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**OBJECTS FROM THE DUTCH EXCAVATIONS AT ABU RAWASH
IN THE EGYPTIAN MUSEUM CAIRO, AND THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF
ANTIQUITIES LEIDEN, THE NETHERLANDS¹**

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Introduction

From 1957 to 1959, the National Museum of Antiquities (RMO) under the directorship of Prof. Dr. A. Klasens excavated several cemeteries near the modern village of Abu Rawash, about nine kilometres north of Giza.² The cemeteries '0'³, 300, 400-500, 800-900 and M⁴ were investigated, and graves dating from the First and Second dynasties, the Fourth and Fifth dynasties to the Middle Kingdom and the

¹ The authors would like to acknowledge the help and express their thanks and gratitude to Dr. Maarten Raven for commenting upon this manuscript and for kindly putting all the Abu Rawash material in the RMO at our disposal, Drs. Willem van Haarlem for supplying information, and to Miss Joanne M. Rowland, MA (University College London) who corrected the English text. Also we would like to thank Dr. el-Damaty and the curatorial staff of the Egyptian Museum, Cairo, for their kind assistance.

² Only preliminary reports were published on the Dutch excavations. A. Klasens, "The excavations of the Leiden Museum of Antiquities at Abu-Roash: report of the first season, 1957. Part I" *OMRO* 38 (1956), pp. 58-68; A. Klasens, "The excavations of the Leiden Museum of Antiquities at Abu-Roash: report of the first season, 1957. Part II" *OMRO* 39 (1958a), pp. 20-31; A. Klasens, "The excavations of the Leiden Museum of Antiquities at Abu-Roash: report of the second season, 1958. Part I" *OMRO* 39 (1958b), pp. 32-55; A. Klasens, "The excavations of the Leiden Museum of Antiquities at Abu-Roash: report of the second season, 1958. Part II. Cemetery 400" *OMRO* 40 (1959), pp. 41-61; A. Klasens, "The excavations of the Leiden Museum of Antiquities at Abu-Roash: report of the third season, 1959. Part I" *OMRO* 41 (1960): 69-94; and A. Klasens, "The excavations of the Leiden Museum of Antiquities at Abu-Roash: report of the third season, 1959. Part II. Cemetery M", *OMRO* 42 (1961), pp. 108-128.

³ We follow S. Hendrickx, *De grafvelden der Naqada-cultuur in Zuid-Egypte, met bijzondere aandacht voor het Naqada III grafveld te Elkab: interne chronologie en sociale differentiatie*. Unpublished doctoral thesis: Katholieke Universiteit (Leuven, 1989): p. 280: "This cemetery was not numbered by the excavators, but in later campaigns they numbered their cemeteries according to the numbering of the tombs. Therefore cemetery 1957 has been christened 0 for convenience" (our translation). Other references for cemetery 0 are 'south cemetery' and 'cemetery 1957'.

⁴ Montet and Lacau first investigated cemetery M in 1913-'14, when 18 mastaba tombs (M1-M18) were excavated. In 1959, Klasens also investigated cemetery M and 7 mastaba-tombs (M19-M25) were excavated. For the French excavations at Abu Rawash see P. Montet, "Tombeaux de la I^{re} et de la IV^e Dynasties a Abou Roasch", *Kemi* 7 (1938), pp. 11-69; and P. Montet, "Tombeaux de la I^{re} et de la IV^e Dynasties a Abou Roasch. Deuxieme partie: inventaire des objects", *Kemi* 8 (1946), pp. 157-227.

Graeco-Roman periods were uncovered.⁵

The authors are currently preparing this material for the publication of a detailed site report of all the cemeteries as well as the 7 mastaba-tombs of cemetery M excavated by Klasens. For the publication, Klasens' original field notes that are kept in the National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden will be the prime source of information. The unpublished documentation consists of different types of information, *viz.* the field diary, the diary, the catalogue of tombs, the catalogue of objects and the drawings, allowing the authors to be comprehensive and extensive in their preparation of the site report that will incorporate a catalogue of tombs and grave goods, a summary of the excavation and the methodology used, reports on the different find categories, and remarks on the political-economic position of Abu Rawash.

Methodology utilised during the Dutch Excavations at Abu Rawash, 1957 – 1959⁶

In order to evaluate the results of the excavations, it is necessary to understand the excavation and recording techniques used by Klasens at Abu Rawash. Here we will discuss in what way the cemeteries at Abu Rawash have been excavated and in which ways the methods used have to be taken into account while interpreting the data. It will be demonstrated that building typologies while excavating influences the way in which archaeologists evaluate the excavations.

