

FROM TABLE TO TRASH

THE LIFE CYCLE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBJECTS



SHOWCASE EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

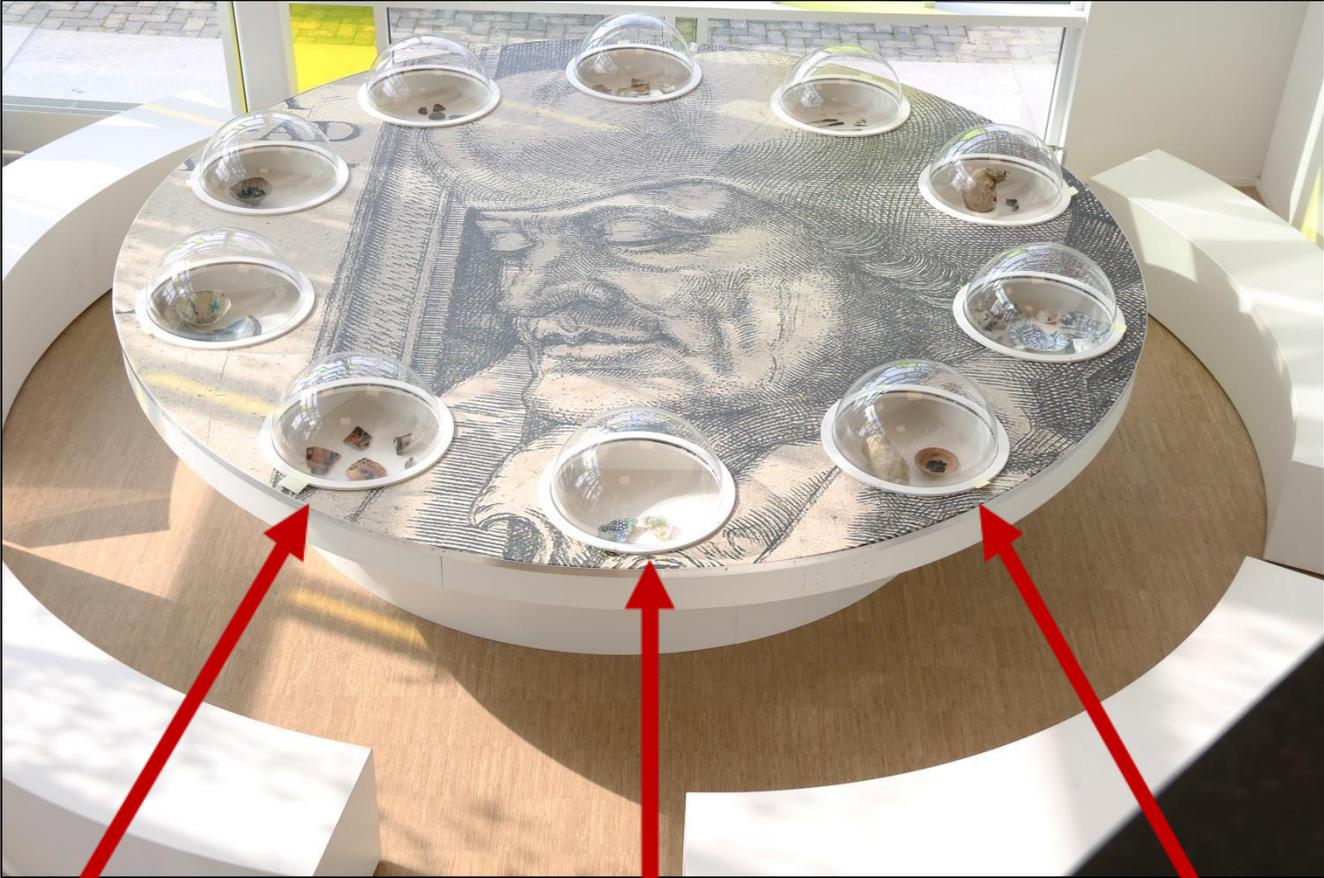
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COORDINATED, ORGANISED & EDITED

BY DR. JOANITA VROOM

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PHOTOS OF THE EXHIBITION EQUIPMENT AND OBJECTS
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THE FIRST OF AN ONGOING SERIES OF MINI EXHIBITIONS



From Table to Trash: The Life Cycle of Archaeological Objects

**The Faculty's depot reveals its secrets:
from Mesopotamian beverages and Iron Age acorns
to wining and dining with Erasmus.**

(07.09.2017 – 20.12.2017)

**Location: at the entrance of the Faculty of Archaeology
of Leiden University**



Organiser and editor: Dr. Joanita Vroom.



