



Clues

Research into provenance history and
significance of cultural objects and collections
acquired in colonial situations

Final report

Pilotproject Provenance

Research on Objects of the Colonial Era

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STICHTING NATIONAAL
MUSEUM VAN WERELDCULTUREN

RIJKS MUSEUM

*in collaboration with KITLV/Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies,
the Open University, Leiden University and the Reinwardt Academy*

Colophon

The **Pilotproject Provenance Research on Objects of the Colonial Era (PPOCE)** is a project of Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, the National Museum of World Cultures (NMVW) and the Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies (NIOD) and its in-house Expert Centre Restitution (ECR). Partners in the project were the Open University, the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV), Leiden University and the Reinwardt Academy. The project was carried out with the financial support of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science of the Netherlands.

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Contents

Summary of report	4
Introduction	5
1. Principles and backgrounds.....	7
2. Theoretical and political dimensions of provenance research.....	15
3. Methodological recommendations.....	18
4. Draft Assessment Framework for provenance research into objects acquired in a colonial context.....	56
5. Findings and recommendations	61
6. Observations and reflections - Essays on aspects of provenance research	64
1. The restitution of Indonesian colonial objects: A Reappraisal <i>Sri Margana</i>	64
2. Colonial abundance without embarrassment. Provenance of museum objects and the moral economy of collecting <i>Marieke Bloembergen</i>	67
3. Thinking through provenance <i>Henrietta Lidchi and Francine Brinkgreve</i>	71
4. Provenance history: transnational and from below <i>Klaas Stutje</i>	73
5. History in layers and across borders: six Sri Lankan objects from the Rijksmuseum <i>Alicia Schrikker</i>	76
6. Looking back. Experiences with provenance research into artworks stolen during the Nazi regime. <i>Ellen Grabowsky and Jona Mooren</i>	79
Appendices	84
Sources and literature	94

Summary of report

This report is the account of the Pilotproject Provenance Research on Objects of the Colonial Era (PPROCE). The project was launched in early 2019 at the initiative of the NMVW, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam and NIOD/ECR, was carried out with the financial support of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science of the Netherlands and was concluded on 1 March 2022.

The report is the result of exploratory research into the provenance history and significance of a representative number of cultural objects and collections acquired in colonial situations and experiences gained with and in the cooperation with researchers and institutions in countries of origin.

The report begins with an introductory chapter about the backgrounds to the project in the light of the national and international debates regarding restitution and repatriation, in particular the *Rapport Adviescommissie 'Nationale Beleidskader Koloniale Collecties'* [Advisory Committee Report on 'National Policy Framework for Colonial Collections'] of the Gonçalves Committee and the response to this from the minister of Education, Culture and Science of the Netherlands.

The second chapter discusses the theoretical aspects of provenance research, in particular the question of how provenance research, in collaboration with researchers from countries of origin, can evolve into a fruitful and productive way of reaching a 'common understanding' in the present and the future.

The largest chapter consists of specific guidance and recommendations for conducting provenance research. Researchers can use this overview as a reference work for selecting objects for research, locating and interpreting sources and writing a provenance report.

The fourth chapter contains a Draft Assessment Framework. This can be used as a tool for an independent assessment committee to be established whose purpose will be to facilitate future restitution applications from countries of origin and to advise the ministry on restitution issues. The Draft Assessment Framework may also be useful to provenance researchers and heritage-management institutions wishing to assess the completeness of their own work.

The fifth chapter contains a number of urgent recommendations with regard to cooperation with researchers and heritage institutions in countries of origin and the further policy with regard to provenance research, in particular the question of how to ensure knowledge creation in this area; in so doing it follows on from the report of the Gonçalves Committee and the minister's response to this.

Finally the report includes six essays in which eight researchers involved in the project reflect on various aspects of restitution issues and, in particular, provenance research.

Introduction

This report gives an account of the findings of the Pilotproject Provenance Research on Objects of the Colonial Era (PROCE), a project launched in early 2019 as a joint initiative of the National Museum of World Cultures (NMVW), Rijksmuseum Amsterdam (RMA) and the Expert Centre Restitution of the NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies (ECR/NIOD) and which was made possible by the financial support of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science of the Netherlands. The report, which will be published in Dutch, English and Indonesian, is aimed at a wide audience – policymakers, politicians and civil servants, museums and other institutions that hold collections, researchers and other interested parties – in the Netherlands, Indonesia and Sri Lanka but also in other parts of the world. At the same time parts of the report may be used as educational material or as material for a teaching module or international workshop for professionals.

The title ‘Clues’ is inspired by *Spie*, a now famous article written in 1979 by Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg.¹ In the article Ginzburg advocated a method whereby the historian, in the manner of a detective or psychoanalyst, goes in search of surviving traces, minute details, unique clues that provide a deeper insight into the past – particularly where groups are concerned that are underrepresented in the archives and have barely been given a voice. With this, Ginzburg laid the foundation for microhistory, a genre of history that focuses on small units of research, such as an event, a community, an individual or a settlement, not simply as a case study, but in order to ‘[ask] large questions in small places.’² Provenance research, in the sense of the history of objects, is also an example of a microhistorical approach. After all, research into object histories does not just provide an overview of successive ownership transactions but above all also gives an insight into the concrete impact of large histories, such as how communities changed under the influence of imperialism and colonial violence, the development of colonial knowledge production, processes of museumisation and heritage formation.

The stories that emerge by studying the objects tell us something both about the objects themselves and the cultures they are believed to have come from (according to the ethnographic tradition of collecting, describing and ‘codifying’ peoples and cultures). But equally, or even more, they say something about processes of expropriation, appropriation and alienation; processes of hybridisation, changing significance, essentialisation and reclamation. In short, about processes of change which are closely related to the history of colonisation and decolonisation itself.

This brings us to the subtitle of this report: ‘Research into provenance history and significance of cultural objects and collections acquired in colonial situations.’ This encompasses various descriptions used by others, including the *Deutscher Museumsbund* (‘*Sammlungsgut aus kolonialen Kontexten*’; ‘Objects/collections/items from colonial contexts’), the Gonçalves Committee (‘*koloniale collecties*’/‘*Koloniale cultuurgoederen*’ [colonial collections/colonial cultural goods], also ‘*koloniale objecten*’ [colonial objects]), the ministry of Education, Culture and Science of the Netherlands (‘*cultuurgoederen uit een koloniale context*’, ‘*collecties uit een koloniale context*’ [cultural goods from a colonial context, collections from a colonial context], alongside ‘*koloniale cultuurgoederen/collecties*’ [colonial cultural goods/collections]), and the *NMVW Principles* (‘Cultural

¹ Carlo Ginzburg, *Spie. Radici di un paradigma indiziario* (1979) [Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm].

² Charles W. Joyner, *Shared Traditions: Southern History and Folk Culture* (Urbana, 1999) 1.

objects' and 'provenance issues arising from colonial appropriations').³ In using the terms significance, acquisition and appropriation we align ourselves with the view that forms the basis for the report by Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy, in which they speak of the 'Intellectual and Aesthetic appropriation combined with the economic appropriation of the cultural heritage of the other'.⁴ Finally, we have given preference to the term 'colonial situations' over the more frequently used phrase 'colonial context' based on the consideration that 'situations' more strongly implies concrete fields of action than 'context' does.

As stated above, this report contains the most important results of the pilot, the core of which lies in the methodological recommendations for conducting research (chapter 3) and the draft assessment framework for the assessment of research (chapter 4). These chapters are preceded by an outline of the backgrounds and principles of this pilot (chapter 1) and a reflection on the theoretical and political dimensions of provenance research (chapter 2). In the short conclusion we will make a number of recommendations regarding provenance research in relation to the developments surrounding the policy concerning cultural objects and collections acquired in colonial situations. Finally, we asked a number of people from the world of research and museums to provide a short essay reflecting on the key issues in this report.

This report is not the only concrete and accessible outcome of the pilot. There are also 50 English-language provenance reports dealing with the history of 65 diverse objects from Indonesia and Sri Lanka in the collections of the NMVW and the Rijksmuseum, which form the empirical basis for the methodological recommendations (chapter 3). Finally, as part of this research Klaas Stutje has compiled the brief historical overview *History of Indonesian Dutch Restitution Debate*, based on secondary literature and additional archive research. These documents will be available online via the library collection of the NIOD and the collection databases of the Rijksmuseum and NMVW.

Various researchers, experts, archive institutions and heritage specialists from the Netherlands and abroad collaborated on this report and the provenance reports, readily sharing their knowledge or providing access to documents. This research would not have been possible without them. We warmly thank everyone involved for their assistance and advice.

³ Sabine Lang (ed.), 'Guidelines for German Museums. Care of Collections from Colonial Contexts. 2nd Edition' (German Museums Association 2019); Lilian Gonçalves-Ho Kang You (ed.), 'Koloniale Collecties en Erkenning van Onrecht' Onrecht' [Colonial Collections a Recognition of Injustice] (Council for Culture 2020); Ingrid van Engelshoven, 'Beleidsvisie collecties uit een koloniale context' (Parliamentary document for the Lower House, 29 January 2021); 'Return of Cultural Objects: Principles and Process' (NMVW 30 April 2019).

⁴ Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy, 'Rapport sur la restitution du patrimoine culturel africain. Vers une nouvelle éthique relationnelle' (November 2018) 5.

1. Principles and backgrounds

Naturally the Pilotproject *Provenance Research on Objects of the Colonial Era* did not come out of the blue. The abundant presence of objects dating from the colonial era in European and North American collections has become the subject of national and international debate in recent years. This also applies to museums in the Netherlands, starting with the National Museum of World Cultures (NMVW) and Rijksmuseum Amsterdam. In 2017-2018 these museums placed the matter on the political agenda and, in collaboration with the NIOD/Expert Centre Restitution, took the initiative to set up a project on provenance research. The plan was boosted by a visit from the director-general of the Indonesian ministry of Education and Culture Hilmar Farid. Following this, the three institutions – Rijksmuseum, NMVW and NIOD – applied to the ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology for financial support; their request was granted given that it was in line with the ministry's policy to place the restitution of cultural objects acquired in a colonial context on the map: PPROCE would be able to contribute to this.

This was also clear from the Letter to Parliament of 10 April 2019 in which the minister of Education, Culture and Science announced her support for the initial plans for the project. In the letter she announced

een nationaal beleidskader [te willen] ontwikkelen voor de omgang met koloniale collecties. Hierbij gaat het om het ontwikkelen van een methodology voor provenance research en om het ontwikkelen van een zorgvuldige procedure voor de omgang met teruggaveverzoeken. Ik kies voor een zorgvuldige en praktijkgerichte aanpak. Cultuurgoederen uit de voormalige Nederlandsse colonies waarvan vermoed wordt dat die in het verleden geroofd zijn, hebben hierbij prioriteit⁵ [[the intention to] develop a national policy framework for dealing with colonial collections. This will involve developing a methodology for provenance research and developing a meticulous procedure for dealing with restitution applications. I am choosing a careful and practical approach. Cultural objects from the former Dutch colonies which are suspected to have been looted in the past will be given priority in this process]

In connection with this policy the minister not only expressed support for the pilot but also announced the creation of '*een gezaghebbende onafhankelijke adviescommissie*' [an authoritative independent advisory committee] to take the initial steps towards establishing a policy framework.

Based on this pledge from the ministry of Education, Culture and Science the three partners further elaborated the proposal. The proposal and the budget were approved by the ministry in the autumn of 2019, after which the project, with an expected duration of two years, could get underway. Specialists from the Open University, Leiden University, the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV) and the Reinwardt Academy were involved in the project. For a brief description of the project design please refer to appendix 2 to this report.

⁵ Ingrid van Engelshoven, 'Reactie op commissiebrief met verzoek om reactie op het bericht in Parool van 7 maart 2019 over roofkunst' [Response to Committee letter requesting a response to the message in Parool of 7 March 2019] (2019D10592)' (Letter to Parliament 10 April 2019)

The purpose of PPROCE was thus to develop a methodology for provenance research into colonial collections. The focus in doing so would be on items from Indonesia and Sri Lanka, with researchers from the country of origin also being involved, partly with a view to providing multiple perspectives. The original proposal formulated the specific objectives of the pilot as follows:⁶

1. To gain an insight into the processes surrounding provenance research into colonial objects in general;
2. To gain an insight into/experience in collaborating with researchers and museums in countries of origin;
3. To gain an insight into the applicability of the methodology developed to provenance research into collections from other former colonies;
4. To chart developments around international provenance research and the lessons that can be learned from these;
5. To deliver concrete results and knowledge in relation to the specific objects and object groups on which the provenance research was carried out;
6. To draft a memo with policy recommendations with regard to provenance research in general and possible further research in particular;
7. To advise on how to present research data (for example an internationally accessible database of researched objects/case studies with detailed information about colonial provenance, documentation on collectors, relevant archive documents and links to military campaigns and colonial institutions);
8. To arrange a final symposium to share the results and the methodological lessons of the completed research project; this symposium should also look ahead to the follow-up of the project and create a platform for future research.

While most of the points in this project were researched in depth, some objectives were adjusted, refined or on reflection not elaborated further or realised in full. These shifts in emphasis were partly caused by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic but were also due to developments within the field such as the launch of the research programme *Pressing Matter: Ownership, Value and the Question of Colonial Heritage in Museums* as part of the Dutch Research Agenda⁷ and the establishment of a Repatriation Committee in Indonesia.⁸

The emphasis within the project was mainly focused on specific provenance research into a selection of objects from the collections of the NMVW and Rijksmuseum Amsterdam (point 5). The provenance research gave us an insight into the processes around provenance research and into the applicability of the methodology developed to provenance research into collections from other former colonies (points 1 and 3). Based on our experience with specific provenance research we were furthermore able to formulate concrete recommendations with regard to policy, research and methodology (point 6).

At first, collaboration with researchers and museums in countries of origin (point 2) was hampered by the effects of Covid-19. For example travel restrictions prevented us from conducting additional research with local experts and communities. An unexpected advantage, however, was the rapid adoption of e-meetings and digital research panels, which allowed us to engage in regular online meetings over a lengthy period of time. Initial differences in pace and priorities were gradually

⁶ 'Gezamenlijk herkomstonderzoek koloniale collecties' [Joint provenance research into colonial collections]. (PPROCE research proposal, 7 June 2019).

⁷ See: <https://www.nwo.nl/projecten/nwa129219419>

⁸ See: <https://www.kemdikbud.go.id/main/blog/2021/01/repatriasi-upaya-indonesia-kembalikan-benda-cagar-budaya-dari-belanda>

evened out in the course of the project, partly thanks to this regular and accessible form of contact. Even so, in-person meetings and the ability to conduct research in different countries will remain essential in the longer term.

During the project period PPROCE showcased itself – both physically and online – at a number of international symposia and conferences in Belgium, Germany, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Switzerland. In addition contact was made with international organisations active in the area of provenance research as well as with a large number of individual researchers and curators with regard to specific research questions. In this way we were able to form a clear picture of the developments around international provenance research and the relevant organisations and networks, although these were not systematically mapped as part of the project (point 4). Moreover it was decided not to work on exploring the possibilities for an internationally accessible database of researched objects (point 7) because on reflection the task vastly exceeded the scope of this pilot. Recommendations on how to present research data were given a place in our project, albeit mainly at an individual object level.

Backgrounds

As stated above, the initiative of the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, the National Museum of World Cultures and the NIOD did not come out of the blue, with the same applying to the step taken by the minister of Education, Culture and Science Ingrid van Engelshoven to establish an advisory committee and to subsidise the pilot. Without having the ambition to present an overview of the history of the restitution debate and recent developments it is useful to provide a brief outline of the backgrounds against which this pilot took place. We will mention three: a changing relationship between the Netherlands and Indonesia with regard to Indonesian heritage in Dutch collections; comparable developments in relationships between African and European governments; and a growing willingness to recognise historical injustice and take steps aimed at restorative justice and transitional justice.

The issue of restitution of cultural objects acquired in colonial situations is not a new one and in fact goes right back to the colonial era itself. As part of the project Klaas Stutje explored the history of the restitution debate in relation to Indonesia, based on recent secondary literature and additional archive research. It is worth noting that Sri Lanka also made applications for restitution in the past but these were never taken seriously; the United Kingdom, however, restituted a number of objects to that country as far back as the 1930s. It would seem that the Netherlands did not feel the same urgency, possibly because this colonial history is more distant – the Dutch East India Company (VOC) left the island of Sri Lanka in 1796.

In Indonesia cultural identity and heritage politics already held a prominent place in the early Indonesian nationalist movement, for example within *Budi Utomo* ('Noble Endeavour') from 1908 and the *politik kebudayaan* in the 1930s. The question as to where heritage most 'belonged' also arose within the colonial government itself – in its relationship with what were known as 'autonomous principalities', with heritage institutions in the Netherlands and with foreign powers.⁹ At the Dutch-Indonesian Round-Table Conference of 1949 between the Netherlands and the Republic of Indonesia, which resulted in the transfer of sovereignty to the United States of Indonesia (*Republik Indonesia Serikat*), article 19 of the draft cultural agreement provided a clear framework

⁹ Marieke Bloembergen and Martijn Eickhoff, 'A Wind of Change on Java's Ruined Temples: Archaeological Activities, Imperial Circuits and Heritage Awareness in Java and the Netherlands (1800-1850)', *BMGN* 128:1 (2013) 81-104; idem, *The Politics of Heritage in Indonesia: A Cultural History* (Cambridge 2020).

for the transfer of cultural objects; however, deteriorating diplomatic relations meant that no further action was taken. It was not until after the new Cultural Agreement of 1968 that relations between the Netherlands and Indonesia had improved sufficiently to put the matter back on the agenda. This resulted in a series of transfers between 1970 and 1978, starting with the important Nagarakrtagama manuscript in 1970 and ending with the Prajnaparamita statue in 1978. In spite of promises of further research by the Dutch, the issue of restitution subsequently disappeared from the agenda.¹⁰



Prajnaparamita of Java that was returned in 1978,
Gunawan Kartapranata
In Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 3.0)

The new millennium appeared to bring more scope for direct negotiations between Dutch and Indonesian institutions and museums, perhaps also as a result of the Indonesian Reformasi after 1998 and a reassessment of the old ethnographic museums in the Netherlands. This led for example to the return by the Wereldmuseum Rotterdam of 185 wayang puppets to the Wayang Museum in Jakarta in 2005, as recorded by researcher and author Jos van Beurden, and the transfer in 2008 and 2009 of 55 ethnographic items from the Tropenmuseum and the Tilburg monastery of the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin to regional museums in West Kalimantan and Nias.¹¹

A separate story concerns the planned transfer of the substantial Indonesia collection of Delft's Museum Nusantara in 2013. An initial 12,000 items were offered to the Museum Nasional Indonesia in Jakarta but talks broke down after the Indonesian ministry of Culture, through its new director-

¹⁰ Cynthia Scott, *Cultural Diplomacy and the Heritage of Empire: Negotiating Post-Colonial Returns* (New York: Routledge 2020) 47; Jos van Beurden, 'Treasures in Trusted Hands: Negotiating the Future of Colonial Cultural Objects' (PhD dissertation, Free University of Amsterdam 2016) 101-103.

¹¹ Jos van Beurden, *The Return of Cultural and Historical Treasures: The Case of the Netherlands* (Amsterdam: KIT Publishers 2012).

general Hilmar Farid, voiced objections to the lack of say, provenance research and transparency, with the result that the number transferred to Indonesia in 2016 was limited to 1,564.¹² These experiences played an important part in the guidelines set out by the National Museum of World Cultures from 2017. In March 2019 the museum published *Return of Cultural Objects: Principles and Process*, a policy document that sets out the principles and procedures based upon which the museum assesses claims for the return of objects which it curates on behalf of the Dutch State.¹³ The ministry of Education, Culture and Science consented to this as a pilot initiative. The document devotes ample attention to provenance research, which the museum advocates conducting in collaboration with countries and communities of origin, partly in order to shape a just return of items to the original owners.¹⁴ The restitution in 2020 of Prince Diponegoro's kris, which was promised by the Netherlands back in the 1970s as an undertaking but never implemented due to the inability to identify the specific item, marks the high point so far in the new relations between the Netherlands and Indonesia in terms of dealing with cultural objects acquired in colonial situations. Even so, reflecting on the restitution in an e-meeting Hilmar Farid once again emphasised the importance of thorough provenance research, with early and intensive involvement of Indonesian historians and policymakers, as a condition for a careful heritage and restitution policy.

The evolving relationship between the Netherlands and Indonesia echoes developments in other parts of the world. The repatriation of colonial objects has been high on the agenda of UNESCO for decades, and a country such as Nigeria has been lobbying for restitution of art objects since gaining independence in 1960. Its main focus has been on the collection of pieces looted by British troops from the kingdom of Benin in 1897 after the conquest of Benin City. Known as the *Benin Bronzes* they consist of 3,000 artefacts including also copper reliefs, bronze and brass sculptures and ivory carvings.¹⁵ The collection was dispersed across a large number of countries: in addition to England mainly also Germany, France, Canada, the Netherlands, the United States and Austria. For a long time these countries paid little attention to the matter – until a few years ago. Concrete collaboration projects with Nigeria were set up in both the United States and Germany, but the most important political breakthrough came with the announcement in 2016 by the French president Emmanuel Macron of the intention to return objects to Africa (in casu the Republic of Benin) within five years.

In March 2018 Macron took the next step by commissioning a report on the return of African cultural heritage in the French collections. Compiled by French art historian Bénédicte Savoy and Senegalese economist Felwine Sarr and published in November of that year, the report recommended that objects which had been removed without permission from their country of origin and sent to the French mainland should be permanently returned if so requested by the country of origin. Such restitution should be accompanied by cooperation in research, scientific exchange and education.¹⁶

Finally, and perhaps superfluously, it should be mentioned here that the debates about the restitution of cultural objects appropriated in colonial situations are linked to a broader movement in recent decades in Western Europe and North America, aimed at restorative justice and transitional

¹² Jos van Beurden, *Herplaatsing Collectie Voormalig Museum Nusantara Delft 2013 – 2018. Lering en vragen* (NMVW 2018)

¹³ 'Return of Cultural Objects: Principles and Process' (NMVW 30 April 2019).

¹⁴ See also: Arjen Ribbens, 'Het gaat om de erkenning dat het koloniale kunstobject van hen is' [It is about the recognition that the colonial art object belongs to them], *NRC Handelsblad* (6 March 2019).

¹⁵ Barbara Plankensteiner (ed.), *Benin Kings and rituals* (Chicago 2008); Dan Hicks, *The British Museums. The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution* (London 2020); Barnaby Phillips, *Loot. Britain and the Benin Bronzes* (London, 2021); Rosalie Hans, Henrietta Lidchi and Annette Schmidt, 'Provenance#2: The Benin collections at the National Museum of World Cultures' (NMVW 21 January 2022).

¹⁶ Sarr and Savoy, *Rapport sur la restitution*.

justice, aimed at moral but sometimes also material reparations for flagrant historical injustice towards various social groups. A first clear manifestation of this was the financial reparation, by Germany and others, to various groups of victims of the Second World War, and, somewhat later, the restitution of assets looted from the victims of Nazi persecution. This even led to international agreements, laid down in 1998 in the *Washington Conference Principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art* and the *Washington Conference on Holocaust Era Assets*.

As is clear from the above, the matter of recognising historical injustice and restorative justice has long ceased to be limited to the victims of the Second World War and extends to the history of slavery, colonialism and racism – a past whose impact remains only too clear today, both within communities and between countries. In short, ‘looking in the mirror of history’ is a crucial way of providing perspective on a shared future.

Report of the Advisory Committee on the ‘National Policy Framework for Colonial Collections’ and the response of the minister of Education, Culture and Science¹⁷

To go back to the immediate policy context within which PPROCE was operating: in October 2020 the Advisory Committee on the ‘National Policy Framework for Colonial Collections’, which had been established exactly one year previously to coincide with the launch of PPROCE by the minister of Education, Culture and Science, issued its report *Koloniale Collecties en Erkenning van Onrecht* [Colonial Collections, a Recognition of Injustice]. The crux of the recommendation made in this report was that the Netherlands must acknowledge that during the colonial period many cultural objects came to the Netherlands against the will of their owners, for example as spoils of war, and that the Netherlands must take responsibility for its colonial past by making recognition and rectification of this injustice a key policy principle. The Netherlands should express a readiness to return stolen colonial cultural objects unconditionally. Furthermore the Netherlands should base its policy regarding the colonial collections in Dutch museums on the recognition of injustice and the willingness to rectify this injustice as much as possible. This means unconditional restitution if so requested by the country of origin, concluded the committee, which was chaired by Lilian Gonçalves-Ho Kang You and operated under the auspices of the Council for Culture of the Netherlands.

The Gonçalves Committee furthermore advised that the Dutch policy be coordinated with the formerly colonised nations, in any case Indonesia, Suriname and the Caribbean islands, as that is the only way to reach a satisfactory outcome for all parties. These countries had expressed the wish to collaborate with the Netherlands; for example the countries want to gain a better insight into the presence and the provenance history of the colonial cultural objects in the Dutch museums. The Gonçalves Committee furthermore advised the establishment of an independent advisory committee to advise the minister on restitution applications relating to colonial looted art.

Finally the Committee recommended the establishment of a Centre of Expertise on the Provenance of Colonial Objects. This purpose of this expert centre would be to conduct additional provenance research and set up a publicly accessible database on the colonial collections in Dutch museums.

The publication of the advice attracted a great deal of attention, both in the media and in the museum world, and sparked some interesting and often heated debates, in some cases fuelled by current events. However reactions were largely positive in tone, although there were question marks as to the speed and feasibility of the suggestions.

