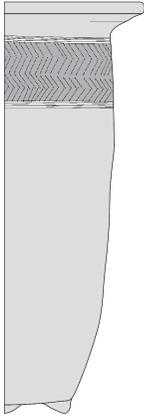


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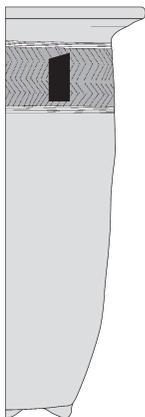
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## BEHIND THE SCENES AND INTO THE KITCHEN



New Directions for the Study  
of Prehistoric Meals

Elizabeth A. Klarich

Although we regularly participate in the preparation and consumption of large, special meals (e.g., Thanksgiving, wedding receptions, etc.), we often must step outside of familiar settings to observe the subtle social, economic, and political factors at play during these events. In 1995 and 1996, I had the opportunity to live and work in the small Aymara community of Ch'alla Pampa on the Isla del Sol, Bolivia, as a member of the Island of the Sun Archaeological Project. There were approximately eighty families in the community and our project worked closely with representatives from each through a community-regulated *turno*, or work rotation. Unlike today, the island did not have electricity, telephones, or tourist accommodations for the grubby archaeologists working there for several months at a stretch. We were housed within a typical house compound (*cancha*) in the main plaza and often were invited to the community-wide gatherings taking place outside our doorway. There were all-night dances for feasts such as San Juan, birthday parties for the crewmembers, and other loosely organized events in the main plaza. However, events within household *canchas* were initially off limits. Several months of living and working in Ch'alla Pampa passed before our small crew was invited to private gatherings such as wedding receptions

and first hair-cutting ceremonies (*retuche*), which are both accompanied by hours of eating and drinking. These events were hosted in the central patio of the cancha and included either the extended family (the typical household unit in the *altiplano* region) or the extended family plus invited friends and select community officials.

At these events, project members were typically shuffled into the small compound and seated with the community officials and male family members on a narrow bench along the wall. A long handwoven textile was unrolled on the floor and quickly covered with impressive mounds of dozens of types of tubers, *aji* (chile sauce) in small bowls, and occasionally stubby corncobs if it was early in the season. The men would help themselves to the tubers and await the serving of the soup and meat dishes by the teenage girls darting in and out of the kitchen. Older women and those not preparing or serving the meal sat in a group across the courtyard, also snacking on potatoes and waiting for their dinner to arrive. Once the serving began, the men were presented with individual bowls from one end of the bench to the other, with the guests of honor and community officials served first. It is a slow process, as everyone watches and awaits their warm bowls of quinoa soup and plates of llama or alpaca meat in the chilly *altiplano* evening.

There was one party in particular, a *retuche*, where a community member who had been working with us was skipped over by the servers, leaving him to wait for many minutes before he was finally served. When his plate did arrive, it held an inadequate piece of meat relative to the piles of food on the plates around him. I almost spoke to mention it, thinking he had been forgotten by mistake, but the silence of the men along the bench made it clear that this shunning was deliberate. A few minutes passed before the partygoers returned to chatting and laughing with those around them. During subsequent conversations with women, typically while being teased about my substandard knitting skills, I gained a bit of insight into the power of the kitchen in *altiplano* gatherings. My knitting partners explained that the man who was left waiting for his small serving of cold meat had been abusing his wife. The hosts, members of her extended family, made it quite clear through this shunning that such behavior would not be tolerated. Additionally, retribution by the abusive husband would have been difficult, if not impossible, as the older women in the kitchen and the girls serving the meal were all accomplices and keeping a watchful eye. The husband could either change his behavior or risk further humiliation, perhaps even in a community-wide setting such as one of the feasts held in the town plaza.

