

Saba, Sint Eustatius and Sint Maarten

Abstract

Dutch museums contain objects originating from Saba, Sint Eustatius and Sint Maarten when the islands were under Dutch colonial rule. Objects from the Saba, Sint Eustatius and Sint Maarten held in Dutch museum collections are often not attributed to specific islands. It is therefore important to use alternative search terms which refer to the islands in the Caribbean region 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 was the case 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. From 1625 British, French, and Dutch colonists took possession of the Lesser Antilles, which had been considered by Spain to be *islas inútiles* – useless islands – and as a consequence had been more or less left alone. The [West India Company](#) established forts in Sint Maarten and Sint Eustatius in 1632 and 1636, respectively, and Saba was colonised from Sint Eustatius in 1640. The three islands changed hands frequently throughout the seventeenth century.

Tobacco, coffee, cotton, and sugar cane were grown on plantations on Sint Eustatius, while Sint Maarten mainly yielded salt, extracted from the salt pans near the capital Philipsburg. After 1650 the hard labour on the plantations and salt pans was carried out by enslaved West Africans. The National Archives in The Hague has an extensive [research aid](#) on its website that can help you research the history of slavery on Saba, Sint Eustatius and Sint Maarten. In addition, the National Archives' research aid [Vrijgelaten slaafgemaakten op Sint Eustatius, 1862-1863](#) (Freed slaves on St Eustatius, 1862-1863) refers to relevant information about the history of slavery on Sint Eustatius. Following in the footsteps of Curaçao, Sint Eustatius developed into a freeport in the eighteenth century where many slaves were traded. Trade with American revolutionaries during the American War of Independence led to the plundering of Sint Eustatius by the British Admiral Rodney in 1781.

During the turbulent period of the French, Haitian and American revolutions, Saba, Sint Eustatius and Sint Maarten once again changed hands frequently. The [Treaty of London of 1814](#) of 1814 gave the islands the name of Sint Eustatius and Dependencies and placed them under the authority of the newly founded Kingdom of the Netherlands, which merged them administratively with Curaçao and Dependencies and Suriname in 1828. The merger was partially reversed in 1845, after which Saba, Sint Eustatius and (the southern part of) Sint Maarten were administered from Curaçao. This colony was renamed the Netherlands Antilles in 1948. Together with the Netherlands and Suriname it accepted the Charter for the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1954, thereby completing the decolonisation of the Dutch colonies in the Caribbean. The Netherlands Antilles were dissolved in 2010 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.

Whilst the research aid of the National Archives in The Hague appears to be focused on

Curaçao it also refers to archives that contain information about the other islands. There is also a research aid on [Non-commissioned officers and soldiers in the army in the West Indies 1815-1950](#)a that refers to relevant archive material about military personnel stationed on Saba, Sint Eustatius, and Sint Maarten, as well as the the research 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 multiple 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 for example to the Netherlands Antilles in another.

The online catalogue of the Wereldmuseum, which manages a large collection of objects from Saba, Sint Eustatius and Sint Maarten, can divide the collection by region of origin. The 'Caribbean' category contains around 11,000 objects, but not all of these originate from Saba, Sint Eustatius, or Sint Maarten; this selection also includes objects from Jamaica and Haiti, for example.

Provenance research

Below you will find various sources and websites with more information to get your research started. The Leiden University [subject guide on the Caribbean](#) from contains a lot of useful information regarding the university's Caribbean collection and other source locations. [this list](#), compiled by the [KITLV](#), contains various links to relevant websites (not all links are still active).

The Colonial Collections Consortium is currently conducting an audit of museum collections originating from the ABCSSS islands that are held in institutions in the European Netherlands.

The National Archives in The Hague contain three relevant archives from the colonial period: 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 [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). From 1845 the administration of the three islands came under the so-called *Gouverneur van Curaçao en Onderhorigheden* (Governor of Curaçao and Dependencies). For relevant archives from the period after 1845 please refer to the research aid [Kòrsou – Curaçao](#).

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

Other relevant resources:

- The [Delpher](#) collection includes newspapers, such as the Amigoe di Curaçao, that contain relevant information about 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:

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 SSS islands.

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

Relevant Data

TO BE FILLED

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

last edited by Wiebe Reints as original_author on 2025-12-16