

Comparing Feasts

For this activity, I usually divide the class into small groups, with each group responsible for reading one of about five articles. I give them the instructions and reading questions below. If you want to emphasize how to employ typologies, choose cases that fit into one of Hayden's types. If you want to emphasize how typologies can be problematic and oversimplify real experiences, choose cases that complicate the typology (this would work better with more advanced students). Be sure to keep all the articles at about the same length and level of complexity. Here are a few of the articles that I've used:

Junker, Laura Lee (2001) The Evolution of Ritual Feasting Systems in Prehispanic Philippine Chiefdoms. In *Feasts*, edited by Michael Dietler and Brian Hayden, pp. 267-310. Smithsonian Institution Press.

LeCount, Lisa (2001) Like Water for Chocolate: Feasting and Political Ritual among the Late Classic Maya at Xunantunich, Belize. *American Anthropologist* 103(4): 935-953.

Nash, Donna (2010) Fine Dining and Fabulous Atmosphere: Feasting Facilities and Political Interaction in the Wari Realm. In *Inside Ancient Kitchens*, edited by Elizabeth Klarich, pp. 83-109. University Press of Colorado.

Potter, James M. (2000) Pots, Parties, and Politics: Communal Feasting in the American Southwest. *American Antiquity* 65(3): 471-492.

Twiss, Katheryn (2008) Transformations in an Early Agricultural Society: Feasting in the Southern Levantine Pre-Pottery Neolithic. *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 27: 418-442.

Instructions to students:

Read your articles strategically (some of them are long and have a lot of detail) in order to be able to answer the following questions in class:

- 1) In which region and time period does your article investigate feasting? Describe the society in terms of its scale, mode of subsistence, and extent of social inequality.
- 2) What archaeological evidence does your article use to identify feasting?
- 3) Describe the feasts, using Hayden's typology (feasts of alliance, economic feasts, or diacritical feasts, and sub-categories). What can we say about scale, participants, main foods, and role of feasts in politics and society?

- 4) Provide the menu to a typical feast for this society:

In class:

Students meet with the others who read the same article to check over their answers to the reading questions and ask me for clarification. Their task is to share their case with the class. I usually ask them to share creatively, by making a banner to publicize this feast as if it were a weekend party on campus, or by making an invitation. By this point in the semester, students welcome a chance to collaborate creatively. Then, groups take turns sharing their creative product and explaining how it reflects the archaeological evidence and the type of feast. As a class, we consider what this comparison helps us understand about feasting and Hayden's typology.