This complex interplay among food, cooking, and culture intrigued me as an anthropologist (Mary Weismantel's *Food, Gender and Poverty in the Ecuadorian Andes* [1988] was one of the first ethnographies I read as an un-

dergraduate), but it was also sobering as an archaeologist to realize how methodologically messy big meals are to document, categorize, and interpret. For example, the event described above involved guests from outside the household unit but was hosted within the *cancha* of the extended family, blurring the distinctions between private and public, household and suprahousehold. The distinction between food preparation and serving practices was also blurred, as multiple generations of women in the kitchen directed the preparation and distribution of food and beverages but remained unseen to the majority of party guests in the patio. However, the power of the kitchen was clear; the women of this extended family used the context of this gathering and meal to reinforce the norms of the community through shunning the offending-in-law. The behind-the-scenes of this feast sparked my interest in further exploring how archaeologists first distinguish between household and suprahousehold meals and how they subsequently interpret the significance of this variability with respect to prehistoric political, economic, and social dynamics.

### **Behind the Scenes: Preparing and Financing Suprahousehold Meals**

Suprahousehold meals are clearly a popular research topic within anthropology, as reflected by the number of journal articles, books, and edited volumes filled with case studies of prehistoric and ethnographic feasts published over the last decade. The broadest definition of feasts—“public ritual events of communal food and drink consumption . . . that differ in some way from daily consumption practices” (Dietler 2001: 69)—includes contexts as diverse as hunting and gathering societies and those organized at the state level (e.g., Hayden 2001). The anthropology of food—be it from an ecological, structuralist, practice-oriented, or other theoretical approach—is an exciting arena in which subsistence (Kelly 2001); technology (Lyons and D’Andrea 2003); social dynamics, like gender (e.g., Bray 2003a; Crown 2000; Hastorf 1991; Weismantel 1988) and status (Weissner 1996); labor organization (Dietler and Herbich 2001; Gumerman 1994; Jennings et al. 2005); etiquette (Goldstein 2003); personal preference (Joyce and Henderson 2007; Smith 2006); ritual (Blinman 1989; Blitz 1993; Hastorf 2003; Lau 2002; Potter 2000); and politics (Bray 2003b; Dietler 2001) intersect and interweave in incredibly complex ways. Within archaeological approaches, the primary focus has been to determine the significance of food and beverages in the construction of political power (Dietler and Hayden 2001: 12) and the links between domestic and political economies (Dietler 2001: 72; Goldstein 2003).

The contributors to this volume build upon a rich corpus of case studies and synthetic feasting frameworks. In case studies, evidence of feasting typically

includes the presence of exotic and/or high-quality foodstuffs, high percentages of serving vessels, and concentrations of large storage vessels (Blitz 1993; Costin and Earle 1989; Dietler 1990; Gero 1992; Junker, Mudar, and Schwaller 1994; see also Bray 2003a; Brown 2001; Clark and Blake 1994; Dietler and Hayden 2001; Jackson and Scott 1995, 2003; LeCount 2001; Mills 1999, 2004, 2007; Potter 2000; Pauketat et al. 2002; Vaughn 2004; Welch and Scarry 1995). Synthetic frameworks integrate archaeological and ethnographic data from these case studies to develop generalized, cross-cultural archaeological “signatures” of feasts. The most comprehensive list of archaeological feasting signatures is that of Brian Hayden (2001: 40–41, table 2.1), which includes special or unusual food and beverages, vessel types, facilities and disposal areas, and several other categories of associated items (see also Junker 2001: 284–285). These comparative frameworks effectively serve as a general guide and checklist for the initial identification and classification of feasting events in a variety of archaeological contexts.

This volume seeks to refine and expand the analysis and interpretation of prehistoric suprahousehold meals through focusing on the context of their preparation. Details of how, where, and by whom the meal was orchestrated—the behind-the-scenes context—often remain unaddressed in archaeological research. Decorated serving vessels, primary trash middens, and abandoned locales used during feasting events have received considerably more attention than the cooking and storage vessels, food-processing and disposal areas, and other related artifacts associated with the preparation end of the process. This is the result of many factors, including both a rich ethnographic record of feasting events and the fact that the remains of serving and consumption activities tend to be more easily identified in the archaeological record. However, as noted by Susan Pollock (2003: 34, emphasis added), “consumption shapes and is shaped by production and preparation of food, but consumption is *only the end result*.”

