

GENDER AND AGE IDENTITIES IN RITUALS OF COMENSALITY. THE ARGARIC SOCIETIES

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Abstract:

Analysis of meat offerings included in the grave goods of Argaric burials has shown the importance of commensality practices for these societies not only as a part of the funerary ritual but also as a way to manifest social inequalities. Our main interest in this paper will be to understand how gender and age identities are incorporated in this social negotiation.

Resumen:

El análisis de ofrendas cárnicas que se incluyen en los ajuares funerarios argáricos de la Edad del Bronce del sudeste de la Península Ibérica han mostrado la importancia de las prácticas de comensalidad para estas sociedades, no sólo como parte del ritual funerario sino también como una forma de manifestar las desigualdades sociales. Nuestro interés principal en este artículo consiste en entender cómo se incorporan en esta negociación social las identidades de género y de edad.

Resum:

L'anàlisi de les ofrenes de carn que s'inclouen als aixovars funeraris argàrics de l'Edat del Bronze del sudest de la península Ibèrica, han mostrat la importància de les pràctiques de comensalitat per a aquestes societats no només com a part del ritual funerari sinó també com una forma de manifestar les desigualtats socials. En aquest article, el nostre principal interès consisteix en entendre com s'incorporen les identitats de gènere i d'edat en aquesta negociació social.

Introduction

We understand that the study of food and eating is important not only due to food is utterly essential to human existence, but also because the subfield has proved valuable for debating and advancing anthropological and archaeological theory and research methods (2002).

Food studies have illuminated broad societal processes such as political-economic value-creation, symbolic value-creation, and the social construction of memory in anthropology; habits associated with food and eating carry a multitude of meanings and play a crucial role in the construction and performance of identities (Mauss 1967; Goody 1982; Weismantel 1988; Mintz & Dubois 2002; Corr 2002). Although we can observe important differences in the knowledge gathered between anthropology and archaeology, this situation is changing during the last years in which the context of preparation and consumption of food have acquired a remarkable relevance in archaeology (Wiessener & Schiefhövel 1996; Gosden & Hather

1999; Wood 2000; Dietler & Hayden 2001; Parker 2003).

Key elements for the analysis of these communal practices of food consumption, from an ethnographic and archaeological perspective, are the categories of gender and age. The relationship among consumption practices and gender identity is quite complex but meaningful in any society. They are implied not only in the representation, reproduction and transformation of gender identities but also in the way in which relations of production and power between women and men are manifested. This mean, in one side that the analysis of these practices could be a crucial element for the study of gender relationships, and in the other side that gender must be an essential category in any analysis we make on consumption practices.

In this paper our interest is focused firstly on how gender and age categories are manifested in the archaeological record linked to consumption practices related to funerary ritual, and secondly how gender and age categories are implied in the articulation of this

ritual regarding the food preparation and consumption.

Symbolic aspects of food consumption: body, identity and memory

Food consumption is full of symbolic and ideological meaning not only in its ritual use but also in multiple aspect of quotidian life. The foods we eat become organically and socially embodied, and the assumption that ‘we are what we eat’ refers to both our cultural and biological beings. Food means power is its more basic and tangible sense because as Lappé, Collins and Roset (1998) stayed: “hunger is the ultimate symbol of powerlessness” and can be use as a political strategy. In addition, food we eat everyday can be directly related to our status, gender, religion or ideology and this symbolic value could be clearly manifested in the cultural materialization on our bodies (Sobolik 1994; Wing & Brown 1979; Danforth 1999; White 2005); this embodiment is not because the social is inscribed in the body but because, the body itself is a field for culture, taking into account the potential, intentional, subjective, active and relational dimensions of

the body we can identify discourses related to negotiation and maintenance of identities (Esteban 2004).

Hence there are multiple meanings for food: fears and taboos on certain foods, technologies created to purify them before eating, experiences for the senses through sight, taste, touch, and smell, and how these feeling are linked to memory (Battaglia 1990; Connerton 1989; Eves 1996; Hamilakis 1998, 1999). For all these reasons, food consumption has been used constantly in order to generate, maintenance and legitimate authority and power; through it we built social relationship and transmit technological, ideological and social knowledge (Hamilakis 1999; Mintz & Dubois 2002).

