

# Volkenkundig Museum Justinus van Nassau

## Abstract

The Volkenkundig Museum Justinus van Nassau was established as part of the Royal Military Academy in Breda. Before 1956, the museum operated independently, after which it became part of the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde, now known as the Wereldmuseum Leiden. In 1993, the ethnographic museum in Breda closed its doors. The museum collection is still part of the Wereldmuseum.

## History of the museum

Due to increasing demand for soldiers for the [\(Royal\) Dutch East Indies Army](#), it was decided to establish an 'Indies training programme' at the [Royal Military Academy](#) in Breda. To enrich the standard form of education, Claas Spat, who taught Malay language and literature at the KMA, decided to establish an ethnographic collection. Spat contacted the [Rijks Etnografisch Museum](#) (National Ethnographic Museum) which sent some doubles to Breda. Objects were also donated by fellow military personnel and the Dutch East Indies Government. The collection grew mainly after the so-called 'pacification wars' waged by the Dutch in Aceh, Lombok and Sulawesi. Among others, the soldier [G.C.E. van Daalen](#) donated a collection to the KMA.

The collection, which was officially recognised in 1909 as the Etnografische Verzameling van de Koninklijke Militaire Academie (Ethnographic Collection of the Royal Military Academy), consisted mainly of weapons. In order to expand the collection with other types of objects, Spat published an advertisement in the [Koloniaal Weekblad](#) to 'persons among the readers of these lines who have a private collection and are willing to donate one or more items from their collection to the Royal Military Academy'.

When the Dutch Ministry of War had to make cutbacks in 1920, it was decided to discontinue the Hoofdcursus in Kampen, a similar military training programme with a less academic focus and therefore lower admission requirements. This resulted in the Kampen museum collection being incorporated into that of the KMA in 1923. H.J. Voskuil, who had succeeded Spat as the administrator of the Breda collection, found himself with a lack of exhibition space due to the merged collections. In 1925, it was therefore decided to use the former residence of Justinus van Nassau, who would later serve as the museum's namesake. While the Kampen collection had always been accessible to the public, this was not the case for the Breda collection. It was not until November 1938 that the museum in Breda officially opened its doors to the public.

Due to the independence of Indonesia, the Indies training programme at the KMA was discontinued in 1949, which cast doubt on the future of the ethnographic museum. This led to an uncertain period for the museum in the early 1950s. Nevertheless, the collection continued to expand, partly because the then curator, Sjoerd Nauta, was offered the opportunity to make a selection from the British '[Wellcome Collection](#)'. Nauta selected various weapons from Africa, Australia and the Pacific to supplement his Indonesian collection. In 1956, the uncertainty came to an end when it was decided to make the Breda museum part of the [Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde](#) (now the Wereldmuseum) in Leiden. As a southern branch of the ethnographic museum in Leiden, exhibitions on areas other than

Indonesia were also held in Breda. Exhibitions that had previously taken place in Leiden were often recycled at 'Justinus van Nassau'. After persistent budget cuts in the 1980s, the then director of the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde in Leiden, Steven Engelsman, decided to close the ethnographic museum in Breda on 1 January 1993.

[image] *One of the halls in the Volkenkundig Museum Justinus van Nassau, 1961* ([G.Th. Delemarre / Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed](#))

## Provenance research

Since the ethnographic museum of the Royal Military Academy in Breda became part of the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde (National Museum of Ethnology) in Leiden in 1956, the Breda museum collection and museum archive are managed by the museum in Leiden. The archive of the ethnographic museum of the Hoofdcursus in Kampen, which was incorporated into the collection in Breda in 1923, is also part of the archive now located in Leiden. Within the archive of the Wereldmuseum Leiden, the archive of the Justinus van Nassau Ethnographic Museum can be found under access code 'A16'. For more information about the collection or to view the archives, please contact [collectieinfo@wereldmuseum.nl](mailto:collectieinfo@wereldmuseum.nl). The general archive of the KMA is available via the National Archives in The Hague.

## Related Aids

- see also: [Army and navy personnel in colonised territories](#)
- see also: [Wereldmuseum Leiden](#)
- see also: [Wageningen University & Research](#)
- see also: [Museum Bronbeek](#)
- see also: [Museum Nusantara](#)
- see also: [Hoofdcursus Kampen](#)

## Primary sources

Archive:

*Wereldmuseum Leiden, archive access A16: Archief Volkenkundig museum 'Justinus van Nassau'*

*The archive of the Volkenkundig Museum 'Justinus van Nassau'. To consult the archive you have to contact [collectieinfo@wereldmuseum.nl](mailto:collectieinfo@wereldmuseum.nl)*