In moving behind the scenes to focus on meal preparation, our most basic goals run parallel to and complement those outlined by Michael Dietler and Brian Hayden (2001: 3) in their edited volume *Feasts: Archaeological and Ethnographic Perspectives on Food, Politics, and Power*:

[C]ommon to all of these [chapters] is the idea that feasts are events essentially constituted by the communal consumption of food and/or drink. Most authors are also explicit in differentiating such food-consumption events from both everyday domestic meals and from the simple exchange of food without communal consumption. These are important distinctions to maintain if the category is to have analytical utility.

In this volume, each author establishes a local or regional baseline that indicates the material requirements of preparing daily meals. Using this baseline,

which includes artifact types such as cooking vessels or food remains and associated features such as hearths or ovens, it is then possible to systematically differentiate between household level and suprahousehold meal preparation.

The baseline in each case study is established using a variety of methods, which often depends on the nature of available data sets. For example, several of the authors implicitly or explicitly apply the concept of “cuisine” in their analyses:

Cuisines are cultural constructs that include rules for the appropriate manner of preparation of foods (recipes, tools, combinations of foods), the traditional flavorings of staples, the number of meals consumed per day, the manner of serving completed dishes, the use of food in ritual activities, and the importance of food taboos. (Farb and Armelagos 1980: 190; Weismantel 1988: 87, in Crown 2000: 225)

Using cuisine to guide the categorization of food and beverage preparation holds potential for a variety of reasons. Most importantly, this approach establishes both the materials involved—the major types of food in the diet—and the transformation of those materials through methods of preparation, modes of serving and eating, and storage practices (Bray 2003b: 96). This requires using various types of data in concert to outline daily food preparation, consumption, and storage activities. It establishes both the requirements for ceramic vessels (or “culinary equipment”) and the forms and scale of associated activity areas such as cooking features (*ibid.*; see also Potter and Ortman 2004). This approach counters an archaeological bias in feasting studies toward ceramic and faunal evidence by incorporating additional data sets from activity areas (e.g., technological and botanical evidence from hearths). Studies of cuisine also highlight social and economic factors that may influence the appearance of new foods, pottery types, or cooking techniques in the material record. For example, adoption of larger cooking pots may be the result of changes in subsistence practices, culinary techniques, taste preferences (Joyce and Henderson 2007), household size (Mills 1999), or the ratios of cooks to consumers (Crown 2000). In other words, the presence of large cooking and storage pots does not necessarily reflect suprahousehold meals, nor are such meals necessarily feasts.

Once the baseline for daily meals is established for a region, it is used to interpret new data sets, to identify suprahousehold meals in the archaeological record, and to determine *why* they vary from daily meals. As noted by Patricia Crown (2000: 228), “[g]iven the conservatism of both diet and cuisine and the centrality of food in structuring social relations, a question of continuing importance becomes why diet and cuisine change at all.” A range of options must be considered—gastropolitical (Appadurai 1981), social, economic, and so forth—if we are to avoid clumping all suprahousehold meals into a single

category, which dilutes both the variability within the data and the explanatory power of the term “feast.”