Embodiment must work in two levels, as an individual and as a group, food that sustain the biological and individual body, act at the same time, in the social or collective body. Communal food and drink consumption is a useful strategy in the construction of social order not only because their biological and physiological effects but also due to the psycho-

logical and emotional ones (Dietler 2001, 2005). Through individual and social food consumption we create memory and this memory have to do with the subjective ways in which the past is memorialized, observed and used in the construction of the present (Holtzman 2006). In the course of food consumption historical, ethnical or nationalistic identities are reinforced; through “nostalgic” food we remember our past; and finally we use it to create new identities, for example, related to initiation rituals (Counihan 1999; Holtzman 2006).

The construction of memory helps in the foundation of expressions of social and power inequality; in the context of commensality practices related to the funerary ritual worldwide documented (Clarke 2001; Adams 2004), the main aim is not the connection with the past but the recreation of memories in order to be used in the future. And this is how work the collective memory because only in the framework of these ideas, discourses and narratives about the food is how these practices become something useful, shared and acknowledged by the whole society (Eves 1996).

In some occasions, food is a unique method to observe particular feminine forms of memory taking into account the special relationship between women and food production; through women’s stories and memories we are able to think about the transmission of knowledge and the custody of a precious social and cultural heritage (Counihan 2002, 2004; Meyers 2001; Blend 2001).

For all these reason, we consider food consumption as a cultural construction that define material culture for the creation and maintenance of social relationships (Holtzman 2006; Mintz & Dubois 2002) and obviously, it must leave traces in the archaeological record of past societies.

Social meaning of commensality practices

Although exist differences among the definitions of commensality, in a general way we can highlight basic characteristics for this social practice. Commensality has been defined as a form of public activity focused in the communal consumption of food and drink with a purpose or special occasion

(Dietler 1996, 2001; Wiessener 2001; Clarke 2001; Bray 2003). Among the main criteria that define the ritual we can consider that it is an activity symbolically differentiated from those developed in daily life in terms of action and purpose. Commensality is a particular type of ritual in which food and drink are the mode of expression and the communal consumption, the symbolic language (Sorensen 2000; Dietler 2001)

In this context, commensality must be understood as a domain of political action and an important scenario for the representation and manipulation of social relationships (Dietler 2001; Aranda & Esquivel 2006, 2007). The efficiency of the ritual, regarding the power structure, can be related to several characteristic, for example, the most convincing and effective symbols or rituals are those that are not clearly politics but relatively ambiguous and combine personal experiences, senses and memories, and power relations. For this reason, traumatic episodes such as death are used for the recreation of these social practices (Cohen 1979; Morris 1992; Dietler 1999). In this context, commensality is a particu-

larly powerful procedure of ritual activity and potentially visible in the archaeological record.

Commensality practices and gender and age identities

Although we can find ethnographic and historic examples showing multiples relation between food and sex or sexual practices (Counihan 1999:9), our interest here is focused on the existent relationship between food and gender. Gender and age are cultural construction and they are negotiated and defined in different ways for different societies. These identities are configured not only through the practice, ideological discourses or symbolic representation but also through physical and material experiences. Links between food and gender have two basic directions, the first explore the power that each society allow or deny to men and women regarding the access and control of food and, the second describe how men and women are valued by their relation to food. As a result, gender relationship can characterise commensality ritual in different ways: spatial differentiation for men and women; temporal distinctions in

the moment of serving or consuming food; qualitative distinction, related to the kind of containers, food or drink served; quantitative distinction, connected to the amount of food and, finally behavioural distinctions, for example who serve to whom. All this performance can be modified also by status (Dietler 2001).

