

From Sacred Duty to Political Theatre

The Transformation of Medieval Hospitality

*Tracing the Shift from Benedictine Obligation
to Chivalric Virtue to Diplomatic Instrument*

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Society for Creative Anachronism
Immersive Hospitality Research Series

I. Introduction

Consider a simple scene: a host places bread, wine, and a basin of water before a guest who has just arrived from the road. The host greets the traveler, seats them, and ensures they are fed and comfortable before any other business is conducted. This scene could take place in a Benedictine monastery in the ninth century, in a nobleman's pavilion at a tournament in the fourteenth, or in a royal tent at a diplomatic summit in the sixteenth. The external forms of the act are almost identical. The meaning behind it, however, has changed completely.

The history of medieval hospitality is often treated as a single, continuous tradition. In one sense, it is. The practices of welcome, of shared food and drink, of the host's personal attention to the comfort of the guest, persisted across centuries with remarkable consistency. But the values that motivated those practices evolved through at least three distinct phases, each with its own logic, its own vocabulary, and its own expectations of both host and guest.

In the earliest phase, hospitality was a sacred obligation rooted in scripture and monastic rule. The guest was received as Christ. The host gained nothing worldly from the act; the reward was spiritual, and the duty was absolute. In the second phase, hospitality became a chivalric virtue, absorbed into the code of conduct that defined noble identity. The host gave abundantly not because God commanded it, but because generosity was the mark of a true nobleman. A knight who failed in largesse failed in nobility itself. In the third phase, hospitality became a political instrument, a means of projecting power, securing alliances, and advancing diplomatic arguments. The host's table was no longer primarily about duty or virtue; it was about statecraft.

The following pages trace this transformation through specific case studies, examining what changed, what stayed the same, and what it means for anyone seeking to understand or recreate medieval hospitality today. The transitions were not clean breaks; they overlapped, blended, and borrowed from one another. A fifteenth-century Burgundian duke could invoke sacred language, chivalric imagery, and political calculation at the same banquet table. But understanding the distinct motivating traditions that converged in such moments is essential to understanding what medieval hospitality actually was, and what it was for.

II. Phase One: Sacred Obligation

"Let all guests who arrive be received as Christ, for he himself will say: I was a stranger, and you received me."

The Rule of St. Benedict, written in the sixth century, is the foundational document of Western monastic life, and Chapter 53, on the reception of guests, may be the single most influential text on hospitality in the Western tradition. Its opening sentence establishes a principle that would shape hospitality practice for centuries: the guest is not merely a visitor to be tolerated or a social obligation to be fulfilled. The guest is Christ, present in the flesh, arriving at the door.

This is not a metaphor of the kind that later centuries would use loosely. Benedict means it as a literal instruction. When a guest is announced, the superior and the brothers are to meet the visitor with every service required by love. They are to pray together first, and only then exchange the kiss of peace. The abbot is to pour water over the guest's hands. The entire community is to wash the guest's feet. The abbot is to break his own fast for the sake of a guest, even if it means violating the normal monastic schedule. The divine law is to be read to the guest, and then every kindness shown.

Several features of Benedictine hospitality deserve attention because they distinguish it sharply from the traditions that would follow.

Hospitality as Obedience, Not Generosity

The Benedictine host is not being generous. Generosity implies a choice, a voluntary act of giving from one's surplus. What Benedict prescribes is obedience to a divine command. The host has no more choice about receiving a guest than about attending the Divine Office. The guest is Christ; refusing the guest is refusing Christ. This removes hospitality entirely from the realm of personal virtue or social display and places it in the realm of sacred duty.

Benedict is also careful to specify that social rank should not determine the quality of welcome. He writes that great care and concern should be shown in receiving the poor and pilgrims, because in them Christ is more especially received. The rich, he notes dryly, receive honor because people fear them; the poor receive honor because they carry Christ more visibly. This is a direct inversion of the hospitality logic that would dominate the chivalric and diplomatic periods, where rank determined everything about how a guest was received.

The Infrastructure of Monastic Hospitality

Benedict does not leave hospitality to good intentions. He prescribes specific infrastructure: a separate kitchen for the abbot and guests so that visitors arriving at

unexpected hours do not disturb the brothers. A dedicated brother with a soul possessed by the fear of God to manage the guest quarters. Adequate beds, always ready. The guesthouse is to be wisely managed by wise persons.

