

Fieldside Hospitality at the Tournament

*Documenting the Tradition of Informal Refreshment
in the Noble Pavilion During Medieval Tournaments*

An Arts & Sciences Documentation

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By Baroness Annabella of the Bay, Kingdom of Atlantia

(Crystal M. Frawley)

Introduction

This documentation supports the presentation of a grazing table set within a dressed pavilion at a Society for Creative Anachronism tournament event. The goal of this project is to recreate the informal, fieldside hospitality that a noble host would have provided to combatants, spectators, and visiting ladies throughout the day of a medieval tournament, a practice that is well-attested in chronicle accounts, tournament manuals, and illuminated manuscripts from the 12th through 16th centuries.

While modern SCA feast culture tends to focus on the formal, multi-course banquet held in a hall after the fighting ends, medieval tournament hospitality actually operated on two levels simultaneously. The formal evening banquet is one; the other is the ongoing provision of food, wine, and refreshment available throughout the day at the tournament field, served in pavilions and tents. This project recreates that second, less-studied but clearly documented layer of noble hospitality.

The Historical Case for Fieldside Hospitality

The Tournament as a Multi-Day Social Event

By the 13th century, tournaments had evolved from purely military exercises into elaborate social occasions spread over several days. The tournament ground was not simply a fighting field but a temporary community, complete with its own infrastructure for housing, feeding, and entertaining large numbers of people. Chronicles describe the lists surrounded by tents and pavilions belonging to combatants and noble spectators, stalls selling refreshments and goods, and areas for entertainment between bouts.

The World History Encyclopedia summarizes the mature tournament setting:

“Spectators set up tents around the designated fighting area, the lists, which was spread with straw or sand. There were stands for spectators, pavilions and balconies for the richest onlookers, stalls with refreshments, sellers of horses and fine clothes, intermission performances of drama with musicians and acrobats, pageants, and several banquets over the course of the event.”

- *World History Encyclopedia, “Medieval Tournament”*

The presence of refreshment stalls alongside noble pavilions indicates that food and drink were available throughout the day at the field, not confined to a single formal meal.

The Host’s Obligation to Provide Refreshment

The most explicit evidence for organized fieldside provisioning comes from René d’Anjou’s *Livre des Tournois* (c. 1460), the most comprehensive surviving manual on how to organize a tournament. René specifies that the two captains (the noble hosts of each side) are responsible for provisioning the entire event, including meals and ongoing refreshment:

“Item, to provide for the supper the eve of the tourney, and for the dinner and supper the day of the tourney, for the ladies in the hall; And for the wine and spices on the other days, and the torches and lighting in the hall and elsewhere.”

- *René d’Anjou, Livre des Tournois, trans. Elizabeth Bennett (c. 1460)*

The critical phrase here is “wine and spices on the other days.” This describes an ongoing, available refreshment service during the multi-day tournament event, not a formal sit-down meal but provisions kept available for guests. This is the period practice that a grazing table most closely recreates.

Refreshment Between Bouts: Froissart’s Evidence

The chronicler Jean Froissart (c. 1337–c. 1405) provides the richest narrative accounts of tournament life in his *Chroniques*. His description of the famous Tournament at Saint-Inglevert (1390) repeatedly shows knights retreating to their pavilions between bouts to rest, rearm, and take refreshment.

Froissart describes three French knights (Boucicaud, Regnault de Roye, and the lord de Sempy) who set up richly decorated vermilion pavilions near the lists. Knights would emerge from these pavilions when challenged, fight their courses, then return:

“They went to the proper places, where they refreshed themselves and took breath.”

- *Froissart, Chroniques, Book IV, trans. Thomas Johnes*

The phrase “refreshed themselves” (se rafraîchirent) implies the availability of food and drink within or near the pavilion during active competition. The pavilion served as a combined rest area, arming station, and hospitality space throughout the fighting day.

The biography of Boucicaut (*Le Livre des fais du bon messire Jehan le Maingre*, c. 1409) further specifies Boucicaut’s hospitality, describing the food and drink he provided for participants in language that invokes the concept of a “Round Table”; used not to describe the tournament itself but specifically the feasting and refreshment he offered to challengers. This frames fieldside hospitality as an explicit expression of chivalric generosity.

