

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/296833887>

Menu of the Gods. Mesopotamian Supernatural Powers and Their Nourishment, with Reference to Selected...

Article in *Archiv orientální* · January 2014

CITATIONS

0

READS

18

1 author:



[Stefan Nowicki](#)

University of Wroclaw

7 PUBLICATIONS 0 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Menu of the Gods. Mesopotamian Supernatural Powers and Their Nourishment, with Reference to Selected Literary Sources

Stefan Nowicki

Food and eating, as crucial requirements for survival, have always been one of the most important aspects of human as well as divine existence.¹ This is probably best explained in one of the Sumerian proverbs – *Food is the matter, water is the matter*.² However, it seems that it was not an essential requirement for all creatures in the non-human world. Although it is probably the only case known from textual sources, the existence of the *gallû* demons of the netherworld is worth noting, as, according to the fragment of *Inana's descent to the nether world*, their lack of expectation in this matter is exceptional:

Those who accompanied her, those who accompanied Inana, knew no food, knew no drink, ate no flour offering and drank no libation. They crushed no bitter garlic. They ate no fish, they ate no leeks. They, it was, who accompanied Inana.³

¹ There are plenty of different books concerning the role of food in daily life – written from the historical, sociological, cultural or behavioural point of view. Among them, for a general outlook on the history of food, see *The Cambridge World History of Food*, edited by Kenneth F. Kiple and Kriemhild C. Ornelas; Maguellone Toussaint-Samat, *A History of Food*; Naomi F. Miller and Wilma Wetterstrom, “The Beginnings of Agriculture: The Ancient Near East and North Africa”; Jean Bottéro, *The Oldest Cuisine in the World. Cooking in Mesopotamia*. Some preserved recipes for Mesopotamian dishes, especially broths, were edited and published in Jean Bottéro, *Textes culinaires Mésopotamiens*. As this article contains the author’s proposal for interpreting ancient Mesopotamian texts mentioning food as proof of the social and culinary development of humans, of most interest and help has been part of a book written from the biological point of view; see Harald Brüssow, *The Quest for Food. A Natural History of Eating*, 551–664.

² “Proverbs: Collection 1,” 189 (98). *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*. <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.6.1.01#>.

³ “Inana’s descent to the nether world,” 295–99. *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*. <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.4.1#>; Bendt Alster, “Inanna Repenting. The Conclusion of Inanna’s Descent,” cf. “The galla were demons who know no food, who know no drink, who eat no offering, who drink no libations, who accept no gifts,” in Samuel N. Kramer and Diane Wolkstein, *Inanna – Queen of Heaven and Earth. Her Stories and Hymns from Sumer*, 68. The information about *gallû* is really meagre, so it is hardly possible to characterize them in detail. For a general description of this kind of demon, see Erich Ebeling, “Dämonen,” 109. Although known as evil demons of the netherworld, such a name could probably also be used as a description of the good ones; see Jeremy Black and Anthony Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia*, 85–86.

The same motive was used again in the *Dumuzid's Dream*, where these fearsome creatures were described again in the following words:

Those who come for the king are a motley crew, who know not food, who know not drink, who eat no sprinkled flour, who drink no poured water, who accept no pleasant gifts, who do not enjoy a wife's embraces, who never kiss dear little children, who never chew sharp-tasting garlic, who eat no fish, who eat no leeks.⁴

But for most divine and human beings food was to become more than a simple form of nourishment – it changed into a cultural aspect of life and leisure. It could even be described as the means by which a happy and rich life, free from worry or fear, could be attained. Dishes and feasts were the natural companions of joyful men,⁵ and so it should not surprise us that feasts seem to play a very important role in the life of the gods, as depicted in literary texts. Therefore, some elaborate descriptions of divine feasts are to be expected, even though we should note the lack of detailed portrayals. Interestingly, descriptions, or even iconographic presentations, of human banquets, are also very rare, and are, in fact, limited to drinking scenes.⁶

Obviously, the cuisine was not only dependent on the époque or season of the year. As with many other factors in human societies it soon turned into a measure of social division. Poor people ate differently when compared with the rich and the lower social classes were not able to savour the taste of most aristocratic dishes. According to one Sumerian proverb: *Let the poor man die, let him not live. When he finds bread, he finds no salt. When he finds salt, he finds no bread. When he finds meat, he finds no condiments. When he finds condiments, he finds no meat.*⁷ The same rule, at least in the early period, was in compliance with the

⁴ “Dumuzid’s dream,” 110–18. *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*. <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.4.3#>; Bendt Alster, *Dumuzi’s dream. Aspects of oral poetry in a Sumerian myth*, 65–66.

⁵ See, for example, the list of products used to prepare food for generals who took the loyalty oath to the king Amar-Suen in Piotr Steinkeller, “Joys of Cooking in Ur III Babylonia,” 186.