¹⁷ Gonçalves-Ho Kang You, ‘Koloniale Collecties en Erkenning van Onrecht’ [Colonial Collections, a Recognition of Injustice].

In January 2021 the minister of Education, Culture and Science issued a policy response to the advice of the Gonçalves Committee in which she adopted almost all the recommendations. In its response the government expressed the wish to rectify historical injustice where possible and, if so requested, to return unconditionally both cultural objects '*onvrijwillig zijn weggenomen uit een voormalige Nederlandse kolonie*' [involuntarily taken from a former Dutch colony] and '*cultuurgooderen met een bijzondere betekenis voor het herkomstland*' [cultural objects of special significance to the country of origin] currently in the Dutch National Art Collection. In the policy framework presented, the government states that it aims to work with formerly colonised countries and to establish an independent advisory committee to consider applications for restitution.¹⁸

Issues surrounding provenance research are mentioned in various places in the policy response. For example the minister states that a lack of sources and archives should not in itself necessarily be an argument to reject an application. That does not change the fact that the provenance history of the cultural object is considered to be of great importance, which is why the minister '*in het geval van een verzoek tot teruggave de beheerder van het object [zal] verzoeken het herkomstonderzoek naar het object uit te voeren, op basis waarvan de beoordelingscommissie haar oordeel kan vormen*' [in the case of an application for restitution [will] request the curator of the object to conduct [the] provenance research into the object, based upon which the advisory committee can form its opinion].

The minister takes the view that the responsibility for conducting provenance research lies primarily with the museums. Research should not only be conducted in the event of restitution applications: the museums are asked to conduct provenance research on a structural basis as well. The curators of the Dutch National Art Collection and the museums are therefore asked to initiate this provenance research without delay. This pilot is also assigned a role in this matter: its results should be used to help the museums to conduct the research with '*de gepaste zorgvuldigheid*' [with due care]; at the same time the results of the project can support the advisory committee in assessing this provenance research, according to the minister.

The Gonçalves Committee also recommended the establishment of a centre of expertise – to supplement the role of the museums – whose tasks would include provenance verification and conducting and advising on additional provenance research, but the government has decided to hold off on this for now. While the minister considers this to be an important task she first wants to see how many applications for restitution are submitted:

Daarnaast is het van belang dat een dergelijke voorziening aansluit op de kennis, expertise en behoeften die musea zelf hebben. Onderzoek naar koloniale collecties vereist soms expertise, die nu nog niet ruim voorhanden is. Ik zal daarom oog hebben voor de capaciteit bij instellingen voor het onderzoek in het kader van verzoeken tot teruggave en zal verkennen hoe dit kan worden ondersteund [In addition it is important that such a facility fit in with the knowledge, expertise and needs of the museums themselves. Research into colonial collections sometimes requires expertise which is not yet widely available. I will therefore take into account the capacity available at institutions for research in connection with restitution applications and will explore how this can be supported].

¹⁸ Van Engelshoven, 'Beleidsvisie collecties uit een koloniale context'.

Finally the minister stated the wish to *‘inzetten op verdere kennisuitwisseling en gezamenlijk onderzoek naar koloniale collecties met Indonesië, Suriname en het Caribisch deel van het Koninkrijk’* [work towards further knowledge-sharing and joint research into colonial collections with Indonesia, Suriname and the Caribbean part of the Kingdom] – a wish also expressed explicitly by the countries of origin. *‘Zij geven aan dat teruggave van objecten vooral waardevol is als dat gepaard gaat met verdere samenwerking en kennisontwikkeling over deze objecten, zoals de uitwisseling van onderzoekers en een online inventaris van cultuurobjecten, die rekening houdt met de wensen in het land van herkomst’* [They indicate that the restitution of objects is particularly valuable if it is accompanied by further cooperation and knowledge development about these objects, such as the exchange of researchers and an online inventory of cultural objects which takes into account the wishes in the country of origin]. However nothing is said about exactly what form this cooperation should take in the absence of an expert centre].

Provenance research

Interesting in the light of the minister’s policy document was the discussion of these issues at *The Politics of Restitution*, a digital conference organised by the University of London’s Centre of South East Asian Studies in May 2021.¹⁹ In response to earlier developments between the Netherlands and Indonesia in the area of provenance research and restitution, such as the settlement of the Nusantara collection and the return of Diponegoro’s kris, Hilmar Farid gave a detailed exploration of the value of provenance research:

It’s not simply about the return of objects; it’s about knowledge production. It’s about rewriting of histories; it’s about dealing with past injustices. That’s where I would locate the discussion of returning objects.

Farid said he was not interested in the repatriation of large numbers of objects but in research as a joint, intensive undertaking, in which the main focus is significance, relationships between people in different periods, with the goal of reaching a ‘common understanding’ in the present and the future. In his argument he once again referred to object histories as a form of microhistory: ‘It is important for us to start from something concrete, like the Indische vlag [see [provenance report NG-1977-279-15-1](#)] [...]. It is probably not the most beautiful flag but it is important to understand what it signified in the past. These are the kind of objects that we are interested in.’

Which brings us back to Carlo Ginzburg’s article ‘Clues’. Research into object histories is not only important to gain a better understanding of the objects themselves and the successive owners who looked after these objects; such microhistories also provide an opportunity to gain a detailed perspective on large histories of historical injustice.

¹⁹ The webinar is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aOF0tMOHnf4>. Notes can be found at <https://www.soas.ac.uk/cseas/events/seminars/20may2021-the-politics-of-restitution.html>.

2. Theoretical and political dimensions of provenance research

Heritage formation by definition has political dimensions and this also applies to related research such as provenance research. As historians, we were fully aware of this within the PPROCE research team and it was something we discussed from the start. These discussions resulted in the plan to use this report to examine this matter and the questions arising from it – in this chapter but also in a number of standalone essays at the end of the report. The political nature lies not only in the hierarchical thinking inherent to provenance research – is ‘origin’ the most important aspect in an object’s history? – but also in the actual commissioning of the research and in the tacit assumption that it is possible for neutral work to be delivered here.²⁰ In this chapter we will seek to further elaborate these questions and in so doing demonstrate how provenance research, as this took shape in practice within PPROCE, can provide insights into history that go beyond an object’s ‘origin’. Provenance research has the ability to break through existing frameworks and historical perceptions, and can provide an alternative to ‘heal’ past injustice, in particular by reflecting critically on the question of how history works and how power relations determine the historical narrative.²¹

Terminology and method

Although there is a great deal of interest in provenance research and its importance is stressed time and again, it would seem that the question of what exactly is meant by the term – ‘herkomstonderzoek’, ‘provenance research’, ‘recherche(s) de provenance’, ‘penelitian asal usul benda’ or ‘Provenienzforschung’ – is barely discussed in textbooks and during conferences. Take the definition of the *Getty Research Institute*, the internationally renowned centre for the study of the visual arts in Los Angeles:

What does *provenance* mean?: From the French word *provenir*, which means "to come from," provenance is the history of ownership of a valued object, such as a work of art. A full provenance provides a documented history that can help prove ownership, assign the work to a known artist, and establish the work of art's authenticity.²²

This definition encompasses the origins of this type of research: the quest for the origin, ownership history and authenticity of objects by both collectors (private individuals as well as museums) and auction houses – with the latter primarily concerned with protecting their trade. Provenance research has, in short, a long tradition and was in fact a contributing factor in the emergence of many branches of the humanities, from archaeology to art history and book history.²³

²⁰ Marieke Bloembergen, ‘Voorstel om het centrale begrip en doel van de opdracht op te rekken: van pilot provenance research naar pilot socio-political lives of objects’. (Internal discussion paper, 15 June 2021).

²¹ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the past: power and the production of history*, (Boston, Mass. 1995).

²² <https://www.getty.edu/research/tools/provenance/>. Cf. for example <https://www.meg.ch/fr/recherche-collections/decoloniser-recherche-provenance>.

²³ For a very brief history see Arthur Tompkins (ed.), *Provenance Research Today: Principles, Practice, Problems* (London: 2020) 18-24.

Provenance research has also taken on strong moral and political dimensions, in the last few decades in particular. For example, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) expects all its members to conduct this type of research before acquiring objects, 'to ensure that any object or specimen offered for purchase, gift, loan, bequest, or exchange has not been illegally obtained in, or exported from its country of origin or any intermediate country in which it might have been owned legally'. It also introduced a standard of due diligence for this: 'Due diligence should establish the full history of the item since discovery or production'.²⁴ These definitions also return, in various variations, in the discussions and documents concerning the restitution of cultural objects appropriated during the Second World War. This applies in the Netherlands as well as in other countries.²⁵

Emphasis is frequently placed on the interdisciplinary nature of provenance research, for example in the description given in the textbook *Provenance Research Today* (one of the few of its kind):

a multidisciplinary portfolio of knowledge, techniques, venues, resources and activities deployed initially by museum and collection curators, and latterly by a much wider variety of those involved with art; provenance research discerns, uncovers, describes and evaluates the history of an artwork. From a sequential narrative description of the owners of an artwork, such as might appear on a provenance statement on a gallery's wall or website, to a more nuanced investigation of the circumstances and validity of sequential transfers of a work, or the legitimacy of the movement of an antiquity [...]²⁶

While this description allows some room for interpretation ('a more nuanced investigation'), the purpose and method are couched in relatively strict and neutral or objectifying terms. The impression created is one of precision, in which very little scope is left to explore the theoretical or political aspects of the concepts and the methods of 'provenance research', to discuss and reflect on these, for example with regard to the question of changing values or changing significance.

Where research into ownership or authenticity of cultural objects linked to the Nazi period is concerned, such reflection is, however, inevitable. Key terms such as origin, ownership, transfer and legality are extremely problematic if they are not theoretically challenged. For example in the context of unequal and often violent power relations the boundaries between voluntary and forced are complicated and their interpretation by definition politically and morally charged.

This moral and political dimension also applies to the actual commissioning of provenance research like this: after all, the aim to reconstitute cultural objects from the Nazi period and repatriate objects acquired in a colonial context comes from a desire to rectify historical injustice. In short, neither the context in which the research is conducted nor the research itself is neutral. Any form of provenance research, however limited in scope, will need to relate to this.

Towards a broader approach

Provenance research is not an exact science and will therefore never produce objective and unambiguous results. Although this report sets out the development of a method for research and contains an assessment framework for the evaluation of this research, it should at the same time be

²⁴ 'ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums' (International Council of Museums 2017)

²⁵ See for example Uwe Hartmann (eds.), 'Provenance Research Manual to Identify Cultural Property Seized due to Persecution during the National Socialist Era' (German Lost Art Foundation 2020).

²⁶ Tompkins, *Provenance Research Today*, 13.

stressed that the research, given the nature of the material and the historical context, could – and should – be so much richer. After all, provenance research also describes the social, cultural and political history of the objects, and of heritage formation – histories that extend beyond the ‘simple’ question of origin.

And it is here that great unprecedented opportunities lie that go beyond repatriation or restitution; opportunities referred to by Indonesian historian Hilmar Farid in the quotation cited previously: ‘It’s not simply about the return of objects; it’s about knowledge production. It’s about rewriting of histories; it’s about dealing with past injustices.’ Provenance research as knowledge production, as the rewriting of histories, described by Farid as a joint, intensive undertaking, which is about significance, about relationships between people in the past, the present and the future. This shared quest for meanings in relation to the nature, workings and impact of historical injustice can be seen as an attempt at rectifying this injustice; these stories have the ability to contribute to a ‘decolonisation’ of museums and exhibitions.

If this approach is chosen, it opens up a different, interesting perspective in which ‘provenance’ or ‘ownership’ are not by definition the most important themes. To conduct this type of research solely in the context of the question ‘unlawfully obtained or not’ or ‘to retribute or not’ is limiting, restrictive, as it reduces the history to one of colonial suppressors versus the suppressed who have no freedom of action of their own.

More important are the socio-political lives and significance or meanings of the objects, and the different power relations within which they were ‘exchanged’ and took on a different meaning, in local, colonial, transnational and international contexts. In this view, provenance research becomes a form of socio-political history of cultural objects, and a provenance report a socio-political biography of a cultural object. The report takes the reader through the worlds travelled by the object and the changes in significance it has undergone in the process, with a sharp eye for the nature of the sources, especially where the colonial context is involved. In so doing the provenance research as conducted within PPROCE ultimately follows a form of research that has been practiced for some time – ‘the social life of things’, after the eponymous book by American anthropologist Arjun Appadurai – in the study of colonial and post-colonial heritage formation.²⁷ Clearly this approach is not only interesting but also provides fruitful leads for international cooperation in the direction envisaged by Farid.

²⁷ This approach of studying objects as if they have a (socio-political) life dates back to the groundbreaking work by Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge 1986), in particular the article ‘The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process’ by Igor Kopytoff featured therein. For application of this method to objects including (but not only) those that end up in museum collections see a.o. Samuel J.M.M. Alberti, ‘Why Collect Science?’, *Journal of Conservation and Museum Studies*, 15-1 (2017); Bloembergen and Eickhoff, *The Politics of Heritage*; Caroline Drieënhuizen and Fenneke Sysling ‘Java Man and the Politics of Natural History’, *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 177-2 (2021).

3. Methodological recommendations

1. Selection, prioritisation and demarcation

- 1.1 Individual objects within larger collections: prioritising
- 1.2 Selecting objects for PPROCE
- 1.3 Policy-related findings

2. Conducting research

- 2.1 Sources and post-colonial source criticism
- 2.2 Information in museum systems
- 2.3 Primary sources outside museum systems
 - 2.3.1 *Public archive institutions*
 - 2.3.2 *Private archives*
 - 2.3.3 *Published primary sources and source editions*
 - 2.3.4 *Online search systems*
 - 2.3.5 *Sources in other countries and countries of origin*
- 2.4 Literature research: primary and secondary sources
- 2.5 Object research
- 2.6 Approaching experts

3. Reporting

- 3.1 Parts of report
- 3.2 Reporting choices
 - 3.2.1 *Two examples*
 - 3.2.2 *Explicit or implicit question-driven research?*
 - 3.2.3 *Chronological or reverse chronological reporting?*
 - 3.2.4 *Designate or describe and contextualise?*
- 3.3 Dealing with sources and gaps in provenance history
- 3.4 Dealing with problematic words and terms
- 3.5 Images
- 3.6 Documentation and file-building

Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to the methodology of the provenance research. It is structured in the form of recommendations, drawn up by Klaas Stutje in consultation with other provenance researchers within PPROCE, listed on page 2. Based on the experiences gained during the provenance research in the context of this pilot, the chapter provides specific guidance and recommendations for provenance research: researchers can use the overview as a reference work when selecting objects to be researched, finding and interpreting sources and writing a provenance report. Users will also be acquainted with a number of methodological discussions currently ongoing in the field of colonial provenance research.

To illustrate the recommendations there are frequent references to the provenance reports written by PPROCE provenance researchers; these are freely accessible via the NIOD website. Various policy and other choices made by PPROCE are also mentioned as a source of inspiration when setting up your own projects. It is important to mention that, as a pilot, PPROCE also involved internal discussions, with insights developing as the pilot progressed. This is reflected in differences in nuance between the various reports, and in the fact that not all the reports fully meet the methodological recommendations made in this chapter.

1. Selection, prioritisation and demarcation

Provenance research takes time and the collections to be researched can be large. In this section we ask how institutions can make a reasoned selection and prioritise individual objects from larger collections. We also discuss how PPROCE arrived at its selection of items to be researched and what policy-related recommendations we can make based on the initial provenance research.

1.1 Individual objects within larger collections: prioritising

Some information is usually known about the genesis of collections, who brought them together and when they were formed. But if we are specifically interested in the origin and acquisition history of objects from a colonial context we will usually need to go beyond the collection history. Only sometimes is the genesis of collections directly linked to the history of the acquisition of individual items in a colonial context; for example the spoils of war acquired after the war against the Klungkung Regency in Bali in 1908, now in the NMVW Museum Volkenkunde, NMVW Tropenmuseum and Wereldmuseum.²⁸



Staatsiekris from Klungkung,
Collection Nationaal Museum
van Wereldculturen, Coll.no.
RV-3600-193. [zie [provenance
report RV-3600-193](#)]

²⁸ Since 2014 the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, the Afrika Museum in Berg en Dal and Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden have been part of the Stichting Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen (NMVW) foundation. In May 2017 the Wereldmuseum Rotterdam formed a collaboration partnership with the NMVW.

More often the wider collection only says something about a later period in the object's biography and nothing about the period when the object was acquired in the colony. This is for example the case with the Tillmann collection in the NMVW Tropenmuseum, put together by Georg Tillmann (1882-1941) in the Netherlands between 1931 and 1939. It can also happen – especially in museums which are not specialised in ethnology – that an object from a colonial context 'disappears' into a wider collection which is usually not related to the colonial history. An example is the trade collection of art dealer Carel van Lier, who mainly dealt in modern art and old masters alongside objects from Asia and Africa. Moreover the PPROCE pilot showed that objects from the same subcollection that had been supposed to share the same colonial origin, may in fact have a materially different provenance or acquisition history.

This means that we cannot always fall back on the genesis of collections when trying to form a picture of the provenance and acquisition history of individual objects from the former colonised world. It is a matter of making a reasoned selection of individual objects from sometimes large collections or subcollections. But how do you prioritise which objects and object groups are eligible for individual provenance research?

This is not just a practical question. As already noted in chapter 2, provenance research is not a neutral scientific practice and political factors always come into play when selecting objects. Which aspects of the socio-political biography of the object are highlighted, and which stories are told by these? And which stories are left out or missed as a result? And prior to that: which objects should be dealt with first in light of what you want to know? Ideally the prioritisation of provenance research takes place at the recommendation of or in consultation with experts and communities in countries of origin. But provenance research can also be a starting point for making contact with countries of origin. Which objects are important for whom and why? Which historical, cultural and spiritual meanings do they attach to certain items? Can the objects be an entry into approaching the colonial past in a different way? On the other hand it is essential that the current legal owners – these may not be the curating institutions themselves, for example in the case of long-term loans from private individuals or foundations – are informed of the intended research. Research that involves looking into the manner and context of acquisition in a colonial situation may raise questions for them. Moreover it is desirable to gain their cooperation because they may have information both about the object itself and the history of successive ownership transactions.

How to select and prioritise individual objects or object groups for provenance research will be different for each heritage-management institution and requires each institution to have its own strategy. Prioritisation is also linked to the purpose of the research: different objects will be of interest in the case of a reinterpretation of the institution's own collection than when answering the question as to what extent an object was ceded involuntarily in the colonial context.

In the case of smaller heritage-management institutions in particular, selection will go hand in hand with the fundamental question of which traces of the colonial past, if any, can be found in the collection.²⁹ To assist such institutions the Dutch Cultural Heritage Agency (RCE), itself a curator of collections with a colonial past, published a useful guide in September 2021, titled *Onderzoek naar*

²⁹ 'Guidelines for German Museums. Care of Collections from Colonial Contexts', prepared by the German Museum Association (DMB), includes a chapter discussing various types of museums and their colonial collections. In addition to ethnographic collections these include natural history collections, antiquities and archaeological collections, teaching collections and cabinets of curiosities, East Asian collections, history and cultural-history collections, collections of technical museums, and art collections. See: Lang, 'Guidelines for German Museums', 47-63.

*sporen van slavernij en het koloniale verleden in de collectieregistratie*³⁰ [Research into traces of slavery and the colonial past in the collection registration]. The guide encourages institutions to look at their collections with fresh eyes and to organise and ask questions of their collection registration systems in a different way. In doing so the RCE aims to increase the number of objects that are eligible for further research.

Institutions with large numbers of objects from a colonial context, on the other hand, benefit from demarcation and prioritisation of research. Sometimes priority is driven by external parties, for example in the case of an application for restitution or public debate concerning certain objects. At other times an institution will have to make its own considerations in this, preferably – as already noted above – in consultation with experts and communities in countries of origin. In 2019 the German Museum Association (DMB) published guidelines for German museums on caring for collections from colonial contexts and formulated a number of ‘starting points for a museum to set its priorities’.³¹ One suggestion was to prioritise objects associated with violent colonial contexts, such as wars of conquest and expeditions. Another possibility is to start with objects which are known to possess a certain historical, cultural or spiritual value for a country or community of origin, or with a type of object that has previously been the subject of discussion or applications for restitution. Furthermore an institution may prioritise provenance research into objects which are on display or are of special significance within its collection. The DMB also recalls the special priority that should be given to research into ancestral human remains.

The selection considerations partly determine what form the provenance research will take, and for large collections it is useful to start by drafting a project plan in which choices are made and explained.

1.2 The selection of objects for PPROCE

We researched a total of 65 objects from over 32 collection sections. So how was the selection of objects made for PPROCE? The purpose of PPROCE was to gain experience in researching many different kinds of objects. Collaboration with researchers from countries of origin – Indonesia and Sri Lanka – was also important. Half of the selection from the Dutch state collections of the Rijksmuseum and the NMVW was made by partners in Indonesia and resulted from earlier conversations with Sri Lanka. As far as the other half is concerned, we started by defining a number of focus areas, internally referred to as work packages. We wanted to research objects which are currently owned by the Dutch state and which came into Dutch hands as a result of violent colonial conflicts (such as the Banjarmasin War of 1859-1863 and the Aceh War 1873–1914), the collection policy of colonial institutes (such as the Royal Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences, the Archaeological Survey and the Ministry of the Navy) or via private collectors (such as Martine Tonnet and Georg Tillmann). The objects in these work packages were selected in cooperation with the participating museums.

³⁰ Hanna Pennock and Simone Vermaat (eds.), ‘Onderzoek naar sporen van slavernij en het koloniale verleden in de collectieregistratie. [Research into traces of slavery and the colonial past in the collection registration]. Een handreiking’ (Amersfoort, Cultural Heritage Agency (RCE) 2021).

³¹ Lang, ‘Guidelines for German Museums’, 33 and 129. See also: Larissa Förster, Iris Edenheiser and Sarah Fründt, ‘Eine Tagung zu postkolonialer Provenienzforschung, Zur Einführung’, in: Larissa Förster (a.o., eds.), *Provenienzforschung zu ethnografischen Sammlungen der Kolonialzeit: Positionen in der aktuellen Debatte* (DGSKA 2018) 19-23; and for a reflection on prioritising research within the field of research into Nazi-looted art: Nancy Yeide, Konstantin Akinsha and Amy L. Walsh, *AAM Guide to Provenance Research* (Washington D.C., 2001) 49.

Furthermore we made the selection as broad as possible and were careful not to select only high-profile objects. The selection comprises archaeological art objects, manuscripts, weapons and objects with a religious or spiritual meaning. The research encompassed famous objects such as the Banjarmasin Diamond and the Cannon of Kandy but also everyday utensils. The objects chosen were from across a range of geographies and times, with varying degrees of available prior knowledge regarding the objects' provenance. We also tried to include different methods of acquisition in the selection – from looting to purchase and donation. Finally we included four human skulls in the selection.

In principle there was no limit on the amount of time that researchers could spend on a provenance research study within PPROCE. Most naturally reached a point where they ran out of leads for further research or where further research steps would mean a significant scaling-up of the work. It should be noted at this point that the limited scope of the pilot and the circumstance of Covid-19 prevented the initiation of promising research steps in Indonesia.

With regard to the objects researched in the context of PPROCE, in most cases five to ten full working days were spent on object research and reporting. In roughly a quarter of cases between 10 and 20 full working days were required, and some reports took longer. This resulted in reports of between 2,000 and 4,000 words on average, with outliers of almost 9,000 words.

1.3 Policy-related findings

It is not easy to answer the question as to the average amount of time required for a provenance research study. The pace of the research partly depends on the prior knowledge and experience of the researcher, the availability and accessibility of sources and the requirements set for the provenance research. Some objects and (sub)collections give rise to further, large-scale research and raise more questions than they answer. Ideally provenance research will also be the starting point for permanent knowledge-sharing, for example with researchers and communities in countries of origin. In that case the pace of the research will partly be determined by them.

A few side notes should be made with regard to the average research time and word count of PPROCE reports stated above. Firstly the hours spent on a research study are in actual fact spread over several weeks, and the progress of the research is subject to frequent interruptions, for example to wait for information requests, schedule archive visits and inform and involve parties who hold information. The research also gives rise to follow-up research and the exchange of ideas with experts in countries of origin. In this sense the 'completed' research reports mainly serve as an impetus for further research.

Furthermore the amount of time spent on a research study is not directly linked to the number of words in the report. Sometimes it takes a lot of time to identify an object, or in-depth research is needed before a hypothesis can be rejected. In the words of provenance researchers Yeide, Akinsha and Walsh: 'Provenance research can be challenging and frustrating. One may spend hours, days or weeks following a trail that leads nowhere.'³² In these cases the word count does not reflect the amount of time invested.

On the other hand in some cases it may be relevant to start the research from information-rich archive documents, such as presentation letters or early inventory lists, and then trace the related

³² Yeide, Akinsha and Walsh, *AAM Guide to Provenance Research*, 141.

objects. Certainly in cases where these sources mention several objects this can reduce the amount of research time spent on each object. In any case provenance research often produces 'by-catch' of information on other objects and related collections.

