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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.

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## 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 guide 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

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

# Primary sources

Almanac:

Almanac:

Almanac:

Parliamentary papers:

Archive:

# Secondary sources

Research aid:

Research aid:

Research aid:

Book:

Book:

Book:

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# Relevant Data

Tags:  
 Activity:

Assistant Resident, Bestuursambtenaar, Commies, Controleur, Districts Commissary, Gouverneur, Gouverneur-Generaal, Resident  
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 Type of objects:

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 Geographical:

ABCSSS islands, Indonesia, Suriname