Some of the ethnohistoric and archaeological evidences illustrate unequal form of access by men and women to determinate types of food used in ritual practices. For example, and although food preparation and consumption for ritual was a source of power for Maya women, isotopic measures in different sites with diverse environment and chronological characteristic evidence that women consumed less food ideologically valued than men. On the other hand, women from non-elites context seem that consumed the same kind of food that their masculine class equivalent. This suggests that women were not participating in the same way, or at least with the same intensity, in ritual that men; or that the consumption of determinate food were linked to gender identity (White 2005). Other simi-

lar example can be found if we look at the alcohol consumption, gender plays probably the most obvious role in this consumption. In fact sometimes masculinity is measured frequently by the faculty of drinking with other men; in some societies is expected that women drink less than men or even nothing; or that they have different preferences in the type of alcoholic beverage or different spaces for drinking (Dietler 2005). However, even in these two examples, although women are excluding for the consumption, they are not leaved out for the preparation and production, as it is, for instances, the case of beer production in Africa (Arthur 2003).

Hence, we can observe how comensality practices frequently are sustained by a gender asymmetry in terms of work and benefit; women's work in the production and processing of food, essential for the feasting, is usually the support of a communal system in which men are the major users and beneficiaries (Dietler 2001:91).

Regarding the analysis of prehistoric societies, it is quite difficult to know whether men or women

developed the previous work for the ritual of commensality, but it is clear that production and preparation of food would be basic and these work are included in the maintenance activities (Picazo 1997; González Marcén *et al.* 2005, 2007; Sánchez & Aranda 2005). These works have not been valued for the historical analysis, although food production and consume have been often considered that have a direct impact over the economic and political systems; for example have been considered that states emerged in environments able to produce surplus and subsequently to control them, or in other example advances in human evolution have been explain through the capacity of taking determinate resources, for example hunting (Aiello & Wheeler 1995; Rose & Marshall 1996; Milton 1999; Finch & Stanford 2004).

Hence, food can explain social change but only when is far from the domestic context and it is important again when is incorporated to the ritual as symbolic element, although the contrary have been demonstrated (Mintz & Dubois 2002; Sánchez & Aranda 2005).

We must consider aspects related to the every day life of preparation and consume not only regarding technology (Colomer 1996; Colomer *et al.* 1998; Crown 2000; Hendon 1996; Montón 2005) but also taking into account ideology and memory. Consume of food generate the reinforcement of links and the construction of networks of physical and psychological survival in the social group. We must bear in mind that the reason for the most of the politic and economic decisions is precisely the maintenance of daily life conditions (González & Picazo 2005:147).

We also must take into account age as an important factor for the commensality practices; for example, these are excellent contexts of socialisation due to boys and girls must be socialised not only in a productive sphere, but also in psychological and ideological aspects reflected in the access and use of normalised ritual (Sánchez Romero 2004, 2007, forthcoming a). We can find an actual example of this in the Israeli-jewish kindergarten where children find out how to elaborate unleavened bread, remembering the exodus from Egypt, or learn about oranges, fruit associated to the early

Zionist settlements in Palestine (Golden 2005).

Commensality practices in the funerary record of argaric societies

Argaric culture, corresponding to Bronze Age in South-east Spain and spanning from c.2250-1450 cal B.C., is one of the better-known periods in the prehistory of the Iberian Peninsula (Mathers 1994; Lull 2000; Gilman 2001; Aranda 2004; Sánchez Romero 2004; Chapman 2005; Aranda & Molina 2006; Montón 2007). Research about Argaric societies has a very long tradition. At the end of the nineteenth century, the existence of this archaeological culture was proposed by two Belgian mining engineers, Louis and Henri Siret, after excavating many sites in the area (Siret & Siret, 1886). Ever since, continuous research has improved considerably the knowledge of Argaric culture. Its classical archaeological definition has centred on a combination of elements that include a specific settlement pattern, the presence of certain kinds of metal tools and ceramic vessels and a characteristic burial rite.

Argaric settlements were usually built on the terraced slopes of steep mountains and hills, usually besides rivers. They frequently had diverse and complex defence systems: stone walls, towers, bastions and stone enclosures protecting the highest points of the settlements. In addition, these settlements presented differences between them in size, location, strategic position and productive activities. These differences have been used to suggest that there was a hierarchical and territorially structured settlement pattern, in which different sites had specialized strategic and economic functions.

