

Jan van Oudheusden and Harry Tummers (eds), *De grafzerken van de Sint-Jan te 's-Hertogenbosch* ('s-Hertogenbosch, Stichting ABC in collaboration with Adr. Heinen Uitgevers, 2010), 4-volume box set (hb.), illustr. in b/w and colour throughout, with a separate fold-out plan. ISBN 978-90-8680-136-7. Price € 149.

It is rare for visitors to churches and cathedrals to pay much attention to the floor under their feet, except when the high relief decorations on some tomb slabs are recognised as constituting a health hazard. Such slabs tend to be ignored as works of art in their own right, however, and yet they are of great interest not just from an art-historical but also from a socio-historical, genealogical and heraldic point of view.

The floor slabs or ledger stones (the term often used by post-medievalists) throughout the cathedral of St John in 's-Hertogenbosch (Bois-le-Duc) in the Dutch province of North-Brabant were studied over a ten-year period by a team of experts. The result is an impressive four-volume study and a very informative website that offers largely the same information, accessible to all at <http://www.degrafzerkenvandesintjan.nl/>. Both are in Dutch, but the website is worth a visit for the quality of the excellent illustrations alone, many of which are photographs especially taken for the project by the Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed (RCE) – the same organisation that also supports the MeMO project with professional photography.

The cathedral of St John is one of the richest in tomb slabs of all Dutch churches. A monograph devoted to its slabs was already published by C.F.X. Smits in 1912, but Smits was selective in his survey, choosing to include only those slabs that he considered worthwhile, esp. those with heraldry and still legible inscriptions. Moreover, a number of slabs have disappeared since Smits's day, although others have fortunately been (re)discovered. In many respects, therefore, Smits's study has become outdated, although it remains important because many inscriptions that he recorded a century ago have since become illegible, worn away by footsteps. The continuing erosion makes it all the more desirable to record what is left – not only at 's-Hertogenbosch but in every church where such ancient floors can still be found.

Three of the four volumes of the book set comprise photographs and detailed descriptions of each slab as situated in the nave (vol. II), the transept (vol. III), and the choir (vol. IV). The same information can also be found on the website where tabs guide the reader through the various available sections, such as summary details, full description, location, history, material, inscription, heraldry, persons commemorated, successive owners of each

grave, and genealogy. Vol. I offers an introduction with four essays, plans, a list of recorded but lost slabs together with their inscriptions, a bibliography, and a glossary. Also useful for researchers are the appendices containing six alphabetical registers of persons, professions, functions, memberships (*e.g.* of guilds, fraternities, and religious orders), place and street names, and buildings.

The introductory essay by Anton Schuttelaars in vol. I offers an overview of the history of the church, burial practices and religious rites in the city before and after the Reformation, the costs of burial, the written sources available, the use and re-use of the floor slabs over the centuries, and what can be deduced about who was buried where. In the second essay Harry Tummers draws interesting parallels between the Roman period when monuments were designed to appeal to the passer-by, the medieval period when the dead were part of the church community and their monuments intended to attract prayers for the deceased, and the post-Reformation period when family (and national) pride was paramount and churches full of mourning boards became places for visitors to admire once again. The cathedral in 's-Hertogenbosch has no surviving medieval monuments nor the imposing types of Baroque monuments to national heroes and local worthies that one finds in several other Dutch churches. This comparative lack of more imposing memorials is remarkable: 509 of the 520 monuments in the cathedral are floor slabs.

As elsewhere, the slabs at 's-Hertogenbosch varied in appearance from stones engraved with names and dates to ones with imagery in high relief. Some were inlaid with brass plates, of which only indents remain. Heraldry was an important feature and the focus of the third essay in vol. I, but its author Jan Melssen also discusses the different personal, merchants' and masons' marks found on them. Finally, Robert Jan van der Drift uses earlier sources to focus on the ownership and location of the slabs in the cathedral, from the first Catholic period before 1629, to the Protestant period until 1811, and the third period after the church had been handed back to the Catholics. Records of burials and the location of slabs were kept much more carefully in the Protestant period, until the second Catholic period saw a halt to intramural burial and a number of restorations in the church during which slabs were moved.

The team responsible for carrying out the project at 's-Hertogenbosch must be congratulated with the results of ten years of research. The books are beautifully produced, while the website is admirably user-friendly. The research carried out so meticulously at 's-Hertogenbosch has resulted in a wealth of information to those interested in the dead, Dutch funeral customs, family history, heraldry, and monuments both before and after the Reformation. One can only hope that this project will inspire churches and researchers

elsewhere to preserve and record what remains of this too often overlooked aspect of our cultural heritage – the church floors under our feet.

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