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SOCIAL STATUS AND CLASSICISM IN THE VISUAL AND MATERIAL CULTURE OF THE SWEET BANQUET IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

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ABSTRACT. *Around 1520, at the court of Henry VIII of England, a new meal type emerged. Called the 'banquet', this took place after the main meal, in a distinct space, and consisted of sweet foods, spiced wine, and sculptural sugarwork. Originally developing at court, the sweet banquet was quickly embraced by the nobility and gentry. This article investigates the adoption of this dining practice in the wealthy country houses of early modern England and the reasons for its popularity in this specific context. It draws on state papers, published works, and household accounts to establish the ways in which the banquet was utilized and understood by early modern elites. This evidence makes it clear that a high-status person would have expected to be entertained with a sweet banquet at any important social occasion involving their peers. An examination of the visual and material cultures associated with the banquet establishes that it was a highly effective means by which to express class status at a time of anxiety regarding social mobility. As an appropriation of the ancient symposium, it provided opportunities to engage with the intellectual and visual cultures of the classical world and the Renaissance.*

I

In September 1591, Queen Elizabeth I visited the earl of Hertford at his estate at Elvetham. The lavish entertainments provided for the queen during her four-day stay included water pageants, fireworks, feasts, and a 'banquet'. A printed account of the entertainment makes it clear that this banquet was no ordinary meal. Served after supper, 'all in glass and silver', and with an accompanying firework display, it involved a thousand sweet dishes. These included sculptural sugarwork representing the queen's arms, castles, and forts, human figures and mythical and exotic animals as well as preserved fruits and other confections.[1] The banquet at Elvetham is one of the best-documented examples of a

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[1] Anonymous, *The honourable entertainment gieuen to the Queenes Maiestie in progresse at Eluetham in Hampshire, by the right honorable the earle of Hertford* (London, 1591), sigs. D3v–D4v.

dining practice which had first appeared at the court of Henry VIII in the 1520s and was quickly adopted by the nobility and gentry. The 'banquet', as exemplified in the account of the entertainment at Elvetham, took place after the main meal or feast, in a distinct space, and consisted of sweet foods and sculptural sugarwork.

Although in recent years scholars have increasingly recognized the sweet banquet as a meal type, it has received relatively little attention.[2] This is due, in part, to a seeming lack of primary sources relating to this dining practice. The accounts of the royal kitchens for the relevant period, which might have been expected to provide a rich seam of information, were destroyed in a fire in 1698. Moreover, written descriptions of the sweet banquet tend to be brief and fragmentary, and are often overlooked due to the modern understanding of the term 'banquet' to refer to any great feast. Additionally, there are very few visual depictions of the English sweet banquet.

Despite the challenges involved, the value of studying ephemeral cultural practices has been demonstrated in recent years by scholars working in disciplines as varied as anthropology, English literature, and history. This work has drawn particular attention to the symbolic importance of food and dining practices in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England.[3] This is a rich period of enquiry due to high levels of political and cultural upheaval and emergent capitalist economies. Related to these developments was an enhanced dialogue about food, manners, and status, played out in contemporary conduct literature, and an increasingly recognized willingness to spend significant amounts of money and time in dining. Scholars such as Michel Jeanneret, Sergio Bertelli, Ken Albala, and David Goldstein have emphasized the importance of food and dining practices as status markers and their role in conveying ideas of kingship and forming and maintaining social relationships.[4] Anthropological approaches have been important in this regard. Felicity Heal, for example,

[2] Works which do deal with the sweet banquet include C. Anne Wilson, ed., *Banquetting stuffe: the fare and social background of the Tudor and Stuart banquet* (Edinburgh, 1991); Patricia Fumerton, *Cultural aesthetics: Renaissance literature and the practice of social ornament* (Chicago, IL, 1991), pp. 111–67; Chris Meads, *Banquets set forth: banqueting in English Renaissance drama* (Manchester, 2001); Tracy Thong, 'Appropriations of the early modern banquet course and informal meals in the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries' (Ph.D. thesis, Loughborough, 2008); Louise Stewart, 'The sweet banquet in early modern England' (Ph.D. thesis, Nottingham, 2016); also see Ivan Day, *Royal sugar sculpture: 600 years of splendour* (Durham, 2002).

[3] The growth of interest in food history and increasing recognition of its status as a valid area of academic enquiry is exemplified in the 2012 publication by Bloomsbury of the six volume *Cultural history of food*. The most relevant volumes here are Ken Albala, ed., *A cultural history of food in the Renaissance* (London and New York, NY, 2012); Beat Kümin, ed., *A cultural history of food in the early modern age* (London and New York, NY, 2012).

