Feasting, Phoenician Trade and Dynamics of Social Change in Northeastern Iberia: Rituals of Commensality in the Early Iron Age Settlement of Sant Jaume (Alcanar, Catalonia)

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Abstract

The archaeological study of feasting practices has proved to be one of the most fruitful lines of research in the social interpretation of the Mediterranean protohistoric record. The focus has been particularly effective for assessing the development of socio-political complexity and the evolution of socialization strategies that characterize many small-scale societies. In seeking to provide a similar assessment, this study analyses a set of ceramic tableware recovered from the early Iron Age site (seventh to sixth centuries BC) of Sant Jaume (Alcanar, Catalonia) and its associated domestic spaces and architectonic structures. Drawing on the postulates of commensality studies, we examine the functional and symbolic characteristics of these artefacts and the social practices linked to them.

Keywords: commensality, early Iron Age, feasts, Iberian Peninsula, protohistory, Phoenicians, socio-political structures

Introduction

The archaeological study of commensality in the second- and first-millennium BC Mediterranean has played a crucial role in the analysis of Bronze and Iron Age communities regarding colonial encounters, hybridization practices, power strategies and social networks (Dietler and Hayden 2001; Bray 2003; Halstead and Barrett 2004; Wright 2004; Hayden and Villeneuve 2011; Twiss 2012a; Hamilakis 1999; 2008). The study of feasting and food practices in general is currently a highly productive line of archaeological research in Iberia, as demonstrated by the recent spate of monographs in this field (Diloli and Sardà 2009; Sanz and Romero 2009; Mata et al. 2010; Aranda et al. 2011). Several authors have stressed the importance of feasts for understanding the transformation of social and power strategies in northeastern Iberia, especially during...
the early Iron Age when the first wines arrived through Phoenician trade (Sanmartí 2004; 2009; 2010; Vives-Ferrándiz 2005; 2008; Sardà 2008; 2010a; 2010b; Sardà et al. 2010). The early Iron Age in this region represents a period of marked social change, since it is precisely in the seventh and sixth centuries BC that crucial developments occurred: pre-hierarchical social systems gave way to new, unstable situations that sharpened the competitive dynamics between elites, and led to what is usually regarded as the first emergence of a social aristocracy (Ruiz Zapatero 2004; Sanmartí 2004; 2010; Rafel 2006; López Cachero 2007; Garcia i Rubert 2011; 2015).

Southern Catalonia is one of the areas where the study of these social processes has benefitted from sustained academic attention in recent decades, and one of the phenomena that defines the social processes here is the appearance of various small isolated settlements with different or special functions (Figure 1: Aldovesta, Sant Jaume, Turó del Calvari, En Balaguer I, Tossal Montañés, Coll del Moro, La Gessera, l’Assut, Puig de la Misericòrdia) (Mascort et al. 1991; Moret 2002; Barrachina et al. 2011; Bea et al. 2013; Garcia i Rubert 2015). Their existence has been linked to the emergence of several local episodes of social segregation led by certain families or prominent social groups, and their varying appearances correspond to the particular situation of each case. Their unique nature, moreover, is due to both their small size and their functional organization—the towers and other defensive structures that convert some settlements like Sant Jaume into highly fortified residences are especially significant. Some of these small settlements, such as Aldovesta, Sant Jaume, Turó del Calvari and En Balaguer I, have yielded ceramic assemblages with different functions and food reserves that may be associated with communal feasts. Detailed analysis of these sites has given an insight into the social strategies adopted by groups or lineages that could play a crucial role in managing the ceremonial cycles and communal politics in southern Catalonia and its neighbouring territories.

In this paper, we investigate the substantial archaeological evidence from key contexts documented in the settlement of Sant Jaume. We give particular attention to several spaces that may be associated with supra-domestic functions (see Figure 3, below), namely a meeting room for social ceremonies (Area A1), a storage area for Phoenician amphorae (Area A3), multiple spaces for livestock husbandry (ground floor of Areas A3, A4 and A5) and in particular a storage space specifically set up to store a large and complex set of tableware (first floor of Area A4).

Here we undertake a functional analysis of these contexts and material culture and explore their implications as we seek to understand the system of socio-political integration of the community that used them. We employ the notion of *feasting rituals* to refer to exceptional practices, usually involving the consumption of luxury items of food and drink and the use of some objects which in all circumstances differ from those encountered in everyday meals. We understand that commensality may be defined in a generic sense as a kind of public ritual activity centred on the communal consumption of food and drink to mark a special occasion or to fulfil a special purpose (Dietler 1996; Dietler and Hayden 2001; Bray 2003).