One of the most significant features of the Argaric world is the location of burials within the settlement area, usually under the floors of the houses. The tombs consisted of single, double or, more rarely, triple and quadruple inhumations in cists, pits, urns and *covachas* (artificial caves cut into the rock), with bodies always in a flexed position. Although with exceptions, double inhumations normally belong to two adults -a man and a woman- or to an adult and a child. Triple tombs use to contain two adults

and a child. Argaric community generally buried their dead with a series of objects that represented the funerary offering. Grave goods uncovered in tombs are dramatically different in number, variety and quality, ranging from sepulchres with no grave goods to burials with an important accumulation of wealth and items such as ornaments made in stone, bone and metal -including gold and silver-, different types of pottery -in some cases made only for funerary rituals- and metallic daggers, swords, halberds, axes, awls and pins.

Argaric funerary grave goods have been considered as offerings that belong to a universe of beliefs scantily accessible through archaeology. Analyses have been made basically from a social perspective interpreting the existent variability in the grave good as a sign of a clear social inequality (Molina 1983; Lull 1983, 2000; Lull & Estévez 1986; Arteaga 1993; Cámara 2001; Aranda & Molina 2006). Hence, recently we have analysed the archaeological evidences that can be related to the performance of commensal practices as a part of the funerary ritual (Aranda & Esquivel 2006, 2007). We consider that, at least

part of the offerings could mean the manifestation of ritual practices in which was included the entire social group. The characteristic of part of the grave goods, mainly some potteries and meat offerings, jointly to other archaeological data allow us to hypothesize about a funerary practice associated with to commensality ritual.

The archaeological evidences of commensal rituals imply the manufacture of specific vessels for the ritual associated to the presentation and consume of food and drinks, with new types such as *copas* (chalices) (Aranda 2004). In these ritual vessels several aspects like slenderness and stylization have been emphasized in front of other characteristic as stability or durability that defines domestic production. Some decorative patterns, especially the treatment of the surface in order to obtain a metallic shine, could accentuate the visual effects. Funerary vessels, especially those found in burials belonging to the elite, would be manufacture *ex profeso* for its inclusion in ritual as an element of wealthy and prestige. Moreover, inside these vessels have been documented traces of drinks, narcotic

substances and food. All these properties allow us to connect these potteries to social practices of exhibition and performance owing to the commensality ritual (Aranda & Esquivel 2006).

In addition, in argaric grave goods have been documented faunal remains as a part of the funerary ritual. They are usually unnoticed; even they are not count in the description of the grave good as they were irrelevant or not present. However we consider them as a crucial part of the commensality ritual developed by these societies. Our methodology have consist in the revision of the available documentation from argaric necropolis in order to elaborate a database including burial with faunal remains, with the aim of setting up potential patterns among type and characteristic of these animal bones, rest of the grave goods, age and sex of the inhumations, geographical distribution and chronological situation. We are excluded those burials that, although containing meat offering, it is not possible to identify the specie. As a result we are counted 57 burials from 9 necropolis with enough data that allow

us not only confirm that this is a pretty widespread phenomenon in argaric world but also to establish hypothesis on this ritual practice (Aranda & Esquivel 2007).

Species preferred for the ritual are basically bovids and ovicaprids. Bovids appear in the 40.3% of the burial and ovicaprids in the 59.6%. Exceptionally other species such as deer (in two burial, 3.5%), pigs (one burial, 1.7%) or horses (one burial, 1.7%) have been documented. For the 89.6% of the cases, the faunal remains belong to single specie and to one animal and there is a clear preponderance of young animal slaughtered (74.4% of the analysed sample). Regarding the anatomical parts included in grave goods, we find a rigorous normalisation. In all cases, independently the specie, meat offerings belong to the legs of slaughtered animals (Fig. 1) (Aranda & Esquivel 2007).