Klasens accrued his field experience mainly after 1952⁷ on the Saqqara expeditions under the direction of Prof. W.B. Emery.⁸ The excavations at Abu Rawash have been carried out using the methods of late fifties: a grid was set up for measurement purposes, defining the area to be excavated. Subsequently, a group of experienced Quftis, aided by locally hired workmen and guided by the director, his staff and a *reis*, started at a certain

⁵ Klasens *OMRO* 38 (1956): 59; Klasens *OMRO* 39 (1958b): 33.

⁶ This section is an excerpt from P.L.P. Haanen, *Abu Roash – South Cemetery. Catalogue of tombs and tentative interpretation*. Unpublished MA thesis University of Leiden (Leiden, 1995), pp. 45–48, 57. The thesis consisted of creating a comprehensive catalogue of the tombs from cemetery 0 (Klasens' first excavation season) based on the unpublished documentation, as well as carrying out several basic statistical analyses on the material.

⁷ C. Hillen, "Sakkara. Graf van koning Oedimoe (?) gevonden" *Phoenix* 1,2 (1955), pp. 17–21.

⁸ W.B. Emery, *Great Tombs of the First Dynasty*, I–III. Egypt Exploration Society (London, 1949, 1954 and 1958).

point 'A', gradually working to another point 'B', carefully removing the upper layers of sand and gravel that covered the mudbrick tombs and the tombs carved in the bedrock beneath. Each grave was excavated when encountered. Planning was such that 'B' was reached at the end of the digging season. The documentation was concluded out by the director and his staff, registering all archaeologica encountered, such as tombs and other architectural features and objects, such as pottery, stone vessels and miscellanea. The depth to be dug was defined by the bedrock and/or undisturbed soil. Stratigraphical and contextual notes were only occasionally recorded. The method of description used was quite ad hoc: anything found of archaeological note was recorded.

No predefined attributes were assigned to and recorded from each archaeological feature and no standardised forms were used. Since archaeology in those days was quite art-history oriented, this resulted in extensive description of the more elaborate tombs, whereas basic information such as 'depth below surface' sometimes went unrecorded for the less elaborate tombs. In addition, this method of registration tends to be 'accumulative reductive', meaning that observations regularly made in the field tend to drop out of the records. Only new and divergent observations attract the attention of the excavators and become noteworthy.

Example: a bricks size of 25 x 12 x 8 cm all over the cemetery tends, in the course of the excavation, to go unrecorded for the later excavated tombs, whereas an appearance of a different bricks size attracts attention of the observant and will be recorded.

This method of registration was also applied to find administration of both pottery and stone vessels, the two main find categories. Every vessel encountered was fitted into a form-based typology, based on that used by Emery. Thus, each pot was assigned the letter-number code associated with the shape of pot, the main attributes being general shape, rim, neck, shoulder, base, ornaments (including handles, number of rope bands etc.). A shape not yet included in the typology was assigned the subsequent letter-number combination of the associated type. Occasionally, gaps were left in the typology for this purpose.⁹ Consequently, the drawings and description of the vessels appearing in the publication

(with the exception of rare examples) stress very much the contents of the tombs encountered early during the excavations.

Example: a tall jar with tapering body and rounded base would be assigned to type A,¹⁰ a number assigned to the vessel in the typology closest to it with regard to shape and number of rope bands, or a new number added to the typology when no type matched the newly found vessel. Hence, the first encountered pot sets the standard, whereas vessels found later in the course of the excavation were fitted into the typology.

The method as described is biased by the fact that in the course of the excavation the typology gets more and more refined, the consequence being that certain vessels are assigned a letter-number code *varying with and depending on the time they are excavated*.

Example: a vessel of type B1 is characterised as having a pointed base. A vessel is assigned to type B2 if the base is perceived as 'blunt pointed'. This assignment is directly associated with the length of the vessel. The paradigmatic B1-vessel has a length of approximately 43 cm; B2 has a length of approx. 33 cm. If a certain B-type vessel with a length of 39 cm was found before type B2 had been added to the typology, this vessel might have been assigned to type B1. Had the same vessel been encountered later, while working with the more extended typology, it might have been assigned to type B2, or another vessel would have become paradigmatic for type B2.