The practical reality of this system is well documented in Julie Kerr's study of Benedictine hospitality in England from the Norman Conquest through the mid-thirteenth century. Kerr's research, focused on the great Benedictine houses of southern England (Abingdon, Bury St Edmunds, Canterbury, Reading, St Albans), reveals how the Rule's injunctions translated into administrative and financial reality. Monasteries maintained dedicated guestmasters (*hostilarii*) and separate guest quarters. Guests were housed according to rank: those arriving with fourteen or more horses in their retinue would be received in the abbot's house, while travelers on foot were directed to a communal hall. Guest quarters had fires, unlike much of the monastery itself, where warmth was restricted to the warming room at specified times.

The financial burden was real. Monasteries on major travel routes found themselves stretched thin by the steady flow of visitors that Benedict himself had acknowledged would never be lacking in a monastery. The Cluniac priory at Bermondsey, situated on the London-Dover road, nearly bankrupted itself through the volume of guests passing through. Reading Abbey accumulated debt for similar reasons. The abbot's obligation to dine with guests, and on those occasions to set aside the normal monastic diet, contributed to a pattern of separate abbatial lodgings and dining that, by the twelfth century, had become standard at most large houses.

The Limits and Tensions

Benedictine hospitality was not without boundaries, and these boundaries reveal something about the pressures the system faced. Benedict instructs that no monk who is not specifically assigned to guest duty should associate with or speak to visitors. If a brother encounters a guest by chance, he is to greet them humbly, ask for a blessing, and pass on, explaining that he is not permitted to converse. The monastic enclosure was to be maintained even as the guesthouse welcomed the outside world.

There was also a practical distinction between spiritual hospitality and material comfort. The Rule instructs that guests be led to prayer first, before being offered food or lodging. The divine law is to be read to the guest for instruction. Hospitality is a spiritual act first and a material one second; the order of priority matters. The feet are washed not because the guest's feet are dirty, but because Christ is to be adored in the act of washing.

Over time, monastic hospitality evolved in ways that moved it closer to the secular models that would eventually overtake it. Abbots who dined separately with important guests began to function more like secular lords hosting at their own tables. Monasteries that cultivated reputations for generous hospitality did so partly for spiritual reasons and

partly because reputation attracted patronage. The spiritual core of Benedictine hospitality, the guest received as Christ, persisted in the Rule and in monastic self-understanding, but the practice increasingly overlapped with secular patterns of noble hosting. This overlap marks the beginning of the transition to the second phase.

III. Phase Two: Chivalric Virtue

By the twelfth century, a second framework for hospitality had emerged alongside the monastic tradition: hospitality as a defining characteristic of noble identity. In this framework, the host gives abundantly not because God requires it of all Christians equally, but because generosity is the mark of a true nobleman. The chivalric virtue of largesse, broadly meaning liberality or open-handedness, placed hospitality at the center of what it meant to be noble.

The shift is subtle but significant. Benedictine hospitality is universal and obligatory; any guest, regardless of rank, is to be received as Christ, and the host has no choice in the matter. Chivalric hospitality is voluntary and performative; the nobleman chooses to give lavishly, and the lavishness of his giving is a public demonstration of his character and status. The spiritual reward of monastic hospitality is invisible, accruing in the next life. The social reward of chivalric hospitality is immediate and visible: reputation, honor, and the loyalty of those who benefit from one's generosity.

Largesse as the Primary Noble Virtue

The elevation of largesse to the foremost aristocratic virtue is well documented in the literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Sidney Painter, in his study of French chivalry, traces the process by which generous hospitality became the defining mark of a nobleman. As noble families found their resources increased by the expansion of arable land, some demonstrated their prosperity through lavish hospitality. Wandering minstrels and landless knights enjoyed these laden tables and spread the praises of their hosts. Less well-endowed nobles felt compelled to match their peers. Within a relatively short period, hospitality on a generous scale became not merely admirable but expected, and largesse was elevated to the primary characteristic of the noble class.

The *Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal*, the verse biography of William Marshal composed around 1226, provides a vivid illustration of this value system. The biographer states that nobility itself (*gentillesse*) was reared in the house of largesse. Henry the Young King, whom Marshal served, maintained such lavish generosity that he kept himself in a perpetual state of bankruptcy, and this was recorded as praiseworthy rather than reckless. The biography also preserves a small but telling episode of knightly largesse in action: waiting fully armed for a tournament to begin, William Marshal was approached by a young herald requesting a gift. Marshal leaped on his horse, rode at the first opponent to appear, overthrew him, and presented the captured horse to the herald. This combination of martial prowess and immediate, impulsive generosity was admired as a single chivalric act, not two separate virtues happening to coincide.

