

Rituals of commensality and the politics of state formation in the "princely" societies of early Iron Age Europe

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Introduction

My task in this essay is to address the question «what can an examination of rituals of commensality add to our understanding of political structure and process in the so-called "princely" societies of Early Iron Age Europe?». The short answer is, I believe, a great deal. This is both because rituals are potentially recoverable as distinct events in the archaeological record and because, as will be shown, they are a fundamental instrument and theater of political relations. These features suggest that, despite the modest goal espoused above, the pursuit of this question has much more widespread relevance for understanding the other cases and the central theme addressed in this volume. However, an exploration of this issue requires first discussing the more general anthropological understanding of the relationship between ritual and politics, and especially of the role of ritual symbolism in the historical process of establishing the relations of domination that constitute state formation.

The relationship between ritual and politics is an intimate one: to paraphrase one recent review of the subject, there is no ritual without politics and no politics without ritual (Kelly/Kaplan 1990, 141)¹. However, this relationship is also a very complex one that has generated an extensive, and often contentious, literature in anthropology (cf. Bloch 1989, Cohen 1979, Comaroff/Comaroff 1993, Kelly/Kaplan 1990, Kertzer 1988, Tambiah 1985, Turner 1969). One consistently common feature of recent views is a rejection of assumptions that continue to underlie some archaeological interpretations: that ritual is a straightforward reflection of social and political structure and / or an inconsequential aspect of the superstructure of society. The older Durkheimian functionalist view of ritual as an adaptive mechanism (a kind of all-purpose adhesive substance) for the maintenance of social solidarity or "system equilibrium" is also now generally recognized to be

a very partial and flawed understanding, and attention has turned to the historically instrumental role of ritual in creating and defining structures of power. In this latter vein, many scholars (e.g. Bloch 1989) see ritual as essentially a conservative authoritarian force, while others (e.g. Kertzer 1988, Comaroff/Comaroff 1993) view it as an important historical force for both the reproduction and the transformation of relations of power. This is because it may serve as an instrument of both domination and resistance, as an arena for the symbolic naturalization, mystification, or contestation of authority.

As Godelier (1980) has noted, the development and maintenance of relations of domination which characterize the process of state formation rely upon a mixture of both violence and consent. Of these, he considers consent the more powerful force and sees an understanding of how certain representations of the social and cosmic order come to be shared by groups with conflicting interests as a fundamental theoretical problem in studying the formation of states. This is precisely the realm where ritual plays a vital role. Of course, ritual is by no means the sole social mechanism at play in this process. Bourdieu (e.g. 1977), through his examination of the microstructures of ideology and power, has very effectively demonstrated how daily practice also has an important and pervasive role in the

¹ Definitions of ritual and politics are by no means uniform. I use the term ritual to mean stylized sequences of action that are performed in such a manner as to be symbolically marked off in some way to distinguish them from daily practice. The term politics is used in a broad sense common in political anthropology to mean actions concerned with relations of power. It is important to emphasize that I am not espousing the kind of reductionist argument which claims that rituals have only, or essentially, a political function. They clearly play a number of other important social roles. I am simply interested in analyzing the political dimension that exists in all ritual.

naturalization of structures of control through the inculcation of dispositions that constitute «habitus» and that serve to constrain the perception of alternatives in action. However, ritual complements this operation of habitus in quotidian practice while functioning in a more dramaturgical fashion, and I have chosen to focus upon it here because of its potential archaeological visibility. An equally important reason for this focus is that ritual is more susceptible to interested micro-manipulation than is habitus. Sahlin (1985, 53), for example, contrasts those structures that are reproduced in practice largely through unreflexive mastery of the dispositions generated through habitus and those that can be objectified as «mythopoeitics». Ritual is a centrally important arena for the generation of these latter as it serves to reify certain representations of history, organize consciousness and order action.

Abner Cohen (1974) has characterized ritual as «politico-symbolic drama» that operates simultaneously at two levels. It is a theater for the representation of idealized or “euphemized” (rather than necessarily real) social relations of power as a natural and eternal order. At the same time, operating within the structured iconography of representation of the perceived social order there is a potential in active performance for symbolic statements by social groups or individuals competing for the definition of their relative status and power. However, there is also the possibility for more subversive performances of ritual in which competition does not simply reproduce the underlying structures of power but serves to challenge them through creative new reconfigurations of meaning.

In order to understand how this might work, it is necessary to explore the concepts of ideology and hegemony and their relationship to power and ritual. These terms, derived from concepts formulated by Marx and Gramsci, are currently used by different scholars in an often bewildering variety of ways (see Eagleton 1991, Roseberry 1989, Scott 1990, Williams 1977). Gramsci (1971) defined hegemony as consisting of a range of strategic means (economic, political and cultural) by which a dominant group creates consent to the asymmetrical structure of power relations among the subaltern groups it dominates. This paper follows particularly the insightful development of this discussion by Comaroff/Comaroff (1991, 19-32) because of their focus on the cultural dimension of hegemony and its relationship to ritual. To summarize their rich and complex argument in brief and schematic fash-

ion, they view ideology and hegemony as the two main forms in which power is entailed in culture and as potentially shifting tendencies along a continuum distinguished primarily by the operation of human consciousness and struggles over signification. Hegemony is the axiomatically presumed, uncontested aspects of culture that preserve the structure of power relations from exposure to conceptualization of alternatives or recognition of its arbitrariness; it is «that order of signs and practices, relations and distinctions, images and epistemologies – drawn from a historically situated cultural field – that come to be taken for granted as the natural and received shape of the world» throughout a community (1991, 23). Ideology, on the other hand, is the more or less self-consciously articulated “worldview” that provides organizing principles for a particular social group. Subordinate groups in a society will be subjected to the ideology of the dominant group. However, elements of this dominant worldview will be open to perception as self-interested opinion and to challenge in a way that hegemony is not; and subordinate groups may have their own variously articulated competing ideologies. All, however, will be culturally grounded in a shared hegemonic order that shields aspects of the structure of power from the conceptualization of alternative modes of thought.