**The Settlement of Sant Jaume and Phoenician Trade in Southern Catalonia and Northern Valencia**

The settlement of Sant Jaume is situated on a hilltop at 224 m a.s.l. in the south of Catalonia, some 5 km north of the Sénia River mouth and roughly 20 km south of the Ebro River delta (Figures 1 and 2). Sant Jaume is a small, strongly fortified site of roughly 700 sq m that presents a slightly elliptical ground plan (Figure 3). It is in an excellent state of preservation, as evidenced by the surviving walls (with an average height of about 2 m). As a result of the excavations carried out to date, a little over 80% of its internal structure has been recorded, while
Figure 1. Map showing the main archaeological sites in the lower Ebro valley (seventh to sixth centuries BC).
almost 40% of the site has been excavated. It was occupied during a single brief period, corresponding roughly to the last decades of the seventh century and, perhaps, the first decades of the sixth century BC—i.e. in the early Iron Age.

The settlement is characterized by several clusters of constructions that are arranged on an orthogonal pattern. Each group is made up of rectangular, two-storey buildings. In some cases the ground floor seems to have been used as a stable and in others it seems to have been used for the processing of farm and livestock products. In all cases, the first floor was used to store large quantities of containers, manufactured products, raw materials and other objects. None of the constructions excavated to date in the northern area (from A1 to A5) can be considered as an evidently domestic dwelling. In fact, the northern area of Sant Jaume seems to be a quarter especially destined for the storage of different products and the raising of livestock. This evidence presents a very different situation compared to nearby settlements such as Moleta del Remei (Alcanar) and La Ferradura (Ulldecona).

The defensive system is characterized by the combination of three elements: a double-faced wall up to 4 m wide that encloses the settlement, two tall and narrow towers (T1 and T2) and a complex and unusual gateway that includes several advanced walls. In our view, the monumental

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**Figure 2.** Map showing settlements of the Sant Jaume Complex.
design and construction of the complex gateway and towers were as much motivated by defensive concerns as they were intended to project an impressive appearance to the outside. This defensive system is unique in the whole of the northeastern Iberian Peninsula during this period.

The settlement played a very important role in the trade relations established during this period between local indigenous communities and Phoenician traders from the colonies founded farther south in the Iberian Peninsula. What stands out above all is the high percentage (30%) of Phoenician pottery relative to the total number of fragments recovered at the settlement. The first Phoenician colonies were established in the area around the Strait of Gibraltar during the ninth century BC. Subsequently, this process of colonization was extended along the peninsula’s Mediterranean coast (La Fonteta, Alicante) and into neighbouring areas (Sa Caleta, Ibiza) and along the Atlantic coast (Abul, Alcácer do Sal). The dynamics of Phoenician trading in the northwestern Mediterranean gradually began to change by the start of the seventh century BC and intensified around the middle of that century to the extent that strong commercial ties were established with the indigenous communities in the northeast of the

Figure 3. Plan of Sant Jaume.
Iberian Peninsula. These connections remained strong until the very end of the initial three decades of the sixth century BC or the middle of that same century, by which time Phoenician trade in Catalonia had declined notably.

Thanks to these commercial relations, Phoenician products, including and especially wine, were introduced into the region as luxury goods. Indeed, every study of Phoenician trade in Catalonia and northern Valencia explains the rapid acceptance of wine in terms of the opportunities that it afforded to certain social sectors, as imported wine allowed various groups to act as intermediaries in these trade contacts and to control the redistribution of imports (Arteaga et al. 1986; Mascort et al. 1991; Ruiz Zapatero 1992; Aubet 1993; Ramon 1994–96; Sanmartí et al. 2000; Gracia 2000; Sanmartí 2004; Garcia i Rubert 2005; Vives-Ferrándiz 2005; Rafel 2006; Sardà 2010b).

The lower basins of the Ebro and Sénia rivers make up the coastal areas of the northeastern peninsula, where the impact of Phoenician trade was most marked. These contacts led essentially to the introduction of new food products like wine, olive oil and salted fish and meat, as is attested by the large storage containers (amphorae and pithoi) that were used for transport and distribution. In the local context of a prestige goods economy, these new exotic products would have served primarily to enhance the exceptional nature of certain specific meals and, as such, they may be counted among the luxury foods that served as active symbols of the feast.

Careful study of the characteristics of the site of Sant Jaume, noting the particular layout of buildings, the strong defensive system and portable material culture, has led us to conclude that Sant Jaume was more than just a simple village. A functional study of the site suggests that Sant Jaume was a large house or fortified ‘aristocratic residence’ that functioned as the seat of local political power increasingly holding sway over the lower River Sénia valley. It is our belief that a local leader exercised direct control from this fortified settlement over several nearby sites, among which we would include at least Moleta del Remei (Alcanar), Ferradura (Ulldecona), Cogula (Ulldecona) and Castell (Ulldecona). We thus suggest that this area constituted a political-territorial entity, and there is indeed evidence of a marked social hierarchy and a political system of integration that are characteristic of a simple chiefdom, which has been named the Sant Jaume Complex (Garcia i Rubert 2005; 2010; 2011; 2015; Garcia i Rubert and Gracia 2011; Garcia i Rubert and Moreno 2008).

