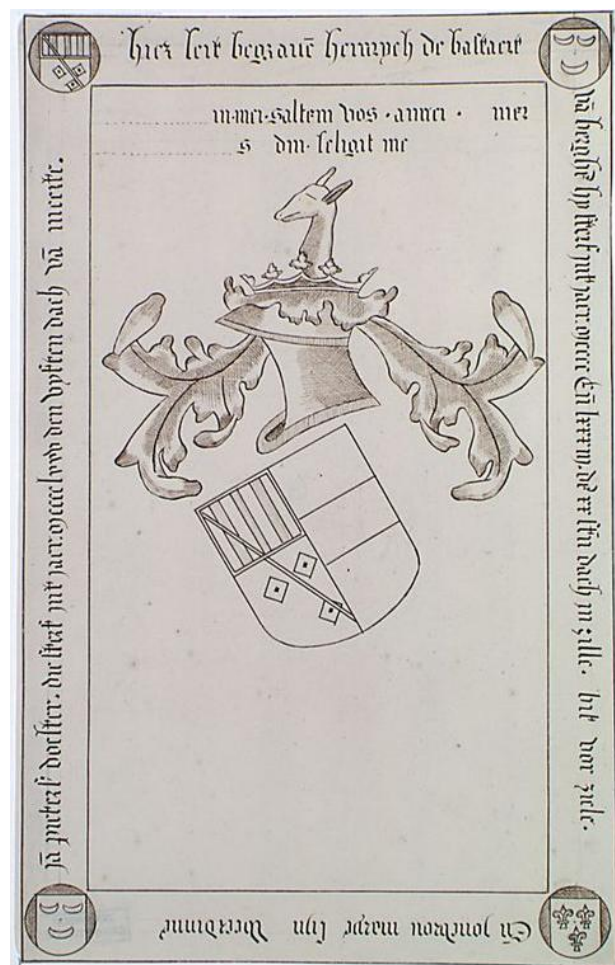
Another drawing by Korstiaen Bestebroer shows us what is now missing on this slab, albeit that he does not seem to have understood the trefoil shape that he has furthermore enlarged (Fig. 18). The quatrefoils in the corners originally featured the traditional evangelist symbols, whereas the trefoil in the centre showed a shield with the arms of Margriet's parents: for Hendrik the Boutershem arms with an indented border as a sign of his illegitimacy, and the van Borssele(?) arms for her mother. The heraldry must have been removed in 1798 during the French occupation.

### *Identity and descent*

So who was Margriet? It was customary on a woman's memorial to name her father and, if she was married, her husband. Both are mentioned in the inscription on Margriet's slab, but the arms on her shield make no reference to her husband. Instead they closely resemble the arms on a damaged and badly worn slab in the church of Our Lady in Scherpenisse (Zeeland), which memorialises one Hendrik 'the Bastard' van Berghen and his widow Marije Jan Pieterszoondochter. It would seem a convincing match of two slabs for a couple and their daughter.

Yet according to the inscription on the slab in Scherpenisse, Hendrik died much earlier:

Hier leit begraven Henryck de bastaert van Berghen; hij sterf int jaer M CCCC ende XXXIII den XXsten dach in zille. Bit vor [de] siele. Ende Joncvrou Marije, syn weduwe, Jan Pietersz. dochter, die sterf int jaer M CCCC LXXV den vijften dach van meerte.



19.

Drawing by Korstiaen Bestebroer (1783) of the slab of Hendrik 'the Bastard' van Berghen and his widow Marije Jan Pieterszoondochter (Zeeuws Archief, Collection Zeeuws Genootschap, *Zelandia Illustrata*).

*(Trans.: Here lies buried Hendrick de Bastaert van Berghen; he died in the year 1433 on the 20th day in February. Pray for [the] soul. And lady Marije, his widow, daughter of Jan Pieterszoon, who died in the year 1475 on the 5th day of March.)*

There is already a long interval of 47 years between the deaths of Margriet and Marije, but could Margriet really have survived her father for 89 years? In other words, can Hendrik and Marije really be Margriet's parents?

Korstiaen Bestebroer also recorded the slab in Scherpenisse (Fig. 19), but he gave Hendrik's year of death as 1483, which would seem more plausible if we wish to identify him as Margriet's father. Unfortunately the inscription also explicitly describes Marije as Hendrik's widow, whereas she died in 1475. The anomaly thus remains: a fine puzzle for genealogists!