With the help of Prof. Peter Akkermans, Prof. Corrie Bakels, Prof. Menno Hoogland, Dr. Olivier Nieuwehuysse, Dr. Roos van Oosten, Dr. Marike van Aerde, Dr. Rachel Schats, Dr. Jason Laffoon, Loe Jacobs, Drs. Annemieke Verbaas, Suzan van de Velde, Mink van IJzendoorn, Timothy Stikkelorum, Fenno Noij, Josephine Say and Jaap Hoff.



The exhibition equipment was kindly donated by the
Wereldmuseum in Rotterdam
after the exhibition *'I cook, therefore I am' / 'Ik kook, dus ik ben'*
(09.02.2017 – 31.07.2017).

Leiden, Faculty of Archaeology 2017

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DINNER WITH ERASMUS



These tableware fragments of Early Modern Majolica and Faience were made in the Netherlands. Their vivid painted decorations show food items like apples, pomegranates and grapes, as well as animals, such as birds.

In Early Modern Europe, during the time of the humanist Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466-1536), tableware revealed a great diversity of intercultural influences. Dutch Majolica and Faience were, for instance, inspired by colourful painted wares produced in the Mediterranean, most notably in Italy.

Erasmus wrote about the subject of table manners in his famous instructional treatises, which, combined with archaeological data, give us great insight into 16th-century culinary culture in the Low Countries.

During this period solid wooden tables were used, covered with a linen tablecloth (*picture 1*). Normally, large food-serving dishes, which were often filled with vegetables and fruits, were centrally positioned on the table, together with glass beakers, metal ewers, cutlery and toothpicks (*picture 2*). The dishes were made of either pewter, earthenware or more luxurious decorated ceramics (such as Majolica and Faience).

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Objects: Majolica and Faience sherds from the Netherlands, ca. 16th to 17th century CE.

Provenance: Unknown.



Picture 1: 16th-century tableware (photo: *Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam*).



Picture 2: Embroidered linen tablecloth depicting a laid table, dated 1527 (photo: *Schweizerisches Landesmuseum, Zurich*).

A MEDITERRANEAN «SYMPOSION»



Traditional gatherings of men, ideas and entertainment, known as symposia (ancient drinking parties held after a banquet), were a steadfast phenomenon throughout the Hellenic Mediterranean. Politics, philosophy and poetry were on the menu, alongside copious amounts of wine in richly-decorated ceramic craters and cups (*see picture*).

The sherds on exhibit are examples of pottery used during symposia, usually decorated with scenes of revelry, or famous tales from Greek mythology. They are of typical red-figure Attic style, possibly originating from 5th century Attica. These sherds were found in southern Italy in the early 20th century. Attic pottery was still in use in the Greek colonies of Magna Graeca and also often included in Etruscan grave contexts up until the 3rd-2nd century BCE.

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Objects: Red-figure Attic pottery fragments 33, 36, 37, 79, IV-A,
ca. 5th century BCE.

Provenance: Southern Italy (collected by the former «Archeologisch Instituut Leiden», ca. 1960).



Pictures: Red-figure crater, ca. 400-380 BCE, probably from southern Italy
(photo: Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden, object nr. GNV 7).



DINING IN DAMASCUS



Arabic cooking manuals were already compiled in Early Islamic times, and among these was the earliest cookbook of the eastern world, Al-Warraq's *Kitab al-Tabikh*, written in Baghdad in the mid-10th century. It contains some 500 recipes, an extensive list of ingredients and various recommendations regarding the etiquette of eating. Contemporary illustrations depicting banquets provide hints about dining habits and the use of tableware in Islamic society.

Diners sat on the floor and ate their food from low tables or trays. A miniature from a 13th-century manuscript shows a centrally placed dish of a roasted animal, surrounded by small round breads (*see picture*). A servant is cutting the meat with a knife, while the guests were eating in a communal way, using their hands. Furthermore, we can see a hanging collective napkin, as well as two decorated vessels on the table. These were probably used for serving drinks, but possibly also for sauces, as meat was often served with a gravy.

