

Paulus

Paulus, a young man born in Africa, worked as a servant in the Nassau La Lecq household in the Netherlands during the 17th century. Although slavery was legally prohibited in the Netherlands, the Dutch elite saw having a black servant as a status symbol.

In The Hague, Paulus married and started a family. He eventually joined Stadholder William III's guard as a timpanist (drummer). He was no longer referred to as 'moor' – a term used in colonial times by elite families for their black servants – but as Monsieur Paul Maurice Agulard.

Nevertheless, in works of art, both young African servants and older men who worked as timpanists are depicted with a collar around the neck. The collar implies a hierarchical relation based on the idea of European dominance and African subjugation.

This neck band was originally categorized as a dog collar but was more probably worn by a human being. Collar with the Nassau Coat of Arms, 1689.

Detail of a bust of an African Man. John Nost the Elder, 1701.

In assembling a dolls' house, wealthy ladies were showcasing the ideal version of a Dutch household which included a black servant. The Dolls' House of Petronella Oortman, Jacob Appel I (1680-1751), c. 1710.

Detail of the African servant on the portrait of Maurits, Count of Nassau-La Lecq, anonymous, c. 1670, Dutch Cultural Heritage Agency.

Cavalry regiment led by a mounted timpanist wearing a collar around his neck, Cornelis Troost, 1742.