

Food, drink and ‘the Other’ in the Celtiberian city-state of Segeda I (Zaragoza, Spain)

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Many of the Iron Age Iberian groups along the coast of Hispania are referred to in classical texts as *togati* and considered peaceful citizens of civilised lifestyles. The Celtiberians of the peninsula’s hinterland, on the other hand, were generally regarded as primitive barbarians before their annexation by the Roman Empire. According to this ethnocentric and simplistic classical view, what different people consumed was closely linked to who they were and whether they could be considered civilised or not. For instance, the consumption of acorns was thought to be characteristic of barbarians, whereas wheat was considered a basic element in the diets of the civilised citizens of the Mediterranean. Similarly, wine distinguished civilised peoples from barbarians, the latter being described as eminently beer drinkers. However, archaeological research from the Celtiberian site of Segeda I (Zaragoza, Spain) is providing us with a better understanding of the nutritional patterns of the settlement’s Late Iron Age inhabitants. Excavations have revealed that there was a local production of wine in Segeda I that exceeded by far the requirements of a domestic consumption. Moreover, Italic fine wares and wines were imported. Contents analyses carried out on Segedan pottery suggest that beer was also widely consumed and, contrary to the Roman and Greek views, there does not seem to have been any predominance of one drink over the other in the city or within any of its excavated areas. Similarly, there is evidence that a wide variety of vegetables was consumed in the settlement, including those considered civilised and those associated with barbarians. Thus, archaeology points towards more intricate and heterogeneous relations between consumption models and identity categories at Segeda I than those suggested by the classical sources.

Introduction

What we consume, when, where and how we do so are elements that are closely related to who we are, both for ourselves and for those observing us. The realisation of this connection is not a recent one—Classical Greek and Roman texts illustrating their own people’s customs as well as those of other cultures often included references to what certain communities cultivated, what they consumed and how they consumed it. In fact, many of these communities were defined in terms of their food and drink, often with stark contrasts between what some people ate and what they did not eat, and consequently what they were and were not.

This was the case with the peoples of the Iberian Peninsula during the Late Iron Age. Classical texts tend to refer to the pacific inhabitants of Italic lifestyles as *togati* (i.e. people who dressed in gowns—real, sophisticated and civilised citizens) (Strabo III, 4, 20; III, 2, 15). On the other hand, people of the hinterland, such as the Celtiberians, were generally considered barbarians before their annexation by the Roman Empire. In addition to the military and political considerations, one important reason why Romans regarded the communities along the coasts as more civilised (which is to be understood in many respects as culturally accessible from the classical point of view) is the fact that they imported,

produced and consumed foods and drinks that were characteristic of a Mediterranean environment, which Greeks and Romans therefore recognised and found familiar. On the other hand, imports and traditions such as the consumption of wine arrived in Iberia's hinterland during the Bronze Age and Iron Age with a lagged effect and less intensity in comparison to the coastal regions. Moreover, many of the ecosystems in these interior territories were suitable for the production of crops that the classical cultures regarded as alien.

According to Strabo, the olive tree, the grapevine, and wheat are crops that can be grown in a temperate climate, which is coincidentally the only suitable climate for the development of culture (Geog. III, 2). Thus, the Roman author establishes a parallelism between the degree of civilisation and the production and consumption of particular goods. In this sense, the Turdetanii (people found on the southern coast of the Iberian Peninsula) are almost civilised, he affirms, because they have kings and laws, and especially olive oil and wine in great quantities, and of excellent quality.

In many respects, this type of passages tells us more about the cultural perceptions and practices of the Romans than the subjects they refer to. However, it is also true that we occasionally take these classical notions for granted implicitly or explicitly, producing simplistic portrayals of non-classical peoples in our studies of the past. This paper aims to move away from dichotomous perceptions of consumption models and levels of civilisation by examining the evidence provided by the excavations of the Celtiberian city-state of Segeda I (Zaragoza, Spain).

This Late Iron Age site offers valuable information about a period in which the Mid Ebro Valley (in the interior territory of the Iberian Peninsula) underwent important transformations, such as a more intense adoption of cultural elements from the western Mediterranean. Moreover, the location of Segeda, in an area where aspects considered distinctive of Iberians and Celtiberians can be found in diverse combinations, makes the site an interesting referent for comparative studies. The archaeological record of Segeda I, as well as pottery contents analyses, contextual analyses, palaeobotanical and typological studies illustrate how the processes surrounding consumption patterns and identity formation are much more complex and heterogeneous than the scenarios portrayed by many of the classical sources and some traditional archaeological approaches.