⁶ Concerning the popularity and importance of feasts that can be interpreted from the Mesopotamian banquet scenes, see Frances Pinnock, “Considerations on the ‘Banquet Theme’ in the Figurative Art of Mesopotamia and Syria,” 16–18.

⁷ “Proverbs: Collection 1,” 1.55, 71–73. *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*. <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.6.1.01#>. See also Jean Bottéro, “The Oldest Feast,” 67. This proverb, if taken literally, might lead us to the conclusion that salt, despite the existence of large areas of saline ground in Mesopotamia, needed processing in order to be edible; see Daniel Potts, “On Salt and Salt Gathering in Ancient Mesopotamia,” 248–58. Michael P. Streck, “Salz, Versalzung. A. Nach Schriftquellen,” 596a, argues that because of its cost it would not have been available to everyone. Such an interpretation can be supported by the fact that salt was included in the food rations system; see, e.g., Henri Limet, *Textes Sumériens de la IIIe Dynastie d’Ur*, 98 (108 vii 11).

descriptions of gods and goddesses. As supernatural beings, they could not eat the same food as human beings. This can easily be concluded through reference to the following fragment from the *Debate between Grain and Sheep*:

At that time, at the place of the gods' formation, in their own home, on the Holy Mound, they created Sheep and Grain. Having gathered them in the divine banqueting chamber, the Anuna gods of the Holy Mound partook of the bounty of Sheep and Grain but were not sated; the Anuna gods of the Holy Mound partook of the sweet milk of their holy sheepfold but were not sated. For their own well-being in the holy sheepfold, they gave them to mankind as sustenance.⁸

It would seem that the gods were able to consume food but unable to satisfy their appetite with either cereal or ovine products. On this basis, a crucial difference between the human race and divine beings can easily be described.⁹ Moreover, in three of the textual fragments cited above (referencing sheep and grain, as well as *gallû* demons) this difference is presented as being of a fundamental nature, i.e., that no man can ever think of himself as being equal to a god or demon.¹⁰

Nevertheless, if the gods could not be satisfied with cereal or ovine products, what did the divine diet consist of according to mythological texts? If we consider the “literary” chronology, their cuisine developed over time, in tandem with developments in human society. Before the creation of humankind they were probably vegetarians, as the following fragment from *Ninurta and the Turtle* suggests: “*You, my plant-eater Enki, who shall I send to you?*”¹¹ Not of minor significance is the fact that Enki was a friend of mankind and creator of the most important and basic agricultural tool – the hoe. This may be the reason for depicting him as the one who does not eat meat or dairy products. On the other hand, such an expression may be connected to the myth of *Enki and Ninḫursag*, which provides a plant-based chronology, in which following passage can be found:

⁸ “The debate between Grain and Sheep,” 26–36. *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*. <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.5.3.2#>; Herman L. J. Vanstiphout, “Sumerian Canonical Compositions. C. Individual Focus. 5. Disputations,” 575–78.

⁹ Another interpretation is also possible, i.e., the gods could not eat their fill because the amounts of grain and ovine products were too small. Therefore, they needed people and the results of their labour to increase the quantity of these goods.

¹⁰ On the other hand, the offering sets for gods, ghosts and demons were more or less similar to regular human meals, and, thus, the eating habits of demons described in the texts cited above may be unique, serving simply as the literary means with which to frighten the audience or readers in relation to such a combination.

¹¹ “Ninurta and the turtle,” 57. *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*. <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.6.3#>; Samuel N. Kramer, and John Meier, *Myths of Enki, the Crafty God*, 86.

Enki (...) said to his minister, Isimud: “I have not determined the destiny of these plants. What is this one? What is that one?” His minister, Isimud, had the answer for him. “My master, the ‘tree’ plant,” he said to him, and he cut it off for him and Enki ate it. “My master, the ‘honey’ plant,” (...) and Enki ate it. “My master, the ‘vegetable’ plant,” (...) and Enki ate it. “My master, the *alfalfa grass* (?),” (...) and Enki ate it. “My master, the *atutu plant*,” (...) and Enki ate it. “My master, the *actaltal plant*,” (...) and Enki ate it. “My master, the *..... plant*,” (...) and Enki ate it. “My master, the *amharu plant*,” (...) and Enki ate it. Enki determined the destiny of the plants, had them know it in their hearts.¹²

Whether or not Enki was actually a vegetarian, it is clear that fruits and vegetables were highly appreciated in divine society, especially by goddesses. A young goddess, Uttu, demands such garden products from Enki, who was crazy about the prospect of having intercourse with her. The creator god fulfils the expectations of Uttu, as described in the myth of *Enki and Ninḥursan*, in the following passage:

Enki made his face attractive and took a staff in his hand. Enki came to a halt at Uttu’s, knocked at her house (demanding): “Open up, open up.” (She asked): “Who are you?” (He answered:) “I am a gardener. Let me give you cucumbers, apples, and grapes for your consent.” Joyfully, Uttu opened the house.¹³

Obviously, divine cuisine was not without taste, since we know from the textual sources that at least one seasoning was used during heavenly feasts – salt. Although it is not mentioned in Sumerian myths or religious texts (except in offering lists), in the much later text of the *maqlû* ritual this ingredient is described as follows:

You are the salt that stands in a pure place. Enlil made you as a dish for the great gods. Without you there is no mealtime in Ekur!¹⁴

Worth noting is the expression “a dish for the great gods,” which could suggest that only major gods and goddesses used salt as a seasoning. If this assumption

¹² “Enki and Ninḥursaġa,” 198–217. *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*. <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.1.1#>; Willem H. P. Römer, “Enki, Ninsikila und Ninchursaga,” 380–81.

