Memorable Embassies: the secret history of Arnoldus Montanus’

Gedenkwaerdige Gesantschappen

INTRODUCTION

The Gedenkwaerdige Gesantschappen, published in Dutch in 1669, is the first major non-Jesuit European work to deal exclusively with Japan (illus. 1). Although its author, a Protestant Minister, never left Holland and large parts of his book owe much to Jesuit eyewitness accounts, Montanus was the first to synthesize a Dutch view of Japan, using materials on the country collected by the employees of the Dutch East India Company. So far, however, no one seems to have remarked on the extremely odd construction of this book. It is divided into two parts. The first part, between pages 1 and 283, seems to have been written around a journal, or an extract of one, kept by someone who participated in the Dutch embassy to Japan of 1649-50. The second part, between pages 284 and 456, contains excerpts of three more journals.

What is odd about the construction of the book is that the embassy of 1649 was sent in order to thank Shogun Tokugawa Iemitsu (1604-51) for his release of ten Dutchmen, who had been arrested in northern Japan in July of 1643. The account of their four-month imprisonment, however, is given in the second part of his book, followed by the Instructions for the embassy of 1649, begging the question why the cause should follow the result. Logically, in the order of their appearance, the arrest occurred first, followed later, and the embassy itself materialized last. Thus, one would expect the order of narration to be something like this: A (arrest, 1643) > B


2 Montanus was not the first to use such materials, for Isaac Commelin had already done so in his Begin ende Voortgangh van de Vereenighde Nederlantsche Gecommercieerde Oost-Indische Compagnie (Amsterdam 1646).

1. Engraved title, preceding the letterpress title page of *Gedenkwaerdige Gesantschappen.*