
Doortmont, Michel R. & Smit, Jinna. – *Sources for the Mutual History of Ghana and the Netherlands*

Andreas Massing



Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/etudesafriaines/14238>
DOI: 10.4000/etudesafriaines.14238
ISSN: 1777-5353

Publisher

Éditions de l'EHESS

Printed version

Date of publication: 30 March 2011
Number of pages: 252-254
ISBN: 978-2-7132-2297-9
ISSN: 0008-0055

Electronic reference

Andreas Massing, "Doortmont, Michel R. & Smit, Jinna. – *Sources for the Mutual History of Ghana and the Netherlands*", *Cahiers d'études africaines* [Online], 201 | 2011, Online since 26 April 2011, connection on 21 April 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/etudesafriaines/14238> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/etudesafriaines.14238>

This text was automatically generated on 21 April 2022.

© Cahiers d'Études africaines

Doortmont, Michel R. & Smit, Jinna. – *Sources for the Mutual History of Ghana and the Netherlands*

Andreas Massing

REFERENCES

DOORTMONT, Michel R. & SMIT, Jinna. – *Sources for the Mutual History of Ghana and the Netherlands. An Annotated Guide to the Dutch Archives Relating to Ghana and West Africa in the Nationaal Archief, 1593-1960s*. Leiden, Brill Academic Publishers & Nationaal Archief, 2007, 393 p., bibl., index.

- 1 In the year which celebrated the bicentennial of the abolition of slavery—and 300 years of Dutch-Asante relations—this guide to documents on Ghana (Guinea Coast, Gold Coast) in Dutch archives gives international students and researchers access to the National Archives (formerly Algemeen Rijksarchief) which previously had been accessible only to Dutch speakers¹. The Netherlands have had the longest contacts with Ghana among the six nations with establishments on the Gold Coast—Portugal, Denmark, Sweden, Prussia, England—and left the largest corpus of documents in their archives, which this guide now opens up to an international readership.
- 2 The guide is preceded by an introduction on background and chronology of Dutch presence in Ghana. A bibliography, indices by name, geographical location, and keywords are found at the end. Numerous shaded chronological or alphabetical charts provide useful working tools. The guide is organized in two parts, namely a chronological guide to the records, and thematic discussions of major topics.
- 3 Part I presents the archival documents in chronological order. The Dutch National Archives form the largest group (some 200 pages). Again the bulk of National Archives records are government documents (from p. 17 to 146) presented in chronological order. A table at the beginning of this part (pp. 1819) gives an alphabetical overview of

government archives by record group and by agency and period with page references. The record groups correspond to historical periods—for example, records from the 2 West India Companies only date from the 17th and 18th centuries, Admiralty documents from the pre-Napoleonic period (before 1795), and ministry records date only from the reorganization of the Dutch Republic in 1795 etc. It is recommended to use this table as entry to the guide if one searches for records of a particular period and compare with the chronology of Dutch presence in West Africa (pp. 4-6) to look for particular dates.

