

CHAPTER 4

HOSPITALITY IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

The discussion of metaphors and models has affirmed that in order to better understand and appreciate the ways that the Pentateuch speaks of God in terms of a host it is necessary to assess the nature and scope of the subject of hospitality in the broad cultural context of the ancient Near East. After making some preliminary observations, this chapter will investigate the topic of hospitality in general and set forth a working definition to frame the remainder of this study. It will then deal with the contributions of key texts from ancient Sumer, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Anatolia, Ugarit, and Israel. Because of the high volume of extant literature from these regions, the following study cannot be exhaustive but will deal with representative texts.

A. Toward an Understanding of Hospitality

The study of hospitality in the ancient Near East faces several kinds of difficulties which must be identified in order to approach the ancient texts with a sufficient measure of realism and objectivity. It is also important to consider the contributions from the field of sociology and to voice the value of clarifying the historical background of hospitality before formulating a working definition that is aware of the general field, yet specific enough to be appropriate to the subject at hand.

1. Limitations of This Study

a) The Nature of the Evidence

One limitation of this study has to do with the nature of the evidence for understanding the character and extent of hospitality as practiced in the ancient Near East. There are few truly descriptive texts that present people hosting people in real-life, historical situations. There is some illustrative value in surveying non-literary sources like iconographic and glyphic representations of people in banqueting situations, typically in royal style.¹ But the methodological difficulties of assembling and evaluating this material place it outside the bounds of the present investigation.

Many of the ancient texts describe gods hosting gods and we may assume that the conventions evident in these situations correspond in some measure to social reality at the human level. For example, Leo Oppenheim discussed “The Care and Feeding of the Gods” in Mesopotamian religion.²

¹ See Frances Pinnock, “Considerations on the ‘Banquet Theme’ in the Figurative Art of Mesopotamia and Syria,” in *Drinking in Ancient Societies: History and Culture of Drinks in the Ancient Near East*, ed. L. Milano, 15–26, *History of the Ancient Near East 6* (Padova: Sargon, 1994) as well as “Il motivo del banchetto rituale nell’arte della Mesopotamia del III millennio a.C.” (Diss., Rome, 1976); Gudrun Selz, *Die Bankettszene: Entwicklung eines “überzeitlichen” Bildmotifs in Mesopotamien von der fröhdynastischen bis zur Akkad-Zeit*, 2 vols., *Freiburger altorientalische Studien 11* (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1983); Robert Muyltermans, “Two Banquet Scenes in the Levant,” in *Archaeologia Iranica et Orientalis: Miscellanea in Honorem Louis vanden Berghe*, ed. L. de Meyer and E. Haerinck, 393–407 (Gent: Peeters, 1989); Izak Cornelius, “Paradise Motifs in the ‘Eschatology’ of the Minor Prophets and the Iconography of the Ancient Near East: The Concepts of Fertility, Water, Trees and ‘Tierfrieden’ and Gen 2—3,” *JNSL 14* (1988) 41–83; and Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*, trans. Timothy J. Hallett (New York: Seabury, 1978).

² A. Leo. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead*

Starting with the claim that the image of a deity was not a mere representation of the god but its actual realization, Oppenheim detailed the elaborate attention that cultic officials paid to these images in terms of their construction, adornment, and maintenance. The images were seen to have social, nutritional, and hygienic needs which occasioned daily attention.³ Oppenheim claimed that these practices not only illuminate the religious concepts of the cult but illustrate the secular customs which are rarely mentioned elsewhere.⁴ An era earlier, the Sumerians held much the same ideas. In the words of Kramer, “The Sumerian thinkers, in line with their world view, had no exaggerated confidence in man and his destiny. They were firmly convinced that man was fashioned of clay and created for one purpose only: to serve the gods by supplying them with food, drink, and shelter so that they might have full leisure for their divine activities.”⁵

Another example of correspondence between earthly and heavenly meals can be seen in a specialized type of feast known as the *marzeah* which was widespread throughout the ancient world and was also said to have been practiced by the gods. Some degree of similarity between customs and the human and divine levels is understandable. Gangloff and Haelewyck thus

Civilization, rev. ed., completed by Erica Reiner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977) 188–93.

³ The gods of Ugarit also needed sustenance (Wolfram Herrmann, “Götterspeise und Göttertrank in Ugarit und Israel,” *ZAW* 72 [1960] 207).

⁴ Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, 190.

⁵ Samuel Noah Kramer, *The Sumerians: Their History, Culture, and Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963) 123.

remark, “Les *marzeah* terrestres sont des répliques de ceux du monde des dieux. Et ils fonctionnent tous deux en symbiose pour assurer la bonne marche du monde sous la juridiction d’une divinité principale du panthéon.”⁶

The Gilgamesh Epic provides yet another example of behavior displayed in narrative (in this case an epic poem) which is thought to have a parallel among mortals.⁷ After receiving the “hospitality” of a prostitute, the uncivilized Enkidu became “human.”

The harlot opened her mouth,
Saying to Enkidu:
“Eat the food, Enkidu,
As is life’s due;
Drink the strong drink, as is the custom of the land.”
Enkidu ate the food,
Until he was sated;
Of strong drink he drank
Seven goblets.
Carefree became his mood (and) cheerful,
His heart exulted
And his face glowed.
He rubbed [the *shaggy growth*],
The hair of his body,
Anointed himself with oil,
Became human.⁸

In this account, Aldina Da Silva noted several features of civilized humanity:

L’amour, le pain et la bière, et le vêtement sont donc tenus comme étant

⁶ Frédéric Gangloff and Jean Claude Haelewyck, “Osée 4,17–19: Un *marzeah* en l’Honneur de la déesse ‘Anat?’” *ETL* 71/4 (1995) 378.

⁷ Tigay calls attention to the fact that there really was a king of ancient Uruk named Gilgamesh, but that this epic portrays him in “legendary and mythological colors” (*The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982] 3–4).

⁸ *ANET*, 77 (Tablet II, Old Babylonian version, iii, lines 10–25).

les caractéristiques essentielles de l'homme civilisé. Seulement l'homme social prépare et cuisine ses mets et boissons, fabrique son vêtement, tandis que l'être sauvage se contente de brouter l'herbe, d'apaiser sa soif aux points d'eau et de parcourir, nu ou sommairement habillé, les steppes et les montagnes.⁹

Before his domestication, Enkidu's state was much like that of primordial humanity as described in *The Dispute Between Cattle and Grain*.¹⁰ According to these traditions, early humans did not eat bread or wear garments, but foraged on available grass and drank water from ditches. Thus while we may assume general correspondence between historical social reality and the world of literature, the degree of actual similarity between the two realms is difficult to demonstrate with much precision.

b) The Breadth of the Evidence

Another limitation has to do with the sheer breadth of the literary evidence. Geographically, Palestine is situated within the region known as the Fertile Crescent which follows the Tigris and Euphrates River valley northwest from the Persian Gulf and then southward along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea toward Egypt, sometimes considered to include the valley of the Nile River. The cultures that inhabited this region contain humanity's earliest literary records and thus span thousands of years before the period of biblical composition. Although societies changed more gradually in ancient times than at present, the cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity of this region and

⁹ Aldina Da Silva, "La symbolique du repas au Proche-Orient ancien," *SR* 24/2 (1995) 147.

¹⁰ Tigay, *Gilgamesh Epic*, 203.

time frame is considerable. Given the large number of texts recovered and current level of scholarly analysis paid to these texts, it is difficult for any lone scholar to locate and bring together all of the material relevant to any particular topic of study. Treating each of them as a specialist would be realistically infeasible. Ultimately, comparative research should be an interdisciplinary and synoptic effort in which experts from the areas of philology, literature, folklore, theology, sociology, history, and the history of ideas cooperate together.¹¹ Therefore, in light of these challenges this study must devote itself to the more modest goal of sampling the material that is most readily available, making observations, and keeping discussion about the issues raised in secondary literature to a minimum.

c) The Complexity of Making Comparisons

In his Presidential Address to the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in 1961, Samuel Sandmel issued a strong caution against the practice of making too much of literary comparisons between biblical and extra-biblical literature, using the word “parallelomania” to denote “that extravagance among scholars which first overdoes the supposed similarity in passages and then proceeds to describe source and derivation as if implying literary connection flowing in an inevitable or predetermined direction.”¹²

¹¹ Shemaryahu Talmon, “The ‘Comparative Method’ in Biblical Interpretation—Principles and Problems,” in *Congress Volume: Göttingen, 1977*, 320–56, VTSup 29 (Leiden: Brill, 1978) 356.

¹² Samuel Sandmel, “Parallelomania,” *JBL* 81 (1962) 1.

While not denying a degree of validity to the drawing of legitimate parallels, Sandmel directed his attack against both an uncritical acceptance of parallels excerpted from their respective contexts and the premature conclusions about sources and borrowing. To be sure, practitioners of what may be called a traditional comparative approach like George Smith and Friedrich Delitzsch were too quick to point out similarities between the culture expressed in the OT and Mesopotamia while failing to assess the significance of important differences.¹³ Sandmel's aversion to the comparative approach was shared by many others.¹⁴

Rather than to eschew all comparisons (a caricature of Sandmel's position), it is preferable to continue to search for valid parallels provided that guiding principles be kept in mind. In addition to the need to read excerpts in context it is also helpful to consider them in relation to the genre in which they

¹³ Tremper Longman III, *Fictional Akkadian Autobiography: A Generic and Comparative Study* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1991) 24–25.

¹⁴ Longman refers to the representative works of Benno Landsberger, "The Conceptual Autonomy of the Babylonian World," trans. T. Jacobsen, B. Foster, and H. von Siebenthal, *Monographs on the Ancient Near East* 1:4 (Malibu: Undena, 1976), originally published as "Die Eigenbegrifflichkeit der Babylonischen Welt," *Islamica* 2 (1926) 355–72; Morton Smith, "The Common Theology of the Ancient Near East," *JBL* 71 (1952) 135–47; "The Present State of Old Testament Studies," *JBL* 88 (1969) 19–35; Bertil Albrektson, *History and the Gods: An Essay on the Idea of Historical Events As Divine Manifestations in the Ancient Near East and in Israel*, *ConBOT* 1 (Lund: Gleerup, 1967); James Barr, *Old and New in Interpretation: A Study of the Two Testaments*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM, 1982); "Revelation through History in the Old Testament and Modern Thought," *Int* 17 (1963) 193–205; and Langdon Gilkey, "Cosmology and the Travail of Biblical Language," *JR* 41 (1961) 194–205. For a discussion of the difficulties biblical scholars have in appreciating the distinctive elements of the religion of ancient Ugarit, see Delbert R. Hillers, "Analyzing the Abominable: Our Understanding of Canaanite Religion," *JQR* 75/3 (1985) 253–69.

appear, for as Hirsch has shown, verbal meaning is bound to literary genre.¹⁵ For example, once the genre of an international political treaty was established in Hittite and biblical literature, parallels between the two could be drawn with a high measure of validity.¹⁶

Following the lead of W. W. Hallo,¹⁷ Tremper Longman enumerated several guidelines which can help determine the relative validity of an alleged comparative parallel.¹⁸ Besides pointing to the importance of studying a passage in its literary and cultural context, the overall logic of these principles centers on the proximity of the two texts with respect to geography, temporal location, language, and genre. The closer any two texts are to each other, the more likely it is that an expression or idea that they share in common is a real,

¹⁵ E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967) 78.

¹⁶ Treatments of biblical covenants that take advantage of the wider historical background are numerous but the more notable examples include George E. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Pittsburgh: Biblical Colloquium, 1955); Dennis J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant*, AnBib 21 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1963); Delbert R. Hillers, *Treaty Curses and the Old Testament Prophets*, BibOr 16 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1964); *Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969); Klaus Baltzer, *Das Bundesformular*, WMANT 4, 2nd ed. (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1964); reprint, *The Covenant Formulary in Old Testament, Jewish, and Early Christian Writings*, trans. David E. Green (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971); and Meredith G. Kline, *The Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of the Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963).

¹⁷ William W. Hallo, "Biblical History in its Near Eastern Setting: The Contextual Approach" in *Scripture in Context: Essays on the Comparative Method*, ed. C. D. Evans, W. W. Hallo, and J. B. White, 1-26 (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1980).

¹⁸ Longman, *Fictional Akkadian Autobiography*, 31.

not imagined parallel.¹⁹ Noting that meaning is a function of context, Talmon has proposed that scholars resist the temptation to isolate or abstract a concept from its cultural, cultic, or literary setting. Instead, the potential for distortion is lessened when the available evidence is considered “holistically” rather than “atomistically.”²⁰ Hence, this dissertation favors exegetical and thematic research over taxonomy, statistical analysis, and noting isolated parallels.