[4] Michel Jeanneret, *A feast of words: banquets and table talk in the Renaissance*, trans. Jeremy Whitelay and Emma Hughes (Chicago, IL, 1991); Sergio Bertelli, *The king's body: sacred rituals of power in medieval and early modern Europe*, trans. R. Burr Litchfield (Pennsylvania, PA, 2001), pp. 191–213; Ken Albala, *Food in early modern Europe* (Westport, CT, 2003); Ken

has utilized Marcel Mauss's theories of gift exchange to provide new insights regarding the meanings of food gifts and hospitality in this period.[5] Works with a strong grounding in political and social context have used published sources including recipe books, conduct literature, and plays to explore the ways in which foods were perceived to affect body and mind, their symbolic associations, and use in the marking of key life events.[6] Relatedly, scholars focused on material culture have explored the ways in which objects associated with preparing and serving food played roles in articulating identities, expressing social status and virtue, and even facilitating subversive agency.[7] In this way, dining practices and the objects associated with them are revealed to have been capable of communicating in highly sophisticated ways.

This article contributes to these discussions in examining the social and cultural significance of a specific dining practice. As is discussed below, a high-status person in early modern England would have expected to be entertained with a sweet banquet at any important social occasion involving their peers. The following examination of the literary, visual, and material cultures associated with the banquet provides an explanation for its ubiquity. It establishes that the banquet was a highly effective means by which to express and even maintain class status at a time of anxiety regarding social mobility. Banqueting also provided opportunities to demonstrate evidence of a refined education and knowledge of a pan-European culture of revived antiquity.

Albala, *The banquet: dining in the great courts of Renaissance Europe* (Chicago, IL, 2007); David B. Goldstein, *Eating and ethics in Shakespeare's England* (Cambridge, 2013).

[5] Felicity Heal, *Hospitality in early modern England* (Oxford, 1990); Felicity Heal, 'Food gifts, the household and the politics of exchange in early modern England', *Past and Present*, 199 (2008), pp. 41–70; Felicity Heal, *The power of gifts: gift exchange in early modern England* (Oxford, 2014).

[6] Stephen Mennell, *All manners of food: eating and taste in England and France from the middle ages to the present* (Chicago, IL, 1996); Laura Mason, ed., *Food and the rites of passage* (Totnes, 2002); Robert Appelbaum, *Aguecheek's beef, belch's hiccup, and other gastronomic interjections: literature, culture, and food among the early moderns* (Chicago, IL, 2006); Joan Thirsk, *Food in early modern England: phases, fads, fashions, 1500–1760* (London and New York, NY, 2007); Joan Fitzpatrick, ed., *Renaissance food from Rabelais to Shakespeare: culinary readings and culinary histories* (Aldershot, 2010).

[7] Sara Pennell, 'The material culture of food in early modern England, 1650–1750', in S. Tarlow and S. West, eds., *The familiar past? Archaeologies of later historical Britain* (London and New York, NY, 1999), pp. 35–50; Mary E. Hazard, *Elizabethan silent language* (Lincoln, NB, and London, 2000); Flora Dennis, 'Scattered knives and dismembered song: cutlery, music and the rituals of dining', *Renaissance Studies*, 24 (2010), pp. 156–84; Kirstin Kennedy, 'Sharing and status: the design and function of a sixteenth-century Spanish spice stand in the Victoria and Albert Museum', *Renaissance Studies*, 24 (2010), pp. 124–55; Wendy Wall, 'Household "writing" or the joys of carving', in Rebecca Ann Bach and Gwynne Kennedy, eds., *Feminisms and early modern texts: essays for Phyllis Rankin* (Selsingrove, PA, 2010), pp. 25–42; Sara Pennell, 'Getting down from the table: early modern foodways and material culture', in Catherine Richardson, Tara Hamling, and Richard Gaimster, eds., *The Routledge handbook of material culture in early modern Europe* (London and New York, NY, 2017), pp. 185–95.

