

Indonesia

Abstract

This search guide provides information about the most common ways in which cultural objects found their way from Indonesia to the Netherlands during the colonial era and where you can find relevant Indonesian museum collections in the Netherlands.

Introduction

This research aid provides information about the most common ways in which objects were collected in Indonesia by the Dutch and where you can find relevant Indonesian museum collections in the Netherlands. At the bottom of the page, you will find various tips for conducting provenance research on Indonesian museum collections. It is important to bear in mind that the Dutch colonial presence in the Indonesian archipelago spanned a period of more than 350 years and that objects were brought to the Netherlands in all kinds of ways. The information in this search guide is therefore by no means exhaustive.

Collecting in Indonesia

From the very beginning of their colonial presence in the Indonesian archipelago, the Dutch brought objects back home with them. Private and institutional collecting – for an institution, such as a museum, or for oneself – were intertwined. Many museum collections in the Netherlands started out as private collections. See Caroline Drieënhuizen's dissertation [Koloniale collecties, Nederlands aanzien](#) for more information on this subject. Below you will find mainly information about object collections that were assembled by institutions, for example to open a museum or to support education. More is generally known about these institutional collections because they often had a public function, kept archives and compiled catalogues. However, it is also important to remember that there are large private collections of Indonesian cultural objects in the Netherlands about which we know much less.

Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen

The [Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen](<https://app.colonialcollections.nl/en/research-aids/https%3A%2F%2Fn2t%252Enet%2Fark%3A%2F27023%2F879aa24d509fdae582d9cbd6cc60160c>) (Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences) is of great importance for provenance research. Founded in Batavia (now Jakarta) in 1778, this society was tasked with promoting the arts and sciences in what was then the Dutch East Indies. From 1878 onwards, all objects collected by civil servants had to be sent first to the Bataviaasch Genootschap, where a selection was made. Most of the objects remained in Batavia, where they eventually formed the core of the collection of what now is Museum Nasional Indonesia. However, often a selection was also sent to the Netherlands, specifically to the Rijks Ethnografisch Museum (now the Wereldmuseum Leiden). The minutes of the society kept a careful record of which collections were received and how they were distributed between the museum in Jakarta and museums in the Netherlands. The minutes from 1862 to 1921 are [digitally available via Leiden University](#). For more detailed information and sources relating to the Bataviaasch Genootschap, see [the relevant research aid](<https://app.colonialcollections.nl/nl/research-aids/https%3A%2F%2Fn2t%252Enet%2Fark%3A%2F27023%2F879aa24d509fdae582d9cbd6cc6016>)

Military and navy personnel

The Dutch authorities in the former Dutch East Indies relied heavily on the [Royal Dutch East Indies Army] (<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/pi7416>) (KNIL). The KNIL was made up of officers of Dutch or other European nationality and mostly locally recruited soldiers. Only a small number of objects in Dutch museums are official war booty sent to the Netherlands on the orders of the KNIL. A well-known example is the so-called [Lombok treasure](#), which was returned to Indonesia in 1977 and 2023. In addition, there are many more objects in museums that originate from individual soldiers and ended up in the Netherlands on private initiative. An important museum that acquired many Indonesian objects through donations from individual soldiers is [Museum Bronbeek](<https://app.colonialcollections.nl/nl/research-aids/https%3A%2F%2Fn2t%252Enet%2Fark%3A%2F27023%2F3443ee68039071c8125b16cf2f813ff>) For more information about researching individual soldiers and objects they brought back to the Netherlands, see the relevant [research aid](<https://app.colonialcollections.nl/nl/research-aids/https%3A%2F%2Fn2t%252Enet%2Fark%3A%2F27023%2F0ceff3da7d6bba371bb16767a65b61>)

Christian missionaries

During the colonial era, missionary work was carried out in the Netherlands [by Protestant missionaries](#) and [by Catholic missionaries](#). The missionaries brought objects back from the areas where they worked, sometimes at the request of the organisations that dispatched them. The objects were displayed during information sessions about the work of the organisation or for the purpose of raising funds. When the organisations disposed of the objects, they ended up in other collections, such as ethnographic museums. Individual missionaries also donated and sold objects to such museums. Objects from the mission also ended up in trade and private collections. The collecting practices of the missionary organisations have long been known to be aimed at eradicating what they considered to be pagan practices. Cultural heritage was destroyed or objects were taken to Europe to prevent them from being used in religious rituals any longer. An important museum that acquired objects through the mission in Indonesia is the [Mission Museum in Steyl](<https://app.colonialcollections.nl/en/research-aids/https%3A%2F%2Fn2t%252Enet%2Fark%3A%2F27023%2Fd2c658fef273decf748b392ab053f04>) For more information about missionaries, see the relevant [research aid](<https://app.colonialcollections.nl/en/research-aids/https%3A%2F%2Fn2t%252Enet%2Fark%3A%2F27023%2F41e407de73f6c70da371491009c521>)

