

# FUNERARY PRACTICES IN THE NETHERLANDS

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# FUNERARY PRACTICES IN THE NETHERLANDS

BY

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# CONTENTS

<i>List of Images</i>	xi
<i>List of Tables and Charts</i>	xv
<i>Preface</i>	xvii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xix
<i>Map of The Netherlands</i>	xxi
1. The Netherlands: An Introduction	1
1.1. Overview	1
1.2. Pillars and Polders	2
1.3. Migration and Diversity	3
1.4. Religion in Numbers	6
2. History	9
2.1. The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries	9
2.2. The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries	12
2.3. The Early Twentieth Century	17
2.4. The Late Twentieth Century	19
3. Demographic and Legal Frameworks	23
3.1. Mortality in the Netherlands	23
3.1.1. Place of Death	24
3.1.2. Causes of Death	24
3.2. Legal Frameworks	24
3.2.1. The Euthanasia Act	25
3.2.2. Corpse Disposal Act	26

3.3.	Recent Developments in Legislation	34
3.3.1.	Resomation, Cryomation and Compostation	35
3.3.2.	Changes in the Personal Records Database	36
3.3.3.	Recent Jurisprudence	37
4.	The Funeral Directing Industry	39
4.1.	Historic Development	39
4.2.	Current Organisation	41
4.2.1.	Types of Funeral Organisations	42
4.2.2.	Trade Associations	45
4.2.3.	Education and Quality Management	47
4.2.4.	Typical Premises of the Funeral Home	48
4.3.	Contemporary Developments: Gender, Diversity and Heritage	50
4.3.1.	The Female Face of Death	50
4.3.2.	A Multicultural Funeral Home	52
4.3.3.	Reallocating Religious Heritage	53
4.4.	Public Appearances: Televised Funeral Commercials	54
5.	Paying for Funerals	57
5.1.	Average Funeral Costs	57
5.2.	Breakdown of General, Burial and Cremation Costs	58
5.3.	Types of Funeral Insurance	59
5.4.	Funeral Poverty and Municipal Help	62
5.5.	Special Income Support	63
5.6.	Technical Cremation	64
5.7.	Baby and Children's Funerals	65
6.	A Typical Funeral	67
6.1.	Diverse and Tailor-made Funerals	67
6.2.	Immediately Following Death	68
6.3.	Making Funeral Arrangements	70
6.3.1.	Advance Funeral Wishes	71
6.3.2.	The Lonely Funeral: A Poetic Initiative	73
6.4.	Arrangements with the Funeral Director	74
6.4.1.	Type of Funeral	74
6.4.2.	Place, Time and Length of the Service	74
6.4.3.	Mourning Cards and Death Notices	75

6.4.4.	The Coffin or Shroud	75
6.4.5.	Flowers	77
6.4.6.	Music	78
6.4.7.	Koffietafel	79
6.5.	Arrangements with the Religious or Civil Celebrant	79
6.5.1.	Minister, Pastor or Priest	80
6.5.2.	Imam and Volunteers	81
6.5.3.	Chevra Kadisha	82
6.5.4.	Pandit	83
6.5.5.	Humanistic Celebrant	83
6.5.6.	Ritual Coach or Civil Celebrant	84
6.6.	The Care of the Deceased	84
6.6.1.	Ritual Washing	87
6.6.2.	Viewing the Deceased	87
6.7.	The Day of the Funeral	89
6.7.1.	Dress	89
6.7.2.	Travel to the Funeral Service	89
6.7.3.	The Place of the Funeral	92
6.7.4.	Decorating the Funeral Location	92
6.7.5.	Orders of Service	93
6.7.6.	Attending the Funeral	93
6.7.7.	The Funeral Service	94
6.7.8.	Committal, Burial and Cremation	98
6.7.9.	Digital Recording	99
6.7.10.	Remembrance or Prayer Cards	100
6.7.11.	After the Funeral Service	103
7.	Burial and Cemeteries	105
7.1.	Historic Development	105
7.2.	Current Cemetery Provision	107
7.2.1.	Municipal Cemeteries	109
7.2.2.	Special Cemeteries	112
7.3.	Graves	125
7.3.1.	Technicalities	126
7.3.2.	Grave Rights and Terms	129
7.3.3.	Clearing of Graves	130
7.3.4.	Burial Costs	131