Generally speaking we can identify the following points for attention when estimating time and resources:

- Objects which have been the subject of controversy and research throughout history may require more research time than objects which have enjoyed relatively long periods of anonymity. It takes time to discover and carefully assess the value of the work of earlier historians and researchers. In this sense prior knowledge can mean that the research takes longer. An example of an object whose historiography and associated sources needed to be studied is the Banjarmasin Diamond [see [provenance report NG-C-2000-3](#)], which has been the subject of regular publications since the 1980s based on more or less extensive historical research. With regard to the provenance history of the Cannon of Kandy [see [provenance report NG-NM-1015](#)] historians had put forward conflicting hypotheses which needed to be discussed, refuted or confirmed.
- Conversely a lack of prior knowledge and research leads can also mean that research takes more time. Where little or nothing is known about the type of object or the available information is set out too generically, even the first research step can take up a great deal of time. An example is the model of the market stall in the Rijksmuseum [see [provenance report NG-C-2009-134](#)], the museum documentation on which only went back as far as 2008.



Model of a Javanese Marketplace, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv.no. NG-C-2009-134. [see [provenance report NG-C-2000-3](#)]

- Objects which have frequently changed curators or owners may require more research time than objects held by a single individual or institution for a lengthier period. An example is the stone *singha* [see [provenance report TM-1772-406](#)], which changed hands three times in the Netherlands alone before being given on loan to the Indisch Instituut/Tropenmuseum, eventually its curator.
- Objects which have been renumbered and reregistered several times may take more time than objects only numbered and registered once. Renumbering campaigns frequently resulted in switches and mistakes. This was the case for example with the flags from the Bronbeek collection in the Rijksmuseum, which include the flag from South Kalimantan [see [provenance report NG-1977-279-15-1](#)].
- Where the history of an object can only be traced by researching the history of related objects, more research time may be needed. In the case of the model of the market stall in the Rijksmuseum [see [provenance report NG-2009-134](#)] it involved examining the provenance history of 21 comparable models in six institutions.
- Where objects are related to recent transactions, such as gifts or purchases, restrictions often apply due to privacy legislation. Moreover some auction houses only release their archives after 50 years. Restrictions of this type came into play during the research into the batik vest [see [provenance report TM-5663-18](#)] and the insignia of the Siliwangi division [see [provenance report TM-6092-1](#)].
- Objects acquired via well-known public figures produce more results because of the many sources available about the person. The opposite situation applies to relatively unknown individuals, such as conscripts during the war of independence. Museum registration systems often only list people by their initials and surname. In the absence of any further information it takes a lot of time to discover the person's identity. For example in the research into the ceremonial krisses from Central Java [see [provenance reports RV-360-5393](#) and [5394](#)] it took a lot of time to identify H.J. Domis as the government official Hendrik Jacob Domis.

That provenance research into objects from the former colonised world always produces a result is proven by the object reports, which have been made available to the public. In general we can say that in the vast majority of cases provenance research resulted in new or additional insights into the socio-political biography of the object. Moreover in almost half of the cases provenance research into one object produced 'by-catch' in the form of information about other objects and collections. In terms of tracing the history of objects back to specific persons, places or contexts in the country of origin the research was 'successful' in almost half of the cases. In a third of the research studies we were moreover able to say something about the manner of acquisition.

We should note in this regard that PPROCE used experienced provenance researchers and researched objects from museums that have extensive experience and capacity in terms of conducting provenance research.

2. Conducting research

A provenance researcher charged with researching an object seldom starts with no prior knowledge. Sometimes the preliminary research which led to the decision to study certain objects in greater detail comes with sources and partly determines the strategy and focal points of the research. Even so it is useful to take a systematic look at possible research steps.

2.2 Museum systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Digital collection registration systems• Analogue systems<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inventory cards• Inventory books• Acquisition logs• Registration logs• Annual reports• Collection catalogues• Object files• Restoration reports• Photo archives• Exhibition catalogues• Correspondence archives
2.3 Primary sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Public archive institutions• Private archives• Published primary sources and source publications• Online search systems• Sources in other countries/countries of origin
2.4 Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recent literature• Contemporary European literature• Contemporary literature from countries of origin
2.5 Object research	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identification of the object and verification of the basic details• Provenance information on the actual object• Analysis of style• Purpose of manufacture
2.6 Experts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Knowledge and memories within the curating institution• National and international expertise• Expertise in the countries of origin

2.1 Sources and postcolonial source criticism

Looking for primary sources and engaging in source criticism are key aspects of the historical métier. An important principle is that a source should not only say something about what happened but also and especially about the perspective of whoever produced the source. As such, source criticism is crucial to historical research. This applies to an even greater degree to research into aspects of the history of colonialism and imperialism. Decades of postcolonial theory formation on dealing with sources have pointed to the inherently colonial origin and nature of most 'traditional' sources and archives.³³ These were produced for a certain purpose and kept by colonial governments, institutions, companies and individuals. Historians who base themselves uncritically on these sources therefore risk reproducing colonial power relations.

In the case of old ethnographic collections it is good to remember that the tradition of collecting, categorising and exhibiting heritage from the colonised world lay at the very heart of the colonial project itself. The objects being researched and the sources held in related archives and libraries are not just testimonies ('clues' in Ginzburg's words³⁴) from a colonial period; they themselves were tools in recording (Ginzburg: 'codifying'), analysing, demonstrating and ultimately dominating people and regions under colonial rule. Just as important as the question of the provenance of a particular object are the questions of where the knowledge about that object came from, how that knowledge was related to colonial discourses and whether any possible alternative sources and meanings in relation to the object can be discovered.

A key task arising from postcolonial theory formation is to deal consciously with the multiple perspectives on the past and create room for manifold interpretations of these. It is therefore important that the selection of objects, the search for and interpretation of sources, and the reporting of the provenance research is conducted in consultation with experts and communities in countries of origin as much as possible.

2.2 Information in museum systems

Where provenance research into objects in museum collections is concerned, a search for sources will usually start with consulting digital collection registration systems.³⁵ As well as listing all objects and their basic details, such digital systems enable museums to add various types of information to an object record. This may be information the museum needs for the current curation of the object, such as where it is stored or displayed, restoration reports and any legal documents. Advanced systems will also include scans and details of historical documentation and link to related objects and

³³ Postcolonial theorists have taken different approaches to this problem of sources. An example is the 'Subaltern Studies Group' which deepened the criticism and stated that sources and discourses produced by local elites and anti-colonial politicians are also coloured by the colonial and 'elitist' perspective. 'Can the subaltern speak?' is a question raised by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in an eponymous and notorious article. Edward Said and Ann Laura Stoler, on the other side, made the Western concept of 'the Orient' and its 'epistemic anxieties' a study subject in its own right. Others again went in search of alternative sources and knowledge systems, for example in Asian handwritings and manuscripts, material culture and oral traditions. For a general introduction to postcolonial theory formation see Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism. An Historical Introduction* (Malden 2001). For the literature referred to see, respectively: Ranajit Guha, 'On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India', in: *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982) 1-7; G.C. Spivak, 'Can the subaltern speak?', in: Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds.), *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: a Reader* (Hertfordshire 1994) 94-104; Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York 1978); Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton 2009); Peter R. Schmidt, *Historical Archaeology in Africa: Representation, Social Memory, and Oral Traditions* (Lanham 2006).

³⁴ Ginzburg, 'Clues', 158.

³⁵ On research in collection registration systems see also Yeide, Akinsha and Walsh, *AAM Guide to Provenance Research*, 15-16.

details. In this way collection registration systems can be used to trace digital and (scanned) analogue inventory cards, as well as other documentation such as annual reports and acquisition logs.

More than just a portal for old and new information, to the provenance researcher a collection registration system is the starting point for mapping an institution's documentation landscape. Not all historical registration systems are linked to the digital system. It is advisable to seek cooperation with the managing conservators, information specialists or archive staff. Each institution has its own collection registration system which moreover is often subject to rapid change, with systems being linked and new information added. The experts may be able to provide an insight into which historical registration systems have and have not been included in the digital systems. This certainly may apply in the case of museum collections which have been taken over or have merged or changed ownership over the decades. Also be aware that several versions of a historical document (e.g. an inventory card or book) may have circulated in various departments of an institution (e.g. the depot and the administration), with only one having been scanned and saved. In that case any information which a conservator may have written in the margin of the unscanned document will not be apparent.

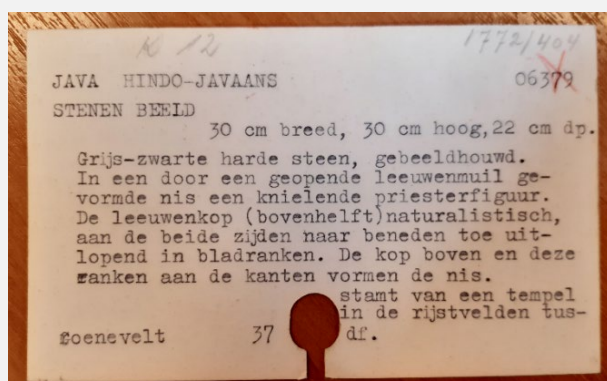
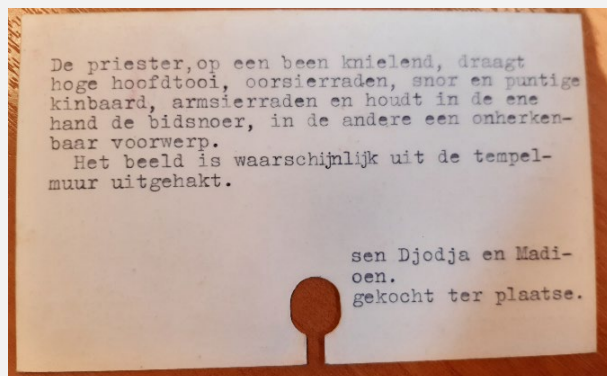
Sources for finding relevant information about objects and collections within the museum domain include inventory cards, inventory books, acquisition and registration logs, annual reports, collection catalogues, object files, restoration reports and photo archives. Finally it is advisable to not just search digital and analogue registration systems for information about the object itself but to also look for information gathered in connection with exhibitions, compendia or relocations involving the object. Sometimes correspondence archives contain correspondence with the person who donated or sold the object. Even if the correspondence does not reveal anything about the object itself it can provide the researcher with a large amount of contextual information.

On the whole, collection registration systems contain no detailed provenance information, or else this is limited to just a few short repeating phrases. The vast majority of 'ethnographica' were acquired at a time and in a context when collectors were more interested in ethnographic and typological aspects, sometimes with an artistic notion of 'primitive art', than in the manner of acquisition of the object and its immediate prior history. We see this reflected in museum sources. There are exceptions where collectors did record information about the provenance of an object but they, too, were often lacking in detail.

An example of a collector who did keep information about the provenance of objects he curated was Georg Tillmann (1882-1941) [see [provenance report](#) TM-1772-406]. Tillmann was a German-Jewish banker and art collector who fled to Amsterdam in 1931 to escape antisemitism. In the Netherlands he continued his activities as a collector and became interested in ethnographica and antiquities, especially from the Dutch East Indies. He amassed a significant collection of objects, mainly textiles but also krisses, jewellery and Hindu-Buddhist antiquities. In November 1939 Georg Tillmann gave his entire collection on loan to the Colonial Institute (now NMVW Tropenmuseum), while he himself fled the Nazis. He died of an illness in the United States in 1941. His collection of more than 2,000 items was packed up in boxes and stored inconspicuously among the museum collection, surviving the occupation unscathed. As can be seen in the picture Tillmann maintained a professional collection registration. He regularly noted on his object cards how the object had been acquired in the Dutch East Indies. Art collector and expert on batik textiles Harmen Veldhuisen (1943-2020) also kept professional records, but as is the case with Tillmann the information is second-hand and after research was found to contain errors [see TM-5663-18]. The most detailed records were kept by Willem Stammeshaus (1881-1957), a colonial government official in Aceh who amassed a sizeable collection. He collected in situ and wrote down the names of those who offered the objects to him, adding personal backgrounds about them, and often also the manner of acquisition [see [provenance report](#) TM-674-722]. Tillmann, Veldhuisen and Stammeshaus provided valuable leads for further research, but in general such records by collectors are rare and provide a low level of detail.



Tillmann's collection registration, including some provenance information. Author's photographs.



2.3 Primary sources other than museum systems

Sources can also be found beyond the walls of heritage-management institutions. They may be found in a wide range of different places, which will vary depending on the object.³⁶ It is difficult to formulate generally applicable recommendations and the researcher must rely on their creativity and detection skills. An obvious move is to in any case consult the archives of all the institutions and individuals who have owned or curated the object over the course of the years. Archives related to the individual or institutional collector and to the region and period of acquisition are also of interest.

Primary sources can be found in many different places. For the research into the *wayang beber* scrolls in the NMVW Museum Volkenkunde we consulted Museum Volkenkunde's own archive; the archive of the Rijksmuseum in the North Holland Archives in Haarlem, and in particular the archive of the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities; the archive of the National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden; and the National Archives of the Netherlands in The Hague for information about the Dutch *resident* who sent the scrolls to the Netherlands [see [provenance report](#) RV-360-5255 to -5257].

In the following overview we distinguish between sources in public institutions and private archives and online search systems, and also take a brief look at where sources may be found in other countries, including countries of origin.

2.3.1 Public archive institutions

Some heritage institutions have deposited their archives in public archive institutions – such as the North Holland Archives, where the archives of the Rijksmuseum and the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities can be consulted, and the Amsterdam City Archive, which houses the archives of the Artis Ethnographic Museum. The archives of the NMVW Tropenmuseum and NMVW Museum Volkenkunde are mainly housed in the National Archives of the Netherlands (NA). Bear in mind that, as well as these deposited archives, museums often also still keep archive material at the institution itself. Businesses, auction houses and families may also have transferred their archive to a professional archive institution over the years. Characteristic of such archives is that they are often deposited in the archive institutions of the municipality or province where the person or organisation was active. Many Dutch colonial dignitaries transferred their personal archive to the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV), whose archive is now held in the Leiden University Library. Archives are usually free to search, certainly if they date from before the Second World War, although some archives are subject to disclosure restrictions. This is usually stated in the archive description.

Government archives which are more than 75 years old are in principle publicly accessible. After 20 years ministries and other government institutions transfer their archives to an archive institution, such as the National Archives (NA) in The Hague or one of the provincial or municipal archive institutions.³⁷ Most of these can be viewed and used directly but where the content may be damaging to the privacy and interests of persons still living or where the national interest is at stake,

³⁶ Cf. Marie Stolberg and Andrea Lehmann, 'Best-Practice Guidelines, Research Methods and Tools', in: Tompkins, *Provenance Research Today*, 58-66.

³⁷ In November 2021 a bill was proposed to modernise the Dutch Public Records act of 1995. The intention is that from 2023 government institutions will hand over their archive after just 10 years. As things stand the legislation is expected to come into force in the summer of 2022 or January 2023.

disclosure restrictions may be extended for a number of years, up to a maximum of 75. If an object was acquired in the recent past such disclosure restrictions can seriously hamper the research.

For the research into the insignia of the Siliwangi division [see provenance report TM-6092-1] we were trying to find out where the Dutch veteran who gifted the insignia to the Tropenmuseum in 2003 had been stationed. However the Ministry of Defence, which keeps the military records of all service personnel, requires a death certificate. In the Netherlands death certificates are made public 50 years after the death.

Of interest to research into objects acquired in the colonial era are the various archives of the Ministry of Colonies and of the Ministries of War and the Navy, which were subsumed into the Ministry of Defence in 1928, all of which have been transferred to the NA. Large sections of the archive of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) are also housed here, including the personal archives of governors and local records of trading posts. These are substantial and arbitrary archives, which can be difficult to search. Significant parts of these archives have now been digitalised. The NA has also published research guides and manuals which greatly facilitate searching.³⁸ These archives can be used for example to search the service records of colonial government officials, naval personnel and soldiers of the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army (KNIL) and to find out what actions and donations led to collectors being awarded honours and distinctions. Information about military operations and political tensions during which objects were seized can often be found in the notes verbales archives of the Ministry of Colonies.

The report on the flag of South Kalimantan [see provenance report NG-1977-279-15-1] illustrates just how many government archives sometimes need to be consulted. In the archives of the Ministry of Colonies (Verbales archive 2.10.02) we found reports of military operations around the *benteng* at Ramonia where the flag was captured in 1861. In the military records of the Ministry of War (military records of officers 2.13.04) we found the service record of Christoffel Fredrik Koch and other soldiers involved. In the archive of the Chancellery of the Royal Dutch Orders (2.02.32) we found reports of military operations for which soldiers were awarded the Military Order of William, including the capture of the aforementioned *benteng*.

2.3.2 Private archives

Museums, church organisations, art dealers, auction houses and art collecting societies often own private archives. It is up to these institutions to decide whether they want to open up their archive for research. Naturally the same applies to archives still owned by families. Many servicemen and colonial government officials kept diaries, memoirs and correspondence. Moreover experience shows that sections of institutional archives have a tendency to 'migrate' and for example end up in the private archive of a former director. For this reason it is definitely worthwhile to approach private institutions and families. It is important to explain clearly in what context the research is taking place and for what purpose. It can take patience and the building of trust before people are prepared to cooperate with such research. It is also advisable to make publication agreements with regard to the research and to omit any sensitive private information from the report.

³⁸ See <https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/zoekhulpen>.

Examples of objects in connection with which private archives were consulted with the cooperation of the families are the objects from the collection of Martine Tonnet (1866-1919) [see provenance reports RV-1994-10; TM-H-350A&B; TM-H-2285]. The private archives were used to map the biography and collection practices in Java. Another example is the research into the jacket of Teuku Umar [see provenance report TM-674-722] for which memoirs from the family archive of Friedrich Wilhelm (Willem) Stammeshaus (1881-1957) were used.

2.3.3 Published primary sources and source editions

Published primary sources are also important for researching colonial collections and include for example books containing reports on acts of war, lists of war decorations and personal memoirs of servicemen and government officials. Travel journals and missionaries' stories were in great demand in the popular press from the 19th century. These sources tend to be highly coloured and limited in perspective and were geared to the wishes and expectations of a European readership. Nevertheless they often describe military actions, journeys and expeditions during which objects were taken, and may yield names of people and places and archive clues.



Those conducting research into the Banjarmasin Diamond [see NG-C-2000-3], the war in Banjarmasin (1859-1863) or the forced abdication of Sultan Tamdjidillah can for example consult sources such as a travel report from 1836 by Salomon Müller, published memoirs of soldiers such as Jean M.C.E. Le Rütte from 1865, an early overview by Van Rees from 1865, and later source editions of court martial verdicts and Royal Mentions in Dispatches from 1865 and 1939.³⁹

Banjarmasin Diamond, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv.no. NG-C-2000-3.
[see [provenance report](#) NG-C-2000-3]

2.3.4 Online search systems

Many of the published primary sources mentioned above have been made available in recent years via various publicly accessible historical datasets and search systems.⁴⁰ The website <https://www.delpher.nl/>, developed and managed by the Royal Library of the Netherlands, enables historical Dutch newspapers, books, magazines and radio bulletins to be searched online. Delpher also includes Dutch-language newspapers from the former colonies, which has made it easier to find

³⁹ Salomon Müller, *Verhandelingen over de natuurlijke geschiedenis der Nederlandsche overzeesche bezittingen* (Leiden 1837-1844); J.M.C.E. Le Rütte, *Expeditie tegen de versterking van Pangeran Antasarie* (Leiden 1863); W.A. Van Rees, *De Bandjermasinsche Krijg van 1859-1863*, deel I (Arnhem 1865); *Verzameling der Merkwaardigste Vonnissen gewezen door de krijgsraad te velde in de zuid- en oosterafdeeling van Borneo gedurende de jaren 1859-1864* (Batavia 1865); *Moed, Beleid en Trouw, Verzameling van Dagorders, van 1818 t/m heden* (Batavia 1939).

⁴⁰ For a reflection on how the discipline of provenance research has changed under the influence of developments and new possibilities in digital research, see Jason Sousa and Ariane Moser, 'Data and Databases in Provenance Research', and Louisa Wood Ruby, 'Provenance Research in a Digital Age', in: Tompkins, *Provenance Research Today*, 85-96 and 97-104.

out information about private individuals, maritime passengers and specific events. Substantial donations sometimes received a mention in the papers and military operations were also reported on. Dutch-language publications dating from before 1900, including catalogues and annual reports for example of the Royal Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences can be downloaded via <https://books.google.nl/>. Various image databases have been set up by institutions that manage photographic images, such as the image database of the KITLV (<https://digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl/imagecollection-kitlv>) and image material in the public collection databases of the NMVW (<https://collection.wereldculturen.nl/>) and the Rijksmuseum (<https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/nl/rijksstudio>). These may include photographs of interiors, photos of excavations, museum displays or paintings which enable objects to be identified.

Newspaper database Delpher turned out to be vital in tracing very early mentions of the Banjarmasin Diamond [see [provenance report](#) NG-C-2000-3]. Moreover the journeys of the ceremonial clothing of Sultan Hamengkubuwono IV of Yogyakarta and the kris of the Sultan of Madura could be traced by using Delpher to check the shipping news [see [provenance reports](#) RV-360-1475 and 1481(a), and RV-360-8080]. For the report on the gravestone from the *kraton* of the Sultan of Aceh [see [provenance report](#) RV-179-1] extensive use was made of early colonial photographs from the collections of the NMVW and KITLV. Conversely photographs of Teuku Umar in the collection of the KITLV cast doubt on the attribution of his jacket [see [provenance report](#) TM-674-722].



On the left: Studio portrait of Teuku Umar, Aceh, c. 1890(?). Collection Leiden University Library, inv. no. KITLV 408104 <http://hdl.handle.net/1887.1/item:843341>.

On the right: Jacket of Teuku Umar, Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen. Coll.no. TM-674-722 [see [provenance report](#) TM-674-722]

When using online sources and databases we should be aware that, despite their aura of permanence and completeness, in practice they are relatively fluid and are constantly being added to, updated and cleaned up. A search that produces no results today may result in hits tomorrow if new information, titles and scans are added to the database. It is also good to be aware that online information, such as object details in public collection databases, is regularly modified without the author being notified.

2.3.5 Sources in other countries and countries of origin

In many respects the collection of material culture in colonised regions for Dutch collections was part of a global history of imperialism which involved people from many continents. A few examples: Swiss soldiers fought with the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army (KNIL) and took objects back to Switzerland. From 1811 to 1816 the British colonised the Indonesian Archipelago during which time they looted the palace of the Sultan of Yogyakarta, after which many objects disappeared to the United Kingdom. Dutch collectors sent objects to museums in Paris and were active in Japan out of Batavia. Dutch museums exchanged objects with museums in Italy and the United States. Traditional matchlock guns from Borneo were improved in Singapore with British flintlocks, before being used by Acehnese fighters and captured by the Dutch. The result of such transnational and cross-imperial contacts was that not only objects but also sources related to them can be found in each of these countries. As is the case in the Netherlands, the sources where information may be found are diverse and differ depending on the object and the country. Two categories of sources deserve separate attention.

Firstly many archives of the Dutch colonial administration are to be found in formerly colonised areas. For example the National Archives of Indonesia (Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia, ANRI) in Jakarta manages a substantial part of the archive of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and of the General Secretariat of the Governor-General, as well as various *residentie* archives. Because the VOC also used Batavia as a base from which it ruled over what is now Sri Lanka as well as trading posts in China and Japan the archive in Jakarta also contains sources concerning these regions. Of especial importance is the archive of the Royal Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences (whose museum was a colonial predecessor of the present-day Museum Nasional in Jakarta), which is held in the ANRI. Other examples of Dutch colonial sources in other countries include VOC archives in the Western Cape Archives and Records Service in Cape Town and the Sri Lankan National Archives, as well as the government archives in the National Archives of Suriname. Those wishing to know more about VOC archives around the world can consult the results of the TANAP ('Towards a New Age of Partnership') project, completed in 2007, whose aim was to combine VOC archive descriptions and inventories in various countries and make them searchable (<http://www.tanap.net/>).

In addition to archives related to the colonial government apparatus, archives and libraries were also formed by local aristocracies and principalities which were involved in heritage and heritage management. In Indonesia we have for example Arsip Mangkunegaran and Perpustakaan Rekso Pustoko in Surakarta, and Arsip Pakualaman in Yogyakarta, which contain information on specific archaeological sites. To obtain a picture of the impact of colonial intrusion on local communities it may also be worth examining local literary traditions. In the Indonesian context we can for example mention the *Syair Perang Wangkang*, a Banjarese poem describing an episode of the colonial war waged by the Dutch on the Sultanate of Banjarmasin [see [provenance report](#) NG-1977-279-15-1].⁴¹ Also of interest are the chronical written by Pangeran Arya Panular about the fall of the palace of the

⁴¹ Haji Sulaiman, *Syair perang Wangkang*, transl. Putri Minerva Mutiara (Jakarta 1979).

Sultan of Yogyakarta in 1812, reissued by Peter Carey [see [provenance reports](#) RV-360-5393 and 5394], and the *Culavamsa* which gives an account of the looting of the palace of Kandy in Sri Lanka in 1765 [see [provenance report](#) NG-NM-1015].⁴² Many of these writings have been reworked by European and local philologists and in some cases translated into European languages, and can therefore be consulted elsewhere (see also the next section). Although these books sometimes describe specific cases of looting and theft, linking the objects described to objects in present-day heritage collections is complicated. Sources such as this are mainly useful for providing an essential context of the period during which an object was acquired.

2.4 Literature research: primary and secondary sources

As well as research in primary sources it is important to search the secondary literature for the object and the collection to which it belongs. Particularly in the case of high-profile objects and collections, such as the 'Lombok Treasure', there may be multiple publications, including from countries of origin.⁴³ Some of these examine the acquisition history. Objects may also appear in compendia on art historical styles or typological categories to which the object is considered to belong. While provenance history is not the main focus of such compendia they can still be used to track down new sources and literature.