The Pavilion as Hospitality Space

Noble pavilions at tournaments were not austere military shelters. They were elaborately dressed interior spaces designed to project wealth, taste, and the host’s capacity for generous hospitality. The evidence for dressed pavilion interiors includes:

- Fabric hangings and tapestries: Surviving inventories from the Field of Cloth of Gold (1520) list hundreds of yards of cloth of gold, cloth of silver, damask, silk, satin, velvet, and velour used to dress tent interiors. The French preparations alone employed approximately 170 men and 120 women for several months sewing tent panels from fine fabrics.
- Floor coverings: Carpets and rushes were used to cover pavilion floors, particularly for noble occupants.
- Furnishings: Tables, benches, candlesticks, and serving vessels were transported to the tournament field. The table laid with cloth and set with food was a fundamental expression of hospitality.
- Heraldic display: Pavilions were decorated with the host’s arms and colors, making them identifiable landmarks at the tournament field.

The Field of Cloth of Gold (1520): The Supreme Example

While late in the medieval period, the Field of Cloth of Gold represents the most thoroughly documented example of tournament hospitality under canvas. The eighteen-day meeting between Henry VIII and Francis I near Calais featured purpose-built kitchen infrastructure adjacent to the tournament fields. The English constructed a temporary palace, a golden dining tent, ovens, and kitchen tents. Fountains ran continuously with wine and beer for all guests.

The scale of provisioning demonstrates how seriously fieldside hospitality was taken: the English camp alone supplied approximately 2,000 sheep, 98,000 eggs, nearly

200,000 litres of wine, and 66,000 litres of beer. While this is an extreme example of royal excess, it illustrates the principle that tournament hospitality was not confined to formal meals. Rather, it was continuous, available, and abundant.

Themed Hospitality: The Pas d'Armes and the Allegorical Tournament

Tournaments as Themed Events

By the 15th century, tournaments were routinely organized around elaborate narrative, allegorical, or literary themes, and the entire event infrastructure, including pavilions, decorations, costumes, and hospitality, was dressed to match. The pas d'armes (passage of arms) tradition placed tournaments within theatrical and allegorical formats. This was not an occasional novelty; it was the dominant form of high-status tournament in the late medieval period.

Earlier tournaments at Le Hem (1278) and Chauvency (1285) in northern France involved knights adopting the names and coats of arms of Arthurian characters such as Lancelot or Gawain. Some tournaments even referred to themselves explicitly as “Round Tables” in homage to this literary tradition. René d'Anjou's own tournaments were heavily themed: his *Emprise de la Joyeuse Garde* at Saumur (1446) was Arthurian in character, and his *Pas de la Bergère* at Tarascon (1449) was built around an elaborate pastoral fiction in which a shepherdess presided over the lists. The decorations, costumes, and setting were all integrated into the overarching narrative of the event.

Themed Decorations and Interactive Displays at Feasts

The practice of decorating hospitality spaces to match an event's theme is extensively documented in the context of medieval banquets and feasts. The most well-known form of this was the “subtlety” (or “entremet” in the French tradition): an elaborate decorative or edible display brought out during the meal to reinforce the event's purpose or theme. At the coronation feast of Henry V, the subtlety at the end of the first course was a confectionery swan surrounded by cygnets carrying lines of verse. At the Feast of the Pheasant (1454), hosted by Philip the Good of Burgundy, the banquet hall featured fountains, statues, moving boats, and other fantastical objects, all organized around the theme of a crusade. The feast's climax involved an elephant bearing a Saracen that heralded a masque on the theme of the Holy Church, designed to persuade the assembled nobility to take crusading vows.

These themed displays were not merely decorative. They were interactive and participatory. At the Feast of the Pheasant, the allegorical performance transformed

spectators into participants by persuading them to sign crusading oaths. The decorations, the narrative, and the act of commitment were all integrated into a single hospitality experience.

Norse Feasting Culture and the Connection to Tournament Hospitality

For a tournament themed around Tyr, the Norse god of law, justice, and oaths, a hospitality space that reflects Norse cultural values has an additional layer of documentation. In Viking Age Scandinavian society, feasting was arguably the most important social institution. Feasts served to reinforce hierarchies, ratify laws, celebrate victories, and perform religious functions. This was not simply eating together; it was a sacred and political act.