¹³ “Enki and Ninḥursaġa,” 167–75. *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*. <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.1.1#>; Willem H. P. Römer, “Enki, Ninsikila und Ninchursaga,” 378–79. Such a demand by the goddess may lead us to the hypothesis that garden products were very expensive or were included only in the diet of a limited number of wealthy people. Concerning the existence and cultivation of plants listed in this fragment, see Marvin A. Powell, “Obst und Gemüse,” 15–16 (apple), 17 (grape) and 20 (cucumber).

¹⁴ *Maqlû* VI, 111–13. Gerhard Meier, *Die assyrische Beschwörungssammlung Maqlu*, 45.

is correct, the use of salt could represent another premise for the differentiation between the social strata.¹⁵

Whatever the composition of the divine menu, drinks were not an insignificant part of it. On the contrary, one may gain the impression that drinks were the most basic part of divine cuisine, whilst food served as nothing more than an accompaniment.¹⁶ Goddesses and gods loved to drink different alcoholic beverages. In *Enki's Journey to Nibru* two of them are mentioned. The text reads as follows:

He directed his steps on his own to Nibru and entered the temple terrace, the shrine of Nibru. Enki reached for (?) the beer, he reached for (?) the liquor. He had liquor poured into big bronze containers, and had emmer-wheat beer pressed out (?). In kukuru containers, which make the beer good, he mixed beer-mash. By adding date-syrup to its taste (?), he made it strong.¹⁷

Obviously, gods were deeply interested not only in drinking but also in the preparation of different beverages.¹⁸ According to the text cited above, Enki knew the process of brewing a strong emmer-wheat beer; however, the liquor was mentioned as being already prepared for him. This fragment may suggest that he was not interested in, or maybe not skilled in, the process of liquor production, which seems to be quite strange in the context of his supposed abilities as a creator god.¹⁹ Nevertheless, divine society was eager to drink such pre-prepared beverages, as another part of the same text suggests:

¹⁵ See note 7.

¹⁶ Interestingly, a Sumerian word, *ka š - d é - a*, that is usually translated as “banquet” has the basic meaning “the pouring of beer,” which identifies the main purpose of such feasts and meetings. See Piotr Michalowski, “The Drinking Gods: Alcohol in Mesopotamian Ritual and Mythology,” 29. Moreover, in early figurative art depicting banquets, the main (and often the only) motive is drinking. Only occasionally does food emerge, usually in the form of bread. See Gudrun Selz, *Die Bankettszene. Entwicklung eines “Überzeitlichen” Bildmotivs in Mesopotamien von der Frühdynastischen bis zur Akkad-Zeit*, 24–33, 55–57, 91–103, 158–71, 255–80, 371–85. It is also possible that some of the vessels shown in such scenes were not drinking cups but dishes of food. For such an interpretation, see Rosemary Ellison, “Some Thoughts on the Diet of Mesopotamia from c. 3,000–600 B.C.,” 147.

¹⁷ “Enki’s journey to Nibru,” 96–102. *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*. <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.1.4#>. In some other mythological texts, such as *Enki and Ninmah* or *Inanna and Enki*, Enki is described as being a heavy drinker, which can help to explain his experience in preparing alcoholic beverages.

¹⁸ Concerning Mesopotamian emmer-wheat beer and strong beer, see Wolfgang Röllig, *Das Bier im Alten Mesopotamien*, 24.

¹⁹ As long as one assumes that the noun “duh” () should indeed be translated as “liquor.” In some older publications it is translated as a bran-mash, which seems to be more appropriate than liquor in the whole context of the production of beer. Al Fouadi translated this fragment

In the shrine of Nibru, Enki provided a meal for Enlil, his father. He seated An at the head of the table and seated Enlil next to An. He seated Nintur in the place of honour and seated the Anuna gods at the adjacent places (?). All of them were drinking and enjoying beer and liquor. They filled the bronze aga vessels to the brim and started a competition, drinking from the bronze vessels of Uraš. They made the tilimda vessels shine like holy barges. After beer and liquor had been libated and enjoyed, and after from the house, Enlil was made happy in Nibru.²⁰