In order to determine the social, economic, and political significance of suprahousehold meals in these diverse case studies, several of the authors focus on identifying who “picked up the bill” and financed the organization and preparation of the meals within each context. In a framework developed in the American Southwest, James Potter (2000: 473) characterizes feasting events based on three dimensions: the scale of their participation and financing, the frequency and structure of occurrence, and the food resources used. In this study, the dimension of scale is used to differentiate among feasts financed, organized, and prepared by household, extended household, or community levels of participation (Potter 2000), not simply as a measure of the size of the feast and the number of people involved (Hayden 2001: 39). This approach provides valuable insight into the mobilization of labor, collection of food and other resources, and management of the completion of related tasks (see also Kelly 2001: 354). Through analysis of event financing, the contributors to this volume provide solid evidence for suprahousehold meals as integral elements of competitive feasting, work parties, funerary rituals, craft economies, and various types of social negotiations.

### **Organization of the Volume**

The contributions in this volume include both Old and New World case studies, with the majority from the latter, and focus primarily on middle-range and complex societies (Figure 1.1). In order to develop a baseline for each case study, a variety of methods are employed to systematize the characterization of food and beverage preparation. First, most authors include an analysis of preparation areas or facilities, including both the architectural remains and related features. The architectural remains include residential contexts and public spaces, which are categorized through measures of size, labor investment, and location. Through documentation of features such as hearths, middens, and other associated activity areas, it is possible to determine the nature of cooking and brewing technologies, scale of preparation, and periodicity of feature use. Second, a variety of artifact data are used to further clarify the context of meal preparation. Ceramic attribute data, combined with insights from ethnographic analogy and textual descriptions, provide insight into vessel function and can be used to differentiate between preparation and consumption contexts. Faunal, lithic, and mortuary data are also featured in discussions of prehistoric diet, technology, and ritual. However, documenting the material remains or the archaeological signatures of suprahousehold meal preparation is only the initial step of the process.



**1.1.** *Location of archaeological case studies referenced in Chapters 2 through 8.*

In exploring the economic, political, and social dynamics of suprahousehold meals, the case studies can be grouped by three major themes: building prestige through big meals, evaluating the ubiquity of work party feasts, and exploring the social identities of those preparing suprahousehold meals. The relationship between suprahousehold meals and prestige building is the theme of both Old World case studies, with the former focusing on regional political economy and the latter on local urban political economy. First, in the Tanjay region of the Philippines, Laura Lee Junker and Lisa Niziolek integrate rich historical, ethnographic, and archaeological evidence to outline the social dynamics involved in the preparation of competitive “feasts of merit” (Chapter 2). Since chiefly power was tied to the ability to mobilize labor, competitive feasts were used to build alliances and expand political networks. The authors use data from rice-fermenting jars, cooking pots, and animal-processing sites within both elite and non-elite household contexts to argue that the preparation of ritual feasting expanded in human labor costs during the centuries before Spanish contact. This expansion included broader social participation as non-elites attempted to gain status through emulation and feast sponsorship, resulting in major shifts in chiefly strategies within the political economy. The financing of these feasting events, particularly the increase in production costs, resulted in major social and economic shifts as marriage patterns changed, the slave trade escalated, and status-seekers attempted to increase their social networks across the region.

Moving much earlier in time, Jason Ur and Carlo Colantoni explore the relationship between the hosting of commensal events and the intensification of household production within urban settlements in northern Mesopotamia during the third millennium BC (Chapter 3). Through a synthesis of data from household excavations, landscape archaeology, and ancient textual sources, the authors model the cycle of agricultural and pastoral production; the storage, preparation, and consumption of these products; and their final discard. In contrast to traditional models for centralized control of surplus production in the region, Ur and Colantoni conclude that motivations existed for households of all scales to intensify production without the influence of the ruling institutions of the state. Although large-scale feasts may have played a role in urban social and economic relations, communal meals at the level of smaller households regularly served to maintain social hierarchies and to enhance household prestige within neighborhoods and clans.

The second theme involves evaluating the ubiquity of work party feasts within the category of suprahousehold meals. This type of feast is documented in both highly stratified societies, where they are often state-sponsored, and in ideologically egalitarian societies, where hosts use them to create “spiraling asymmetries in economic and symbolic capital” (Dietler and Hayden 2001: 17; see also Dietler and Herbich 2001). In this volume, two case studies from the Andes compare their local data with well-documented evidence of massive, state-sponsored Inca work party feasts (e.g., Costin and Earle 1989) in order to explore regional and temporal variability in Andean feasting practices.