Hegemony may be considered to be that part of a dominant worldview which, by being naturalized and euphemized to the extent that it becomes invisible and no longer is recognized as ideology, has been subtly diffused among all levels of society and permeates the fabric of social life². Under this schema it is clear that hegemony and ideology have an historically dynamic inverse relationship. It is also clear that to the extent that maintenance of domination relies upon what Godelier (1980) calls the force of consent, the historical success of domination relies upon the continual transformation of as great a portion as possible of the dominant ideo-

² An important distinction between legitimation and naturalization should be drawn. People can be convinced that a particular structure of power is legitimate even while recognizing that it is only one of several possible alternative structures. Naturalization, however, results in a limitation of the perception of alternatives to the extent that a particular structure comes to be seen as inherently the only possible one, it becomes inscribed in consciousness as a part of “nature” (see Eagleton 1991, 54-55). This distinction is one dimension of the boundary of consciousness between hegemony and ideology.

logy into hegemony through control over various types of «symbolic production» (Comaroff/Comaroff 1991, 25). Hegemony is clearly not a static phenomenon; it is a dynamic process that relies upon continual reproduction and modification through symbolic action.

As a major form of symbolic practice that objectifies categories and definitions and reifies authority, ritual is an extremely important apparatus for the production of such hegemony and, hence, for the creation and maintenance of all forms of domination. Clearly, those who are able control the staging and construction of rituals are in a position to objectify their own representations of history and of the social and cosmic order. However, ritual can also become an arena of contest by which aspects of hegemony may be exposed as ideology.

The effectiveness of ritual in this domain stems from several features. As Cohen (1979) has noted, the most emotionally compelling and effective political symbols are those which are not overtly political but rather tend to have an ambiguous «bivocality» melding intense personal experience of existential identity issues with broader structures of power. By «condensing meaning» in this way, ritual symbolism infuses social norms and categories with emotion (Turner 1967, 29). This is one reason that traumatic life crisis events, such as death, so commonly serve as a major ritual arena for the manipulation of political symbolism (Morris 1992). The emotional power of rituals also stems from certain theatrical media and sensory mechanisms commonly employed (in various combinations) in performance that tend to frame ritual as symbolically pregnant action marked off from other kinds of daily practice, thus focussing people's attention and rendering them receptive to episodes of heightened emotional experience. These devices include such things as music, dancing, rhythmic verse, role acting, evocative staging and costumes, and intoxication. Dramaturgical techniques such as the creation of images through contrast and the dialectical resolution of contradictions merge emotional catharsis with important pedagogical functions. Symbolic references to the past are commonly invoked to create an impression of seamless continuity, and highly formalized, repetitive sequences of action serve to limit the perception of alternatives and to naturalize the projected order by linking it to the «natural» experience of the passage of time (cf. Turner 1967, Moore/Myerhoff 1985, Tambiah 1985, Bloch 1989, Dietler/Herbich 1993). The potential of rituals as a form of hegemonic

apparatus derives from fusing personal emotional experiences of these kinds with conceptions of order and authority and thereby internalizing and naturalizing structures of domination.

Hallstatt political ritual

Given this brief discussion of anthropological views on the general relationship between ritual and politics, how does this help us to understand the central theme of this volume and the particular archaeological case of Early Iron Age Europe? Although, as Cannadine has noted, ritual is «like the snow: an insubstantial pageant soon melted into thin air» (1987, 1), rituals do commonly have a material dimension that may be subject to archaeological recovery. As it happens, the excavated remains of ritual activity constitute one of our principle sources of evidence about social relations in Hallstatt societies. In this, as in many other archaeological cases, we are confronted particularly with ritual activity of a limited and specific kind: that is funerary ritual, and indeed predominantly the funerary ritual of a limited elite segment of those societies (where there is clearly an interest in the symbolic production of hegemony). This has certainly been the primary basis for most inferences made by archaeologists about socio-political structure in late Hallstatt societies, including that aspect which constitutes the focus of this volume: their characterization as «princely». It would seem, therefore, that fruitful and secure interpretation of this evidence depends critically upon developing an improved understanding of the nature of ritual and its connections to politics and power, coupled with a close analysis of the specific rituals that constitute our archaeological evidence (see also Miller/Tilley 1984, Morris 1992). The perspective outlined above serves as a general foundation for the development of an interpretive strategy directed specifically toward understanding the political ritual of the Hallstatt «princes» and its role in both processes of state formation and the initial entanglement of these societies in the Mediterranean colonial political economy.

The Early Iron Age societies of the West Hallstatt region have for a long time been identified as having developed a markedly hierarchical social and political structure. They have, in fact, been variously interpreted as corresponding to some form of what might currently be called a «complex chiefdom», in the terminology of Johnson and Earle (1987), or an «early state» (Velde

1985). However, the complexity and variability of the socio-political formations lumped under these typological rubrics, the variation in criteria used to differentiate them, the often graduated or relative nature of those criteria, and the fact that changes in many of these aspects may be occurring at non-correlated rates (cf. Claessen/Skalnik 1978a, 1978b, Gailey 1985, Gibson/Geselowitz 1988, Gledhill 1988, Goody 1982, Johnson/Earle 1987, McGuire 1983), calls the analytical utility of these terms into question. This essay eschews the typological approach to understanding these societies. In other words, I am less concerned to decide whether late Hallstatt societies crossed some arbitrary evolutionary border between "chiefdoms" and "states" than to identify and comprehend through analysis of ritual practice the historical operation and experience of certain fundamental political processes underlying the relations of domination that constitute state formation.

Initially the attribution of hierarchical structure in Hallstatt societies was simply an assumption based upon the impressive wealth collected in certain large tumulus burials, such as the famous Vix tumulus in Burgundy (Joffroy 1979) or the Hochdorf tumulus in Baden-Württemberg (Biel 1985). However, this inference of hierarchical structure has more recently been strengthened through more sophisticated analysis of both settlement and burial patterns, with different scholars arriving at relatively similar conclusions through somewhat different measures of hierarchy (cf. Brun 1987, 1988, Buchsenschutz 1984, 1988, Frankenstein/Rowlands 1978, Härke 1979, Olivier 1988, Olivier/Reinhard 1993, Olivier/Wirtz 1993, Pare 1991, Wells 1980). I believe one can provisionally accept these analyses of hierarchical structure as a basis for pushing interpretation further into a somewhat neglected aspect: an explanation of the specific ritual dimension of this evidence and its role in the process of establishing and institutionalizing the expanding relations of domination underlying the patterns of hierarchy.

Among the most salient of the political processes noted above which I believe can be identified in the West Hallstatt region are: 1) the merging of smaller-scale polities into larger political communities, 2) the institutionalization of hierarchical authority, and 3) the naturalization of social inequality (see Dietler 1995a). Ritual necessarily plays fundamental roles in each of these processes.

The merging of polities within a region or a society reduces the number of political communities

and increases the size of the territories and populations of those which emerge. These larger clusters of political relationships are, in the phrase of Benedict Anderson (1983), «imagined communities» on a new scale; and for the reproduction of their existence they require the construction of emotionally charged traditions of identity with evocative symbols marshalled to invoke authenticity (see also Hobsbawm 1983). Ritual is an important arena for this kind of symbolic manipulation.

