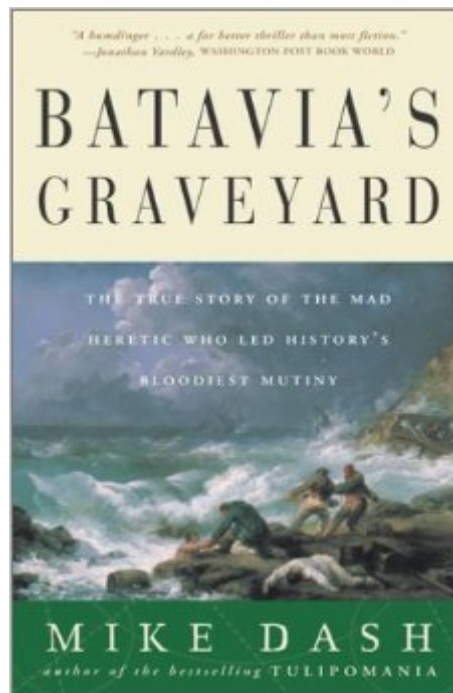


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Batavia's Graveyard: The True Story Of The Mad Heretic Who Led History's Bloodiest Mutiny



Synopsis

In 1628 the Dutch East India Company loaded the Batavia, the flagship of its fleet, with a king's ransom in gold, silver, and gems for her maiden voyage to Java; the ship itself was a tangible symbol of the world's richest and most powerful monopoly. The company also sent along a new employee to guard its treasure. He was Jeronimus Corneliszoon, a disgraced and bankrupt man with great charisma and dangerously heretical ideas. With the help of a few disgruntled sailors, he hatched a plot to seize the ship and her riches. The mutiny might have succeeded, but in the dark morning hours of June 3, 1629, the Batavia smashed through a coral reef and ran aground on a small chain of islands near Australia. The captain and skipper escaped the wreck, and in a tiny lifeboat they set sail for Java "some 1,500 miles north" to summon help. More than 250 frightened survivors waded ashore, thankful to be alive. Unfortunately, Jeronimus and the mutineers had survived too, and the nightmare was only beginning.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The setting for this book is an obscure chain of coral reefs in the 1620s. I would've never thought that incidents from so long ago and far away could inspire nightmares. But this book is every bit as chilling as "In Cold Blood" or "Helter Skelter." We'll never understand how people can commit barbarities against innocent women and children, as Jeronimus Cornelisz and his sycophants did. But eyewitness accounts and archaeological evidence, which were utilized by Mike Dash for this book, offer a testament to the grim reality of such atrocities. The story of the "Batavia" has been related before: in the year 1628, the flagship vessel of a fleet of Dutch East Indian traders smashed into a previously unknown group of jagged coral islands off the west coast of Australia in the dead of

night. While the captain and over-merchant sailed to Indonesia for help, the charismatic under-merchant set himself up as caretaker/dictator of the desperate survivors of the wreck. He turned out to be a 17th-century version of Charles Manson. He not only convinced enough naïve, under-educated, and cowardly sailors to follow him into mutiny against the East India Company, but he managed to order them into gleefully murdering over 100 of their fellow castaways. Mike Dash's book is undoubtedly the most complete account of the "Batavia" incident written thus far. The bibliographical notes he provides comprise a book in itself. For the first time, he examines the culture and background that produced a monster like Cornelisz, digging into ancient town records in Friesland, Amsterdam, and Haarlem. It's riveting to think that Cornelisz may have been acquainted with the infamous bacchanalian painter Torrentius, who was a neighbor of his in Haarlem.

"Absolutely nothing in this book is invented." Mike Dash starts off his book *Batavia's Graveyard* (Crown) with this declaration for a good reason. The story is quite literally incredible. Dash's previous book, the excellent *Tulipomania*, wittily described the improbable craze of speculating on tulip bulbs in Holland in the seventeenth century, but the tulip madness is relatively well known. Stories of the fate of the ship *Batavia* in 1629 in the service of the Dutch East India Company, however, were wildly popular at the time, but have gradually been forgotten. The story was spectacular enough that there were memoirs, eyewitness accounts, pamphlets, books, and court testimony, all of which Dash has dug through with notable thoroughness. The bizarre tale of the *Batavia* reads like a thriller. The main character in the tale is Jeronimus Cornelisz, who had newly joined the Dutch East India Company to make his fortune. He was probably brought up as a member of the Anabaptists, a small protestant sect with a history of fanaticism and resistance to worldly governments, based largely on the belief that the Second Coming of Christ was just around the corner. He had also joined a social organization which had dangerous philosophies, and he came to antinomianism, the creed that one can exist in a state of perfection and thereby avoid following any moral law. "All I do, God gave the same into my heart," he explained. He planned a mutiny to take over the ship and become a pirate, but about a month before arriving at the destination Java, it crashed into a coral reef off Australia's western coast. Cornelisz, the highest ranking official left on the islands, took charge with real self assurance, eloquence, and charisma, and hell descended.

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