Science

The former Dutch East Indies and its nature, culture and population were important sources for scientific investigations by researchers from the Netherlands and other countries. Scientists often had broader interests than their own field of expertise. For example, a geologist might collect other types of objects and later donate them to a Dutch museum. In order to support and promote science in the former Dutch East Indies, various associations and societies were established, such as the [Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen](<https://app.colonialcollections.nl/nl/research-aids/https%3A%2F%2Fn2t%252Enet%2Fark%3A%2F27023%2F879aa24d509fdae582d9cbd6cc60160c>) and the [Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV)](<https://app.colonialcollections.nl/nl/research-aids/https%3A%2F%2Fn2t%252Enet%2Fark%3A%2F27023%2F62191a1bbbed9b315db786f20374171>) (KITLV). Through these types of organisations, the findings of scientific research were published in journals and books. The objects, documents and photographs collected during the research often found their way into the collections of the institutions to which the researchers belonged. For more information about scientific research in Indonesia and related object collections, see the relevant [research aid](<https://app.colonialcollections.nl/nl/>)

research-aids/

<https://app.colonialcollections.nl/nl/research-aids/>

Traders

The trade in cultural objects from Indonesia formed the basis for the creation of many collections in the Netherlands at the end of the eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century. Museums regularly purchased items from dealers and auction houses, not only in the Netherlands, but also in other European colonising countries, particularly Germany, Belgium, France and Great Britain. These same dealers and auction houses were sources for private collections, from which objects sometimes later ended up in museum collections. Conversely, dealers often acquired their collections through contacts with colonial officials, military personnel or missionaries. It is thus clear that the distribution of objects across Dutch museum collections took place via a broad network of individuals and organisations. For more information about the role of dealers, see the relevant [research aid] (<https://app.colonialcollections.nl/nl/research-aids/>)

Research into Indonesian collections in the Netherlands

Museum collections

During the 350 years of Dutch colonial presence in Indonesia, extensive collections of objects were shipped to the Netherlands. These include objects of great cultural value, but also everyday utilitarian objects and natural history specimens. It is likely that practically every Dutch museum collection contains objects originating from Indonesia or objects related to Dutch colonial history in the archipelago. Using region-specific search terms in the Datahub, you can find out which museums have regional collections. The most important Dutch museums with collections acquired in a colonial context are described in the various research aids on this website. For a general overview of the various museums, please visit the [Museums and collections research aid] (<https://app.colonialcollections.nl/en/research-aids/>)

The most extensive Indonesian collections can be found in the following museums: the [Wereldmuseum in Amsterdam] (<https://app.colonialcollections.nl/en/research-aids/>) [Leiden] (<https://app.colonialcollections.nl/en/research-aids/>) and [Rotterdam] (<https://app.colonialcollections.nl/en/research-aids/>) the [Rijksmuseum Amsterdam] (<https://app.colonialcollections.nl/en/research-aids/>) and [Museum Bronbeek] (<https://app.colonialcollections.nl/en/research-aids/>)

Archives In addition to objects, the above museums also manage large archive collections, and the institutions act as experts in provenance research. Do you have questions about provenance research, or would you like to get in touch with a museum? Then please contact the [Colonial Collections Consortium](#), who can help you further.

In addition to museum archives, there are several other institutions in the Netherlands that manage interesting archives relating to cultural objects from Indonesia. Which archives are relevant depends on the collection and the specific provenance history of an object. For more information and tips on conducting provenance research, see the research aids on [Research] (<https://app.colonialcollections.nl/nl/research-aids/>)

and [Sources](https://app.colonialcollections.nl/nl/research-aids/https%3A%2F%2Fn2t%252Enet%2Fark%3A%2F27023%2F5f0031f66044adefab19b67b1344b3). These research aids provide a handy overview of relevant archives and a detailed step-by-step plan for conducting provenance research.

Related Aids

- [Select and delineate](#)
- [Civil servants in colonised territories](#)
- [Army and navy personnel in colonised territories](#)
- [Scientific research in colonised territories](#)
- [Christian missionaries in colonised territories](#)
- [Koninklijk Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen](#)
- [Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies \(KITLV\)](#)
- [Museum Bronbeek](#)
- [Rijksmuseum Amsterdam](#)
- [Wereldmuseum Amsterdam](#)
- [Wereldmuseum Leiden](#)
- [Wereldmuseum Rotterdam](#)

THIS RA HAS NO SOURCES

Relevant Data

TO BE FILLED

last edited by Wiebe Reints as original_author on 2025-12-03