- 4 The earliest documents are found in the record groups of the States of Holland and Friesland (1572-1795), the States General (1576-1796), the Admiralty (1586-1795), miscellaneous West Indian documents (1614-1875), the First West India Company (1621-1674), the Second West India Company (1674-1791), while the majority of documents date from the 19th century, among which the State Council, the State Government, and the various ministries (Trade & Colonial Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Economic Affairs). Two groups of documents indicate earlier periods but the dates are in doubt—the so-called 1902 collection (from 1218-1885) collection of misplaced records of unknown origin (1474-1848), as the documents from the early part of the periods are not presented in the guide.
- 5 Collections outside the National Archives are also present in the guide : documents in private collections (pp. 146-177) ; maps and charts (pp. 178-208) ; documents in the Royal Colonial Institute (KITLV)² at Leiden (pp. 209-213) ; documents at Kew Gardens in Great Britain (pp. 214-215) ; and documents at the University of Ghana at Legon—the so-called Furley collection (pp. 216-240).
- 6 Part II presents on some 100 pages Dutch history in Ghana by topics. These are the history of Dutch presence on the West African Coast, which begins in 1590, and from 1621 is synonymous with West India Company presence in Africa. Dutch relations with other European nations ; Dutch administration and judiciary ; Guinea Coast in Dutch archives ; Economic activities and socioeconomic relations ; Castles, forts and towns. Therefore readers interested in particular subjects should first consult this part which also contains further references, explanatory maps, charts and sample documents.
- 7 For example, the section on economic activities contains sub-sections on gold trade and mining, slave trade, “other activities” and the recruitment of Africans for the East Indies. The section on “other activities” contains sections on the Axim cotton plantation including sketch map of fort and village, on indigo dyeing, on production of building materials, on logging and sawmill operations, on yards for ship repair and boat building. Also included are tables on Dutch imports and exports by commodity, quantity and value—which show gold and ivory to account for 87 % and 10 % respectively of export value. Nontraded items such as planks for ship repair, vegetables and fruit from the Government Garden at Elmina for Dutch personnel, or poultry or small animals from a livestock ranch are also mentioned here as documented either in the WIC (West India Company) or NBKG records.
- 8 While the guide focuses on the Dutch presence in Ghana, particularly its coastal possessions, there are two exceptions, for the 17th century when Dutch archives collected documents from all possessions on the “Guinea Coast” from the Gold Coast to Benin e.g. Allada (Ardra) to Cape Town and, second, the 19th century when they collaborated with the British in Sierra Leone for the suppression of the slave trade. Explicit reference is made to earlier guides to Dutch archives, such as Carson’s guide to

archival materials in Belgium and Dutch archives (1962), and Roesingh & Visser's (1978) guide to sources of African history in Dutch archives.

- 9 From 1576 to 1796 government archives are those of the Staten Generaal (something similar to the first Continental Congress) which governed the United Provinces and was responsible for foreign relations, colonies and the supervision of the trade *e.g.* the West India (WIC) and East India (VOIC) Companies. After 1795 government archives were centralized under the Ministry of Colonial Affairs until 1872, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs thereafter. They are divided into collections of Resolutions *i.e.* treaties and foreign negotiations ; of Secret Affairs with the WIC and VOIC, of Admiralty and foreign naval powers *e.g.* Sweden, Denmark ; provincial records such as those of Seeland, Friesland and archives of the Supreme Commanders (Stadhouders) of the WIC and VOIC. A special collection is that of the colonial archives of the first WIC (1621-1664) much of it lost in 1821 and 1841 fires, with sections on Dutch possessions on the Guinea coast. These include the archives of the Governors, of various other administrative bodies *e.g.* the Great Council, the military commanders, the fort commanders. After 1795 besides Foreign Affairs other Ministries such as War, Trade & Economic Affairs, Colonial Affairs (including a Dutch section in the French Naval Ministry), and Religious Affairs also maintain archives relating to Ghana. The private collections include among others pre-and post-1621 material *e.g.* of admiral de Ruyter, and governor Daendels³.

NOTES

1. The online inventory of the archives of the Guinea coast possessions can be accessed through <<http://www.nationaalarchief.nl/webviews/summary>>.
2. The former Royal Institute of Geography, Linguistics and Ethnology at Leiden University, is now Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies. Its focus is on Dutch Indonesia, but documents relating to West Africa are contained in the Caribbean record group.
3. Not covered by this guide but sources on Dutch History in Ghana (Elmina) can be found in the Library, the Africa Study Centre (<www.ascleiden.nl>), or the Institute KITLV (<www.kitlv.nl>) of Leiden University, the Netherlands Economic and Historical Archives in Amsterdam (<www.neha.nl>), the Town archives of Amsterdam, Rotterdam and of the Hague (<www.stadsarchief.amsterdam.nl> <www.gemeentearchief.rotterdam.nl>, <www.gemeentearchief.denhaag.nl>).