The poet Bertrand de Born expressed the ideal in its most extreme form: a true nobleman would mortgage his estates to fund lavish hospitality and magnificent gifts. Living within

one's means was, in this view, evidence of a deficiency in noble character. The preacher Stephen of Bourbon, asked by a group of knights to identify the chief noble virtue, reportedly proved to their complete satisfaction that the position belonged to largesse.

Hospitality in the Tournament Culture

The tournament, which evolved from a rough military exercise in the eleventh century to an elaborate social and cultural event by the fourteenth, is the setting where chivalric hospitality is most visible. René d'Anjou's *Livre des Tournois* (c.1460), the most detailed surviving tournament manual, explicitly requires tournament captains to provide "wine and spices on the other days," meaning ongoing refreshment beyond the formal banquet, throughout a multi-day event. This is framed not as a sacred duty but as what a proper captain does; it is part of the job of being a noble host at a tournament. The obligation is social and customary, embedded in the role rather than commanded by God.

Jean Froissart's *Chroniques*, covering events of the late fourteenth century, provide eyewitness-level descriptions of tournament hospitality in operation. His account of the Tournament at Saint-Inglevert in 1390 describes how three French knights maintained pavilions near the lists and retired to them between bouts to refresh themselves. The biography of one of the participants, Jean le Maingre (known as Boucicaut), invokes the concept of the Round Table specifically in connection with the food and drink that Boucicaut was providing for participants. The pavilion, with its provision of food, drink, and comfort, functions as a visible expression of the host's noble character. The quality of the hospitality offered reflects directly on the quality of the man offering it.

Geoffroi de Charny and the Knight's Code

Geoffroi de Charny's *Livre de Chevalerie*, written around 1350, is the most pragmatic of the surviving chivalric manuals. Charny was not a theorist; he was a practicing knight, one of the most respected in France, who would die carrying the Oriflamme at the Battle of Poitiers in 1356. He prepared his book as a guide for members of the Company of the Star, a chivalric order created by Jean II of France to rival the English Order of the Garter.

Charny's vision of knightly conduct is significant for this study because it demonstrates the chivalric framework at its most self-conscious. He places generous conduct within a broader system of martial virtue, noble deportment, and social responsibility. The great lords, he argues, have greater demands upon their behavior precisely because their fame ensures that any scandal associated with their names will produce more notoriety than with a lesser-known knight. Noble lords must be temperate in eating, avoid gambling and greed, and be found only in worthy company. The hospitality they offer must reflect their standing, not through excess, but through the consistency and quality of their generosity.

What is absent from Charny's framework is any reference to the Benedictine idea that the guest is Christ. The religious dimension has not disappeared entirely; Charny compares the knight's life to a monk's penance and argues that the hardships of knighthood outstrip the austerities of the cloister. But hospitality is no longer framed as a response to a divine presence in the guest. It is framed as a component of noble character, alongside prowess, loyalty, and courtesy. The host gives because of who the host is, not because of who the guest might be in disguise.

The Transition: From Virtue to Instrument

The chivalric framework for hospitality carried within it the seeds of its own evolution. If generous hospitality is a demonstration of noble identity, then it is also, inevitably, a tool for establishing, maintaining, and projecting social position. The line between "I give because I am noble" and "I give so that others will see that I am powerful" is thin, and by the fifteenth century, the great aristocratic courts of Europe had crossed it decisively. The Burgundian court, in particular, developed hospitality into a political art form of extraordinary sophistication.

IV. Phase Three: Political Instrument

By the fifteenth century, the great courts of Europe had developed hospitality into something that would have been recognizable to a Benedictine guestmaster in its external forms but entirely foreign in its purpose. The table was still set, the guest still welcomed, the food and drink still abundant. But the motivating force behind these acts was no longer spiritual obedience or personal virtue. It was political calculation.

This is not to say that fifteenth- and sixteenth-century hosts were cynical or insincere. Many of them genuinely believed in the chivalric values they invoked, and some retained a sincere religious dimension in their hospitality. But the dominant logic governing the great set-piece hospitality events of this period was statecraft: the projection of power, the cultivation of alliances, the advancement of political arguments, and the careful management of how the host was perceived by both guests and observers.