The issue of literary dependence of one text upon another is much more problematic and beset with methodological difficulties which extend beyond the matter of trying to date the time of composition. It is often assumed that one literary tradition borrowed from another, but it is also possible that two traditions drew from a third culture or that the two traditions developed similar features in isolation from one another.²¹ Therefore, I will not claim that any specific biblical text borrowed material from an extra-biblical one. My goal is rather to illuminate some ideas about hospitality that were in existence in the ancient Near East, and that conceivably could have had some influence on the thought and literature of the OT.

¹⁹ For a subsequent valuable treatment of the issues in comparative studies, see William W. Hallo, “Compare and Contrast: The Contextual Approach to Biblical Literature,” in *Scripture in Context III: The Bible in the Light of Cuneiform Literature*, ed. William W. Hallo, Bruce William Jones, and Gerald L. Mattingly, 1–30, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts and Studies* 8 (Lewiston: Mellen, 1990).

²⁰ Talmon, “Comparative Method,” 356.

²¹ Longman, *Fictional Akkadian Autobiography*, 33.

d) Subjectivity

It is impossible to investigate the social contours of ancient hospitality from a purely objective standpoint, and it is clear that modern notions of hospitality are part of a sociological and religious framework that is geographically, temporally, and intellectually distinct from the ancient Near East. It is possible that a researcher can hunt for manners and customs in antiquity that parallel one's own culture or some other, more geographically proximate contemporary culture and miss an ancient feature that is simply not very well attested today. Even when one looks for parallels to what is found in the OT, there is an element of subjectivity, albeit of a different sort.

The scarcity of ancient texts that speak directly to the practice of hospitality on the human level has led some to rely on information gained from first- or second-hand experience with inhabitants of the Middle East, producing a style of interpretation that can justly be called "exegesis-by-travel-account."²² Researchers who placed stock in this kind of anecdotal material appealed to "primitive" and "unchanging" nature of Middle Eastern culture in the nineteenth century, claiming that their observations filled in gaps in our knowledge, reduced subjectivity, corrected mistaken idea, added vividness, and

²² This practice is evident even in commentaries with high academic standards (Rebecca A. Wright, "Establishing Hospitality in the Old Testament: Testing the Tool of Linguistic Pragmatics" [Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1989] 1). She notes the commentary by August Dillman, *Genesis: Critically and Exegetically Expounded*, trans. Wm. B. Stevenson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1897); as well two commentaries in the ICC series: John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1910); and G. F. Moore, *Judges* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1895).

validated the details of biblical history and geography.²³ Customs of hospitality were of special interest and illustrations gained from modern Bedouin were thought to have a tendency to persist in the literature, even though the method by which they were acquired is outdated. Wright observed,

No one today would put forward travel report data uncritically for the explication of scripture. Yet in some areas such data which were entered into commentaries have never been re-examined with any other methodological controls. Hospitality is a signal case.²⁴

Twentieth-century study of the ancient Near East has revealed considerably more cultural diversity and development than was previously recognized, making the axiom of the stability of Eastern culture plainly untenable. With its loss, the supposed objective window into the past afforded by travel-account anecdotes once again became clouded, leaving scholars to search for new ways to see past their own cultural conditioning.

The relatively recent application of modern anthropology to biblical and ancient Near Eastern studies has constituted an attempt to reduce this subjectivity, yet not without introducing some complications of its own.²⁵ While the lack of historical information necessarily renders some questions

²³ Wright, "Establishing Hospitality in the Old Testament," 21, 31–41.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

²⁵ See Niels Peter Lemche, *Early Israel: Anthropological and Historical Studies on the Israelite Society before the Monarchy*, trans. Frederick H. Cryer, VTSup 37 (Leiden: Brill, 1985); Bernhard Lang, *Anthropological Approaches to the Old Testament*, Issues in Religion and Theology 8 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); and John W. Rogerson, *Anthropology and the Old Testament*, The Biblical Seminar 1 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984).

unanswered and unanswerable,²⁶ work in this field has helped researchers to transcend the limits of their native cultures. In the words of Lemche, “a broad general knowledge of anthropology will limit the number of more or less arbitrary common-sense explanations of those social conditions which may have served as the presuppositions for concrete historical events.”²⁷

e) The Nature of Hospitality

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “hospitality” as “the act or practice of being hospitable; the reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers, with liberality and goodwill.”²⁸ The classic word for hospitality, φιλοξενία, literally means “the love of strangers.” This term suggests a close association with foreigners and does not deal narrowly with the matter of a shared meal which is the central concern of this study.²⁹ A related word, θεοξενία, refers to the regalement of the gods and may be used to designate

²⁶ John W. Rogerson, “Anthropology and the Old Testament,” in *The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological and Political Perspectives*, ed. R. E. Clements, 17–37 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 30.

²⁷ Lemche, *Early Israel*, 83; quoted in Rogerson, “Anthropology and the Old Testament,” 28.

²⁸ “Hospitality,” in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., prepared by J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, vol. 7 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989) 415.

²⁹ For an investigation of this word and its cognates see Gustav Stählin, “xeno”, xeniá, xeniáw, xenodocew, filoxeniá, filoxeno”, in *TDNT*, vol. 5, 1–36 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967). Rodney Duke’s study of OT hospitality is based on the conclusion drawn from ancient Latin and Greek terminology that “feasting and banqueting with one’s friends and invited guests did not constitute the primary idea of hospitality in antiquity; hospitality was directed to the stranger” (“Towards an Understanding of Hospitality in the Old Testament” [M.C.S. thesis, Regent College, 1980] 10).

mythic scenes in which a god hosts others as well as those occasions when humans honor gods with an earthly banquet such as those at Delphi during the month of March-April which was known as “Theoxenios.”³⁰ Gaster commented that these theoxenic banquets “are not to be dismissed as mere expressions of jubilation on the part of men; rather they are ceremonies of communion at which, by the medium of commensality, the topocosmic bond is periodically renewed.”³¹

It should be noted at this introductory point that there is no extant Hebrew term for “host,” “guest,” or “hospitality.”³² The archaic expressions “LORD of Hosts” (t/abx] hwhy) and “God of Hosts”³³ appear 245 and 40 times respectively in the King James Version of the OT. These epithets have nothing to do with hospitality and are translated by the NIV using the word “Almighty”

³⁰ Theodor H. Gaster, *Thespis: Ritual, Myth, and Drama in the Ancient Near East*, with a foreword by Gilbert Murray (New York: Harper and Row, 1961) 190–92, 46.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 46.

³² The substantives rGf and bv/T approach the idea of a guest as the recipient of hospitality, but they more commonly denote a resident alien. The noun tWrGf is a *hapax legomenon* which appears only Jer 41:17. The lexicon of Holladay defines it as “hospitality” with the specification that it designates a place and should be taken as in construct with the following word, reading with the *Qere*, μhmKi tWrGf] (William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament: Based upon the Lexical Work of Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971] 64). Holladay himself later added that it designates a place where μyrGf may stay and was probably a caravansary or khan, rendering the phrase simply as “Geruth Chimham” (*Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 26—52*, ed. Paul D. Hanson, Hermeneia [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989] 298).

³³ Various Hebrew phrases are behind this translation: t/abx] yhd a0 t/abXh' yhd a0 t/abx] yhil a0 t/abx] yhd a0 hwhy0 t/abXh' yhd a0 hwhy0 t/abx] yhil a0 hwhy0 t/abx] hwhy0 yndæ} and t/abXh' hwhy0 yndæ}

because they refer to “he who is sovereign over all the ‘hosts’ (powers) in heaven and on earth, especially over the ‘hosts’ (armies) of Israel.”³⁴

The lack of Hebrew lexical stock for the field of hospitality should not be construed as an indication that ancient Israel had no concept of hospitality or that it held the practice in low esteem. Such a position can only be maintained if one subscribes to an obsolete theory of language which holds that the specific vocabulary and grammatical structure of a given language are direct expressions of the particular thought of its host culture.³⁵ James Barr receives credit for issuing a thorough analysis and critique of this theory as a forced application of idealist philosophy. He concluded, “The idea sometimes cherished in biblical theology that the biblical language corresponds to or coheres with the inner thought of the Bible is a reproduction on another level of the idealist picture of reality or spiritual power bringing forth its own expression in language.”³⁶

Just as the concept of hospitality can be present in a culture which lacks

³⁴ *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (East Brunswick, N.J.: International Bible Society, 1984), preface.

³⁵ This view was set forth by Wilhelm von Humboldt (*Sprachphilosophische Werke*, ed. H. Steinthal [Berlin: Dümmler, 1884]) and developed by Thorleif Boman (*Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, trans. Jules L. Moreau [New York: Norton, 1960]). It has a degree of similarity with the views of Benjamin L. Whorf (*Language, Thought, and Reality*, ed. John B. Carroll [Cambridge: Technology Press of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1956]) and Edward Sapir (*Language: an Introduction to the Study of Speech* [New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1939]). One can only guess what Boman could have concluded from the fact that the Greek *ξένος*, Latin *hospes*, French *hôte*, and Italian *ospite* each do double-duty for “guest” and “host.”

³⁶ James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961) 49.

a narrow set of lexemes to denote it, a metaphor, motif, or model can also be present in a text which does not explicitly name both terms. For example, even though the following quotation uses the language of forestry, one does not need to be told that “God” is a “lumberjack” to make sense of this judgment oracle against the enemies of Israel:

Look! The Lord, the LORD Almighty,
 lopping off boughs with a crash.
 The tree tops being hewn down,
 the lofty will be laid low. (Isa 10:33)

In the same way, the explicit presence of terms within the extended semantic range of food and drink, verbs of welcoming and ingestion, as well as the accessories of meals and cuisine can signal the influence of an implicit model like “GOD IS A HOST.” A clear understanding of these lexical items will naturally contribute to a better appreciation of the literary craft of the metaphor and the semantic import of the passage in question.

2. The Sociological Perspective

One place to begin the investigation of hospitality in the ancient Near East is from a sociological perspective. While hospitality in general may include a wide range of activities including the offer of food, drink, washing, clothing, lodging, conversation, entertainment, and the provision of immediate needs, the element of table fellowship is central to all cultures and is usually coupled with culturally conditioned matters of protocol. Yehudi Cohen observed,

Food and drink are almost universally associated with hospitality. In most cultures, there are explicit or implicit rules that food or drink be offered to guests, and there are usually standards prescribing which foods and drinks are appropriate. Reciprocally, these sets of rules also assert that guests are obligated to accept proffered food and drink and that failure to do so is

insulting.³⁷

Having narrowed the focus of hospitality in this study to the point of a common meal, it can be observed that whatever varied cultural customs are involved, the sharing of food and drink always takes place within the matrix of social relationships. Viewing food as a type of code, Mary Douglas claimed that the message itself “is about different degrees of hierarchy, inclusions and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across boundaries.”³⁸ Meals tend to be enduring components of occasions deemed significant by the larger group.

Cohen stated,

The provision of food and drink, if not actual feasting, is characteristic of rites of passage—*i.e.*, rites marking events such as birth, initiation ceremonies, marriage, and death—in almost all traditional cultures and in some modern nontraditional groups as well. The reason for this is that these events are regarded as being of importance not only to the individual and his family but also to the group as a whole because each event bears in one way or other on the group’s continuity.³⁹

To learn the food customs of a culture, one must study the literature and practice of that particular group.⁴⁰ But in contrast to specific *codes* of

³⁷ Yehudi A. Cohen, “Dietary Laws and Food Customs,” in *The New Encyclopædia Britannica*, 15th ed., Macropædia vol. 5, 728–36 (Chicago: Helen Hemingway Benton, 1982) 729.

³⁸ Mary Douglas, “Deciphering a Meal,” *Dædalus* 101 (1972) 61–81. Much of this article discusses the taxonomy of edible and inedible animals in ancient Israel, a topic she originally set forth in *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966).

³⁹ Cohen, “Dietary Laws and Food Customs,” 729.

⁴⁰ One example is Ladislaus Bolchazy’s study of ancient Roman hospitality from the perspective of comparative anthropology which has revealed seven categories of hospitality falling along a spectrum from primitive to advanced (*Hospitality in Antiquity: Livy’s Concept of Its Humanizing Force* [Chicago: Ares, 1995]). Steve Reece studied eighteen hospitality scenes in the literature of Homer and assembled a descriptive grid of thirty-eight typical

hospitality which vary among social groups, Julian Pitt-Rivers claims it is possible to formulate a more abstract and universal *law* of hospitality which derives not from cultural tradition but from sociological necessity.⁴¹ By taking evidence from conventions of manners, habitual practice, ritual customs, as well as the language of poetry, Pitt-Rivers has sketched the fundamental elements of hospitality that tend to persist across a wide range of cultures, no matter their level of relative development.⁴² There are several ways in which guests are to behave. They are to show honor to the host and avoid any show of hostility or rivalry. They are not to usurp the role of the host by demanding or taking what is not offered. On the other hand, the refusal to take what is offered is an insult. Pitt-Rivers claimed,

Commensality is the basis of community in a whole number of contexts. Therefore the guest is bound above all to accept food. But any refusal reflects in fact upon the host's capacity to do honour, and this is what the guest must uphold.⁴³

Likewise, a host infringes on the law of hospitality by insulting the guest or by showing hostility or rivalry. The host must protect his guest and guard his honor. The host is to attend to his guests, granting them due precedence, showing concern for their needs, and earning the gratitude the guest ought to

elements which reveal the “syntax” of the standard Homeric hospitality scene (*The Stranger's Welcome: Oral Theory and the Aesthetics of the Homeric Hospitality Scene*, Michigan Monographs in Classical Antiquity [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993] 8).