### ***The husband***

Another riddle remains: where is the grave of Evert van Eck to whom Margriet was such a faithful wife? If the slab in Scherpenisse is indeed that of her parents, it is likely that Margriet was buried in the same church as her husband and, indeed, along the south wall of the nave in the church of Sint-Maartensdijk we find the slab of steward Ewert Janszoon van Eck (Fig. 20).



At 208 x 106 cm it is slightly smaller than Margriet's slab. The inscription reads:

Hier leet begraven Ewert Jans zoon van Eck,  
rentmeester van desen land was, sterf anno XV<sup>e</sup>  
ende XVII IX dage in april. Bidt voer de ziele.

*(Trans.: Here lies buried Ewert Jansz. van Eck, [who] was steward of this land, died in the year 1517 on the 9th day in April. Pray for the soul.)*

The dates of death – 1522 and 1517 – are fairly close together, which makes it plausible that Ewert was Margriet's husband and that she survived him for almost five years. Besides being a close match in size, the two slabs are very similar in design with a marginal inscription in Gothic textualis, quatrefoils with (partly effaced) evangelist symbols in the corners, and in the centre a trefoil with effaced heraldry.

20.

Tomb slab of steward Evert (Ewert) Janszoon van Eck (d. 1517) in the church at Sint-Maartensdijk (photo: Chris Booms, RCE).



## Location

The inscription on Margriet's slab does not describe her as a widow. This may mean that the couple commissioned their memorials during their lifetime, but we cannot be sure. We also cannot draw any conclusions from the present location of the two separate slabs: after all, many church floors were disturbed over the centuries and the floor slabs rearranged.

There are other examples of couples commissioning separate slabs that were placed side by side as the spouses desired to be buried in separate but adjacent graves. One such example can be found in the church in Oudelande (Zeeland). Here Cristoffel Corneliszoon (d. 1521) and his wife Mariken (d. 1517) chose two slabs with an interesting iconography that were evidently intended to be seen together (Fig. 21-22). The incised designs show the spouses wearing a shroud, lying in their coffins but casting aside the lids as they are about to be resurrected. One curious feature is the difference in size: Mariken's slab measures 145 x 72 cm whereas Cristoffel's is noticeably wider, *viz.* 145 x 86 cm. Was this intended to reflect Cristoffel's higher status as the husband or did he really require a larger grave because of his greater bulk?



22-23. Incised slabs of Cristoffel Corneliszoon (d. 1521) and his wife Mariken, church of St Eligius, Oudelande (photo: Chris Booms, RCE).



## The church and its chapter

The church of St Martin at Sint-Maartensdijk still contains eleven medieval slabs that can be securely identified as belonging to canons: the inscriptions explicitly describe the deceased as such. In addition, there are two slabs for priests and one for a chaplain. This may seem like a large number for a parish church until we remember that Frank van Borssele had elevated the church to collegiate status in the 1420s. This means that there may well have been more memorials to canons originally.

### *The collegiate church*

With the foundation of a chapter Frank van Borssele is said to have fulfilled the last wish of his father Floris van Borssele (d. 1422). The foundation charter of 23 June 1428 specifies a chapter consisting of a dean and ten canons, while the confirmation charter of 8 October 1429 mentions an additional two chaplains as members of the chapter. It was nearly one and a half centuries later, after 17 April 1577, that the chapter was dissolved. This means that a large number of canons will have been connected to Sint-Maartensdijk during this period, and many of them must have found a last resting place in the local church.

As founder Frank van Borssele endowed his new chapter with a good income. This was subsequently enlarged through further donations, such as the additional annual allowance that Frank offered the chapter in 1437 as a *memoria* for his late wife Jacqueline (see Fig. 5), which also entailed masses for his own salvation. In 1478 a later lady of Sint-Maartensdijk, Alienora van Borssele, founded a chantry for her deceased husband, Gijsbrecht van Nijenrode.

### *Tomb slabs and memorial stones*

Tomb slabs for priests can usually be identified as such by an image of a chalice with a host above, albeit that this symbol was sometimes effaced at the Reformation. Inscriptions also often mention the status of the deceased, e.g. canon or priest connected to a particular altar. A large, worn and broken slab at Sint-Maartensdijk features the incised image of a priest in mass vestments (Fig. 24). The Latin inscription is only partially legible, starting with the customary phrase 'Hic jacet sepultus' (*Here lies buried*). Wouter was a 'presbiter canonicus' (*priest and canon*). His date of death was never completed, which shows that he must have commissioned his own memorial while he was still alive, some time in the sixteenth century.