II

It is likely that the English sweet banquet was originally based on continental models which conflated two features of medieval feasts, the 'void' and the 'entremet' in the development of increasingly elaborate finales. Throughout fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Europe, ceremonial feasts at court were followed by a 'void'. This involved the consumption of wine, spices, and wafers and occurred in the main dining hall, after the tables had been cleared, or 'voided'.[8] From the fourteenth century, the courses of ceremonial feasts at the Valois-Burgundian courts were interspersed with entremets, including sculptures, and sometimes tableaux involving live performers.[9] As early as 1369, the final course of Dutch marriage feasts was referred to as the 'banket' and consisted of wine and a mixture of sweet and savoury dishes which, like the void, were served buffet-style on tables from which guests helped themselves.[10] At the mid-fifteenth-century French courts, entremets began to be presented towards the end of the meal, and could accompany the wine and spices of the void in a grand finale.[11]

In Italy, by this period the intersection of the void and entremets had been elaborated into a separate meal, the *collation*. This featured spectacular edible sculptures, confectionery, and fruit alongside the wine and spice of the void.[12] Accounts of ducal weddings of the 1460s and 1470s describe sweet *collationi* (collations), which could precede feasts or be presented late in the evening, after the main meal, dancing, and masquing. The wedding of Lorenzo Medici and Clarice Orsini in 1469 featured various collations. One, of fruit, confections, and wine, took place in a garden loggia, and the following evening, after dancing, another collation of wine and gilded confections was served.[13]

[8] On the void, see Philippa Glanville, *Silver in Tudor and early Stuart England: a social history and catalogue of the national collection* (London, 1990), p. 217; C. Anne Wilson, 'The evolution of the banquet course: some medicinal, culinary and social aspects', in Wilson, ed. *Banquetting stuffe*, pp. 10–11.

[9] Day, *Royal sugar sculpture*, p. 17; L. B. Ross, 'Beyond eating: political and personal significance of the entremets at the banquets of the Burgundian court', in Timothy J. Tomasik and Julian M. Vitullo, eds., *At the table: metaphorical and material cultures of food in medieval and early modern Europe* (Turnhout, 2007), pp. 145–66; Christina Normore, *A feast for the eyes: art, performance and the late medieval banquet* (Chicago, IL, and London, 2015), p. 50.

[10] A. Janse and J. M. Van Winter, 'Ein bruilhoftsmaal aan het Hollandse hof in 1369', *Jaarboek voor middeleeuwse geschiedenis*, 3 (2000), pp. 162–95.

[11] Jean-Louis Flandarin, *Arranging the meal*, trans. Julie E. Johnson with Sylvie and Antonio Roder (Los Angeles, CA, and London, 2007), pp. 50, 55–6; Johanna Maria van Winter, 'The medieval banquet', *Petit propos culinaries*, 100 (2014), pp. 63–70.

[12] Day, *Royal sugar sculpture*, p. 23; Katherine McIver, *Cooking and eating in Renaissance Italy: from kitchen to table* (Washington, DC, 2014), pp. 73–4.

[13] Claudio Benporat, *Feste e banchetti: convivialita Italiana fra tre e quattrocento* (Florence, 2001), p. 154.

The void had been a feature of royal and ecclesiastical feasts in England from at least the thirteenth century.[14] The first substantial evidence for its elaboration in the style of the European courts is found in literary sources and court records relating to the reign of Henry VIII. Here, this fashionable, separate sweet meal was known as a 'banket' or 'banquet'.[15] Sources indicate that it took place in specially designated spaces, was distinct from and generally occurred after 'supper', the main evening meal, and involved a specific category of sweet foods known as banqueting foods. These included spices, fresh and preserved fruits, a variety of confectionery, sculptural sugarwork, and 'marchpanes', decorative objects made from a substance similar to marzipan, which was itself also referred to as marchpane.[16]

Given that the term 'banquet' is used today to refer to any lavish feast, there is potential for confusion in relation to this terminology, and arriving at a precise definition of the term as it was used in the early modern period is challenging, not least due to the dispersed and often fragmentary nature of the sources in which it appears. Whilst the term banquet was clearly widely understood, its specific meanings in sixteenth-century England can only be reconstructed through the close reading of primary sources. In the majority of cases, its use is accompanied by references to sweet foods and/or spatial withdrawal. It is not clear that the term was always used to refer to what is classified here as the separate sweet banquet, and particularly in sources relating to the 1520s, there is ambiguity between the terms 'banquet', 'void', and 'supper'. However, in attempting to reconstruct and contextualize this highly ephemeral dining practice, this article has drawn on examples where at least two of the triad outlined above (sweet foods, spatial withdrawal, and the term 'banquet') are present. Given the nature of the evidence, it has often been necessary to extrapolate and interpret what appears in textual sources. Nevertheless, they do suggest an increasing understanding, from the 1520s, of the banquet as a separate dining practice.