Interestingly, the meal prepared by Enki for Enlil is described in just one word, whilst the ancient editor of this text paid much more attention to the divine drinking party. Such parties must have been very popular among the ancient inhabitants of Lower Mesopotamia as there are plenty of mythological texts which mention heavy drinking. The aftermath of the consumption of huge amounts of alcoholic drink is also very well known to goddesses and gods. The outcome could be positive, as with Enlil, who “was made happy in Nibru,” but also negative. Drunken gods could lose control of their decision-making skills, as in the case of Enki, whose irresponsible donation of the “me” rules to his daughter Inana was preceded by the following events:

(Enki) welcomed holy Inana at the holy table, at the table of An. So it came about that Enki and Inana were drinking beer together in the abzu, and enjoying the taste of sweet wine. The bronze aga vessels were filled to the brim, and the two of them started a competition, drinking from the bronze vessels of Uraš.²¹

This is not the only example of the unwanted effects of alcohol consumption. Such divine recklessness could sometimes pose dangers for the human race, since goddesses and gods, being creators of the world, might experiment with their creative powers. The Sumerian myth *Enki and Ninmah* contains an explanation for the existence of the physically disabled and other sick people in the world. The existence of disabled people resulted from a divine wager, linked to a drinking

(vs. 98–102) as follows: *Enki stepped forward to make the beer, he stepped forward to prepare the fine beer. Into big bronze containers he poured out the fine beer, in the kukurru-container he brewed its bran-mash for a good beer, then, by adding the syrup of the dates into its mouth, he made it of excellent quality.* See Abd-al-Hadi al-Fouadi, *Enki's Journey to Nippur: The Journeys of the Gods*, 83. Moreover, in Sumerian dictionaries it is more often translated as “beer mash, bran mash,” rather than “liquor.” Such a translation is provided, for example, in John A. Halloran, *Sumerian Lexicon. A Dictionary Guide to the Ancient Sumerian Language*, 50.

²⁰ “Enki’s journey to Nibru,” 104–16. *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*. <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.1.4#>; Abd-al-Hadi al-Fouadi, *Enki's Journey to Nippur: The Journeys of the Gods*, 83.

²¹ “Inana and Enki,” 27–30. *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*. <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.3.1#>. See also Gertrud Farber-Flügge, *Der Mythos “Inanna und Enki” unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Liste der me*, 21.

competition, as thus described, *Enki and Ninmah drank beer, their hearts became elated*.²²

Apart from savoury dishes and drinks, goddesses and gods were eager to eat desserts, first and foremost cakes. The sweet and smooth taste of a butter cake could disarm and calm even a fierce goddess such as Inana. Her father, Enki, was aware of it, so he ordered the preparation of cakes, cold water and beer to properly welcome Inana to his house. The text reads as follows:

When the maiden had entered the abzu and Eridug, when Inana had entered the abzu and Eridug, she got butter cake to eat. They poured cool refreshing water for her, and they gave her beer to drink, in front of the Lions' Gate. He made her feel as if she was in her girlfriend's house, and made her as a colleague.²³

But Inana was not as devoted to the sweet cakes as another member of the divine family – the moon god, Suen. When he came to Nibru, Enlil offered him his beloved delicacies, among which cakes, beer and bread can be listed. The text reads as follows:

Enlil rejoiced over Suen and spoke kindly: "Give sweet cakes to my little fellow who eats sweet cakes. Give sweet cakes to my Nanna who loves eating sweet cakes. Bring out from the E-kur the bread allotment and first quality bread for him. Pour out for him the finest beer (...) Order pure sweet cake, syrup, crescent (?) cake and clear water for him."²⁴

Presumably, these cakes, which were so fancied by the gods, contained butter, flour, honey and various fruits.²⁵ There are some recipes for special offering cakes (*nin da . i . dé . a*;²⁶ *giri . lam*), as well as for cakes made only for the palace, in Sumerian sources. Such cakes can be similar or identical to those described in the aforementioned texts.

²² "Enki and Ninmah," 52. *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*. <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.1.2#>; Samuel N. Kramer and John Meier, *Myths of Enki, the Crafty God*, 33.

²³ "Inana and Enki," 6–13. *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*. <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.3.1#>. See also Gertrud Farber-Flügge, *Der Mythos "Inanna und Enki" unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Liste der me*, 21.

²⁴ "Nanna-Suen's journey to Nibru," 319–25. *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*. <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.5.1#>; Samuel N. Kramer and Jean Bottéro, *Lorsque les dieux faisaient l'homme. Mythologie mésopotamienne*, 137.

²⁵ Rosemary Ellison, "Methods of Food Preparation in Mesopotamia (c. 3000–600 BC)," 91.

²⁶ Written as *NIĜ₂-i₃-de₂-a*, read as *inda₃-i₃-de₂-a*, known in Akkadian as *mirsu*. Probably it was a kind of paste made of fat and fruits, used as a stuffing for bakery products. See Hagan Brunke, *Essen in Sumer. Metrologie, Herstellung und Terminologie nach Zeugnis der Ur III-zeitlichen Wirtschaftsurkunden*, 200. Earlier, this term was interpreted as fat-improved bread. See Henri Limet, "The Cuisine of Ancient Sumer," 133.