The Feast of the Pheasant, 1454

On 17 February 1454, Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, hosted a banquet in Lille that stands as one of the most elaborately documented hospitality events of the medieval period. Known as the Feast of the Pheasant (*Banquet du Vœu du faisan*), it was nominally organized to rally support for a crusade against the Ottoman Turks, who had captured Constantinople the previous year. What it actually accomplished was far more complex.

The event is recorded in extraordinary detail by Olivier de la Marche, a member of Philip's court who served on the organizing committee and personally participated in the spectacles, at one point entering the hall riding on a mechanical elephant. The *Chroniques of Mathieu d'Escouchy* provide a second contemporary account.

Three enormous tables dominated the hall, two of which bore spectacular centerpieces. One was constructed to resemble a giant pie; from inside it, twenty-four musicians performed. The other was built as a model of a church, complete with bells, an organ, and a quartet of singers. The entertainments between courses (*entremets*, the dramatic interludes staged during the meal) escalated throughout the evening. The climactic moment came when an actor dressed as a woman in white satin, representing the Church of Constantinople, entered mounted on an elephant led by a giant costumed as a Turk. She lamented the fall of Christendom in the East and begged the assembled nobles for aid. A live pheasant, adorned with jewels, was then brought in, upon which Philip and his court swore elaborate oaths to take up the cross.

The oaths were never fulfilled. No crusade took place. But the political work of the banquet was accomplished. As Rolf Strøm-Olsen argues in his analysis of the event, the Feast of the Pheasant served as a platform for Burgundian political narrative, allowing Philip to assert themes of ducal primacy and independence without openly contesting the

legal subordination that made him a vassal of the French king. The crusading framework gave Philip a stage on which to perform as a leader of Christendom, a role that implied sovereignty without directly claiming it. The lavishness of the hospitality itself was a political argument: only a prince of the first rank could host on this scale.

The Feast of the Pheasant is a perfect example of the layering that characterizes this third phase. Sacred language (crusading oaths, the defense of the Church), chivalric performance (the oath on the bird, following the tradition of the *Voeux du Paon*), and diplomatic calculation (asserting Burgundian independence) are all present at the same table, served alongside the musicians in the pie and the elephant in the hall. The forms of hospitality are ancient; the purpose is entirely contemporary.

The Field of Cloth of Gold, 1520

If the Feast of the Pheasant represents diplomatic hospitality at its most theatrically inventive, the Field of Cloth of Gold represents it at its most extravagant and its most nakedly political.

In June 1520, Henry VIII of England and François I of France met in the fields between the English-held town of Guînes and the French town of Ardres, near Calais, for eighteen days of feasting, jousting, and diplomatic performance. The event was orchestrated by Cardinal Thomas Wolsey to ratify a peace treaty signed two years earlier, but its real function was to allow two young, competitive kings to display their power to each other and to the watching courts of Europe.

The scale defies easy summary. Henry constructed a temporary palace covering nearly 12,000 square yards, built of timber and canvas painted in *trompe l'oeil* to resemble brick and stone. Beyond this palace, 2,800 tents were erected for lesser members of the English retinue. François's answer was a tent of cloth of gold and blue velvet strewn with golden fleur-de-lys that rose, according to an Italian observer, to a height of 120 feet, its central pole made from two ships' masts lashed together. A gilded statue of St. Michael stood at its peak.

The provisioning was proportional to the architecture. English accounts record the consumption of more than 2,200 sheep, 98,000 eggs, 13 swans, and 3 porpoises, alongside the equivalent of 266,000 bottles of wine and 132,000 bottles of beer. Fountains flowing with red wine were built on the English side. The French catering was comparable in scale, though fewer records survive in the same detail.

Every element of the hospitality was carefully calibrated for diplomatic balance. Neither king was permitted a larger retinue than the other (approximately 6,000 attendants each). During the three main feasts, each king dined at the other's camp, hosted by the queens: Katherine of Aragon presided over the English hospitality that received François,

while Claude of France hosted Henry in the French camp. This reciprocal hosting ensured that neither king occupied the subordinate position of guest without also occupying the dominant position of host.

The political results of this enormous expenditure were negligible. Within a year, Wolsey had arranged an alliance with Charles V, and England and France were again on opposing sides. The Field of Cloth of Gold endured in memory not for what it accomplished, but for the sheer scale of its hospitality, a hospitality whose purpose was entirely about the projection of royal power and the performance of diplomatic equality.