Norse mythology itself places feasting at the center of the warrior's experience. Valhalla, the hall where Odin houses those warriors deemed worthy, is essentially an eternal tournament hospitality pavilion: the einherjar (chosen warriors) fight all day and feast together all night, served by the Valkyries in a hall whose roof is made of shields and whose rafters are spears. The Poetic Edda's *Grímnismál* and Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda* both describe Valhalla's feasting in detail, emphasizing the connection between martial valor and communal hospitality.

The act of providing food and drink to warriors at a tournament thus echoes one of the most fundamental concepts in Norse culture: that hospitality to fighters is the highest form of honor. A Tyr-themed hospitality space at a tournament connects the medieval Christian tradition of themed tournament pageantry with the Norse cultural tradition that tied feasting to martial culture and divine obligation.

The Project: A Tournament Grazing Table

Concept

This project is part of an ongoing practice the author calls Immersive Hospitality: the creation of hospitality spaces that go beyond simply providing food and drink, aiming instead to draw guests into a complete sensory and thematic experience rooted in historical tradition. Each installment is tailored to the event it serves. At Ymir: Tyr's Redemption, the Immersive Hospitality space recreates the informal hospitality pavilion at a tournament: the space where a noble host provides ongoing refreshment to combatants resting between bouts, visiting ladies, heralds, and noble spectators throughout the fighting day.

The hospitality space comprises two elements. The first is a grazing table: an abundant spread of foods laid out on a cloth-covered table within a dressed pavilion interior, available for guests to serve themselves at will. The second is a themed interactive display, the Oaths Table, which engages guests with the event's Norse theme through symbolism and a participatory act of personal commitment.

The grazing table corresponds most closely to the "wine and spices on the other days" described by René d'Anjou: the ongoing provision of refreshment that accompanied, but was distinct from, the formal banquets held in halls. The Oaths Table draws on the well-documented tradition of themed, interactive displays at medieval tournaments and feasts, most notably the allegorical entremets and oath-taking ceremonies of the Burgundian court, adapted here to reflect the event's theme of Tyr, the Norse god of law, justice, and oaths.

The Setting

The pavilion interior is dressed with the following elements, each of which has period justification:

- **Fabric-hung walls with tapestry:** Blue fabric panels line the tent walls, with a millefleurs-style tapestry as the focal point behind the table. This echoes the dressed pavilion interiors described in accounts of the Field of Cloth of Gold and depicted in illuminations of Froissart's *Chroniques*.
- **Layered tablecloths:** The table is covered with layered cloth (green over dark fabric), reflecting the use of table linens as markers of status and hospitality. Period tables were always covered with cloth before food was laid.
- **Floor covering:** A carpet covers the ground beneath the table, reflecting the documented practice of covering pavilion floors for noble occupants.

- **Candelabra:** Candles provide both illumination and atmospheric richness, consistent with René d’Anjou’s specification that the captains should provide “torches and lighting in the hall and elsewhere.”
- **Metal serving vessels:** Metal serving pieces reflect the kinds of tableware used at noble tables. Elevated serving stands and tiered displays present food at multiple heights, creating the visual abundance that was central to the display of hospitality.

The Food

The grazing table presents foods in categories that correspond to documented period items available for informal refreshment. The following analysis maps the items presented to their period equivalents and documentation:

Strongly Period-Documented Items

- **Fresh fruits (grapes, strawberries):** Fresh fruits were served at noble tables and were considered especially appropriate for informal eating. Grapes in particular appear frequently in manuscript illuminations of feasting scenes. The *Tacuinum Sanitatis* manuscripts (14th–15th c.) include multiple illustrations of fruit cultivation and serving.
- **Cheeses:** Cheese was a staple at all levels of medieval dining and appeared at both formal banquets and informal meals. It was commonly served alongside bread and wine as part of lighter refreshment.
- **Breads and crackers:** Bread was the foundation of the medieval table and appeared at every level of dining. Crackers and wafers were high-status snack foods by the late Middle Ages, often served alongside wine and cheese as part of lighter refreshment.
- **Dips and sauces with bread:** The concept of “sops” (pieces of bread accompanied by sauces, broths, or other liquids for dipping) was one of the most common elements of medieval eating, described as “one of the common constituents of a medieval meal, either as part of a banquet or as a small snack” (Medieval Cuisine, Wikipedia). The hummus and other dips presented here serve as modern stand-ins for period sauces and condiments.
- **Vegetables (carrots, broccoli):** While raw vegetables were not commonly eaten in the medieval period (cooked vegetables were preferred, as raw foods were believed to carry disease), carrots, onions, and other root vegetables were widely cultivated and consumed. These items represent a modern concession to accessibility and dietary variety.