⁴¹ Julian Pitt-Rivers, “The Stranger, the Guest, and the Hostile Host: Introduction to the Study of the Laws of Hospitality,” in *Contributions to Mediterranean Sociology*, ed. J. G. Peristiany, 13–30 (Paris: Mouton, 1968) 27.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 27–28.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 28.

show. "Failure to offer the best is to denigrate the guest. Therefore it must always be maintained that, however far from perfect his hospitality may be, it is the best he can do."⁴⁴

When these laws are acted upon, good relations follow. When one or more of them is violated either intentionally or unintentionally, relations suffer. This is especially true when placed in the context of entertaining an outsider who is, by definition, unknown and having the status of somewhere between hostile stranger and community member. The loss ensuing from a lapse in protocol is therefore a serious matter.⁴⁵ Pitt-Rivers asserted, "Any infringement of the code of hospitality destroys the structure of roles, since it implies an incorporation which has not in fact taken place; failure to return honour or avoid disrespect entitles the person slighted in this way to relinquish

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Another text which has been clarified through the application of a sociological perspective is the sordid account of the Levite and his concubine in Judges 19 (Kenneth Alan Stone, "Gender and Homosexuality in Judges 19: Subject-Honor, Object-Shame?" *JSOT* 67 [1995]). This work builds on the notion of an Eastern honor-shame complex to explain the logic of homosexual rape. See also, Victor H. Matthews, "Hospitality and Hostility in Genesis 19 and Judges 19," *BTB* 22/1 (1992) 3-11; Julian Pitt-Rivers, *The Fate of Shechem: or, The Politics of Sex: Essays in the Anthropology of the Mediterranean*, Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology 19 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) 94-112; Michael Herzfeld, "'As in Your Own House': Hospitality, Ethnography, and the Stereotype of Mediterranean Society," in *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean*, ed. D. Gilmore, 75-89, A Special Publication of the American Anthropological Association 22 (Washington, D.C.: American Anthropological Association, 1987); J. G. Peristiany, ed., *Honor and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965); and Stuart Lasine, "Guest and Host in Judges 19: Lot's Hospitality in an Inverted World," *JSOT* 29 (1984) 37-59.

his role and revert to the hostility which it suppressed.”⁴⁶

This summary of the universal law of hospitality is useful to the researcher who recognizes the need to transcend the unrecognized presuppositions of one’s native culture in order to better comprehend the specific codes of hospitality of another.

3. The Historical Perspective

In chapter 3, this study noted that biblical theology is a historical discipline and therefore uses the tools of historical and philological research to understand what the biblical testimony actually meant. These same tools can be applied to extra-biblical literature to illuminate the historical environment of the wider world of the ancient Near East. But because this study focuses on *biblical* theology, the investigation into hospitality outside the Bible must remain in the category of background so as to avoid writing something more akin to a history of ideas.

In that same chapter, this study also noted that the consideration of a biblical model for God should attend to the particular “form” of the model, specified as the historical nature of the donor field. This includes not only the social practice of hospitality but the literary uses of the concept, preferably in genres comparable to what is found in the OT. Therefore the following investigation into hospitality in the ancient Near East will focus on literary evidence and take an interest in the features and ideas associated with it in a

⁴⁶ Pitt-Rivers, “Stranger, Guest, and the Hostile Host,” 29.

variety of contexts, both human and divine.

The general model “GOD IS A HOST” frames the particular model of God as a provider of food or one who spreads a banquet. Two domains are evident. The target domain “God” in the OT consists of the portrait of Israel’s deity, Yahweh. I will not attempt to classify the qualities of hospitality ascribed to God categorized by divine epithets such as *hwhy*, *pyhil* *gô :/yl* *][*, *yD^v¼* and the like. I have already noted that the source domain is not tied to any particular technical term. It is rather a social situation in which communal eating and drinking take place and is signaled by the presence of a wide range of terms having to do with eating, meals, and food. These two domains provide a rich fund of ideas which are available for potential interaction with one another.

4. A Working Definition

The breadth of the concept of hospitality in society renders several aspects of it outside the parameters of this study which is concerned with the provision of food and meals. Since its primary focus falls on the nature of God as a Host and not the anthropological dimensions of hospitality, this dissertation will treat the latter in summary fashion.

Elements that are a legitimate part of hospitality in the broad sense but nevertheless fall outside of my present concern are the provision of clothing and lodging, foot washing and other hygienic considerations, care for a person’s animals, acts of charity and social welfare in general, enforced hospitality, and the rendering of services for payment.

When hospitality is viewed as a meeting between two parties from either

a single realm or from two different ones, four resultant combinations are possible. The human welcome of other people fits the standard definition of hospitality and in this case, knowledge of ancient Near Eastern social customs is valuable background material. The divine reception of other gods forms another pairing which reveals some of a culture's theology and may illuminate social practice, particularly among royalty who have means and a close connection to the cult. The literature of the ancient Near East sometimes presents humans hosting divine beings. This pairing also reveals a theological perspective, but is not as central to the plan of this study as is the divine hosting of people which is a relatively rare concept.

Nevertheless, the issue of human hosting divine beings calls for special comment especially in relation to the concept of sacrifice in the OT. As already shown, sacrifice in Mesopotamia carefully attended to the "care and feeding" of the gods and the same idea was also present in ancient Egypt.⁴⁷ Eichrodt noted this thought and concluded, "An examination of the ritual and language of Israelite sacrifice with this in mind reveals unmistakable traces of this conception."⁴⁸ Several times, offerings like the $\mu y m i l \nu]$ and the $h \nu a i$ are called

⁴⁷ Serge Sauneron, *The Priests of Ancient Egypt*, trans. Ann Morrisett (New York: Grove, 1960) 84–85; Sabatino Moscati, *The Face of the Ancient Orient: A Panorama of Near Eastern Civilizations in Pre-Classical Times* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Vallentine, Mitchell, 1960; reprint, Chicago: Quadrangle, 1961) 119 (page citation is to the reprint edition). The "Hymn to Imhotep" (Late Period) mentions the daily requirements of water, wine, beer, milk, and burnt-offerings which satisfy the god (Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings*, vol. 3, *The Late Period* [Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980] 105).

⁴⁸ Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961) 1:142. For a comparative study of sacrifice in

“food” (אֱכָל אֱלֹהִים.⁴⁹ The altar was called “my table” (Ezek 44:16) and on one occasion the angel of Yahweh consumed meat and bread with fire (Judg 6:19–22). Beyond these specific references, the presence of the table with loaves, candelabra, and incense altar in the Tabernacle and Temple make sense as furniture for Yahweh’s residence where he could apparently relax and eat in a comfortable setting. But Eichrodt himself was aware of the possibility of twisting the evidence gained from the comparative study of religion and realized that sometimes elements may migrate from one culture to another and undergo a transformation of meaning. With regard to the comparative evidence “proving” that the God of Israel “ate” the sacrifices, Eichrodt observed,

All this proves no more than that, as regards material and ritual, the Israelite sacrifice *ultimately* derives from the conception of the feeding of the deity. But it is extremely doubtful whether this conception was still a *living* reality in Israel. . . . the whole tenor of ancient Israel’s belief in Yahweh is irreconcilable with the idea that God is fed by the sacrifice, bound up as this is with God’s dependence on man.⁵⁰

This statement is in harmony with the idea that Yahweh has no need to eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats, nor would he tell Israel if he were hungry because all the animals belong to him (Ps 50:9–13). Yahweh says, “There is no god besides me” in contrast to the people’s gods who eat the fat

ancient Israel and Ugarit, see Lucio Milano, “Codici alimentari, carne e commensalità nella Siria-Palestina di età pre-classica,” in *Sacrificio e società nel mondo antico*, ed. C. Grottanelli and N. F. Parise, 55–85 (Rome: Gius, Laterza & Figli, 1988).

⁴⁹ Lev 3:11, 16; Num 28:2, 24. The phrase “food of God” (אֱכָל אֱלֹהִים with pronominal suffixes) appears in Leviticus 21:6, 8, 17, 21, 22 and 22:25. An oblique reference to the ability of gods to enjoy the pleasures of drink appears in a parable-like passage in Judges 9:13, “But the vine answered, ‘Should I give up my wine, which cheers both gods and men, to hold sway over the trees?’”

⁵⁰ Eichrodt, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:143 (italics original).

and drink the wine of their sacrifices and offerings (Deut 32:37–39). Korpel commented on the uniqueness of this conception of God as lacking hunger.

It is one of the most ostensive differences between Ugarit and Israel that the Old Testament hardly ever describes YHWH as eating or drinking. On the contrary, the Old Testament emphasizes that only foreign gods eat the drink sacrifices, but not the God of Israel.⁵¹

The study of Israel's concept of sacrifice reveals a high degree of complexity (and there may be no single explanation for it) but whatever Israel thought about sacrifice, sustaining Yahweh was apparently not part of it.⁵² Speaking of the OT data that could possibly be pulled in to support the idea that Yahweh needed to be fed, Milgrom wrote, "These words, objects, and mores are only fossilized vestiges from a dim past, which shows no signs of life in the Bible."⁵³

Instead of conveying the idea of nutritional satisfaction for God, the food offerings of the Tabernacle and Temple (together with the idiomatic language that surrounds them) point as a complex whole to the concept of divine presence. The Tabernacle was a tangible expression that God had taken

⁵¹ Marjo Christina Annette Korpel, *A Rift in the Clouds: Ugaritic and Hebrew Descriptions of the Divine*, Ugaritisch-Biblische Literatur 8 (Münster: UGARIT-Verlag, 1990) 408. In addition, YHWH has no cups, beakers, or bowls with which to quench thirst (411).

⁵² John W. Rogerson observed that ever since Robertson Smith claimed (not demonstrated) that the earliest social units of Israel were essentially totemistic, the now-outdated idea that the achievement of divine-human communion lay at the heart of all sacrifices has persisted and that the theory of communion sacrifice even found its way into the authoritative lexicons of BDB and KB relative to the word *jōn* (*Anthropology and the Old Testament*, 26–27).

⁵³ Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus: 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 16 (New York: Doubleday, 1991) 440.

his place as resident in a special dwelling place in the midst of his people who could readily identify with the features of his “house” (Exod 25:8; 29:42–45).

The role of sacrifices and offerings then, has less to do with divine hospitality than it does with the fellowship of divine presence.⁵⁴ Richard Averbeck offered a fitting summary statement of this powerful symbolism.

The gifts of food offering and the various related idioms outlines above could be taken to imply that according to the OT the God of Israel actually ate food offerings. However, an integrated reading of the OT will suggest that according to OT priestly theology the real purpose of these idioms was to impress the people and the priests with the fact that God was actually physically present, dwelling in the tabernacle. . . . What better way could there be to communicate such an idea than to require that all the regular needs of a household should be supplied on a continual basis to the tabernacle and offered to its resident in an appropriate manner (i.e., through daily burnt offerings, etc.)?⁵⁵

Having set forth these preliminary considerations then, I propose the following working definition to serve the purposes of this dissertation.

⁵⁴ The “Bread of the Presence” (Exod 25:30), however, is especially suited for communicating the idea of divine hospitality. For example, John Hartley commented, “The table with the twelve loaves of bread on it represented the twelve tribes in fellowship with God. That is, God served as the host, having a meal prepared for the twelve tribes at his place of residence. This meal was eaten weekly by the priests as representatives of the people inside the holy chamber in the presence of God” (*Leviticus*, WBC 4 [Waco: Word, 1992] 402). On the uniqueness of this bread within the ritual complex, see Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into the Character of Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978) 209–10.

⁵⁵ Richard E. Averbeck, “Offerings and Sacrifices,” in *NIDOTTE*, vol. 4, 996–1022 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997) 999–1000. The notion of divine presence is central to Israel’s sanctuary and the portrait of the garden of Eden (Gen 2–3). For a discussion of the extensive verbal and ideological parallels between these two, see Gordon J. Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story,” in *“I Studied Inscriptions from before the Flood:” Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11*, ed. Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura, 399–404, vol. 4, *Sources for Biblical and Theological Study*, ed. David W. Baker (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994).