What Changed, and What It Reveals

The distance between a Benedictine guestmaster washing the feet of a pilgrim and Cardinal Wolsey orchestrating wine fountains for 12,000 attendees is not merely a distance of scale. It is a distance of meaning. The guestmaster washes feet because the pilgrim is Christ. Wolsey builds fountains because Henry VIII must not appear less magnificent than François I. Both acts involve providing drink to a guest. The resemblance ends there.

In the Benedictine framework, the identity of the guest does not matter; all guests are Christ. In the chivalric framework, the identity of the host matters most; the quality of the hospitality reflects the quality of the man. In the diplomatic framework, the identities of both host and guest are central, because the hospitality is a negotiation conducted through the medium of food, drink, spectacle, and material display.

The vocabulary also shifts. Benedictine sources speak of duty, obedience, love, and the reception of Christ. Chivalric sources speak of largesse, honor, nobility, and the reputation of the host. Diplomatic sources speak of magnificence, display, rivalry, and the careful management of appearances. These are not merely different words for the same thing; they describe fundamentally different relationships between the host, the guest, and the act of hospitality itself.

V. The Thread of Continuity

Against all these shifts in meaning, the external forms of hospitality proved remarkably durable. Certain practices appear in every phase, carried forward by custom, by practical necessity, and by the deep human intuition that welcome is expressed through specific physical acts.

The shared table persists throughout. Benedict prescribes that the abbot's table must always be with guests. The tournament captain provides wine and spices at his table. The diplomatic host stages elaborate banquets. The table, set with food and drink and shared between host and guest, is the constant.

The greeting at the threshold persists. Benedict's monks meet the guest at the door with prayer and the kiss of peace. The tournament host greets arriving knights at the entrance to the pavilion. Henry and François ride to meet each other in the valley between their camps and embrace before entering the golden tent together. The form adapts, but the structure, that the host goes to meet the guest and marks the transition from outside to inside with a deliberate act of welcome, endures.

The provision of drink persists. Water for hand-washing in the Benedictine guesthouse. Hippocras and spiced wine at the tournament collation. Wine fountains at the Field of Cloth of Gold. The offering of drink to a guest upon arrival is one of the most ancient and persistent hospitality gestures, and it survives every transformation of the values behind it.

The host's personal attention persists. Benedict instructs the abbot personally to pour water over the guest's hands. The tournament captain personally oversees the refreshment of his guests. Henry and François dine personally at each other's tables, hosted by the queens in person. Hospitality, in every phase, is personal. It is not enough to provide food and shelter; the host must be present, attentive, and visibly engaged.

This continuity of form is what makes the shifts in meaning so easy to miss. A modern observer watching a fifteenth-century duke offer wine to his guests might see the same act that a sixth-century monk performed. Understanding the different values behind that act is the work of this kind of research.

VI. Overlap and Blending

It would be misleading to present these three phases as clean, sequential replacements. They overlapped extensively, and practitioners of hospitality at any given moment might draw on all three frameworks simultaneously.

Chivalric hospitality never fully abandoned religious language. The tournament oath, the invocation of God's blessing, the chapel that stood alongside the pavilion: all of these maintained a sacred dimension even when the primary purpose of the hospitality had shifted to the demonstration of noble virtue. Geoffroi de Charny, the most martial and pragmatic of chivalric writers, still compares the knight's life to monastic penance and frames knightly conduct within a broadly Christian moral framework. The religious vocabulary of hospitality gave chivalric generosity a spiritual legitimacy that purely secular self-display would have lacked.

Diplomatic hospitality, in turn, borrowed from both earlier traditions. The Feast of the Pheasant is built on a framework of crusading oaths, language drawn directly from the sacred tradition, combined with the chivalric tradition of the bird-oath (modeled on the fourteenth-century romance of the *Voeux du Paon*), and deployed in service of a political argument about Burgundian sovereignty. Philip the Good was simultaneously performing as a Christian prince defending the faith, a chivalric lord hosting his knights in magnificent style, and a political actor asserting his independence from the French crown. The hospitality of the evening carried all three messages at once, and the guests understood all three layers.

The Field of Cloth of Gold shows a similar blending. The tournament jousting invoked chivalric tradition. The religious services held throughout the eighteen days maintained a sacred dimension. The queens' reciprocal hosting drew on the conventions of noble courtesy. But the organizing logic, the logic that determined the scale, the expense, and the careful calibration of every detail, was diplomatic. The older traditions were present as vocabulary, as legitimizing frameworks, as the cultural language through which political power was expressed. They were real, in the sense that the participants genuinely understood themselves as chivalric and Christian actors. But they were also instrumentalized, deployed in service of ends that Benedict, writing his Rule in the sixth century, would not have recognized as hospitality at all.