Modern Concessions and Adaptations

Some items on the grazing table are modern in form but have period conceptual equivalents. The purpose of the grazing table is to provide accessible, appealing refreshment to SCA participants at an outdoor event; strict period accuracy in every ingredient would conflict with modern food safety requirements, dietary needs, and the practical realities of outdoor field service. Where modern items appear, they fill the role of a period equivalent (e.g., commercial crackers for wafers, modern dips for period sauces, raw vegetables for cooked preparations that would be impractical to serve at an outdoor field).

The Oaths Table: An Interactive Themed Display

In addition to the food hospitality table, this project included a separate interactive display called the Oaths Table, themed around Tyr's role as the god of law, justice, and the keeping of oaths. Positioned on its own table within the pavilion, it invited guests to engage with the event's theme through symbolism and a simple participatory act. The table featured the following elements:

- A brass balance scale, representing Tyr's association with fairness and the steady measure of right action.
- A chain-wrapped fist, symbolizing bonds freely chosen and promises that hold firm, a reference to the binding of Fenrir, in which Tyr sacrificed his hand to uphold the gods' oath.
- Coin tokens placed in a dish and on the scale, which guests were invited to take as a private reminder of an oath they were keeping that year, to their household, kingdom, craft, or themselves.
- A framed text explaining the symbolism and inviting participation, concluding with the words: "Honor is not proven in grand gestures. It is proven in what we continue to uphold. May your word stand strong."
- Greenery, candles, and the tapestry-hung pavilion backdrop, integrating the Oaths Table into the overall hospitality environment.

This interactive display draws directly on both documented traditions discussed in the preceding historical section. The practice of inviting guests to take a physical token and make a personal commitment mirrors the oath-taking ceremonies at themed Burgundian feasts, most notably the Feast of the Pheasant, where nobles were invited to swear crusading vows upon a live pheasant in response to the allegorical displays. The Oaths Table translates this interactive, participatory tradition into a form appropriate for the event's Norse theme, substituting Tyr's association with oath-keeping for the Burgundian crusading context.

The concept also resonates with the Norse tradition of oath-rings and arm-rings, which were physical objects associated with the swearing and keeping of oaths. The Eyrbyggja Saga describes a temple ring upon which oaths were sworn, and various Icelandic sagas reference the giving of rings as tokens of pledged faith. The coin tokens on the Oaths Table serve a similar symbolic function: a small, portable, physical object that carries the weight of a personal commitment.

Primary Sources

Chronicle and Treatise Sources

1. **René d'Anjou**, *Traictié de la Forme et Devis d'ung Tournoy* (c. 1460). English translation by Elizabeth Bennett, available at princeton.edu/~ezb/rene/renehome.html. The most comprehensive surviving manual on tournament organization, with explicit instructions regarding the provision of food, wine, spices, and lighting for the duration of the event.
2. **Jean Froissart**, *Chroniques* (c. 1370–1400). Penguin Classics edition translated by Geoffrey Brereton; full Thomas Johnes translation available online. Froissart's descriptions of the Tournament at Saint-Inglevert (1390), the Smithfield Tournament (1390), and Queen Isabella's entry into Paris provide detailed accounts of tournament hospitality, pavilion culture, and feasting.
3. **Author unconfirmed**, *Le Livre des fais du bon messire Jehan le Maingre, dit Bouciquaut* (c. 1409). Ed. Denis Lalande (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1985). Biography of the knight Boucicaut, with descriptions of the hospitality he provided at the Saint-Inglevert tournament, including food and drink for participants.
4. **Author unconfirmed**, *L'Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal* (c. 1226). Verse biography of William Marshal, with accounts of 12th-century tournament life including the social customs, feasting, and hospitality that surrounded the tournament circuit.

