

Saba, Sint Eustatius and Sint Maarten

Abstract

Dutch museums contain many objects deriving from Saba, Sint Eustatius and Sint Maarten when these were under Dutch colonial rule. Within Dutch museum collections, objects from the Saba, Sint Eustatius and Sint Maarten are often not attributed to specific islands. It is therefore important to use different search terms referring to the islands in the Caribbean region that were formerly colonised by the Netherlands.

Description

Saba, Sint Eustatius, and Sint Maarten (the SSS islands, also known as the Windward Islands from a colonial perspective) are three islands in the Lesser Antilles in the Caribbean Sea. As in the rest of the Lesser Antilles, the original Arawak [Igneri population](#) was driven out of Saba, Sint Eustatius, and Sint Maarten in the thirteenth century by [Caribs](#), who in turn had to contend with Spanish colonists from the fifteenth century onwards. From 1625, British, French, and Dutch colonists took possession of the Lesser Antilles, which had been considered *islas inútiles* – useless islands – by Spain and as a consequence had been more or less left alone. The Dutch [West India Company](#) established forts in Sint Maarten and Sint Eustatius in 1632 and 1636, respectively. In 1640, Saba was colonized from Sint Eustatius. Throughout the seventeenth century, the three islands changed hands frequently.

Tobacco, coffee, cotton, and sugar cane were grown on plantations on Sint Eustatius, while salt was mainly extracted from the salt pans near the capital Philipsburg on Sint Maarten. After 1650, slaves from West Africa performed the heavy labor on the plantations and salt pans. The National Archives in The Hague has an extensive [research aid](#) on its website that can help you research the (slavery) history of Saba, Sint Eustatius, and Sint Maarten. The research aid [Vrijgelaten slaafgemaakten op Sint Eustatius, 1862-1863](#) (Freed slaves on St Eustatius, 1862-1863) of the National Archives of the Netherlands contains relevant information about the history of slavery on Sint Eustatius. Following in the footsteps of Curaçao, Sint Eustatius developed into a free port in the 18th century where many slaves were traded. Trade with American revolutionaries during the American War of Independence led to the plundering of Sint Eustatius by British Admiral Rodney in 1781.

During the turbulent period of the French, Haitian, and American revolutions, Saba, Sint Eustatius, and Sint Maarten changed hands frequently. With the [Treaty of London of 1814](#), the islands came under the name of Sint Eustatius and dependencies under the authority of the newly founded Kingdom of the Netherlands, which in 1828 merged them administratively with Curaçao and dependencies and Suriname. In 1845, this merger was partially reversed, after which Saba, Sint Eustatius, and Sint Maarten were administered from Curaçao. This colony, renamed the Netherlands Antilles in 1948, accepted the Charter for the Kingdom of the Netherlands together with the Netherlands and Suriname in 1954, thereby completing the decolonization of the Dutch colonies in the Caribbean. In 2010, the Netherlands Antilles were dissolved and Sint Maarten became a separate country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. In the same year, Saba and Sint Eustatius became ‘public entities’ of the Netherlands. This rather complicated administrative history has had an impact on the formation of archives and collections. Please take this into account in your research.

The research aid of the National Archives in The Hague seems to focus on Curaçao, but it also refers to archives that contain information about the other islands. There is also a

research aid for [Non-commissioned officers and soldiers in the army in the West Indies 1815-1950](#) that refers to relevant archive material about military personnel stationed on Saba, Sint Eustatius, and Sint Maarten, and the search aid [Civil servants in the West Indies: Suriname and the Antilles 1815-1936](#), which contains information about Dutch colonial civil servants in Suriname and on Saba, Sint Eustatius, and Sint Maarten.

During the colonial period, many objects were transported from Saba, Sint Eustatius, and Sint Maarten to the European Netherlands, where they ended up in various (museum) collections. Searching for objects originating from Saba, Sint Eustatius, and Sint Maarten can be difficult, as objects can be located anywhere. When searching museum collections, it can be useful to use different search terms to find objects originating from Saba, Sint Eustatius, and Sint Maarten. This is because an object may be attributed to a specific island in one case, and to the Netherlands Antilles in another.

The Wereldmuseum, which manages a large collection of objects from Saba, Sint Eustatius, and Sint Maarten, has divided its collection by place of origin. The 'Caribbean' category contains around 4,500 objects, but not all of them originate from Saba, Sint Eustatius, or Sint Maarten; this selection also includes objects from Jamaica and Haiti, for example. For more information about researching museum collections, see the search help [Research](#). See the search help [Sources](#) for more information and tips on finding relevant sources for your research.