The analysis of the meat offerings has allowed us to suggest different patterns in the ritual consume. First of all, these types of offerings are a transversal phenomenon in the entire argaric territory; they are a recurring element in the different necropolis with a quantita-

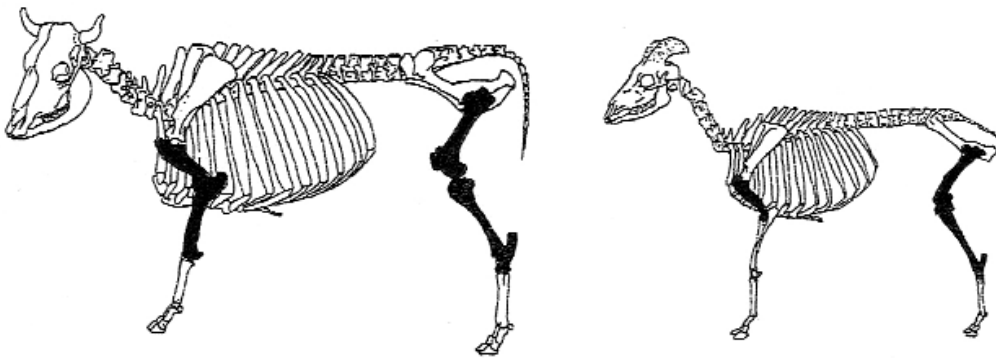


Fig. 1. Anatomical parts of bovids and ovicaprids selected for meat offerings.

tive relevance, approximately between 35% and 40% of the burial included this component. The type of meat offering is coherent with the ritual consume present in the rest of the grave goods¹. Bovids are associated to grave good that include the high number of quantity and quality element, opposite the ovicaprids, with a reduced ritual consume. Hence, bovids would be associated with the high social level, and ovicaprids are related to members of other social classes with less power of amortization, they have a recognizable social position but are clearly depending on those form the first class (Aranda & Esquivel 2007).

The occurrence of meat offerings solidly standardised would imply that, as a part of the funerary ritual,

some animals were slaughtered and consumed during commensality ritual. One piece of meat from these animals, always belonging to the legs, would be introduced in the burial as a part of the grave good, meaning the symbolic inclusion of the deceased in the commensality ritual. Argaric commensal ritual practices present specific features depending on the social adscription of individuals. Hence, upper social class enjoyed a funerary banquet characterized by bovid consumption together with other elements that reinforced wealthy and power exhibition such as the manufacture of pottery vessel purposefully for ritual use. On the contrary, commensal ritual for individuals belonging to a lower social class involved slaughter and consumption of ovicaprids.

Gender and age identities in the commensality ritual of argaric societies

Our next enquiry is how gender and age identity affect the commensality ritual and on the converse how these practices reveal gender and age relationship in argaric societies. For the analysis of the association between meat offerings and sex of the inhumations we

have considered only individual burials, due to in double or triple inhumation we can not assure the link between the animal bones and particular individual. Our sample is integrated by 28 burials and the application of χ^2 test ($\chi^2=0.030$, $gl=1$ y $p=0.863$) indicates that there are not statistically significant differences between men and women regarding the use of bovid or ovicaprid in the grave goods (Fig. 2).

