

Nederlands Volkenkundig Missiemuseum

Abstract

In 1936, the Nederlands Volkenkundig Missiemuseum (Netherlands Ethnographic Missionary Museum) opened in Tilburg, bringing together several collections that missionaries had send back to the Netherlands. The museum closed its doors in 1987, after which the collection was loaned to the Nijmeegs Volkenkundig Museum (Ethnographic Museum Nijmegen). The latter closed in 2005.

History of the museum

In 1932, the Nederlands Volkenkundig Missiemuseum (Netherlands Ethnographic Missionary Museum) Foundation was established in the city of Tilburg, Noord Brabant, partly because [Hendrik Moller](#), who was alderman in Tilburg at the time, had thrown his weight behind the idea. The foundation's aim was to establish a museum by bringing together various collections of objects that missionaries had send back to the Netherlands. At that time, there were several congregations active in Tilburg, each of which maintained its own collection. The Nederlands Volkenkundig Missiemuseum had two objectives: firstly, to promote the Catholic mission and, secondly, to introduce people to the religious beliefs, art, customs and traditions of the people from the missionary countries. Together with the Natuurhistorisch Museum Tilburg (now the Natuurmuseum Brabant), the Nederlands Volkenkundig Missie Museum was opened on Paleisstraat in Tilburg in 1936. Both museums relocated several times until the ethnographic museum closed its doors in 1987 due to budget cuts.

The Nederlands Volkenkundig Missiemuseum exhibited collections from various Dutch congregations engaged in missionary work around the world. Objects that were loaned or donated came from various religious groups from different Catholic parts of the Netherlands: ranging from Tilburg to Maastricht. In addition, a large number of private individuals also donated ethnographic items.

The collection of the Ethnographic Museum comprised some 6,000 objects and originated from a large number of areas. The focus was on South and Southeast Asia. In the 1982 [Museumboek voor Noord-Brabant](#), Harry Verwiel describes the layout of the Ethnographic Museum at that time. Four regions were permanently represented with their own extensive collections: Latin America, Indonesia, New Guinea and Africa. The Latin America section contained many objects from pre-Spanish period tombs, such as statues of warriors. Statues of gods from the Mayan culture were also on display. The Indonesia section included leather and wooden wayang puppets, textiles, wickerwork, jewellery and statues. There was also a large ancestral altar from the Tarimbar Islands. The New Guinea section consisted mainly of wood carvings: masks, large ancestral figures, canoes, shields and statues of gods. From Africa came a collection of masks and statues.

In order to reduce the museum's connotations with its ecclesiastical background, its name was changed to the Nederlands Volkenkundig Museum (Netherlands Ethnographic Museum) in 1969. After the museum closed in 1987, loans were returned, many of which ended up in the Carmelite monastery Elzendaal in Boxtmeer. The remaining collection was transferred to the Nijmegen Ethnographic Museum, which was managed by the Catholic University of Nijmegen (now Radboud University).

In 2009, the [Peerke Donders Pavilion](#) opened in Tilburg, where the life story of Peerke

Donders, who was active as a missionary in Suriname and the former Dutch East Indies, is told with the use of various objects. The [Stadsmuseum Tilburg](#) (Tilburg City Museum) also manages an collection, including items from the Brothers of Tilburg. This mainly concerns an extensive [Caribbean Heritage photo collection](#).

Provenance research

A significant portion of the archives of the Nederlands Volkenkundig Missiemuseum is available at the [Regionaal Archief Tilburg](#) (Regional Archives of Tilburg). A description of the collection can be found in [box 20](#). An edited version of this inventory can also be found in the article [Het Nederlands\(ch\) Volkenkundig \(Missie-\)Museum 1936-1986, een roomse erfenis](#) by Cees van Raak.

Radboud University also holds a small amount of relevant archive material about the Volkenkundig Missiemuseum. This mainly consists of formal correspondence regarding the loan and repurposing of the museum collection after the closure of the Nijmeegs Volkenkundig Museum in 2005. The archive material includes two inventory lists as appendices: the 'loan collection of the Ethnographic Mission Museum Tilburg' and the 'loan collection of the Capuchin Fathers Tilburg'. The objects in these inventories are only briefly described (lender, name of object and place of origin). To view the archive, please contact the administrator of the Radboud University archive, [Marianne Waldekker](#).

Related Aids

- [Museums and collections](#)
- [Christian missionaries in colonised territories](#)
- [Missiemuseum Steyl](#)
- [Natuurhistorisch en Volkenkundig Museum Oudenbosch](#)
- [Nederlandsch Zending Genootschap](#)
- [Wereldmuseum Berg en Dal](#)

Primary sources

Archive:

NL-TbRAT toegang 517 Plaatsingslijst van het archief van het Volkenkundig Museum te Tilburg, 1932 - 1989 Archive of the Nederlands Volkenkundig Missiemuseum (Netherlands Ethnographic Missionary Museum) at the Tilburg Regional Archives. Box 20 contains, among other things, an inventory of the museum collection.

<https://www.regionaalarchieftilburg.nl/zoek-in-archieven/?/file/8fe8c8d66b2d3d5d8a2e8a73eb87563a>

Secondary sources

Article:

Raak, Cees van. 'Het Nederlands(ch) Volkenkundig (Missie-)Museum 1936-1986, een roomse erfenis.' Tilburg. Tijdschrift voor geschiedenis, monumenten en cultuur 21, no. 3 (2003): 90-98. Article by Cees van Raak (in Dutch) on the history of the Nederlands Volkenkundig Missiemuseum in Tilburg. The article describes in detail

the history of the museum, the various parts of the collection and the curators over the years.

<https://www.historietilburg.nl/wp-content/uploads/Jaargang-21-2003-nummer-3.pdf>

Book:

Verwiel, Harry. Museumboek voor Noord-Brabant. Bosch & Keuning, 1982. Booklet from 1982 with descriptions of various museums. The chapter 'Van vreemde volken' (Of foreign peoples) briefly discusses the Nederlands Volkenkundig Missiemuseum in Tilburg.

<https://search.worldcat.org/title/781496494>, [WorldCat 781496494](#), [ISBN 9789024644247](#)

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