In Chapter 4, Donna Nash explores the relationship between feasting and political control during the Wari Empire of the Middle Horizon (AD 550–1000). She synthesizes extensive excavation data from both residential quarters and monumental structures at the Wari sites of Cerro Baúl, a provincial center, and Cerro Mejía, a more modest site located nearby in the Upper Moquegua drainage of Peru. The quality, manner of food and beverage preparation, and details of both production and consumption areas (e.g., “atmosphere”) are outlined in detail for four different contexts: daily meals, ample meals, festive meals, and grand feasts. Based on the architectural and artifact data recovered from various residential areas, Nash argues that households across the political hierarchy participated in Wari feasting. In contrast to the large work party feasts documented for the Inca Empire, Wari feasts were small-scale gatherings where goods could be exchanged, alliances negotiated, and group membership reinforced through ritual.

On the Peruvian North Coast, George Gumerman IV presents food-preparation evidence from several sites in order to document and interpret the variety of suprahousehold meals prepared and consumed by the Moche (AD 200–800) (Chapter 5). Excavation data from the sites of El Brujo, Ciudad

de Dios, Santa Rosa–Quirihuac, and the Huacas del Sol y de la Luna include evidence of industrial-scale cooking features, including super-sized ceramic vessels, which are clearly differentiated from facilities used to prepare household-level meals. Gumerman documents both life-cycle feasts for occasions such as funerals and work party feasts for the mobilization of Moche farmers, craftsmen, and local administrators. Evidence does not support centralized control over production or preparation of these events, nor of the subsequent distribution of foodstuffs and beverages. Unlike Inca feasts hosted for political aggrandizement or large-scale reciprocity, Gumerman argues that Moche feasts were more limited in the scale of financing and participation, reflecting a decentralized sociopolitical organization of independent and self-sufficient households and communities.

The third theme of the volume involves exploring the social identity of the individuals and groups responsible for the preparation and financing of suprahousehold meals. In the Maya region, Lisa LeCount investigates the organization of food and beverage preparation sponsored by rulers at the site of Xunantunich (AD 600–800) (Chapter 6). Classic Maya feasts are well documented on polychrome vessels, with images and glyphs indicating vessel function and the types of food and beverages served (e.g., tamales, roasted meat, chocolate drinks, and a fermented beverage called *balche*). However, relatively little attention has been paid to meal preparation, motivating LeCount's analysis of household ceramic assemblages and facilities from across the Classic Maya social spectrum. LeCount concludes that attached occupational specialists (see Costin 1991) staffed palace kitchens, preparing meals primarily for private parties in the ruler's residence and occasionally for public feasts. In terms of social identity, were these meal-preparation specialists considered artisans in their own right?

Returning to the Peruvian North Coast, David Goldstein and Izumi Shimada compare plant remains from suprahousehold food-preparation areas associated with metal- and ceramic-production areas to document the nature of multi-craft interactions at Huaca Sialupe during the Middle Sicán period (AD 950–1050) (Chapter 7). The authors analyze data from firing features, faunal remains, and botanical microremains to determine what foods were being prepared and how suprahousehold (or extra-household) meal production was related to other economic activities at the site. Goldstein and Shimada conclude that large-scale meals were an integral element of complex economic and social negotiations between different types of producers at Huaca Sialupe. Specifically, these meals were used to sustain alliances among metal workers, ceramic producers, and “industrial cooks.” The results of the Huaca Sialupe case study, like those from the Mesopotamian case study presented by Ur and Colantoni, encourage further investigation of suprahousehold meals as integral

elements of *daily* economic and social interactions, not only as elements of periodic feasting events.