Provenance research

Below you will find a number of sources and websites where you can find more information to get your research started. The [subject guide on the Caribbean](#) from Leiden University contains a lot of useful information regarding their Caribbean collection and other source locations. In [this list](#), compiled by the [KITLV](#), contains various links to relevant websites (not every link functions any more).

The Colonial Collections Consortium is currently conducting an audit of object collections from the ABCSSS islands that are located in European Netherlands' institutions.

Three relevant archives from the colonial period can be found at the National Archives in The Hague: the [Inventaris van de archieven van St. Eustatius, St. Maarten en Saba, 1709-1828](#) (Inventory of the archives of Sint Eustatius, Saint Martin and Saba, 1709-1828), the de [Inventaris van de archieven van St. Maarten, \(1806\) 1828-1845 \(1902\)](#) (Inventory of the archives of Saint Martin, (1806) 1828-1845 (1902)), and the [Inventaris van de archieven van Sint Eustatius en Saba, 1828-1845](#) (Inventory of the archives of Sint Eustatius and Saba, 1828-1845). Thereafter, the administration of the island fell under what was then called the *Gouverneur van Curaçao en Onderhorigheden* (Governor of Curaçao and Dependencies). For relevant archives from the period after 1845, see the search aid [Kòrsou – Curaçao](#).

The St. Maarten National Heritage Foundation manages the museum's extensive collection on the island, and the [website](#) contains a lot of relevant information.

Other relevant resources:

- Within [Delpher's](#) collection, you can find newspapers, such as the *Amigoe di Curaçao*, which contain relevant information regarding Saba, Sint Eustatius and Sint Maarten.

Related Aids

- [Select and delineate](#)
- [Sources](#)
- [Civil servants](#)
- [Military and navy](#)
- [Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies \(KITLV\)](#)
- [Rijksmuseum Amsterdam](#)
- [Wereldmuseum Amsterdam](#)
- [Wereldmuseum Leiden](#)
- [Wereldmuseum Rotterdam](#)

Primary sources

Secondary sources

Book:

Heijer, H. J. den. Geschiedenis van de WIC: opkomst, bloei en ondergang. Vierde herziende druk. Walburg Pers, 2013. Book published in 2013 about the history of the Dutch West India Company (WIC), which played an active role in the colonisation of the Caribbean.

<https://search.worldcat.org/title/861797634>

Book:

Oostindie, Gert. Paradise Overseas: The Dutch Caribbean: Colonialism and Its Transatlantic Legacies. Warwick University Caribbean Studies. Macmillan Caribbean, 2005. Book published in 2005 that describes the history of the colonisation of the ABC islands by the Netherlands in seven essays.

<https://search.worldcat.org/title/61483105>

Book:

Oostindie, Gert, en Jessica V. Roitman, red. Dutch Atlantic Connections, 1680-1800. Brill, 2014. Book published in 2014 that examines the role of the Netherlands in the colonisation of the Atlantic world.

<https://brill.com/edcollbook-oa/title/25367>

Book:

Martis, A. De geschiedenis van Aruba tot 1816: van zustereiland tot imperium in imperio. LM Publishers, 2018. Book published in 2018 covering the history of the island of Aruba up to the year 1816. It describes the pre-colonial period (2500 BC-1500), the years when the island was under Spanish rule (1499-1634) and the period under the administration of the Dutch West India Company (1636-1791) and the transitional years that followed until the transfer of the island from the British to the Dutch (1792-1816).

<https://search.worldcat.org/title/1051752557?oclcNum=1051752557>

Book:

Alofs, Luc. Koloniale mythen en Benedenwindse feiten: Curaçao, Aruba en Bonaire in inheems Atlantisch perspectief, ca. 1499-1636. Sidestone Press, 2018. Book published in 2018 describing the period of Spanish rule on the ABC islands.

<https://search.worldcat.org/title/1050133765>

Book:

Smeulders, Valika, red. Ons koloniale verleden: in 50 voorwerpen. Alfabet Uitgevers, 2023. Book published in 2023 as part of the project 'Ons koloniale verleden in 50 voorwerpen', which also features various objects from the ABC islands.

<https://search.worldcat.org/title/1452966194>

Book:

Stipriaan, Alex van, Luc Alofs, en Francio Guadeloupe, red. Caribbean Cultural Heritage and the Nation: Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao in a Regional Context. Leiden University Press, 2023. Book about the history of shared cultural heritage of the ABC islands.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/jj.4470335>

Relevant Data

TO BE FILLED

first edited by Wiebe Reints as original_author on 2024-11-25

last edited by Maarten van der Bent as editor on 2025-06-19 (applies to section: Content)