One of the earliest descriptions of a sweet banquet in England appears in a 1518 letter by Sebastian Giustinian, Venetian ambassador to the English court. This took place during celebrations relating to the signing of the Treaty of London. On 3 October, Universal Peace was declared at St Paul's cathedral, after which the king, ambassadors, and nobles attended a supper hosted by Cardinal Wolsey. A masque and dancing followed supper, and then the twelve male and twelve female maskers, including the king and his sister Mary, lords, and ladies 'seated themselves apart from the tables, and were served with countless dishes of confections and other delicacies'.[17] Here, we have evidence that a separate course or meal, served after entertainments,

[14] Wilson, 'The evolution of the banquet course', p. 11.
[15] For clarity, I have used the more frequently occurring 'banquet' where possible.
[16] Wilson, 'The evolution of the banquet course', pp. 9–10.
[17] Sebastian Giustinian, *Four years at the court of Henry VIII* (2 vols., London, 1854), II, p. 225.

was associated primarily with confectionery. This account is of further interest as it indicates that this course was both temporally and spatially distinct from other eating practices, being consumed away from the supper tables, if in the same architectural space. Also of significance is the fact that only the twenty-four masquers are described as being served with the confectionery. The use of specific, separate spaces and exclusivity in terms of participants would later become common, and conceivably defining, features of the sweet banquet. A 1700 account of a summer house in a garden, for example, describes the structure as 'pretty, and therefore little, built rather for a Banquet than a feast', underscoring the exclusive and distinct nature of the banquet.[18]

Later descriptions of banquets held during the reign of Henry VIII clearly distinguish them from other meal types and associate them with specific foodstuffs. In a remembrance for the meeting between Henry VIII and the Emperor Charles V at Gravelines in May 1520, for example, it is noted that a supper should be held on the Sunday night, 'and after supper a mummery, with a banquet'.[19] Orders for the reception of Anne of Cleves into England in 1539 call for 'wine, fruits and spices' to be prepared in the 'manner of a banquet'.[20] These examples of the specificity of the term's use suggest that, like other terms such as 'dinner' and 'supper', it had a clear and recognizable meaning, being associated with sweet foods and spatial and temporal distinction from other meals.[21]

An analysis of the frequency and use of the term in both contemporary printed sources and modern editions of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century state papers is revealing with regard to the chronology of the banquet's adoption at court. Relevant state papers from the reign of Henry VIII onwards are now available online and can therefore be subjected to keyword searches for the term 'banquet'. In the documents relating to the reign of Henry VIII, the term 'banquet' occurs 111 times. Of these, twenty-one instances are almost certainly separate sweet banquets, in that they are associated with sweet banqueting foods and/or movement to another space after supper and masquing. Seventy instances are ambiguous: they might refer to sweet banquets, but without sufficient accompanying information it is impossible to be sure. Two references to

[18] Eugenius Philo-Patriae, *A succinct description of France* (London, 1700), p. 39.

[19] J. S. Brewer, ed., *Letters and papers, foreign and domestic, of the reign of Henry VIII*, III (London, 1867), p. 281.

[20] James Gairdner and R. H. Brodie, eds., *Letters and papers, foreign and domestic, of the reign of Henry VIII*, XIV (London, 1894), p. 199.

[21] It has long been recognized that the terms 'dinner' and 'supper' had very specific meanings. Dinner was the main meal, usually served between midday and 2pm, while supper was a lighter meal, eaten later, usually between 5pm and 6pm. The term 'feast' also had specific connotations, being used to refer to meals served on saints' days and other religious holidays, as well as the holidays themselves. Albala, *Food in early modern Europe*, p. 231; Alison A. Smith, 'Family and domesticity', in Albala, ed., *A cultural history of food in the Renaissance*, p. 143; C. M. Woolgar, *The culture of food in England 1200–1500* (New Haven, CT, and London, 2016), pp. 12–15.

the term banquet clearly refer to something other than the sweet banquet as defined here, and there are eighteen references to banqueting houses.[22] The Elizabethan state papers contain twenty-four ambiguous or certain references to banquets, five to banqueting houses, and one to banqueting foods.[23] In the equivalent volumes relating to the reigns of James I and Charles I, there are thirteen ambiguous or definite references to banquets, and thirty-seven to banqueting houses.[24] In the papers relating to the reigns of Charles II and James II, the term banquet appears in contemporary usage twenty-three and two times respectively, and again the majority of these references are to the banqueting house as a space rather than to the banquet as a dining practice.[25] This suggests that at court the banquet reached a peak of popularity under Henry VIII, and declined significantly in the early seventeenth century.