*Archive access: National Archives, The Hague, Ministerie van Onderwijs, Kunsten en Wetenschappen: Afdeling Oudheidkunde en Natuurbescherming en taakvoorgangers, nummer toegang 2.14.73, inventarisnummer 458*

*Documents regarding the transfer of the ownership of the collection of the ethnographic museum of the Royal Military Academy from the Dutch Ministry of War to the Ministry of Education, Arts and Sciences on 25 October 1956 and the renaming of the museum to Volkenkundig Museum Justinus van Nassau after 1 January 1957.*

<https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/archief/2.14.73/invnr/%40H.%40H.2~H.2.2~458>

*Archive: National Archives, The Hague, Koninklijke Militaire Academie (KMA), nummer toegang 2.13.22*

*Archives of the Koninklijke Militaire Academie (KMA), (1818) 1828-1940 (1941); Hoofdcursus in Kampen and 's-Hertogenbosch, 1878-1923; Cadettenschool,*

1890-1924; Artillerie- en Genieschool te Delft, 1816-1823.  
<https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/archief/2.13.22>

## Secondary sources

Book:

Willemsen, Marie-Antoinette. *Volkenkunde in Breda: Van Indische Verzameling Tot Rijksmuseum Justinus van Nassau En de Vereniging Voor Volkenkunde* (Breda: Bureau Cultureel Erfgoed, Directie Ruimtelijke Ontwikkeling, Gemeente Breda, 2011).

Book from 2011 in which extensive information on the history and collections of Volkenkundig Museum 'Justinus van Nassau' can be found.

<https://search.worldcat.org/title/729683375?oclcNum=729683375>, ISBN 9789491045004, [WorldCat 729683375](#)

Boek: Somer, J.M. *Gids Voor Den Bezoeker van Het Ethnografisch Museum Te Breda, Kasteelplein 13* (Breda: Ethnografisch Museum, 1940).

Visitor guid from J.M. Somer, the then manager of Volkenkundig Museum 'Justinus van Nassau' J.M. Somer. The guide contains descriptions of various exhibited objects.

<https://search.worldcat.org/title/64962667?oclcNum=64962667>, [WorldCat 64962667](#)

Provenance report: Shatanawi, M. Provenance report regarding Sinkin panjang met schede [Sword]. PPROCE provenance reports; No. 16 (Amsterdam, 2022).

\_ Provenance report that was created in the context of the Pilotproject Provenance Research on Objects of the Colonial Era (PPROCE). The report describes the provenance of an object (Sinkin panjang, NG-2004-47) from the collection of G.C.E. van Daalen. The object has been exhibited at Volkenkundig Museum 'Justinus van Nassau'. The report contains references to relevant source material regarding the Breda museum.\_

<https://pure.knaw.nl/portal/en/publications/provenance-report-regarding-sinkin-panjang-met-schede-sword>

Provenance report: Shatanawi, Mirjam. Provenance report regarding Grafsteen [gravestone] - Batu Aceh. PPROCE provenance reports; No. 23 (Amsterdam, 2022).

Provenance report that was created in the context of the Pilotproject Provenance Research on Objects of the Colonial Era (PPROCE). The report describes the provenance of an object (Grave stone, RV-3600-594) that was brought from Aceh (Sumatra) by officer George Nypels. The report contains references to relevant source material regarding the Breda museum.

<https://pure.knaw.nl/portal/en/publications/provenance-report-regarding-grafsteen-gravestone-batu-aceh>

Provenance report: Quist, T. Provenance report regarding Staatsiekris - keris (Ceremonial Kris). PPROCE provenance reports; No. 31 (Amsterdam, 2022).

Provenance report that was created in the context of the Pilotproject Provenance Research on Objects of the Colonial Era (PPROCE). The report describes the provenance of a kris (RV-3600-193) that was looted in April 1908 during the so-called 'puputan' in Klungkung (Bali). In 1909 the object became part of the collection of the Royal Military Academy in Breda. The kris concerned was restituted to the Republic of Indonesia in 2023.

<https://pure.knaw.nl/portal/en/publications/b7847e19-0d56-42b2-8357-942e5131a118>

Provenance report: Quist, T. Provenance report regarding Krissen [Krisses].

*PPROCE provenance reports; No. 32 (Amsterdam, 2022).*

*Provenance report that was created in the context of the Pilotproject Provenance Research on Objects of the Colonial Era (PPROCE). The report describes the provenance of a set of krisses (RV-3600-1892 t/m RV-3600-1895). Through George Nypels the krisses were firstly part of the collection in Kampen and were later transferred to the ethnographic museum of the Royal Military Academy in Breda. The report contains references to relevant source material.*

<https://pure.knaw.nl/portal/en/publications/988bfde3-eea3-4d27-83cc-8702dc7d7516>

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## Relevant Data

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*last edited by Wiebe Reints as original\_author on 2025-05-13*