Painted ceramic vessels used for dining have been excavated in many different sizes and shapes. Bowls were probably used for appetizers and side dishes, while meat and fish were served in larger vessels, comparable to this 13th-/14th-century blue and lustre painted dish from Damascus.

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Objects: Glazed painted bowl and dish with a fritware body,
ca. 13th-14th century CE.

Provenance: Syria.



Picture: Miniature from Al-Hariri, *Maqamat*, Iraq, 1240s
(photo: *Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS. Arabe 3929, 149r, Paris*).

CHARRED ACORNS FROM IRON AGE BRABANT



Today, acorns are commonly regarded as pig food, but in prehistory they were part of the human diet. In some parts of the world, acorns are still consumed. In Korea, acorn flour is used to prepare noodles; in the western Pyrenees, they are made into pancakes (*see picture*).

The nuts are rich in carbohydrates and have a nutritional value comparable with cereals. Acorns, however, contain tannic acid, giving a bitter taste, and this has to be removed before they can be eaten.

The usual method of making acorn flour is to first shell the acorns. After the shells are removed, the acorns are ground, and the flour is rinsed with water to remove the tannic acid. Rinsing is done by putting the flour in a sieve with a fine cloth at the bottom. The resulting pulp is then dried.

Roasting acorns over a fire, or in an oven, makes the shelling easier. However, this needs to be done with caution: too much roasting can cause charring. The acorn is then inedible. For the archaeological record, however, this is a good outcome, as charred acorns resist decay and turn up in excavations.

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Objects: Charred acorns, Iron Age.

Provenance: Excavation Faculty of Archaeology at Oss in Brabant.



Picture: Plate with acorn pancakes, made nowadays (*photo:* <http://evergreenknits.blogspot.nl/2006/05/acorn-pancakes.html>).

Detail of acorns



DRINKING MILK IN PREHISTORY



Several sherds of Neolithic cooking pots and painted beakers were recovered during the Dutch excavation project at Tell Sabi Abyad, northern Syria. On first inspection, the black and red fragments on the left do not seem very attractive, but, on closer examination, they reveal something extraordinary.

In fact, during chemical analysis carried out by the School of Chemistry of the University of Bristol in collaboration with Leiden University (*picture 1*), microscopic traces of milk have been discovered on these sherds. This prehistoric milk residue is evidence of the earliest human use of milk and dairy in the Middle East.

Livestock, such as goat and sheep, were already herded in the Middle East around 8000 BCE; however their secondary products (wool and milk) only came into use two thousand years later. Today, we are still grateful for the healthy invention of our forefathers (*picture 2*).

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Objects: Neolithic ceramic sherds, ca. 6200-6000 BCE.

Provenance: Tell Sabi Abyad, northern Syria.



Picture 1: R. Evershed and M. Roffet-Salque discuss the organic residue analyses carried out on Neolithic sherds from Tell Sabi Abyad (*photo: School of Chemistry, University of Bristol*).



Picture 2: Lili drinks a beaker of milk, a ‘secondary product’ (*photo: Olivier Nieuwenhuyse*).

WESTERN BOWLS ON EASTERN TABLES



These decorated tableware sherds were found at Tell Deir ‘Alla in north-western Jordan during an excavation in the 1960s. The assemblage consists of different types of so-called ‘Polychrome Glazed Sgraffito Ware’, which originates from the island of Cyprus and from Italy. Such Western imports can be placed in the geopolitical and socioeconomic contexts of Medieval and Post-Medieval society.

Two major historic events were important: the Crusades and the increasing influence of Venetian and Genoese merchants in the eastern Mediterranean. These events drastically changed the inter-regional connectivity between the Near East and the Mediterranean world in the 13th century, when commercial activities intensified. Many goods were shipped from and to the Crusader states in the Levant. Most of these items have all but perished. However, pottery, like these colourful sherds, still remains to tell a story of the once lively contacts between East and West.

Fragments like these also shed light on the societies in which ceramics were produced and consumed, because they were used at the table as well as for display. Especially Cypriot bowls have elaborate motifs depicting scenes from daily life, including flowers, animals, knights and feasting ladies (*see picture*).

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Objects: Sherds of Cypriot and Italian Polychrome Glazed Sgraffito Wares, 13th-15th centuries CE.

Provenance: Tell Deir ‘Alla, north-western Jordan.