Online 'text mining' applications also allow for the analysis of the frequency with which the terms 'banket' and 'banquet' appear in printed sources from the late fifteenth century onwards (Figure 1). This data makes it clear that the term 'banquet' gains momentum from 1540 and takes over from 'banket' in 1570. Although neither the data nor written sources suggest a clear explanation for this shift, it may be related to the early use of the term 'banket' in the Dutch context and the later elaboration of this course at the French/Burgundian and Italian courts. The highest incidence of printed occurrences of banket/banquet falls between 1530 and 1650. That the term was at its peak in printed texts slightly later than was the case in papers associated with the royal courts suggests that the banquet was originally adopted at court and subsequently disseminated beyond it. Due to the large quantity of data for the term 'banquet' produced via the text-mining method for the later part of the period, a sample was analysed using the works published in the first year of each decade

[22] *Letters and papers foreign and domestic of the reign of Henry VIII*, various editors (28 vols., London, 1864–1920), www.british-history.ac.uk/search/series/letters-papers-hen8, accessed 9 Dec. 2015.

[23] Robert Lemon and Mary Anne Everett, eds., *Calendar of state papers, domestic: Edward, Mary and Elizabeth* (8 vols., London, 1856–72), www.british-history.ac.uk/search/series/cal-state-papers–domestic–edw-eliz, accessed 11 Aug. 2016; and *Calendar of the Cecil papers in Hatfield House* (24 vols., London,1883–1976), www.british-history.ac.uk/search/series/cal-cecil-papers, accessed 11 Aug. 2016. The apparent decline of the term 'banquet' in the Elizabethan state papers does not reflect the relatively higher number of banquets taking place during progresses and beyond the court in the later sixteenth century.

[24] Mary Anne Everett, ed., *Calendar of state papers, domestic: James I* (4 vols., London, 1853–9), www.british-history.ac.uk/search/series/cal-state-papers–domestic–jas1, accessed 9 Dec. 2015; *Calendar of state papers domestic: Charles I*, various editors (23 vols., London, 1858–97), www.british-history.ac.uk/search/series/cal-state-papers–domestic–chas1?query=&title=, accessed 9 Dec. 2015.

[25] *Calendar of state papers domestic: Charles II*, various editors (28 vols., London, 1860–1939), www.british-history.ac.uk/search/series/cal-state-papers–domestic–chas2?query=&title, accessed 9 Dec. 2015; E. K. Timings, ed., *Calendar of state papers domestic: James II* (3 vols., London, 1960–72), www.british-history.ac.uk/search/series/cal-state-papers–domestic–jas2, accessed 9 Dec. 2015.