A Commensal Study of Storage Spaces: Area A4 of the Sant Jaume Site

It has been observed that in order to undertake well-founded contextual studies of consumption and culinary practices, sites that present a single limited period of occupation followed by rapid abandonment—that is, settlements affected by ‘Pompeii-style’ catastrophic events—are especially informative (Van der Veen 2003: 415). In Sant Jaume, the stratigraphic sequence has provided us with a considerable amount of information, because the settlement’s demise occurred as the result of an attack and a raging fire that led to its sudden and definitive abandonment.

Area A4, in which the set of tableware studied here was recovered, lies in Sector 1 of the settlement. Rectangular in shape, the building is especially large in comparison to the rest of the areas: 5.1 m long by 4 m wide. Its eastern and western walls abut the inner face of the northern section of the settlement wall, which acts as the site’s outer defence. The façade has a door in its eastern end, which leads directly into Street C1. Just like most of the site, A4 was destroyed by fire and subsequently abandoned. The building itself had two floors, and the upper one still held a variety of objects; the ground floor appeared empty. The numbers of vessels, containers, unfired clay boxes and weights, amongst other things, that had been deposited in the upstairs storage room were remarkably high. At the time of the fire, the
upper floor must have been packed with objects, chief among which were a series of elements that, as we show below, made up a set of dishes or tableware of a markedly distinct character.

First, however, we should situate the study of feasts and commensality politics in a broader social sphere of general eating habits, in order to recognize ‘exceptional’ contexts. In this regard, it should be noted that archaeological perspectives on feasts are often based on sets of artefacts documented in highly specific contexts: spaces of communal consumption, votive pits and ditches and distinct tombs. Area A4, however, where the set of tableware under study was recovered, presents interpretative variables that do not correspond to any of these possibilities. It is a storage space, which does not tell us anything about when and how the objects were used but which does allow us to specify many aspects of the make-up and quantities of the set.

Spaces reserved for storage of large sets of tableware have been attested along the Ebro valley and in neighbouring territories from as early as the end of the Bronze Age. Such a space has been noted, for example, in Area H-2 of the settlement of Genó (Aitona), which has been dated to the eleventh century Cal BC (Maya 1993: 15-16). Among contexts that are culturally and chronologically closer to that of Sant Jaume, Room 2 of the isolated building of Turó del Calvari (Vilalba dels Arcs), dated to 580–550 BC, should be noted. This room appears to have been used as a storage area, which housed a large set of plates (29 pieces: Sardà 2010b: 444).

**Wine and Roasted Meat: Functional Analysis of a Tableware Set used for Feasting**

The identification of the tableware set and the confirmation of its unique nature in comparison to other finds from Area A4 are based on four particular circumstances: the typological rarity of several individual elements of the set, the unique function, the location and the unusual quantities.

More specifically, 31 items from the total number of portable artefacts originally stored on the upper floor of Area A4 were identified as ceramic vessels intended for serving, handling and presenting and/or consuming food and drink (García i Rubert and Moreno 2009). Most (28) are hand-made, but they are accompanied by a small number (3) of Phoenician wheel-made items (Figures 4-5). The set of items presents a marked typological diversity, and we note that we have erred on the side of caution in our identifications of vessels as tableware by adhering to multiple criteria, including the completeness of the vessels. The hand-made tableware comprises at least two ‘lid plates’ (a type of plate particular to northeastern Iberia that was also used as a lid), two serving dishes, six high-stemmed plates, six small globular cups, three cups, two shallow bowls also known as plate-bowls, a mug, a small lid, a small plate, a *patera* (a two-handled, saucer-shaped, shallow bowl), a plate with cylindrical stand, a large tray and a *clepsydra* (a standing strainer), while the wheel-turned vessels comprise a carinated bowl, a tripod vessel and a broad-rimmed plate.

In addition to these ceramic objects, other ceramic vessels have probably served as culinary accessories or for the storage of specific products—this applies to a locally made S-shaped vase with zoomorphic decoration, a Phoenician amphora and a *pithos*. Several iron utensils like a spit and a knife were presumably used for handling food, most probably meat. Other specific elements likely related to the tableware include a so-called *simpulum*, or large bronze spoon, and an iron axe-head. Both have been found in Street C1, the latter in front of A4. Finally, we note that we do not know to what extent other unique items recovered inside A4, in particular a set of 39 cone-shaped pendants made of bronze sheets, could have been part of the formal, functional and/or ceremonial paraphernalia of the feast and thus associated with the set of tableware.