Hospitality is the voluntary offering and provision of food and drink to persons outside of one's immediate household, usually in the social context of a common meal which is governed by explicit and implicit standards of conduct. The host is the person responsible for the offer and provision of hospitality and the guest is its recipient.

B. Hospitality in the Literature of the Ancient Near East

The designation "ancient Near East" refers to a geographical and temporal zone with no definite boundaries. Geographically, the region is circumscribed by the Indian Ocean to the southeast and to the north by the Caucasus, the Black Sea, and the Caspian Sea. To the south, the Red Sea and the Sinai Peninsula constitute a formidable boundary, and even though Egypt developed its own system of writing and experience a relatively unique cultural development, it is customary to reckon Egypt as part of the ancient Orient only in the wider sense of the term.⁵⁶ This study of hospitality will embrace the Egyptian data because of Egypt's cultural influence on Israel. The Greco-Roman world is both ancient and literate but stands outside of this geographical area.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Wolfram von Soden, *The Ancient Orient: An Introduction to the Study of the Ancient Near East*, trans. Donald G. Schley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 1.

⁵⁷ For some helpful studies of Greco-Roman meal customs, see Willi Braun, *Feasting and Social Rhetoric in Luke 14*, SNTSMS 85 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Jean-Marie Dentzer, *Le motif du banquet couché dans le Proche-Orient et le monde grec du VII^e au IV^e siècle avant J.-C.*, Bibliothèque des écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome 246 (Rome: École française de Rome, 1982); Jerome H. Neyrey, "Ceremonies in Luke-Acts: The

Ancient Mesopotamia has provided the earliest evidence of a writing system and because this study is concerned with the literary data from this general region, the *terminus a quo* need not be clearly defined. But because this knowledge will be used to illuminate the historical background of the world in which the Bible took shape, for the purposes of this study the *terminus ad quem* must be early enough for this information to be justly describable as “background.” Yet I have already alluded to the thorny problem of literary dependence that so often insinuates itself into comparative studies. In addition to these difficulties, the historical location of an idea precedes its initial expression in composition which furthermore cannot be identical with the date of later copies of that original. This is true of both biblical and extra-biblical literature.

Still, at least two factors mitigate the impact of these considerations. First, the aim of this chapter is not to establish or even suggest literary dependence but rather to reveal a range of ideas that were to some degree present in the ancient world. Therefore it is not imperative to settle the date of any given document with much precision. Second, the evidence presented here does not need to be comprehensive in order for it to be useful. Therefore it is not necessary to depend on texts that are relatively late; indeed, most of the examples treated here are considerably earlier than the close of the OT. The

Case of Meals and Table-fellowship,” in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*, ed. J. Neyrey, 361–87 (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991); Sandra R. Shimoff, “Banquets: The Limits of Hellenization,” *JSJ* 27/4 (1996) 440–52; and Dennis E. Smith, “Social Obligation in the Context of Communal Meals: A Study of the Christian Meal in 1 Corinthians in Comparison with Graeco-Roman Communal Meals” (Th.D. diss., Harvard University Divinity School, 1980).

following texts are not presented in any strict chronological sequence or geographical ordering but are arranged for convenience by language groups.

1. Sumerian

Two Sumerian texts show banquets held in celebration of a completed temple building projects. In “The Hymn to the temple of Enki in Eridu,” Enki celebrated the construction of the temple É-engurra by traveling to Nippur. There, in hope of winning Enlil’s favor, Enki prepared a large feast to which the gods Enlil, An, Nintu, and the Anunna (the children of An) were invited.⁵⁸ The text not only connects temple building and banquets, but is one of several to mention seating arrangements.

In the shrine Nippur, Enki
 prepared a banquet for his father Enlil.
 An sat at the ‘place of honour’.
 Enlil was next to An.
 Nintu sat at the ‘big side’ (of the table).
 The Anunna seated themselves at their places.⁵⁹

The other temple hymn, “The Installation of Ningirsu of Lagash,” celebrates Gudea’s rebuilding of the É-ninnu shrine for Ningirsu in Lagash. To welcome Ningirsu’s return from Enki in Eridu, Gudea prepared a banquet in Ningirsu’s honor and invited the gods, An, Enlil, and Ninmah, seating them in

⁵⁸ Another text which mentions a banquet as the context for receiving Enlil’s blessing is “The Journey of Nanna to Nippur” (Samuel Noah Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology: A Study of Spiritual and Literary Achievement in the Third Millennium B.C.*, rev. ed. [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972] 47–49).

⁵⁹ A. J. Ferrara and S. B. Parker, “Seating Arrangements at Divine Banquets,” *UF* 4 (1972) 39 with reference to *OECT* I iv 5–10.

places of honor.

For Ningirsu he (Gudea) prepared a fine banquet.
An sat at the 'big side'.
Next to An was Enlil,
Next to Enlil
was Ninmah.⁶⁰

This same practice of honoring guests by seating arrangement is evident in a very different sort of text known as "Schooldays," composed about 2000 BCE.⁶¹ In desperation, an aspiring young scribe who was struggling in school convinced his father to invite the teacher home for a meal. The teacher, who had shown extreme disappointment in the student, is brought to the boy's home, seated in the "big chair," and thanked for his fine instruction. In addition to the meal, the father ordered special treatment for the honored guest who then converted his disapproving opinion regarding his young disciple.

Pour for him *irda*-oil, bring it to the table for him. Make fragrant oil flow like water on his stomach (and) back; I want to dress him in a garment, give him some extra salary, put a ring on his hand.⁶²

The text illuminates hospitality probably at its best, even though an ulterior motive is conspicuously present.

In "The Journey of Inanna to Eridu," there are two occasions for banquets: deception and celebration. In order to increase the prosperity of her

⁶⁰ Ferrara and Parker, "Seating Arrangements," 38–39 (Gudea Cylinder B XIX 17–21). See also Samuel Noah Kramer, "The Temple in Sumerian Literature," in *Temple in Society*, ed. Michael V. Fox, 1–16 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1988) 5.

⁶¹ Kramer, *Sumerians*, 237.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 239. See also Samuel Noah Kramer, *Schooldays: A Sumerian Composition Relating to the Education of a Scribe* (Philadelphia: University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, 1950).

city Erech and her own fame as well, Inanna traveled to Eridu, the city of Enki where she hoped to obtain the divine decrees (*me's*) that were considered fundamental to civilization. She planned to bring them to her city, and secure her unrivaled glory. As she approached the Abzu, the watery abyss where Enki dwelt, Enki was impressed with her charm and ordered his messenger Isimud to invite her to a banquet, issuing these instructions,

Give her to eat barley cake with butter,
 Pour for her cold water that freshens the heart,
 Give her to drink beer in the “face of the lion”
 At the holy table, the “Table of heaven,”
 Speak to Inanna words of greeting.⁶³

Inanna and Enki feasted together, and in a drunken state, Enki presented the decrees. But just after Inanna left Eridu by boat for Erech with the *me's*, Enki sobered up enough to realize that he had given up the *me's*. Enki dispatched his messenger Isimud and various sea monsters to regain the *me's* from Inanna while *en route* to Erech, but to no avail. When Inanna arrived in Erech with the coveted *me's*, there was a festive banquet.

Finally, there is a text which touches on the issue of food from the opposite perspective: judgment and deprivation. The “Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur” deals with the fall of Ur and the end of the Ur III kingdom in the twenty-fourth year of King Ibbi-Sin (2028–2004 BCE).⁶⁴ The text attributes the Gutian invasion of the city to the decree of An, Enlil, and Enki in

⁶³ Kramer, *Sumerians*, 161.

⁶⁴ Piotr Michalowski, *The Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur*, Mesopotamian Civilizations 1, gen. ed. Jerrold S. Cooper (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1989) 1.

response to various offenses against them by the people of Sumer. The poet tells of the city's plight and of Nanna-Sin's grief over his beloved capital city, causing him to plead with his father Enlil for relief. The description of the city's condition includes a detailed description of the loss of food which once nourished both king and god.

At the royal station that was on top of the platform there was no food,
 The king who was used to eating marvelous food grabbed at a (mere)
 ration,
 (As) the day grew dark, the eye (of the sun) was eclipsing, (the people)
 experienced hunger,
 There was no beer in his (the king's) beer-hall, there was no more malt (for
 making) it,
 There was no food for him in the palace, it was made unsuitable to live in,
 Grain filled not his lofty storehouse, he could not (sent there for supplies)
 to save his life.
 The grain stacks and grain depots of Nanna held no grain,
 The evening meal in the great dining hall of the gods was defiled,
 Beer, wine, and honey ceased (to flow) in the great dining hall,
 the butcher knife that used to slay sheep and oxen lay hungry in the grass,
 Its mighty oven no longer processed sheep and oxen, it no longer emitted
 the aroma (of roasting meat).⁶⁵

In summary, these Sumerian texts present banquets as celebrations for temple construction and moments of victory. Meals serve as gestures of goodwill and win the blessing of the honored guest. Details of protocol are limited to seating arrangements and information about menu is scarce. On one occasion, a guest took advantage of her host, robbing him while he was inebriated. The withdrawal of abundant food which caused celebrations to cease was not just a reason for lament, but was directly attributed to divine disfavor.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 55 (lines 303–13).

2. Akkadian

The literature of Babylonia and Assyria that is relevant to this study can be classified according to genre, falling into several categories: myth, wisdom, legal (treaty documents), historical, and oracular. One of the most significant texts to survive from ancient Mesopotamia is the creation epic known as the “Enuma Elish.” Tablet VI describes a banquet held by Marduk in celebration of the building of Babylon and his palace, Esagila. Speaking of Marduk, it reads,

The lord being on the lofty dais which they had built as his abode,
 The gods, his fathers, at his banquet he seated:
 “This is Babylon, the place that is your home!
 Make merry in its precincts, occupy its broad [places].”
 The great gods took their seats,
 They set up festive drink, sat down to a banquet.⁶⁶

Not only does this text connect temple building and banqueting, but from a more inclusive perspective, it conforms to a mythic pattern attested elsewhere in the ancient Near East. In the “Enuma Elish” the pattern takes the following, classic form.

Threat (I:109–II:91)
 Combat-victory (IV:33–122)
 Theophany of Divine Warrior (IV:39–60)
 Salvation of the Gods (IV:123–146; VI:1–44; cf. VI:126–127, 149–151)
 Fertility of the restored order (V:1–66; cf. VII:1–2, 59–83)
 Procession and victory shout (V:1–66)
 Temple built for Marduk (V:117–156; VI:45–68)
 Banquet (VI:69–94)
 Manifestation of Marduk’s universal reign (anticipated: IV:3–18; manifested VI:95–VII:144)⁶⁷

⁶⁶ ANET, 69 (tablet VI, lines 70–75).

⁶⁷ Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Imagery*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 302. The pattern is also evident in tablet I of the Apsu-Ea conflict, albeit in abbreviated form (Paul D. Hanson, “Zechariah 9 and the Recapitulation of an

All manuscripts are from the first millennium BCE but the date of composition is unlikely to be earlier than the period of Nebuchadnezzar I (1133–1116).⁶⁸ In contrast to an older Pan-Babylonian view⁶⁹ in which all ideas were thought to have migrated from east to west, it is generally recognized that the Babylonian version of this epic likely came to Mesopotamia from the west, particularly from the Ugaritic texts from Ras Shamra.⁷⁰ Because the ritual combat pattern is of particular interest to this dissertation, I will consider it in more detail when discussing the Ugaritic material.

Two other mythic texts touch briefly on the topic of hospitality. In “Adapa,” a semi-divine being by the same name who is also a priest at the temple of Ea in Eridu.⁷¹ Adapa is called to heaven to give an account to Anu for some misdeed. Having been warned by his father, Ea, that the food offered to him there would prove lethal, Adapa refused to take the “bread of life” and drink the “water of life” which Tammuz and Gishzida presented to him along with a garment and oil, which he took. The price of this refusal was Adapa’s

Ancient Ritual Pattern,” *JBL* 92/1 (1973) 54). The pattern also receives analysis from Thorkild Jacobsen, *Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976) 184.

⁶⁸ W. G. Lambert, “Enuma Elish,” in *ABD*, ed. David Noel Freedman, vol. 2, 526–28 (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 527.

⁶⁹ Friedrich Delitzsch, *Babel und Bibel* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1903).

⁷⁰ Thorkild Jacobsen, “The Battle between Marduk and Tiamat,” *JAOS* 88 (1968) 104–108. Hanson is aware of the scholarly debate concerning literary priority and is content to recognize that both the Mesopotamian and Canaanite versions of the basic story follow a common outline (Hanson, *Dawn of Apocalyptic*, 302).

⁷¹ *ANET*, 101–3.

forfeiture of immortality. The story presents a relatively unique instance of gods being hospitable to beings of lower status but is otherwise slim on details.