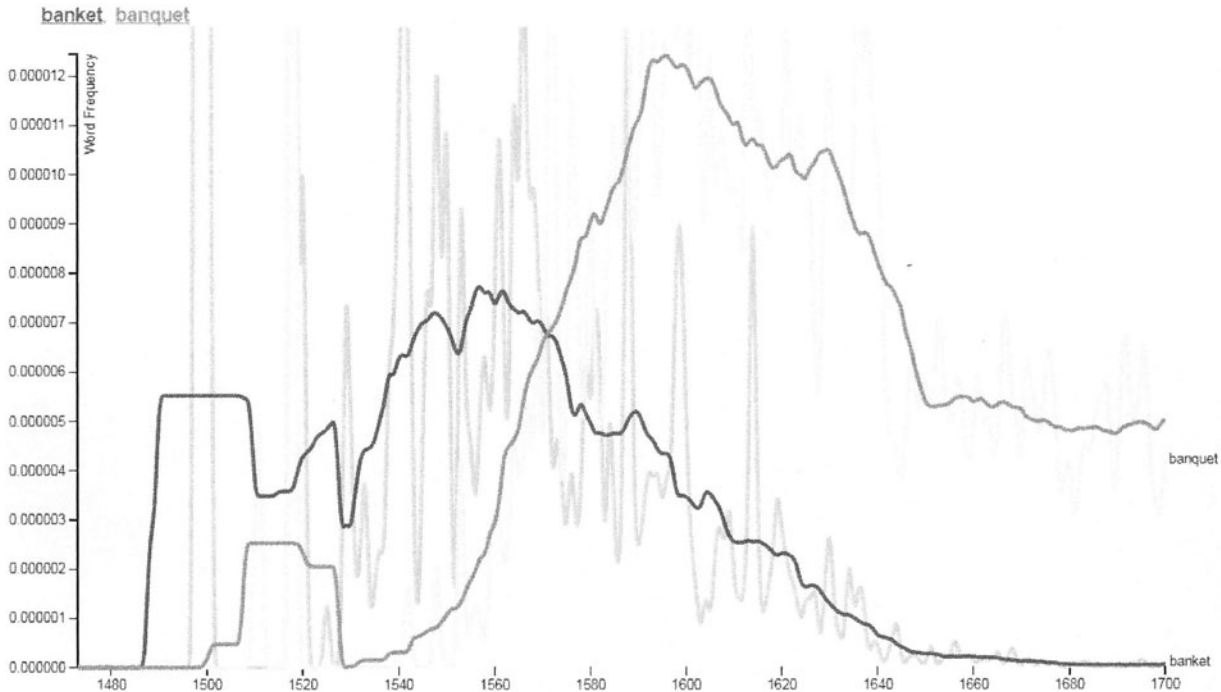

Fig. 1. Frequency of the use of the term 'banquet' in printed sources to 1700. earlyprint.wustl.edu, accessed 24 Apr. 2017.

for the period from 1580 to 1700. This allowed the data to be analysed over time, which indicated that there was little significant change across the sample. Analysis using the EEBO-TCP keywords in context tool made it possible to apply the criteria of sweet foods and spatial withdrawal to the terms 'banquet' and 'banket'.[26] This indicated that the majority of references are ambiguous, as is the case in the state papers, with a smaller number of definite references to the practice of banqueting as defined here, a comparable number of instances which do not refer to the sweet banquet and a very small number of references to banqueting houses or chambers (Figures 2, 3 and 4). The large number of ambiguous uses may indicate that the term was widely understood and therefore required little by way of explanation.

The data was also analysed based on broad categories of types of text. Of the 3,189 uses of the term 'banket' in print between 1485 and 1700, it was most often found in works on ancient history (147 occurrences), books of manners (249 occurrences), compendia (194 occurrences), works on contemporary and recent history (220 occurrences), and accounts of travel or distant lands (192 occurrences). The high incidence to be found in books of manners and contemporary chronicles is to be expected for a term denoting a current dining practice. Its association with accounts of travel may be the result of a widespread awareness of the origins of sugar and spices in the east and related ideas about the 'exotic' nature of the banquet as a whole.[27] The association with works on ancient history and compendia is significant in light of the below discussion of the sweet banquet as a revival of the ancient symposium.

The most common categories of text in which the term 'banquet' was found in the 1,674 instances analysed for context were contemporary histories (102 instances), accounts of travel and distant lands (99 instances), and plays (98 instances); works on ancient history, classical mythology and literature, compendia, and books of manners also continued to use the term relatively frequently (33, 62, 56, and 45 instances respectively), reflecting the wider range of types of text published during the later period during which 'banquet' became dominant.

Across the whole period, the majority of those instances which did not refer specifically to the sweet banquet were found in theological texts: 632 out of a total of 728 in the analysis of the term 'banket' and 238 out of a total of 297 in the sample analysed for 'banquet'. Here, the term was frequently used to refer to Holy Communion (often described as a holy banquet), the experience of faith or as a metaphor for heaven. Thus, one 1664 text describes God as 'a

[26] Data sets: Banquet: https://earlyprint.wustl.edu/toolwebgrok.html?corpus=plaintext&searchPattern=banquet&startYear=1476&endYear=1700&authors=&titles=&page=1, accessed 4 Dec. 2017; Banket: https://earlyprint.wustl.edu/toolwebgrok.html?corpus=plaintext&searchPattern=banket&startYear=1473&endYear=1700&authors=&titles=&page=1, accessed 4 Dec. 2017.

[27] On this, see Stewart, 'The sweet banquet', pp. 45–7, 237–9.

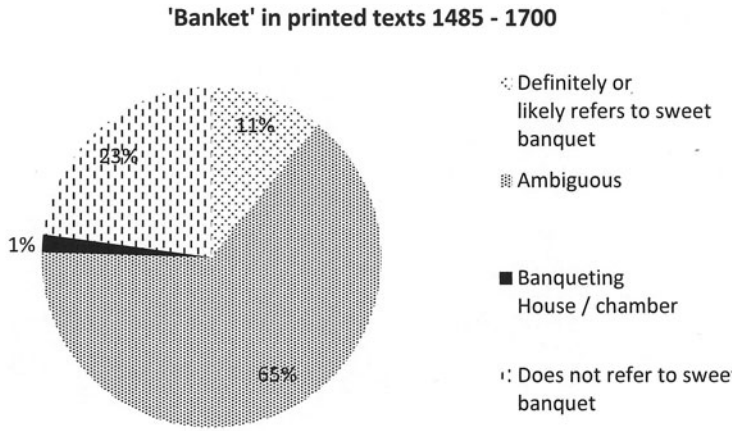

Fig. 2. Usage of 'banket' in printed sources using data from https://earlyprint.wustl.edu/toolwebgrok.html?corpus=plaintext&searchPattern=banket&startYear=1473&endYear=1700&authors=&titles=&page=1, accessed 12 Dec. 2017.