7.3.5.	Grave Covers	133
7.3.6.	Preservation	136
7.4.	Cemetery Variation in the Netherlands	137
7.4.1.	Marken and Volendam: Protestant and Catholic Traditions	138
7.4.2.	Roermond: The Old Cemetery	140
7.4.3.	Amsterdam: De Nieuwe Ooster	142
7.4.4.	Beth Haim: Portuguese Jewish Cemetery	144
7.4.5.	Syrian Orthodox Cemetery Glanerbrug	146
7.4.6.	A Variety of Muslim Burial Plots	147
8.	Cremation and Crematoria	151
8.1.	Historic Development	151
8.2.	Burial vs Cremation	157
8.3.	Current Crematorium Provision	159
8.4.	Crematorium Architecture	160
8.5.	Cremation Law and Certification	162
8.5.1.	Current Legal Debates	164
8.6.	Crematorium Logistics	166
8.6.1.	Welcoming Facilities at the Crematorium	167
8.6.2.	Cremation Services in the Auditorium	168
8.6.3.	Crematoria and Funeral Music	171
8.6.4.	Incineration and the Witnessing of the Charge	171
8.6.5.	The Crematorium Bar and Restaurant	174
8.6.6.	The Technical Cremation Process	174
8.6.7.	Environmental Regulations	175
8.6.8.	Cremulation and Ash Storage	178
8.7.	The Ashes	178
8.7.1.	Retrieving the Ashes	178
8.7.2.	Types of Ash Disposal	180
8.7.3.	Ash Artists and Entrepreneurs	181
8.7.4.	Accommodating Hindu Ash Disposal	183
8.8.	Cremation Equipment and OrthoMetals	184



9. Death and Remembrance in the Public Sphere	187
9.1. Personal Commemoration: Between Private and Public	187
9.1.1. All Souls' Day	188
9.1.2. Virtual Commemoration	190
9.2. War and Holocaust Commemoration	191
9.2.1. National Remembrance of the Dead: May 4	191
9.2.2. Holocaust Names Memorial	192
9.2.3. Honour Fields and War Cemeteries	193
9.2.4. German Military Cemetery Ysselsteyn	195
9.3. Notable Developments in Dutch Memorial Practices	196
9.3.1. Spontaneous Commemorations	196
9.3.2. Dying Publicly	197
9.3.3. MH17: Public Mourning	199
<i>Bibliography</i>	201
<i>Index</i>	209



# LIST OF IMAGES

## Chapter 2

- Image 2.1. Code of the Funeral Association *Tot Aller Welzijn* ('For Everyone's Wellbeing'). . . . . 14
- Image 2.2. Image of the Westerveld Crematorium in Driehuis-Velsen in 1913, the Year of Its Opening. . . . . 18

## Chapter 4

- Image 4.1. A Small Auditorium in a Funeral Home in Overasselt, Gelderland. . . . . 50

## Chapter 6

- Image 6.1. An Example of a Contemporary Mourning Card, with Fictional Information, Based on Digital Templates. . . . . 76
- Image 6.2. A Hearse, Characterised by the Triangular Flags with Three White Stripes at the Front. . . . . 90
- Image 6.3. A Funeral Bicycle, Used to Transport the Deceased to the Cemetery or Crematorium. . . . . 91
- Image 6.4. Religious Symbols at a Dutch Crematorium. . . . . 93

Image 6.5.	Typical Mourning Card 1951. . . . .	101
Image 6.6.	Typical Modern Mourning Card 2014. . . . .	102
<b>Chapter 7</b>		
Image 7.1.	Grave Candle Vending Machine at Rustoord Cemetery in Nijmegen, Gelderland. . . . .	112
Image 7.2.	Roman Catholic Cemetery in Nijmegen, Gelderland. . . . .	114
Image 7.3.	The Old Cemetery in Sauwerd, Groningen, with Protestant Headstones. . . . .	117
Image 7.4.	Jewish Cemetery in Dwingeloo, Drenthe.	119
Image 7.5.	Muslim Burial Site, Grave Plots at Municipal Cemetery Blerickse Bergen in Venlo, Limburg. . . . .	120
Image 7.6.	Grave at a Natural Burial Ground in Blerick/Maasbree, Limburg. . . . .	123
Image 7.7.	Open Air Auditorium at Natural Burial Ground in Blerick/Maasbree, Limburg. . . . .	124
Image 7.8.	Canadian War Cemetery and Memorial in Groesbeek, Gelderland. . . . .	124
Image 7.9.	'You are the sweetest dog'. A Memorial Plaque at the Pet Cemetery in Grashoek, Limburg. . . . .	125
Image 7.10.	Overview of a Burial Plot at Municipal Cemetery Venlo, Limburg, with New Graves. . . . .	127
Image 7.11.	Open Spaces at the Cemetery after Grave Plot Clearance. . . . .	131