The elements that make up the set are not only functionally but also typologically heterogeneous.
Figure 4. Set of ceramic tableware recovered at Sant Jaume in Room A4 and other associated elements.
To begin with, we can distinguish between vessels associated with the consumption of solid or semi-solid foods and those associated with drinking. Among the former we find six high-footed plates, a ‘plate-bowl’ and a broad-rimmed Phoenician plate, a total of eight pieces. Here we also include the spit, the axe-head and the knife—three metal artefacts associated with the preparation and distribution of meat. Similarly, the large oval tray, fitted with handles for carrying, may well have served to bring most of the solid food from the point of preparation to the place of consumption. Among the elements associated with drinking, we find six small globular cups, three cups, a bowl, a mug and a carinated Phoenician bowl, twelve pieces in all. To these we may add the simpulum and clepsydra, as these were both used in the serving and handling of liquids. We also need to consider the presence of a Phoenician tripod vessel that would have been used for flavouring drinks. The two serving dishes, two ‘lid plates’ and the ‘plate-bowl’ on a cylindrical foot would probably have played a role in the presentation of food, possibly including both solid and liquid elements. In all circumstances, it would seem logical to assume that the deeper vessels, including the two serving dishes or bowls (the crater-like vessels) were used to hold drinks. The particular ‘plate-bowl’ on a cylindrical foot may similarly be associated with the consumption of solids or semi-solids; it is also sufficiently unusual to have belonged to a figure of some importance. Finally, we should also include other accessories used in the feast, especially those vessels that might have been designed to contain rare luxury items, such as the S-shaped vase with a zoomorphic decoration, the amphora and pithos, or those that might have fulfilled a complementary ritualistic or ceremonial function, like the small lid or plate and the patera.

Some of these elements allow us to take our functional interpretation one step further and focus specifically on the consumption of roasted meat and wine. In the case of meat, the roasting spit points clearly to the way in which the meat was prepared; in the case of wine, in the context of the early Iron Age, the simpulum and the tripod vessel can be interpreted in this area as veritable symbols of its consumption. In fact, at a site like Sant Jaume, with its notable presence...
of Phoenician amphorae, it is perhaps appropriate to think that the ritual ideology of this set of artefacts would have revolved largely around the drinking of wine. Overall, we propose that what we are dealing with is a set of objects illustrative of a type of feast based essentially, even if not exclusively, on the consumption of wine and roast meat. These are practices that resemble feasts documented in many areas of the eastern Mediterranean or, at least, significant elements introduced from the east into the framework of local commensal practices.

Elsewhere in the western Mediterranean, the Etruscan and Latin world saw the introduction of the wine ceremony in the seventh century BC, following the adoption of new practices of consumption closely linked with emerging elites (Riva 2010a; 2010b). In Sicily, there is evidence from the seventh century BC onwards of the selective adoption of certain elements of Greek tableware clearly linked to the consumption of wine (Hodos 2000; 2006; Ferrer 2013). In the south of the Iberian Peninsula, the consumption of meat and wine has similarly been noted in contexts influenced by practices introduced from the eastern Mediterranean and associated with feasting (Delgado 2008; 2012).

Faunal remains recovered from multiple settlements in northeastern Iberia demonstrate on the contrary a diet with little meat consumption. It has been argued that meat consumption in the early Iron Age was mainly concentrated at specific moments such as those of sacrifice or slaughter, which could be combined with the celebration of exceptional and communal meals (Nadal and Albizuri 1999; Valenzuela 2008; Albizuri et al. 2010). These studies also demonstrate sheep/goats were preferentially consumed, followed by cattle and pig, which closely matches the trends documented at Sant Jaume (Font et al. 2015). In Sant Jaume, ovicaprines were slaughtered predominantly as sub-adults, which means they could be kept for the production of meat, but also for their milk and wool. Most cattle were instead slaughtered as adults of two to three and up to five years of age, which suggests that they were primarily used for their labour. Pigs (Sus domesticus), however, were clearly kept for their meat, as is underscored by a perinatal individual of just one to four months, i.e. a suckling pig, found in Room A1 (Font et al. 2015: 603).

At Sant Jaume, the small globular cups, the bowl, the mug and the carinated Phoenician bowl would have been used for drinking, most...
probably wine. For the consumption of meat, we suggest that the residents of the site would have made use primarily of the high-stemmed plates, which would have served as a support for bringing the food to the mouth, either directly with the hands or with the help of, for example, crusts of bread. It may well be that guests helped themselves to a portion of meat from a large common dish placed at the centre of the communal space, for which function the large oval tray was ideally suited. The axe-head and knife could have served for carving and sharing out the meat cuts. The other bowls and ‘lid-plates’, as well as the typological diversity of the set as a whole, nevertheless suggest that other complementary or accompanying dishes were also consumed, which may have included sauces, purées, broths, vegetables, legumes, nuts, candied fruit and cheeses.