This layering is one of the most important things to understand about late medieval hospitality. It was never purely one thing. The forms were ancient; the intentions were complex; the meanings were multiple. A host who offered wine to a guest was performing an act that carried echoes of monastic duty, aristocratic identity, and political calculation, all at the same time.

VII. Implications for the SCA Practitioner

Understanding these three traditions of medieval hospitality is not merely an academic exercise. For anyone recreating hospitality at SCA events, recognizing which tradition informs a given practice helps the practitioner make deliberate choices about what kind of hospitality they are performing and why.

A hospitality setup at a tournament event, with a pavilion offering refreshment to fighters and spectators throughout the day, draws most naturally on the chivalric tradition. The host is providing ambient hospitality because that is what a noble tournament captain does. The quality and abundance of the offering reflects on the host's character and standing. René d'Anjou's instruction to provide wine and spices on the other days is the direct ancestor of this practice. A practitioner working in this tradition might focus on the visible generosity of the spread, the welcoming presence of the host, and the sense that all who approach the pavilion are met with abundance.

A hospitality setup framed as a rest stop or waystation for weary travelers, where any person who arrives is welcomed equally and offered comfort, draws on the sacred tradition. The logic is Benedictine: the guest is welcomed not because of who they are, but because welcoming the stranger is an act of service. A practitioner working in this tradition might focus on the personal greeting, the offering of rest, and the experience of the guest as an individual rather than as one member of a crowd.

A hospitality setup designed to serve as a social gathering point during a court event, where the spectacle of the offering and the prestige of the host are part of the event's larger social and political fabric, draws on the diplomatic tradition. The hosting is part of a broader performance of status and community, and the host's table serves as a gathering point where social connections are made and reinforced. A practitioner working in this tradition might focus on the visual impressiveness of the display, the quality of the experience, and the way the hospitality contributes to the larger social atmosphere.

These are not rigid categories, and most SCA hospitality will blend elements of all three, just as medieval hospitality did. But knowing which tradition one is drawing from, and being able to articulate that in documentation and in practice, deepens the work. It connects the physical act of placing food and drink before a guest to the centuries of meaning that produced that act.

The SCA practitioner who offers hospitality at an event is not simply doing something nice. They are participating in a tradition that spans from the Benedictine guesthouse to the Burgundian court, from the Rule of St. Benedict to the Field of Cloth of Gold. Understanding the range of that tradition, and the different values it has carried at different moments, is what transforms a generous gesture into a historically informed practice.

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IX. Open Questions for Further Research

The role of women in each of these hospitality traditions deserves dedicated investigation. In the Benedictine tradition, female religious houses maintained their own hospitality practices under the same Rule, but the specific mechanisms and the degree to which gendered expectations shaped the guest experience are less well studied. In the chivalric tradition, ladies of the tournament are well documented as judges and prize-givers, but their role in managing the ambient hospitality of the camp (the collation, the pavilion as domestic space) is more elusive. In the diplomatic tradition, the queens at the Field of Cloth of Gold (Katherine of Aragon and Claude of France) served as hosts for the reciprocal banquets, a specific and politically significant function. A study tracing the noblewoman's hospitality role across all three phases would be a natural extension of this work.

The vocabulary of hospitality across these three traditions would repay systematic study. Tracking how the language used to describe the host's obligations changed from monastic Latin to vernacular French to diplomatic correspondence would provide a linguistic map of the conceptual shift this paper has outlined in narrative form.

The relationship between hospitality and gift-giving, particularly the tradition of tokens, favors, and small gifts at tournaments and diplomatic events, connects to this analysis but could not be fully addressed here. The material culture of hospitality (what was given, when, to whom, and what it signified) is a research topic in its own right.

A comparative study examining whether similar transitions from sacred to aristocratic to political hospitality occurred in non-Western contexts (Byzantine, Islamic, or East Asian courtly traditions) would test whether this three-phase model describes a specifically Western European phenomenon or a more general pattern in how cultures use hospitality.

Finally, the question of whether the three traditions this paper describes might be usefully applied as a framework for understanding hospitality practices in the modern SCA deserves its own treatment. The SCA practitioner operates within a community that values service (echoing the sacred tradition), personal generosity (echoing the chivalric tradition), and the social display of artistry and skill (echoing the diplomatic tradition). A future paper might explore how the historical framework illuminates what SCA hospitality practitioners are actually doing when they set a table at an event.