Also, the typology is apt to be biased by the aesthetic intuition and experience of the registrar: whenever the need was felt to add another type to the typology this was done, with no regard to a possible division on statistical grounds, given the attributes of the vessels themselves.

The major problems with the method of developing a typology as described above can be summarised as follows:

- the categories within the typology are constructed on an ad hoc basis and bear neither a relationship to properties of the corpus nor to a research question,
- the earliest encountered vessels in the excavation become paradigmatic, thus biasing the

⁹ Emery, *Great Tombs*, I, p. 130 on the typology of stone vessels: "Some apology must be given for a certain lack of order and sequence in the arrangement of the types: this is because the corpus was built up as the excavations progressed and gaps had to be left for potential additions." The same applies to the pottery.

¹⁰ For pottery typology, see Klasens *OMRO* 39 (1958a): 20-23.

types within the typology,

- no rigid way exists for the assignment of vessels to a certain type, because those types are too loosely defined,
- the assignment of vessels to a certain type depends on the stage of development of the typology, rather than on the typology as such.
- the addition of a new type to the typology is dependent on the aesthetic intuition and experience of the excavator.

The cemeteries of Abu Rawash

South of the edge of the modern village of Abu Rawash, four clusters of graves were uncovered by Klasens who numbered and named them (north to south): cemetery 300, cemetery 400-500, cemetery 1957 (is cemetery 0), and cemetery 800-900. The majority of graves within these clusters date to the Early Dynastic period¹¹, although later burials were found interspersed among these early burials. Near to these clusters late Old Kingdom tombs were found with a concentration around the modern Christian cemetery (see plate). These clusters of Early Dynastic graves should not be perceived as true cemeteries in their own right, but rather form a single cemetery.

In his unpublished thesis¹² Hendrickx has concluded, based on the published material from Abu Rawash, that cemeteries 300, 400-500 and M did show internal differentiation, but this could not be established for the cemeteries 0 and 800-900. Analysis of cemetery 0 by Paul Haanen¹³ indicated that, with regard to burial customs it is a typical Egyptian cemetery. The population interred in cemetery 0 was buried in tombs of various type and size. The bodies were generally placed in flexed position, often wrapped in a reed mat, or placed upon a reed mat; less often remains of a wooden coffin or piling were found. It is generally accepted that the differences in tomb type and amount of grave goods reflect the status or prestige of the deceased. Status and

¹¹ According to the site list by Van den Brink and Hendrickx, the time range of these clusters is from Naqada IIIB to IIID. This site will appear in E.C.M. van den Brink & T.E. Levy, eds., *Egyptian-Canaanite Interaction during the 4th through early 3rd Millennium BC*, in press.

¹² Hendrickx, *Grafvelden*, pp. 279-285.

¹³ Haanen, *Abu Roash*, pp. 43-44.

prestige were confirmed in and expressed by the burial customs. Tombs 47, 58 and 65 (all children's burials in relatively large tombs) suggest that status was at least partially inheritable. A high linear relationship between the type of tomb and the amount of grave goods could be established. This pattern is only slightly distorted by the practice of tomb robbery. Based on the unpublished material it seems justified to state that the tombs and burial customs of cemetery 0 reflect social inequality. A similar pattern is expected for all of the Early Dynastic cemeteries of Abu Rawash, but this preliminary conclusion needs further consideration.

Political-economic situation at Abu Rawash

The reports published by Klasens¹⁴ are of a preliminary nature and on occasion omit material found on the site as well as observations and interpretations made by the excavator. As such, these reports do not allow for a comprehensive review of the site. This has, unfortunately, led to some misunderstandings about the site. Recently, Wilkinson published his capacious review of Early Dynastic Egypt and stated that cemetery M at Abu Rawash was an 'overspill' burial ground for the highest officials/elite of the mid-First dynasty (reign of king Den) that were buried at Saqqara north, and due to 'insufficient space' relocated to Abu Rawash.¹⁵ This assumption seems unlikely due to the distance of about 25km between the 'city' of Memphis with the Saqqara cemetery and Abu Rawash, nor does the distance allow for a line of sight between the two sites. Also, the presumed insufficient space did not deter officials of the late First dynasty as well as Second and Third dynasties to build their tombs at Saqqara north.

Research by both Paul Haanen¹⁶ and Joris van Wetering¹⁷ has indicated that Abu Rawash should be seen as a provincial community that occupied a strategic location

¹⁴ See note 2.