Levels of Participation, Commensal Spaces and Frequency of Feasting

Having presented a functional analysis of the elements of the feast, we now proceed to evaluate our interpretations. We do so by examining the parameters that enable us to understand the commensal activity in more detail. The three analytical categories that we use are the level of participation, the spaces of commensality and the frequency of the feasts, as highlighted by archaeological studies of feasting elsewhere (Potter 2000; Hayden 2001; 2011; Twiss 2008; 2012b; Halstead and Isaakidou 2011).

The number of participants in the communal feasts at Sant Jaume can be inferred from the basis of the set of artefacts recorded in A4, because we can assume that the whole set of objects would have been used in the celebration of these meals. This requires not only a quantitative assessment of the tableware set, but also an evaluation of the artefact associations. In total, the set of tableware and other associated items include 35 pieces, made up of 31 ceramic and four metal elements. The first point to note in this respect is that both the high-stemmed dishes, which we think were for solid or semi-solid food, and the small globular cups that appear to have been intended for individual use, number six. This suggests a restricted commensal practice with a relatively small number of participants. There are nevertheless also other hand-made ceramic vessels, namely three cups, two bowls, the *patena* and mug, which could also have been used for the individual consumption of liquids. This might point to the participation of other guests, who, however, would not have used the same vessels as the first six participants. The latter vessels may also have been used for the consumption of other food and drinks than meat and wine.

Either way, it is significant that we have a set of 12 vessels for the consumption of beverages and a set of nine vessels for the consumption of solid food, namely six small globular vessels, three cups, a bowl, a mug and a carinated Phoenician bowl and six high-stemmed plates, a ‘plate-bowl’, a broad-rimmed Phoenician plate and, finally, a high-stemmed plate. We thus believe that this collection of tableware could have served a feast attended by a minimum of six and a maximum of 12 guests, going by the number of high-stemmed dishes (Figure 7) and drinking vessels (Figure 8).

An alternative approach to assessing participant numbers is based on the presence of single artefacts that make up a distinctive set of unique objects or artefacts of limited circulation—we refer to these as diacritical insignia. By this we mean that these objects confer prestige on the owner, and that they are indicative of social status; the main purpose of these items would thus have been to be collected and displayed. In many cases, they are the kinds of objects that were acquired from outside sources through gift exchange, and whose circulation was usually very restricted; they were not commonly available in local exchange networks (Dietler 1999: 146). In our view, the diacritical insignia at Sant Jaume include the *simpulum*, axe-head,
Figure 7. Proposed distribution of the tableware set for use by six guests, mostly determined by the number of high-footed bowls.
Figure 8. Proposed distribution of the tableware set for use by 12 guests, in which drinking vessel determine the number of participants.
spit, knife, tripod vessel and the *clepsydra*, as well as the Phoenician plate and bowl. Among these artefacts there is a prevalence of elements designed for carving (axe-head), preparing (spit), dividing (knife) and eating meat (plate). Others served to flavour (tripod vessel), serve (*simpulum*), handle (*clepsydra*) and consume drinks (bowl). We could perhaps add the plate on the cylindrical high foot and the *patera*, since they too are unusual items. The latter objects are nevertheless somewhat different, because they are indigenous ceramic products, which might seem to disqualify them as diacritical insignia. They are, however, infrequent and thus of limited circulation, and they may plausibly be regarded as status indicators as well—as their inclusion in the set of objects in A4 would tend to confirm. We would indeed propose that these items should be interpreted as the symbolic paraphernalia associated with the individual(s) appointed to officiate at the ceremony, since only persons of high social standing could act as host. Finally, the Phoenician plate and bowl, which are clearly intended for individual use, may indicate that the host was able to adopt the commensal objects typical of the Phoenician world for consuming both meat and drink.

With regard to the spaces used for commensal practices in Sant Jaume, we suggest that Area A1 is the only suitable space in the settlement so far recorded. It occupies the westernmost point of Sector 1, is rectangular in shape and measures about 24 sq m. In the centre of the ground floor stands a large limestone block that would have served as the base for a central pillar. Along the northern and western sides of the room run long benches that are 90 cm high and 60 cm wide, and that round off the northwest corner of the building. Also worth mentioning is the presence of a large quantity of food provisions, especially cuts of meat as indicated by faunal remains, and other products that were stored in the ceramic containers from the upper floor. We have also recorded a significant quantity of faunal remains on the stone floor of this area (Font et al. 2015).

It is, however, also conceivable that some commensal occasions that involved a higher number of participants or even the entire community were hosted outdoors, either in close proximity to the settlement, since there are no open spaces within it, or farther afield, perhaps even in the neighbouring village of Moleta del Remei, which did have a large central square.