This construction of identity for an enlarged political community can be accomplished through appeals to different kinds of sentiments, and it appears unlikely that polities in Early Iron Age Europe relied upon the same mechanisms of popular mobilization as the newly invented nation-states of eighteenth century Europe that Anderson was analyzing. Sahlins' (1985) broad distinction between the conceptualization of historical agency in «praxiological» societies and divine kingship societies provides a good platform for identifying a basic difference in the cultural construction of identity in political communities. In the former type of society, history is considered to be made from the bottom up, and sentiments of communal identity must be established "horizontally" between all citizens of a polity on the basis of some sense of similarity or complementarity. In the latter, historical agency is considered to originate at a center, from the top down. Hence, individual subjects derive a sense of political community through ties to a common ruler (rather than directly to each other), and expansionary merging of polities is accomplished through alliances between rulers and the symbolic legitimation of newly configured "vertical" hierarchical relationships. This structural model is what Sahlins (1985, 44-46) identifies as «hierarchical solidarity».

A shift toward increasing hierarchical authority involves a reduction in the number and a ranking of the points of legitimate political action, as well as a concentration and rigidification of the channels of control. Such a process requires the naturalization of conceptions of hierarchically structured relations of dominance and deference. The rigidity and concentration of hierarchical structures of authority, of course, vary greatly among societies with centralized political structures. It may well be that some version of the kind of fluid «segmentary state» described by Southall (1956, 1965) in Africa, with shifting points and levels of legitimate political action, provides a better model for the Western Hallstatt situation than some of the more rigidly

centralized kingships; this is a point which needs closer investigation than can be undertaken here. Nevertheless, both kinds of political systems require the objectification of levels of social hierarchy: that is, the institutionalization of social inequality. By this is meant a process whereby disparities in relations of economic and political power among social groups or categories produced through manipulation of social, economic, and cultural resources are reproduced in ways that naturalize and formalize their existence.

How then are these processes manifested in the archaeological evidence of the Hallstatt case, and how can an analysis of ritual help us to interpret this evidence and better understand the specific historical experience of these processes? A first point to be made is that, as noted earlier, our sources of good evidence are confined primarily to certain «rituals of royalty» (Cannadine/Price 1987) of a very specific kind: the funerary ritual of an elite stratum of society vitally interested in the symbolic production of hegemony through the staging of such rituals³. This is not the context in which we are likely to detect evidence of symbolic statements of resistance (although there may well be competitive manipulation among members of the elite order). Moreover, nor can we detect from these rituals alone their ultimate success in producing hegemony within a community⁴. What we are seeing is the deployment of an ideological strategy of symbolic representation orchestrated from above; but ideology is never completely transformed into hegemony and people are not always as completely duped by such devices as they may appear to be, even as they acquiesce in participating in rituals of domination and deference. What is visible is the «public transcript» (Scott 1990) of the representation of social relations rather than possible sentiments of skepticism that may be expressed only in the safety of private conversation. The ultimate effectiveness of this kind of ritual in creating and reproducing hegemony and modes of domination can only be discerned from a critical historical perspective incorporating other kinds of evidence. More will be said later about this issue in the Hallstatt case.

Although enormously variable in the specific cultural forms of the symbols employed in different societies, rituals of the kind described above must meet certain operational requirements to fulfill the political roles outlined earlier. They must create bonds of identity between those wielding power and those submitting to it while at the same time

engendering a sense of inherent ranked difference and social boundaries. They must also project a sense of authenticity by which the ritual and the imaginary static order it represents are seen to transcend the lives of the individuals engaged in its performance. As Bloch (1987, 272) notes, rituals of this type share certain universal characteristics of the symbolic construction of authority, but they derive specific meaning and emotional power through the borrowing and elaboration of symbolic forms which are pervasively significant in the lives of the non-elite. They also mine the past for symbols that will create a sense of eternal continuity and authenticity, that will turn history into nature.

Looking at the development of funerary practices in the West Hallstatt region over the course of the Early Iron Age with these considerations in mind helps us to better understand the political dimensions and cultural meaning of the patterns observed. I want to examine specifically the area within this larger Western Hallstatt region that is generally invoked in discussions of Hallstatt «princes». This is an area extending over eastern France, southwestern Germany, and western Switzerland that may be called, for convenience, the Hallstatt *Fürstensitze* zone. It is characterized by certain stylistic commonalities in aspects of material culture and, more importantly, during the final phase of the Early Iron Age (Hallstatt D 2-3 or

³ Unfortunately, in Iron Age Europe we do not generally have access through the archaeological record to rituals of «royal» accession, those less frequently occurring «*rites de passage*» that confer power on a new ruler. Such rituals are usually charged with the explicit symbolic representation of the centrality of the ruler to the well-being and definition of the polity, the legitimating continuity of the new ruler with a series of predecessors, and both the supreme authority of the ruler and his/her spiritual and practical responsibilities to the people (see Cannadine 1987, Mair 1977, 41-49). Funerary rituals of the elite order may be expected to encompass some of these same elements (especially the aspect of legitimating continuity in time of transition), but with a more generalized emphasis on the symbolic naturalization of the structure of social relations.

⁴ It must be stressed that archaeological funerary data are notoriously difficult to interpret, and they have generated a tremendous literature of contentious theoretical discussion (cf. Binford 1971, Cannon 1989, Morris 1987, 1992, O'Shea 1984, Pader 1982, Tainter 1978). Nevertheless, as Morris (1992) has eloquently demonstrated for ancient Greece, a better understanding of the nature of ritual as a political phenomenon and an analysis of its specific elements in given funerary contexts with appropriate historical perspective can significantly improve interpretation of such data.

Hallstatt final) it evinces what may arguably and provisionally be interpreted as a consistently replicated settlement pattern of micro-regions with central defended hilltop settlements surrounded by wealthy tumulus burials (cf. Fischer 1987, Frankenstein/Rowlands 1978, Härke 1979, Kimmig 1969, 1983, Pare 1991, Wells 1980, and the prudent caveat of Eggert 1989). This more circumscribed territorial distinction is necessary because some areas which might reasonably be included within the larger Western Hallstatt culture region on the basis of material culture exhibit considerable divergence from this pattern (cf. Freidin 1982, Willaume 1985).