Illuminated Manuscript Sources

5. **René d'Anjou**, *Livre des Tournois*, BNF MS Fr. 2695 (c. 1460s). René's own illuminated copy, containing 91 illustrations by Barthélemy d'Eyck depicting pavilions, tournament grounds, and the infrastructure of the event. Digitized by the Bibliothèque nationale de France.
6. **Jean Froissart**, *Chroniques*, Harley MS 4379 (Bruges, c. 1470–75). The "Harley Froissart" at the British Library contains illuminated miniatures depicting the Tournament at Saint-Inglevert, including pavilions and the tournament field. Multiple illuminated copies of Froissart's *Chroniques* depict pavilions and the landscape around the lists.
7. **Tacuinum Sanitatis** manuscripts (various, 14th–15th c.). Health handbooks with illustrations of food cultivation, preparation, and serving, providing visual evidence for period food items including fruits, breads, and spices.

8. **The Luttrell Psalter**, British Library Add MS 42130 (c. 1325–40). Contains feast scenes and depictions of food service.
9. **The Field of Cloth of Gold** painting (c. 1545), Royal Collection, Hampton Court Palace. Depicts the tents, pavilions, temporary palace, and banqueting infrastructure of the 1520 summit, providing visual evidence for the scale and character of tournament hospitality under canvas.

Recommended Secondary Scholarship

- Richard Barber and Juliet Barker, *Tournaments: Jousts, Chivalry and Pageants in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1989).
- Glenn Richardson, *The Field of Cloth of Gold* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).
- Justin Sturgeon, *Text and Image in René d'Anjou's Livre des Tournois* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2023).
- P.W. Hammond, *Food and Feast in Medieval England*.
- Bridget Ann Henisch, *Fast and Feast: Food in Medieval Society*.
- David Crouch, *William Marshal: Knighthood, War and Chivalry, 1147–1219* (2nd ed., London: Longman, 2002).
- Thomas Asbridge, *The Greatest Knight: The Remarkable Life of William Marshal*.
- Craig Taylor, “The Tournament at Saint-Inglevert (1390): Chivalry, Diplomacy and Pas d’armes,” *English Historical Review* (2024).
- Alan V. Murray and Karen Watts, eds., *The Medieval Tournament as Spectacle: Tourneys, Jousts and Pas d’Armes, 1100–1600* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2020).
- Christina Normore, *A Feast for the Eyes: Art, Performance, and the Late Medieval Banquet* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).
- Snorri Sturluson, *The Prose Edda*, trans. Jesse Byock (London: Penguin Classics, 2005). For Valhalla, feasting culture, and the role of hospitality in Norse cosmology.
- *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Carolyne Larrington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, revised ed., 2014). For Grímnismál and descriptions of Valhalla.
- Vivian Etting, *The Story of the Drinking Horn: Drinking Culture in Scandinavia during the Middle Ages* (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2013).

Conclusion

The hospitality pavilion presented at this tournament event is not an anachronism; it is a recreation of well-documented aspects of medieval tournament culture. The noble host's obligation to provide ongoing refreshment to participants and guests throughout the event is explicitly described in René d'Anjou's tournament manual, depicted in the illuminations of his *Livre des Tournois* and Froissart's *Chroniques*, and narrated in multiple chronicle accounts. The pavilion interior, dressed with fabric hangings, furnished with table linens and serving vessels, and offering an abundant spread of food and drink, represents the informal hospitality space that was an essential complement to the formal banquet hall.

The inclusion of a themed interactive display, the Oaths Table, draws on a second and equally well-documented tradition: the practice of organizing tournament hospitality around a narrative or allegorical theme. From the Arthurian Round Tables of the 13th century through the elaborate *pas d'armes* and *entremets* of the Burgundian court, medieval hosts used themed decorations and participatory displays to engage their guests with the meaning of the event. The Oaths Table adapts this tradition to the event's Norse theme, inviting guests to reflect on Tyr's association with law, justice, and oath-keeping, and to carry away a coin token as a personal reminder of a commitment they are upholding.

Together, the grazing table and the Oaths Table represent two complementary facets of medieval tournament hospitality: the generous provision of food and drink that sustained guests throughout the fighting day, and the themed, interactive display that connected hospitality to the deeper purpose of the gathering. This installment of the author's Immersive Hospitality practice seeks to bring both traditions to life for the benefit of the SCA community, providing fighters, spectators, and visitors with the kind of generous, thoughtful, and purposeful hospitality that a noble tournament host would have considered both a duty and a privilege.