Civil servants in colonised territories

Abstract

Civil servants in the Dutch colonies played an important role in the collection of objects during the colonial era. Some maintained their own collections, which they often later donated to museums in the Netherlands.

Description

Civil servants were appointed to govern the Dutch colonies. The former [Dutch East Indies](#) and [Suriname](#) in particular had a large number of civil servants, who were partly managed from the Netherlands. In addition to administrative civil servants they included officials for education, the justice system, tax administration, police, agriculture and other government services, such as the Kantoor voor Inlandse Zaken (the Office for Indigenous Affairs), the meteorological service and the archaeological service.

The administrative structure differed from colony to colony, with the position of 'gouverneur(-generaal)' (governor/governor-general) being a commonality. The administrative structure of a colony can be found in the research aid concerning that particular former Dutch colony. It is important to note that during the French domination of the European Netherlands, most of the Dutch colonial territory came under British administration, which is known as the British Interregnum. As a result you may come across English names relating to civil servants in archives dating from the period from roughly 1795 to 1820. An example is [Thomas Stamford Raffles](#), who was governor of the former Dutch East Indies from 1811 to 1816.

A significant proportion of the objects in Dutch collections come from civil servants and other persons who were in colonial government service. From 1862, government officials in the Dutch East Indies were encouraged to build up collections and send these to the [Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen](#) (Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences), which would then distribute the objects between its own museum and museums in the Netherlands. However, in practice not much came of this and civil servants decided for themselves what to do with the objects in their possession.

Provenance research

Many Dutch nationals in the colonies, as well as colonial subjects, were employed in the colonial civil service. It is therefore advisable to check whether a person associated with the provenance of an object appears in the personnel files. The National Archives of the Netherlands offers various [research aids](#) to help you find your way around the archives.

Colonial officials frequently changed positions and postings. The job title of the collector mentioned in the object documentation may therefore be different from the job title at the time of acquisition. Service registers in the National Archives and almanacs issued by the government are reliable sources for finding out the person's job position at the time of acquisition. The digitalised newspapers on [Delpher.nl](#) are useful for retrieving information about the duties of the civil servant in question.

The research aid [The Colonial State 1854-1942](#) contains detailed explanations of the archives relating to the Dutch East Indies and the various civil service departments. A [glossary](#)

explains the abbreviations used in the service registers.

Most of the archives of the Dutch colonial government can be found in the [National Archives of the Netherlands](#) in The Hague. Some archives are still located in the former colonised countries.

The Dutch government published an annual almanac listing all civil service officials in the colonies. For the former Dutch East Indies, there was the "Almanak en naamregister van Nederlandsch-Indië" (1817-1864) and "Regeeringsalmanak voor Nederlandsch-Indië" (1865-1939). For Suriname and the other former West Indian colonies, there was the "Surinaamsche Almanak", published by the Paramaribo Department of the "Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen" (1820-1913), and "De vraagbaak: almanak voor Suriname" (1912-1955). Many almanacs have been digitalised and are available via [Delpher.nl](#) or [Google Books](#). Starting in 1848, the Dutch government gave an annual account of the state of affairs in the various colonies through the Koloniaal Verslag (Colonial Report). This contained important events as well as a variety of statistical data. It is a useful source for exploring the context surrounding the acquisition of objects. The report was published until 1931 as an Appendix to the Acts of the States General, from 1869/70 as a standard Appendix C, and under various names: Mededeelingen betreffende de Koloniën (for 1848); Verslag van het beheer en den staat der Koloniën (1849-1865); Koloniaal Verslag (1866-1923); Verslag van bestuur en staat van Nederlandsch-Indië, Suriname en Curaçao (1924-1930). The reports were issued as separate publications under the titles: Indisch Verslag (1931-1939) and Verslag van Bestuur en Staat (1931-after 1940) for Suriname and the ABCSSS islands, respectively.

Some personal archives of Dutch nationals in government service have been preserved, containing, for example, diaries, memoirs, correspondence and reports made in a professional capacity. Private archives of this kind can be found at very many records offices in the Netherlands. It is therefore advisable to begin your search at [www.archieven.nl](#). However, not all archive services can be found here, so it will often be necessary to continue the search beyond this website. Many personal archives of officials in colonial service can be found at the Leiden University Libraries (KITLV archive) and the National Archives of the Netherlands. Some archive documents may still be held privately, for example by descendants.