Analyses from various micro-regions of the Hallstatt *Fürstensitze* zone show that by the final phase of the Hallstatt period (D 2-3) a consistent spatial pattern had developed with wealthy tumulus burials clustered around a fortified hilltop settlement: the so-called *Fürstengräber* and *Fürstensitze* in the German terminology proposed by Kimmig (1969). Eggert's (1989) skepticism of Kimmig's original formulation must certainly be borne in mind. In addition to difficulties stemming from the imposition of anachronistic Medieval social terminology and a Hellenocentric fixation on an "acropolis / suburbium" concept, the temporal and spatial homogeneity of the *Fürstensitze* pattern criteria were also overstated. And it must be recognized that the archaeological record of many areas remains too poorly known to properly evaluate their conformity to the model. However, employing the term pragmatically in the more general sense noted above, there are relatively well documented cases in Burgundy (Joffroy 1979), Baden-Württemberg (Kimmig 1983), the Swiss Plateau (Schwab 1983), and the Hagenau area in the Alsace (Legendre 1989), as well as a greater number of suggestive instances in other areas. It is important to emphasize (for reasons which will become clear later) that outside of southwestern Germany the *Fürstensitze* pattern is almost entirely confined to the Hallstatt D 2-3 period (roughly 530-450 BC) (Pare 1991).

During this final phase, the funerary practices themselves also evince a highly consistent hierarchical pattern for wealthy burials across the Hallstatt *Fürstensitze* zone in terms of both funerary structure and grave furniture. In the first place, within each micro-region the tombs that are wealthiest in terms of indigenous prestige objects and exotic items interred in the primary burial chamber also tend to be the largest monuments

with the most complex internal structures. What is even more interesting in terms of the argument being addressed here is that, for the wealthier set of burials, the specific configurations of objects and features that compose the grave furniture (such as wagons, weapons, drinking and feasting gear, wooden chambers, gold torcs and bracelets, and Mediterranean imports) also tend to be limited, consistent, and hierarchically patterned in terms of association over a wide region (see Frankenstein/Rowlands 1978, Wells 1980, Pare 1991, 1992). Mediterranean imports, for example, tend during the Hallstatt D 2-3 phase to be largely restricted in each micro-region to the most elaborately endowed of the tumuli containing (associated with an inhumation burial) a four-wheeled wagon, feasting paraphernalia, and a central wooden chamber, along with a range of more gender-specific items. In other words, it appears that there not only developed a consistent hierarchical spatial structuring of settlements and burials within each of the various micro-regions of the Hallstatt *Fürstensitze* zone, but that the specific ritual iconography for representing status distinctions came to be shared for a certain set of wealthy burials in a very consistent way across many different micro-regions. The striking lack of a similar inter-regional homogeneity in the less elaborate Hallstatt burials (cf. Wamser 1975, Zürn 1987, Reim 1988) serves to emphasize all the more the extraordinary consistency of the wealthier set of tombs.

As Pare (1992) has recently documented in detail, this consistently associated set of funerary status markers (four-wheeled wagons, weapons, drinking and feasting gear) in elaborate Hallstatt tumulus burials shows several correlated diachronic trends. From the early to the late Hallstatt period such burials become at the same time: 1) increasingly exclusive (*i.e.* found in ever smaller numbers), 2) increasingly widespread (*i.e.* found over a much wider region), and 3) increasingly more richly endowed. Although at first characteristic only of southwestern Germany, by the Hallstatt D 2-3 period they are found spread through eastern France and western Switzerland as well (see Pare 1991, 1992). Moreover, by this late period Mediterranean imports began to appear in the most elaborate of these graves and on the fortified hillforts associated with them (and they were fairly consistently limited to and concentrated in these contexts). As several scholars have recently shown, the general iconography of elite status differentiation remained quite consistent in the Hallstatt domain from the early

through the late Hallstatt period, but the degree of differentiation among graves (measured in terms of energy expenditure in funerary ritual, monument construction, and grave furniture) increased dramatically over time (Olivier 1988, Olivier/Reinhard 1993, Pare 1991, 1992).

These wealthy burials represent an extremely conspicuous investment of labor and ritual consumption of wealth (consumption in the strict sense, since the objects were actually removed from circulation). This is at once a demonstration of splendor and an advertisement of control over an extensive network of exchange connections. But in order to understand their cultural significance it is necessary to move beyond this rather banal observation and consider the specific characteristics of the items which were involved in the ritual. It is not enough to treat them as generic "prestige goods" circulating in some great world-system. Specific items were chosen as part of the elite funerary ritual over an increasingly wide area because they had meaningful symbolic resonance, and the characteristics of those objects offer clues to their specific cultural meaning.

For the purposes of this essay, I will limit the discussion by excluding consideration of a number of equally interesting and important symbolic fields⁵ to focus particularly on one selected aspect of these funerary rituals of consumption: the ritual arena of feasting, or what I have elsewhere called «commensal politics» (Dietler 1996). I focus upon this domain for two reasons. First, I believe it is a key to understanding a major dimension of the ritual strategy and hegemonic potential represented in these burials. Secondly, because the Mediterranean imports found in the Hallstatt region are almost entirely restricted to drinking paraphernalia (Dietler 1990a), it is clear that feasting served as the nearly exclusive cultural field through which Hallstatt societies became entangled in the Mediterranean colonial political economy. Hence, rituals of commensality are also a key to understanding indigenous agency and experience in this gradually unfolding historical process.

Commensal politics

Feasts are a prime political tool (Dietler 1990a, 1996). I mean by this statement that they have an important role in the creation and reproduction of relations of power and they serve as major nexi in articulating the political economy. Feasts are, in fact, ritualized social events in which food and

drink constitute the medium of expression in the performance of politically charged symbolic drama. As public ritual events, in contrast to daily activity, feasts provide an arena for the highly condensed symbolic representation of social relations. Like all ritual, they express idealized concepts, the way people believe relations exist or should exist rather than how they are necessarily manifest in daily activity. However, in addition to this idealized representation of the social order, they also offer the potential for manipulation by individuals or groups attempting to alter or make statements about their relative position within that social order as it is perceived and presented. As such, feasts are subject to manipulation for both ideological and more immediately personal goals.

The symbolic power that feasts have as a form of ritual activity derives from the fact that food and drink serve as the medium of expression and commensal hospitality constitutes the syntax in the context of a ritual of consumption. Consumption is inherently a form of political activity (cf. Douglas/Isherwood 1979, Bourdieu 1984, Appadurai 1986), and food and drink are highly charged symbolic media because they are a basic and continual human physiological need. They are also a form of «highly condensed social fact» (Appadurai 1981, 494) embodying relations of production and exchange and linking the domestic and political economies⁶.