bower of spices unto thee, and his fruit is sweet to thy tast, he hath brought thee into his banketting house … he causeth thee to drink of his spiced wine which is the liquor of life'.[28] Such usages are likely to have drawn on the banquet's perceived health-giving properties, the term's associations with costliness, rarity, and royalty as well as the wine and wafers served at voids and banquets; the same items as those consumed during communion.[29] Incidences of the term categorized in the statistical analysis as not referring specifically to the sweet banquet could therefore still draw on readers' awareness of this meal type.

In addition to textual sources, architectural remains and surviving material culture provide important evidence for the awareness and, importantly, the practice of banqueting in early modern England. In relation to the elite, this is demonstrated by the proliferation of banqueting houses in the gardens and on the roofs of the country houses of the nobility and gentry, and by information found in household accounts. Small, ornamental buildings, banqueting houses were first built in the grounds of wealthy homes as early as the 1520s, but the majority of over sixty surviving examples date from the late sixteenth or early seventeenth centuries.[30]

[28] William Bennit, *God only exalted in his own work* (London, 1664), pp. 10–11.

[29] Stewart, 'The sweet banquet', pp. 42–4

[30] On banqueting houses, see Mark Girouard, *Life in the English country house: a social and architectural history* (New Haven, CT, and London, 1978), p. 106; Paul Woodfield, 'Early buildings in gardens in England', in A. E. Brown, ed., *Garden archaeology* (London, 1991), p. 124; Paula Henderson, 'The architecture of the Tudor garden', *Garden History*, 27 (1999), p. 60; Mark Girouard, *Elizabethan architecture: its rise and fall, 1540–1640* (New Haven, CT, and London, 2009), pp. 105, 251–2. For a table of surviving and documented banqueting houses, see Stewart, 'The sweet banquet', appendix 2.

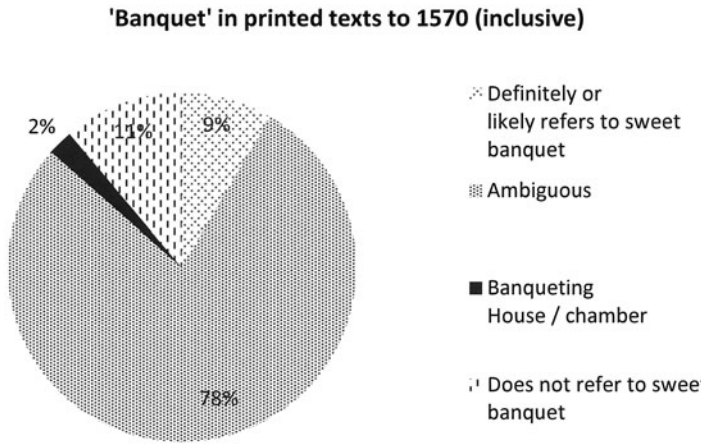

Fig. 3. Usage of 'banquet' in printed sources to 1570 using data from https://earlyprint.wustl.edu/toolwebgrok.html?corpus=plaintext&searchPattern=banquet& startYear=1473&endYear=1700&authors=&titles=&page=1, accessed 12 Dec. 2017.

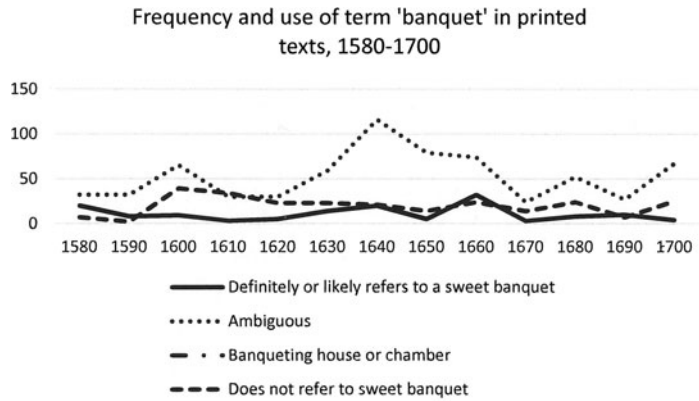

Fig. 4. Frequency of 'banquet' in printed texts using data from https://earlyprint.wustl.edu/toolwebgrok.html?corpus=plaintext&searchPattern=banquet&startYear=1473&endYear=1700&authors=&titles=&page=1, accessed 12 Dec. 2017.