Although only on rare occasions, meat dishes were also included in the divine menu. According to mythological texts, if gods and goddesses were to partake of such a repast, they preferred roasted meat rather than cooked or fried. It also appears that kid was considered especially tasty. Such a course – roast kid – is mentioned in the description of the feast organized by heaven’s inhabitants after the creation of human beings. Roast kid must have been a festive dish, as in the following text it is prepared by the greatest of the gods themselves. The text reads as follows:

Enki brought joy to their heart. He set a feast for his mother Namma and for Ninmah. All the princely birth-goddesses (?) ate delicate reed (?) and bread. An, Enlil, and Lord Nudimmud roasted holy kids.²⁷

Interestingly, it appears that goddesses preferred much lighter cuisine than gods – the choice of the former being reed and bread, whilst the latter preferred heavy meat dishes. Another thing that should be noticed here is the fact that gods only began to eat meat after the creation of man – their slaves and food-producers. This may also provide us with a clue as to the food habits of sedentary societies – only in a stratified society would the highest class be able to afford the inclusion of meat in their diet.

In all probability, opinions about the divine taste did not change over the centuries. Offering lists from the later periods do not seem to have been severely altered. In one of the *namburbi* rituals, performed to ward off any calamity resulting from unfavourable divination, the following ingredients can be found:

12 Emmer-breads, dates, sasqu flour, mirsu, syrup, butter and beer.²⁸

Such an offering seems to be typical for magical rituals, as it is repeated in many other texts. Sometimes, the list is more detailed, containing various kinds of bread, beer or flour, as in the case of the *namburbi* against calamities caused by the field or garden:

Seven pannigu breads, seven “ear”-breads, seven “bow”-breads, long bread, kukku pastry, mirsu, syrup (and) butter.²⁹

²⁷ “Enki and Ninmah,” 44–47. *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*. <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.1.2#>; Samuel N. Kramer and John Meier, *Myths of Enki, the Crafty God*, 33. Worth noting here is the means of meat preparation, since, according to most Sumerian textual sources, meat, being an ingredient of different soups and broths, was cooked. See, for example, Jean Bottéro, *Textes culinaires Mésopotamiens*, 22–110. Roasted meat is listed almost only in mythological and ritual texts. Concerning one of the rare examples of roasted and smoked meat, see Hagan Brunke, *Essen in Sumer. Metrologie, Herstellung und Terminologie nach Zeugnis der Ur III-zeitlichen Wirtschaftsurkunden*, 172.

²⁸ Stefan M. Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung: eine Untersuchung altorientalischen Denkens anhand der babylonisch-assyrischen Löserituale (Namburbi)*, 437.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 371.

This kind of offering is enhanced a little in the *namburbi* against misfortune caused by a failure to correctly follow cultic rules. The following guidance is provided regarding what should be placed on the offering table:

You put there 2 rations of emmer bread. You place there dates and good flour. You put there mirsu with syrup and butter. You libate miḥḥu-beer. You will kill a kid. Shoulder (T-bone), fat and roasted meat you will place there.³⁰

If we were to believe every piece of readable data from textual sources, it would have to be admitted that the gods sometimes also consumed a special kind of meat – human flesh. As far as I know, there is only one such case, which is included in an incantation from the *maqlû* ritual. The victim of witchcraft and black-magic manipulation addresses his (or her) pleas to Gibil, the god of fire, in the following words:

Devour my enemies! Eat who is evil to me!³¹

In all the textual sources discussed above, one can detect many similarities between divine and terrestrial cuisine and eating habits. Among them can be included the dishes, the way of organizing feasts, the meals and products that were considered especially tasty and also the “social strata” of the divine society that takes part in such activities. In the preserved texts, we find descriptions of the feasts and meals of “great gods” rather than those of “common” ones. It appears that the distinction between commonness and “high society” was neither acceptable in the human world, nor in the divine world. These similarities are so numerous that we are in a position to say that the divine cuisine was almost identical. Nevertheless, slight difference can also be observed – such as the lack, in mythological texts, of popular ingredients and dishes that constituted common meals, such as leeks, onions, fish and other items.³² This probably results from the effect of a number of religious Mesopotamian taboos,

³⁰ Ibid., 429.

³¹ *Maqlû I*, 116. Gerhard Meier, *Die assyrische Beschwörungssammlung Maqlû*, 11. This fragment can also be understood as an invocation to fire, as it “eats” everything. Nevertheless, I have doubts in relation to such a simple interpretation – if fire were considered as being the one who eats everything, there would be no burnt offerings, since they would never reach the addressee. It seems much more probable that the fire itself was viewed as being the carrier of different materials (offerings, impurity and so on), so the appeal to Gibil in this case cannot be identified as an invocation to fire itself.

³² Fish dishes in particular were very popular in Mesopotamia. See Rosemary Ellison, “Methods of Food Preparation in Mesopotamia (c. 3,000–600 BC),” 94. Concerning the possible ingredients of the daily meal in Mesopotamia, see also Jean Bottéro, “The Cuisine of Ancient Mesopotamia,” 37; Rosemary Ellison, “Some Thoughts on the Diet of Mesopotamia from c. 3,000–600 B.C.” It must be underlined here that this observation refers to literary texts only; fish was often included in the offering sets of some deities. See Elizabeth D. van Buren, “Fish-Offerings in Ancient Mesopotamia.”

according to which eating the above mentioned products was not allowed before the undertaking of any cultic activities. If the deities did not accept such aromas when conversing with men, it would also seem to be hardly possible for the gods and goddesses themselves to eat this kind of food.³³

As a recapitulation, I would like to outline a very short and simple model that illustrates the evolution of food habits in the society of the gods, which can be interpreted from the textual sources discussed above, and which will be supplemented with some references to the development of human societies.³⁴ In the first stage, the most important requirement was simply to obtain something to eat and something to drink, a necessary prerequisite for survival. Basic cuisine probably consisted of different plants and vegetable products.³⁵ After the development of the sedentary lifestyle, various garden products emerged, i.e., new fruits and vegetables, and dishes would sometimes be seasoned with salt.³⁶ Regarding divine

³³ Such a food taboo is included, for example, in letter ABL 1405, published in Hermann Hunger, *Astrological Reports to Assyrian Kings*, 126 (231). For more about food taboos, see Stefan M. Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung: eine Untersuchung altorientalischen Denkens anhand der babylonisch-assyrischen Löserituale (Namburbi)*, 39, 123, 142. Nevertheless, religious taboos changed throughout Mesopotamian history, and it is hard to prove, or sometimes even accept, that the same activity that was prohibited in the first millennium B.C. would also have been considered as being taboo at the time when the Sumerian mythological texts were being composed.

³⁴ The model designed here by me is based only on the information contained in the mythological texts. As I am convinced of the important role played by oral tradition, which would have preceded the composition of such texts, I believe that the literary image of divine society may well reflect the stages of development of human society, and that it is possible that the text can be used to read back at least a few generations into the past. Nevertheless, these suggestions are, and must remain, highly speculative, until proved or rejected by new discoveries or further research.

³⁵ Such an early stage in the development of human civilization can be traced in some of the literary texts. In the *Debate between Grain and Sheep* text, we read as follows: *The people of those days did not know about eating bread. They did not know about wearing clothes; they went about with naked limbs in the Land. Like sheep they ate grass with their mouths and drank water from the ditches.* See “The debate between Grain and Sheep,” 20–25. *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*. <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.5.3.2#>; Herman L. J. Vanstiphout, “Sumerian Canonical Compositions. C. Individual Focus. 5. Disputations,” 576. It should be added here that at least until the third millennium B.C. the gathering of plants and plant foods could have been an important part of the diet, supplementary to the plants and food produced by farming. See Marvin A. Powell, “Obst und Gemüse,” 13.

³⁶ Undoubtedly, salt was known in Mesopotamia from the oldest times because of the existence of saline ground. The question is in relation to when people started to use it in the process of the preparation and preservation of food. From the proverb on page 212 we can easily interpret that bread was usually eaten with salt, while meat was accompanied by some other spices, but apart from the temple records we have very few texts which address salt consumption. Some offerings for the gods or goddesses, e.g., the *ginû*, consisted of salt or saline solutions. For more about salt in ancient Mesopotamia, see Daniel Potts, “On Salt and Salt Gathering in Ancient Mesopotamia”; Michael P. Streck, “Salz, Versalzung. A. Nach Schriftquellen.”

society, the stage that coincides with the beginning of the human sedentary lifestyle is probably reflected in the period covering the creation of humankind. At that point, both rural and urban societies developed skills in processing plants into more complicated products, such as bread, beer, liquor, wine and cakes.³⁷ And again, with regard to the inhabitants of heaven, this stage of development might be portrayed through reference to divine feasts, consisting mostly of beer, as well as the welcome ceremonies, which included beer and cakes.³⁸ The final stage of this development, a period during which an increasing number of workers saw improvements in their everyday life conditions, and thus wealth, saw the introduction of meat to the menus of both gods and some men.³⁹

References

- al-Fouadi, Abd-al-Hadi. *Enki's Journey to Nippur: The Journeys of the Gods*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms Inc., 1969.
- Alster, Bendt. *Dumuzi's Dream. Aspects of Oral Poetry in a Sumerian Myth*. Mesopotamia. Copenhagen Studies in Assyriology 1. Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1972.
- . "Inanna Repenting. The Conclusion of Inanna's Descent." *Acta Sumerologica* 18 (1996): 1–18.
- Black, Jeremy, and Anthony Green. *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia*. London: British Museum Press, 1992.
- Bottéro, Jean. *Textes culinaires Mésopotamiens*. Mesopotamian Civilizations 6. Winona Lake: Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1995.
- . "The Cuisine of Ancient Mesopotamia." *The Biblical Archaeologist* 48, no. 1 (1985): 36–47.
- . *The Oldest Cuisine in the World. Cooking in Mesopotamia*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.
- . "The Oldest Feast." In *Everyday Life in Ancient Mesopotamia*, edited by Jean Bottéro. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001.

³⁷ This stage of development can easily be tracked in Sumerian textual and iconographic sources. Most "banquet" scenes contain beer and, on rare occasions, bread, and the names of Sumerian festivals are connected to different stages of beer or bread production, as with ezen-še-kú (Festival of barley-eating) or ezen-munukú (Festival of malt-eating). See Gudrun Selz, *Die Bankettszene. Entwicklung eines "Überzeitlichen" Bildmotivs in Mesopotamien von der Frühdynastischen bis zur Akkad-Zeit*, 474–75.

³⁸ Obviously, in accordance with Sumerian mythology, people were created to work for the gods and to feed them; as the human population grew and the rate of development increased, the divine cuisine became more sophisticated. The constant enhancement of the divine menu can easily be traced, for example, by reference to the offering lists, which are not the subject of this article and were intentionally avoided. Concerning nutritional offerings and donations to the gods, see Wilfred G. Lambert, "Donations of Food and Drink to the Gods in Ancient Mesopotamia"; Krystyna Szarzyńska, "Offerings for the Goddess Inana in Archaic Uruk."

³⁹ Undoubtedly, meat was not an uncommon meal for pastoral tribes. Nevertheless, for sedentary people the production of meat is rather expensive in comparison to other animal products such as milk and wool. This is the main reason why the remains of young animals (pigs and sheep) are found mostly in affluent households. See Max Hilzheimer, *Animal Remains from Tell Asmar*, 31, 38; Juliet Clutton-Brock and Richard Burleigh, "Animal Remains from Abu Salabikh. Preliminary Report," 89; Paul Collins, "Everyday Life in Sumer," 353.

- Brunke, Hagan. *Essen in Sumer. Metrologie, Herstellung und Terminologie nach Zeugnis der Ur III-zeitlichen Wirtschaftsurkunden*. Geschichtswissenschaften 26. München: Herbert Utz, 2008.
- Brüssow, Harald. *The Quest for Food. A Natural History of Eating*. New York: Springer, 2007.
- Clutton-Brock, Juliet, and Richard Burleigh. "Animal Remains from Abu Salabikh. Preliminary Report." *Iraq* 40, no. 2 (1978): 89–100.
- Collins, Paul. "Everyday Life in Sumer." In *The Sumerian World*, edited by Harriet Crawford. London-New York: Routledge, 2013.
- "Dumuzid's dream." In *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*. <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.4.3#> [accessed 26 August 2013].
- Ebeling, Erich. "Dämonen." In *Reallexikon der Assyriologie*, Vol. 2, edited by Erich Ebeling and Bruno Meissner. Berlin-Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter, 1938.
- Ellison, Rosemary. "Methods of Food Preparation in Mesopotamia (c. 3000–600 BC)." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 27.1 (1984): 89–98.
- . "Some Thoughts on the Diet of Mesopotamia from c. 3000–600 B.C." *Iraq* 45, no. 1 (1983): 146–50.
- "Enki and Ninḫursaĝa," 198–216. In *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*. <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.1.1#> [accessed 28 August 2013].
- "Enki and Ninmah." In *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*. <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.1.2#> [accessed 28 August 2008].
- "Enki's journey to Nibru." In *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*. <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.1.4#> [accessed 28 August 2013].
- Farber-Flügge, Gertrud. *Der Mythos "Inanna und Enki" unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Liste der me*. Studia Pohl. Dissertationes Scientificalae de Rebus Orientis Antiqui 10. Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973.
- Halloran, John A. *Sumerian Lexicon. A Dictionary Guide to the Ancient Sumerian Language*. Los Angeles: Logogram Publishing, 2006.
- Hilzheimer, Max. *Animal Remains from Tell Asmar*. Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization 20. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941.
- Hunger, Hermann. *Astrological Reports to Assyrian Kings*. State Archives of Assyria VIII. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1992.
- "Inana and Enki." In *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*. <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.3.1#> [accessed 28 August 2008].
- "Inana's descent to the nether world." In *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*. <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.4.1#> [accessed 26 August 2013].
- Kramer, Samuel N. *Sumerian Literary Texts from Nippur in the Museum of the Ancient Orient at Istanbul*. Annual of the American School(s) of Oriental Research 23. New Haven-Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1944.
- , and Diane Wolkstein, *Inanna – Queen of Heaven and Earth. Her Stories and Hymns from Sumer*. New York-Toronto: Harper & Row Publishers, 1983.
- , and Jean Bottéro. *Lorsque les dieux faisaient l'homme. Mythologie mésopotamienne*. Paris: Gallimard, 1989.
- , and John Meier. *Myths of Enki, the Crafty God*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Lambert, Wilfred G. "Donations of Food and Drink to the Gods in Ancient Mesopotamia." In *Ritual and Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East*, edited by Jan Quaegebeur. Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 55. Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters & Departement Orientalistiek, 1993.
- Limet, Henri. *Textes Sumériens de la IIIe Dynastie d'Ur*. Documents du Proche Orient. Epigraphie 1. Brussels: Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, 1976.
- . "The Cuisine of Ancient Sumer." *Biblical Archaeologist* 50, no. 3 (1987): 132–47.