24.  
Sixteenth-century tomb slab of a canon named Wouter at Sint-Maartensdijk with the incised figure of a priest in mass vestments (photo: Chris Booms, RCE).





25.  
Memorial stone to canon  
Adriaen Janszoon van  
Steelant (d. 1470) at Sint-  
Maartensdijk (photo:  
Chris Booms, RCE).

A much smaller memorial tablet (87 x 58 cm) is inserted into the south wall of the tower in the south aisle of the nave (Fig. 25). It features an inscription in elegant incised Gothic textualis that identifies the deceased as canon Adriaen Janszoon van Steelant (d. 1470). The stone is in pristine condition, which indicates that it was never placed on the church floor. Instead it serves to mark the nearby grave of the priest, who wished to be buried in the vicinity of the altar that he had founded, as the inscription tells us:

Hier is begraven Meester Adriaen Janszoon van Steelant, fondator van deser outaer  
ende canonick van deser kerken; hi starf int jaer M CCCC ende LXX VI daghe in  
meey. God heb sijn ziele.

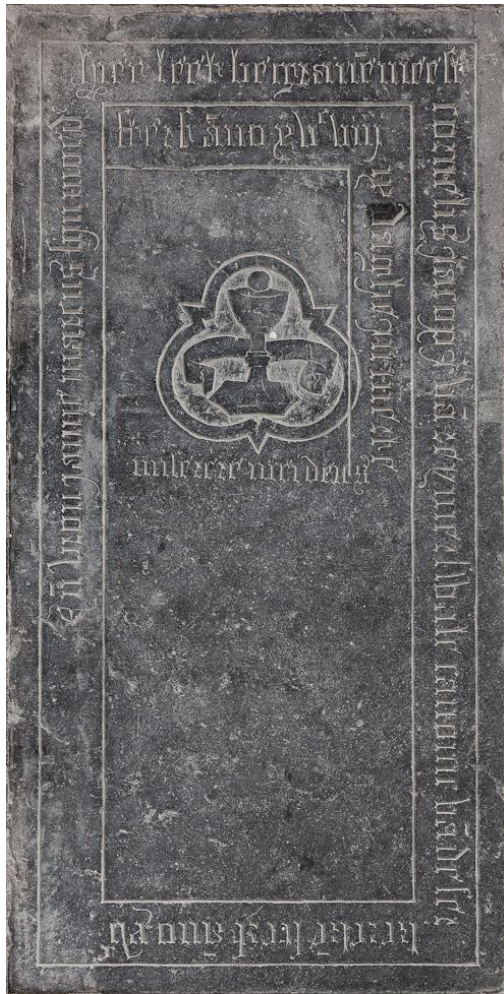
(Trans.: *Here is buried master Adriaen Jansz. van Steelant, founder of this altar and canon of this church. He died on in the year 1470 on the 6th day in May. God have his soul.*)

### ***A priest and his mother***

Yet another tomb slab for a priest is less sophisticated in its design and execution (Fig. 26). It features a marginal inscription in Gothic textualis and a trefoil in the centre with a chalice and host. However, the engraved border line of a later inscription runs through the lower right lobe of the trefoil, while the incised Latin prayer 'Miserere mei Deus' (*God have mercy on me*) beneath the trefoil is noticeably askew. The marginal inscription commemorates not just a canon, but also his mother. It runs:

Hier leet begraven meester Cornelis Jacop zoon van Reymerswale, canonic van deser  
kercken, sterf anno XV<sup>e</sup> [...]. Ende vrou Janne Marcus, sijn moeder, sterf anno XV<sup>e</sup>  
VIII / IX daghe in merte.

(Trans.: *Here lies buried master Cornelis Jacobsz. van Reimerswaal, canon of this church, died in the year 15[...]. And lady Janne Marcus, his mother, died in the year 1508 on the 9th day in March.*)



26.

Tomb slab of canon Cornelis Jacopzoon van Reymerswale and his mother Janne Marcus at Sint-Maartensdijk (photo: Chris Booms, RCE).

This is another example of a slab on which the space for the date of death was left blank. Cornelis evidently commissioned this stone in his lifetime with the intention that his mother would be buried with him. Her date of death has been added, albeit rather crudely along the inner margin of the original inscription. We can only conclude that she predeceased her son as otherwise his date of death would have been added as well.