With the historiography on specific objects tending to be limited the researcher will soon come across literature written in the colonial period itself. Conservators and ethnographers of the 19th and early 20th centuries sometimes wrote lengthy treatises on the typology and cultural origin of specific objects and collections. In line with the thinking of the era such ethnographers were not concerned with the immediate prior history of the objects themselves but mainly with the question of which cultural group, style or period the objects could be considered to belong to. On the one hand their findings can provide interesting leads for the researcher with regard to an object's regional and cultural origin. On the other hand there is a risk of the researcher becoming entangled in confusion about the originality of knowledge. Does this contemporary literature say something about the nature of the studied object, or was the object itself – in the absence of comparable objects – the source and foundation of the contemporary literature?

A good example of confusion about the originality of knowledge is the literature produced from the turn of the last century in regard to the *wayang beber* tradition in Java. Based on the two ancient *wayang beber* sets known at the time in the villages of Gedompol (Pacitan, East Java) and Gelaran (Wonosari, Special Region of Yogyakarta), Dutch authors such as Sicco Roorda (1897), Godard Hazewé (1902), Hendrik Kern (1909) and Gerrit Pieter Rouffaer (1918) attempted to reconstruct and generalise the form and history of this dying tradition. When researching the *wayang beber* set in NMVW Museum Volkenkunde [see [provenance reports](#) RV-360-5255 to -5257] the researcher is soon tempted to use this literature to situate the NMVW set in the broader tradition of *wayang beber*. But what looks like knowledge on *wayang beber* in general is in fact a generalisation of the interpretation of just two particular sets.

⁴² Pangeran Arya Panular, 'Babad Bědhah ing Ngayogyakarta', in: Peter Carey, *The British in Java, 1811-1816: a Javanese account: a text edition* (Oxford 1992); Wilhelm Geiger and C. Mabel Rickmers (transl.), *Culavamsa, Being the More Recent Part of the Mahavamsa II* (Oxford 1930).

⁴³ With regard to the 'Lombok Treasure' see for example Wahyu Ernawati, 'The Lombok Treasure', in: Endang Sri Hardiati and Pieter ter Keurs (eds.), *Indonesia: the Discovery of the Past* (Amsterdam 2006) 146-159; Moh. Ali, *Surat-surat perdjandjian antara kerajaan-kerajaan Bali/Lombok dengan pemerintah Hindia Belanda, 1841-1938* (Jakarta 1964).

In a similar way we can ask ourselves whether the contemporary literature should not itself be considered a primary source that provides us with an insight into the European scientific practices and approach to cultural heritage of the time.⁴⁴ However this ambiguity of contemporary literature should not result in us dismissing it altogether. These researchers were often the first to describe an object and their findings were subsequently included in the object descriptions which can be found in the museum registration systems today. Looked at in this way, the study of contemporary literature is an important part of the reconstruction and consideration of provenance attributions.



Stone *singha*, Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen.
Coll.no. TM-1772-406.
[see [provenance report](#) TM-1772-406]

An example is the stone statue of a lion, or *singha*, from the Tillmann collection [see [provenance report](#) TM-1772-406]. The *singha*, which was in the possession of the Royal Asian Art Society in the Netherlands from 1923 to 1936, was at one time cut out from the gaping jaws of a mythological sea-creature, or *makara*. Our research was unable to ascertain how the Royal Asian Art Society in the Netherlands acquired the *singha* but it is highly likely that the interest in collecting such *singha* was connected to the value attributed to *makara* by Dutch archaeologists such as Theo van Erp (1874-1958) and Frederik David Kan Bosch (1887-1967). They were considered to be one of the architectural details which distinguished Hindu-Buddhist structures of Java from Hindu-Buddhist structures in South Asia and continental Southeast Asia. Moreover, according to the interpretation of these archaeologists, *makara* were specific to the early classical period in Java and were almost completely absent from later Hindu-Buddhist structures in Java. This literature tells us less about the *singha* itself than about why such *singha* were collected.

Another category of contemporary literature concerns literary traditions in regions of origin, which we already discussed briefly above. These writings also have multiple meanings: they can simultaneously be considered as secondary literature about the history, a primary historical source, and objects in their own right. A significant number of these manuscripts, insofar as they are accessible to the average researcher, are held in universities, museums and libraries. Often they ended up there at the same time and via the same channels as ethnographic collections. Dutch linguists and philologists such as Herman Neubronner van der Tuuk (1824-1894) and Hendrik Kern (1833-1917), who worked on translating and editing Asian texts, were rooted in the same colonial scientific tradition as the conservators and collectors of non-literary objects. Partly as a result of this the Asian Library of the Leiden University Library holds, according to its own claims, the largest collection in the world on Indonesia and important collections on South and Southeast Asia, China,

⁴⁴ It should be noted in this context that non-European researchers were also active in this scientific practice, such as philologist, historian and legal expert Hoesein Djajadiningrat (1886-1960) from Java and epigrapher and archaeologist Don Martino de Zilva Wickremasinghe (1865-1937). See for example the research conducted by the latter in 1898 into inscriptions on the Cannon of Kandy [see [provenance report](#) NG-NM-1015].

Japan and Korea. Such texts are interesting both for what can be read in them and for the collection history of manuscripts themselves as well as their ability to provide an insight into the local perception of European collection practices.

2.5 Object research

Another standard part of the search for information about an object is a detailed study of the object itself.⁴⁵ This requires seeking cooperation with the curating institution.

An initial goal of object research is to identify the object and verify the basic details in the collection registration system. Usually this is a routine process but it can happen that the basic information does not match the external characteristics of the object. This may be due to carelessness on the part of a conservator or registrar, but we should also be alert to switches and incorrect attributions in the past. Registration systems were not always in good order, and information may have been lost and added as a collection changes. Sometimes, as happened with the reclassification of the collection of the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities in 1879 by David van der Kellen (1827-1895), a conservator would fill in 'gaps' in the inventory list with similar objects without registration. Other objects were lost in the depots or even stolen. There is no certainty that an object that was registered during the colonial period is actually still present or can be located. Conversely the opposite may occur: it can happen that objects which are missing according to the current registration system come to light again during the provenance research.

An example of a research study where the verification of basic details led to problems was the musket [see [provenance report](#) RV-360-5859]. The dimensions of this musket were different from the dimensions stated on a sales list dating from 1836 and in a Royal Cabinet of Curiosities catalogue of 1879. It was also a different type of gun from the one described. As can be read in the report this discrepancy is probably the result of a switch, probably not long after the item was transferred to the Rijks Ethnographisch Museum (National Museum of Ethnology) in 1883. The gun that was acquired in 1836 could not be located and the provenance of the gun that is currently registered under number RV-360-5859 remains unknown.

An example of lost objects which were found as a result of provenance research can be read in the report about the gravestone from Aceh [see [provenance report](#) RV-3600-594]. It belongs to a series of eight gravestones from this region (see [provenance reports](#) RV-3600-589 to 596) in the collection of the NMVW Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden. During the research it was discovered that the eight gravestones in the depot were incorrectly labelled, as a result of which the object photos in the collection registration system had also been switched around. In addition two of the eight gravestones, which had been registered as missing, were discovered under different object numbers (RV-03-394 and RV-03-395).

The second reason for researching objects themselves is the information associated with them. What are the dimensions of the object and to what extent do these match the dimensions as stated in the

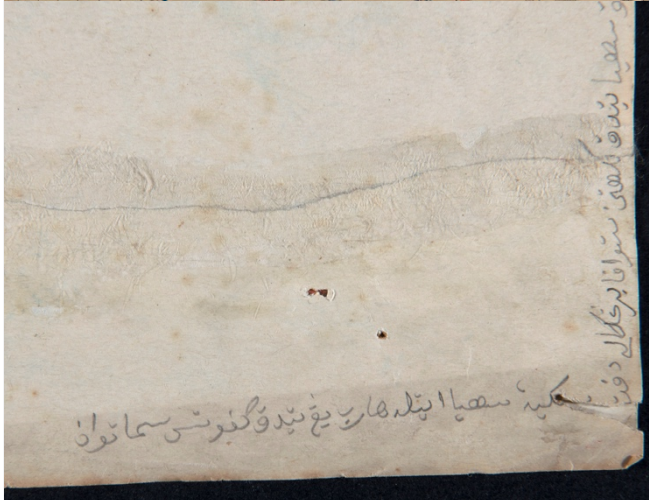
⁴⁵ Cf. Stolberg and Lehmann, 'Best-Practice Guidelines', 55-56; Yeide, Akinsha and Walsh, *AAM Guide to Provenance Research*, 11-15.

sources and registration systems? What material, what manufacturing techniques and what colours were used, and does this say something about where or when the object was made? Are there any traces of usage such as traces of combat action, transport or day-to-day use, and do these provide any indications of the history and authenticity of the object? Are any texts or signs inscribed on the object? Do they bear any markings, registration numbers, tags or labels from earlier collection registrations?



Drawing of mythical bird and notes on the back, Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen. Coll.no. RV-1429-134.

[see [provenance report](#) RV-1429-134/134a]



The pencilled notes on the back of the drawings by Teungku Teungoh can serve as an example here. They confirmed not only the name of the artist but also the circumstances in which the drawings were made. It is clear from the notes that when Teungku Teungoh made them he was being held prisoner and that he appealed to the local civil governor Theo Veltman for some favours [see [provenance report](#) RV-1429-134/134a].

Sometimes restoration reports contain information about traces of usage and the use of material but for many objects basic information is lacking. Some of the questions above require the use of advanced analysis techniques and the involvement of specific experts and conservators. When using advanced technologies such as CT scans, DNA analysis or invasive techniques be aware that there may be resistance to this among communities of origin, particularly where culturally sensitive objects or ancestral remains are concerned.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Lang, 'Guidelines for German Museums', 127; Dorothea Deterts (ed.), 'Recommendations for the Care of Human Remains in Museums and Collections' (German Museums Association 2013) 54, 56.

Additional research techniques were for example used in researching the Cannon of Kandy. At first the earliest descriptions of the cannon in the sources seemed to not completely match the cannon in the Rijksmuseum. One specific source from 1765 states that the cannon is inlaid with silver, while the cannon in the Rijksmuseum is made of gilded bronze, with silver decorations and precious stones. However, the source also states that the cannon weighed 90 pounds, and that proved to be an exact match [see [provenance report NG-NM-1015](#)]. Contemporary sources also initially caused confusion in the case of the *wayang beber* scrolls, with the Dutch professor of Language, Regional Geography and Ethnology Gz.J. (Jan) Pijnappel claiming in 1851 that the scrolls were recent creations which '*met de wajang bebèr wel niets te maken zullen hebben*' [likely have nothing to do with the *wayang beber*]. However a recent carbon dating test performed by Saiful Bakhri, Isamu Sakamoto and Muhammad Nurul Fajri refuted Pijnappel's doubts and showed that the scrolls were in fact created between 1633 and 1669.⁴⁷ [see [provenance reports RV-360-5255 to -5257](#)]

It can be useful to study the object in conjunction with other and comparable objects, within or outside the same (sub)collection. Are there any objects of a similar size, which could have resulted in a switch? When were markings applied and by whom? Which other objects has the object been stored with in the past? Such comparisons can provide additional information about the history of the object being studied.

Thirdly, object research can lead to an additional analysis of the style, age and regional or cultural origin of an object. Sometimes the researcher can build on previous style analyses carried out by conservators and art historians to trace the creation of an object to a certain region or period; in other cases it may be necessary to involve experts in the research. However it is important to note that object research in the context of provenance history is materially different from an art historical or ethnographic analysis of cultural or regional origin. Some objects have a layered and hybrid manufacturing history: they were created, composed, modified and embellished at various times and in several cultural styles. In addition the place, period or cultural context of manufacture says nothing about possible displacements in the object's subsequent existence and hence about where it was acquired by a collector. An object made in the cultural style of one region may be related to a history of acquisition in a different region or period. An art historical style analysis is therefore only one part of an object's broader provenance history.

⁴⁷ Saiful Bakhri, Isamu Sakamoto and Muhammad Nurul Fajri, 'Collaborative Efforts to Preserve Wayang Beber in Indonesia', conference paper 7 December 2018 symposium 'Recent Advances in Barkcloth Conservation and Technical Analysis', Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, United Kingdom.



Cannon of Kandy, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam,
inv.no. NG-NM-1015.
[See [provenance report](#) NG-NM-1015]

The Cannon of Kandy is an example of an object with a hybrid creation history. The cannon was probably cast in the 17th century in the Dutch Republic or in Batavia before ending up in Kandy, Sri Lanka, where it was embellished with lavish decoration, and finally sent to the Republic as spoils of war in 1765. The accompanying gun carriage is made of tropical wood which would suggest that it was made in Asia, but the decoration, which thematically matches the decoration on the cannon, is clearly European and may not have been added until after its arrival in the Republic [see [provenance report](#) NG-NM-1015].

The dagger donated to the Rijks Ethnographisch Museum (National Museum of Ethnology) in 1890 by Willem G.A.C. Christan, a captain in the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army, clearly shows that the region of manufacture does not by definition match the region of acquisition: the dagger is a *badik raja*, considered to be a traditional weapon of the Makassar and Buginese cultures on South Sulawesi, while Christan acquired it in South Kalimantan [see [provenance report](#) RV-761-105].

Finally, object research, in conjunction with a style analysis and analysis of material and traces of usage, can say something about the purpose of manufacture. Sometimes local communities actively responded to collectors' interest in a certain type of object.⁴⁸ In some cases objects were made to order and were part of a souvenir market. In other cases colonial collectors were not aware of the fact that communities were responding to their demand and wrongly believed that they had acquired an 'authentic' object. Object research can help answer the question of whether an object was indeed used for its presumed purpose or was perhaps a non-functional model.⁴⁹ In this context it is relevant to note that this latter tradition of object research, aimed at assessing authenticity, has long been common practice in the art history world. Authenticity was an important part of determining an object's value and whether it is 'genuine'. In the object research proposed by us 'authenticity' does not so much say something about the value of an object, but primarily something about its socio-political function.

⁴⁸ Pieter ter Keurs, 'Collecting in the Colony', *Indonesia and the Malay World* 37-108 (2009) 147-161, 148.

⁴⁹ Lang, 'Guidelines for German Museums', 92.

In all cases it is important that the researcher obtains prior information about any culturally determined rules and regulations with regard to approaching, handling and portraying an object. It goes without saying that this applies specifically to 'objects' with a known religious and spiritual function and to objects with an important historical significance. But also with regards to 'objects' which have lost their meaning for curators and researchers we have to keep in mind that they may still retain a spiritual or animate meaning for communities of origin. Caution is vitally important when researching ancestral remains, and it is advisable to engage with communities and ethical experts.⁵⁰ Furthermore it is essential that object research is only conducted in the presence of an employee of the curating institution. Besides providing substantive input this person must also take the necessary precautionary measures to ensure the objects are handled with due care.

2.6 Approaching experts

The search for information also involves approaching experts. Firstly these are employees of the heritage management institutions themselves, who in many cases have unrecorded memories and forms of knowledge about the collections they curate. In addition there are many formal and informal cross-border networks of people who have specialised in a certain type of object and can sometimes provide detailed information based on external object characteristics. It is impossible to state in general terms when someone should be considered an 'expert'. Sometimes the expertise will be apparent from a position at a renowned institution or from relevant publications, but dealers, collectors and 'amateurs' may also have detailed knowledge about certain specific objects.

It is essential to actively seek out expertise in the countries of origin. One way of doing this is via experts in the Netherlands who already have contacts on the ground. In the case of local communities in particular it is good to be aware that expertise is not always enshrined in scientific institutions but can also be found among descendants, craftspeople, artists, cultural activists and other groups. They can provide information about the external forms, function, spiritual value and local particularity of objects, and help sort out wrongly spelled or mangled place names. There may also be written and oral forms of history and memory which shed a light on the acquisition history, as can for example be seen in the report on the *korwar* from West Papua [see [provenance report RV-2432-3](#)]. The exchange of information works best when the interested parties on the spot also have access to the sources that are available in the Netherlands, such as original and translated archive documents, research reports and detailed photographs of the object itself.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Lang, 'Guidelines for German Museums', 17-18 and 127; David van Duuren, Mischa ten Kate and Susan Legêne, *Physical Anthropology Reconsidered: Human Remains at the Tropenmuseum* (Amsterdam: KIT publishers 2007).

⁵¹ For an example of successful cooperation see Amber Aranui, 'The Importance of Working with Communities; Combining Oral History, the Archive and Institutional Knowledge in Provenance Research', and Trevor Isaac, 'Using the Reciprocal Research Network for both Indigenous and Western Cultural Provenance Standards', in Förster (a.o., eds.), *Provenienzforschung zu ethnografischen Sammlungen*, 45-54 and 91-102.



Close-up of hilt of the gold *kastane*, showing detail of goddess Sri Devi Lakshmi, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv.no. NG-NM-560 [see [provenance report](#) NG-NM-560]

In the research into the objects from Sri Lanka, the availability of detailed photographs of the *kastanes* helped Sri Lankan researchers answer the question of whether they may have been royal property or may have served as diplomatic gifts to governors and governors-general [see [provenance reports](#) NG-NM-560 and NG-NM-7112].

The expertise of a historian from Banjarmasin was also vital in the research into the so-called '*Indische vlag*' [East Indian flag] in the Rijksmuseum. He recognised the ribbon-shaped symbols on the flag as a stylised fusion of the Arab letters *lam* and *alif* and as such as a reference to one of the warring factions in the war in South Kalimantan from 1859 to 1863 [see [provenance report](#) NG-1977-279-15-1].

Experience has shown that it takes time and patience to create mutual trust and build good contacts. Working out of the Netherlands it is not always easy to gain a direct overview of the dynamics and internal relations in a country or to understand differences between experts in countries of origin. Conversely, for local researchers it can be unclear what the aim of the Dutch research is and how it relates to possible restitution. There may be mistrust – unsurprising considering the prior history of various restitution applications. Moreover timetables may not always be compatible: we cannot expect people 'there' to be ready and waiting to respond to 'our' questions and plans. It is important to think carefully about the questions and the interests of experts in actual countries of origin, and where possible exchange sources and information. It may also be desirable to pay for work that is performed on request and for which people receive no payment in the country itself, or to think about other forms of recognition and involvement.

As is the case with owners of private archives it is good to explain clearly the context in which the research is taking place and why you are enlisting the expert's expertise. If information is sourced from an external expert and this information has not been recorded elsewhere in a publication, a written account should be made of this and added to the documentation as a source. Specific emails or interviews with an informant may be referred to in the ongoing reporting on the research. Finally informants must obviously be thanked for their information and willingness to provide input.

3. Reporting

A key part of a new approach to heritage acquired in colonial situations is to make knowledge about the provenance and acquisition history of objects and collections freely available, not least to involved parties in countries of origin. There are many ways of sharing provenance information and these can be tailored to different target groups: from information boards displayed beside exhibits for a general museum audience to datasets and search systems aimed at researchers in countries of origin. In this section we discuss the reporting possibilities following research into individual objects or groups of objects, and for a reasonably well-informed international audience of museum professionals, academics and heritage enthusiasts. The emphasis is on written reports although we acknowledge that there are other ways of recording and sharing information. We look at several elements which could or should be discussed in a provenance report, at choices regarding presentation and textual arrangement, and at matters related to language use and terminology.

3.1 Parts of report

To identify the described object it is advisable to start with some basic details such as registration title, inventory number, location, material and dimensions. It is also important to mention the current legal owner of the object – not necessarily the heritage-management institution itself. Other basic information, such as the presumed maker and the region of origin, the moment of acquisition and any historical inventory numbers is a subject of research and can logically be omitted here.⁵²

A schematic representation of the provenance is useful for showing key information at a glance. This may take the shape of a timeline showing the most important moments of ownership change or of a provenance statement: a standardised way of noting down known dates, owners and their place of residence, separated by punctuation marks. This schematic representation should also include any gaps in knowledge. As yet there is no universally applicable standard for provenance statements, which are sometimes also displayed on information boards in museums. In their guide to provenance research Yeide, Akinsha and Walsh put forward a proposal.⁵³ A problem with such provenance statements is that they are strongly focused on individual and legally recognised owners and legally formalised forms of ownership changes. Such a strictly defined provenance statement leads to problems in relation to acquisition practices in colonial situations in particular, for example where a gravestone was removed from a cemetery or an object was used by a community.

In the PPROCE reports the choice was therefore made to use a concise timeline limited to successive moments of ownership transfer, a mention of owners/users/curators and a source referring to the moment concerned. To avoid confusion, further information about the manner of acquisition and loss of ownership was omitted in the knowledge that the exact circumstances of transfer would be a subject of research in the subsequent report.

⁵² Cf. Hartmann (eds.), 'Provenance Research Manual, 30.

⁵³ Yeide, Akinsha and Walsh, *AAM Guide to Provenance Research*, 33-34; see also Claudia Andratschke (a.o., eds.), 'Leitfaden zur Standardisierung von Provenienzzangaben' (Magdeburg: German Lost Art Foundation, 2018) 13-14.

The following schematic representation of provenance is taken from the report on the *wayang beber* scrolls [see [provenance reports](#) RV-360-5255 to -5257]:

17th century – [no date]

[...]

Saiful Bakhri, Isamu Sakamoto and Muhammad Nurul Fajri, 'Collaborative Efforts to Preserve Wayang Beber in Indonesia', 2018.

[no date] - [no date]

The guardian of a cemetery of the Panembahan in Sampang

NL-HlmNHA, 476 Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam, inv. no. 845, letter of the director of the Archeologisch Cabinet, to the Minister of Interior Affairs, dated 10 January 1852.

[no date] - November 1851

A.F.H. van de Poel (1816-1875)

NL-HlmNHA, 476 Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam, inv. no. 845, letter of the director of the Archeologisch Cabinet, to the Minister of Interior Affairs, dated 10 January 1852.

November 1851 - 2 March 1852

Archeologisch Cabinet der Hoogeschool

NL-HlmNHA, 476 Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam, inv. no. 845, letter of the director of the Museum voor Oudheden, to the director of the KKZ, dated 2 March 1852.

2 March 1852 - 1883

Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden

Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde, inventory card series 360, no. 5254-5257.

1883 - today

Rijks Ethnografisch Museum (today NMVW Museum Volkenkunde).

Furthermore an introduction to the type of object and a detailed description of the object itself help the reader assess the nature and value of the object. What values and meanings does the object have from a social, spiritual, historical/art historical or cultural perspective, both for former communities and collectors and for present-day interested parties and heritage institutions? This is also the place to discuss whether this is a culturally or historically sensitive object that is of special importance to local communities or the country of origin.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ For a reflection on 'historically and culturally sensitive objects': Lang, 'Guidelines for German Museums', 17-18.

It is useful to provide an estimation of the object's place in the overall heritage landscape. Is the object related to other objects in the collection? Are there any similar objects that ended up in European collections or does the object in fact have exceptional characteristics? Often the object's place in the heritage landscape will say something about why it was selected: an object can be worth researching because it is 'unique' in some way. Examples of such 'unique' objects from the PPROCE selection are the batik vest, with the only similar ones held by the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia [see [provenance report TM-5663-18](#)], and the aforementioned *wayang beber* sets. Although there are many modern variants of these sets, to date only three antique sets are known [see [provenance report RV-360-5255 to -5257](#)].



An object can also spark interest because it is 'exemplary' for a larger group of similar objects. An example is the sabre of the type *beladah belabang* which were manufactured in large numbers in the village of Negara in South Kalimantan in the 19th century, and of which the NMVW owns dozens [see [provenance report TM-H-1669](#)]. Finally an object may be worth researching because it would appear to belong to a group with a corresponding provenance. An example of this is the model of the market stall in the Rijksmuseum, which is closely related to at least 20 similar models in other museums, and which all appear to come from the same atelier in Java [see [provenance report NG-2009-134](#)]. The reader will have a better idea of where they stand if the object's place in the heritage landscape is contextualised.

Other elements that may be added to the provenance report are translations of relevant sources, a representation of consulted sources and literature, and suggestions for further research.

3.2 Reporting choices

3.2.1 Two examples

The fact that different choices can be made in terms of reporting form is evidenced by a brief comparison of two recently published provenance reports prepared by the AfricaMuseum in Tervuren in Belgium and the NMVW in the Netherlands.

In 2020 the AfricaMuseum declared provenance research into its own collections a priority and the museum has been publishing regular provenance reports on its website since July 2021. In August 2021 a report appeared on the website, based on an internal document by a conservator, concerning a Luba mask that has long been considered a highlight of the collection.⁵⁵ According to the report, in 1896 the mask was *'geplunderd in het dorp Luulu [in de voormalige Onafhankelijke Congostaat van Leopold II, vandaag de Democratische Republiek Congo] door de troepen van Oscar Michaux'* [looted in the village of Luulu (in the former Congo Free State of Leopold II, now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) by Oscar Michaux's troops]. The AfricaMuseum has chosen to present the report, which is just over 4,000 words long, as a web text, available in four languages and open for review. In addition to details of the successive ownership transactions the museum provides a great deal of context which is aimed at enabling the reader to assess the manner of acquisition by Michaux. The text covers not only the actual pillage of Luulu, but also how Michaux himself looked back on the pillage, the 'collecting frenzy' of similar colonial officials and the mask's place in the wider museum collection. The museum furthermore shares lengthy quotes and scans of archive material, as well as inviting readers to contact them to share *'opmerkingen, informatie of getuigenissen'* [comments, information or stories].