The site of Segeda I

Segeda I is located in Mara, next to the Perejiles River (a stream of the Jalón River), on the Central Iberian Mountain Range. In 154 BCE, Rome declared war to this city-state, considered by Apian (Iber, 44-47) a great and powerful city of the Belli, who were allied to Numantia. The reason for this war, according to Apian, was that Segeda, which had subscribed to the Pacts of Gracchus, 'caused smaller towns to move to its side, and built a wall of some forty stadia in circumference around itself, and forced the Titthi, another neighbouring tribe, to join with it'.

The first confrontation between the Roman troops (led by the consul Nobilior and made up by nearly 30,000 men) against the coalition of Segedans and Arevaci (led by the

Segedan citizen Carus and made up by 25,000 soldiers) resulted in a defeat for the Roman army. This was of such significance to the Romans that this day (the 23rd of August, day of Vulcan) was established as a *dies nefastus*. However, Segeda was not able to withstand the attack for much longer, and so Nobilior succeeded in besieging the Celtiberian city, which fell to the Romans in 153 BCE. The city-state of Segeda was captured and destroyed. Instead of reoccupying the invaded city, the Romans erected a settlement *ex novo* in the present-day region of Belmonte de Gracián (Segeda II), at a distance of approximately one mile from the original city. Therefore, unlike other Celtiberian sites (such as Numantia, Uxama or Tiermes) where the Roman settlement covers the indigenous occupation levels, Segeda is divided into two locations. This fact accounts for the excellent preservation of much of the indigenous Late Iron Age settlement.

The indigenous city of Segeda I has been excavated since 1998 as part of the ongoing *Segeda Project*. The settlement was erected around the Hill of Mara. During its first phase, the city expanded southward until it reached a size of 11 or 12 hectares. Between the hill and the nearby dry riverbed of Orera large natural sedimentary deposits cover the remains of an urbanised area (area 3). Evidence such as the urban planning, the construction technique of the houses and relative chronology have led to the identification of this area as the quarters of the Titthi and other Celtiberian neighbours, who, according to Apian (Iber 44), were forced to join the city by the Segedans (Burillo 2003a). This sector of the city had an approximate area of 5 or 6 hectares. Therefore, with its expansion Segeda reached a total inhabited space of 17 hectares, which makes the settlement the largest known oppidum in the northern Iberian Peninsula.

The importance of the city is also corroborated by its monetary mints (M. Gomis, 2001 and Burillo 2001b), with coins displaying the city-state's name (read as *sekeida*) printed in the Iberian alphabet (Rodríguez Ramos, 2001-02). Thus, Segeda I reveals itself towards the end of the Iron Age as a dynamic settlement with a predominant role to play in its territory in an economic, political, military and demographic sense. There is good reason to believe that Rome's declaration of war was originated by the Senate's uneasiness towards Segeda's rapid increase in influence rather than a mere disagreement concerning the extension of the defensive walls.

Wine and beer

One of the most notable finds since the start of the *Segeda Project* has been made in space 5 of area 2. Area 2 is located on the eastern slope of the Hill of Mara. It comprises two contiguous houses and an access zone that cover an earlier fortified house abandoned in the fifth century BCE. The house of sector 1 in area 2 was a two-storey building with a quadrangular plant measuring approximately 90 m². Its interior is divided into 6 spaces, separated by dividing walls made of mud and dry mud bricks. Space 5, measuring approximately 20 m², is the largest. It consists of a room with whitewashed clay walls and a black socle bordering the jamb of the door that leads to space 4. A large structure made of plaster has been discovered in one of the corners of the room. The structure measures two metres long by a metre wide, has a drain opening and is similar in shape to a bathtub.

Residue analyses carried out by J. Juan-Tresserras and J. C. Matamala (in press) on samples obtained from the drain opening of the structure have demonstrated the presence of

tartrates, which are associated with wine deposits. Further analyses have revealed charred *Vitis vinifera* seeds and remains of grapevine leaves in stratigraphic layers of space 5. Moreover, ceramic vessels with traces of resin (which was used in the preservation of wine) have been retrieved in space 5. The structure has thus been identified as a winepress with a 2,000-litre capacity, exceeding by far the requirements of a domestic use and corroborating the existence of a local wine industry in Segeda I.

From a classical perspective, beer was the barbarian drink *par excellence*. It was regarded as a vulgar, non-sophisticated product, only consumed by those who could not afford wine, could not grow vineyards in their lands or simply did not know any better. According to Greek and Roman authors, when barbarians obtained wine they drank it in a laughable and brutish manner, not as an element of social interaction. Strabo, in the aforementioned Book III of his *Geographia*, where he referred to the Turdetanii as ‘almost civilised people’ and praised the quality of their oil and wine, writes about the peoples of the Hispanic hinterland (Astures, Cántabros and Vascones in this case) and affirms that ‘(...) these people know beer. They only drink wine in rare occasions, and the wine they have they drink fast in feasts with their kin’. What is more, barbarians earned a reputation for drinking the little wine they had pure, without mixing it with water. This was not only socially unacceptable for Greeks and Romans (who drank their wine diluted and frequently perfumed), but in fact degrading as well as a health threat, for it was thought that pure wine led to insanity.