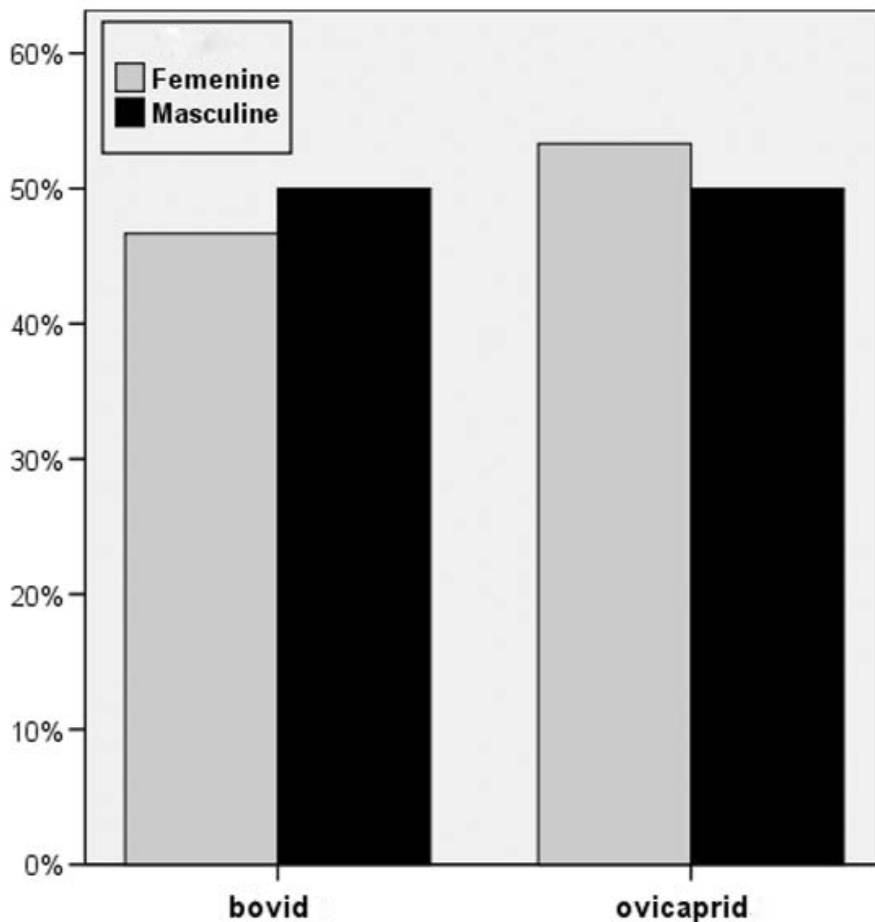


Fig. 2. Relation between meat offerings and sex of the inhumations.

This situation change when we analyse the distribution of meat offering by age. In this case the analysed sample includes both, individual burial with age identified and those double inhumations where both individuals belong to the same category of age. The total amount is 41 burials with the following age categories: Infant I (0-6

years old), Infant II (7-12 years old); Juvenile (13-20 years old), Adult (21-40 years old), Mature (41-60 years old) and Senile (from 60 years old), both infant categories have been grouped in a single cluster. The analysis of distribution pattern of meat offering by age reveals that infants are associated exclusively with ovicaprid (Fig. 3).