In November 2010 the NMVW also started publishing provenance reports in its own 'Provenance series'.⁵⁶ The first edition discussed six different objects in English-language reports of around 3,500 words, available as a PDF file on the website. This publication is clearly more reflective in tone than the AfricaMuseum reports but is comparable in terms of the depth of the research. There is a greater contrast between the AfricaMuseum reports and the second edition in the Provenance series. In an 86-page report this second edition discusses the provenance of 184 bronze sculptures and other NMVW objects attributed to the Kingdom of Benin (Edo) in what is now Nigeria. Given the size of the collection and the context within which the research is taking place – a specific and urgent wish expressed by Nigeria for the restitution of all objects looted in 1897 in an attack on Benin City by British colonial troops – the museum consciously limits itself to the question of how likely it is that objects can be linked to that particular attack. For this purpose the many routes via which the 184 Benin objects ended up in NMVW museums are divided into four categories of probability.⁵⁷

One consequence of this choice is that there is less scope for reflection on the period before 1897, for objects with a different provenance or for any changes in meaning of the objects in later periods. In the museum's own words: 'This research has been undertaken to assess the strength of connection to the military campaign led by British forces against Benin City in early February 1897, during which Edo cultural and ancestral objects were looted and then sold.'⁵⁸

⁵⁵ 'The famous Luba mask' (Royal Museum for Central Africa, 4 August 2021).

⁵⁶ See <https://www.tropenmuseum.nl/nl/provenance-reeks>.

⁵⁷ Hans, Lidchi and Schmidt, 'Provenance#2: The Benin collections'. Research showed that 115 objects had 'a proven link' to the military campaign of 1897. Nine objects have a 'possible link' according to the NMVW research, with 46 objects having an 'unlikely link' and five objects to have 'no link' to the attack. There is also a category of missing objects.

⁵⁸ Hans, Lidchi and Schmidt, 'Provenance#2: The Benin collections', 11.

The differences in reporting between the two museums are connected to the purpose for which the reports were written but are also attributable in part to stylistic choices and the textual arrangement of the reports. In the remainder of this section we will take a closer look at some of these choices.

3.2.2 Explicit or implicit question-driven research?

An initial choice that presents itself is whether the purpose of the report is to answer a specific research question or to describe an object biography. In the NMVW report on the Benin objects we saw a clear demarcation around the question of whether the objects ascribed to the Kingdom of Benin held by the NMVW could be related to the British attack and looting of 1897. Other research questions may relate to the consideration of frequently heard assumptions in the literature regarding the object and its history. Concrete questions from countries of origin, for example about the manner of acquisition of a certain object or all available objects in a collection from a certain region, may justify a specific research question.

An example of a provenance report involving specific research questions is that concerning the ceremonial kris with the number RV-360-6021 from NMVW Museum Volkenkunde. In the literature it is assumed that the kris originally came from the Gowa Sultanate on South Sulawesi, that it came into the possession of the VOC in the 18th century and ended up in the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities via the stadtholders' collections. All three assumptions are questioned in the report [see [provenance report RV-360-6021](#)].

An advantage of using a specific research question is that it gives the researcher a focus for their work, which can be useful where large groups of objects or complex cases are concerned. A consequence is that periods and aspects of the biography of an object which do not relate to answering the research question risk being neglected or overlooked altogether. In reality such question-driven research is not a form of micro-history: instead of small research units being used to question large histories – in this case the history of an object – the objects are related to large histories which themselves remain untouched and undiscussed.

An alternative is to take the whole biography of the object, from the time it was made right up to the present day, as the subject of research. But such reports also start from a specific research question, albeit implicitly. When researching the provenance history and significance of cultural objects from colonial situations the author is led by the question of which stages and aspects of the social life of the objects are important to understanding its colonial and postcolonial meaning. The researcher is free to place their own emphases. However this freedom is not without danger: such an approach means that assumptions and hierarchies of interest remain implicit. Because is it really the case that we find every stage in the biography of an object acquired in a colonial context equally interesting? Why and for whom is that the case? Another danger is that the research inadvertently focuses more on periods about which there are many available sources – and that usually means the period after their arrival in Europe.



Vajrasattva statue, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv.no. AK-RAK-1970-2
[see [provenance report](#) AK-RAK-1970-2]

An example of a report which devotes a lot of attention to the period in Europe is the report about the battledress [see provenance report RV-300-183] which was probably made by the Ngaju Dayak people in South Kalimantan and was displayed in the Dutch pavilion at the World's Fair in Paris in 1878 before being transferred to the Rijks Ethnographisch Museum. The same applies to the report on the silver Vajrasattva statue [see provenance report AK-RAK-1970-2], which from 1919 was successively owned by Hugo Loudon, his widow Anna van Marken and Cornelis Gerardus Rieff before ultimately being purchased by the Rijksmuseum in 1970. It is likely that Hugo Loudon came into possession of the statue via his uncle Alexander Loudon, who amassed his collection in Java in the mid-19th century. Most attention was given to the 'European period' in the hope that a reconstruction of successive owners would enable the first European owner to be identified, thus providing a clue to the Indonesian provenance of the statue.

Whatever research strategy is chosen it is advisable to bear in mind which conscious and unconscious hierarchies play a role in the social biography of an object, and whether these are desirable.

3.2.3 Chronological or reverse chronological reporting?

Another choice, particularly if the whole biography of the object is being researched, relates to whether the report should be arranged in chronological or reverse chronological order. Arguments can be put forward for both options.

An advantage of a chronological report is that it is generally easier for the reader to follow and that the report begins with the period which has usually been most likely to have received too little

attention, namely the period before the object was transported to Europe. Prioritising in this way can, however, create problems because where do you start the story? If it is not known when the object was made or this happened a very long time ago, as is the case for example with Hindu-Buddhist antiquities, then there is a strong temptation to abandon the trail of the specific object and resort to more general ethnographic or art historical analyses. A chronological approach also poses problems if the object has been switched over time, has been wrongly attributed or where there are several possible provenance scenarios. Many of the reports selected by PPROCE are chronological reports. The report on the Banjarmasin Diamond clearly shows the struggle with where the story should be started; although the first definite mention of the diamond dates from around 1859 there are many earlier mentions (in Dutch) which probably refer to the same diamond [see [provenance report NG-C-2000-3](#)].

In some cases reverse chronological reporting can provide a solution. This involves starting with the information that is certain – the current presence in a Dutch heritage institution – and then working back through time using sources. An example is the report concerning the trophy skull from West Kalimantan [see [provenance report RV-360-5268](#)]. It can be a challenge for the author to maintain a clear line in such reports. Another disadvantage can be that emphasis is unintentionally placed on the ‘definite’ period in European museums, and too little attention is given to the history in the region of origin because the trail there quickly reaches a dead end. Such reports can also be unsatisfactory for objects whose confirmed provenance only goes back a few years.

3.2.4 Designate or describe and contextualise?

Important moments in the biography of an object are those when the object changed hands, whether voluntarily or involuntarily. This certainly applies where the change of ownership took place in a colonial situation and context, and the object – in hindsight – turned out to be headed for the Netherlands. What exactly happened at these moments and how should the power relations within this transaction be understood?

It transpires that it is not always possible to make clear statements about the manner and context of acquisition. With regard to the objects studied within PPROCE we were able to trace the change of possession of objects to specific individuals, places or events in the country of origin in half of the cases. In only a third of the research cases were we able to reach a conclusion on the manner of acquisition based on research in mostly Dutch colonial written sources.⁵⁹ Moreover where we were able to find information about the manner of acquisition it turned out that the contemporary Dutch terms of acquisition that we found in the sources were not always sufficient to provide a full understanding of the transfer of possession. These include terms such as ‘*gevonden*’, ‘*gekregen*’, ‘*buitgemaakt*’ and ‘*afgestaan*’ [found, received, captured and surrendered]. Quite apart from the inherently colonial perspective of the sources and the general colonial context of structural power imbalance in which the transactions took place, some terms of transfer turned out to be concealing and others misleading if adopted without a context.

⁵⁹ It should be noted in this context that the selection for PPROCE was aimed at researching a wide range of objects, including objects about which few specific sources tend to be available, such as utensils. Research may produce better results if the nature and availability of sources is taken into account at the time of making the selection.



One of the *wayang beber* scrolls, Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen. Coll.no. RV-360-5255. [see [provenance report](#) RV-360-5255]

An example of the use of concealing language in Dutch sources is the description of the manner of acquisition of the *wayang beber* scrolls currently under the curation of Museum Volkenkunde [see [provenance reports](#) RV-360-5254 to 5259]. According to a report from 1852 they were 'gevonden' [found] in around 1851 in the village of Sampang, Central Java, by deputy *resident* A.F.H. van de Poel. Another source states: '*Deze Wajang bladen zijn afkomstig uit het huis van den bewaker van het graf des Panambahans Sampang in de dessa Sampang (Assistent Residentie Keboemen?) waar zij in pinang bladeren gewikkeld, bewaard, door den heer Van de Poel gevonden en in eigendom verkregen werden*'⁶¹ [These Wajang scrolls are from the house of the guard of the grave of Panambahan Sampang in the village of Sampang (Keboemen district?) where they were found, wrapped in palm leaves and kept, by Mr. Van den Poel and received in ownership]. It is not clear from this source how Van de Poel 'found' the scrolls and 'received them in ownership', while we know that 50 years later such scrolls would not be relinquished by their owners under any circumstances.

An example of the use of misleading language is the statement of abdication which was drafted in the name of Sultan⁶⁰ Tamdjidillah II (1817-1867) of Banjarmasin on 25 June 1859, in which he also renounced his rights to the Banjarmasin Diamond now in the Rijksmuseum [see [provenance report](#) NG-C-2000-3]. The abdication of the Sultan and his '*bereid[heid] tot afgifte van alle de rijksornamenten*' [willing[ness] to hand over all the state ornaments] took place, according to this statement, '(...) *uit eigen vrijen wil en zonder eenigen dwang* (...) [(...) out of [his] own free will and without any duress (...)]. But if we read the report of the meeting between the Dutch *resident* of Banjarmasin and the Sultan that took place the day before, it is clear that the Sultan had in fact been put under a great deal of pressure. Essentially he was left with no other option but to step down and give up the state jewels; the alternative was an insurrection against his rule and his probable death.⁶¹

⁶⁰ NL-HlmNHA, 476 Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam, inv. no. 845.

⁶¹ NL-HaNA, Colonies, 1850-1900, 2.10.02, inv.no. 869, note verbale 16 September 1859 no. 29, copy of a translation of a public announcement by Tamdjid Illah on 25 June 1859.

Two examples whereby the context is vital to understanding the power relations within a transaction are the ancestor figure (*korwar*) from the island of Batanta [see [provenance report](#) RV-2432-3] and the two drawings from Aceh [see [provenance reports](#) RV-1429-134/]. The drawings were made in around 1903-1904 by Teuku Teungoh, a local dignitary in West Aceh. He (very probably) gave them to Theo Veltman, Governor of Pulo Raya, when he was being held prisoner there.⁶² The drawings include a request from the prisoner to the governor for permission to leave his cell for a daily walk and be allowed a small knife for craftwork. The gift itself poses few questions but the knowledge that the power relations between Teuku Teungoh and Theo Veltman were heavily imbalanced puts a different slant on the gift of the drawings.

This is also the case with the *korwar* from the island of Batanta, West Papua, made by Barakasi Omkarsbai for the soul of Mansar Mambibi Saleo, leader of the Kafdarun clan. The Protestant missionary Freek Kamma is thought to have acquired the *korwar* in around 1934-1935, when members of the Kafdarun clan '*hun heidensche toovermedicijn [kwamen] inleveren*' [[came] to hand in their heathen magic medicine]. This was a condition for their baptism and conversion to Christianity. While the clan members did hand over their *korwar* voluntarily, they did so in a colonial context and under uncertain power relations.⁶³



The *korwar* of Batanto.
Collection Nationaal
Museum van
Wereldculturen.
Coll.no. RV-2432-3.
[see [provenance report](#) RV-2432-3]

These examples from the provenance reports illustrate that the contemporary terms of transfer as can be found in Dutch sources need to be contextualised, with the contextualisation also acknowledging the colonial perspective of Dutch sources. What legal and moral norms and notions applied in local communities and how did they see the gift, sale or other form of loss of possession?⁶⁴

⁶² Inscriptions on the reverse of drawings RV-1429-134 and RV-1429-134a.

⁶³ Freek C. Kamma, 'De beslissing', *De Nederlander* (22 August 1936) 8.

⁶⁴ Larissa Förster has written a useful chapter on dealing with alternative legal traditions and ownership regimes outside of European colonial law: Larissa Förster, 'Legal Questions from the Perspective of Social/Cultural Anthropology', in: Lang, 'Guidelines for German Museums', 108-111.

It is up to the author how far they want to go in providing context, with the basic principle being that the context should serve to create a better understanding of the object history and the moments of transfer of possession described.

Sometimes the need may even arise to actively contradict the sources. For example the provenance report on the Luba mask in the AfricaMuseum states that in the diary he wrote commandant and collector Oscar Michaux wrongly created the impression that he only 'zag' [saw] the mask and other 'collectiestukken' [collectible objects]: '*Michaux, de overste van Lapière, verdraaide op een misleidende manier het relaas over de inval van zijn gewapende troepen in Luulu. [...] De in Luulu geroofde voorwerpen zijn weldegelijk geplunderd van de dorpingen die gevlucht waren voor de gewapende troepen onder leiding van Michaux*'⁶⁵ [Michaux, as Lapière's superior, gives a misleading adaptation of his armed column's encampment in Luulu. [...] The objects rounded up in Luulu can certainly be classed as booty acquired by use of force against the villagers confronted with Michaux's armed column]. The author can make their own decision in describing and designating the manner of transfer although it is important that the contemporary terms and precise manner of acquisition are still mentioned in the report. In order to understand acquisition in colonial situations, characterised by a fundamental imbalance of power, we must know exactly what social, legal and ethical formulas were applied. An effective way of contradicting sources is by contrasting them with other sources. In the report on the Luba mask this is done by contrasting Michaux's diary with the diary of his officer Albert Lapière.

3.3 Dealing with sources and gaps in provenance history

As well as contextualising sources concerning moments when possession was transferred it is important to take a critical approach to other sources.

In the discussion of postcolonial source criticism in section 2 it was already noted that many sources in European heritage institutions and archives were shaped by the colonial power structures that produced them. Explicit reflection on the perspective expressed by these sources helps in recognising the multiple perspectives on the past and creating scope for manifold interpretations of these. In accordance with the theory formation of Ann Laura Stoler in her book *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* this does not have to mean that sources with a strong colonial perspective are necessarily uninteresting.⁶⁶ The author can also take the space to reflect on the epistemological world image of the person who produced these sources and in so doing helped shape a certain interest in material culture. Racist notions of supposedly 'primitive' cultures produced different sources, collection interests and exhibition traditions than Orientalist representations of ancient civilisations believed lost. It can also be derived from the sources which material traditions European collectors considered to be of no interest at all. For example Mirjam Shatanawi puts the apparent lack of Islamic heritage in Indonesian collections in the Netherlands down to the colonial disdain of the Islamic culture in Southeast Asia, viewed as an undesirable influence from the Arabian peninsula.⁶⁷ In other words sources can take a one-sided view of the provenance history of objects and at the same time say a lot about the history of colonial knowledge production, collection traditions and their continued influence on present-day heritage collections.

⁶⁵ 'The famous Luba mask'.

⁶⁶ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*.

⁶⁷ Mirjam Shatanawi, *Islam at the Tropenmuseum* (Arnhem 2014); idem, 'Making and unmaking Indonesian Islam: Legacies of Colonialism in Museums' (University of Amsterdam dissertation, forthcoming).

There are also other reasons why sources need to be subjected to critical questioning where objects are concerned. It should be borne in mind that it was sometimes in the interest of collectors and curators to deliberately attribute certain wrong meanings and histories to an object, for example to increase its value. In an essay on the challenges of provenance research Sharon Flescher described this attitude as 'healthy scepticism': 'Many works offered on the market, or being researched for other reasons, come with provenance information, but one must constantly ask: how reliable is the information? Is it plausible? What are the gaps?'.⁶⁸

Given that a provenance report ideally serves as an impetus for further research into the object itself or into similar objects it is good to devote explicit attention to sources that contain information which appears to contradict other details as these may prove important in combination with sources that crop up at a later date. For the same reason it is advisable to mention, where applicable, that certain sources could not be consulted in connection with the research, and where the gaps and lacunae in the provenance history are (and why). In practice it will only be possible to establish a complete chain of transfers of possession in a minority of cases.⁶⁹

Finally, as is always the case in historical research, meticulous annotation is essential. Carefully stating from which source (and hence from which perspective) information has come will make it easier for future provenance researchers to continue the work. Where quotes are translated it is good practice to show the original text in a footnote.

3.4 Dealing with problematic words and terms

Language and usage are subject to constant change. They reflect and reinforce (changing) power relations in the past and present. There are two ways in which we are confronted with this in our field of work. Firstly, objects were collected, described and registered using terms which are no longer in common usage, and are in some cases considered to be inappropriate and offensive. Even so, such archaic terms are important when selecting objects and searching for sources because this is how they are registered in registration systems. To help researchers the Cultural Heritage Agency (RCE) has compiled a list of search terms '*met als doel een zo groot mogelijk bereik te hebben binnen de gangbare museale collectieregistratie*'⁷⁰ [in order to have the greatest possible reach within the typical museum collection registration system].

Secondly it is important to be aware that centuries of colonialism and imperialism continue to influence our language and how we are accustomed to describing the world. Words matter, and in 2018 the National Museum of World Cultures' Research Center for Material Culture published an 'unfinished guide to word choices within the cultural sector' under that title.⁷¹ In it, Wayne Modest writes: 'Can the word "tribe" be used today, and, if so, whom does it describe? Why is "tribe" not normally associated with Western Europeans in the same way it is with other groups of people across the world? Which groups are **Indigenous** or **Aboriginal** and which are not, and where do those terms come from?' To provide researchers and museum staff with guidance on how to answer these and other questions surrounding terminology and word choice the guide discusses 56 archaic and sometimes problematic terms and suggests alternatives.

⁶⁸ Sharon Flescher, 'The Challenges of Provenance Research', in: Tompkins, *Provenance Research Today*, 40-41.

⁶⁹ Lang, 'Guidelines for German Museums', 92-93, 117.

⁷⁰ Pennock and Vermaat (eds.), 'Onderzoek naar sporen', 31-34.

⁷¹ Robin Leijveld and Wayne Modest (eds.), 'Words Matter, Work in Progress I' (NMVW 2018).

Other authors and institutions have also problematised and redefined terms commonly used in the practice of provenance research. For example in its *Guidelines for German Museums: Care of Collections from Colonial Contexts* the German Museum Association highlights the terms ‘community of origin’, ‘sensitive objects’, ‘racism’, ‘colonialism’, ‘post-colonialism’ and ‘colonial contexts’.⁷² In his thesis *Treasures in Trusted Hands* Jos van Beurden discusses terms such as ‘provenance’, ‘biography’, ‘country of origin’, ‘violence’, and ‘dialogue’.⁷³ The National Museums Scotland project ‘Baggage and Belonging: Military Collections and the British Empire, 1750 – 1900’ defines various terms of acquisition, such as ‘taken’, ‘acquired’, ‘collected’, ‘found’ and ‘recovered’.⁷⁴

There is a danger of reproducing colonial representations and power relations if we do not take a critical approach to our language use. If provenance research is aimed at changing our approach to the colonial past, then that should be accompanied by conscious use of words and languages. As described earlier in the context of contemporary terms of acquisition, it is, however, important to mention certain words and terms in the provenance report – perhaps between quote marks and with an explanation – if these are essential to understanding the object history and to enable further research.

An example is the use of the term ‘Dayak’ in the context of the second skull in Breda [see [provenance report](#) on skull B]. ‘Dayak’ is a term of Malay origin which was not used by the peoples in Kalimantan it referred to. The term was adopted by Europeans, however, and took on a life of its own in the analysis of cultures and the problematic tradition of physical anthropology and racial doctrine. It is because of this same tradition that the skull found its way into Dutch collections. Another example can be found in the report on the flag from the Sulu Archipelago [see [provenance report](#) NG-MC-1889-84-4], which was probably captured by the Dutch Navy during an attack on the sultanate there in 1848. The Dutch accused the sultanate of ‘*piraterij*’ [piracy], in a context which we now understand as a conflict over sphere of influence and control of trade and shipping.



Flag of the Sulu archipelago, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv.no. NG-MC-1889-84-4 [see [provenance report](#) NG-MC-1889-84-4]

⁷² Lang, ‘Guidelines for German Museums’, 20-23.

⁷³ Van Beurden, ‘Treasures in Trusted Hand’, 29-30.

⁷⁴ See ‘Project Catalogues’ (National Museums Scotland). A German glossary for provenance research into Nazi-looted art can be found in Andratschke (et al. eds.), ‘Leitfaden zur Standardisierung von Provenienzzangaben’, 33-37.

Other recommendations regarding words and language use:

- It is important that the provenance reports are written in, or translated into, a language currently spoken in the country of origin.
- It is a good idea to bear in mind that your audience may not be familiar with the history of Dutch museums and heritage institutions.
- Another important linguistic consideration is the use of revised spellings. The spelling and orthography of proper nouns, place names and the names of institutions is to a large degree culturally determined and subject to change. As a basic principle it is advisable to use the most common and modern spelling and orthography. At the same time it is important to state any alternative names and spellings found in the sources in brackets to enable verification and further research. For the same reason it is advisable to leave local and colonial ranks, stations, titles and decorations untranslated. Translations of for example the Dutch position of '*resident*' into English or of '*raden mas*' in the Indonesian context promote confusion, are often culturally inaccurate and complicate further research.
- On first mention, a person's initials and years of birth and death should be given (between brackets) where known. The approach to given names and family names is also strongly culturally determined, and the first name/second name division is not universal. It may be necessary to explain name systems in a footnote, and to distinguish names from titles and forms of address.

3.5 Images

Images of the object along with maps, portraits of people discussed, historical photographs and other illustrations can help clarify the report. Depending on the chosen reporting form the author can make their own decisions on the matter. It can also be very useful to include detailed photos of (parts of) the object. Decorations and patterns which seem insignificant at first glance may contain important information.

However it is good to bear in mind that depicting and looking at certain objects may be considered undesirable by communities of origin. This may apply to people from outside the community or to uninitiated members of the community itself. Where it is suspected that such restrictions apply it is advisable to seek advice from experts and consider whether the image is an essential part of the analysis. Sometimes it is easier to dispense with the image of the object. The considerations apply in particular to the depiction of ancestral remains.⁷⁵

Furthermore applicable copyrights must be taken into account and images must be provided with a proper source reference.

3.6 Documentation and file-building

In principle meticulous annotation should guarantee that sources can be retrieved. Even so it is sensible to save notes and correspondence and to gather digital copies of consulted sources and literature wherever possible. In many cases access to sources from countries of origin is limited, and the sharing of material with interested researchers – with due observance of any privacy restrictions – can considerably enhance the exchange of knowledge and ideas. For now, where and how such research information should be saved – and this also applies to the actual publication of the report – differs for each research and curation institute and this will remain so until a national policy is developed.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Lang, 'Guidelines for German Museums', 133.

⁷⁶ Lang, 'Guidelines for German Museums', 116.

Recommended literature on provenance research

General

Johannes Gramlich, 'Reflections on provenance research: values – politics – art markets', *Journal for art market studies* 2 (2017) 1-14.

Tone Hansen, Anna Maria Bresciani, *Looters, Smugglers and Collectors: Provenance research and the market* (Cologne 2015).

Arthur Tompkins (ed.), *Provenance Research Today, Principles, practice, problems* (London 2020).

Nancy Yeide, Konstantin Akinsha and Amy L. Walsh, *AAM Guide to Provenance Research* (Washington D.C. 2001).

Provenance research into objects from a colonial context

Larissa Förster, Iris Edenheiser, Sarah Fründt, Heike Hartmann, *Provenienzforschung zu ethnografischen Sammlungen der Kolonialzeit. Positionen in der aktuellen Debatte* (DGSKA 2018).

Sabine Lang (ed.), 'Guidelines for German Museums. Care of Collections from Colonial Contexts. 2nd Edition' (German Museums Association 2019).

Hanna Pennock and Simone Vermaat (eds.), 'Onderzoek naar sporen van slavernij en het koloniale verleden in de collectieregistratie handreiking' [Research into traces of slavery and the colonial past in the collection registration]. Een handreiking' (Amersfoort: Cultural Heritage Agency (RCE) 2021).

Provenance research into objects in the context of Nazi-looted art

Uwe Hartmann, Maria Obenaus, Leonhard Weidinger, Michaela Scheibe (eds.), 'Provenance Research Manual to Identify Cultural Property Seized due to Persecution during the National Socialist Era' (Magdeburg: German Lost Art Foundation, 2020).

Sharon Flescher, 'A brief guide to provenance research', in: Julia Courtney (ed), *The Legal Guide for Museum Professionals* (Lanham 2015) 55-72.

Christian Fuhrmeister and Meike Hopp, 'Rethinking Provenance Research', *Getty Research Journal* 11 (2019) 213-231.

Provenance research into ancestral human remains

Dorothea Deterts (ed.), 'Recommendations for the Care of Human Remains in Museums and Collections' (German Museums Association 2013).

4. Draft Assessment Framework for provenance research into objects acquired in a colonial context

Introduction

The following Draft Assessment Framework has been prepared as a tool for a future independent assessment committee as well as for provenance researchers and heritage management institutions.

In her policy vision the Dutch minister of Education, Culture and Science Ingrid van Engelshoven announced her intention to form an independent assessment committee to facilitate future restitution applications from countries of origin and to advise her on restitution issues. The assessment committee must establish whether it can be demonstrated with a reasonable degree of certainty that involuntary loss of possession occurred in a colonial context. It will do so based on provenance research conducted by the museum or institution that curates the object, which, according to the minister's wishes, must observe the minimum due diligence⁷⁷ requirements.

