*This is a level 3 Research Aid*  
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 (applies to section: Main-text; Sources)*

# 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 collection

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.

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

## Secondary sources

Book:

Dissertation:

Book:

Book:

Magazine:

Book:

## Relevant Data

Identifiers:

https://www.wikidata.org/entity/Q17339437  
,  
 Name variations:

Verzameling Von Siebold, Rijks Japansch Museum, Rijks Japansch Museum Von Siebold, Rijks Etnografisch Museum, Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde, Museum Volkenkunde, Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen  
,  
 Tags:  
 Activity:

Collectie, Ethnographic museum  
,  
 Type of objects:

Ethnographic objects  
,  
 Geographical:

Africa, Asia, North America, Oceania, South America  
,  
 Period of activity:  
 Year of start:  
 1837,  
 Year of end:

,  
 Collections:  
 Within Data Hub: