Ronan James Head

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The Politics of Feasting in the Ancient Near East

As Walter van Beek pointed out, most rituals, no matter how complex, find their roots in normal, everyday activities. Ronan James Head explores just such a ritual event—the feast, an extraordinary event based on a very common one. Beginning with the role of the feast in the ancient Near East, he examines the manner by which feasts help define a community; then he discusses the Christian sacrament as a symbolic feast. Finally, he demonstrates how the ritual of the feast can give greater meaning to the more prosaic and certainly more mundane Latter-day Saint ward get-together. —*DB*

As human society has developed, food has taken on meanings beyond simple survival. Because food is such a basic and powerful element of human existence, its use as a symbol of social, religious, and political ideology is widespread. As Appadurai states, food and drink represent "a peculiarly powerful semiotic device," something that can "[bear] the load of everyday cultural discourse."[1] In *The Raw and the Cooked*, Lévi-Strauss showed how cooking metaphors have parallels with processes of socialization (with "raw" representing the natural and "cooked" representing the transition to culture).[2] Mary Douglas has noted that, "like sex, the taking of food has a social component, as well as a biological one."[3]

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Because food is so mundane, its role as a semiotic device transcends class and culture; but precisely *because* it is mundane, we can easily fail to notice the sociocultural meanings carried by food. A humble family meal, Thanksgiving dinner, fast food, ritual feasting, and state banquets are all settings where food symbolizes something more than just nutrition. The preparation, presentation, and consumption of food in a social setting can be both egalitarian and profoundly hierarchical, fostering both social cohesion and competition. In this paper we will explore this phenomenon of "commensality" (the act or practice of communal eating) in an ancient Near Eastern setting. The feast as a political and social tool is gaining greater attention among Near Eastern scholars, and a study of this expression of human culture may allow us to consider the wider meaning of food and ritual eating among Latter-day Saints. If we can see how food works in an unfamiliar setting, it may be easier to see the often-ignored meaning of food in our own.

Near Eastern "Commensality"

The ancient Near East provides many examples of commensality. Most of them come from elite contexts owing to the elite bias of the sources involved. Among the first are those from ancient Mesopotamia. As Michalowski states, "Collective banquets in the presence of royalty were a ubiquitous feature of Mesopotamian political ideology."[4] Susan Pollock has considered in detail the politics of elite food consumption in the Mesopotamian Early Dynastic period (ca. 2900–2350 BCE). She shows how royal commensality was used to support the elite class's position in society by emphasizing and elaborating social distinctions, reinforcing intragroup bonds, and distinguishing the elite group from others.[5]

The art of the Early Dynastic period is replete with images of feasting. Alongside cylinder seals and clay plaques, Pollock draws attention to the famous Royal Standard of Ur, one side of which depicts an elite banquet (see fig. 1).[6] According to Pollock, the image on the standard was part of a program of indoctrination used to both "maintain unity and coherence within a privileged group" and to "distinguish it from others."[7] In the Early Dynastic period, the emerging urban elites found it necessary to use

such symbolic tools to solidify their status in society, which in the third millennium BCE was returning to a high degree of urbanization, centralization, and stratification after the collapse of the fourth-millennium state centered at Uruk. Extravagant feasts reminded the newly powerful king and his court of their elite status while also reminding the court that there was a hierarchy even among the elite (on the standard, the king is shown conspicuously larger than his fellow diners). They also showed the lower classes the social and political distance between them and their rulers. The standard, the feasts, and the extravagant palaces that housed them were deliberate symbols of power aimed at both an illiterate public and an elite that sought to reassure itself of its own privileged position.

The ubiquity of drinking vessels found by archaeologists from the Early Dynastic period, mainly from funeral contexts ("graveside commensality"), is also taken by Pollock as evidence for feasting,[8] as are sumptuous pieces of dining equipment such as the metal vessels and metal "drinking straws" found in the famous Ur Royal Cemetery.[9] (They also represent tangible remains of just the kind of feasting paraphernalia seen on the Royal Standard of Ur.) Funerals represent powerful social events and are often geared toward the needs of the survivors rather than the needs of the dead. At the death of the king, the graveside feast and deposition of drinking vessels may have had less to do with honoring the dead king per se and more to do with reinforcing the intra-elite bonds that allowed his successor to reign in his stead.[10]

Further examples of collective banqueting in the presence of royalty are found throughout Mesopotamian political history. For example, Sargon of Akkad (ca. 2334–2279 BCE), king of Mesopotamia's "first empire," speaks of daily feasts with 5,400 men.[11] Centuries later, King Ashurnasirpal II of Assyria (883–859 BCE) threw an elaborate feast as part of his building works at the city of Kalakh: "When Ashurnasirpal, king of Assyria, consecrated the joyful palace, the palace full of wisdom, in Kalakh (and) invited inside Ashur, the great lord, and the gods of the entire land; [vast numbers of livestock, bread, wine, fruit, vegetables, seeds, nuts, oil, and so forth are listed;] when I consecrated the palace of Kalakh, 47,074 men and women were invited from every part of my land, [plus] 5,000 dignitaries

(and) envoys of the people of the lands. . . . For ten days I gave them food, I gave them drink, I had them bathed, I had them anointed. (Thus) did I honor them and send them back to their lands in peace and joy."[12]

Thus far we have discussed only elite commensality in Mesopotamia. Clues as to the social meaning of food for common people are less obvious, owing to the nature of the sources. We do know that graveside commensality in Mesopotamia may have existed in the form of the *kispu* ceremony.[13] Also, the Akkadian tale of the Poor Man of Nippur[14] (though written and promulgated by the scribal elite) describes the desperation of a "wretched" man whose "insides burned" from lack of food. Able to afford only one nanny goat, he is ashamed that he cannot provide a meal for his neighborhood and seeks assistance from the mayor, who provides him with only "bone and gristle" and "third-rate beer." Food is depicted in the tale as the great social divider. Prestige would fall to the poor man if only he were able to hold a neighborhood feast.

Such feasting was not limited to Mesopotamia, of course.[15] The Old Testament features food in numerous ways. Communal eating denotes community and trust (see Psalm 41:9). Eating was often used to seal a covenant (see Genesis 26:28–31). The *šelem*-sacrifice ("peace offering") involved the partaking of food and drink before the Lord (see Deuteronomy 27:7). Eschatological feasting at Yahweh's table is envisioned in apocalypses such as Isaiah's (see Isaiah 25:6–8). The meal provided by David in 2 Samuel 6 celebrating the return of the ark to Jerusalem demonstrated his own largesse as king. Perhaps the best-known Hebrew feast is the annual *sēder*, or Passover meal. The meal serves numerous purposes: it acts as an offering to God (Exodus 12:2–7), a celebration of the Exodus (Exodus 12:27), and a harvest festival (Leviticus 23:1–4) and was an expression of communal solidarity (Exodus 12:43–49). Jenks calls the Passover "nearly sacramental."[16] The early Christian movement made feasting fully sacramental; the Lord's Supper became the theophagic Eucharist. Its exact relationship to the *agape* feast (see Jude 12) is unknown, but what seems certain is that early Christian feasting was a far more celebratory occasion than the austere Eucharist of today.[17] Early Christians also participated in graveside commensality, including

an adaptation of the pagan *refrigeria*, or funeral meals, evidence for which is recorded in the Roman catacombs.[18]

Because food is so mundane, its semiotic power is often lost on both the consumer and the scholar who uncovers evidence for feasting in the historical record. If quizzed, a king like Ashurnasirpal would probably have said he was simply being hospitable to his guests as Kalakh, and yet once we accept the symbolism of the feast, we see that the banquet was in fact a projection of his power. The same can be said for the feasts that are described in our next set of evidence, the letters to and from the king of Egypt in the Late Bronze Age Amarna correspondence. The political meaning of these feasts is often so well disguised that we have to read between the lines; nevertheless, it *is* there, and it demonstrates well the ubiquity of politically driven Near Eastern commensality.

Amarna Commensality

The Amarna letters (EA) represent cuneiform correspondence that was found in Al-Amarna, Egypt, in 1887.[19] The letters describe diplomatic communication between both Egypt and her vassals in the Levant and Egypt and the other Near Eastern great powers (Babylon, Assyria, Mitanni, Hatti, and Alashiya). The letters date to the fourteenth century BCE.[20]

Sometime during the reign of Tushratta of Mitanni (Syria, mid-fourteenth century BCE), an Egyptian embassy from the court of Amenhotep III arrived in Washukanni, the Mitannian capital. Mitanni was concerned about the threat from the Hittites in Anatolia, and the arrival of the Egyptians, representing as they did the maintenance of the Egypto-Mitannian alliance, provided welcome news. In one of the Amarna letters (EA 21), Tushratta expresses his delight in the Egyptian embassy, which had just arrived and which had evidently brought gifts for the royal treasury.[21] To underline his delight, the Egyptian ambassadors[22] were treated "like gods": "Mane, [my brother's] messenger, and Hane, my brother's interpre[ter], I have ex[alted] like gods. I have given [them] many presents and treated them very kindly, for their report was excellent. In everything about them, I have never seen men with such an appearance. May my gods and the god of my brother protect them" (EA 21:24–32).

The care and maintenance of messengers was an integral part of Amarna-period diplomacy. It was not, however, simply due to "Middle-Eastern hospitality" that foreign ambassadors were treated well in the courts of the great powers.[23] Nor was it solely an attempt to "forge friendly relations" with the other great powers.[24] Instead, the public feeding and care of messengers was part of an ideological system intended to strengthen the host's political base via a program of conspicuous consumption. The arrival of messengers occasioned the opportunity for public feasting by the elite, thus continuing the already ancient tradition of elite commensality. Put more simply, the arrival of messengers bearing gifts provided the excuse for throwing a grand party, a local celebration of the power and international prestige of the king.

Consider the case of EA 7, where Burnaburiash II, king of Babylon (1349–1323 BCE), snubs the Egyptian envoy. According to Meier, this went against the rules of hospitality: "The customs of diplomacy (no doubt arising in this case from the traditional regard for hospitality) called for the wining and dining of the messenger in the actual presence of the king."[25] One might have expected, according to this supposed "traditional regard for hospitality," that messengers would be "wined and dined" *whatever* the circumstances of their arrival at court. But this behavior in such situations always had a political motive. Burnaburiash was not interested in the rules of any kind of common hospitality because the shipment of gold from Egypt had been minuscule and there was nothing, therefore, to celebrate: "From the time the messenger of my brother ar[rived here], I have not been well, and so on no occa[sion] has his messenger eaten food and [drunk] spirits" (EA 7:8–9).

The "sickness" of the Babylonian king sounds more like a feigned excuse for occasioning a diplomatic snub. If messengers did not bring good news, they were ignored or, worse, detained. If the messengers *had* brought gifts to Burnaburiash's liking, he would certainly have found the energy to rouse himself out of bed. As it was, a party without presents would be embarrassing for the king, suggesting how little he meant to Egypt. With this in mind, it was best to keep things quiet by ignoring the diplomats.

The motive for the conspicuous care and feeding of messengers is confirmed by EA 21:71–74. Tushratta has been suitably honored by the Egyptian embassy and now he wants more. His reason is clear: so that "my brother may greatly glorify me before my country and before my foreign guests."[26] For Tushratta, a large shipment from Egypt would have been the cause for great celebration, thus providing the king *local* prestige at court, amongst the public, and in neighboring countries (whose ambassadors were also at the palace). It would have limited political effect if the shipments of gold arrived quietly in the king's coffers. Instead, a great public festival was required: "Mane, my brother's messenger, came again . . . and I read the tablet which he brought and heard his message. And my brother's message was very pleasing, as if I had seen my brother! So I rejoiced exceedingly on that day—that day and night I celebrated (EA 20:8–13; Tushratta to Amenhotep III).

Here, Tushratta expresses his great pleasure—"I rejoiced exceedingly"—which joy caused day and night celebration. Regarding these moments of joy in the ancient Near Eastern culture, Meier points out the following: "Expressions of joy upon the arrival of messengers were accompanied by the giving of gifts and extensive banqueting. . . . In the ancient Semitic world, communal joy without food, oil, wine, song, or the giving of gifts was not joy at all."[27] According to Meier, even when a festival is not specifically referred to, it is almost certainly implicit when joy is expressed: "Rejoicing in the contexts of messenger activity is not an abstract emotion but a visible and tangible expression of congeniality."[28]

That messengers—the embodiment of good foreign relations and bringers of treasure—were often an integral part of such joy (festivity) is made clear not only by Tushratta's hospitality in EA 21 discussed above, but also by EA 16:6–8: "When I saw your [me]ss[en]gers, I rejoiced greatly. Your messengers shall reside with me as objects of gr[eat soli]citude (Ashuruballiṭ to Amenhotep IV).[29]

The receiving of gifts was a matter of show and status. Burnaburiash admits the same, demanding that the Egyptian king treat him generously in order that "neighboring kings might hear it said, 'The go[ld is much.

Among] the kings there is brotherhood, amity, peace, and [good] relations'" (EA 11:21–22).

Similar sentiments are echoed in EA 29:80–90, where Tushratta describes the great festivities which accompanied the arrival of an Egyptian caravan. The whole spectacle was carried out before court magnates, foreign guests, and the Egyptian ambassador. The text is poorly preserved, but the sentiments are clear: "happiness" will abound in Egypt and Mitanni to the envy of foreign countries.[30] This "happiness" filled the king's coffers. As Schmandt-Besserat points out, "The feast reinforced the king and the queen's prestige and authority. By the same token, the actual presence of the king to review the parade of gifts, and that of the queen to receive the offerings, further increased the pressure for giving."[31]

According to Grottanelli, redistribution may also have been one of the aims of commensality.[32] Elites come together to celebrate communal meals used to project their wealth and power and to bond themselves to each other. These expressions of joy, with messengers as guests of honor, were opportunities for the king to share some of his wealth with his nobles. This created loyalty and demonstrated the king's great power and standing. Thus these magnificent celebrations become a tool for ensuring future donation by local kings: "If you want to share the 'love' of the Great Kings," goes the message, "you must give, just as I am giving to you, and the Great Kings give to me!" In the Amarna letters, feasting is a symbol of power and a tool by which power is maintained. In this way the letters provide useful textual confirmation of the tradition of royal commensality seen in the images of feasting contained on the Ur Standard and elsewhere.

Some Latter-day Saint Reflections

Politically motivated commensality may seem to be a world away from the experiences with food that exist in the lives of most contemporary Mormons. Latter-day Saints may be vaguely aware of ritual feasting in some biblical contexts (such as the annual Israelite festivals or the Last Supper; and the Jewish *kašrût* laws and the Word of Wisdom remind us

of the religious dimension of food), but we make a mistake if we expect "ritual" feasting to always be overtly ritualistic. The diners at the court of Ur were probably not entirely aware of their participation in a social ritual. One assumes that Tushratta's guests and the Egyptian diplomats were mostly just happy to enjoy a lavish party. In the same way, Mormons are probably often ignorant of the power of food and commensal rituals in their own religious lives.[33]

As Ur and Amarna demonstrate, elite commensality in the ancient Near East served to reinforce a social and political hierarchy. In the New Testament and early Christianity, commensality appears to be more egalitarian, at least superficially. Communal eating was a feature of the Corinthian church, one designed to be shared by rich and poor Christians alike (although as 1 Corinthians 11 demonstrates, this was not always successful). The Lord's Supper has sacramental value among believers, who are meant to come together as rich and poor, black and white, male and female, to seal a renewed contract with Christ. Thus Christian commensality seems of a different kind to the conspicuous consumption of the Near Eastern court.

And yet if we dig a little deeper, we see that the Eucharist (the Mormon "sacrament") does in fact draw borders between groups in a way akin to royal feasting. The uninitiated and the unworthy are not supposed to partake, and if they do, they are to do so with the realization that this is a ritual that is not rightfully theirs. The simple act of partaking of bread and wine (or water) becomes a symbol of a spiritual elite, binding believers together and to God, and separating them from the world. It is also an act of redistribution, something the Mormon sacrament prayers make clear. God—the king at this banquet—is presented with gifts by his court (the believers): they promise to always remember him and to keep his commandments. He then promises to let them "have his Spirit to be with them," the greatest of all Christian gifts (see D&C 20:77–79). His glory ultimately becomes theirs: "This is my work and my glory, to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39). The centrality of Christ at the Christian feast is further illustrated by the Book of Mormon: "Come, my brethren, every

one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come buy and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk without money and without price. . . . Come unto the Holy One of Israel, and feast upon that which perisheth not, neither can be corrupted, and let your soul delight in fatness" (2 Nephi 9:50–51).

Imagining the modern Mormon sacrament as a banquet may be hard to do, but the celebrants at the Kirtland School of the Prophets probably understood these symbols better than we do. Zebedee Coltrin described the Kirtland sacrament in terms that are rich with the joyous meaning of food: "The Sacrament was also administered at times when Joseph appointed, after the ancient order; that is, warm bread to break easy was provided, and broken into pieces as large as my fist and each person had a glass of wine and sat and ate the bread and drank the wine; and Joseph said that was the way that Jesus and his disciples partook of the bread and wine; and this was the order of the church anciently, and until the church went into darkness."[34]

Of course, contemporary Mormon (and wider Protestant)[35] commensality is often less exotic than the Kirtland sacrament, but no less meaningful. The family table has become the family altar, the place of communion for the "basic unit of society."[36] President Ezra Taft Benson said that "mealtime provides a wonderful time to review the activities of the day and to not only feed the body, but to feed the spirit as well, with members of the family taking turns reading the scriptures, particularly the Book of Mormon."[37] On a community level, the ward social, complete with potluck dinner, is a delightfully low-brow assertion of Mormon sociality, one that avoids the excesses of gustatory sensuality and remains true to the simple Mormon aesthetic. Even the staple Utah Mormon foods—Jell-O and "funeral potatoes"—while often a source for self-deprecating Mormon humor, have still become fond symbols of Utah Mormon culture, the culture of a "peculiar people" who are proudly "not of the world." Thus Mormon feasting strengthens group bonds and demarcates it from others. Family reunion picnics, ice cream socials after priesthood session, and cultural hall wedding receptions are further symbols of social communion over food. At the end of days, Mormons imagine a great

sacramental feast when they will drink of the "fruit of the vine" with Jesus and his ancient prophets (D&C 27:5–12).

Preparing and eating pioneer food has even become a hobby for some Mormons.[38] Pioneer food is held in great reverence, and pioneer cookbooks grace many Mormon homes. The consumption of pioneer food may help Mormons feel closer to their literal or spiritual ancestors. In an article in the 1973 *New Era*, the youth of the Church were shown how they could reverently eat as Joseph Smith ate. Recipes in the article included potato pancakes and rusk.[39] Pioneer nutritional simplicity is echoed in wheat-based recipes that intend to ready one's belly for the coming day when survival will supposedly rely on the consumption of one's prophetically commanded food storage.

Against the backdrop of ancient Near Eastern elite commensality, Mormon feasting appears to be a dramatically more modest affair. The political machinations of the Amarna-period courts serve mostly to remind us of the power of food and are not intended to represent some kind of ancestral template for Mormon commensality, and yet as the sacrament shows, Mormon "feasting" is a device that similarly divides one group from another. The feasts of Zion, like their ancient Near Eastern counterparts, are communal occasions for the elite, drawn along spiritual rather than temporal lines.

But the comparison should not be pushed too far. Regardless of wealth and position, all are invited to the Lord's banquet. This may not always function in practice, but the idea of a unified, egalitarian "feasting," both physical and spiritual, is a cherished vision held by the community of Saints. And it may even be argued that the most Mormon feast of all—the monthly "feast" of fasting for the benefit of the poor—is the ultimate sign of a Zion people.

Notes

1. Arjun Appadurai, "Gastro-Politics in Hindu South Asia," *American Ethnologist* 8 (1981): 494.
2. See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969).

3. Mary Douglas, "Deciphering a Meal," in *Myth, Symbol, and Culture*, ed. C. Geertz (New York: Norton, 1971), 61.
4. P. Michalowski, "The Drinking Gods: Alcohol in Mesopotamian Ritual and Mythology," in *Drinking in Ancient Societies*, ed. L. Milano (Padova, Italy: Sargon, 1994), 37.
5. Susan Pollock, "Feasts, Funerals, and Fast Food in Early Mesopotamian States," in *The Archaeology and Politics of Food and Feasting in Early States and Empires*, ed. T. L. Bray (New York: Kluwer, 2003), 19.
6. Excavated from the Ur Royal Cemetery by Sir Leonard Woolley in the 1920s.
7. Pollock, "Feasts, Funerals, and Fast Food," 25.
8. Pollock, "Feasts, Funerals, and Fast Food," 26.
9. Pollock, "Feasts, Funerals, and Fast Food," 25.
10. This view of death is a hallmark of post-processualist funerary archaeology, which maintains that humans leave conscious statements of ideology and power in the archaeological record (as opposed to the determinism of processualism). See Mike Parker Pearson, *The Archaeology of Death and Burial* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999), for a discussion of death-theory in modern archaeology.
11. Sargon C2:41–44, translated in I. J. Gelb and B. Kienast, *Die altakkadischen Königsinschriften des dritten Jahrtausends v. Chr.* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1990). Critics of this notion of funerary theory say that it leaves little room for the genuine affection for the dead held by the living.
12. From the so-called "Banquet Stele." See A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian Royal Inscription* (Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrasowitz, 1976), 2:172–76.
13. *Kispu* is an Akkadian word denoting a funerary offering. It consisted of various foodstuffs, including dairy products, water, and beer. The intent was for the deceased to partake of the offering and be placated by it, thus removing their propensity to haunt the living. It is not known how much (if any) of the foodstuffs was consumed by the living at the graveside.

    The idea of feeding the dead has continued into the modern era. The Sardinian *sa mesa* meal is described by Carole M. Counihan, "The Social and Cultural Uses of Food," in *The Cambridge World History of Food*, ed. Kenneth F. Kiple and Kriemhild Coneè Ornelas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1515. On All Souls' Day, Sardinians prepare *sa mesa*, literally, "the table," which is a meal for the deceased that they lay out as they are going to bed. They always include spaghetti and *pabassini*, a special cookie made for All Souls' Day, as well as many other foods, including bread, nuts, fruit, and sometimes wine, beer, Coca-Cola, juice, coffee, snuffing tobacco, or cigarettes. The meal is destined for one's own dead relatives, and often the optional food items reflect a specific deceased person's preferences in life. The meal serves to communicate and maintain good relations with the dead, just as food exchanges regularly do with the living.

14. See Benjamin R. Foster, *From Distant Days: Myths, Tales, and Poetry of Ancient Mesopotamia* (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 1995): 357–62.
15. Counihan offers a useful introduction to commensality across the world. Two examples outside of the ancient Near East demonstrate the ubiquity of the social and cultural uses of food. In India, "caste is marked quite conspicuously by different food habits and rules prohibiting eating with those of lower caste." Counihan, "Social and Cultural Uses of Food," 1514. Among the Wamirans of Papua New Guinea, "the T-mode (transaction) feast . . . serves to reinforce power ranks and the I-mode (incorporation) feast . . . strengthens community solidarity" (1515).
16. A. Jenks, "Eating and Drinking in the Old Testament," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:254.
17. See G. Feeley-Harnik, *The Lord's Table: The Meaning of Food in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian, 1994), for a discussion of Christian feasting.
18. See E. Jastrzebowska, *Untersuchungen zum christlichen Totenmahl aufgrund der Monumente des 3. und 4. Jahrhunderts unter der Basilika des Hl. Sebastian in Rom* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1981).
19. The Amarna letters are written in an Akkadian koine with strong West Semitic influences.
20. The letters date primarily from the reign of Amenhotep III and his son Amenhotep IV, better known as Akhenaten, "the heretic king."
21. This is not stated in EA 21, but in view of the complaint in EA 20 that gold had not been forthcoming and the turnaround in sentiment evident in EA 21, it is likely that Tushratta's mood had been lifted by some kind of gift.
22. In this paper, the terms *messengers*, *diplomats*, and *ambassadors* are used interchangeably. In Akkadian, *mār šipri* means "messenger," but it is clear that they were also diplomats in a way that approaches the modern sense. See C. Jönsson, "Diplomatic Signaling in the Amarna Letters," in *Amarna Diplomacy*, ed. R. Cohen and R. Westbrook (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2000), 202.
23. Samuel A. Meier, *The Messenger in the Ancient Semitic World*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 45 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 219.
24. C. Jönsson, "Diplomatic Signaling in the Amarna Letters," in *Amarna Diplomacy*, ed. R. Cohen and R. Westbrook (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2000), 202.
25. Meier, *Messenger in the Ancient Semitic World*, 219.
26. On *ubāru* ("foreign guests"), see W. Moran, *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1992), 49n16 and *passim*.
27. Meier, *Messenger in the Ancient Semitic World*, 219.
28. Meier, *Messenger in the Ancient Semitic World*, 217–19 provides a host of examples from the Old Testament which show that joy is concretely manifested in feasting. For example, his translation of Proverbs 21:17 says, "He who loves joy will be a poor man, he who loves wine and oil will not be rich."

29. Moran's translation of *teknie*. "Etwa liebevolle Betreung," W. von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1959–81), "teknûm."
30. EA 29:119–35. For comment, see C. Zaccagnini, "The Interdependence of the Great Powers," in *Amarna Diplomacy*, ed. R. Cohen and R. Westbrook (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2000), 152.
31. D. Schmandt-Besserat, "Feasting in the Ancient Near East," in *Feasts, Archaeological and Ethnographic Perspectives on Food, Politics, and Power*, ed. M. Dietler and B. Hayden (Washington, DC: Smithsonian, 2001), 401.
32. C. Grottanelli, "The Roles of the Guest in the Epic Banquet," in *Production and Consumption in the Ancient Near East*, ed. C. Zaccagnini (Budapest: Eotvos Lorand, 1989), 272.
33. Meditations on Mormon food include Linda Hoffman Kimball, ed., *Saints Well Seasoned* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1998); J. Hill and R. Popp, "Toward a Mormon Cuisine," *Sunstone* (May 1988): 33–35. Somewhat related are the food and feasting metaphors contained in Mormon scripture; see R. Rust, "Taste and Feast: Images of Eating and Drinking in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 33, no. 4 (1993): 743–52.
34. Minutes, Salt Lake City School of the Prophets, October 3, 1883, 58–59, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, cited in M. H. Graham, ed., *Salt Lake School of the Prophets Minute Book, 1883* (Palm Desert, CA: ULC Press, 1981).
35. On "whitebread" American Protestant food, see Daniel Sack, *Whitebread Protestants: Food and Religion in American Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).
36. See Janene Wolsey Baadsgaard, "Mealtime, Family Time," *Ensign*, September 1998, 22–27.
37. Ezra Taft Benson, "Strengthening the Family," *Improvement Era*, December 1970, 51.
38. In a religion lacking a systematic theology, history is often taken to be Mormonism's theology. Richard and Joan Ostling observe, "There is a very real sense in which the church's history is its theology. . . . Just as creedal churches have official statements of faith, the Mormon church tends to have official versions of sacred history." *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2000), 245. For example, stories of pioneer privations serve as theological expressions of theodicy: the faithful may sometimes be called to austerity (through a diet radically less rich than that enjoyed by modern Western Mormons), but the kingdom will roll gloriously on.
39. Mary K. Stout, "From a Nauvoo Pantry," *New Era*, December 1973, 42–45.