Both food and drink are also a highly perishable form of good, and their full politico-symbolic potential is realized in the drama of consumption events that constitute a prime arena for the reciprocal conversion of what Bourdieu (1977) calls «economic and symbolic capital». Public distribution and consumption of a substance essential for human life derives added symbolic resonance from its demonstration of confidence and managerial skill in the realm of production. More importantly, however, consumption is played out in the extremely powerful idiom of commensal hospitality. I believe this feature is critical to understanding the

⁵ For a discussion of some of these other symbolic fields see Daubigny (1993), Olivier/Reinhard (1993), and Pare (1992).

⁶ Drink must be included in any consideration of the significance of feasts. Alcoholic beverages are a special form of food with certain psychoactive properties (resulting from an alternative means of preparation) that tend to amplify their importance in the ritual contexts in which power relations are negotiated and formalized (Mandelbaum 1965, Heath 1976, Dietler 1990a).

political dimensions of feasts, and it is for this reason that I have identified «commensal politics» as a fundamental form of political ritual (Dietler 1996)⁷.

Commensal hospitality may be understood as a specialized form of gift exchange that establishes the same relations of reciprocal obligation between host and guest as between donor and receiver in the exchange of other more durable types of objects (Mauss 1966). The major difference is that food is destroyed in the act of commensal consumption at a feast. Unlike durable valuables it cannot be recirculated (or “reinvested”) in other gift exchange relationships, and it must be produced anew through agricultural and culinary labor in order to fulfill reciprocal obligations⁸.

In addition to their potential for manipulation of political symbolism, feasts serve important roles in the larger regional political economy: they often act as the nodal contexts that articulate regional exchange systems. Commensal hospitality establishes relationships between exchange partners, affines, or political leaders and provides the social ambiance for the exchange of valuables, bride-wealth, and other goods which circulate through a region (cf. Munn 1986, 49-73, Scheffler 1965). Feasts also serve to provide links to the gods or ancestors which can be used to define the structure of relations between social groups or categories within a region or community (see Friedman 1984). Finally, as will be discussed later, they provide an important mechanism for the process of labor mobilization that underlies the political economy. Feasts simultaneously serve all these broader functions while offering myriad possibilities for individual manipulation of commensal politics.

The crucial point is that commensal hospitality centering around food and drink distribution and consumption is a practice which, like the exchange of gifts, serves to establish and maintain social relations. This is why feasts are often viewed positively as mechanisms of social solidarity that serve to establish a sense of community. Indeed, hospitality is often employed as a metaphor for generosity (e.g. Munn 1986, 49-54). However, as Mauss (1966) pointed out long ago, the relations created through exchange are relations of reciprocal obligation which translate into a relationship of social superiority and inferiority unless and until the equivalent can be returned (see also Appadurai 1986, Bourdieu 1977, Sahlins 1972). In this feature, the potential of hospitality to be manipulated as a tool in defining social relations, lies the crux of commensal politics

and the key to its hegemonic potential in the kinds of “rituals of royalty” examined here. Hospitality is, of course, only one of many potential fields of political action (e.g. see Bourdieu 1977, Modjeska 1982, Lemonnier 1990); but its special attribute is that, because of the intimate nature of the practice of sharing food, of all forms of gift prestation it is perhaps the most effective at subtly euphemizing the self-interested nature of the process.

In analyzing the political dimensions of feasting and the pervasiveness of this arena of symbolic action, I have found it useful to delineate three different general patterns, that may be called “entrepreneurial feasts”, “patron-role feasts”, and “diacritical feasts” (see Dietler 1996). This scheme is not proposed as a formal typology of kinds of feasts but rather as a heuristic differentiation of the ways feasts may serve instrumentally in the creation and reproduction of relations of power.

Entrepreneurial Feasts

The first of these feast patterns involves the manipulation of commensal hospitality towards the acquisition and accumulation of what Bourdieu (1977, 171-183) calls “symbolic capital”. This kind of capital is readily convertible into informal political power and economic advantage. By informal political power I mean an ability to influence group decisions or actions which derives not from the authority vested in a particular status, role, or institution; but rather through the relations between individuals created and reproduced in the process of personal interaction. In this case, those are multiple relations of reciprocal obligation and sentiments of social superiority / subordination between

⁷ As an anthropological archaeologist, my approach to rituals of commensality is grounded primarily in the literature of comparative ethnology. For some very interesting complementary perspectives stemming from the ancient history of the classical world see Murray (1990), Ruby (1993), and Schmitt Pantel (1992).

⁸ Like durable valuables, some food may also be exchanged at a feast without being consumed immediately (cf. Kaberry 1941-42, Salisbury 1962, Young 1971). This can be in the form of processed food (e.g. cooked or smoked meat and fish), raw food (e.g. grain or tubers), or live animals. These kinds of exchanges should be analytically distinguished from commensal consumption. Although feasts may serve as a context for such exchanges, they are not central to the definition of feasts: they may even occur outside feast contexts altogether (e.g. see Strathern 1971).

host and guests created through generous displays of hospitality.

Comparative analysis of the ethnographic literature shows that in societies without formal specialized political roles, hosting feasts is very often a major means "building a career" or "building a name" (e.g. see Kennedy 1978, Lemonnier 1990, Munn 1986, Scheffler 1965): that is, of acquiring and maintaining the prestige necessary to exert leadership. In societies where institutionalized political roles or formal status distinctions exist, but without fixed hereditary rules for determining who may fill them, feasting is often the means by which individuals are able to assume and hold these roles and statuses (see Cancian 1965, Obayemi 1976). In all cases, this kind of power is continually being renegotiated and contested through competitive commensal politics⁹.

Commensal hospitality may be manipulated in the entrepreneurial feast pattern for economic advantage as well as for political power, especially through the institution of the work-party feast; and this was particularly true of societies in the past. The work-party feast is a labor mobilization device with a world-wide distribution in which a group of people are called together to work on a specific project for a day and are then treated to a meal and / or drink, after which the host owns the proceeds of the day's labor. Before the development and spread of the monetary economy, this was virtually the only means (excluding slavery) by which a group larger than the domestic unit could be mobilized for a project requiring a larger communal effort (cf. Erasmus 1956, Moore 1975). This is particularly true of societies without centralized political authority, but even obligatory forms of *corvée* labor organized by chiefs or kings normally employ this symbolic idiom by providing refreshments for workers.