Finally, the frequency of these feasts is something we cannot determine with any certainty. The unique contextual, functional and typological nature of the tableware nevertheless clearly points to rather exceptional commensal practices that perhaps marked particular festive occasions. Even so, we note that the main products consumed, i.e. wine and roasted meat, were exclusive and rare foods, and it is quite likely that they were only consumed at certain feasts. These could be either incidental or periodic, and they could be part of providing hospitality in or beyond the community, or they might be triggered by the agricultural cycle. What is clear, we suggest, is that the standardized set of stored items indicates commensality practices that were strictly regulated, and quite possibly subject to a well-established calendar or liturgical cycle. This still does not exclude the tableware set of Room A4, which could also have been used from time to time at *ad hoc* feasts to celebrate occasions like marriages, funerals, initiation rituals, the marking of trade exchanges or agreements, and so forth.

**Commensality Rituals and Power Relations in the Lower Sénia Valley**

Having completed the typological, functional and contextual analyses of the set of tableware, in this section we consider the commensal practices that would have involved the items discussed (Figure 9). Ultimately, we seek to relate these to the model of social organization, the exchange system and economy in the lower Sénia valley during the early Iron Age. Here, our main points of reference are the various forms in which feasting can serve to create and repro-
duce power relations, namely entrepreneurial/empowering feasts, patron-role feasts and dia-

We wish to stress, however, that we adopt these categories in a most flexible and tenta-
tive manner. We are convinced that they may help us to see more clearly the broader contexts and to advance our reconstruction of the social changes unfolding in the lower Ebro valley and neighbouring territories during the early Iron Age (Sardà 2008; 2010b). We thus want to emphasize that these categories of commensality should not be seen as simple or rigid evolution-
ary stages that succeed each other; we see them instead as representing generic ways in which commensal politics can present themselves, assuming that we are able to document such ambivalent practices and situations.

We therefore need to undertake a fresh analy-
thesis in order to decipher the social objectives and ideological factors that underpin the consump-
tion practices suggested by this set of tableware. In so doing, we should not forget the fact that it was found in a unique settlement that must have played a key socio-political and commer-
cial role within the region. We have outlined above how the characteristics of the tableware allow us to infer certain consumption practices in which only a very small number of guests could have participated (between six and 12 individuals). We stress, however, that at least 23% of the utensils (simpulum, spit, axe-head, knife, tripod vessel, clepsydra, Phoenician bowl and plate), or even 29% if we also include the patera and the plate on a cylindrical foot, can be included within the category of distinctive objects or of diacritical insignia. This provides important clues to the particular composition of the whole set. Moreover, it should be borne in mind that other ceramic artefacts, such as the high-footed plates—in particular those deco-
 rated with a fretwork of triangles—can also be interpreted as refined or distinguished pieces.

These characteristics suggest that we are dealing with a mode of commensal politics referred to as the diacritical feast. This notion highlights those practices that serve to naturalize or reify status differences through the consumption of expensive or rare foods, or by using unusual or exotic utensils that are typically associated with specific consumption habits. These practices thus often serve to highlight clear social bounda-
ries between social groups (Dietler 1999: 145). However, while it is difficult to say with any certainty who would have participated in these exclusive acts of consumption, it is reasonable to assume that they would have included the chief, whom we argue would have resided in Sant Jaume and would have acted as host. It is also possible that certain practices were specifically reserved for the residents of Sant Jaume, most of whom are quite likely to have made up the high-
est social class in the community. If so, we are probably dealing with practices that took place within their own family circle. But we can also see these artefacts in the context of an elite feast, attended by leading members of the community at the local and even the regional level. This raises the possibility of periodic feasts, in which different family heads would have participated in order to reach local agreements that could vary from establishing alliances to agreeing matters as diverse as community work parties or exchanges. We also cannot exclude the possibility that this particular set of artefacts played a significant role in celebrations as part of recurrent contact and exchanges with Phoenician traders. All these proposals are perfectly plausible.

Similarly, if we examine in detail the char-
acteristics of this set of diacritical objects, we see that, with the exception of two vessels (the Phoenician dish and bowl) and perhaps the plate with the cylindrical stand and the patera, all other artefacts are associated with the preparation and serving of food. This might be an attempt to strengthen the symbolic value of handling and serving certain exclusive products. This could thus be an ideological strategy to reinforce the restricted and ritualized character of certain consumption and feasting practices.
in order to cement existing status differences (Lucas 2003–2004: 129; Sardà 2008: 103). In any case the prominence of serving utensils seems to point to an ideological link with a more traditional kind of commensality which based its symbolic potential on the principles of communal consumption of food or the use of certain shared objects.

