

GUESS WHO 'S COMING TO DINNER

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FEASTING RITUALS IN THE PREHISTORIC
SOCIETIES OF EUROPE AND NEAR EAST

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Prologue by Ferran Adrià

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CONTENTS

List of Contributors	v
Prologue.....	vii
<i>Ferran Adrià</i>	
1. <i>Appetite Comes With Eating: An Overview of the Social Meaning of Ritual Food and Drink Consumption</i>	1
<i>Gonzalo Aranda Jiménez, Sandra Montón Subías, Margarita Sánchez Romero and Eva Alarcón García</i>	
2. Commensality Rituals: Feeding Identities in Prehistory	8
<i>Margarita Sánchez Romero</i>	
3. Feasting and Social Dynamics in the Epipaleolithic of the Fertile Crescent: An Interpretive Exercise.....	30
<i>Brian Hayden</i>	
4. Evolving Human/Animal Interactions in the Near Eastern Neolithic: Feasting as a Case Study.....	64
<i>Nigel Goring-Morris and Anna Belfer-Cohen</i>	
5. Feeding Stonehenge: Feasting in Late Neolithic Britain	73
<i>Mike Parker Pearson, Joshua Pollard, Colin Richards, Julian Thomas, Kate Welham, Umberto Albarella, Ben Chan, Peter Marshall and Sarah Viner</i>	
6. Political Cuisine: Rituals of Commensality in the Neolithic and Bronze Age Aegean.....	91
<i>Paul Halstead and Valasia Isaakidou</i>	
7. Drinking and Eating Together: the Social and Symbolic Context of commensality Rituals in the Bell Beakers of the Interior of Iberia (2500–2000 cal BC)	110
<i>Rafael Garrido-Pena, Manuel A. Rojo-Guerra, Iñigo García-Martínez de Lagrán and Cristina Tejedor-Rodríguez</i>	
8. Feasting Death: Funerary Rituals in the Bronze Age Societies of South-eastern Iberia	131
<i>Gonzalo Aranda Jiménez and Sandra Montón Subías</i>	
9. Feasting Metals and the Ideology of Power in the Late Bronze Age of Atlantic Iberia	159
<i>Xosé-Lois Armada</i>	

10. Representing Communities in Heterogeneous Worlds: Staple Foods
and Ritual Practices in the Phoenician Diaspora..... 182
Ana Delgado and Meritxell Ferrer
11. Consumption Relations within the Domestic Unit
in the Northern Iberian Context..... 203
Ramon Buxó and Jordi Principal
12. The Archaeological Identification of Feasts and Banquets:
Theoretical Notes and the Case of Mas Castellar..... 224
Lluís Garcia and Enriqueta Pons

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PROLOGUE

Ferran Adrià

I am fond of saying that feeding ourselves is – along with sleeping – the activity that takes up more time and energy in our lives. To the lapse of one to three hours we actually spent eating food every day must be added every operation aimed at procuring and preparing that food. That's a fact that remains unchanged down the ages. We go shopping with a list of groceries in our pockets, while in the past our ancestors went hunting and gathering, or – down the centuries – harvesting what they had sown and tending to the animals that supplied milk, eggs, or meat.

As is explained in this book, even in ancient times a fascinating distinction was made between everyday food consumption, required for daily nourishment and subsistence, on the one hand, and singular events, feasts and celebrations, social and religious rituals where banquets played a central role, on the other hand. This dichotomy still holds even in our rather sophisticated present-day societies, so far removed from the ancient customs of people from past millennia. We are still bound by uninterrupted traditions that revolve around special events where people gather together to celebrate something.

In our days there is, however, a relative novelty dating from about two hundred years ago: eating out in a restaurant. The first restaurants are believed to have appeared in the 1780s, around the time of the French Revolution. Of course, even before that period, there must have been inns and other establishments where one could sit at a common table and have the food prepared that day. But restaurants as the concept is understood today, *i.e.* public establishments where one can order dishes from a menu, appeared in the late 18th Century. The aftermath of the French Revolution contributed to their emergence, as a number of great chefs became unemployed when the aristocrats they catered for went into exile or to the guillotine, and the bourgeoisie began to occupy the social spaces that had formerly belonged to them. In parallel to the emergence of the public concert hall, which made music available for burghers who could not afford their own orchestras and composers, the restaurant likewise made it possible for the bourgeoisie that could not hire their own private cooks to nevertheless pay for a special dinner.

The habit of eating out born in that period continues today and all of us in the catering and restaurant business make our living out of it. The rituals are still alive, as witnessed by media attention on restaurants and gastronomy – and I am not referring only to the specialised media.

Human beings have changed a great deal since the days of prehistoric commensality rituals. I invite you to explore, as presented here by the experts, how we have evolved as diners, and how our ancestors dealt with the physiological, ritual and social dimensions of eating – and what may remain today from their attitudes and habits.