Related Aids

- [Sources](#)
- [Select and delineate](#)
- [Army and navy personnel in colonised territories](#)
- [Koninklijk Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen](#)
- [Scientific research in colonised territories](#)
- [The trade in objects from a colonial context](#)
- [Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV)](#)
- [Royal Cabinet of Curiosities](#)
- [Wereldmuseum Amsterdam](#)
- [Wereldmuseum Leiden](#)
- [Wereldmuseum Rotterdam](#)
- [Rijksmuseum Amsterdam](#)
- [C.G.C. Reinwardt](#)
- [Museum Nusantara](#)
- [Museon-Omniversum](#)
- [International Colonial and Export Exhibition 1883](#)

Primary sources

Almanac:

Surinaamsche Almanak (1819-1846, 1887-1954) Search for title 'Surinaamsche Almanak'. All editions of the Surinaamsche Almanak between 1819-1846 and 1887-1954 can be accessed online through the website of the Digital Library of Dutch Literature. https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/_sur001suri01_01/

Almanac:

Regeeringsalmanak voor Nederlandsch-Indië Via Delpher, the editions from 1865 until 1942 can be found by selecting the title 'Regeringsalmanak Nederlandsch-Indië' within the periodicals section. At the Staatsbiblitohek zu Berlin, the editions from 1865 until 1912 can be found by searching for PPN718684745. https://www.delpher.nl/, https://digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/)

Almanac:

Almanak voor de Nederlandsche West-Indische bezittingen, en de kust van Guinea (1856-1861) Search for the title Almanak voor de Nederlandsche West-Indische bezittingen, en de kust van Guinea. The 1856, 1858-1860 editions can be accessed online via the website of the Digital Library of Dutch Literature. https://www.dbnl.org/titels/tijdschriften/tijdschrift.php?id=_alm009alma00

Parliamentary papers:

Koloniaal Verslag Go to the selection titled 'Kamerstukken' (Parliamentary Papers) and search for 'Koloniaal Verslag' (Colonial Report). https://www.officielebekendmakingen.nl/

Archive:

NL-HaNA 2.10.02 Complete inventory of the archives of the Ministry of Colonies, 1850-1900. https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/archief/2.10.02/download/pdf

Secondary sources

Research aid:

Civil servants in the Dutch East Indies, 1814-1952 Research aid from the National Archives for archival records on civil servants in the Dutch East Indies. Tip: the data in the service registers are sometimes continued on another page. In that case, a note is placed at the bottom of the page: 'zie verder' (see further) with the relevant page number. https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/zoekhulpen/ambtenaren-in-nederlands-indie

Research aid:

Officials in the West Indies: Suriname and the Antilles 1815-1936 Research aid from the National Archives for archival records on civil servants in the West Indies, Suriname and the Antilles. Tip: the information in the service registers is sometimes continued on another page. In that case, a note is placed at the bottom of the page:

'zie verder' (see further) with the relevant page number. https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/zoekhulpen/ambtenaren-in-west-indie-suriname-en-de-antillen-1815-1936

Research aid:

Overzicht van overheidsarchieven in het Nationaal Archief met betrekking tot Nederlands-Indië. Research aid from the National Archives with an overview of all archive accessions related to the Dutch East Indies and further information on accessing these archives. https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/zoekhulpen/overzicht-van-archieven-over-nederlands-indie

Book:

Fasseur, C. De indologen: ambtenaren voor de Oost 1825-1950. Amsterdam: Aula, 2003. Book (in Dutch) about the training of civil servants for the Dutch East Indies. The author discusses the background and origins of the students and teachers. https://search.worldcat.org/title/66730672, ISBN 9789057137723, WorldCat 66730672

Book:

Graaff, M.G.H.A. de. Gids voor onderzoek in het archief van het Ministerie van Koloniën in beheer bij het Nationaal Archief, 1814-1951. Den Haag, 2015. Guide (in Dutch) to conducting research in the archives of the Dutch Ministry of Colonies. https://search.worldcat.org/title/921923079?oclcNum=921923079, WorldCat 921923079

Book:

Doel, H. W. van den. De Stille Macht: Het Europese Binnenlands Bestuur Op Java En Madoera, 1808-1942. Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1994. Book about the development of the Dutch colonial administration in Indonesia from 1808 to 1942. https://search.worldcat.org/title/471738724, ISBN 9789035114050, WorldCat 471738724

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