¹⁵ T.A.H. Wilkinson, *Early Dynastic Egypt* (London, 1999), p. 13 and 76.

¹⁶ Haanen, *Abu Roash*, pp. 52-53.

¹⁷ At the 8th International Conference of Egyptologists in Cairo, April 2000, J. van Wetering presented a paper on the political-economic situation in the East Delta. This paper entitled "A Political-Economic Hierarchy of First Dynasty cemetery sites in Lower Egypt" will be published in the forthcoming conference proceedings.

between the settlements of the Delta and the 'city' of Memphis, the royal residence and the seat of the central administration. The elite of this Early Dynastic community¹⁸ was buried at cemetery M while (a part of) the community was buried in the clusters nearby. The position of Abu Rawash allowed them to be a vital node in the communications and trade network between the settlement of the Delta, and the Levant beyond, and the settlements along the River Nile.

Some objects from Abu Rawash in Cairo and in Leiden

During the three excavation seasons Klasens discovered numerous objects, including pottery, stone vessels, flint knives, schist palettes and a great variety of implements. After the excavations were concluded, these objects were divided between the Egyptian government and the Dutch excavation team. Many of them ended up in museum displays in both Egypt and the Netherlands.

The objects conferred upon the Dutch team are now at the RMO where some are on display in the newly re-furbished Egyptian collection, primarily in the section dedicated to Early Dynastic Egypt. A few objects have been loaned to, and are on display at the Allard Pierson Museum in Amsterdam and the Museum Van der Leeuw in Groningen.

The Egyptian Museum in Cairo has about 200 objects from the group that remained in Egypt. These are currently on display in the Early Dynastic rooms on the first floor of the museum. Among these objects are 2 vessels that came from the Levant, as well as objects made of ivory, precious stone and pottery. Also on display are several offering-tables, including a flat topped, oval offering-table with an eccentric pedestal made of limestone (J.98283), as well as a ceramic ring-shaped spouted vessel with a red slip (J.98383). The offering-table was found in tomb 405 and is dated to the First dynasty. Tomb 926, in which the ring-shaped vessel was found, is dated to the late First dynasty or the Second dynasty (see plate).

¹⁸ No trace of the settlement has been found, although J. de Morgan found 'settlement remains' at or near Abu Rawash. J. de Morgan, *Recherches sur les origines de l'Egypt I. L'Age de la pierre et des metaux* (Paris, 1896), p. 69; and J. de Morgan, *Recherches sur les origines de l'Egypt II. Ethnographie*

