

the way, his body was to be embalmed at sea.⁷² Thinking of everything, wood for a coffin was supplied as well, a detail which is again suggestive of East Asian custom for Chinese investiture envoys to the Ryukyu Court also used to bring their own coffins on the perilous journey from and back to China.⁷³

As a matter of fact, Blockhovius was worth more dead than alive, for while dead he would not be likely to give away the great secret of this embassy, i.e. that it was a charade put together at Batavia.⁷⁴ Everything turned out as Caron had foreseen. Blockhovius died en route, was embalmed, and arrived in Japan in his coffin. He was replaced, again as foreseen in the *Instructions*, by Andries Frisius, a dead-pan member of the Council of the Indies at Batavia, who stoically bore the ordeal of play-acting a Dutch ambassador in Japan. As neither Blockhovius nor Frisius was carrying the necessary credentials, signed and dated in Holland by Dutch authorities nor even fakes composed at Batavia, no one in the Bakufu was fooled. Caron's preparations, however, had been thorough and he knew that all such embassies were really required to do in East Asia was to put up a public show of submissiveness. (Illus. 2.)

The Bakufu, on the other hand, having insisted for so long that the Dutch should send an ambassador was hard put to refuse to receive this embassy now that an ambassador (even though dead and obviously fake) had finally arrived. Caron had taken care, moreover, to include in Blockhovius' retinue an artillery expert, for whom the Japanese had been asking for more than ten years. The dead ambassador was therefore accepted at face value, and Frisius was allowed to travel to Edo to thank the shogun humbly for his magnanimous release of the prisoners from Nambu. The only one who refused to play the game, however, was the shogun himself, who pretended that illness prevented him from receiving Frisius in person.⁷⁵ In the end, Frisius was received by the shogun's counselors and by his son, the future Shogun Tokugawa Ietsuna (1641-80). So both sides, Japanese and Dutch, agreed to keep up appearances, for the sake of preserving their mutually advantageous relationship.

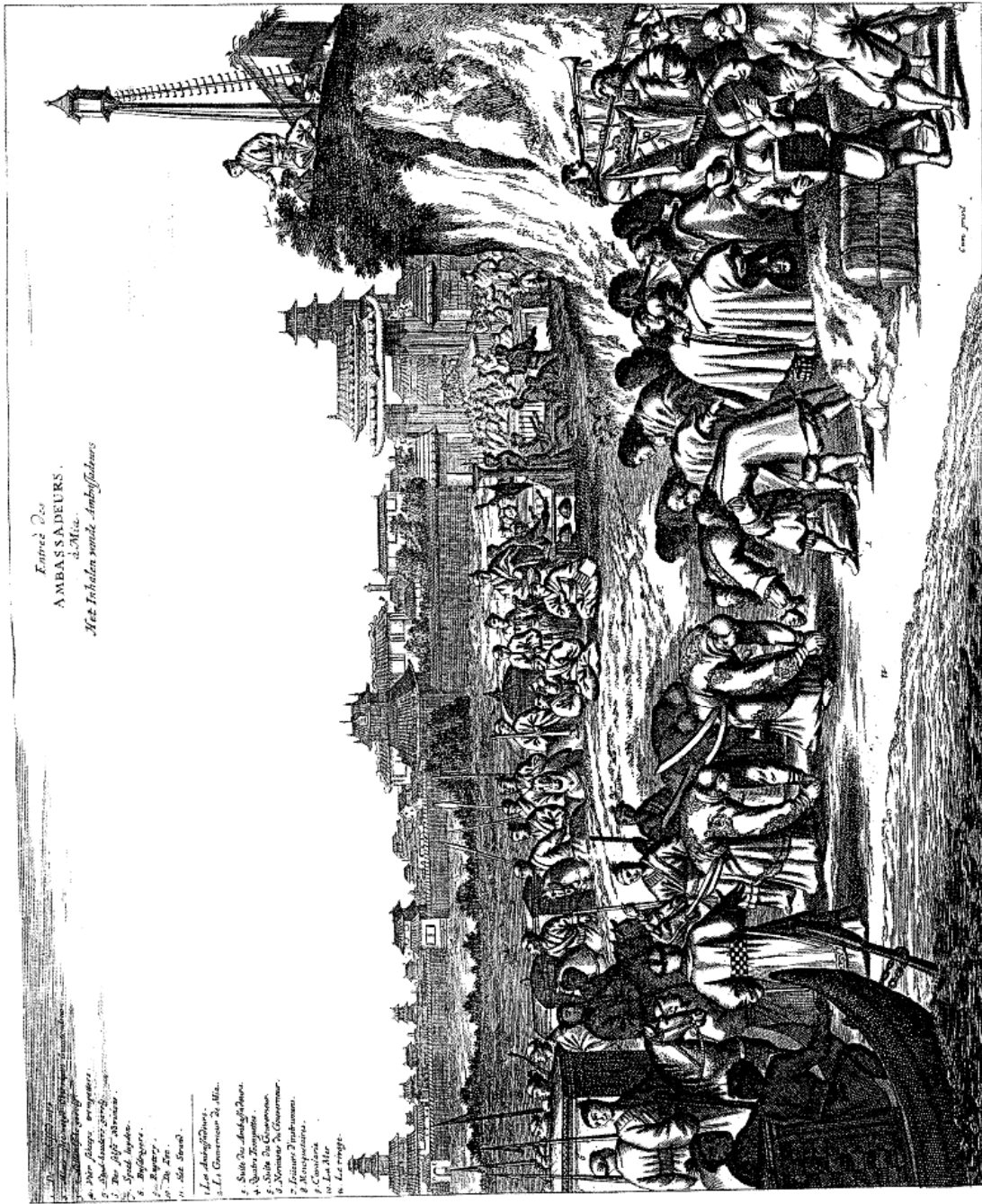
There is no indication of all of this in the first part of Montanus' book which describes this embassy. Blockhovius is mentioned, of course, and so is his death at sea and the fact that he was embalmed. Montanus, however, does not give the slightest indication that he had any idea why this embassy had been sent or why the ambassador needed to be embalmed and could not just be thrown overboard, as was usual with those who died at sea. In the second part of his