In the myth of “Nergal and Ereshkigal” a banquet provides the setting for a serious breach of protocol.⁷² The gods prepared a feast and desired that their sister Ereshkigal, goddess of the under-world have a share. But since she could not ascend from her post, she sent her vizier Namtar to heaven to get her serving. While there, Nergal offended Ereshkigal, by remaining seated when Namtar entered the banquet hall and all the gods rose in honor.⁷³ In payment for this offense, Ereshkigal engaged in an elaborate vendetta designed to bring Nergal to the under-world. While the degree of correspondence between the scene in the divine dining hall and a typical human situation must remain open, the text probably reflects an ancient concern with manners and ill effects on those who choose to flaunt them. In the Neo-Assyrian addition to this story, a few more details relevant to the elements of proper hospitality surface. Having been warned by Ea to refuse whatever food Ereshkigal would offer Nergal down below, Nergal declined to receive the offer of bread, meat, beer, and water for his feet.⁷⁴

The wisdom literature from Mesopotamia differs from the mythic texts in that it presents hospitality on a purely human level. “The Words of Ahiqar” is an Aramaic text of a story set in the courts of the Assyrian kings Sennacherib

⁷² ANET, 103–4, with Neo-Assyrian additions on 507–12.

⁷³ Robert W. Rogers, *Cuneiform Parallels to the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (New York: Abingdon, 1926) 131–32.

⁷⁴ ANET, 509.

(704–681) and Esarhaddon (680–669).⁷⁵ The story makes reference to Ahiqar's reception of a refugee Assyrian official, Nabuṣumiskun who was the object of a plot by Sennacherib. Ahiqar later had occasion to remind him, "I brought you to my house. There I sustained you as a man deals with his brother."⁷⁶ Ahiqar also commented on the virtue of hospitality in general.

Two things [which] are meet, and the third pleasing to Shamash: one who dr[inks] wine and give it to drink, one who guards wisdom, and one who hears a word and does not tell.—Behold that is dear [to] Shamash. But he who drinks wine and does not [give it to drink], and one whose wisdom goes astray, [and . . .] is seen.—⁷⁷

This virtue is also attested in the Babylonian "Counsels of Wisdom."

Give food to eat, beer to drink,
Grant what is asked, provide for and honour.
In this a man's god takes pleasure,
It is pleasing to Samaš, who will repay him with favour.
Do charitable deeds, render service all your days.⁷⁸

The social value prized here must be set in context of the generally negative Mesopotamian attitude with respect to foreigners. Oppenheim wrote,

⁷⁵ *ANET*, 427. A letter from Adad-shum-[usur] to his master, Ashurbanipal also epitomizes human generosity, but without invoking distinctions particular to hospitality. "The hungry have been sated; the lice-infested have been anointed; the naked have been clad in garments" (*ANET*, 627). A more specific reference to human hospitality appears in a humorous account of a physician of Isin who is welcomed by a scribe of Nippur who says, "Si tu viens à Nippur, en ma ville, je te revêtirai d'un vêtement . . . , je découperai pour toi . . . [une bonne pièce de viande?] . . . , et je servirai à boire deux cruchons de la meilleure bière." (Da Silva, "Symbolique du repas," 150).

⁷⁶ *ANET*, 428.

⁷⁷ *ANET*, 428.

⁷⁸ W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1960) 103 (lines 61–65). There is a related fragment of wisdom literature with this same idea in *ANET*, 426–27.

“the concept of, and terminology relating to, hospitality are conspicuously absent in Mesopotamia. This contrasts with the Old Testament.”⁷⁹

Treaty documents from Mesopotamia also shed some light on hospitality, but especially the lack of food, drink, and dwelling as punishment for treaty violation. The “Treaty Between Niqmepa of Alalakh and Ir-^dIM of Tunip” contains a demand that the vassal show hospitality to travelers from the suzerain’s country. The element of coercion in this example, however, reduces its value in terms of hospitality being voluntary, as defined above.

[If *families* from my land] enter your land to find subsistence, you must take them into custody in your land, and *feed* them, (but) whenever they want to [ret]urn to my land, you must gather them and return them to [my land], and you must not detain one single family in your land.⁸⁰

Two treaties present similar descriptions of judgment. The “Treaty Between Ashurnirari V of Assyria and Mati’ilu of Arpad” invokes these curses should Mati’ilu fail to support Ashurnirari in a military campaign:

May Adad, the canal inspector of heaven and earth, put an end to Mati’ilu, his land and the people of his land through hunger, want, and famine, so that they eat the flesh of their sons and daughters and it taste as good to them as the flesh of spring lambs. . . . Let the dust be their food, pitch their ointment, donkey’s urine their drink, rushes their clothing, let their sleeping place be in the corners (of *walls*).⁸¹

The vassal-treaties of Esarhaddon use comparable language but with considerably more imagination and detail. The following curses were wished on the vassal who dared to violate the treaty:

⁷⁹ Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, 78–79.

⁸⁰ *ANET*, 532 (section 9).

⁸¹ *ANET*, 533 (column iv).

. . . may a pregnant mother (and) her
daughter eat the flesh of your sons; in your extremity may you eat the
flesh of your sons [.].

(In) hunger may one man eat the flesh of another; may one man
clothe himself in another's skin; may dogs and swine eat your flesh⁸²

[. . . may food and water abandon you.]
[May want and famine, hunger and plagues]
[never be removed from you . . .⁸³

[. . . may the
earth not receive your corpses (in burial); may you be food in the belly
of a dog or pig⁸⁴

[. . . may tar and pitch be your food;]
[may the urine of an ass be your drink, may naptha be your ointment;]
[may duckweed be your covering.]
[May demon, devil (and) evil spirit select your houses.]⁸⁵

Just as rain does not fall from a brazen heaven
so may rain and dew not come upon your fields
and your meadows; may it rain burning
coals instead of dew on your land⁸⁶

Just as a starving ewe puts
[the flesh of her young] in her mouth, even so
may he [Shamash] feed you in your hunger
with the flesh of your brothers, your sons (and) your daughters⁸⁷

[Just as bread] and wine enter into the intestines,
[so may they] cause this curse to enter into your intestines

⁸² D. J. Wiseman, *The Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon* (London: British School of Archaeology in Iraq, 1958) 62–64 (lines 448–51).

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 66 (lines 479–81).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 66 (lines 483–84).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 66 (lines 490–93).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 70 (lines 530–33).

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 70 (lines 547–50).

[(and into) those of your sons,] and your daughters⁸⁸

[Ditto; just as honey is sweet, so may the blood of your]
 [women, your sons and your daughters be sweet in your mouth]
 [Ditto; just as you do not eat *sazpu raw*]
 [so may you taste and eat, while you are alive,]
 [your own flesh and the flesh of your wives, your sons
 and your daughters.]⁸⁹

Just as the inside of a hole is empty
 may your inside be empty⁹⁰

As when the water of a split water-bottle is
 scattered; so in a place of thirst and famine may
 your water-bottle be broken so that
 (that you die) from lack of water⁹¹

These images are every bit as repulsive as are the delicacies of a banquet attractive. The reverse side of divine hospitality is important to demonstrate for it shows the way in which literature develops a strand of thought by repeatedly using a theme or motif and then creatively turns that thought “on its head,” so to speak, forging what Frye referred to as a “demonic counterpart.”⁹²

A well-preserved historical text from the palace of Ashurnasirpal II presents a detailed description of a banquet ceremony which follows an account of military conquest and subsequent construction of a temple and

⁸⁸ Ibid., 72 (lines 560–62).

⁸⁹ Ibid., 72 (lines 568–72).

⁹⁰ Ibid., 78 (lines 641–42).

⁹¹ Ibid., 80 (lines 652–55).

⁹² Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982) 140.

royal palace in Calah which opened in 879 BCE.⁹³ These ceremonies are frequently mentioned in Assyrian royal inscriptions, but this text is unique in that it enumerates the menu, quantities, and also the number of provenience of the guests.⁹⁴ The guests included Ashur, “the great lord and the gods of all the land” plus 47,074 construction workers, 5,000 high officials who were delegates of the conquered territories, 16,000 persons of the local population (possibly slaves), and 1,500 palace and administrative officials totaling 69,574.⁹⁵ Upon its initial publication, Wiseman stated that it provides “what may well prove to be the oldest extant Assyrian menu.”⁹⁶ The items are carefully enumerated in terms of meat, wild game, eggs, bread, beer, vegetables, grain, fruit, and spices.⁹⁷ The count of animals approaches 20,000, not to mention some 34,000 birds of various kinds. The text ends with a glowing testimony from Ashurnasirpal himself:

The happy peoples of all the lands together with the people of Kalhu for ten days I feasted, wined, bathed, anointed and honoured them and then

⁹³ D. J. Wiseman, “A New Stela of Aššur-našir-pal II,” *Iraq* 14 (1952) 24–44. For another description of large-scale Assyrian banquets, see Karl Friedrich Müller, *Das Assyrische Ritual*, Teil I, *Texte zum Assyrischen Königsritual*, *Mitteilungen der Vorderasiatischen Gesellschaft* 41:3 (Leipzig: Hornets, 1937).

⁹⁴ In the assessment of translator Oppenheim (*ANET*, 558). Wiseman noted that the information provided by this text is similar to that given by Sennacherib when he opened his palace at Nineveh (“New Stela of Aššur-našir-pal II,” 29, with reference to text in Daniel David Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib*, University of Chicago Oriental Institute Publications 2 [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924] 116).

⁹⁵ Lines 104–5, 142–49.

⁹⁶ Wiseman, “New Stela of Aššur-našir-pal II,” 24–25.

⁹⁷ Lines 106–41.

sent them back to their lands in peace and joy.⁹⁸

On the whole, this text conforms admirably to the pattern of conquest, construction, and banquet which is so well-established in ancient Near Eastern myths.

Finally, two short oracular texts show gods hosting people. “An Oracular Dream concerning Ashurbanipal” from cylinder B of Ashurbanipal is dated in 648 BCE.⁹⁹ In response to the king’s prayer, the goddess Ishtar appeared to one of his servants and assured him that Ashurbanipal would have success against Te-umman, king of Elam. Speaking through the seer to Ashurbanipal, Ishtar says,

You shall stay here, where the dwelling of Nabu is. Eat food, drink wine, supply music, praise my divinity, while I go and do that work in order that you attain your heart’s desire.¹⁰⁰

In a similar text, from the “Oracles concerning Esarhaddon” (reigned 680–669 BCE) the king receives assurance of success.

Excellent food you will eat, excellent water you will drink; in your palace you will be comfortable. Your son, your grandson will exercise the royal power on the knees of the god Ninurta.¹⁰¹

Regarding the evidence from Mesopotamia as a whole, food and alcohol (as well as sex) function textually as powerful symbolic images which can be operative in a wide range of contexts.¹⁰² Given that these same matters have

⁹⁸ Lines 150–52.

⁹⁹ *ANET*, 451.

¹⁰⁰ *ANET*, 451.

¹⁰¹ *ANET*, 450 (from column vi).

¹⁰² Piotr Michalowski, “The Drinking Gods: Alcohol in Mesopotamian

potent symbolic value in contemporary society, specifying their significance in their ancient setting is difficult.¹⁰³ Michalowski claimed that the task is barely underway, making it prudent to regard most conclusions in this area of research as subject to substantial expansion and refinement.

We have only begun to unravel the complexities of such texts and of the multifold codes of consumptions of food and alcohol in Mesopotamia and the ancient near East but once we understand better the languages of these symbols in particular societies we shall be able to merge the results in comparative perspective.¹⁰⁴

In summary, it is possible to affirm the following conclusions. The Mesopotamian texts treated above present people hosting people, gods hosting gods, and rarely, gods hosting people—both times kings. In spite of the elaborate ritual surrounding cultic meals for the gods, no degree of friendship resulted from it. Oppenheim observed,

There is no trace in Mesopotamia of that *communio* between the deity and its worshipers that finds expression in the several forms of commensality observed in the sacrificial practices of circum-Mediterranean civilizations, as shown by the Old Testament in certain early instances and observed in Hittite and Greek customs.¹⁰⁵

The narrative pattern that includes conquest, building projects, and

Ritual and Mythology,” in *Drinking in Ancient Societies: History and Culture of Drinks in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Lucio Milano, 27–44, *History of the Ancient Near East / Studies 6* (Padova: Sargon, 1994) 43–44. In the same volume see also Jean Bottéro, “Boisson, banquet et vie sociale en Mésopotamie,” 3–13 as well as Jean Bottéro, *Textes culinaires Mésopotamiens*, *Mesopotamian Civilizations 6*, gen. ed. Jerrold S. Cooper (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1995) and Jean-Jacques Glassner, “L’hospitalité en Mésopotamie ancienne: aspect de la question de l’étranger,” *ZA 80* (1990) 60–75.