As such, it may be the case that the use of these exclusive artefacts served above all to strengthen the impact of the symbolism associated with the pouring or serving of wine. It is this emphasis on the parameters of sharing that leads us to consider the possibility that these diacritical objects were also used in commensal practices with a wider audience, which would

Figure 9. Model of changing feasting practices at Sant Jaume, in which competitive feasts, typically found among societies without institutionalized political roles, give way to new commensal practices that include an increasingly strong diacritical message and increasingly explicit expressions of status.
suggest a move away from traditional entrepreneurial and empowering feasts. In other words, it is possible that these items were used in collective feasts staged by the elite as a means of acquiring power, obtaining an economic advantage and maintaining social prestige in order to exercise their leadership (Dietler 1999: 142).

Archaeologically, it is generally difficult to document in situ evidence of the celebration of these large communal feasts, since these domestic spaces and the spaces for communal use would routinely be cleaned, regardless of whether they were indoors or outdoors. In any case, multiple ethnographic and archaeological examples have documented that communities and families participating in such feasts would bring and use their own household utensils and objects, which underscores the close connections between the ritual symbolism of the feast and the domain of everyday meals (Bell 1992; Bradley 2003; 2005). In fact, during the early Iron Age, all contexts in the northeast of the Iberian Peninsula that can be related to feasting show a clear symbolic or ritual enhancement of domestic habits and parameters of consumption. This strongly suggests that large collective meals were a social practice that was available to everyone and that facilitated links and relationships between families and communities (Sardà 2010a; 2010b; Sardà et al. 2010). The use of distinguished or prestigious objects at such entreprenuerial/empowering feasts, the main goal would have been to extend the success of the group, to attract followers and to strengthen the labour force. At the same time, these surpluses, which we understand as including wine, would have been a key factor to ensure the internal working, modification and/or renegotiation of the social mechanisms of the Sant Jaume Complex, as well as to facilitate interaction and exchange with neighbouring communities. It is worth noting in this respect that the 14 amphorae from Area A3 alone could have held 420 litres of wine, which was sufficient to host multiple community feasts attended by large numbers of guests.

The evidence from Sant Jaume is also consistent with the emergence of so-called patron-role feasts, as regular contacts with Phoenician traders would have created an increasing demand for certain local goods, especially metals such as lead. Since access could only be guaranteed by extending social networks that relied on Sant Jaume as the centre of redistribution, new relationships of interdependence, if not unequal dependence, would have been forged with neighbouring communities and territories. As a result, Sant Jaume became a centre of regional redistribution and the seat of an emerging local power.

In fact, in the case of Sant Jaume, a significant number of Phoenician amphorae have been found in the settlement, most notably in Area A3. In this area alone, a set of at least 14 large (30-litre) storage containers has been recorded (García i Rubert 2005: 510). This significant number of Phoenician amphorae can be considered as indicative of the accumulation of goods intended for redistribution, which in turn indicates that well-attended feasts were celebrated in the Sénia district, where commensal hospitality would have served to establish political power and economic advantage, especially through the institution known as work-party feasts (Dietler 1996: 92-96; Dietler and Herbich 2001). At such entreprenuerial/empowering feasts, the main goal would have been to extend the success of the group, to attract followers and to strengthen the labour force. At the same time, these surpluses, which we understand as including wine, would have been a key factor to ensure the internal working, modification and/or renegotiation of the social mechanisms of the Sant Jaume Complex, as well as to facilitate interaction and exchange with neighbouring communities. It is worth noting in this respect that the 14 amphorae from Area A3 alone could have held 420 litres of wine, which was sufficient to host multiple community feasts attended by large numbers of guests.

The brief period during which the settlement was actually inhabited, however, and its sudden and violent destruction, speak to a rather
unstable situation, in which patronage did not become well entrenched, and it is unlikely that an openly tributary model was established. We should therefore bear in mind that the difference between competitive feasts and patron-role feasts is only based on the degree of acceptance and recognition by the social actors involved. In reality, both types of feast are based on a very similar symbolic logic, since they are both articulated by communal practices of consumption in which asymmetries are expressed through the distribution of food. The differences between the two types of feast may therefore be very subtle, especially when seeking to draw a distinction on the basis of the material record.

**Discussion**

The evidence we have documented at the settlement of Sant Jaume, we argue, captures a moment of major change in regional social dynamics, which in our view can be interpreted as the transformation of the competitive feasts characteristic of societies without institutionalized political roles into commensal practices with an increasingly strong diacritical message and explicit demonstrations of status. The tableware documented within Area A4 represents a set of utensils specifically linked to the periodic celebration of certain practices of exceptional feasting, practices that can be closely associated with the age-old ideological principles of local tradition, centred on the celebration of the feast as a relational phenomenon and as a means of social advancement.