One important economic feature of feasts is that they act as a means of conversion between spheres of exchange in a multi-centric economy. For example, while grain is often so low on the scale of value that no one would be willing to accept even a huge quantity of it in direct exchange for prestige goods, its conversion into alcohol and food in the context of a feast is a prime means of acquiring prestige and mobilizing the labor by which prestige exchange objects can ultimately be obtained. In this way entrepreneurial feasts serve as a conduit for reciprocal conversions of economic and symbolic capital. People are drawn to participate in such "festive" work parties by the reputation of the host

for generous hospitality. This reputation is an aspect of symbolic capital acquired through the expenditure of economic capital in previous feasts. But through the institution of the work-party feast, this symbolic capital is used to harness the labor of others for the acquisition of further economic capital.

The entrepreneurial feast pattern operates on a variety of scales and in numerous contexts within a given society. It may extend from the private hosting of a pot of beer among a small group of friends to the hosting of trade partners from another community to the sponsorship of major community life crisis ceremonies and religious festivals. Guests may include members of the local community or people from other communities. The extent of the symbolic capital derived from these activities varies according to the context, lavishness, and range of guests convened. The "host" may be either an individual household, a kinship unit, or an entire community. In the latter cases there are usually certain individuals who act as managers and derive prestige from their role in successfully organizing and executing feasts which represent the group to out-

⁹ In using the term "competitive", I manifestly do not mean to imply the existence in all societies of the kind of overtly aggressive, agonistic, escalating manipulation of hospitality and gift prestation one finds in special cases such as certain New Guinea *Big Men* societies (see. Sahllins 1963, Lemonnier 1990), the famous (and often misunderstood) *potlatch* of the Northwest coast (cf. Codere 1950, Suttles 1991), or some African societies (e.g. Rehfisch 1987). More often, in fact, the competitive aspect may be symbolically camouflaged or denied and is subject to controlling sanctions. Nevertheless, because the prestige and informal power created through commensal politics are, by nature, a *relative* phenomenon defined by relations between individuals, the process is inherently competitive no matter how subtle and no matter how obscured from consciousness. Hence, even celebratory feasts of community identity and unity that symbolically emphasize harmonious egalitarianism are simultaneously arenas for competitive manipulation. Indeed, much of the effectiveness of this political mechanism derives from the fact that it often entails a kind of collective misrecognition or euphemization of the self-interested nature of the practice that is maintained through the symbolic drama of ritual.

Likewise, in employing the term "entrepreneurial" to describe an aspect of certain feasts, I am not naively proposing that all people everywhere acted as market-driven capitalist businessmen. Rather, I am attempting to integrate a socially situated concept of agency into the discussion of commensality. I am assuming that people in specific contexts exploit the potential of feasts to acquire symbolic capital in ways that are culturally appropriate to satisfy desires that are socially situated.

siders; hence prestige accrues to both the hosting group as a whole and to certain influential individuals who can mobilize group activities.

While most households will engage in some form of this kind of feasting behavior, hosting large-scale feasts requires considerable planning, time, and labor (for both agricultural production and culinary preparation), as well as large surplus stocks of food and / or drink. The kinds of food and drink available in prehistoric societies would generally have had very limited storability, especially once prepared for consumption. This would necessitate, in most cases, a large labor force for final preparation and serving just prior to the feast as well as command of a large ready supply of agricultural produce. The institutional arrangements for mobilizing these large supplies of labor and food vary a great deal from society to society, but in all cases the organization and execution of a large feast requires the host to be a good manager. It is usually advantageous for a household sponsoring a feast to be able to provide a large portion, if not the bulk, of the labor and raw materials from its own reserves, and a high incidence of polygyny among *Big Men* and other types of informal leaders is often cited in this connection (e.g. Geschiere 1982, Friedman 1984, Lemonnier 1990). As noted above, in some cases work-party feasts may also be employed to harness the labor of others in differentially increasing the productive base of certain households. In most cases of very large feasts, however, the host must mobilize additional food and labor contributions through personal networks of social obligation. These networks of support are established by adept building up of symbolic capital over the years through various arenas of prestige competition and various deployments of economic capital. Hence a large, lavish feast is not just an isolated event. It is a moment of public drama in a continuous process of political manipulation which serves as an advertisement of the scale of the support base that a social manager has been able to construct through various transactions at the same time that it produces further social credit and symbolic capital.

Patron-role Feast

The second pattern that may be distinguished among the political dimensions of feasts may be called the "patron-role feast". It consists of the formalized use of commensal hospitality to symbolically reiterate and legitimize institutionalized rela-

tions of unequal power. This corresponds to a form of what has traditionally been called "redistribution" in the literature of economic anthropology (cf. Polanyi 1957, Sahlins 1972). The operative principle behind this form of commensal politics is the same as for the previous type: the relationship of reciprocal obligation engendered through hospitality. In this case, however, the expectation of equal reciprocation is no longer maintained. Rather, the acceptance of a continually unequal pattern of hospitality symbolically expresses the formalization of unequal relations of status and power and ideologically naturalizes it through repetition of an event that induces sentiments of social debt. On the one hand, those who are continually in the role of guests are symbolically acknowledging their acceptance of *minister* status (Mauss 1966, 72) *vis-à-vis* the continual host. On the other hand, the role of continual and generous host for the community at large comes to be seen as a duty incumbent upon the person who occupies a particular elevated status position or formal political role. Institutionalization of authority relies on this binding commensal link between unequal partners in a patron/client relationship.

This is the principle which lies behind the regular lavish hospitality expected of chiefs and kings in many societies (cf. Evans-Pritchard 1971, 215, Mair 1977, 95, Netting 1964). This sense of obligation for generosity in a commensal context is nicely encapsulated in the Baganda definition of the essential qualities of a good chief: «beer, meat and politeness» (Mair 1934, 183). This is not, as has sometimes been posited, a functionally adaptive means of providing balanced food security for a population. Rather, it is a politico-symbolic device for legitimizing status differences (Friedman 1984, Hayden/Gargett 1990).

Chiefs and kings raise food supplies for this lavish public hospitality in a variety of ways (e.g. see Schapera 1938, Richards 1939, Hunter 1961, 384-389). Often tribute in food and drink furnishes a certain part, with individuals obligated to provide the chief with a portion of their own production. The work-party feast (especially in the more obligatory *corvée* form), directed toward the extensive fields of the chief, is another very common mechanism of mobilizing food stocks for such purposes. Moreover, chiefs are very often ostentatiously polygynous in comparison to their people, providing a large pool of household labor; and they sometimes have attached forms of dependent labor (such as slaves).