The relationship between meal preparation and social identity is further investigated through the analysis of a unique burial context at the Wari site of Conchopata (AD 550–1000) in the Peruvian highlands (Chapter 8). William Isbell and Amy Groleau describe in detail the burial of a woman, several infants, and their accompanying grave goods recovered from a room in a moderately sized residential complex. The grave goods include a number of domestic tools, offering pits of animal bones, and smashed oversized vessels associated with the preparation and consumption of corn beer (*chicha*). Based on the archaeological evidence, it appears that the tomb was revisited in order to make additional offerings many times after it was originally sealed. The authors argue that this venerated woman was a brewer of *chicha*, utilizing this exceptional burial context to explore the relationship among feasting activities, practices of commemoration, and notions of gender in the Wari Empire.

The volume concludes with commentaries by Arthur Joyce, a Mesoamericanist, and James Potter, a Southwestern archaeologist, who provide valuable insights into the place of each case study and the volume as a whole in the expanding literature on prehistoric feasting. In the first discussion, Joyce highlights a major goal of the volume—to sharpen the analytical focus of feasting studies—and provides examples of how the various case studies move our discussions beyond unnecessarily narrow definitions and overly generalizing typologies. In terms of the theoretical contributions of the volume, Joyce focuses on how both gender complementarity and intense gender asymmetries are materialized through the preparation of suprahousehold meals in several of the case studies. Both Joyce and Potter agree that “[o]ne of the topics that we would suggest still needs much more explicit treatment and fuller elaboration is the gender relations that underlie, and are reproduced and transformed through, feasts” (Dietler and Hayden 2001: 10–11; see also Bray 2003b; Dietler 2001: 91). In proposing future directions for research, Joyce focuses on the potential for detecting points of friction or social contradictions that may be activated at different stages of the meal process, from its organization and preparation through its consumption and disposal. He concludes by suggesting further consideration of the symbolism of food preparation and consumption (e.g., gods “eating” people at death) that would enrich our understanding of the significance of prehistoric meals beyond economics and politics.

In the final chapter, Potter places the volume into historical perspective, emphasizing both the unique contributions of each chapter and their potential to influence future directions in the study of prehistoric meals. According to Potter, the primary methodological contributions of the volume are a move-

ment away from the trend of consumption-centric studies of feasting and a greater emphasis on archaeological data versus ethnographic data in the individual case studies. In terms of theoretical concerns, he is primarily interested in how feasts are used to maintain, promote, and transform structure and he commends the contributors for documenting and unpacking the relevance of subtle differences in feasting behavior. As discussed earlier in this chapter, his own research has been concerned with the financing, organization, and scale of food and beverage preparation and the insights into social and political strategies that can be obtained through their study (e.g., Potter 2000). Potter discusses the necessity of using both direct and contextual evidence in developing a middle-range theory of feasting and, like Joyce, highlights the importance of incorporating gender in these models. Potter stresses the importance of considering both the intended (short-term) consequences of feasting and the often-neglected unintended (long-term) “social, political, and economic ramifications of feasts” (p. 249). He challenges us to establish how feasts “do or do not result in change and, if so, at what temporal scale” (p. 248), requiring further systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of behind-the-scenes food- and beverage-preparation data.

In sum, the case studies in this volume contribute to expanding both methodological and theoretical approaches to the study of prehistoric meals across the globe. Each study establishes the archaeological signatures of household versus suprahousehold meals in their respective region (the baseline) and then contextualizes these different types of meals within the goals of the volume. The often subtle differences in the how, why, and by whom of meal preparation and financing are highlighted when we look behind the scenes, revealing the powerful role of the kitchen in creating, reinforcing, challenging, and often transforming existing economic, political, and social dynamics. Ideally, as we continue to uncover the remains of prehistoric meals, we will also continue to develop the necessary methodological and theoretical tool kits to further document the significance of their incredible diversity through time and across space.

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