## Lost lustre

Large tomb slabs were expensive, especially if they featured an elaborate design as well as a marginal inscription. More costly still – and more ostentatious – were slabs that featured a brass. None of these copper-alloy plates survive at Sint-Maartensdijk (see Fig. 3). However, thanks to Korstiaen Bestebroer's late-eighteenth-century drawings we have an idea of what three of them looked like.

### *A high-status memorial*

The term 'brass' is commonly used for engraved plates made of copper alloy that were inserted into a stone slab and fixed with pitch and metal plugs. When polished, the shiny metal surface of a brass would have made an impressive sight and attracted the attention – and ideally prayers – of onlookers. Unfortunately many brasses were ripped out for their scrap value.

Among the few surviving examples in Dutch churches is the magnificent brass of dean Willem van Galen (d. 1539) in the *Grote Kerk* (church of Our Lady) in Breda (Fig. 27 a-b). It illustrates the high-quality design and engraving that could be applied to such prestigious monuments.





27a-b. Brass of dean Willem van Galen (d. 1539) in the *Grote Kerk* in Breda (photo RCE and (detail right) Erfgoedweb Breda).

### ***Lost brasses at Sint-Maartensdijk***

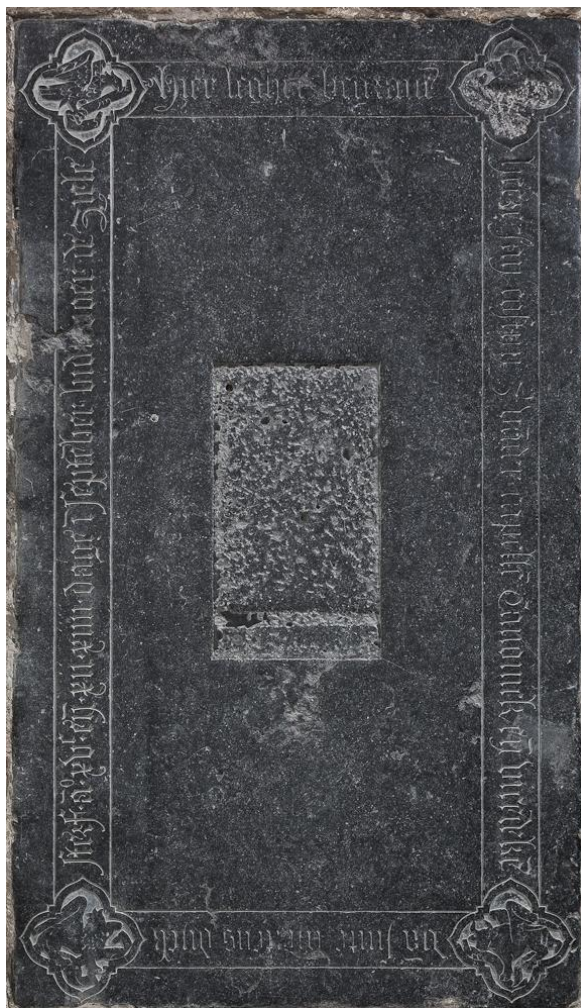
At least three canons were commemorated with brasses in the collegiate church of Sint-Maartensdijk. They all date from the early part of the sixteenth century and there is a hint of rivalry among the canons, although none of their brasses matched Willem van Galen's in size.

The earliest known example is the slab of Jan Costynzoon van der Capelle, who died on 14 September 1512: he was a canon and vice-dean at Sint-Maartensdijk. The large slab (229 x 130 cm) features the traditional quatrefoils with the evangelist symbols in the corners (Fig. 28). The marginal inscription in incised Gothic textualis is in Dutch and reads:

Hier leghet begraven heere Jan Costyn zoon vander Capelle, canonick en vicedeken van Sinte Mertens dyck sterf anno XV<sup>e</sup> ende XII, XIII<sup>e</sup> dage in september. Bidt voer de ziele.

(Trans.: *Here lies buried sir Jan Costijnsz. van der Capelle, canon and vice dean of Sint Maartensdijk, died on in the year 1512 on the 14th day in September. Pray for the soul.*)

Yet the most striking feature would have been the brass that once fitted the rectangular indent in the centre of the stone.



28.  
Tomb slab of vice-dean Jan Costynzoon van der Capelle (d. 1512) with a rectangular indent for a lost brass (photo: Chris Booms, RCE).