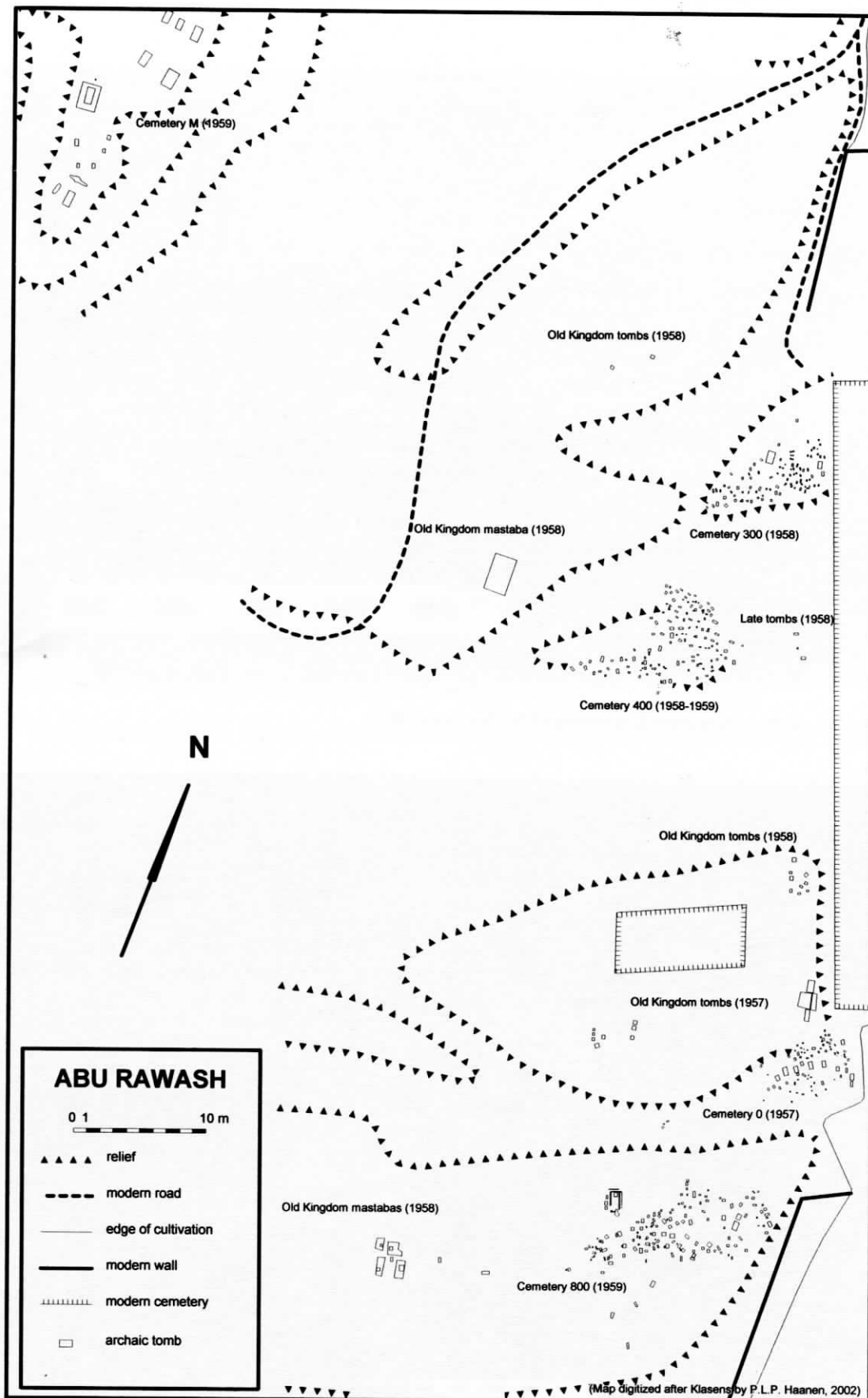
The objects from Abu Rawash indicate a high status of some of the interments, although this probably should be interpreted as a provincial elite rather than the highest officials of the state administration as suggested by Wilkinson.¹⁹

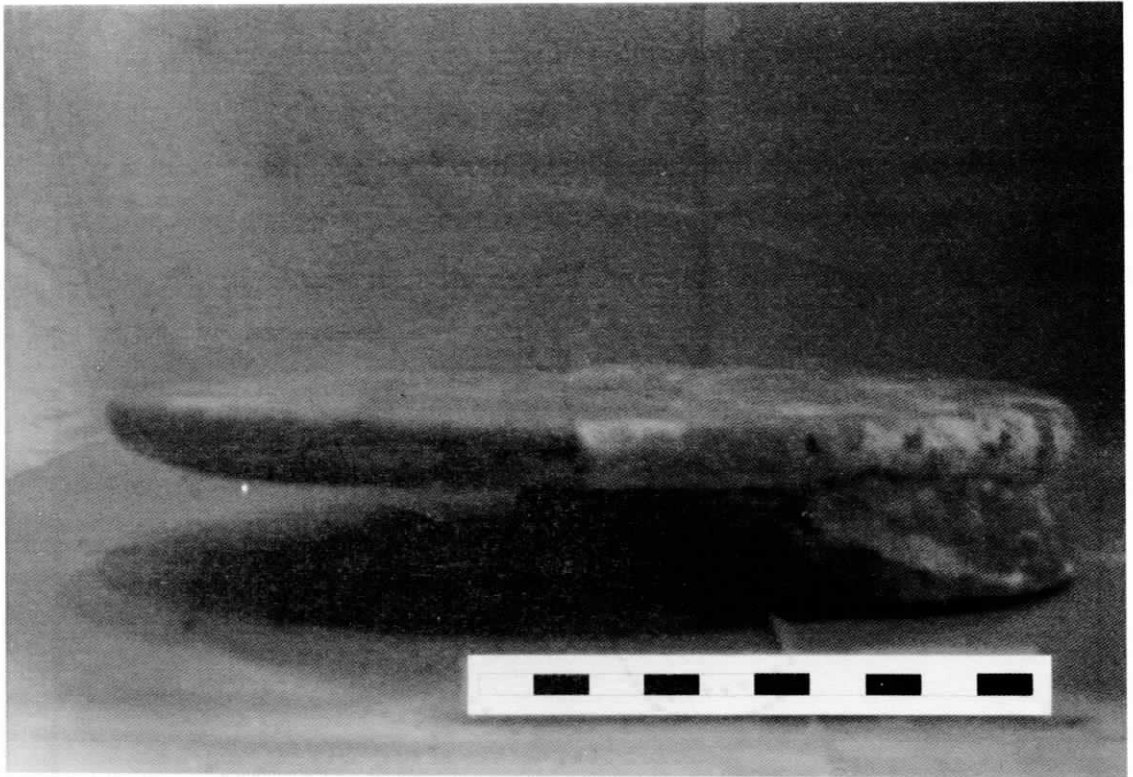
The authors²⁰ are in the process of re-examining and photographing these objects, now in the various Dutch Musea and in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. It is also the authors' intention to relocate the remainder of the objects from the Dutch excavations at Abu Rawash.

