

Volkenkundig Museum Justinus van Nassau

Abstract

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

History of the museum

Due to increasing demand for soldiers for the [Royal Netherlands East Indies Army](#), it was decided to establish an 'Indies training programme' at the [Royal Military Academy](#) (KMA) in Breda. To supplement the students' book knowledge Claas Spat, who taught Malay language and literature at the KMA, decided to establish an ethnographic collection. Spat contacted [Rijks Etnografisch Museum](#) (National Museum of Ethnology) in Leiden, which sent some duplicates 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. General [G.C.E. van Daalen](#) was among those who 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, in 1909 Claas Spat published an advertisement in the [Koloniaal Weekblad](#) appealing 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. Following the merger of the collections, H.J. Voskuil, who had succeeded Spat as the curator of the Breda collection, found himself with a lack of exhibition space. 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.

Following 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. Despite this 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 duly selected various weapons from Africa, Australia and the Pacific to supplement the Indonesian collection. The uncertainty ended in 1956 when it was decided to make the Breda museum part of the [Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde](#) (now the Wereldmuseum) in Leiden. With Breda now being the southern branch of the ethnographic museum in Leiden, from 1956

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 exhibition rooms in the Justinus van Nassau Ethnographic Museum, 1961*
([G.Th. Delemarre / Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands](#))

Provenance research

Ever since the ethnographic museum of the Royal Military Academy in Breda became part of the [Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde](#) in Leiden in 1956 the Breda museum collection and museum archive have been 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. The archive of the Justinus van Nassau Ethnographic Museum can be found within the archive of the Wereldmuseum Leiden under access code 'A16'. For more information about the collection or to view the archives, please contact collectieinfo@wereldmuseum.nl. The general archive of the KMA is available via the National Archives in The Hague.

Related Aids

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

Primary sources

Archive:

Wereldmuseum Leiden, archive access A16: Archief Volkenkundig museum 'Justinus van Nassau' TThe archive of the Justinus van Nassau Ethnographic Museum. To consult the archive please contact collectieinfo@wereldmuseum.nl.



Archive access:

National Archives, The Hague, Ministerie van Onderwijs, Kunsten en Wetenschappen: Afdeling Oudheidkunde en Natuurbescherming en taakvoorgangers, accession number 2.14.73, inventory number 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.%20H.2.2~458>

Archive:

National Archives, The Hague, Koninklijke Militaire Academie (KMA), accession number 2.13.22 Archives of the Royal Military Academy (KMA), (1818) 1828-1940 (1941); Hoofdcursus in Kampen and 's-Hertogenbosch, 1878-1923; Cadettenschool, 1890-1924; Artillerie- en Genieschool in 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](#)

Book:

Somer, J.M. Gids Voor Den Bezoeker van Het Ethnografisch Museum Te Breda, Kasteelplein 13 (Breda: Ethnografisch Museum, 1940). Visitor guide by the then manager of the Justinus van Nassau Ethnographic Museum J.M. Somer. The guide contains descriptions of the various exhibited objects.

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

Provenance report:

Shatanawi, Mirjam. Provenance report regarding Sinkin panjang met schede [sword with sheath]. PPROCE provenance reports; No. 16 (Amsterdam, 2022). Provenance report created in the context of the Pilot Project 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 which was exhibited at the Justinus van Nassau Ethnographic Museum. 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 created in the context of the Pilot Project Provenance Research on Objects of the Colonial Era (PPROCE). The report describes the provenance of an object (Gravestone, RV-3600-594) that was brought from Aceh (Sumatra) by officer George Nijpels. 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 created in the context of the Pilot Project 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' [mass ritual suicide] in Klunkung (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 created in the context of the Pilot Project 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). Via George Nijpels the krisses first ended up at the Hoofdcursus in Kampen and were later absorbed into to the collection 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>

Relevant Data

TO BE FILLED

first edited by Wiebe Reints as original_author on 2025-05-13

last edited by Wiebe Reints as original_author on 2025-12-22