29.  
Drawing by Korstiaen Bestebroer (1783) of the tomb slab of Jan Costynzoon van der Capelle (Zeeuws Archief, Collection Zeeuws Genootschap, *Zelandia Illustrata*).

### ***A true record?***

Korstiaen Bestebroer recorded Jan's slab in 1783 prior to the removal of the brass (Fig. 29). His drawing shows the figure of a priest in mass vestments with a heraldic shield at his feet. The chalice and host 'floating' above his hands suggest a recumbent posture, yet the figure is otherwise shown standing underneath a round-headed arch: a common anomaly.

Yet can we really trust Bestebroer's drawing? The name of the deceased and the date of death given in his drawing match those on the actual slab, but his transcription is otherwise far from accurate. Furthermore, the indent proves that the lost brass was rectangular and relatively small, whereas Bestebroer depicts a much larger brass with a arched top. It may be an indication that Bestebroer did not execute his drawings *in situ*, but copied them out later from sketches and perhaps over-hasty notes.





30.  
Tomb slab with indent of canon Cornelis Olaerdszoon (d. 1522) at Sint-Maartensdijk (photo: Chris Booms, RCE).



31.  
Drawing by Korstiaen Bestebroer (1783) of the tomb slab and brass of canon Cornelis Olaerdszoon at Sint-Maartensdijk (Zeeuws Archief, Collection Zeeuws Genootschap, *Zelandia Illustrata*).

### ***A second brass***

Two more canons were commemorated with brasses not long after Jan Costynzoon. The first of these was situated in the slightly smaller slab (203 x 113 cm) of Cornelis Olaerdszoon alias Roemijn (d. 1522), which still shows a large rectangular indent in the centre (Fig. 30). The incised marginal inscription in Gothic textualis is in Latin and reads:

Hic iacet sepultus venerabilis ac discretus dominus Cornelius Olaerdi alias Romani canonicus huius ecclesiae qui obiit anno Mo V<sup>e</sup> XXII pro festo nativitatis Johannis Baptiste. Requiescat in pace.

(Trans.: *Here lies buried the venerable and wise sir Cornelis Olaerdsz, alias Roemijn, canon of this church, who died in the year 1522 the day before the feast of the Nativity of [St] John the Baptist [= 24 June]. May he rest in peace.*)

Again we find the traditional quatrefoils with the (effaced) evangelist symbols in the corners.



Another drawing by Korstiaen Bestebroer depicts a brass that was evidently more magnificent than that of Jan Costynzoon (Fig. 31). It shows a priest with the customary chalice and host, but dressed in much more elaborate mass vestments. The arch above the figure is also exuberantly decorated with renaissance motifs, such as rosettes, a garland of flowers, and a winged sphinx on either side.



32.  
Tomb slab of Johannes Craghe (d. 1524) at Sint-Maartensdijk (photo: Chris Booms, RCE).



33.  
Drawing by Korstiaen Bestebroer (1783) of the tomb slab of canon Johannes Craghe at Sint-Maartensdijk, (Zeeuws Archief, Collection Zeeuws-Genootschap, *Zelandia Illustrata*).

### ***The third brass***

Canon Johannes (or Jan) Craghe, who was also vice-dean of the collegiate church, died in 1524. The size of his stone slab (200 x 112 cm) is almost identical to that of Cornelis Olaerdszoon, who had died two years before (Fig. 32). The same is true of the indent, yet Bestebroer's drawing suggests a brass even more sophisticated than that of Cornelis (Fig. 33). This is perhaps not surprising as the marginal inscription suggests an educated man of high status:

Hic iacet sepultus providus ac discretus Johannes Craghe, artium magister,  
decretorum bacularius, canonicus et vice decanus huius ecclesiae, qui obiit anno M<sup>o</sup>  
V<sup>o</sup> XXIII<sup>o</sup> XIII die mensis Mertii.



*(Trans.: Here lies buried the discerning and wise Johannes Craghe, master of arts, bachelor of canon law, canon and vice-dean of this church, who died in the year 1524 on the 14th day of the month of March.)*

The brass shows the figure of a canon dressed in lavishly decorated vestments and standing underneath an elaborate arch, apparently with a fringed cloth of honour behind him. Whereas Cornelis's brass featured a pair of sphinxes, Johannes is flanked by two winged cherubim who each support a shield. That on the left shows a Jerusalem cross or Crusaders' cross, which consists of a large cross potent surrounded by four smaller Greek crosses, one in each quadrant: it is the attribute of Jerusalem pilgrims. The palm held by the priest in the crook of his right arm confirms that Johannes had been to Jerusalem himself.