- Maul, Stefan M. *Zukunftsbewältigung: eine Untersuchung altorientalischen Denkens anhand der babylonisch-assyrischen Löserituale (Namburbi)*. Baghdader Mitteilungen 18. Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 1994.
- Meier, Gerhard. *Die assyrische Beschwörungssammlung Maqlu*. Archiv für Orientforschung Beiheft 2. Berlin, 1937.
- Michalowski, Piotr. "The Drinking Gods: Alcohol in Mesopotamian Ritual and Mythology." In *Drinking in Ancient Societies. History and Culture of Drinks in the Ancient Near East*, edited by Lucio Milano. History of the Ancient Near East/Studies 6. Padova: Sargon, 1994.
- Miller, Naomi F., and Wilma Wetterstrom. "The Beginnings of Agriculture: The Ancient Near East and North Africa." In *The Cambridge World History of Food*. Vol. 2, edited by Kenneth F. Kiple and Kriemhild C. Ornelas. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- "Nanna-Suen's journey to Nibru." In *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*. <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.5.1#> [accessed 28 August 2008].
- "Ninurta and the turtle." In *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*. <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.6.3#> [accessed 29 August 2008].
- Pinnock, Frances. "Considerations on the 'Banquet Theme' in the Figurative Art of Mesopotamia and Syria." In *Drinking in Ancient Societies. History and Culture of Drinks in the Ancient Near East*, edited by Lucio Milano. History of the Ancient Near East/ Studies 6. Padova: Sargon, 1994.
- Potts, Daniel. "On Salt and Salt Gathering in Ancient Mesopotamia." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 27, no. 3 (1984): 225–71.
- Powell, Marvin A. "Obst und Gemüse." In *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie*, Vol. 10, edited by Gabriella Frantz-Szabó and Ursula Hellwag. Berlin-New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2003–2005.
- "Proverbs: Collection 1." In *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*. <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.6.1.01#> [accessed 28 August 2013].
- Röllig, Wolfgang. *Das Bier im Alten Mesopotamien*. Berlin: Gesellschaft für die Geschichte und Bibliographie des Brauwesens E.V., 1970.
- Römer, Willem H. P. "Enki, Ninsikila und Ninchursaga." In *Mythen und Epen I. Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments* 3/3. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlag-Haus Mohn, 1993.
- Selz, Gudrun. *Die Bankettszene. Entwicklung eines "Überzeitlichen" Bildmotivs in Mesopotamien von der Frühdynastischen bis zur Akkad-Zeit*. Vol. 1, Freiburger Altorientalische Studien 11. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1983.
- Steinkeller, Piotr. "Joys of Cooking in Ur III Babylonia." In *On the Third Dynasty of Ur. Studies in Honor of Marcel Sigrist*, edited by Piotr Michalowski. Journal of Cuneiform Studies Supplemental Series 1. Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2008.
- Streck, Michael P. "Salz, Versalzung. A. Nach Schriftquellen." In *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie*. Vol. 11, edited by Sabine Ecklin. Berlin-New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006–2008.
- Szarzyńska, Krystyna. "Offerings for the Goddess Inana in Archaic Uruk." *Revue d'Assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale* 87 (1983): 7–28.
- The Cambridge World History of Food*, edited by Kenneth F. Kiple and Kriemhild C. Ornelas. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- "The debate between Grain and Sheep." In *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*. <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.5.3.2#> [accessed 28 August 2013].
- Toussaint-Samat, Maguellone. *A History of Food*. Malden: Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2000.
- Van Buren, Elizabeth D. "Fish-Offerings in Ancient Mesopotamia." *Iraq* 10, no. 2 (1948): 101–21.
- van de Mieroop, Marc. "Democracy and the Rule of Law, the Assembly and the First Law Code." In *The Sumerian World*, edited by Harriet Crawford. London-New York: Routledge, 2013.

Vanstiphout, Herman L. J. "Sumerian Canonical Compositions. C. Individual Focus. 5. Disputations." In *The Context of Scripture, I: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World*, edited by William W. Hallo. Leiden-New York-Köln: Brill, 1997.