¹⁰³ Michalowski, “Drinking Gods,” 43.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁰⁵ Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, 191 (*italics original*).

festive celebration stands out in clear relief, whether in mythic or historical texts. While it is not surprising that the abundance of food is considered a divine blessing, the treaty curses show that judgment may take the form of famine and the replacement of abundant food with substances usually regarded as inedible. Transgressions of protocol constituted a serious offense. On the human level, hospitality is a virtue, though probably not widely practiced.

3. Egyptian

Texts from Old Kingdom into the Late Period span over two thousand years of history and represent a wide variety of genres, not to mention changing ideas about religion and society. Their consideration together in this section makes no statement about the nature or pace of development in Egypt's thought which was undoubtedly complex. Speaking only of Egyptian religion, Moscati concluded that "it repels and baffles us with the endless multiplicity of its forms, the obscurity which is characteristic of so many of them, and its many contradictions There is nothing more difficult than to describe and define them."¹⁰⁶ With that in mind, it is of some consolation that the Egyptian evidence pertinent to hospitality is relatively sparse in relation to that obtained from Mesopotamia and Ugarit.

Many references to food, clothing, and shelter properly belong to a discussion of charity and social justice. They appear, for example, in several

¹⁰⁶ Moscati, *Face of the Ancient Orient*, 111.

Old and Middle Kingdom funerary inscriptions which catalogue the virtues of the deceased. A typical testimony reads, “I gave bread to the hungry, clothing to the naked.”¹⁰⁷ This same virtue is extolled in texts that belong to the genre of instructions. Maxim 22 of “The Instruction of Ptahhotep” (Old Kingdom, 6th Dynasty?) says,

Sustain your friends with what you have,
You have it by the grace of god;
Of him who fails to sustain his friends
One says, “a selfish *ka*.”¹⁰⁸

Charity is also a positive trait in two tales, “The Eloquent Peasant” and “The Story of Sinuhe,” both from the Middle Kingdom.¹⁰⁹

References to divine hospitality toward people do not describe meals or any specific situation but rather speak generally of the gods’ provision for humans, both in this life and in the life to come. For instance, the “Memphite Theology” text from the Old Kingdom teaches that Ptah gives food and

¹⁰⁷ From the “Autobiography of Harkhuf” (Old Kingdom, 6th Dynasty) (Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings*, vol. 1, *The Old and Middle Kingdoms* [Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973] 25). See also the “Inscription of Nefer-Sheshem-Re Called Sheshi” (Old Kingdom, 6th Dynasty), the “Stela of Intef Son of Sent” (Middle Kingdom, 12th Dynasty), as well as the “Book of the Dead” (New Kingdom, 26th Dynasty); (Ibid., 17, 22; Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings*, vol. 2, *The New Kingdom* [Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976] 128).

¹⁰⁸ Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 1:69. See also Maxim 34 (Ibid., 1:72) as well as passages from “The Instruction of King Amenemhet I for His Son Sesostris I” (Middle Kingdom), “The Instruction of Any” (New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty), “The Instruction of Amenemope” (New Kingdom); (Ibid., 1:136, 2:141–41, 2:161).

¹⁰⁹ Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 1:172, 1:227.

provisions to all.¹¹⁰ “The Prayers of Paheri” include a vision of the afterlife in which Paheri becomes a living *ba* which “shall thrive on bread, water, and air” and that he shall “eat bread beside the god at the great terrace of the Ennead’s Lord.”¹¹¹ The “Hymn to Amon-Re” (Middle Kingdom) praises the god for making fruit trees for humanity.¹¹² A stela containing hymns from King Wahankh Intef II to Re and Hathor mentions the divine communion daily enjoyed by the living king and Horus “who feasts with you on your foods, who eats with you of the offerings.”¹¹³

In summary, the paucity of texts from such a broad historical period reveal little of what the Egyptians believed and practiced with regard to hospitality. Certainly generosity was a virtue, but we know little the customs of welcoming and entertaining guests. The conviction that material abundance is a divine blessing is neither surprising nor unique. The lone reference to the fellowship between king and god at table is of marginal interest but is too isolated to be of much significance.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 1:55. See also “The Instruction of Merikare,” “The Great Hymn to the Aten,” “The Prayer to Amun,” (Ibid., 1:106, 2:98, 2:112).

¹¹¹ Ibid., 2:17–18. In “The Hymn to Imhotep” (Late Period) the daily requirements of water, wine, beer, milk, and burnt-offerings both satisfy the god and provide a surplus which he then uses to feed the worthy spirits of the dead (Ibid., 3:105–6).

¹¹² ANET, 366.

¹¹³ Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 1:95.

4. Hittite

The Hittite evidence for understanding hospitality is even slimmer than the Egyptian. Two texts portray gods hosting other gods. The Old Hittite “Myth of Illuyanka” was part of the yearly *Purulli* festival and survives in two versions.¹¹⁴ In the older one, the serpent (*illuyanka*) has defeated the storm god in battle and is therefore lured by the goddess Inara to a banquet where the serpent ate and drank so much that it was unable to return to its hole, allowing the storm god to kill it.

In contrast the deceptive nature of this meal, the repast between the Sea and Kumarbis (the father of the gods) in the cosmic myth, “The Song of Ullikummis” fosters an improvement in relationship and provides a glimpse into the role of music in hospitality. To assuage the anger of Kumarbis, the Sea invites him to a banquet with these words,

Why hast thou come in anger toward (my) house? Fear has seized the house, and fright the house-slaves. For thee cedarwood is already split, food is already prepared. The musicians hold their instruments in readiness for thee day and night. So arise and come to my house!¹¹⁵

The ideas connected with ritual meals in Hittite religion are of greater relevance to this study.¹¹⁶ Billie Jean Collins described the rituals that were performed when there was a need for divine intervention. The client would have an animal butchered and prepared, set a table, invite the god(s) to eat, and

¹¹⁴ *ANET*, 125–26.

¹¹⁵ *ANET*, 122 of *KUB*, xxxiii, 98 ii 1–30.

¹¹⁶ Bernhard Rosenkranz, “Kultisches Trinken und Essen bei den Hethitern,” in *Documentum asiae minoris antiquae: Festschrift für Heinrich Otten*, ed. E. Neu and C. Rüster, 283–289 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1988).

then feast together with them, hoping to encourage a reciprocal act of kindness.¹¹⁷ For example, in order to remove the effects of transgression, one officiant called on the gods with these words:

Who(ever) is hungry, who(ever) is thirsty (among) the gods, come, eat and drink, and join with me. From the house and city may you cleanse the evil impurity, bloodshed, perjury, sin, and curse.¹¹⁸

Likewise, to remove a plague that was afflicting an army, the worshippers prepare a billy goat, sheep and pig and then address the god who brought the plague and say,

Let that deity eat and drink, let him be friendly to the land of Ḫatti and to the army of the land of Ḫatti. Let him turn in favor (to the army).¹¹⁹

There were two seasonal festivals in the Hittite cult, one in autumn and one in the spring. Besides the various activities of these prolonged occasions, the fall ritual included the offering of sheep, bread, and beer to the image that has been carried to the sacred *ḫuwaši*-stone. The participants then partake of a banquet while the *ḫazgara*-women provide entertainment for the god.¹²⁰ The spring ceremony is similar.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Billie Jean Collins, "Ritual Meals in the Hittite Cult," in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, ed. Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki, *Religions in the Graeco-Roman World*, vol. 129, ed. R. van den Broek and others, 77–92 (Leiden: Brill, 1995) 78.

¹¹⁸ Collins, "Ritual Meals in the Hittite Cult," 91, of *KBo* 10.45 iv 11–15.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, of *KUB* 9.32 rev. 14–19.

¹²⁰ For the text of these two rituals, see O. R. Gurney, *Some Aspects of Hittite Religion*, The Schweich Lectures of the British Academy, 1976 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) 27.

¹²¹ See also A. Archi, "Das Kultmahl bei den Hethitern," *Türk Tarih Kurumu Kongresi Yayinlari* 8 (1979) 197–213.

In summary, the meager Hittite evidence reveals that meals could serve as occasions of deception and enhancement of an interpersonal relationship. Beyond this, the evidence testifies to the belief that table fellowship did exist between gods and mortals, either periodically for worship or on special occasions when a show of divine favor was needed. In no case that I am aware of does a divine being ever host a human being.

5. Ugaritic

The archaeological discoveries at Ras Shamra have produced epistolary and administrative texts from ancient Ugarit, but the only material that is relevant to this study of hospitality is from the genre of myth.¹²² J. B. Lloyd has surveyed the use of the banquet theme in Ugaritic narrative and discerned the existence of three basic scenes: the preparations for a banquet, the issuing of invitations, and the meal itself.¹²³ The last two scenes are typically described by stylized formulaic expressions showing clear parallelism and merismus.¹²⁴ Noting that the divine banquet theme was commonly known among West Semitic people groups, Lloyd is not surprised to find it in the OT as well, particularly in Exodus 24 and Jeremiah 51.

In the Old Testament, we find that the formulae used in Ugaritic divine

¹²² In a letter addressed to “Whomever,” an apprentice scribe named Ithatilli makes an attempt at humor by using overwrought expressions to request a cup of wine (RS 16.265).

¹²³ J. B. Lloyd, “The Banquet Theme in Ugaritic Narrative,” *UF* 22 (1990) 189.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 176.

banquet scenes are not present. However, below the surface level of the language used in the Old Testament, there are narratives that depend upon the notion of divine banquet and of “anthropomorphic polytheism”.¹²⁵

The Baal-Anat cycle is the longest of the Ugaritic myths and contains many meal scenes. It falls into three parts: the conflict between Baal and Yamm, the construction of Baal’s palace, and the conflict between Baal and Mot.¹²⁶ The two conflict stories follow a similar pattern¹²⁷ and scholarly discussions of their relationship are not relevant to the issue of illuminating the nature of divine banquets. Of the two, the Baal-Yamm story is the more informative.

Although the sequence of tablets is not beyond dispute,¹²⁸ the story of Baal and Yamm soon finds El in his banqueting hall (*bt mrzh*) holding a celebration where Yamm’s name is changed to “the darling of El” (*KTU* 1.1.4.1–32). The menu for this happy occasion includes freshly slaughtered oxen, sheep, bulls, rams, yearling calves, lambs and kids. In the next tablet, envoys of Yam-Nahar arrive at the mount of Lel where the gods had sat down to eat, with Baal at a place of honor beside El (*KTU* 2.1.19–29).

The story of Baal’s palace contains more elaborate descriptions of banquets. Its beginning is not extant and in the first scene an elaborate banquet is spread for Baal. The occasion is uncertain nor is it clear who is

¹²⁵ Ibid., 191.

¹²⁶ Respectively *KTU* 1.1–2, 1.3–4, and 1.5–6.

¹²⁷ Hanson, *Dawn of Apocalyptic*, 302,

¹²⁸ John C. L. Gibson, *Canaanite Myths and Legends*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1978) 3.

providing the feast.¹²⁹ What is more clear is the centrality of music, meat, alcohol and vessel used to hold it.¹³⁰

He did rise, he set (the table) and fed him;
 he divided a breast before him,
 with a salted knife he did carve a fatling.
 He did stand up, he spread a banquet and gave him drink;
 he gave a cup into his hand(s),
 a flagon into his two hands,
 a large jar, huge to see,
 a cask of mighty men,
 a holy cup which no woman could regard,
 a flagon which no goddess could look upon;
 he took a thousand pitchers of wine,
 ten thousand he mixed in his mixture.
 One did rise, one changed and sang;
 the cymbals were in the hands of the minstrel;
 the sweet-voiced hero sang
 over Baal in the recesses of Zephon. (KTU 1.3.1.4-22)¹³¹

In the course of securing El's permission for Baal to build his palace, two other dining scenes occur and are described in short compass.¹³² With El's blessing on the project, Baal invited Kothar-and-Khasis, the craftsman of the gods, to a meal where plans of the palace are discussed. Kothar-and-Khasis were given a seat of special honor.

¹²⁹ KTU 1.3.1.2 reads *rdmn* which may be the Akkadian *Radmānu* or some minor deity (Gibson, *Canaanite Myths and Legends*, 46) or the supreme god El himself (Walter Beyerlin, ed., *Near Eastern Religious Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, OTL [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978] 192).

¹³⁰ Large amounts of wine were typical at *marzeah*-feasts (Philip J. King, "Using Archaeology to Interpret a Biblical Text: The *Marzeah* Amos Denounces," *BAR* 14/4 (1988) 42-43).

¹³¹ Gibson, *Canaanite Myths and Legends*, 46. For a sample of seven translations and discussion, see E. Lipiński, "Banquet en l'Honneur de Baal: CTA 3 (V AB), A, 4-22," *UF* 2 (1970) 75-77.

¹³² KTU 1.4.3.37-44 and 1.4.4.31-38.