Diacritical Feasts

The third major feast pattern, which I will call the "diacritical feast", involves the use of differentiated cuisine and styles of consumption as a diacritical symbolic device to naturalize and reify concepts of ranked differences in social status (see Appadurai 1986, Elias 1978, Goody 1982, Bourdieu 1984). Although it serves a somewhat similar function to the previous pattern (*i.e.* the naturalization and objectification of inequality in social relations), it differs from it in several important respects. In the first place, the basis of symbolic force shifts from quantity to style. Moreover, the emphasis shifts from a commensal bond between unequal partners to a statement of exclusive and unequal commensal circles: obligations of reciprocal hospitality are no longer the basis of status claims and power. This is the distinction made by Goody (1982) when he differentiated between «hieratic» and «hierarchical» systems of stratification in his discussion of the origins and significance of cuisine. This practice transforms elite feasts into what Appadurai (1986, 21) has called «tournaments of value» which serve both to define elite status membership and to channel social competition within clearly defined boundaries.

Diacritical stylistic distinctions may be based upon the use of rare or expensive foods or food service vessels and implements. Or it may be based upon differences in the complexity of the pattern of preparation and consumption of food and the specialized knowledge this entails. Because this type of feasting relies upon style for its symbolic force, it is subject to emulation by those aspiring to higher status. This can result in the gradual spread through a society of food practices by a «trickle-down» process (McCracken 1988, Simmel 1904) or «turnstile effect» (Appadurai 1986), as happened in ancient Greece with the expansion of the *symposion* (wine-drinking party) from its aristocratic origins throughout urban society (Dentzer 1982, Murray 1990). Such emulation can be thwarted only by the imposition of sumptuary laws or by the use of exotic foods and consumption paraphernalia, access to which can be controlled through elevated expense or limited networks of acquisition. In the absence of effective monopolization, the symbolic force of elite food practices can eventually become "devalued" and this may provoke continual shifts in elite style as it reacts to the process of emulation.

Although there is an obvious correlation with increasing social stratification and complexity of

structures of political power, these three different feast patterns should not be interpreted as evolutionary stages. Rather, they constitute a progressively inclusive repertoire of forms of commensal politics. To be sure, there are and have been societies in which only entrepreneurial feasts are operative; but societies in which diacritical feasts are found are also likely to have each of the two other types. Where cuisine is used as a diacritical symbolic device between social orders or classes, competitive commensal politics will still be used by individuals or groups jockeying for relative status within those classes, and unequal commensal hospitality will be simultaneously used to legitimize institutionalized political authority roles. Likewise, both entrepreneurial and patron-role feasts are likely to be operative where the latter type is found: the use of redistributive hospitality by chiefs, kings, or other "patrons" to maintain their authority does not preclude the use of competitive hospitality by others to define their relative statuses below that of the chief (or indeed its use by clients to curry favor with patrons: *e.g.* Barlett 1980), or its use by chiefs of different areas to negotiate and define their relative statuses *vis-à-vis* each other.

Hallstatt commensal ritual

Returning again to the Hallstatt case with these considerations in mind, the symbolic significance of the feasting equipment, including especially the Mediterranean imports, found in the repertoire of funerary goods becomes easier to comprehend. Unlike the contemporary situation in southern France (Bats 1992, Dietler 1990a, 1997, Py 1990), it appears that there was not a significant influx of Mediterranean wine into the Hallstatt region. Instead, rare, exotic, and spectacular drinking vessels were imported sporadically for use by the elite in the context of feasting activities. These vessels were not generic "prestige goods" destined for redistribution, but rather goods that were reserved exclusively for use and burial within the highest stratum of the social scale in the context of specific rituals¹⁰. Their adoption does not constitute an

¹⁰ There is a good deal of confusion over the concept of "prestige goods" in the archaeological literature. This generic term is often used to describe items with at least two rather different social roles. In the first place it is often used to indicate objects that circulate in the "prestige sphere" of a multi-centric economy, or what are often called "primitive valuables" (Dalton

attempt to imitate the Greek symposium, as has sometimes been claimed (*e.g.* Bouloumié 1988); this can be readily seen by their admixture in tombs with native drinking horns, buckets, and plates. Rather it represents the selective incorporation of exotic items into an established repertoire of feasting equipment in a pattern of diacritical social symbolism that was already well established.

Moreover, the imports correspond very clearly to Appadurai's (1986, 38) definition of «luxury goods», which derive their political «rhetorical» value particularly from:

- 1) the complexity of their acquisition;
- 2) the specialized knowledge required for their «appropriate» consumption;
- 3) the close linkage of their consumption to the person and personality.

The selective acquisition and incorporation of this very specific range of rare exotic luxuries enabled the development and manipulation of a more exclusive form of «cultural capital» (Bourdieu 1984) within a «traditional» ritual context and a long-established set of symbols. They may be recognized as playing upon a pattern of diacritical symbolism in feasting gear already noted in this region during the Bronze Age in tombs such as Hart an der Alz (Müller-Karpe 1959, 156) and Saint-Romain-de-Jalionas (Verger/Guillaumet 1988). As Pare (1992) has pointed out, the emphasis on four-wheeled wagons in the same elite tumuli is another example of a marked conservatism in the iconography of status symbolization. This practice of increasing the exclusivity, or «singularity» (Appadurai 1986, 16), of objects within an established class of items having a prominent historical role in the arena of social representation enabled an emphasis to be focussed on the «eternal» character of the social order at the same time that it altered the standards of «appropriate» consumption at the top of the social hierarchy. It thus subtly transformed elite Hallstatt feasting practices into a simultaneously more exclusive and «natural» diacritical marker.

This process may be viewed as a form of what Goody (1982) described as the development of differentiated cuisine as a diacritical symbolic device in hierarchical societies, where commensal circles and marriage networks come to be restricted along class divisions. In this case, transport and communication impediments precluded the incorporation of exotic Mediterranean food ingredients (such as wine) in the elite cuisine on a regular basis, but the vessels in which food and drink were served offered

a more durable and visible means of differentiating elite consumption at feasts. Another feature which offers support for the interpretation presented here is that for virtually the first time in the European archaeological record women were also buried with elaborate sets of feasting gear, including Mediterranean imports. The Vix tumulus, for example, was a female burial. This indicates that men and women were united as a class in the symbolic use of feasts as a statement of social differentiation. It may also indicate a possible shift in the role of wives within the elite class from food preparers and servers to commensal partners, a shift linked to the development of specialist food preparers which Goody (1982) views as associated with the distinction between «hierarchical» and «hieratic» societies.

By focussing on the domain of commensal politics for a central element of its funerary ritual, the Hallstatt elite were able to invoke symbolic forms with strong emotional resonance in the daily lives of the population of the non-elite. Moreover, by adapting spectacular paraphernalia of exotic origin to this ritual, they were able to naturalize a division between ranked commensal circles. Invoking historical precedents for these symbols also provided a sense of authenticity and continuity.