prehistorique et tombeau royal de Negadeh (Paris, 1897), p. 26.

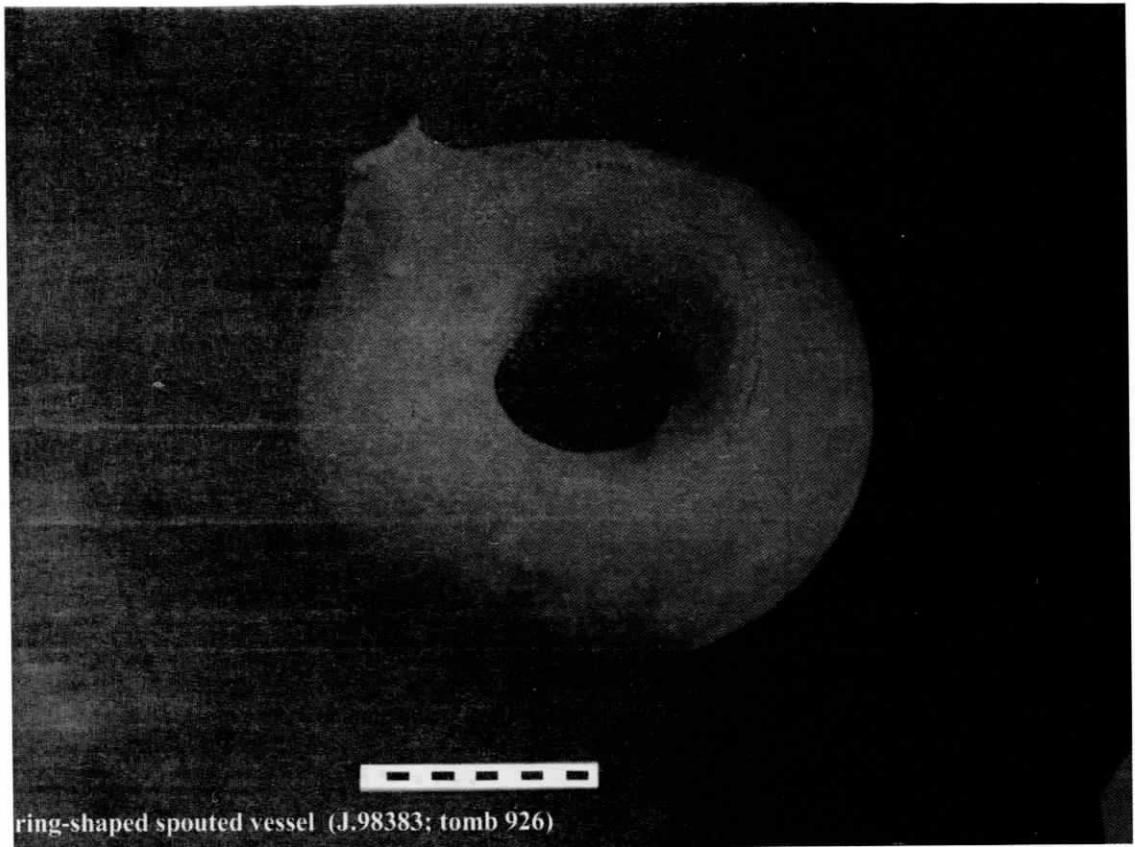
¹⁹ See note 15.

²⁰ Joris van Wetering may be contacted at jflvwetering@yahoo.co.uk; Paul Haanen may be contacted at p.haanen@aarad.nl





offering-table with eccentric pedestal (J.98283; tomb 405)



ring-shaped spouted vessel (J.98383; tomb 926)