Afterwards Kothar-and-Khasis did arrive;
 they did set an ox before him,
 a fatling too in front of him;
 they made ready a seat and he was seated
 on the right hand of the mightiest Baal,
 while [the gods] did eat and drink. (KTU 1.4.5.106–10)¹³³

After the palace was completed, Baal held a festive celebration and invited the seventy sons of Athirat plus their consorts. After an account of animals being prepared and invitations sent forth, the text provides a full description of the lavish event.

he did supply the gods with rams (and) with wine,
 he did supply the goddesses with ewes [(and) with wine]
 he did supply the gods with seats (and) with wine,
 he did supply the goddesses with thrones [(and) with wine],
 he did supply the gods with tuns of wine,
 he did supply the goddesses with casks [of wine]
 while the gods did eat (and) drink,
 and they were supplied with a suckling of the teat;
 with a salted knife they did carve a fatling;
 they drank flagons of wine,
 the blood [of trees from] cups of gold. (KTU 1.4.6.47–59)¹³⁴

The only other reference to meals in this story appears in Baal's sinister invitation for the insatiate Mot to come from the under-world to Zephon for a meal, thus removing him from his sphere of power (KTU 1.4.7.42–52). This invitation angers Mot who only has an appetite for human flesh and blood, and thus sets up the conflict central to the third story.

These stories manifest an ancient ritual pattern which has already been seen in the Akkadian literature. Hanson has provided the most common reconstruction of the Baal-Yamm conflict as follows.

¹³³ Gibson, *Canaanite Myths and Legends*, 61–62.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 63–64.

Threat (2.1[137])
 Combat-Victory (2.4[68])
 Temple Built (4[51])
 Banquet (4.6.39ff. [51])
 Manifestation of Baal's Universal Reign (anticipated: 2.4.9–10 [68];
 manifested: 4.7.9–12 [51])
 Theophany of the Divine Warrior (4.7.27–39 [51])
 Fertility of Restored Order (anticipated: 4.5.68–71 [51];
 effected 4.17.18–30 [51]; cf. 6.3.6–7, 12–13 [49])¹³⁵

In summary of the Baal-Anat cycle, banquets provide occasions of celebration for naming and house building. On these special affairs, meat and wine are abundant, guests sit in places of honor, and there is musical entertainment. Meals also serve as occasions of regular fellowship and in one instance, a meal is part of a deceptive scheme.

Ugaritic literature furnishes other instances of meals and banqueting beyond those already discussed. In the story of Aqhat, Daniel hosted the gods for seven days, hoping that El would give him a son.¹³⁶ Upon receiving such assurance, Daniel held a seven-day-long feast in joyful anticipation of the birth of this son, Aqhat (*KTU* 1.17.2.24–38). After Aqhat was born and grown, Daniel saw Kothar-and-Khasis coming to his home with a gift of bow and arrows for Aqhat. Daniel welcomed him and instructed his wife Danatay to slaughter a young lamb and fix a meal for the divine guest who ate with him and presented the gift to Aqhat (*KTU* 1.17.5.13–33).¹³⁷ Sometime later, both Aqhat and the

¹³⁵ Hanson, "Zechariah 9 and Ancient Ritual Pattern," 55. For a similar explanation, see William R. Millar, *Isaiah 24–27 and the Origin of Apocalyptic*, HSM 11, ed. Frank Moore Cross, Jr. (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976) 71–81.

¹³⁶ *KTU* 1.17.1.16–34. See the discussion by Matitahu Tsevat, "Eating and Drinking, Hosting and Sacrificing in the Epic of Aqhat," *UF* 18 (1986) 345–50.

¹³⁷ For an eight-part comparison of this scene with Abraham's reception

goddess Anat are at a feast together when Anat tried to persuade Aqhat to sell her the coveted weapon. In order to soften Aqhat to her suggestion, she offered him delicacies from the table.

Eat of food, ho!
 Drink of the liquor of wine, ho!
 Drink goblets of wine.
 With beautiful knife, slaughter? fatlings.
 They drink goblets of wine,
 In cups of god, the juice of vine-stocks. (KTU 1.17.6.2-5)¹³⁸

When Aqhat preferred to keep his bow, Anat offered him immortality that Baal would guarantee, likening it to a feast.

And Baal when he gives life gives a feast,
 Gives a feast to the life-given and gives him drink;
 Sings and chants over him,
 Sweetly serenad[es] him:
 So give I life to Aqhat the Youth. (KTU 1.17.6.30-33)¹³⁹

Aqhat's refusal to budge and relinquish his bow and arrows incited Anat lure him to a meal where her bungling attendant Yatpan struck him down yet failed to recover the weapon (KTU 1.18.4.7-1.19.1.4). Aqhat's sister, Pughat vowed to avenge her brother's death. Disguised as Anat and secretly armed with a dagger, she is received in the tent of Yatpan and served wine (KTU 1.19.4.204-

of the three visitors in Genesis 18, see Paolo Xella, "L'episode de Dnil et Kothar (KTU 1.17 [=CTA 17] v 1-31) et Gen. XVIII 1-16," *VT* 28/4 (1978) 485.

¹³⁸ Richard J. Clifford, "Proverbs IX: A Suggested Ugaritic Parallel," *VT* 25/3 (1975) 300-1. He likens this invitation formula to that of Lady Wisdom and Dame Folly in Proverbs 9 as well as the invitation in Isaiah 55 (Richard J. Clifford, "Isaiah 55: Invitation to a Feast," in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Carol L. Meyers and M. O'Connor [Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983] 27-35).

¹³⁹ *ANET*, 151.

24).¹⁴⁰ Before describing the resolution of the conflict, the tablet breaks off.

In summary of the Aqhat story, a number of meals serve various functions. They provide occasions for hosting the gods in hopes of a favor, celebrating the reception of good news, welcoming a divine visitor bringing a gift, bargaining over a piece of personal property, and plots to commit murder. It is also noteworthy that the divine conferral of eternal life is cast in terms of a feast.

In addition to the Baal-Anat cycle and the story of Aqhat, there are three other shorter texts which touch on the subject of hospitality and banquets and deserve some attention. In *KTU* 1.108 (RS 24.252), Rāpi'u seems to be the guest of honor at a banquet where El, Athtart, and Hadd are seated next to each other.¹⁴¹ If this understanding is correct, it constitutes another attestation of deities holding seats of honor at divine banquets, a feature already noted in one other Ugaritic text and two Sumerian temple hymns.¹⁴²

Two other texts provide important testimony to the existence of a feast at Ugarit known across the ancient Near East as a *marzeah* (Greek *qīāsō*" or

¹⁴⁰ Victor H. Matthews discusses this story in connection with the deceit of Sisera by Jael, mentioning a parallel with Judith and Holofernes ("Hospitality and Hostility in Judges 4," *BTB* 21/1 [1991] 18).

¹⁴¹ Following the interpretation of Simon B. Parker ("The Feast of Rāpi'u," *UF* 2 [1970] 249, as well as Ferrara and Parker, "Seating Arrangements at Divine Banquets," 37). The fragmentary text presents many difficulties and Baruch Margulis defends a translation which does not specify seating arrangements ("A Ugaritic Psalm [RS 24.252]," *JBL* 89 [1970] 293).

¹⁴² *KTU* 1.4.5.106-10 as well as "The Hymn to the temple of Enki in Eridu" and "The Installation of Ningirsu of Lagash."

sumposion).¹⁴³ The Hebrew word זָרְחָה appears only twice in the OT (Jer 16:5; Amos 6:7), but other biblical allusions to *marzeah*-like celebrations portray these banquets as times of mourning and revelry for the dead, accompanied by drunkenness and sacral sexual acts.¹⁴⁴ Pope offers the following summary of the feast as illuminated by Ugaritic, biblical, and rabbinic evidence together with the inscriptions from Palmyra.

From the various strands of evidence, we gather that the *marzēah* was a religious institution which included families and owned houses for meetings and vineyards for supply of wine, that the groups met periodically to celebrate seven-day feasts with rich food and drink and

¹⁴³ The word is attested twice in biblical Hebrew (Jer 16:5, Amos 6:7). The literature on this subject is extensive. Studies that relate the *marzeah* to a biblical text include Susan Ackerman, “A *Marzēah* in Ezekiel 8:7–13?” *HTR* 82/3 (1989) 267–81; Bernhard A. Asen, “The Garlands of Ephraim: Isaiah 28.1–6 and the *marzēah*,” *JSOT* 71 (1996) 73–87; Hans M. Barstad, *The Religious Polemics of Amos*, VTSup 34 (Leiden: Brill, 1984); Jared J. Jackson, “Style in Isaiah 28 and a Drinking Bout of the Gods (RS 24.258)” in *Rhetorical Criticism: Essays in Honor of James Muilenberg*, ed. Jared J. Jackson and Martin Kessler, PTMS 1, 85–98 (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1974); King, “Using Archaeology to Interpret a Biblical Text,” 34–44; Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 7C (Garden City: Doubleday, 1977) 210–29; and Gary A. Rendsburg, “The Mock of Baal in 1 Kings 18:27,” *CBQ* 50 (1988) 414–17. Studies of the *marzeah* in a wider context include Otto Eissfeldt, “Etymologische und archäologische Erklärung alttestamentlicher Wörter,” *OrAnt* 5 (1966) 165–76; David B. Bryan, “Texts Relating to the *Marzeah*: A Study of an Ancient Semitic Institution” (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1973); and Jonas C. Greenfield, “The *Marzeah* as a Social Institution,” *Acta Antiqua* 22 (1974) 451–55. Studies that deal with the *marzeah* at Ugarit include Otto Eissfeldt, “Kultvereine in Ugarit,” in *Ugaritica VI*, Mission de Ras Shamra 17, 187–95 (Paris: Geuthner, 1969); Marvin H. Pope, “A Divine Banquet at Ugarit,” in *The Use of the Old Testament in the New and Other Essays: Studies in Honor of William Franklin Stinespring*, ed. James M. Eifird, 170–203 (Durham: Duke University Press, 1972); “The Cult of the Dead at Ugarit,” in *Ugarit in Retrospect: Fifty Years of Ugarit and Ugaritic*, ed. Gordon D. Young, 159–79 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1981); and Patrick D. Miller, Jr., “The *MRZH* Text,” in *The Claremont Ras Shamra Tablets*, ed. L. Fisher, 37–49, *AnOr* 48 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1971).

¹⁴⁴ Pope, *Song of Songs*, 216.

sometimes with sexual orgies.¹⁴⁵

In *KTU* 1.114 (RS 24.258) El invited the gods to a banquet¹⁴⁶ where wine flowed freely.¹⁴⁷ El became so drunk that he had to be helped home, where he saw a “creeper” with two horns and a tail, eventually collapsing in his own excrement. Lines 15–16 read,

El sat in his *mrzḥ*
[El] drank [wi]ne till sated,
Must till inebriated.¹⁴⁸

This reference to the *marzeah* is quite old but concurs with the earliest data that was previously available, though separated by nearly a millennium.¹⁴⁹ This text corresponds with RS 1957.702 which deals with a “*marziḥ*” which Shamumanu established in his house. Miller has claimed that the document is a legal contract between Shamumanu and the other members of the *marziḥ*, stating its obligations and stipulations, though Dahood interprets it as a judicial statement having to do with an accusation against the

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 219.

¹⁴⁶ Following de Moor, it is more likely that *mšd* in line 1 means “game” that El offered than Margulis’ claim that it means a “feast” which El held. Either way, the setting is clearly a banquet (Johannes C. de Moor, “B. Margulis on RŠ 24.258,” *UF* 2 [1970] 347; Baruch Margulis, “A New Ugaritic Farce [RŠ 24.258],” *UF* 2 [1970] 132–33).

¹⁴⁷ According to Michalowski, “Drinking Gods,” 44, an extensive study of this banquet is found in the work by Dennis Pardee, *Les textes para-mythologiques de la 24^e campagne (1961)*, with an archaeological notice by Jacques-Claude Courtois, *Ras Shamra-Ougarit 4* (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les civilisations, 1988) 13–74. See also Cristiano Grottanelli, “Ancora sull’ebbrezza del dio El (*KTU* 1.114),” *Vicino Oriente* 7 (1988) 177–88.

¹⁴⁸ Pope, “Divine Banquet at Ugarit,” 172.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 202, noting also that “El’s experience in his *marzēah* mirrors that of his worshipers in theirs” (Ibid., 201, cf. Judg 9:13; Prov 23:33; Isa 28:7).

owner of the house who is presumably also the treasurer of the club.¹⁵⁰

Drawing on data from other texts, Miller offers this description:

The *marziḥ* was a social and religious institution, a cultic association of persons who engaged in apparently regular festive celebration and banqueting. At least in part the association appears to have engaged in mourning rites and memorials for the dead through their eating and drinking activities.¹⁵¹

In summary, the discussion of these last three texts confirms the importance of seating arrangements and sheds some light on the custom of the *marzeaḥ*-feast, establishing its antiquity before the period of the Bible's composition.