The provenance research performed in connection with the pilot resulted in the methodological recommendations set out in the previous chapter. Some general guidelines can be derived from these recommendations which are included in this Draft Assessment Framework. The assessment committee can use the framework to assess whether provenance research into items in colonial collections was conducted satisfactorily. It will be up to the future assessment committee, in conjunction with the further development of the policy on restitution, to work out the details of the application of the assessment criteria. The weighting and importance of the individual parts or assessment criteria may differ for each case.

The framework can also provide guidance for heritage management institutions and provenance researchers in checking their own research. Not all the points mentioned will turn out to be important in every research study to the same degree or at the same moment. Consequently this Draft Assessment Framework should expressly not be considered or used as a step-by-step plan but rather as a tool. The object reports written in connection with this project were also unable to comply with every point in every case.

In formulating the assessment criteria we started from the assumption that the restitution procedure provides countries of origin with the opportunity to state the importance of a cultural object when motivating the application for restitution.

⁷⁷ In so doing the minister is following the guidelines for professional conduct set out by the International Council of Museums in the 'ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums' (International Council of Museum 2017).

Assessment criteria	Yes	No, further action required	No, but adequate motivation given
General criteria			
The research complies with the guidelines for independent scientific historical research, including mention of the researcher's status. This independence should be understood in the sense of the principles for commissioned historical research or statement of scientific independence from the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW). ⁷⁸			
The (provisional) results have been published in a language that enables counter-expertise to be provided by interested parties from the countries of origin.			
During the research objects were treated and written about with respect and care, based on the realisation that they may have a special cultural, historical, spiritual or religious meaning for communities in countries of origin. This especially applies to ancestral human remains.			
Historically substantive criteria			
Attention has been given to the history of the object before it came into European hands.			
Attempts have been made to answer the question of who made the object, when and in what context.			
It has been made clear what functions and spiritual and other values the object has or has had.			
Insight has been given into the possible link to events or persons of historical significance.			
Attempts have been made to answer as precisely as possible the question of in what colonial situation the object was acquired by European actors.			
Attempts have been made to answer as precisely as possible the question as to the manner of acquisition.			

⁷⁸ 'Richtlijnen voor historisch-wetenschappelijk onderzoek in opdracht' (KNAW 2007).

It has been made clear in which broader context and power relations acquisition took place.			
Research has been conducted into the European history of the object.			
Attention has been given to all former possessors and – where relevant – their position in, and relationship with, colonial society.			
Insight has been given into the time, the context and the manner in which the current legal owner gained possession of the object.			
Insight has been given into the time, the context and the manner in which the curating institution acquired management of the object.			
Research technical criteria: object research and location			
The object has been identified and the object registration verified. Is the object registered correctly and is it physically present in its entirety?			
An account has been rendered of the object’s external characteristics, material and technique based on the object itself and on the clues that these characteristics may provide as to the precise geographical or cultural provenance and history.			
Research has been conducted into the meaning of any inscriptions, labels, markings and collector’s marks as well as any damage and signs of usage that can be detected on the object or its medium.			
It has been made clear which different numberings occur in registration systems.			
The question has been answered as to whether other objects within or outside the collection are connected to the object and its acquisition.			
Insight has been given into the type of object and its clear identification so that it can be established whether the sources indeed refer to the object in question or to other objects.			

It has been made clear whether it is certain, highly likely, likely or uncertain that the object is identical to the object found in the provenance sources.			
Research technical criteria: source research			
Insight has been given into the search for and interpretation of relevant sources in relation to the research.			
It has been explained which information is present in the museum registration systems (for example digital and analogue inventory cards, annual reports, catalogues, correspondence archives and acquisition logs, but also knowledge among current and former employees regarding the provenance history which was not entered in the registration system).			
Various types of relevant sources have been used outside the museum registration systems (for example private and other archives, estate inventories, ego documents, historical newspapers, visual sources, historical literature).			
It has been made clear which potential sources are present in countries and regions of origin (for example archives, literature and oral history).			
The question has been answered as to which potential sources are present with all previous possessors and their (public and/or private) archives.			
Research technical criteria: cooperation with experts			
Assistance has been sought from relevant experts in the Netherlands, such as curators, anthropologists, historians/art historians and object experts.			
Assistance has been sought from experts and relevant parties in countries of origin.			
Assistance has been sought from relevant experts internationally, for example within networks of object experts.			
Reporting criteria			
It has been explained which research steps have and have not been taken, so that the research is transparent and traceable and can be continued if desired.			

It has been clearly stated which parts of the provenance history are incomplete or unclear.			
An account has been given of the various perspectives on the colonial past and the moment of acquisition concerned.			
Source criticism has been performed and an account given of the nature of the sources used and their inherent perspective.			
The annotation meets the requirements for accountability and traceability.			
It has been made clear which sources contain information which contradicts or appears to contradict other data. These may fall into place in the course of further research.			
An account has been given of the fact that provenance research generally leads to provisional conclusions. Sources may emerge in the future which shed a different light on the matter.			
A file has been built with as much information as possible having been gathered digitally and stored for consultation by other researchers.			
Both the current possessors and the applicant have been given sufficient opportunity to provide feedback on the research.			
The report states whether there are possibilities for further research and, if so, why there has not yet been an opportunity for this (inaccessibility of a source, lack of time, etc.).			

5. Findings and Recommendations

In this chapter we wish to share some general findings and make a number of recommendations based on our research experiences and related discussions. The recommendations mainly relate to cooperation with researchers and heritage institutions in countries of origin and to the further policy with regard to provenance research, in particular the question of how to ensure knowledge creation in this area. In so doing we are following on from the *Rapport Adviescommissie 'Nationale Beleidskader Koloniale Collecties'* [Advisory Committee Report on 'National Policy Framework for Colonial Collections'] of the Gonçalves Committee summarised earlier and the minister of Culture's response to this.

In its advice the Gonçalves Committee emphasised the importance of cooperation with the formerly colonised countries, in any case with Indonesia, Suriname and the Caribbean islands. The committee also recommended the establishment of an independent advisory committee to advise the minister on applications for restitution of colonial looted art as well as a Centre of Expertise on the Provenance of Colonial Objects. The purpose of this Expert Centre would be to conduct additional provenance research in relation to restitution applications and set up a publicly accessible database on colonial collections in Dutch museums.

In her response the minister expressly acknowledges the importance of provenance and other research, first and foremost to enable an Assessment Committee to assess applications for repatriation. The minister believes that the conduct of such research, whether incidental or structural, is primarily the province of the museums. The methodology for provenance research developed in the context of PPROCE may be helpful in this respect, she said. The minister furthermore stated that she did not wish to proceed at this time with the establishment of a centre of expertise, tasked with verifying the provenance of objects and advising on provenance research. While she considers these to be important tasks she first wants to see how many applications for restitution are submitted. Moreover *'een dergelijke voorziening [moeten] aansluiten op de kennis, ervaring en behoeften die musea zelf hebben. Onderzoek naar koloniale collecties vereist soms expertise, die nu nog niet ruim voorhanden is'* [such a facility [should] be aligned with the knowledge, expertise and needs of the museums themselves. Research into colonial collections sometimes requires expertise which is not yet widely available].

It is in the light of these policy documents that we share a number of findings and make recommendations aimed at the continuity and development of this type of research, both in the conduct of the research and in the cooperation with researchers and heritage institutions in countries of origin.

Findings

Experience has shown that conducting research into provenance history and significance of cultural objects and collections acquired in colonial situations requires a long-term commitment and perseverance, along with specific knowledge and expertise – historical, anthropological, art historical or religious-scientific. This may begin with recognising objects and determining the region they originate from and extends to all stages of the object's 'biography'. This knowledge network and knowledge regarding objects and their meaning, collection development, archives and the historical context are present at several places in the Netherlands, including the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, the National Museum of World Cultures, the Vrolijk Museum and Museum Bronbeek, but not at most

other museums and heritage institutions, including archives and academic or educational institutions. Institutions where such knowledge is not present may also contain controversial heritage from colonial situations such as collections of skulls, ancient manuscripts and confiscated documents from the Indonesian War of Independence. Provenance research therefore involves pooling resources and must be able to call in external help, for example from universities and experts from communities in the Netherlands and abroad. Knowledge of non-European cultural objects is thin on the ground in the Netherlands – this applies even to knowledge of cultural objects from Indonesia. Provenance research requires strengthening both knowledge and infrastructure, with collaborative projects with countries of origin as well as other experts in many cases being vital.

Interesting in this regard is the research conducted for PPROCE in relation to objects from Sri Lanka. Experience showed that establishing an international research group with experts from several countries can be fruitful, provided the research concerns a small group of specific objects which (probably) share the same provenance. An essential aspect was the sharing of documents and research material right from the start. The cooperation with Indonesia taught us for example that it takes time to coordinate political dynamics and research agendas in the two countries before fruitful and systematic collaboration can begin. And what applies to Sri Lanka and Indonesia, applies to many other parts of the world, including the many regions with which the Netherlands shares a colonial past, such as Taiwan, Brazil, South Africa, Suriname and Ghana.

Another aspect in terms of the need to engage in transnational cooperation and establish long-term networks is the fact that objects often had an international ‘travel history’ before ending up in a Dutch collection. This is an experience we have also gained over the last two decades with provenance research in relation to objects from the Nazi era.

Recommendations

Based on the experiences gained in this project we advocate a policy that safeguards not only the knowledge about objects and historical, religious or anthropological themes as well as the collection development history and museum practices, but also knowledge of the networks necessary to conduct this research. Museums and other heritage institutions should be supported in this area. Another factor in play in this context is that the differences between countries are great, partly due to differences in approach to heritage and history and differences in the scientific, political and institutional constellation within which the cooperation in the research must be shaped. For example it can be difficult to separate research from specific expectations regarding restitution. A request for cooperation in research can immediately acquire political implications, and heritage institutions are not always adequately equipped to deal with this.

Based on the experiences gained in this research pilot and the discussions associated with it we have reached the conclusion that the socio-political history of objects is valuable in its own right, regardless of whether an application for restitution has been made. It is a way to enrich our historical impressions and give them multiple perspectives, and thus decolonise them. In this way research, and the objects themselves, can be a way for museums everywhere to tell these new relevant histories based on an engagement with objects.

Based on these considerations and in addition to the specific methodological guidelines (chapter 3) and the Draft Assessment Framework (chapter 4) we make the following recommendations:

1. *Expertise and information should be properly safeguarded*
 - a. to support museums and other heritage institutions;
 - b. for the conduct of research for a possible government-appointed committee to deal with applications for repatriation and/or restitution.

2. *The organisation to be made responsible for these tasks should:*
 - a. have expertise in the field of provenance research into objects acquired in colonial situations;
 - b. have an extensive network of organisations and individuals in the Netherlands and regions of origin of such objects, in particular the former Dutch colonies;
 - c. have no vested interests in relation to either the objects being researched or to policy objectives;
 - d. be of a long-term nature.

3. *A diplomatic-political framework should be designed both to deal with restitution/repatriation issues and to shape the cooperation in the research.*

4. Allow enough room in the policy for the wish to conduct *provenance research as a shared and meaning-creating undertaking, transcending the borders of historical injustice*. This is a wish expressed not only in international discussions on restitution/repatriation but also in the contacts with museums and researchers.

5. Examine how the objective under (4) can be further developed, in the shape of *cooperation agreements and shared projects* of heritage and knowledge institutions in the Netherlands and in the countries of origin.

6. *Access to museum objects as well as museum and other archives* is crucial to enabling provenance research – both nationally and internationally and for professionals as well as interested parties. This can be achieved through digitalisation and open access but also by making translations available and facilitating interested parties from the Netherlands and abroad and familiarising them with the multitude of archives and inventory systems.

6. Observations and reflections - Essays on aspects of provenance research

1. The Restitution of Indonesian Colonial Objects: A Reappraisal

Sri Margana

My academic journey brought me to the Netherlands for the first time in 1998. The purpose of my journey was clear: I was seeking to find indigenous historical sources in the Netherlands. The 1990s was a period in which the study of Indonesian colonial history became strongly influenced by the idea of an autonomous history, that is, that Indonesian history should be written through recourse to Indonesian sources, rather than colonial sources. Several Javanese manuscript bundles collected by G.P. Rouffaer during his stay in Java in the late 19th century were the very first Indonesian documents that I touched. A collection of documents from the Surakarta, Yogyakarta and Mangkunegaran courts copied by Raden Ngabehi Hardjo Pradoto also caught my attention, because I had a profound interest in writing the history of Java during the colonial period. These documents are located in the KITLV library in Leiden and are very well looked after. Indeed, I was even allowed to copy the entire documents. The catalogue of the Rouffaer archive collections that is written by Dorothea Buur contains clear information about the origins of documents, which has greatly assisted me in drawing upon these documents in my research.

This collection of Javanese documents copied by Raden Ngabehi Hardjo Pradoto constitutes only one of the thousands of Indonesian material objects that were brought to the Netherlands during the colonial period. These documents are so important to the history of Java that I may never encounter them within my own country. For a historian such as myself, an encounter with documents of this kind is an incredibly exciting discovery that I am highly grateful for. However, this feeling was far from a straightforward one, because of my gnawing concern that the documents should not be there. I experienced precisely the same feeling and anxiety when I returned to Leiden for the second time in 1999. Once again I copied a bundle of memoirs from a Chinese descendant, Ko Hosing, who lived in Yogyakarta during the 19th century. On this occasion my anxiety was exacerbated by the fact that this manuscript was located in KITLV for an altogether different reason: the manuscript had been purchased in the 1970s from someone in Semarang. I believe that every Indonesian cultural object located in Yogyakarta has different reasons for being there, reasons which extend beyond colonialism alone.

In 2002, I began my studies at Leiden University. I was part of a major academic project that had been initiated a year earlier by Leiden University in collaboration with the National Archives in The Hague and UNESCO. I never did understand why this huge academic project involving scholars from Asia, Africa and Europe was named “Towards a new age of partnership”. It was not until I attended the 400th anniversary of the VOC commemoration that something dawned on me. The word “partnership” appears to refer to how the historical existence and journey of the VOC (*Vereenigde Oost Indische Compagnie*), a Dutch multinational trade organisation, is understood in the context of *Neerlandocentric* historiography. The two centuries in which the VOC existed are commonly referred to as the “golden age”. During this period, a trade organisation from a country whose territory is so small was able to control the trading network in the Indian Ocean for almost two centuries as well as

bequeath a vast territory and have abundant natural resources, a legacy that would later become a colonial state. This great achievement was understood as resulting from a partnership or cooperation between the Netherlands and the colonial community, rather than as imperialism. Consequently, this academic project aimed to use the VOC archives to reconstruct the history of this “partnership”. From this perspective, the historical information and facts contained in the VOC archives are a shared history that needs to be utilised by both parties.

Of course, this impression soon dissipated upon visiting several ethnological museums in the Netherlands. One museum that particularly induces anxiety and concern in me still as a member of a former colonised nation is the Ethnology Museum in the Netherlands (now known as the National Museum of World Cultures), which houses so many artifacts from Indonesia. It is not only the large number of collections that is astonishing, but also the sheer variety, age and historical value of the artifacts that are on display there. The impression that this museum made upon me, one I should add that has yet to leave either my heart or mind, generated manifold questions for me. For example, how did the objects get there, why are they there, how are they cared for, how many millions of euros have been generated from the sale of museum tickets, how many books have been written on these artifacts, and is it possible that they could be brought back to Indonesia? Therefore, whenever the issue of restitution of colonial objects is raised in public discourse, I feel a strong sense of *déjà vu*.

What I stated above is a mixture of subjective impressions framed by my background as an academic, a historian and also a member of a formerly colonised Indonesian nation. These impressions more or less inform my opinion, which I will present below in relation to this discourse. I will start by providing a general overview of the emergence of these ideas, before proceeding to end with providing ideas that might be understood as an attempt to bring these ideas to fruition.

Irrespective of who one is or what one’s motivations are, as a historian I wholly welcome the idea of restitution of colonial objects. The main reason for this is that we as a nation of owners have the right to own and care for these objects, both for present and future generations. This return need not concern itself with whether the existence of these objects in the Netherlands stemmed from violence or otherwise. Rather, all that matters is that they are returned to their country of origin.

Restitution of colonial objects as part of the process of decolonisation is not only a Dutch problem but also an Indonesian problem. From the Dutch perspective, restitution is driven by good intentions and will undoubtedly positively effect how the younger generation will view their colonial past. Restitution will reduce the burden of history itself as well as the burden of the generations who inherit history. For Indonesians, the restitution of historical objects will help to build a new historiography based on the artifacts that serve as the missing link in Indonesian history. While the existence of these historical objects in the Netherlands is history in itself, the two nations are wise enough to see what has happened in the past. However, what is more important for Indonesia is that historiographic decolonisation cannot be carried out if the existing historical evidence is out of reach.

Therefore, the restitution of historical objects must also be accompanied by something which has been proposed by both parties, namely provenance research. Such research would not only trace the origin of these objects, but, more importantly, would give birth to new knowledge about these objects and their historical value. This research should be the shared responsibility of both parties, given the fact that the production of knowledge on these objects is of universal scientific benefit. Therefore, both parties must work together to establish collaborations between academic institutions to research these objects. Although the restitution of historical objects may well lead to

the loss of certain financial assets and even value for the Netherlands, this will not be the case in relation to the assets and knowledge value of the returned objects themselves. This is because the value of knowledge is not attached to the place where artifacts are stored, but rather to the object itself. In other words, regardless of where objects are stored, they will still have the same value.

Besides the production of knowledge, provenance research is also important for inspiring moral values towards what is called “the legacy of past responsibilities”. To cite an illustrative example, when I was doing provenance research on the Kris Kyai Hanggrek from Susuhunan Pakubuwana IV Surakarta, I discovered that this kris had disappeared from the place where it was supposed to be kept, namely the Ethnology Museum in Leiden. The object was lost in the process of being transported from its original repository in the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities in The Hague. The disappearance of Kyai Hanggrek raises a host of issues concerning morality and responsibility for the loss of the object. However, this is not the first time this has happened in history. For example, when Kyai Hanggrek was sent from Surakarta to the Netherlands during the second decade of the 19th century, four of the eight ships filled with objects of natural history and material culture from Indonesia sank at sea. How can the moral issue and responsibility for the loss of these objects be accounted for? These issues are not meant to add to the “colonial sins” necessarily, but they certainly have implications for the future if and when the plan for the restitution of historical objects is realised. What if what happened in the past was once again repeated?

The question of Indonesia's readiness to accept the return of these objects is not a trivial matter. This question of readiness not only pertains to Indonesia's ability to provide a proper and safe place for these objects, but also its ability to manage conflict in the event that an individual or group claims entitlement over the returned objects. The elements of legality, property rights and post-restitution conservation are issues that are quite difficult to resolve. Therefore, Indonesia must anticipate this problem by issuing clear regulations that are supported by firm legal enforcement.

Another ongoing issue is the lack of clarity over the implementation of this restitution idea from the governments of both parties. Clarity and certainty are urgently needed if the initial steps and discourses that have been undertaken by academics and the public are not to be in vain.

Finally, I would like to suggest that the implementation of this idea will change the nature of academic, scientific, and cultural cooperation between the two countries in the future. Specifically, Indonesia will inevitably play a greater role in this collaboration by virtue of hosting the objects that have been returned. Indonesia's ability and commitment as a host in future collaborations need to be addressed from the Indonesian side. This concerns not only providing services for researchers from both countries but also from other countries.

2. Colonial abundance without embarrassment. Provenance of museum objects and the moral economy of collecting

Marieke Bloembergen

Provenance, in the narrow sense of ‘origin’, is not necessarily the most interesting aspect of the life of a museum object. The signification of objects changes, in mechanisms of exchange and interdependence, when they change owner and place, in the eyes of different involved parties, users and viewers, and in their journey through time. In this process, time and again, in different places, they become part of heritage politics. The sum of these transactions is what we call the social biography of an object, and what makes this biography political. For this reason alone, the question of provenance is not the same as asking: who is the rightful owner?

Whilst for many objects it is unclear *who* they should be with – and the answer to this question is always political – for some it is immediately clear *where* they should be. This applies – for example – to the Islamic gravestones from Sumatra and the Borobudur Buddha heads from Central Java, now held in depots and showcases in museums around the world (including in Jakarta). The gravestones belong on the ancient graves in Sumatra, the Buddha heads belong on the statues of the Buddhist temple which has stood in Java for over 1,100 years. In Indonesia these places, graves and temple, have in turn become part of national and international heritage politics, and also changed as a result of local signification. But *there* the gravestones and Buddha heads which are now in Dutch museums could have continued to play a part in local religious practices, memory creation and changing signification of that place. The fact that they have been unable to do so is painful. The fact that they were removed – in the context of colonial power structures – and disappear into museum showcases and depots as spiritual ‘Asian Art’ or are traded in the art market at ever-higher prices, should be seen as an injustice and epistemic violence. This is not necessarily a new idea: PPROCE itself is a result of the discussions on this subject.

Provenance research, as conducted within PPROCE, encompasses not only the question of origin but also the socio-political biography of an object: the histories and circumstances of the various transactions (including pillage) which have occurred from the moment an object disappeared from its original site to the moment when it ended up in a museum. Whilst the research by PPROCE produced salient descriptions of looting or donation under duress, this transactional history often remains shrouded in mystery for it is these transactions which were seldom or never recorded – by collectors, donors or recipients. Which is in fact strange. Those who, for example, removed the Buddha heads from Borobudur, saw the original site and entered into an actual transaction. However, most did not take the trouble to note down how, from whom, under what circumstances and conditions of exchange, they had obtained the heads there. More importantly, this did not seem to bother collectors and curators of the archaeological, ethnographic and art historical museums that purchased or received the heads. There was virtually no change to this passive stance – until the recent worldwide restitution debates and, for the Netherlands, PPROCE. Why was the provenance of items held in museums with collections amassed in a colonial context never a burning issue?

Let us follow a few of the donors and recipients of Buddha heads from Borobudur. What *did* they write down? Perhaps that will give us an answer to our question. Three motifs stand out: firstly, a sense of abundance without embarrassment; secondly, and seemingly contradictorily, a sense of decay and mission: a compulsive mission to save the material witnesses of disappearing ‘civilisations’; and finally, love of the object, in other words greed; greed motivated by scientific curiosity, aesthetic appreciation, desire for status, the drive for profit or a combination of these

motives. This love, or greed, dispelled all thoughts of moral and ethical questions regarding an object's provenance. In some cases patriotism – a frequently used argument for shipping objects off to museums, private collections and exhibitions in the Netherlands – could be a factor connecting all three motives but was just as much a façade for these. This combination of motives paradoxically resulted in indifference towards the object. The tragic thing about this is that the museums' own collection drive led to their becoming alienated from their collections.

Abundance without embarrassment

Abundance without embarrassment perhaps best describes the attitude that came to characterise collectors on the ground and the museums that were starting to be established from the 19th century. Even today, 19th-century descriptions of the abundance of Hindu-Buddhist antiquities in Java convey to the modern reader the idea of 'obtainability': as if they were there for the taking.

The Reinwardt Academy in Amsterdam, where heritage professionals are trained, is named after Caspar G.C. Reinwardt, a Dutch botanist of Prussian descent. On seeing the Borobudur in 1817, when it had only just been reclaimed from the jungle, Reinwardt experienced an acute and overwhelming sense of decay. Watching the ruined temple sprouting tree roots, and the behaviour of its visitors, Reinwardt moreover observed an apparent 'freedom' to remove the statues.

[d]it voor de geschiedenis van Java merkwaardig stuk [zal] spoedig [...] afnemen en verdwijnen, nu elk vrijheid heeft daarvan beelden af te nemen⁷⁹ [this piece which is remarkable to the history of Java [will] quickly [...] decline and disappear, now everyone is free to remove statues from it]

Apparently, for Reinwardt too, this freedom gave reason to ship a number of heads (and hands) of statues from Borobudur to the Netherlands. He did not note how he had acquired them, and in the Netherlands nobody seemed to care about this. What mattered to the recipients was the head itself, what it might represent and to which science – and hence in which emerging museum – it belonged. With regard to the transportation of the heads (from the temple to the port, from the port to the Netherlands and from the warehouse to the museum) there is currently more that we do not know than that we do.

The idea of abundance and obtainability of statues is a recurrent one in descriptions relating to the Buddha heads. In 1883 the director of the Rijks Ethnographisch Museum in Leiden Lindor Serrurier wrote: '*Beelden van de Boeddha's en mannelijke en vrouwelijke Boeddha-heiligen, met wezenlooze gelaatstrekken [...] zijn talloos op Java*'⁸⁰ [statues of the *Buddhas* and male and female *Buddha* divinities, with expressionless features [...] are countless in number on Java]. He wrote this in a background piece on the Hindu-Buddhist antiquities from Java at the 'International Colonial and Export-Trade-Exhibition', the world fair held in that year in Amsterdam. These included four Buddha heads, submitted by the Artis society and described as '*vermoedelijk afkomstig van den tempel Boro Boedoer*' [probably having come from the Temple of Borobudur]. It is highly likely that these are the four Buddha heads that in 1921 would end up – as part of the gift by Artis of its entire ethnographic collection – in the collection of the Colonial Institute (the predecessor of the Tropenmuseum, which

⁷⁹ Reinwardt, *Journal van de reis naar Indië en excursies op Java, Oct. 1815- Oct.1818*. UBL Leiden, Special Collections, BPL 2424: 5. Digitalised version, pp. 86-87.