Picture: Dish depicting a feasting lady with a jug and a beaker in her hands, 14th century CE, found at Nicosia
(photo: *Department of Antiquities, Nicosia, Cyprus*).

ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE ARCHAEOLOGISTS (THROUGH 19TH-CENTURY CUTLERY)



During recent excavations at Ephesus (western Turkey) metal cutlery was found at an Ottoman grave monument («Türbe»), among which a spoon, a fork and a knife with bone haft. It is tempting to connect these 19th-century iron finds with the first generation of archaeologists and workmen in Ephesus, as these teams were working at the nearby excavations of the Artemis Temple during the 1860s.

It is known that some of these archaeologists used this Türbe as a shed for rest and recreation, for meals, and for storage of their tools. Looking at pictures of the first excavations in Ephesus, taken by J. Trotman in the 1860s and stored in the Beazley Archive in Oxford, the excavator J.T. Wood and his team are clearly visible in front of the Türbe (*picture above*).

In a way, our recovery of the rubbish they discarded (metal knives, forks, spoons), while searching for earlier remains of human activity, completes the archaeological circle.

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Objects: 19th and 20th Century metal, antler and bone cutlery and knives.

Provenance: Unknown.



Picture 1: J.T. Wood and his team in the 1860s (*photo: J. Trotman, Beazley Archive, Oxford*);



Picture 2: 19th-century metal cutlery recovered at Ephesus (*photo: N. Gail, ÖAI*).

THE PROBLEM WITH FOOD



Food is an important aspect of human life both past and present. We need food to survive, as well as for a range of other purposes, from enjoyment to the display of status. There is, however, always a snag: in combination with poor oral hygiene, certain food types may result in problems for consumers.

Eating too many carbohydrates, like sugars and starches, may for instance result in cavities, also known as carious lesions. An advanced case of this can be seen in the displayed mandible from the Post-Medieval town of Aalst (Belgium), where you can see how parts of the teeth have been destroyed by caries.

Dentistry in the past was not a very pleasant affair (*see picture*), but sometimes the only option. When caries became unbearably painful, teeth could be pulled and replaced by dentures (if you had enough money to afford them). Here, an example of a Post-Medieval denture is shown, made from silver with milky glass inlays.

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Objects: Cranium and mandible with dentures (right); mandible with carious lesions (left), Post-Medieval.

Provenance: From excavation at Middenbeemster (NL) (right); from the Post-Medieval town of Aalst (Belgium) (left).



Picture: Detail of a miniature of the *Martyrdom of St. Appollonia*, ca. 1440-1450, from the Dunois Hours, Paris (photo: British Library, London, Yates Thompson MS 3, f. 284v).

CERAMIC ‘RUBBISH’ FROM A DUTCH WELL



Objects: A selection of ceramics was recovered in 2015 during an excavation of a well at the Waardgracht in Leiden (location: Lakenplein). The well was situated in the backyard of a so-called ‘wevershuis’, built around 1660. Circa 1800 the well fell into disuse. Several nearly complete vessels of Faience tableware (Delft porcelain) and some pieces of industrial pottery were dumped in the well, which made the archaeologists wondering whether this was a one-time dump.

The excavation was carried out by IDDS Archeologie and the results were published in a public-private collaboration involving the Faculty of Archaeology, IDDS Archeologie and Heritage Leiden & Environs (Erfgoed Leiden en Omstreken). The ceramic finds were restored by Tonny van der Laan and Maria Sisternans, volunteers at the Faculty of Archaeology.

DETAILS OF OBJECTS



WINING AND DINING AT THE COURT OF THE GRAND VIZIER



At the site of Tell Sabi Abyad in Syria an Assyrian fortress was excavated by archaeologists from Leiden University. The fortress is dated to about 1230-1150 BCE and was owned by Ilipada, a powerful Grand Vizier of the Assyrian empire. According to cuneiform inscriptions found on clay tablets at the site (*picture 1*), the Grand Vizier and his guests regularly dined on mutton, goat meat, bread, garlic, onions, sesame oil, cumin and coriander, accompanied by dozens of litres of beer (*picture 2*).

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Object 1: Assyrian beer goblet, 2nd Millennium BCE.

Provenance: Unknown.

Object 2: Charred garlic, about 3000 years old. The garlic was found in a ceramic bowl, dated ca. 1750 BCE, at Tell Sabi Abyad (Syria), on the floor of a house.