6. Israelite

An understanding of Israelite hospitality can be deduced from the texts of the OT which describe people offering food or lodging to guests. Unlike the previous discussions, however, this section will not consider ritual or symbolic meals but limit itself to hospitality as practiced in society at large.

The classic example of hospitality in the OT is Abraham's reception of the three visitors initially called $\mu\upsilon\upsilon\upsilon\eta\eta\alpha\}$ (Gen 18:1-8). Even though the narrative seems to effortlessly switch to identifying one of these guests as Yahweh (18:13), Abraham showed no awareness of the divinity of his company upon their arrival. Abraham rushed from his tent to meet them, showed proper

¹⁵⁰ Miller, "MRZḤ Text," 42; Mitchell Dahood, "Additional Notes on the MRZḤ Text," in *The Claremont Ras Shamra Tablets*, ed. L. Fisher, 51-54, AnOr 48 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1971) 54.

¹⁵¹ Miller, "MRZḤ Text," 38.

respect by bowing, offered water for their feet and a place to rest. Then he and his wife Sarah prepared bread, a young calf, plus curds and milk for the meal. This sterling example of hospitality became a frequent topic of reflection in later Jewish writings.¹⁵²

From a broader study of hospitality in the OT and the ancient Near East, Victor Matthews derived seven codes of conduct that together seek to maintain the honor of persons, their households and communities by receiving and offering protection to strangers.

- (1) There is a sphere of hospitality which comprises a zone of obligation for both the individual and the village or town within which they have the responsibility to offer hospitality to strangers. The size of the zone is of course smaller for the individual than for the urban center.
- (2) The stranger must be transformed from being a potential threat to becoming an ally by the offer of hospitality.
- (3) The invitation of hospitality can only be offered by the male head of household or a male citizen of a town or village.
- (4) The invitation may include a time span statement for the period of hospitality, but this can then be extended, if agreeable to both parties, on the renewed invitation of the host.
- (5) The stranger has the right of refusal, but this could be considered an affront to the honor of the host and could be a cause for immediate hostilities or conflict.
- (6) Once the invitation is accepted, the roles of the host and the guest are set by the rules of custom.
 - (a) The guest must not ask for anything.

¹⁵² M. J. Selman, "Hospitality," in *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed., ed. D. R. W. Wood and others, 484–86 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996) 484–85. T. Desmond Alexander has noted several parallels between Abraham and Lot in Genesis 18–19. Together with a lengthy discussion in praise of Lot's hospitality (*Pirqe R. El.* 25), these facts support the claim that in spite of the inconsistent portrayal of this man in the book of Genesis, hospitality is Lot's defining mark of righteousness and that 2 Peter 2:8–9 accurately reflects this tradition by referring to him as "a righteous man" ("Lot's Hospitality: A Clue to His Righteousness," *JBL* 104/2 [1985] 289–91).

- (b) The host provides the best he has available—despite what may be modestly offered in the initial offer of hospitality.
 - (c) The guest is expected to reciprocate immediately with news, predictions of good fortune, or expressions of gratitude for what he has been given, and praise of the host's generosity and honor.
 - (d) The host must not ask personal questions of the guest. These matters can only be volunteered by the guest.
- (7) The guest remains under the protection of the host until he/she has left the zone of obligation of the host.¹⁵³

These codes of conduct constitute a checklist of what counted for good hospitality in Israel. Even though one cannot expect each element to be explicitly present in any given narrative passage, the list provides a heuristic tool for evaluating hospitality scenes and helps alert the reader to systematic violations of protocol.¹⁵⁴

The second chapter of this dissertation noted the importance of considering the total speech context in which an utterance occurs. Rebecca Wright has applied tools of linguistic pragmatics to the text of the OT, studying the way direct and indirect illocutions and conversational implicature function to reveal the nature of genuine hospitality.¹⁵⁵ She produced a fluid pattern of Israelite hospitality set in terms of “felicity conditions” which specify how potential hosts and guests establish a friendly relationship (see Table 1). Wright

¹⁵³ Abstracted from Matthews, “Hospitality and Hostility in Judges 4,” 13–15.

¹⁵⁴ In his study of Jael and Sisera in Judges 4, Matthews has catalogued the extensive breaches of hospitality protocol and noted that Sisera's request for something to drink from Jael is unique. “No other example of hospitality ritual in the Hebrew Bible contains a request by the guest for anything from his host.” (Ibid., 18).

¹⁵⁵ Wright, “Establishing Hospitality in the Old Testament.”

then applied this pattern to several accounts of hospitality in the OT, illuminating some of their more obscure features.

The motives for showing hospitality in the ancient Near East varied. For example, in Egypt the motive for social charity in general was partly altruistic in that it pleased the gods and partly pragmatic in that it contributed to a moral life which would be rewarded in eternity and also in that generosity tended to predispose others to reciprocate as need arose.¹⁵⁶ These motives may very well have been felt in ancient Israel, but must be set in relation to a decidedly historical and theological one. As the people of Yahweh, Israel had experienced deliverance from slavery and were therefore commanded to befriend strangers as an act of gratitude. Rusche rightly observed,

Das sogenannte „Bundesbuch“, ältestes israelisches Gesetz, wird einem Volk gegeben, das Gott aus der Rechtlosigkeit der Knechtschaft in Ägypten herausgeholt hat, um es unter Sein Recht zu stellen. . . . So wird Dankbarkeit gegen Gott zum Hauptmotiv israelitischer Gastfreundschaft.¹⁵⁷

Social charity and hospitality for Israelites, then, were more than a matter of commandment, much less a *quid pro quo*. Ideally, this concern was to be cultivated by those who saw themselves as created in the image of Yahweh.

Patricia Kerr stated it well,

Yahweh's laws in the Old Testament were not just his fingerprints, they were his very footprints. The Israelites were to follow in them as a response

¹⁵⁶ Duke, "Towards an Understanding of Hospitality," 68.

¹⁵⁷ Helga Rusche, "Gastfreundschaft im Alten Testament, im Spätjudentum und in den Evangelien unter Berücksichtigung ihres Verhältnisses zur Mission," *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 41/3 (1957) 172. Cf. Exod 22:20; 23:9; Deut 10:18; 14:29; 16:11-24; 26:11.

of their whole being to the Holy Being who had set them apart to reflect his own character among the nations. Israel was to honour God by keeping his commandments about hospitality to the stranger and the needy as he had constantly protected and provided for his people.¹⁵⁸

Just as the kings of the ancient Near East provided extravagant banquets on special occasions, the kings of Israel displayed an impressive measure of royal hospitality.¹⁵⁹ To celebrate the dedication of the temple building project, Solomon offered a huge number of sacrifices and held a festival (Qj) ¼ with Israel for fourteen days (1 Kgs 8:65). The daily provisions of his table for palace residents and international dignitaries included a variety of beef, venison, and poultry which were served in such fine style that the Queen of Sheba expressed marvel that the impressive reports of Solomon's wealth did not exceed the reality she witnessed first hand (1 Kgs 4:22–23[5:2–3]; 10:4–7). The royal style of entertainment in Israel was known to have included music (2 Sam 19:35[36]; Eccl 2:8), large numbers of guests (1 Kgs 18:19), and presumably servants like cupbearers, though these are not expressly mentioned in the Bible.¹⁶⁰

In summary, Israel's practice of hospitality among the citizenry and royalty does not appear to differ significantly from what we know of social customs throughout the ancient Near East. Although the offering of hospitality

¹⁵⁸ Patricia Elisabet Kerr, "Hospitality as the Christian Individual and Corporate Relational Reality that Reflects God's Character," (M.C.S. thesis, Regent College, 1994) 16.

¹⁵⁹ On the relation of Akkadian and Ugaritic evidence to the sanctuaries associated with Solomon (1 Kgs 3–9), Moses (Exod 24–40), and Ezekiel (40–48), see Arvid S. Kapelrud, "Temple Building, A Task for Gods and Kings," *Or* 32/1 (1963) 56–62.

¹⁶⁰ Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, trans. John McHugh (London: Darton, Longman & Todd 1961; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 122 (page citation is to the reprint edition).

was occasionally an act of deception (Judg 4:17–22), it was usually considered an act of kindness which took place within a well-established matrix of social values. Common meals were times of fellowship and celebration.

Because biblical instances of human and divine hospitality often refer to food and diet, a brief concluding summary of ancient Israelite cuisine is in order. In addition to the literary evidence in the Bible, knowledge of food and drink in ancient Israel is derived from archaeological remains of domestic storage jars and sites of occupation and is further informed by inferences from Ugaritic and Canaanite evidence.¹⁶¹ A fairly wide variety of food available to ancient Israelites contrasts with the simplicity of the common diet. Wheat and barley were eaten cooked and baked into bread with olive oil. Inhabitants of Iron Age Palestine consumed a variety of legumes including chickpeas, broad beans, and lentils. Other vegetables included cucumbers as well as onions, leeks, and garlic which were popular for their flavoring. Figs, grapes, pomegranates, and sycamore figs were readily available fruits. Milk and dairy products were also known although it is difficult to assess the extent of their use. The consumption of meat was certainly less common but included the flesh of goats, sheep, and beef as well as game birds and fish. Wright offered the following representative description of daily fare:

The typical daily diet is probably illustrated by the rations brought to David's band by Abigail, the wife of Nabal: bread, wine, parched grain,

¹⁶¹ Mayer I. Gruber, "Private Life in Ancient Israel," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, vol. 1, ed. J. Sasson and others, 633–48 (New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1995) 637. The following summary of Israelite cuisine is derived from Gruber's chapter as well as G. Ernest Wright, *Biblical Archaeology*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962) 186–87.

raisins and figcakes (I Sam. 25:18). She also took along with her five sheep, but meat was not eaten as a daily diet. It was reserved for certain festival occasions, even as is the case today among Arab peasants.¹⁶²

C. Summary

This chapter has noted the paucity of direct evidence for hospitality between humans in the ancient Near East and has resisted the attempt to address this lack by turning to modern practices like those found among Palestinian Bedouins. Even though ancient societies lauded social charity, hospitality was generally more frequently mentioned in the Old Testament than in the literature of Mesopotamia and Egypt. This chapter has also related a transcultural pattern of obligations and attitudes that guests and hosts tend to expect from one another.

Addressing the content of the ancient Near Eastern material, there is a narrative pattern that links successful temple construction with banquets. This chapter has clarified the nature of a special type of feast known as a *marzeah*. Hospitality protocol was seen to include making invitations, providing for seating arrangements, making guests comfortable, and serving fine food and drink (sometimes in great abundance). Banquets sometimes lasted for a week or more and were known to have sometimes included entertainment.

Banquets celebrated special events, established or improved goodwill, and could be a sign of divine blessing. Sometimes banquets provide a setting for deception and murderous intentions. In the Hittite cult, meals provided fellowship between worshippers and their gods, a situation which did not hold

¹⁶² Wright, *Biblical Archaeology*, 187.

true in Mesopotamian religion.

Divine judgment could be shown by removing dietary abundance, causing festive occasions to cease, and creating conditions in which people may be tempted to eat or drink unnatural substances.

Table 1. Felicity Conditions for Hospitality

I. Felicity Conditions for an Offer of Hospitality

Preparatory	1. Speaker [S] and Hearer [H] are not known to reside near each other 2. S and H are free agents within the bounds of the situation 3. There is no economic transaction involved
Sincerity	1. S wants H to take on the role of guest 2. S commits self to the role of host
Propositional Content	1. S offers H(s) food, water, and/or an opportunity to rest 2. S offers food and bedding for H(s)'s animals
Formal	1. S uses deferential terms of address to H 2. S uses self-deprecating reference 3. S makes deprecating mention of what is offered 4. S uses "polite" forms and formulaic polite phrasings
Essential	Counts as an offer of hospitality

II. Felicity Conditions for Accepting an Offer of Hospitality

Preparatory	Same as in I
Sincerity	1. S wants H to take on the role of guest
Propositional Content	1. "Do as you have said."
Essential	Counts as acceptance of an offer of hospitality

III. Felicity Conditions for Requesting Hospitality

Preparatory	Same as in I
Sincerity	Same as in II
Propositional Content	1. S requests food, water, and/or chance to rest
Formal	1. S uses deferential terms of address 2. S uses self-deprecating references 3. S makes deferential and/or oblique references to the things requested—may assure H that nothing material is being requested 4. S uses polite forms and formulaic polite phrasings
Essential	Counts as a request of hospitality

IV. Felicity Conditions for Agreeing to a Request for Hospitality

Preparatory	Same as in I
Sincerity	1. S wants H to take on the role of guest 2. S commits self to the role of host
Formal	Often non-verbal action of providing one of the elements requested
Essential	Counts as the granting hospitality