⁸⁰ L. Serrurier, '11^{de} klasse. Kunsten en wetenschappen', *Catalogus der afdeling Nederlandsche Koloniën van de Internationale Koloniale en Uitvoerhandelentoonstelling van 1 Mei tot ulto October 1883. Groep II*. Leiden: Brill, 1883, p. 286

opened its doors in 1926). Here we can trace their journey from highly refined imperial showpiece to the museum depots, but otherwise these four Buddha heads suffered a similar fate to the Reinwardt Borobudur pieces, which would end up in the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden in 1903: nobody asked about their provenance.

Doubts

With the provenance history of most of the Buddha heads remaining uncertain, more recent registration cards dating from the postcolonial era, after the Colonial Institute had been renamed the Tropenmuseum, show that one curator had his doubts. He believed that the different external characteristics of the various Borobudur Buddha heads in the Tropenmuseum, by now eight in total, may suggest that they could not all have come from the same temple. In other words: doubts about provenance. Nothing was actually done; no historical research was conducted. These doubts, and the reasoning behind them, were eventually copied over into the digital registration system TMS.

Having spent most of their time in storage in depots three of the Artis Buddha heads resurfaced in 2012, next to a painting by Jan Veth – *‘Studie van de Boroboedoer, 1922’* [Study of the Borobudur, 1922] – in the exhibition ‘Encounters: Hidden Stories from the Tropenmuseum’s Collection’. The accompanying museum text was almost a verbatim copy of what the aforementioned curator had written on a registration card:

*‘De Borobudur bezat 505 levensgrote beelden van een zittende boeddha-figuur. Van vele beelden ontbreekt het hoofd. Talrijke musea en particulieren beweren een of meerdere van die hoofden te bezitten, ook het Tropenmuseum dat acht Boeddha-hoofden in de collectie heeft. Maar hooguit één komt van de Borobudur’*⁸¹ [The Borobudur had housed 505 life-size statues of a seated Buddha figure. Many statues are missing their head. Numerous museums and private individuals claim to own one or more of these heads, including the Tropenmuseum, which has eight Buddha heads in its collection. But at most one is from the Borobudur.]

Visitors to the exhibition were invited to think about the ethics of all this: *‘Is het hebben van een Boeddha-hoofd van de Boroboedoer prestigieus, of juist onethisch en moet teruggave overwogen worden?’*⁸² [Is it prestigious to have a Buddha head from the Borobudur or is it in fact unethical and should restitution be considered?]. In so doing the museum publicly subjected itself to critical self-examination and the exhibition makers should be commended for this. At the same time their question about ethics seems non-committal, if only because of the bizarre way in which they chose to express doubts about provenance and authenticity in the museum text without suggesting that any serious research was being or should be conducted into the collection or provenance history or saying anything about the necessity of this. The biggest let-down came at the end of the museum text: the metaphor of abundance and takeability.

*‘In de buurt van Borobudur liggen trouwens andere monumenten die ooit duizenden Boeddha-beelden telden. Om een zogenoemd ‘authentiek’ Borobudur-boeddha-hoofd te vinden hoefde je niet ver te lopen’*⁸³ [Near Borobudur there are also other monuments which once housed thousands of Buddha statues. You did not need to walk far to find a so-called ‘authentic’ Borobudur Buddha head].

⁸¹ Museum text, Exhibition ‘Onverwachte ontmoetingen’, Tropenmuseum, 2012-2013.

⁸² Museum text, Exhibition ‘Onverwachte ontmoetingen’, Tropenmuseum, 2012-2013.

⁸³ Museum text, Exhibition ‘Onverwachte ontmoetingen’, Tropenmuseum, 2012-2013.

Alienation

Did the sense of abundance perhaps have a paralysing effect on directors and curators of ethnographic museums? Could that be why no provenance research was generated? Because it is clear that the idea of abundance was registered by 19th-century collectors and later adopted by curators. Moreover abundance was leading for 19th-century exhibitors: the thinking went that the more that was arranged in a space or showcase or on a wall, the more convincing the story would be. Abundance was also a motto for evolutionary scientific research: the more objects in the evolutionary history of mankind, the more convincingly the comparison could be substantiated. And the more a collection grew, the less time a collector or curator could spend on object-focused historical research. But this way of distributing and spending hours for research into the collection also reflects the priorities set by the museums and their financiers.

Or was the lack of interest in 'provenance history' paradoxically related to specific scientific curiosity? And hence to affection for and love of the object – or, in other words, greed? In the context of the evolutionary racial thinking that determined the world view of curators well into the 20th century the questions that they asked had a self-validating effect, to the exclusion of other choices and questions, and with these questions equally leading to greed. This insight, that the questions were driven by a need for self-knowledge or self-validation, is also not new. But it shows that love for and curiosity about the object ultimately come across as a lack of genuine interest in the provenance and social biography of the item, and as indifference. Here, too, the priorities of museums play an important part. The tragedy, once again, is that the museums became alienated from their collections.

The question of provenance is not necessarily the most important aspect of the socio-political history of a museum object but this is not to say that provenance does not matter. It is strange that museums did not feel the need to have their curators research this history of objects. In order to deepen and broaden insight into world history and local history and the question about the colonial dimensions, object-focused **historical** research should become the main task of museums and their curators, if they wish to be socially relevant. Regardless of the question of restitution. But museums should not be the ones in control of such research: let them be generous in opening up and giving access to their archives and providing research space in permanent reading rooms for students and outside researchers of every kind. So that the objects can tell the socio-political stories that they hold within them – wherever and to whomever. So that we can learn from the objects and see and understand the wider world, beyond our own horizons and outside the context of heritage institutions.

3. Thinking through Provenance

Henrietta Lidchi and Francine Brinkgreve

This collaborative project has asked, of those curatorial and research staff involved, a key series of questions as we work through, and in so doing, trouble the idea of provenance research. A key consideration is that of purpose. The classical model of provenance is that of tracking and tracing ownership and to the extent that ownership betokens authenticity, creating an understanding of the original identity of the object investigated. This genealogical exercise owes much to the well-understood format that comes from art historical investigation and those more recently deployed to identify the former owners of spoliated material coming out of the Second World War. However both the concepts of ownership and authenticity when viewed within transcultural processes carry significant amounts of epistemological baggage. The overarching question regarding provenance research in the colonial context it could be argued, is less one of genealogy or linear transmission and more one of structural implicated-ness. Concepts of ownership and identity are entangled with structural processes of appropriation and appreciation in colonial contexts and require investigation of the often opaque, and erratically documented, business of object transfer. What are the implications of identifying the processes by which objects came into possession of institutions and individuals when the context in which they did so have fuzzy or self-serving regulations essentially determined by colonial nations? How do these processes implicate the current custodians, and how are the current custodians to properly address them? In thinking through these questions, we can move beyond biographical models, that helpfully generate a more expansive sense of heritage, ownership and value to further models that seek to examine the politics of implication, namely that seek to forefront understandings of the legacies and entanglement of objects in current debates about heritage, value and justice.

New perspectives on research and value

Provenance research like all research is framed by questions that require answers, and as our questions change, so our methodologies should adapt, and our answers flex to accommodate new principles, new evidence, and new possibilities. Conventional provenance research departs from the object and works back through catalogues, and ownership and documentation. But what of an object that has historically not been found, as is the case of the keris of Pangeran Diponegoro long associated with the National Museum of World Cultures. What kind of investigation, evidence and reasoning is necessary to enable conclusions to be drawn? As has been argued by Jos van Beurden, this keris was the object of enquiry many times, and yet in 2017-2020, the museum engaged in new research and found it.

What was the key change? A reframing of the question, a process of deduction as regards collections; changing relationships with the nature of evidence; in particular understanding the question of rhetorical strategies innate to documentation and the vagaries of translation.

The key change in this final research process was that the National Museum of World Cultures for the first time took Indonesian perspectives seriously. The researchers especially took good notice of a letter written by Diponegoro's army commander Sentot Alibasaya Prawirodirdjo, in which he states that he knows for sure that the keris donated to colonel Cleerens was owned by Prince Diponegoro. The margin of the translation contains a statement written by the Javanese painter Raden Saleh,

which not only explains the meaning of the name of the keris, Kyai Naga Siluman, but also gives a detailed description of the keris. This description turned out to be the main key to the identification. Moreover, we respected the capacity of a Javanese keris expert to feel the powerful *isi* (content) of the keris. What also helped was the mutual trust within political/diplomatic relationships between Indonesia and the Netherlands, which had improved over the past decades. The museum worked closely together with the Indonesian Embassy. And it was at the request of Indonesia to wait for an official moment (the State visit by the Dutch King and Queen to the Republic of Indonesia) for the return of the keris of one of Indonesia's most prominent national heroes.

As of March 2020, the keris is returned to the Republic of Indonesia, and is added to the collections of the National Museum of Indonesia, and not to a regional museum in Yogyakarta or to the Sultan's family, of which Prince Diponegoro was a member. The ownership of the keris had already changed from an individual to a national level when the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities, where the keris was kept after being presented in 1831 to King William I by colonel Cleerens, was dissolved in 1883 and became part of the National Museum of Ethnography ('s Rijks Ethnografisch Museum) which takes care of a State collection.

Provenance research in the colonial context can very rarely trace back individual ownership of an object or a collection. An example is *Staatsiekeris [keris] RV-3600-193*, taken as war booty after the colonial war in 1908 against the Balinese kingdom of Klungkung (*Puputan Klungkung*, see [provenance report Staatsiekeris \[keris\] \(RV-3600-193\)](#)). The paper trail of the transfer of the booty as a whole, from the Klungkung battlefield (28 April 1908) to Batavia (June 1908), to the museum in Leiden (1909), to the museum of the KMA in Breda, and back to Leiden in 1956, provides no evidence either of the individual Balinese person who was the owner of the keris, or the individual KNIL soldier who took it away. Moreover the circumstances under which it was taken remain unclear. The kerisses were treated as a group. However, keris Ardawalika, which was the personal possession of Dewa Agung Jambe, the Ruler of Klungkung, was extracted in order to remain in the colonial capital Batavia and was not sent to Leiden, because of the importance of the individual to whom it had originally belonged. Today it remains on display in the treasure room of the Museum Nasional Indonesia, the successor of the Museum of the Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences. Klungkung was able to borrow this keris from the Museum Nasional for a major centenary remembrance ceremony of the *puputan* in 2008, but afterwards sent it back to Jakarta.

In preparation of an exhibition about Bali, in 2018 the National Museum of World Cultures filmed and interviewed a descendant of the deceased Dewa Agung, Ida Dalem Surya Darma Sogata. We talked about the *puputan* and all the precious objects, now in the museums in Jakarta and in the Netherlands. According to Ida Dalem Surya Darma Sogata, all these important *pusaka*, heirloom pieces, irrespective of whether they are kept by museums, will always be regarded as the property – the inheritance – of the kingdom of Klungkung. He added that in this regard he remained very proud of them. If provenance has historically been limited to questions of legal title and ownership, these recent developments invite us to challenge assumptions and seek to understand the potential of provenance research in new and multi-dimensional ways.

4. Provenance history: transnational and from below

Klaas Stutje

Ngeyakabani na legolide (who's gold is this, man?)
Ngeyakabani na legolide (who's gold is this?)
[...]
Iyelele bare mataba abutse (beautiful stones)
Iyelele bare mataba abutse baabitsa bari kidi demand Bapedi (beautiful stones they call them diamonds, Bapedi)
[...]
Who takes the gold and where does it go?
When I have to go home empty handed, after my contract's done.

Hugh Ramapolo Masekela, *Gold*, from the album *Still Grazing*
(Blue Thumb Records, 2004)

The need to know the provenance and circumstances of acquisition of colonial collections is a key part of the broader agenda to 'decolonise' ethnographic and other museums. The call to hold museums accountable is real and deserving of serious attention. However there are three methodological pitfalls – each of which has long been known but is still relevant – which pose a threat to a critical reinterpretation of the meaning (and future) of these collections.

Firstly there is the pitfall of 'methodological nationalism': research whereby, consciously or unconsciously, the nation state is understood to be the most fundamental and original unit of research. The meaning of other geographical units and interpretation frames, such as (transnational) cultural regions, cross-border trade networks or spheres of religious influence, is considered to be of lesser importance in this approach.⁸⁴ Methodological nationalism is partly inherent in the collecting tradition of ethnographic museums. Because although it was in the nature of ethnographic collecting to distinguish, categorise and record different peoples, languages and cultures, the peoples together represented the entity of the colony, as a delineated unit under the rule of the own nation state: the colonial motherland. Another part is that methodological nationalism can once again be evoked – if we are not careful – if we put provenance research too much at the service of restoring historical injustice between former colonising and colonised states. Traditional 'national' interpretation frameworks continue to give too little attention to the fact that objects in reality are often hybrid products, influenced by and designed in various material traditions, and could moreover easily cross national borders.

Secondly there is the pitfall of uncritical acceptance of national and regional 'identities' as historical fact and their application as an analytical category. The term 'identity' is often used both in formulating national restitution policy and in describing the meaning of objects for countries or groups of origin. However its use has long been criticised in the realm of social sciences and humanities. For example in *Colonialism in Question* Frederick Cooper and Rogers Brubaker point to a

⁸⁴ For an accessible analysis of methodological nationalism and issues surrounding it see Sebastian Conrad, *What is Global History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2016) 3 ff.

number of issues surrounding the term, such as the fact that 'identity' is understood as a deeply embedded immutability, whereas it is mainly applied in the analysis of identity **change**. The term is also used both to refer to individual and personal uniqueness and to the sense of groupness, and as an objective analytical category as well as for subjective definition of the self.⁸⁵ Because of the conceptual vagueness of the term it remains for example unclear whether 'national' objects mainly took on meaning in relation to a deep-rooted sense of national uniqueness or, conversely, in relation to a fluid process of colonial expropriation, nation **building** and postcolonial **reclaiming**. Also, uncritical acceptance of the existence of regional identities can sometimes lead to a reaffirmation of deep colonial and even racist assumptions about the originality and immutability of peoples and their cultures.

Finally there is the pitfall of elite historiography. Despite the fact that many ethnographic museums collected everyday utensils and commercial products, it is state regalia and objects which once belonged to prominent historical figures that receive above-average attention when developing restitution and heritage policy. The lives and contributions of other groups with less power or status, including women, cultural minorities and workers, are once again at risk of being disregarded, despite decades of historiography from below. This applies to both the selection of objects and how these objects are written about. To understand the essence of the colonial system and its everyday consequences for various social groups it is however vital to reflect actively on the material heritage of these groups.

These three pitfalls should not discourage the provenance researcher from conducting their research. On the contrary! The research experiences with PPROCE show that object-focused provenance research is in itself a very appropriate way to avoid the aforementioned dangers and give a platform to alternative stories. When researching for example the Banjarmasin Diamond [see [provenance report](#) NG-C-2000-3] the researcher can focus on Sultan Tamdjidillah II (1817-1867), who was put under severe pressure by the colonial state to abdicate and surrender the crown jewels in 1859, but they can also reveal how the diamond – as a raw material – was mined in the 1820s in the royal diamond mines around Martapura, and what systems of remuneration and tribute applied to the miners, many of whom were Chinese. The forced surrender of the diamond is part of the violent expansion of the colonial state in the Indonesian archipelago but also provides an insight into the role of the local diamond industry in the 18th century in contacts between Banjarmasin and South China, the growing colonial interest of the Netherlands and Great Britain in the area from in the 19th century, and the economic decline of the region after the global market became flooded with South African diamonds from 1870 onwards. Finally object-focused research can illustrate how the meaning of the diamond has changed over time: from one of the 150 crown jewels of Banjarmasin to the prime symbol of Eastern despotism in the eyes of Dutch orientalists; from "*een kostbaar gedenkteekeken van eene belangrijke gebeurtenis in de geschiedenis van Nederlands-Indië*"⁸⁶ [a precious memento of a major event in the history of the Dutch East Indies] in 1875 to "*voorbeeld van oorlogsbuit*" [an example of spoils of war] in 2020⁸⁷; and from "*betekenisvol niet alleen voor het Sultanaat van Banjarmasin maar ook voor het Banjarese volk in het algemeen*"⁸⁸ [meaningful not only to the Banjar Sultanate but also to the Banjar people in general] to an object "*met een*

⁸⁵ Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question. Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2005) 62-70.

⁸⁶ NL-HaNA, Colonies, 1850-1900, 2.10.02, inv.no. 2779, note verbale 21 April 1875 no. 19.

⁸⁷ Gonçalves-Ho Kang You (ed.), "Koloniale Collecties en Erkenning van Onrecht" [Colonial Collections a Recognition of Injustice] (Adviescommissie Nationaal Kader Koloniale Collecties, Raad voor Cultuur, 2020), 10.

⁸⁸ Endang Nurdin, Callistasia Wijaya, "Raja Belanda diminta mengembalikan berlian Banjarmasin: 'Jika bertemu, saya akan minta semua barang kesultanan di Belanda'" (BBC News Indonesia, 13 March 2020).

belangrijke historische waarde voor de Indonesische samenleving en identiteit”⁸⁹ [of significant historical value to Indonesian society and identity].

In other words, object-focused provenance research that is aware of methodological pitfalls provides an opportunity to tell varied and balanced stories, resulting in a more layered understanding of the colonial past.

⁸⁹ Callistasia Wijaya, “Indonesia-Belanda: Ratusan ribu benda bersejarah Indonesia dimiliki Belanda, akankah segera dikembalikan?” (BBC News Indonesia, 17 March 2020).

5. History in layers and across borders: six Sri Lankan objects from the Rijksmuseum

Alicia Schrikker

The interplay between the local and the foreign is not simply a phenomenon of Nāyaka [Kandyan] rule but existed in different shapes and forms in Lankan history and, one might even add, in the history of other nations - Gananath Obeyesekere⁹⁰

Provenance research of objects with a colonial history must not solely revolve around the question of when and why an object ended up in a Dutch collection. Instead, the PPROCE report argues that provenance research should include a biographical approach to the object, with space for reflection on the changing socio-political context in which the object acquired meaning. In practice the research shows that this socio-political context is usually less clear than would appear at first sight. Thorough knowledge and consideration of the regional historiographical debates is therefore vital. In the case of Sri Lanka, for example, various views of ethnic identity and cultural uniqueness play a major part in the social and academic debates. At the same time the Netherlands long held a rather nostalgic view of its own colonial past in Sri Lanka.⁹¹ In the course of the research into the Sri Lankan objects from the Rijksmuseum it proved important to recognise these at times conflicting views and historiographical trends. Moreover it is through object research that we are able to make our own contribution to these debates.

Layered history

The provenance research into the Sri Lankan objects largely revolved around unravelling the layered and culturally intertwined history of the objects. Precisely because of this layeredness of the objects the research needed a transnational, borderless approach, in both the literal and the figurative sense. As an island in the middle of the Indian Ocean Sri Lanka has a long history of external political, cultural and economic influences. For example in the 17th and 18th centuries the Kingdom of Kandy maintained dynastic relations with courts in South India and had religious links with other centres of Theravada Buddhism in Arakan (Myanmar) and Ayutthaya (Thailand). Moreover it is one of the few regions in the world scarred by colonialism of three successive European powers: the Portuguese (1506-1656), the Dutch (1636-1796) and the British (1796-1947). The recent political history of Sri Lanka was long dominated by a nationalist discourse, in which foreign cultural influences were minimalised and the history of minorities was marginalised. In the words of Zoltán Biederman and Alan Strathern:

here remains indeed a general sensitivity towards 'foreign interference' in the past and in the present, whether that is suspected as emanating from the neighbouring behemoth of India or the more distant ex-hegemon of Europe or 'the West'.⁹²

⁹⁰ Gananath Obeyesekere, 'Between the Portuguese and the Nāyakas: the many faces of the Kandyan Kingdom, 1591–1765.' In: Biedermann, Z ; Strathern, A. *Sri Lanka at the Crossroads of History*. (London, 2017). 161-178: p. 177; see also the important reflection on this in the report by Asoka de Zoysa, 'Report No: 01' in: Asoka de Zoysa and Ganga Rajinee Dissanayaka, 'Provenance research of the "Lewke cannon" in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (2022).

⁹¹ Nira Wickramasinghe wrote as recently as 2016: '*Terwijl in postkoloniaaal Sri Lanka onverschilligheid over het koloniale verleden veranderde in een gretige consumptie ervan, lijkt de Nederlandse samenleving te volharden in ontkenning. Termen als ras, of koloniaaal geweld horen we zelden in het maatschappelijk debat of de wetenschap*' [While in postcolonial Sri Lanka indifference with regard to the colonial past made way for eager consumption thereof, Dutch society appeared to persist in denial. Terms such as race or colonial violence are seldom heard in either the public debate or scientific circles], see: N. Wickramasinghe, 'Voorwoord' in: Lodewijk Wagenaar, *Kaneel en Olijfant. Sri Lanka en Nederland sinds 1600*. (Nijmegen, 2016), p. 13.

⁹² Alan Strathern and Zoltán Biedermann, 'Introduction: Querying the cosmopolitan in Sri Lankan and Indian Ocean history' in: Biedermann, Z ; Strathern, A. *Sri Lanka at the Crossroads of History* *Sri Lanka at the Crossroads*, 1-18: p. 13

The six Sri Lankan objects from the Rijksmuseum which were studied bear traces of this layered history of Sri Lanka. On the one hand they portray cultural processes of localisation, interconnectedness and exchange and on the other show the raw history of physical appropriation of land, people and resources by the VOC. The research into these objects was a fascinating process in which we sought to untangle the objects' various layers. The provenance question with which we started the research automatically led to broader questions about the manufacturing history and signification.

Take for example the Cannon of Kandy. The layered history was a part of the socio-political biography of this object, both literally and figuratively. For instance the cannon turned out to have been decorated in various stages. Our research showed that it was probably originally cast as a gift from the VOC to or by order of the king of Kandy. That also explains why the cannon was originally decorated with acanthus leaves and cherubs – familiar European motifs. But it also bore a number of typically local elements, for example being decorated with a Kandyan crest and a typical onion-shaped knob on the end. So even this bottommost layer of the cannon expresses this history of cultural adaptation and interconnectedness. Subsequently the cannon was further embellished with exceptionally rich decoration which is largely Kandyan in nature and it is during this phase that a Sinhalese inscription was added. We were able to deduce from the inscription that the lavish decoration had been applied on the instruction of the Sinhalese noble Lewke, an important political figure in the 18th-century kingdom of Kandy. Closer inspection of the motifs once again revealed traces of cultural interconnectedness: the elegant Narilathas (plant women) engraved on its side – most unusually – have wings which appear to echo the wings of the cherubs applied at an earlier date. Other elements, such as the engraved giant squirrel, a type of animal endemic to Sri Lanka and South India, conversely pointed to the specifically local context in which the decoration had been applied.

Socio-political biography of the objects

Right from the start the cannon was a political object, having twice served to curry favour with the king of Kandy, first by the VOC and later by Lewke Disawe. The subsequent history of the cannon, however, shows the violent context of colonialism: it was probably taken during the Dutch campaigns against the king of Kandy in 1762-1765 and subsequently gifted as spoils of war to stadtholder William V, who displayed it in his cabinet of curiosities as a war trophy. In the 19th century the object took on another new life when it was temporarily linked to national hero Michiel de Ruyter. In the 20th century it was alternately interpreted both as a gift and as spoils of war. The research therefore involved peeling away not only the art historical layers but also the various meanings assigned to the cannon in the past.

Each object was found to have a different socio-political history. The manufacturing history of the *maha thuwakku* (wall guns) brought to light an ancient history of technical knowledge exchange which led to the development of a sophisticated weapon industry in Kandy in the 17th and 18th centuries. With clear traces of usage, these heavy weapons literally carry with them the history of the war between Kandy and the VOC in 1762-65. The golden *kastane* has a beautiful and typically Kandyan hilt of solid gold, inlaid with no fewer than 138 diamonds and 13 rubies. At the same time this royal ceremonial weapon has a blade with a clear VOC origin, and as such this object once again revealed this entangled history. The biographies of these Sri Lankan objects thus make an extremely complex history tangible. It is the uncomfortable history of a world in which cultural transfer, diplomacy and violent conflict were inextricably linked.

Cross-border research

Cross-disciplinary cooperation was essential in creating the object biographies, with the cooperation with experts from Sri Lanka and other parts of the world being vital: expertise in the area of 18th-century Sri Lankan (Kandyan) art, crafts, weapons and epigraphy is virtually non-existent in the Netherlands. Conversely the language barrier means that Dutch archives are virtually inaccessible to Sri Lankans, despite some of them being held in the National Archives of Sri Lanka in Colombo. Although travel was impossible for the duration of the project much could be done via video calls, for example close joint examination of detailed photographs of inscriptions and motifs on the objects and archive files. This provided an effective way for researchers who were looking at the objects from different disciplines to share their observations and analyses.

There is also another way in which the experience with Sri Lanka brought important insights into cooperation. Sri Lanka is a country that, like many other parts of the world (for example Taiwan, Brazil, South Africa, Ghana) has a Dutch-colonial past which impacted on the subsequent colonisation by other European (or, in the case of Taiwan, Asian) powers. People in the Netherlands were and are often not so aware of the frequently violent role played by the Dutch in this early history of colonisation, and until quite recently this had consequences for how objects from these regions were treated. Applications for restitution were often not taken seriously, while the painful history of war and violence was often downplayed. This was not always beneficial to the dialogue.