Image 7.12.	Esserveld Cemetery, Groningen: The Most Expensive Cemetery in the Netherlands. . . . .	132
Image 7.13.	Balloon-decorated Grave to Celebrate the Deceased's Birthday. . . . .	135
Image 7.14.	Protestant Cemetery of Marken, Noord Holland. . . . .	139
Image 7.15.	Roman Catholic Cemetery of Volendam, Noord Holland. . . . .	139
Image 7.16.	Grave with the Hands at the Old Cemetery in Roermond, Limburg. . . . .	141
Image 7.17.	An Elaborately Decorated Seventeenth-century Grave at the Portuguese Jewish Cemetery Beth Haim in Ouderkerk aan de Amstel, Noord Holland. . . . .	146
Image 7.18.	A Recent Grave at the Portuguese Jewish Cemetery Beth Haim in Ouderkerk aan de Amstel, Noord Holland. . . . .	147
Image 7.19.	Children's Grave at the Muslim Cemetery in Venlo-Blerick, Limburg. . . . .	149

## Chapter 8

Image 8.1.	Early Twentieth-century Cremation Propaganda of the <i>Vereeniging voor Facultatieve Lijkverbranding</i> . . . . .	154
Image 8.2.	A Building Plan of the Westerveld Crematorium. . . . .	155
Image 8.3.	The Leiden Murderess Maria Catharina Swanenburg. . . . .	165

Image 8.4. Small Auditorium at a Crematorium in Gelderland. . . . . 170

Image 8.5. Witnessing the Charge of the Deceased at a Crematorium in Gelderland. . . . . 173

Image 8.6. The Technical Cremation Process: The Operator Removes the Cremated Remains. 176

Image 8.7. The Technical Cremation Process: After Cremulation the Ashes Are Placed in Ash Containers for Storage.. . . . 177

Image 8.8. The Ash Storage Room. . . . . 179

Image 8.9. Ash Scattering Garden at Crematorium Blerick, Limburg. . . . . 182

Image 8.10. Buckets Collecting Ortho Materials for Recycling.. . . . 185

**Chapter 9**

Image 9.1. A Commemoration Tree at an All Souls' Event. . . . . 190

# LIST OF TABLES AND CHARTS

## **Chapter 1**

Table 1.1. Migration in the Netherlands, 2018. . . . . 7

Table 1.2. Religious Affiliation in the Netherlands:  
Historical Development, 1830–2015. . . . . 8

## **Chapter 4**

Chart 4.1. Number of Funeral Companies and  
Employees in 2007 and 2019. . . . . 42

## **Chapter 5**

Table 5.1. Average Funeral Costs. . . . . 59

Table 5.2. Average Burial Costs. . . . . 60

Table 5.3. Average Cremation Costs. . . . . 60

## **Chapter 6**

Table 6.1. Place of Death. . . . . 68

## **Chapter 8**

Table 8.1. Development of Cremation in the  
Netherlands. . . . . 158

Table 8.2. Number of Crematoria in the Netherlands. . . 160





## PREFACE

Death is inevitable to each of us and to those we hold dear. It is a matter of existential concern. People's experiences with death are highly diverse, and so are their funerary practices. They are influenced by regional customs, legal frameworks and personal preferences. Moreover, our responses to loss are shaped by our age, ethnicity, class, gender and religion, as well as by the type and time of a death, and our relationship to the deceased.

People's varied experiences with death challenge researchers who want to study funerary repertoires. How does one describe a miscellaneous field of practices, beliefs and experiences? How can one grasp its changes over time? Many researchers, including us, solve this difficulty by bypassing it. We situate our specific (Dutch) context in a larger, seemingly homogeneous one: Europe or the West. Rather than unpicking the notion of 'Western' death practices and its political implications, we have created a myth of Western funerary culture.

In the writing and structuring of this book, the notion of Western death ways proved problematic. It has, for instance, been impossible to translate some funerary practices and legislations to a (partially) non-Dutch and English-speaking audience, without compromising on the cultural aspects and meanings. At many occasions we discussed whether we should refer to the 'Dutch Burial and Cremation Act' or the

‘Corpse Disposal Act’, and whether we should speak of autopsies and sections while the Dutch word *lijkschouwing* clearly indicates that the coroner primarily observes the corpse, rather than dissecting it.

The Funerary International Series provides accessible information on funerary practices in different (European) countries, and thereby aims to modestly unpick the notion of ‘Western’ funerary culture. This book does so for the Netherlands. It provides a concise introduction to contemporary funerary practices, and their historic, geographic, demographic, (multi)cultural and political context.

Although we have made a selection of funerary practices, as well as some simplifications to provide a clear and manageable overview, we want to emphasise the dynamics of funerary practices and the diversity of society. The Dutch funerary landscapes have been shaped by a Protestant majority in the North and a Roman Catholic majority in the South, by the segregation of society in pillars, by the arrival of migrants from the former colonies of Surinam and Indonesia, and from the Caribbean territories, as well as by the arrival of guest workers and refugees from the peripheries of Europe and elsewhere, by individualisation and secularisation, by emancipation movements, and by technical innovation. Thus although ‘the’ Dutch funerary culture does not exist, we look forward to offering you some insight into it.

Brenda Mathijssen and Claudia Venhorst

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# MAP OF THE NETHERLANDS