Furthermore, another epitaph in Latin verse was inscribed beneath the figure on the brass:

Hic ego qui longe digessi, tedia vite,  
gaudior extincta est, organa tellus habet,  
quod natura dedit solvi, sub lege tributum,  
corpus abit terram et spiritus astra petit.

*(Trans.: Here am I, who long drew out a tedious life. I am so glad it's over! [Now] the earth has my organs. What Nature gave I have paid back, as tribute under law. My body lies in the earth and my spirit seeks the stars.)*

It is tempting to assume that each successive canon tried to outdo the others in the splendour of their memorial, although we cannot be certain that they did indeed commission their own memorials.

### ***Lost splendour***

Just over half a century after the deaths of these three canons the chapter in Sint-Maartensdijk was dissolved. Nonetheless their memorials survived the Reformation and remained in the church with their brasses intact, at least until 1783. Then the evangelist symbols in the corners of two of the slabs were hacked away, presumably in 1798 (when their religious meaning may no longer have been obvious), and the brasses were probably removed at the same time. Thus these once splendid memorials lost much of their magnificence as only the bare stones survived.

Yet we are lucky still to have these slabs and also the antiquarian drawings by Korstiaen Bestebroer. Although these drawings may not be wholly accurate they offer us an idea of the former splendour of these medieval memorials, and of how much we have lost – not just in Sint-Maartensdijk, but across the country.

**Note:** *Most of the slabs in the church of Sint-Maartensdijk cannot normally be seen as they are covered with a protective carpet fixed with adhesive tape. (This also explains the dark stripes that can be observed in some of the photos.)*

## Links to other websites:

<a href="http://memo.hum.uu.nl">memo.hum.uu.nl</a>	Website of the ‘Medieval Memoria Online’ (MeMO) project carried out at Utrecht University to investigate the medieval <i>memoria</i> culture in the Netherlands prior to the Reformation (in English and Dutch).
<a href="http://memo.hum.uu.nl/database">memo.hum.uu.nl/database</a>	Free and searchable online database of the MeMO project with an extensive introduction, instructions and descriptions (in English).
<a href="http://memo.hum.uu.nl/jerusalem">memo.hum.uu.nl/jerusalem</a>	Part of the MeMO website, offering an extensive survey of representations of Jerusalem pilgrims as part of the Dutch late-medieval <i>memoria</i> culture (in English and Dutch).
<a href="http://memo.hum.uu.nl/oudewater">memo.hum.uu.nl/oudewater</a>	Part of the MeMO website, focussing on the tomb slabs in the <i>Grote Kerk</i> (church of St Michael) in the historic town of Oudewater (in English and Dutch).
<a href="http://zeeuwsarchief.nl">zeeuwsarchief.nl</a>	Website of the Zeeuws Archief in Middelburg (in Dutch only): one may search the <i>Zelandia Illustrata</i> via <a href="http://www.zeeuwsarchief.nl/actueel/zoeken-zelandia-illustrata/">www.zeeuwsarchief.nl/actueel/zoeken-zelandia-illustrata/</a> .
<a href="http://zeeuwsekerken.nl">zeeuwsekerken.nl</a>	Website of the Stichting Oude Zeeuwse Kerken ( <i>Foundation of Historic Churches in Zeeland</i> ), which aims to promote interest in Zeeland’s historic church buildings and their maintenance (in Dutch only). The Foundation also publishes a Bulletin.
<a href="http://dodenakkers.nl">dodenakkers.nl</a>	Website of the Stichting Dodenakkers ( <i>Graveyard Foundation</i> ), offering news and information about cemeteries and funerary culture in the Netherlands and abroad (in Dutch only).
<a href="http://churchmonumentsociety.org">churchmonumentsociety.org</a>	Website of The Church Monuments Society, an international society that aims to foster the appreciation, study and conservation of church monuments, with a bibliography, glossary, weblinks, an index and summaries of articles published in its annual peer-reviewed journal <i>Church Monuments</i> and the biannual <i>Newsletter</i> , a Monument of the Month feature, and other useful information (in English).
<a href="http://mbs-brasses.co.uk">mbs-brasses.co.uk</a>	Website of The Monumental Brass Society, an international society for the study and conservation of memorial brasses, featuring a bibliography, picture library, information about its annual journal <i>Monumental Brass Society Transactions</i> and other publication, a Brass of the Month feature, and other useful information (in English).