The presence of *Vitis vinifera* seeds on sites throughout different areas of the Iberian Peninsula is not uncommon. In fact recent chloroplast DNA studies reveal that the domestication of this plant appears to have originated from two foci in Europe: Greece and the Iberian Peninsula (Arroyo-García et al. 2002: 1142). Charred *Vitis vinifera* seeds have been found in the Celtiberian region on sites dating to the sixth century BCE, such as Cabezo de la Cruz de la Muela (Zaragoza) (Burillo and Fanlo 1979). However, carpological studies suggest that in many of these cases the grapes were being consumed as fruit and not processed into wine. Moreover, the quantity and quality of other elements of evidence, such as the presence of a Greek kylix cup and an oinochoe on the site of Cuarte de Huerva (Zaragoza) suggest a minor use of wine in relation to the coastal areas.

In the Mid Ebro Valley, where Segeda is located, the first reliable indications of the consumption of wine date to the period covered by the Pacts of Gracchus (179 to 153 BCE). However, it was only after the Roman invasion—and particularly during the Imperial Period—that wine started penetrating the interior of Hispania as a relatively common product. In this sense, Segeda’s local production and consumption of wine (in a period of confrontations that eventually brought Rome against Segeda I itself with the start of the Celtiberian Wars) takes on an interesting political and economic significance. Until the discovery of the winepress in area 2, wine consumption in Segeda was thought to be exclusively linked with Italic imports, which are evidenced by finds of fine ware and amphorae fragments.

Contents analyses of microscopic remains and organic compounds carried out by J. Juan-Tresserras and J.C. Matamala (in press) on various vessels of Segeda I have provided interesting results regarding the consumption of drinks in the settlement. Vessel number

1327, for instance, is a handmade cup in which tartrates were identified. Tartrates were also discovered in cup 1194—a Celtiberian wheel-made crater. On the other hand, traces of oxalate—deposits associated with beer—were found in container number 4447, a handmade cup. Although this cup's form might be interpreted as a simple shape that could have evolved from earlier indigenous models, the fact is that there is no known equivalent in the indigenous archaeological record of earlier chronologies. The cup's closest analogy is, we believe, the Lamboglia 25 black gloss form, which, in a Roman context, would be associated with the consumption of wine.

As well as the local pottery production, imported Italic forms associated with the consumption of wine have been found in Segeda I. Examples of this are the amphora neck retrieved from a water tank in area 2 (its typological categorisation lying between the last Graeco-Italic productions of Sicily, Calabria and the later Dressel IA forms of the Italian Tyrrenic coast) and fragments of black gloss bowls and cups that probably arrived into the city through the same commercial routes as the amphorae containing the wine. Four Campanian A fragments (two bases and two rims) belonging to a Lamboglia 31b type, which is associated with the overseas export of wine from Campania to the western territories, were retrieved in area 2. Thus, in conjunction with the production and consumption of local wine (with its respective associated indigenous drinking ware), Italic wine was imported, transported in Italic containers, consumed in Italic fine ware, and perhaps even drunk in the Italic fashion.

What is more, several indigenous vessels retrieved in Segeda I are local adaptations and imitations of the genuine Roman imports (particularly of black gloss fine ware). An interesting example is a Celtiberian cup modelled after a Morel 68 black gloss form with slightly simplified handles and a smaller size, as can be observed when compared to a genuine Roman Morel 68 cup retrieved in area 4 of Segeda. The Celtiberian cup is decorated with black wavy lines, which is a particularly common motif in the region, as evidenced by the pottery of the site Alto Chacón (Atrián 1976), thus incorporating a local element to a Mediterranean influence.

Hence, an examination of the archaeological record of Segeda I indicates that wine and beer were far from mutually exclusive elements or opposite poles. In fact, there is no evidence to suggest that they were even indicative of aspects such as ethnic identity, status or social complexity in the settlement. Both drinks coexisted throughout different sectors of the site (including areas inhabited by different 'tribes', such as the Titthi and the Belli); they are associated with a varied set of vessel forms—both locally made and imported—and affected by an array of external influences and local traditions.