This blind spot that the Netherlands has with regard to its own colonial past also played a role in a different way. With the discussion about the objects being viewed as a purely Dutch-Sri Lankan matter, earlier reconstructions of the object histories rarely looked beyond these borders. That it was important for the research to orient itself beyond the borders of the Netherlands and Sri Lanka was already apparent from the research into the aforementioned cannon of Kandy. Thanks to the involvement of two British cannon specialists in the research we were able to track down two similar cannons which are held in Windsor Castle. A comparison of these three cannons produced important insights into the manufacturing history. There was also another way in which the British legacy played a role in the history of the objects we researched: Sri Lankan interest in the cannon was sparked in the 1930s, a period when a number of royal objects which had been gifted to the British royal house as spoils of war after the conquest of Kandy in 1815 were returned by Great Britain to the national museum in Sri Lanka.⁹³

After gaining its independence in 1947 Sri Lanka also made a number of applications to the Netherlands for restitution of the cannon but the Netherlands never took these requests seriously. Not only was Sri Lanka not on the radar, it is also likely that people were unaware that the British had already restituted Kandyan objects and how important this was to Sri Lanka. In other words: for the Netherlands the cannon simply belonged to a history which it regarded as 'closed' but which was still visible everywhere in Sri Lanka and which moreover had paved the way for British colonialism. From the Sri Lankan point of view these histories are therefore inextricably linked. And what applies to Sri Lanka will also apply to many other areas where the Netherlands has left its colonial mark.

⁹³ Nira Wickramasinghe, 'Authenticity and hybridity: Scrutinising heritage.' in: *IIAS newsletter*, No.57, 2011, 20-21; Aldrich, R. (2016). 'The return of the throne: the repatriation of the Kandyan regalia to Ceylon.' In: Robert Aldrich and Cindy McCreery (eds) *Crowns and Colonies*. (Manchester 2016). 139-162

6. Looking back. Experiences with provenance research into artworks stolen during the Nazi regime.

Ellen Grabowsky and Jona Mooren

In 2019 the Expert Centre Restitution/NIOD, the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam and the National Museum of World Cultures initiated the Pilotproject Provenance Research on Objects of the Colonial Era (PPROCE). The experience that the Expert Centre Restitution (ECR) has with provenance research into artworks whose original owner involuntarily lost possession of them during the Nazi regime – now generally referred to simply as ‘Nazi-looted art’ – was an important reason why the project was placed with the NIOD. Many employees at the ECR have a long track record in the area of research and restitution and the various professional and social developments in this field, not just in the context of recommendations to the Restitutions Committee but also as a result of involvement with *Museale Verwervingen vanaf 1933* [Museum Acquisitions from 1933]. In addition the theme of ‘transitional justice’, which revolves around issues relating to the processing of a traumatic past, is firmly anchored within the ECR and the NIOD. This provides the opportunity not only to contribute to the research into the individual objects selected for PPROCE and the methodological recommendations in this report but also to reflect on developments surrounding provenance research into and restitution of objects from different periods of injustice.

In recent decades the Netherlands has built up extensive experience in researching and dealing with objects whose original owners involuntarily lost or may have lost possession of them during the Nazi regime and in the issue of how to restore this injustice. It is an issue which was felt to be increasingly pressing both nationally and internationally and on which the Netherlands also took initiative to bring about a restoration of injustice. April 1998 saw the publication of the first report with recommendations to this end, following a pilot concerning the recovered artworks managed by the Dutch State, known as the Netherlands Art Property Collection or NK collection. Not long after, an important step was taken with the establishment of the Restitutions Committee, which advises on individual applications for the restitution of Nazi-looted art. The expectation was that several dozen applications would be brought before the committee and that the committee itself would be disbanded after a few years. Things turned out differently.

This was followed by numerous other research initiatives, almost always on a project basis. Museums researched their own collections. The Origins Unknown Agency (BHG) researched the NK collection and supported both museums and applicants in their research. In addition scientific publications appeared, from Muller and Schretlen and Campfens⁹⁴ among others, and exhibitions were organised in the Bergkerk church in Deventer, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam and the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. Several times expectations were voiced or even announcements made that the possibility to submit applications for restitution was to end. However the topic has constantly remained high on the social agenda, with almost no decline in the number of claims and the minister once again investing heavily in provenance research with the renewed research into the NK collection by the Cultural Heritage Agency (RCE). In 2018 the ministry assigned the ECR a key role in the areas of research in relation to claims, free scientific research and the generation of attention for the field and its further professionalisation.

⁹⁴ Eelke Muller and Helen Schretlen, *Betwist Bezit. De Stichting Nederlands Kunstbezit en de teruggave van roofkunst na 1945*, (Zwolle: Waanders, 2002), Evelien Campfens, *Cross-border title claims to cultural objects: Property or heritage*, (The Hague: Eleven, 2021)

It is pointed out with some regularity that there are major differences between research into loss of possession during the Nazi regime (1933-1945) and research into loss of possession in a colonial context.⁹⁵ Of course there are major differences between these research domains, starting with the much longer time period over which the research extends. The manner in which injustice will be restored is also likely to be different, for example intergovernmental restitution versus individual restitution. That said, the nature of the problem (restoration of injustice) is essentially comparable and there are major similarities in the research into the historical circumstances. Consequently a provenance researcher specialised in Nazi-looted art will recognise many of the methodological recommendations set out in this report. This researcher also has to deal with strongly biased sources, here too it is very important to research the situation in which the (often Jewish) owner or donor found themselves in the case of a sale or gift, and the object itself will sometimes provide important research leads.⁹⁶ The results of such research do not only contribute to individual restorative justice but also to knowledge production with regard to persecution and the persecuted. In this reflection we mainly want to look at the existing infrastructure. What lessons have been learned and what pitfalls can be avoided by looking carefully at this parallel field? The following contains a number of initial observations.

Network

A national and international network is crucial to provenance researchers. After all, the consequences of both the Nazi regime and colonial power relations were felt far beyond the national borders of the occupying or conquering powers. The two *Museale Verwervingen* projects showed that it is very important that curators and provenance researchers exchange experiences, share knowledge and keep each other on their toes in what can at times be a challenging or even frustrating job⁹⁷. Internationally the *Arbeitskreis Provenienzforschung* has come to play an important role⁹⁸. The *Provenance Research Exchange Program* (PREP) between Germany and the United States, which involves a small group of provenance researchers alternately spending a week in archives and museums in Germany and the US, could be a great – and, insofar as we can judge at this time, desirable – example for researchers in countries including the Netherlands and Indonesia.⁹⁹ It takes time and effort to build such an international network, given that a relationship of trust needs to be built before the network can start producing results.

Independent research and opinion

In the Netherlands an infrastructure has been established in the field of provenance research and restitution processes relating to the period 1933-1945, which can serve for comparison and as inspiration for the new infrastructure being established in relation to the colonial past, more or less as proposed by the Gonçalves Committee. The existence of an independent assessment body in the Netherlands, the Restitutions Committee, is generally highly valued. For example in *Appell für ein Beratendes Gremium* Andrea Bambi points to the desirability of bodies which transcend the German federal states, of mutual checks and a broad-based and well-founded standard. In so doing she points to the Dutch model as an example for Germany: *‘Vorbildhaft sind in diesem Zusammenhang*

⁹⁵ For the differences and similarities see for example Adams, Catteeuw, Van Beurden, “Teruggave ontrafeld, reflecties over museumobjecten in tijden van repatriëring en restitutie”, in *Volkskunde* 2019, 3, 305-323, p. 317

⁹⁶ Some objects will moreover require both research into the colonial situation and into the provenance during the Nazi regime. Think for example of the many Benin bronzes in the confiscated collection of the Jewish collector Rudolph Mosse. [MARI \(mari-portal.de\)](http://mari-portal.de)

⁹⁷ “Provenance research can be challenging and frustrating. One may spend hours, days or weeks following a trail that leads nowhere”, Nancy H. Yeide, Konstantin Akinsha and Amy L. Walsh, *AAM Guide to Provenance Research*, (Washington DC: American Alliance of Museums, 2001), 141.

⁹⁸ See [Arbeitskreis Provenienzforschung \(arbeitskreis-provenienzforschung.org\)](http://arbeitskreis-provenienzforschung.org)

⁹⁹ See [German /American Provenance Research Exchange Program for Museum Professionals, 2017-2019 | Smithsonian Institution](https://www.si.edu/german-american-provenance-research-exchange-program)

die niederländische Restitutiecommissie (...).¹⁰⁰ Lynn Rother considers the involvement of experts in restitution or legal procedures to be very important:

Reconstructing a provenance today usually entails identifying, locating and gaining access to sources and archives as well as interpreting historical signs and documents which can be fragmentary, decontextualized and difficult to understand.¹⁰¹

The frequently used term ‘provenance’ sometimes evokes associations with the historical practice whereby famous sites and collections were linked to artworks in order to increase their prestige or value. The provenance research that takes place in connection with applications for restitution is, however, much more than creating an overview of former owners or possessors. Not only are there questions in play surrounding identification and ownership relations, but in research connected with applications for restitution of Nazi-looted art it is particularly important to reconstruct the actions of actors who were involved in the journey the objects have made and the context in which this took place. Moreover, by casting light on crimes of the past or previously unknown parts of the family history the research process can provide a kind of reparation for the descendants or heirs.

Research relating to applications for restitution therefore involves much more than may be expected at first. As well as research in art historical literature and archives, biographical and historical research is of key importance, as is knowledge of relevant networks. This extensive research – which exceeds the capacity of heritage institutions themselves – is often greatly appreciated by applicants in restitution procedures:

The Committee’s research bureau gets to the bottom of everything. We received an investigation report relating to our claim, from which it emerged that a great deal of archival research had been conducted. And probably what we saw was only the tip of the iceberg. (...) This makes a much better impression on applicants such as ourselves rather than receiving a letter with the announcement, “These are your things. Where do you want us to deliver them?” (...) I personally learned a great deal from the investigation report. It contained facts about my family and my grandfather’s gallery that I never knew.¹⁰²

Structural embedding

Finally, research into Nazi-looted art has taught us that continuity and structural embedding of provenance research is vital. Looking back we can see that the infrastructure surrounding provenance and other research into Nazi-looted art was established in a somewhat ad hoc way, often under great social pressure. The inherent risk of ad hoc solutions is that they will result in patchwork, with Bureau Berenschot concluding in 2015 that there were duplications and blind spots in the field.¹⁰³ In recent years a lot of work has been carried out by temporary staff, and provenance

¹⁰⁰ Andrea Bambi, “Appell für ein Beratendes Gremium in der ethnologische Provenienzforschung”, in *Provenienzforschung zu ethnografischen Sammlungen der Kolonialzeit Positionen in der aktuellen Debatte* ed. Larissa Förster, Iris Edenheiser, Sarah Fründt, Heike Hartmann, (digital publication, 2018) <https://doi.org/10.18452/19029>, 325

¹⁰¹ Sharon Hecker, Jennifer Mass, Lynn Rother, “The Benefits and Challenges of Expert Witnesses for Art Law Cases and the CAFA Expert Witness Pool”, in *Art & Cultural Heritage Law Newsletter*, Summer 2021, 6

¹⁰² Annemarie Marck and Marleen Schoonderwoerd, “Ultimately, the Applicant Needs to Feel that Justice Has Been Done, an interview with Alfred Jacobsen”, in Ed. Evelien Campfens, *Fair and Just Solutions: alternatives to litigation in Nazi-looted art dispute: status quo and new developments*, (The Hague: Eleven International Publishing, 2014), 105

¹⁰³ Bureau Berenschot, Een toekomstgericht restitutiebeleid. Over een duurzame, transparante en onomstreden organisatie rondom restitutie (The Hague, 2015), can be consulted at www.tweedekamer.nl.

research has often been used as a standalone, short-term project, meaning that expertise on the provenance of collections has not always been preserved in the museums.

This problem is not exclusive to the Netherlands. In *Rethinking Provenance Research* Christian Fuhrmeister and Meike Hopp wonder with regard to German research into Nazi-looted art:

If, however, one of Germany's largest museums [Bayerischen Staatsgemäldesammlungen] considers a period of 274 years to be realistic just for the art-historical processing, in the form of a collection catalog, of seven thousand paintings dating from before 1800, how is the incomparably larger challenge of checking the provenance of works to be met within a two-year project?¹⁰⁴

At the same time experience shows that such processes simply have to happen one step at a time and that aiming for completeness can also have a paralysing effect.

In the colonial field the question also arises as to how and where the research should be organised. In her policy vision the minister stated:

*Herkomstonderzoek van collecties behoort tot de kerntaken van musea en is essentieel voor het aankopen, behoud, beheer en presenteren van objecten. [...], [ik] verzoek [...] de beheerders van de Rijkscollectie om dit herkomstonderzoek voortvarend op te pakken en zal [...] de overige musea wijzen op hun verantwoordelijkheid*¹⁰⁵ [Provenance research of collections is among the core tasks of museums and is essential to acquiring, maintaining, curating and presenting objects. [...], [I] request[...] the curators of the Dutch National Art Collection to expeditiously tackle this provenance research and will [...] remind the other museums of their responsibility].

The question is, however, how many museums are at present actually able to consider provenance research as a core task, at a level beyond basic registration, also bearing in mind the changing role of curators.¹⁰⁶

Another problem in this respect is that educational opportunities have failed to keep up with all these developments. The Netherlands does not yet offer any structural higher education in the area of provenance research into Nazi-looted art; most researchers learn on the job, whereas countries such as Germany and the UK do offer targeted learning. It would be worthwhile to structurally embed specialist provenance research in the Dutch heritage landscape. This could be done not only by creating space for specialised provenance research that is structurally embedded in all large and medium-sized Dutch museums and for an independent expert centre for restitution applications, but also by creating study opportunities for master students in the Netherlands and countries of origin, as well as offering further training to heritage institutions and the art trade. This will create a generation of employees in the museum and heritage sector who have the tools needed to address these issues.

¹⁰⁴ Fuhrmeister, Hopp, "Rethinking Provenance Research", *Getty Research Journal*, vol. 11, 2019, 217

Followed by: "It is worth noting that what is meant here by "art-historical processing" is really no more and no less than the documentation, recording, classification, and, where appropriate, attribution of the works in keeping with the latest research—not provenance research, and not the search for previous owners."

¹⁰⁵ Gonçalves-Ho Kang You, Lilian (ed.), 'Koloniale Collecties en Erkenning van Onrecht' (Council for Culture 2020) 9

¹⁰⁶ See for this for example Micha Leeflang, *No Exhibitions, No Visitors, No Money: The Effect on the Curator's Role*, lecture at the Codart Congress 2019









In conclusion



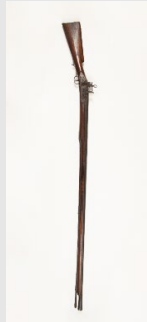




What we can in any case learn from research into objects stolen between 1933 and 1945 is that provenance research can bring a great deal of information to light and as such can deepen and broaden the general public knowledge of the period. In so doing it can contribute to a long-term process of processing the past.¹⁰⁷ Building a professional field and network takes time and money, and requires investment in the building of expertise. Anyone considering cutting corners to achieve a quick result could well be making a serious mistake. This mistake can be avoided by investing systematically right from the start in international networks, in structural embedding of provenance research, in education and retention of expertise and in safeguarding independent research and judgement.

¹⁰⁷ As Hilmar Farid said “It’s not simply about the return of objects; it’s about knowledge production. It’s about rewriting of histories; it’s about dealing with past injustices.” This webinar can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aOF0tMOHnf4>. For an explanation see <https://www.soas.ac.uk/cseas/events/seminars/20may2021-the-politics-of-restitution.html>.









Appendices

1. List of PPROCE provenance reports (selected objects)

Serial no. of provenance report	Serial no. of object	Managing institution	Object number	Object name (as registered by the institution)	Image	Author of provenance report
1	1	NMVW, Museum Volkenkunde	RV-360-1475	Hoofddekseel (kanigara) [headwear]		Tom Quist
	2		RV-360-1481	Gordel voor Staatsiekris (Epek) [belt]		
	3		RV-360-1481a	Staatsiekris (Keris) [ceremonial kris]		
2	4	NMVW, Museum Volkenkunde	RV-360-1623	Schild [Shield]		Klaas Stutje
3	5	NMVW, Museum Volkenkunde	RV-360-5255	Wayang bèbèr platen [Wayang beber scrolls]		Klaas Stutje
	6		RV-360-5256			
	7		RV-360-5257			
4	8	NMVW, Museum Volkenkunde	RV-360-5268	Trofee-schedel [skull]		Klaas Stutje
5	9	NMVW, Museum Volkenkunde	RV-360-5393	Staatsiekrissen [Ceremonial krisses]		Tom Quist

	10	NMVW, Museum Volkenkunde	RV-360-5394			
6	11	NMVW, Museum Volkenkunde	RV-360-5839	Lans [<i>lance</i>]		Klaas Stutje
7	12	NMVW, Museum Volkenkunde	RV-360-5859	Musket		Klaas Stutje
8	13	NMVW, Museum Volkenkunde	RV-360-6021	Staatsiekris [Ceremonial kris]		Tom Quist
9	14	NMVW, Museum Volkenkunde	RV-360-8080	Brief van de sultan van Madura [Letter of sultan of Madura]		Tom Quist
	15	RMA	NG-NM-7115	Kris of King William I		
10	16	NMVW, Museum Volkenkunde	RV-360-8082	Staatsiekris - Keris		Tom Quist






11	17	NMVW, Museum Volkenkunde	RV-360-9543a	Amuletrol [talismanic scroll]		Mirjam Shatanawi
12	18	RMA	AK-RAK-1988- 19	Miniatuurstupa [Miniature stupa]		Caroline Drieënhuizen
13	19	RMA	NG-C-2000-3	The Banjarmasin Diamond		Klaas Stutje
14	20	RMA	NG-2009-134	Model of a Javanese Marketplace		Klaas Stutje
15	21	NMVW, Museum Volkenkunde	RV-1429-134	Tekeningen van mythische vogel [Drawings of a mythical bird]		Mirjam Shatanawi
	22		RV-1429-134a			Mirjam Shatanawi
16	23	RMA	NG-2004-47	Sinkin panjang met schede [Sword]		Mirjam Shatanawi



17	24	NMVW, Museum Volkenkunde	RV-1599-660	Kris met schede (Kreh bugeh meusarongan) [keris]		Mirjam Shatanawi
18	25	NMVW, Tropenmuseum	TM-1482-1	Handgeschreven Koran met rijk versierde folio's [Qur'an manuscript]		Mirjam Shatanawi
19	26	NMVW	RV-179-1	Paneel van een graftombe [Tomb Panel]		Mirjam Shatanawi
20	27	NMVW, Tropenmuseum	TM-674-722	Laken staatsiejas toebehoort aan Teuku Umar [Teuku Umar jacket]		Mirjam Shatanawi
21	28	NMVW, Tropenmuseum	TM-1704-11	Zwaard zonder schede [Sword without sheath] (Gliwang pucok meukawet)		Mirjam Shatanawi
22	29	NMVW, Museum Volkenkunde	RV-163-48d	Hikayat Makkah Madinah [manuscript]		Mirjam Shatanawi
23	30	NMVW, Museum Volkenkunde	RV-3600-594	Grafsteen – Batu Aceh [Gravestone]		Mirjam Shatanawi
24	31	NMVW, Museum Volkenkunde	RV-761- 105	Dolk met schede – lading belajoeng lama [spearhead]		Klaas Stutje

	32		RV-761-114	Lans met schede, gebruikt als waardigheidssymbool van een vorst – <i>toembak djangat</i> [dagger]		
25	33	NMVW, Tropenmuseum	TM-H-1669	Kromme sabel met schede, de kling met geïncrusteerde Arabische inschrift [Curved Sabre]		Klaas Stutje
26	34	RMA	NG-1977-279-15-1	Indische vlag [Flag]		Klaas Stutje
27	35	NMVW, Museum Volkenkunde	RV-300-183	Strijdjak [Ceremonial war jacket]		Klaas Stutje
28	36	OSG Graaf Engelbrecht	-	Skull A (no formal title)		Klaas Stutje
29	37	OSG Graaf Engelbrecht	-	Skull B (no formal title)		Klaas Stutje
30	38	OSG Graaf Engelbrecht	-	Skull C (no formal title)		Klaas Stutje
31	39	NMVW, Museum Volkenkunde	RV-3600-193	Staatsiekris – <i>keris</i> [Ceremonial Kris]		Tom Quist

32	40	NMVW, Museum Volkenkunde	RV-3600-1892	Krissen [krisses]		Tom Quist
	41		RV-3600-1893			
	42		RV-3600-1894			
	43		RV-3600-1895			
33	44	NMVW, Tropenmuseum	TM-6441-1	Miniatuurkoran in messingen foedraal [Miniature Qur'an in brass locket]		Mirjam Shatanawi
34	45	NMVW, Tropenmuseum	TM-5663-18	Katoenen jak met Arabische kalligrafie [Batik vest with Arabic calligraphy]		Mirjam Shatanawi
35	46	NMVW, Tropenmuseum	TM-6092-1	Insigne van de nationalistische Siliwangi divisie – Enblem pin divisi Siliwangi [<i>Insignia of the Siliwangi Division</i>]		Mirjam Shatanawi
36	47	NMVW, Tropenmuseum	TM-A-5945	Stenen hoofd van een Boeddha Beeld (Artis Buddhaheads) [Stone head of a Buddha statue]		Marieke Bloembergen and Melle Monquil
	48		TM-A-5946			

	49		TM-A-5947			
	50		TM-A-5948			
37	51	RMA	NG-MC-1889-84-4	Flag (Vlag uit de voormalige Nederlandse koloniën)		Caroline Drieënhuizen
38	52	RMA	NG-MC-1889-84-6	Flag (Zulfiqar) – Vlag uit de voormalige Nederlandse koloniën		Caroline Drieënhuizen
39	53	RMA	AK-RAK-1992-3	Bodhisattva Amoghapasha Lokeshvara (statue)		Caroline Drieënhuizen
40	54	RMA	AK-RAK-1970-2	Vajrasattva (statue)		Caroline Drieënhuizen
41	55	NMVW, Museum Volkenkunde	RV-2432-3	Voorouderbeeld – amfjanir, amphjanir [Human figure]		Caroline Drieënhuizen
42	56	NMVW, Tropenmuseum	TM-H-350a	Model van een saron, kinderspeelgoed [Model of a saron, children's toy]		Caroline Drieënhuizen
43	57	NMVW, Tropenmuseum	TM-H-2285	Zalfpot van aardewerk [Chinese ointment jar]		Caroline Drieënhuizen

44	58	NMVW, Tropenmuseum	TM-1772-406	Stenen beeld van een Singha [Stone statue of a lion, or singha]		Klaas Stutje
45	59	NMVW, Museum Volkenkunde	RV-1994-10	Handschrift (Lontar)		Caroline Drieënhuizen
46	60	RMA	NG-NM-1015	Singalees kanon of Lewuke's kanon		Alicia Schrikker and Doreen van den Boogaart in collaboration with <i>Asoka de Zoysa, Ganga Dissanayake, Ruth Brown, Kay Smith and Arie Pappot</i>
47	61	RMA	NG-NM-7114	Singalees mes of Piha-kaetta met schede [knife]		Alicia Schrikker and Doreen van den Boogaart in collaboration with <i>Senarath Wickramasinghe</i>
48	62	RMA	NG-NM-560	Kastane met schede uit Kandy (gouden) [sabre]		Alicia Schrikker and Doreen van den Boogaart in collaboration with <i>Senarath Wickramasinghe</i>
49	63	RMA	NG-NM-7112	Kastane met schede (zilveren) [sabre]		Alicia Schrikker and Doreen van den Boogaart in collaboration with <i>Senarath Wickramasinghe</i>

50	64	RMA RMA	NG-NM-519	Two wall guns (jingals) <i>Gingals</i> or <i>Grasshoppers</i>		Alicia Schrikker and Doreen van den Boogaart in collaboration with <i>Chamikara</i> <i>Pilapitiya</i> , on behalf of the Colombo National Museum
	65		NG-NM-520			

2. Organisation of the research: the work packages

The research for the **Pilotproject Provenance Research on Objects of the Colonial Era (PPROCE)** is organised around eight work packages (WPs). Aside from organisational WPs dealing with project management and external communication (WPs A and H) and the work project about the Indonesian-Dutch restitution debate the remaining WPs are organised thematically based on object research. These thematic work packages were carried out under the direction of Jona Mooren.

The work packages primarily constituted an internal organisational tool and were not arranged based on theoretical or historical grounds. The choice does, however, reflect a variety of potential starting points and approach routes, ranging from lists compiled by museums in countries of origin to collections in a particular museum, as described in more detail in chapter 3. This also left room for a certain amount of overlap. In the actual conduct of the research not all work packages were developed to the same depth.

Work package B

The objects in this work package were selected in consultation with the Museum Nasional Indonesia in Jakarta. The research was conducted by Klaas Stutje, Mirjam Shatanawi, Tom Quist and Caroline Drieënhuizen.

Work package C

The purpose of this work package is to analyse the Indonesian-Dutch restitution debate since Indonesian independence and was carried out by Klaas Stutje.

Work package D

The objects in this work package can be related to a number of colonial conflicts, namely those in Banjarmasin, Aceh, Bali and the war of decolonisation. The research was conducted by Klaas Stutje, Mirjam Shatanawi and Tom Quist.

Work package E

The objects in this work package ended up in the Netherlands via colonial institutions. The research was conducted by Marieke Bloembergen and Melle Monquil, and Caroline Drieënhuizen.

Work package F

The objects in this work package ended up in museums via private collections. The research was conducted by Caroline Drieënhuizen and Klaas Stutje.

Work package G

The objects in this work package were selected after discussions with various universities and museums in Sri Lanka. The research was conducted by Alicia Schrikker and Doreen van den Boogaart.

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