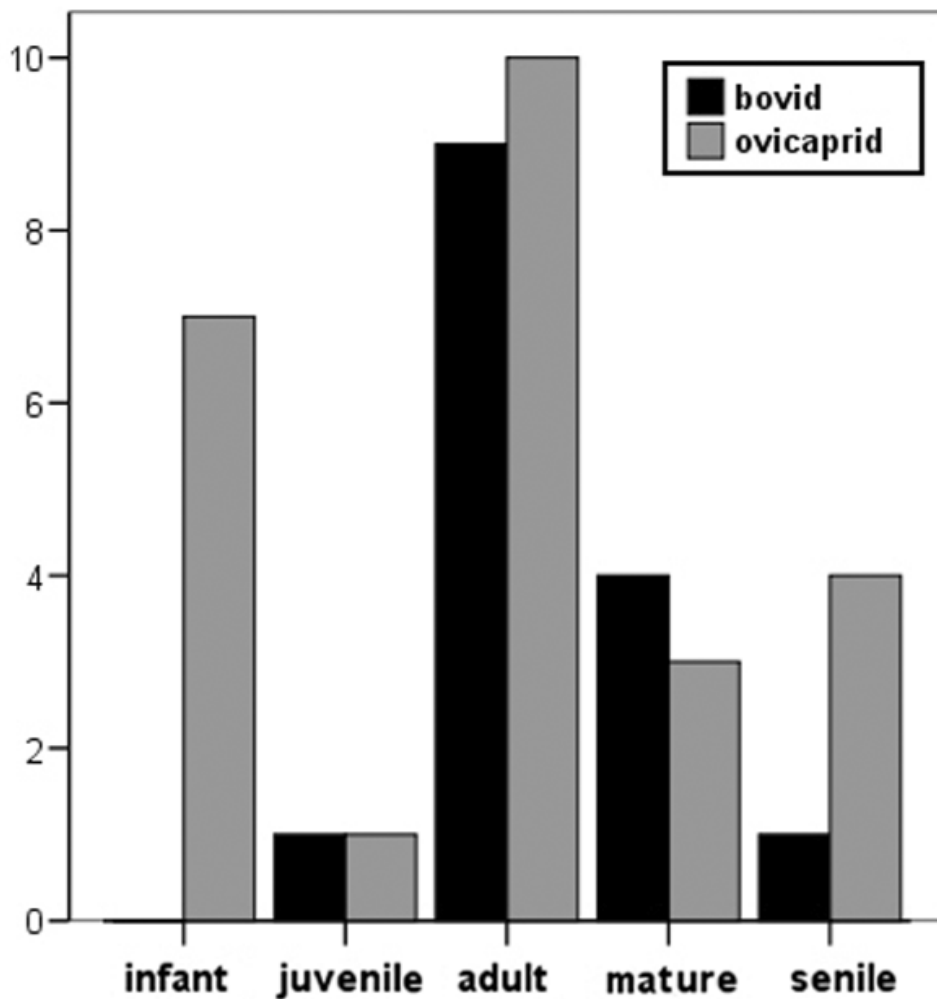


Fig. 3. Relation between meat offerings and the categories of age.

Discussion

The study of commensality practices developed as a part of the funerary ritual brings to light several significant conclusions. First of all we must highlight that there is not any specific pattern regarding the sex of the deceased and the type of meat offering, men and women's burial contain bovid and ovicaprid remains in similar quantity. This show that the access to the slaughter, consume and deposition of food is equal between sexes and the scale of the differentiation devolve upon the rank of the individual and not upon the gender identity.

This attribute in the argaric societies have been manifested in the evaluation of other data from funerary record such as the number of buried individuals by sex, the study of nutritional differences through the examination of bones and dental remains in men and women, the consideration of traces of physical violence or the analysis of the rest of the grave goods that, although reveal differences in their association to women or men (for example in the upper social class, halberds for men and diadems for

women) does not mean inequality between them (Sánchez Romero 2007a).

Other evident distinction between men and women belonging to the same social rank is the differences in the pattern of physical activity. We have examined three types of markers: degenerative diseases such as arthrosis, musculoskeletal stress and frequency and types of traumatism. Analyses reveal similar physical conditions for both sexes caused by the location of settlement on the top of the hill and step slopes; and very different ones regarding the practice of a mixed economy in which men probably developed works related to herding, mining and transport that implies walking, falls and a greater physical effort and subsequently markers in the lower part of the body; meanwhile, anthropological analysis link women with the domestic space in which they carried out work such as transport, food preparation or milling with lesions pattern in the upper part of the body (Sánchez Romero forthcoming b).

The second evidence from the study of meat offering in funerary

ritual from the argaric culture is the exclusion of bovid from the children burial. Age, in this case, denote a ritual norm for which infants up to 12 years old are associated only to ovicaprids, contrary to the rest of age categories in which bovid and ovicaprid appear indistinctly.

As we mention above, we consider that commensality practices are a crucial elements in the development of modes of socialization for girls and boys, through these practices they are included in the world that surrounding them. The use of ovicaprids in their grave goods regardless the social rank must be interpreted as a element of adscription to a social group that have not yet acquired certain rights, and it is a similar mechanism to the documented for the rest of the children's grave goods in these societies. In our opinion, during the Bronze Age in southeast Spain, the identity of children was defined through the ornamental objects that appear in the grave goods in burials; an identity that changed as these individuals progressed through their life courses. The differential status among these children is marked by the use of certain metals like silver

and especially gold in ornamental objects. The profusion of ornamental elements suggests a classification more tied to age than to gender, a trend that probably began to change as the reproductive cycles of both women and men changed, and tied to the type of work that each individual undertook with the progressive introduction of metal implements as age increases, with the acquisition of daggers and awls in the oldest age group. (Sánchez Romero 2007b, forthcoming a).

Therefore, commensality must be understood as one of the main domain of the political action and is an important scenario for the representation and manipulation of social relationship. In the case of argaric societies, commensality is one mechanism of social behaviour in which the majority of the social group participates. These practices are reflected in the use of certain pottery vessels and the slaughter of particular animals, through these rituals is pretended the manifestation of the existence of social classes clearly defined not only through the adscription of individuals to specific social rank but also as a mechanism of socialization for the future.

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