Food and the ecosystems

One of the aspects of the *Segeda Project* involves the study of the ecosystems surrounding the city-state's territory. Analyses carried out by Javier Ibáñez (1999) based on residual C¹⁴ and data obtained from modern weather stations have revealed a sudden decrease in temperature in the area during the second half of the fourth century BCE. This was followed by a period of relative climatic stability ranging between the third and first

centuries BCE, characterised by weather conditions that are similar to those observable in the area today.

Despite Segeda's location on the Central Iberian Mountain Range, its Iron Age ecosystems in the Perejiles Valley could be generally described as Mediterranean-type environments. Ten kilometres east of Segeda, in the region of Campo Romanos, the modern ecosystem is only suitable for the plantation of cereals (figure 1. A). Similarly, the nearby mountainous region of Vicort (figure 1. B) is a forested area that mainly allows for the plantation of oaks. The Perejiles Valley, on the other hand, is a more versatile region allowing for the plantation of cereals, grapevines and fruit trees (figure 1. C, D and E). Olive trees can also be found four kilometres away from the site. In this sense, Strabo's notion of primitive barbarians living in poor lands, incapable of growing civilised crops such as olive trees or grapevines as a result of a lack of knowledge and skill seems a distant reality, despite the fact that Segeda I is located in Celtiberia, a region described by several classical authors as inhabited in the Late Iron Age by fierce warriors who were certainly considered barbarians.

The archaeological record of the site provides us with a heterogeneous picture regarding food consumption. Celtiberian kalathoi associated with the storage of honey and vessels associated with the processing of dairy products have been found. Contents analyses reveal that kitchen ware in Segeda I were mostly used in the preparation of various types of stew, vegetable soups and porridge. A variety of ingredients have been recognised in the analyses, such as *Borrigo officinalis* (a relatively rare vegetable that is still grown in the area), as well as products regarded in the classical sources as civilised, such as wheat, in combination with ingredients considered barbarian, such as acorns, which, according to Strabo (Geog. III, 3, 7) was the food consumed by Lusitanians for three quarters of the year.

Conclusions

Segeda provides clear archaeological evidence that the Roman and Greek portrayals of other people, in this case in relation to notions of complexity and primitiveness based on the production and consumption of particular foods and drinks, are by and large ethnocentric and reductionist. Beer was not as primitive or wine as complex as suggested by the classical sources. Both drinks coexisted in various areas of Segeda I with no apparent contradiction or conflict. Posidonius, in his descriptions of the Celtic peoples' customs, points out that the richer Celtic citizens drank imported wine, pure or mixed with some water (i.e. the Roman and Greek way), whereas the poorer Celtic citizens had no choice but to drink beer (in Atheneus, Deipn., IV, 152 c). A relatively small proportion of the site has been systematically excavated, but initial contextual comparative analyses suggest that there was no significant pattern in relation to status or wealth in the areas where wine and beer appear to have been present. What is more, there is no evidence that any of these two beverages had predominance over the other within the city.

Similarly, the presence of particular crops does not seem to be as unequivocally associated with certain peoples (or even territories) as might be inferred from a literal reading of the classical sources. The Iron Age ecosystem of the region surrounding Segeda I in the Perejiles Valley allowed for the farming of a wide variety of crops, including elements regarded as civilised by the Romans and those considered barbarian. Many of the

excavated areas in Segeda I contain kitchen ware with traces of various ingredients, once again with no visible pattern regarding status, wealth or ethnicity.

What we consume, when, where, and how we do so can deeply affect the ways in which we see ourselves and how others see us. Consciously or unconsciously, people construct identities for themselves or others through agents' relations with their food and drink as an important element of the material culture. An examination of Segeda's archaeological record has provided us with an illustration of the fact that this is far from a simple or predictable process though. Instead of barbarism-*togati* or wine-beer dichotomies we observe varied consumption patterns, complex adoptions of external influences and a heterogeneous ecosystem providing a variety of crops to process and consume in different ways. The polarised portrayals of classical sources and some traditional archaeological approaches with regard to consumption models and identity categories do not appear to be valid. If the maxim 'we are what we eat' is to be considered true, what seems clear from an archaeological examination of Segeda I is that, at least from the ethnocentric Greek and Roman perspectives, the Iron Age people of this Celtiberian city-state were certainly eating more than what they were thought to be.

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Figure 1: Geographical location of Segeda I and modern ecosystems in the area. A. Cereal; B. Cereal and oaks; C: Pine trees, cereal, almond trees and grape vines; D. grape vines and cereal. E. Orchards, cereal, and fruit trees.

Figure 2: Aerial photograph of Segeda I with the excavated areas.

Figure 3: Area 2, sector 1, space 5 (room with the winepress).

Figure 4: A. Cup 4447; B. Cup 1327; C. Celtiberian imitation of a Morel 68; D. Italic Morel 68 cup.