Picture 1: Clay tablets from Tell Sabi Abyad (*photo: Peter Akkermans*).



Picture 2: The feast of Ashurbanipal, Neo-Assyrian banquet relief from the North Palace of Nineveh, 7th century BCE (*photo: The Trustees of the British Museum, London*).

INTERESTED?

RECOMMENDED FOR FURTHER READING

* **Dinner with Erasmus:**

Dongen, A. van. 2017. Global dining with Erasmus: The Early Modern European Dining table, in: J. Vroom, Y. Waksman and R. van Oosten (eds.) 2017. *Medieval MasterChef. Archaeological and Historical Perspectives on Eastern Cuisine and Western Foodways (Medieval and Post-Medieval Mediterranean Archaeology Series 2)*, Turnhout, Brepols Publishers, 245-256.

* **A Mediterranean Symposium:**

Birch, S. 2015. *Greek Pottery. History of Ancient Pottery Part III*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Lynch, K.M. 2011. *The Symposium in Context: Pottery from a Late Archaic House near the Athenian Agora (Hesperia Suppl. 46)*, Athens, American School of Classical Studies at Athens.

Oakley, J.H. 2014. *Athenian Potters and Painters*, Oxford, Oxbow Books.

* **Dining in Damascus:**

Bağcı, Y. and Vroom, J. 2017. Dining habits at Tarsus in the Early Islamic period: A ceramic perspective from Turkey, in: J. Vroom, Y. Waksman and R. van Oosten (eds.) 2017. *Medieval MasterChef. Archaeological and Historical Perspectives on Eastern Cuisine and Western Foodways (Medieval and Post-Medieval Mediterranean Archaeology Series 2)*, Turnhout, Brepols Publishers, 63-94.

* **Charred Acorns from Iron Age Brabant:**

Bakels, C.C. 1985. Het onderzoek van plantenresten, in: K.J. Steehouwer en A.H.C. Warringa (red.), *Archeologie in de praktijk*, Weesp, Fibula-Van Dishoeck, 180-197.

* **Drinking Milk in Prehistory:**

Nieuwenhuys, O.P., Roffet-Salque, M., Evershed, R.P., Akkermans, P.M.M.G. & Russell, A. 2015. Tracing pottery use and the emergence of secondary product exploitation through lipid residue analysis at Late Neolithic Tell Sabi Abyad (Syria), *Journal of Archaeological Science*, 54-66.

*** Western Bowls on Eastern Tables:**

Vroom, J. 2014. Human representations on Medieval Cypriot ceramics and beyond: The enigma of mysterious figures wrapped in riddles, in: D. Papanikola-Bakirtzi and N. Coureas (eds.), *Cypriot Medieval Ceramics. Reconsiderations and New Perspectives*, Nicosia, A.G. Leventis Foundation & Cyprus Research Centre Nicosia, 153-187.

*** Archaeology of the Archaeologists:**

Vroom, J. 2015. The small finds, in: S. Ladstätter (ed.), *Die Türbe im Artemision. Ein frühosmanischer Grabbau in Ayasuluk/Selçuk und sein kulturhistorisches Umfeld (Österreichisches Archäologisches Institut Sonderschriften Band 53)*, Vienna, Österreichisches Archäologisches Institut, 313-328.

*** The problem with food:**

Waters-Rist A.L., Braekmans D. and Hoogland M.L.P. 2013. New archaeological examples of dental prosthetics: Dentures from the nineteenth century village of Middenbeemster, The Netherlands. British Association of Biological Anthropology and Osteoarchaeology [conference poster].

*** Ceramic ‘Rubbish’ from a Dutch Well:**

Oosten R.M.R. van, Meijer Y., Brandenburgh C. and Noort A. van 2017. Leidse wevershuizen in seriebouw: Een materiële getuigenis van 'projectontwikkeling' in de Gouden Eeuw, *Archeologie in Nederland* 1(3), 36-45.

*** Wining and Dining at the Court of the Grand Vizier:**

Akkermans, P.M.M.G. and Wiggerman, F.A.M. 2015. West of Aššur: The life and times of the Middle Assyrian Dunnu at Tell Sabi Abyad, Syria, in: B.S. Düring (ed), *Understanding Hegemonic Practices of the Early Assyrian Empire (PIHANS vol. 125)*, Leiden, NINO, 89-123.

SOME DETAIL PHOTOS OF OBJECTS IN EXHIBITION