⁷² ARA: VOC 873, fo. 68r.

⁷³ Ta-tuan Ch'en, op. cit. (n. 70), p. 141.

⁷⁴ A point of view first proposed by Johann Jacob Merklein, *Reise nach Java, Vorder- und Hinter-Indien, China und Japan, 1644-1653*. Reprinted from the 1663 edn. (The Hague 1930), p. 61.

⁷⁵ Naikaku Bunko MS *Kei'an Nikki* (Ryūeiroku copy): Kei'an 2/11- Kei'an 3/03. For an analysis of the shogun's condition see my *Prisoners from Nambu*, pp. 154-6, *De gevangenen uit Nambu*, pp. 213-4, or *Orandajin hobaku kara saguru kinseishi*, pp. 277-8.



2. Entrée des Ambassadeurs; plate mounted between pp. 448 and 449 in *Gedenkwaardige Gesantschappen*.

book, however, the author is suddenly more well-versed about the reasons for this embassy. On page 364, for example, Montanus summarizes the *Breskens* affair as follows: 'Jan van Elserak reported the case of the ten released Dutchmen to Cornelis van der Lijn, chief at Batavia, who judged the matter of so much importance that he wrote to the East India Company of the United Netherlands: how the yacht *Breskens*, sent out to search for *Tartary*, came to the Japanese kingdom of *Nassame*, where in the bay of *Namboe* it had fired its guns. For this reason, the chiefs of the ship, having gone ashore with their boat, had been arrested, brought to *Jedo*, and had finally been released, even though they were guilty of a capital offense according to the Japanese laws.'

Montanus takes here exactly the position of the Japanese authorities in Bijlvelt's debriefing report. He says, in effect, that (1) the Dutchmen had behaved in a criminal manner, and that (2) the shogun had been magnanimous. He then continues: 'The East India Company took his [i.e. Elserack's] letter in serious consideration and finally came to this conclusion: the Japanese emperor would, through a special embassy, be thanked in a festive manner for the pardon he had granted to the released Dutchmen, and also to pay the usual respects for allowing the trade at Nagasaki.' We may now date this new information to 1668, when Montanus had first learned of the connection of the embassy of 1649-50 with the *Breskens* affair of six years before.

This affair and the subsequent embassy provided the mold into which the Japanese-Dutch relationship was subsequently cast. In 1643, the Bakufu was still convinced of Japan's right to require an embassy from Holland in recognition of the shogun's 'magnanimity' in releasing the Dutch prisoners. The representatives of the Dutch East Company in Japan had, of course, often professed that they considered themselves the shogun's own vassals.⁷⁶ The 'Lord of Holland' should therefore, in the opinion of the Bakufu, subordinate himself formally to the Japanese shogun by the dispatch of an embassy. It is likely that, if such an embassy from Holland had been sent, the history of the Dutch in Tokugawa Japan might have taken a somewhat different turn.