1965). These are items whose purpose is to establish and maintain social relations through certain kinds of exchange (usually forms of «gift» exchange), and they create prestige through being given away (either in reciprocal or redistributive forms of exchange: see Sahlins 1972). They are continually in circulation: even when temporarily accumulated, it is only for the purpose of an impressive show of giving. Objects of this class are found in a wide variety of societies, from acephalous groups with an egalitarian political ethos to stratified states.

The term «prestige goods» is also frequently applied to objects that confer prestige by possession. Their primary function is symbolic (of dominant social groups, classes or orders) and their primary use is to be accumulated, displayed, and consumed. These are items that acquire special diacritical value as they are removed from the «commodity state» (*i.e.* from circuits of exchange: see Appadurai 1986), although they are often initially acquired through gift exchange with sources outside the local polity and may be subsequently exchanged within very restricted groups. These might more precisely be called «diacritical insignia» to distinguish them from the former type of «exchange valuables». I believe the Mediterranean imports in the Hallstatt tumuli are of this «diacritical insignia» type, although they have frequently been confounded with «exchange valuables» destined for redistribution, particularly in the various applications of world-systems models.

The ultimate success of this ritual strategy of legitimation and its relationship to the real course of social relations is uncertain. As noted earlier, the dominant ideology is never completely transformed into hegemony and it is a mistake to assume that people are completely duped by ideological representations even when they act as if they were in carrying out the performances which recapitulate an idealized or euphemized model of social relations. By the nature of the process, our archaeological evidence, particularly that concerned with the kind of elite funerary rituals examined here, is predominantly a reflection of these acquiescent performances that Scott (1990) calls the «public transcript». However, there exist many subtle forms of everyday resistance which at times give rise to overt opposition once the «hidden transcript» of dissent is publicly voiced and people suddenly refuse to comply with such performances (see Scott 1990, 1985).

Given these considerations, it is not clear whether the dramatically increasing ostentation and hierarchization noted in late Hallstatt funerary treatment was a genuine reflection of effectively increasing stratification and political control or whether it was the result of an increasingly desperate and elaborate attempt by a regional elite to bolster the legitimacy of its authority in the face of challenges to the hegemonic reproduction of consent, diminishing control, and popular resistance. It is well to recall that, for example, rituals of human sacrifice increased dramatically in the African kingdom of Benin exactly at the point when the royalty began to lose their power (Bradbury 1973, 50) and the recent Shah of Iran mounted his most ostentatiously orchestrated public ceremonies invoking connections to the ancient past of Persia just before the revolution toppled his government.

In this vein, it must be remembered that the Hallstatt centers disappeared fairly rapidly sometime near the mid fifth century BC, just after the period of greatest escalation in elaboration of elite burials and the greatest territorial expansion of their distribution. This process is commonly explained as a sudden collapse due to changes in trade patterns with the Mediterranean states (*e.g.* Brun 1993, Villard 1960, Frankenstein/Rowlands 1978). However, this popular explanation is based on the assumption that the development of the Hallstatt political structure was driven by Mediterranean trade and that it had become dependent upon sources of Mediterranean goods for its re-

production. As a growing number of dissenting scholars (Bintliff 1984, Gosden 1985, Dietler 1989, 1990a, 1995b, 1998, Pare 1991) have argued recently, there is good reason to doubt the validity of this dependency model and to look for other factors which may explain the genesis and reproduction of socio-political formations in the region.

Rather than reading the “public transcript” too literally and searching for external explanations for the collapse of an apparently vigorous and powerful political structure, it is reasonable to take a more critical look at the process of ideological representation which produced the material record we are interpreting. Evidence of the repeated destruction of the Heuneburg walls (Kimmig 1983) and of the frequent looting of elite tumuli near the end of the Hallstatt period and the beginning of the succeeding La Tène period (Wells 1980, 31-32, Spindler 1983, 195-200) may suggest that the collapse was due to a failure of the symbolic transformation of dominant ideology into hegemony in legitimating the expansionary domination involved in the processes outlined earlier in the paper and to the consequent process of resistance noted above (see also Demoule 1993).

The geographical expansion of the *Fürstensitze* and *Fürstengräber* pattern during the final Hallstatt phase does suggest the merging of multi-polities into a larger political community dominated by an elite class with increasingly closer regional links (Dietler 1995a). To be stable, this new “imagined community” would have needed to have forged emotionally charged symbols of communal identity that would both consolidate loyalties among the general population and at the same time reify the structural position of the dominant group. This strategy seems to have been articulated through an elite class with the regionally shared iconography of status identity outlined earlier. This iconography played upon an association of long established symbolic motifs in several fields of “symbolic capital” (drinking and feasting paraphernalia, wagons, weapons) to evoke the naturalizing authenticity of “tradition”. At the same time, it pushed the diacritical symbolism within these fields as a means of objectifying and institutionalizing the hierarchy of social and political relations.

This latter process can be traced in the increasing differentiation of burials, including particularly an increasing elaboration of the upper range of burials that involved the incorporation of more spectacular exotic elements (from the Mediterranean states) used in the performance of feasting

ritual. These rare and impressive implements of consumption would have helped to even more exclusively mark elite feasting practice as «tournaments of value» (Appadurai 1986, 21), which restrict competition and the privilege of participation to a certain group of peers. The intended effect would be to solidify the common identity of a regional elite as a class at the same time that it served to distinguish this group from those below on the social hierarchy. But, as noted earlier, the ultimate effectiveness of this marshalling of “symbolic capital” in the cause of the production of hegemonic consent for the expanding political community cannot be determined from the impressiveness or cultural coherence of the display itself. Rather, it must be evaluated from a comparative historical perspective on the broader social context in which the rituals unfolded. As indicated, there are reasonable grounds to doubt the success of the naturalization of the new order and its mode of domination.

I began this essay by stating that my goal was a limited one: to examine closely the nature of rituals of commensality and their relationship to politics and power, and to use this discussion as a basis for investigating the ‘princely’ societies of a particular region of Early Iron Age Europe. In so doing, I hope to have demonstrated the insights that can be derived into the specific case of the Hallstatt ‘princes’ from an anthropological perspective on commensal politics. More ambitiously, I also hope to have indicated the fundamental necessity of understanding both the nature of ritual and the relationship between ritual and power for archaeological interpretation of the politics of state formation. Penetrating the archaeological evidence through which we perceive “le phénomène princier” depends critically upon comprehending how it served in ideological strategies designed to create a consensual acceptance of certain representations of the social and cosmic order among groups with conflicting interests.

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