

DIGITAL RESEARCH AIDS

For provenance research into colonial collections

niod

institute for war,
holocaust and
genocide studies



Colonial Collections
Consortium

WHAT?

The Expert Centre Restitution of the NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies is creating a series of digital research aids. These have the goal to make available a wide variety of knowledge on how to conduct research into museum collections that were acquired in a colonial context. The research aids are created in the context of the Colonial Collections Consortium – a collaboration between five cultural and scientific institutions.

The intended audiences are starting provenance researchers in the Netherlands (such as curators, students, and other heritage professionals) as well as researchers, source communities and other interested parties from countries of origin.

Digital Research Aids

The research aids are constantly under construction and therefore subject to changes.

On March 20, 2025, an initial presentation of the digital research aids took place at Spuiz25 in Amsterdam. You can watch a recording of the event via the Spuiz25 website.

On this page you can find various research aids that can assist you in doing (provenance) research on colonial collections. The research aids

contain information about conducting research on objects that were acquired in a colonial context and which are currently part of museum collections in the Netherlands. Besides a brief description of the subject, the research aids provide specific research tips and references to relevant source material.

We are curious about your thoughts on the digital research aids. Therefore, we have created a questionnaire. The form allows you to provide any feedback or additional information.

Provenance research into colonial collections

- Select and delineate
- Doing research
- Sources
- Writing a provenance report
- The Dutch restitution policy

Page segments: Topics Locations Top ↑

Topics

- Persons**
 - C.G.C. Reinwardt
- Museums and collection holding institutions**
 - Koninklijk Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen
 - Museum Bronbeek
 - Artis Ethnographic Museum
 - Volkenkundig Museum "Gerardus van der Leeuw"
 - Hoofdcursus Kampen
- The trade in objects from a colonial context**
 - Artis Ethnographic Museum
 - Groote Koninklijke Bazar
 - Kunsthandel Van Lier
 - Royal Asian Art Society in the Netherlands
 - Rijksmuseum Amsterdam
 - Rijksmuseum van Oudheden
 - International Colonial and Export Exhibition 1888

Locations

- Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao
- Saba, Sint Eustatius and Sint Maarten

WHY?

In recent years, we have witnessed a changing attitude towards colonial collections within museums in the Global North. In the Netherlands, this has resulted in on the one hand the development of a restitution policy and on the other hand in the establishment of various projects to support and encourage research into Dutch museum collections.

While the Dutch restitution policy has already resulted in returns of cultural items to Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Nigeria and the United States, a lot is still unknown about the histories of objects that came to the Netherlands during the colonial era. Moreover, there is still no clear picture of all colonial collections present in Dutch museums.

The Digital Research Aids developed by the NIOD are tools to inform researchers from the Netherlands and abroad about the Dutch museal and archival landscape, institutional histories and specific individuals that have played an important role in amassing objects in colonial contexts.

HOW?

The website of the Digital Research Aids offers a dynamic digital environment where users can find relevant information to start their research. Therefore, we have created an intuitive structure existing of three levels of research aids:

- A more abstract level. This level acts as a set of guidelines for starting provenance research. Here, you can find information on where to find relevant source material or how to write a provenance report, for instance.
- A thematic level. Through themes, such as the trade in objects during the colonial era or the work of missionaries in colonised regions, these research aids discuss how objects came to the Netherlands.
- A detailed level. These research aids cover specific subjects, ranging from individual collectors to museums. These aids provide detailed information on where to find relevant archival material and how to approach researching the relevant topic.

Artis Ethnographic Museum

Name variations: Museum voor Land- en Volkenkunde

The Artis Ethnographic Museum was an ethnographic museum in Amsterdam founded in 1851 as part of the Artis Zoo. In 1921, the collection was subsumed by the newly established Colonial Museum, today's Wereldmuseum Amsterdam.

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History of the museum

The Artis Ethnographic Museum was founded in 1851 to house the collection of ethnographic objects of the Koninklijk Zoologisch Genootschap Natuurlijke Geschiedenis en Kunst. At the time it was not unusual for a zoo to also collect objects, as the rapidly changing sciences in the nineteenth century often focused on several areas of research at once. The interest both in other cultures, objects and customs and in plants, animals and geology was closely linked to the broader European colonial project. Artis' ethnographic collection grew steadily throughout the nineteenth century and so a special museum building, the Voithardring, was constructed in 1888. The building is still part of Artis Zoo today. In the late nineteenth century, the collection was expanded with objects from the Internationale Koloniale en Uitvoerhandel Tentoonstelling, also known as the World Exhibition, of 1883 and objects collected by the Nieuwe Afrikaansche Handels-Vereeniging. As such, the Artis Ethnographic Museum was closely linked to Dutch colonial relations.

From 1905 to 1913 the collection of the Colonial Museum in Haarlem was temporarily included in the collection of the Ethnographic Museum Artis but not long after the decision was made to transfer the collections to the yet-to-be-established museum of the Colonial Institute, which finally took place in 1921. It was not until 1926 that the museum of the Colonial Institute, now Wereldmuseum Amsterdam, opened its doors. To this day, the collection of the Ethnographic Museum Artis forms an important basis of the collection of the Wereldmuseum Amsterdam.

Related research aids

- Sources
 - C.G.C. Reinwardt
 - Koninklijk Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen
 - Artis Ethnographic Museum
 - Museum Bronbeek
 - Royal Cabinet of Curiosities
 - Civil servants in colonised territories
 - Hoofdcursus Kampen
 - Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV)
 - Groote Koninklijke Bazar
 - Kunsthandel Van Lier
 - Museum Nusantara



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QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS? PLEASE REACH OUT TO
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