We should nevertheless keep in mind that this set of tableware seems intended for use by a small group of guests, between six and 12 individuals, among whom we presume one individual to have acted as host, officiating at the ceremony and using a very specific subset of objects. Among these distinct objects we find, on the one hand, certain utensils reserved for personal use, such as the Phoenician bowl and plate for the individual consumption of food and drink, and, on the other hand, items related to the preparation and serving of drinks, such as a tripod vessel, simpulum and clepsydra, as well as meat—i.e. an axe-head, knife and spit.

The joint occurrence of the tripod vessel and the Phoenician bowl in a settlement such as Sant Jaume, where many amphorae and pithoi also have been recorded, suggest that at least some basic features of the Phoenician mode of wine consumption were adopted. Tripod vessels have been associated with the eastern Mediterranean practice of crushing spices in order to add them to honey and other aromatic substances so as to enhance the taste of wine and/or to hide the bad taste of a wine that might have turned sour, or whose flavour had been affected during a long trading trip (Vives-Ferrándiz 2005; 2008). This practice was common in the Syro-Mesopotamian area and would have been gradually introduced during the seventh century bc into various Mediterranean regions, including southern Etruria and Sardinia (Botto 2000). In fact, the adoption of this habit and the use of these exotic objects linked to the drinking of wine could have been employed as an especially effective diacritical symbol, one that was eminently suitable for supporting strategies of social differentiation adopted by hosts and leaders at these ceremonies. The use of the tripod vessel has also been documented in Area A7 of the neighbouring settlement of Moleta del Remei, which was a very different area associated with a family specializing in metallurgy and perhaps in community rituals. This confirms that the preparation and flavouring of wine, in line with Phoenician habits, would have contributed to the introduction of emulation strategies among elite heads and family groups.

In addition to these links with the Mediterranean area, we also need to examine the important connections that these objects created with other regions in northeastern Iberia. This is confirmed by the simpulum, which is associated with the serving of drinks and which has been documented primarily in notable tombs on the central and northern coasts of Catalonia.
and southeast France (including, for example, Tomb 68 in the Grand Bassin I cemetery, Tomb EF-9 in the Vilanera cemetery, Tomb 399 of the necropolis of Agullana, Tomb 8 of the Anglès necropolis and Tomb 18 of the necropolis of Can Piteu-Can Roqueta). The co-occurrence of typical early Iron Age metal objects, such as the *simpulum*, knife and spit, clearly illustrates the integration and selective combination of prestige objects (Sardà 2008: 110; 2010b: 750).

The general increase in the complexity of tableware and the symbolic-decorative sophistication of certain ceramic repertoires does not necessarily imply diacritical feasts, but may simply respond to an increase in the complexity or ostentation of the sets. Indeed, the latter is often associated with the reformulation and/or reinvention of ritual parameters, something that is especially manifest in the redefinition of local identity strategies, which are always implicitly related to situations of cultural contact (van Dommelen 1997; 2006; Knapp and van Dommelen 2010; van Domme- len and Rowlands 2012).

**Conclusions**

If we are correct to suggest that the tableware from Area A4 was used by a limited circle of guests responsible for handling the symbolic paraphernalia at these exceptional ceremonies, either during community celebrations or as part of diacritical feasts reserved for a small group of distinguished figures, then we have to accept that the use of this complex set of tableware served to emphasize the theatrical nature and the ritualistic significance of the consumption of most significant products. Such events appear designed to reinforce expressions of status within the context of commensal practices, and emphasize above all the liturgical role of those figures that officiated at these ceremonies and who acted as hosts and managers of these rituals.

In time, the institutionalization of power would gradually convert these feasts into practices of social advancement that, without losing their competitive roots, would eventually include the recognition and acceptance of unequal hospitality by all participants. We should not forget, however, that these processes of commensal change, conflicts and tension may have emerged as a logical consequence of the social changes to which they were tied. This suggests that the same consumption practices were perceived quite differently by distinct groups of participants. For example, the hosts could sponsor and organize a particular celebration as a patron-role feast, while the guest might perceive this same celebration as a competitive feast. This is a critical observation, especially in those cases in which certain groups or individuals challenged the main authority and refused to recognize the patron-role feasts as such. In this regard, it seems that the resistance to recognizing unequal hospitality typically illustrates one of the frequent tensions of commensality politics, above all in the framework of those societies undergoing the first attempts at institutionalizing power. All in all, this helps us to understand commensality politics as a genuine force of social opposition and as a dynamic agent for political change, which we believe would be a good description of the situation documented in the lower Sénia valley during the final days of the early Iron Age.

Finally, we would like to emphasize the fact that the characteristics of the tableware set examined, and the general inferences made regarding the context of its use, necessarily place the tablewares and other associated elements in the hands of the social elite of the community that inhabited this district during this period. This elite would probably have used the ritualized and ceremonial consumption of food and drink to reaffirm, maintain and redefine their social position.

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