Wereldmuseum Leiden

# Abstract

Today's Wereldmuseum Leiden, which was previously known as Museum Volkenkunde and before that as the 's Rijks Etnografisch Museum (State Ethnographic Museum), was founded in 1837 from the amalgamation of several collections of objects that were acquired in regions that were under Dutch colonial rule.

## History of the museum

The history of today’s Wereldmuseum Leiden goes back to 1837. Its first hundred years were characterised by financial difficulties, the accumulation of large quantities of objects and many changes of location. In 1937 the museum finally found a permanent home in the former University Hospital where it could display its entire collection. The museum is still located in this building.

The collection of the Wereldmuseum Leiden originated from the private collection of Philipp Franz von Siebold, who was also the museum's first director. His collection, which originally consisted mainly of Japanese objects, was expanded during the 19th century to include several private collections and, in 1883, a significant collection of ethnographic objects from the collection of the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities. At the start of the twentieth century, part of the collection of the Museum of Antiquities in Leiden was also transferred to what was then the Rijks Ethnographisch Museum (National Museum of Ethnology). The latter group of objects included the various Singhasari statues, some of which were returned to Indonesia in 1978 and others in 2023. Objects were also transferred from the National Museum of Ethnology to other museums, such as the Anatomical Museum in Leiden in 1935.

Objects were acquired in various ways. First, as described above, through exchange with other museums. In addition, the National Museum of Ethnology itself was an active buyer of ethnographic objects from dealers and auctions, with for example part of the museum's collection of Benin Bronzes having been obtained in this way. Many objects were also received as donations, often from colonial civil servants or military personnel who served for example with the Royal Dutch East Indies Army (KNIL). The vast majority of the collection of the present Wereldmuseum Leiden was therefore collected during the 19th and 20th centuries.

Picture of the Wereldmuseum Leiden in November 2024  
\_The Wereldmuseum Leiden in November 2024\_ (Sneeuwvlakte / Wikimedia Commons)

## Provenance research

Objects from the Wereldmuseum Leiden can be identified within the Wereldmuseum collection by the attribute ‘RV-’. ‘RV-360’ comprises the objects that were received from the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities in 1883. ‘RV-1403’ refers to a significant collection of objects that were transferred from the Museum of Antiquities in 1904. The Wereldmuseum Leiden has kept records of the collection since its foundation. However, the archive system has changed several times and different documentation is available for each object or collection series (several pieces that were registered at the same time).

The archives can roughly be divided into the collection archive and the correspondence archive. The collection archive consists of object registers, inventories, series files and, for some older objects, lists of donations and exchanges. This archive can be found under NL-LdnRMV\_A3. The correspondence archive contains incoming letters and telegrams, copies of outgoing letters, lists of incoming and outgoing correspondence, and so on. This archive can be found under NL-LdnRMV\_A1.

The archive of the Wereldmuseum Leiden is not accessible online. For more information about the collection or to view archival documents please contact collectieinfo@wereldmuseum.nl.

Documents related to the Wereldmuseum Leiden can also be found at the Dutch National Archives, these are mainly administrative records. The archives of museums that exchanged collections with Wereldmuseum Leiden may contain further archival material on those specific objects.

# Related Aids

* \_see also:
* Sources
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* \_see also:
* The trade in objects from a colonial context
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* \_see also:
* Army and navy personnel in colonised territories
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* \_see also:
* Civil servants in colonised territories
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* \_see also:
* Royal Cabinet of Curiosities
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* \_see also:
* Groote Koninklijke Bazar
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* \_see also:
* Kunsthandel Van Lier
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* \_see also:
* Artis Ethnographic Museum
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* \_see also:
* Koninklijk Bataviaasch Genootschap van Wetenschappen en Kunsten
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* \_see also:
* Naturalis Biodiversity Center
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* \_see also:
* Wereldmuseum Amsterdam
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* \_see also:
* Wereldmuseum Rotterdam
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* \_see also:
* Wereldmuseum Berg en Dal
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* \_see also:
* Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies
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* \_see also:
* Rijksmuseum Amsterdam
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* \_see also:
* Rijksmuseum van Oudheden
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* \_see also:
* C.G.C. Reinwardt
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* \_see also:
* Museum Nusantara
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* \_see also:
* Volkenkundig Museum Justinus van Nassau
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* \_see also:
* International Colonial and Export Exhibition 1883
* \_
* \_see also:
* Natuurhistorisch en Volkenkundig Museum Oudenbosch
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# Secondary sources

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ISBN 9789057891595, WorldCat 244247206  
 Dissertation:  
 Effert, Rudolf. “Volkenkundig Verzamelen: het Koninklijk Kabinet Van Zeldzaamheden en het Rijks Ethnographisch Museum 1816-1883.” Dissertatie, Universiteit Leiden, Leiden 2003.  
 \_Dissertation by Rudolf Effert, corresponds to the English version. About the history of the National Museum of Ethnology and how it was formed from the collections of the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities.\_  
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https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB06:000003234:00005  
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# Relevant Data

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