The real reaction of the leadership of the Dutch East India Company in Holland, however, is clear from a letter dated 26 April 1650, three weeks after Frisius had left Edo. It reveals, in its sarcastic phrasing, that a real ambassador from Holland was out of the question: 'Having seen from your most recent general as well as private communications concerning the Company's trade in Japan, that this arrogant nation wants to be recognized and thanked for the so-called great favor done for our nation by releasing the prisoners, who had gone ashore in Nambu from the yacht *Breskens*, a matter [the embassy] you have never raised to this Body [the Lords Seventeen] before your last general missive . . ., we

⁷⁶ Most notably Chief Factor Couckebacker, who in 1636 answered the shogun's summons for the Dutch to participate in the siege of Hara Castle.

understand from the said private letters that this affair is being taken extremely seriously by the highest officials around the Emperor, and we do not doubt therefore that you will have sent someone there from Batavia with an appropriate title and rank.⁷⁷

Clearly, the Dutch were seeing things differently. The 'embassy' put together at Batavia, therefore, was a farce which had already been almost played out by the time the Lords Seventeen became aware of the necessity to appease the Bakufu. The lack of a letter of accreditation proved to the Japanese that the shogun's right to demand an ambassador was not being taken seriously by the Dutch, but reasons of state prevented the Bakufu from cutting off all ties with these insolent merchants. The representatives of the Dutch East India Company were therefore allowed to playact their roles as vassals of the shogun, just as Ryukyuan ambassadors playacted the role of envoys from a separate kingdom when they were in China. And the more the Dutch acted, the more the Japanese side treated them as *actors*, a profession held in very low esteem in Japan. As is well-known, this later became the hallmark of the Japanese-Dutch relationship when some shoguns required the Dutch Captain to sing and dance upon the occasion of his visit to the Court.⁷⁸

Because Montanus based himself, in his account of the *Breskens* affair and the embassy of 1649-50, on the report left by Wilhem Bijlvelt, he unwittingly took the side of the Bakufu in this matter. Given the importance of never openly admitting that the Dutch embassy had been a farce, the *Gedenkwaerdige Gesantschappen* fitted well into the Company's strategy towards Japan. Although I have not been able to find a clear reference in the VOC sources about a copy of Montanus' book being offered to the shogun, it did, indeed, reach Japan and became part of the Bakufu collection of Western books.⁷⁹ I have no doubt that, however laboriously, it was eventually read by Bakufu retainers.

Since its first publication in 1669, there may have been those who have asked themselves the question why the Dutch East India Company did not take action against a publisher and author who had so flagrantly divulged what the Company considered its most treasured secrets: the details of the Japan trade. This persistent riddle can now be considered solved, for we see that behind the things divulged there was an even more secret reality that was better left untouched. The Lords Seventeen were wise not to challenge Montanus' account of the 1649-50 embassy, for to do so might have given others a chance to give a more real-

⁷⁷ ARA, VOC 317, fo. 161v.

⁷⁸ See, for example, Engelbert Kaempfer, *The History of Japan*, vol. 3 (Glasgow 1906), p. 168.

⁷⁹ *Edo Bakufu Kyūzō Ransho Sōgō Mokuroku*, ed. Ogata Tomio (Tokyo 1980), p. 28. The Bakufu's copy ended up in the Bansho Shirabesho [Institute for the Study of Barbarian Books] and is now owned by Tokyo Gaikokugo Daigaku [Tokyo University for Foreign Studies].

istic appraisal of what had happened in Japan. There were still too many voc employees alive who knew more than Montanus did.⁸⁰

On the Japanese side, the embassy left a very bitter taste behind. Never again were the Dutch either asked or forced to send another embassy. The idea to admit Holland into Japan's own new diplomatic world order failed for reason of the unwillingness of the Dutch traders to do anything else but trade. And so the Dutch were considered uncivilized precisely because they did not sufficiently recognize the centrality of Japan in Asia. That judgment remained final throughout the reign of the Tokugawa Bakufu.

SUMMARY

This article throws new light on the first extensive Dutch account of Japan, *Gedenkwaerdige Gesantschappen . . . aan de Kaisaren van Japan* (Amsterdam 1669) by Arnoldus Montanus. After an exploration of the author's life and work, his book on Japan is set in its original environment of the publishing world of seventeenth century Holland, more especially among the works on world geography published by Jacob van Meurs. Next, through an analysis of the contents of the *Gedenkwaerdige Gesantschappen*, the author of this article shows that, apart from printed materials, Montanus used four different unpublished manuscripts on Japan written by employees of the Dutch East India Company. These manuscripts seem to have been sold to Montanus or Van Meurs during the decade before the publication of the *Gedenkwaerdige Gesantschappen*. Summarizing recent research on the early history of the relationship between the Dutch East India Company and Japan, Montanus' book is then given its place in the political context of that relationship.

⁸⁰ Cf. note 71 above.