One such example, described in building records as a 'banqueting house', can be found on the roof of Hardwick Hall in Derbyshire (Figure 5).[31] Household accounts provide evidence for the consumption of banqueting foods at Hardwick Hall in the 1590s and 1600s. The accounts for February to March 1606 include a payment of 6*s* 4*d* to 'Mrs Spurling' for sweetmeats, and comfits were bought in spring 1598, September 1600, February 1603,

[31] David N. Durant and Philip Riden, eds., *The building of Hardwick Hall, Part 2: The New Hall, 1591–1598* (Chesterfield, 1984), pp. 232, 261.

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Fig. 5. Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire, 1590–7, walk leading to banqueting house. Photograph by the author, reproduced by kind permission of the National Trust.

and January 1605.[32] A payment was made by 'My Lady' in October 1604 of 12*d* for gilding marchpanes.[33] As noted previously, marchpanes provided centre-pieces for banquets, and gilding them added significantly to their expense.

[32] Chatsworth, Hardwick MS 23, fos. 180, 29, 42, 97, 142; 10a, fo. 32.
[33] Ibid. MS 23, fo. 136v.

Material relating to the manor house at Ashby de la Zouch in Leicestershire, the principal house of the earls of Huntingdon, provides further evidence for banquets beyond the court. There are several early modern garden buildings here, some of which are likely to have been banqueting houses.[34] The household accounts include detailed lists of 'banqueting stuff' purchased. For example, on 11 September 1634, a payment of £20 13*s* 7*d* was made to a confectioner for 'banqueting sweetmeats served in at my lady Elizabeth's wedding and other times not entered before'.[35] In 1673, a bill for confectionery included cherries, currant cakes, raspberry cakes, apricot paste, quince cakes, dried raspberries, 'puffs', muscadines (grapes), orange blossom, long muscadines, 1 lb of marchpane 'royal', jumbals, oranges, lemons, comfits, and plums. The total came to £5 17*s* 6*d*.[36] In conjunction with the garden buildings/banqueting houses, this strongly suggests that banquets took place at Ashby.

Evidence from gentry households indicates that the sweet banquet and the foods associated with it were considered to be particularly appropriate for high-ranking guests. Amongst the generally modest entries for spices in the sixteenth-century steward's accounts from Haddon Hall is a payment on 11 August 1549 of 6*s* 4*d* for 'dyuers kynds of spycs agenst Mr Cavendysshes coming to Haddon ffor the use of my mast[e]r'.[37] The wording in this brief entry suggests that the spices were an element of hospitality, and that this was exclusive: they were to be used specifically by the master.

Household accounts from Wollaton Hall also demonstrate that banqueting foods were largely consumed in the presence of important guests. A household book for 1587–8 is particularly useful in this respect. It lists items purchased, received, used, and remaining by week, including banqueting foods such as marmalade, comfits, rosewater, and 'biskets'. These items were only eaten when important guests were present. The largest amounts of banqueting foods were consumed at Thurland House on 22 June 1588, when Francis Willoughby dined with the archbishop of York, Sir Thomas Manners, Mr Edward Stanhope, and 'dyvers other gents w[i]th their retyne[rs]…w[i]th

[34] The exact date(s) of these buildings are unclear; however, recent archaeological work by English Heritage has suggested that they were built in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth centuries. See Sarah Newsome et al., *Ashby de la Zouch Castle, Leicestershire: a multidisciplinary investigation of the castle garden*, English Heritage Research Department Report Series no. 52 (Portsmouth, 2008). Paula Henderson has identified two of these garden buildings as banqueting houses in *The Tudor house and garden: architecture and landscape in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries* (New Haven, CT, and London, 2005), p. 160.

[35] Francis Bickley, ed., *Report on the manuscripts of the late Reginald Rawdon Hastings esq. of the manor house, Ashby de la Zouche* (4 vols., London, 1928), I, p. 376.

[36] Ibid., p. 404. The Ashby manuscripts were sold to the Huntington Library in California in the early twentieth century and have yet to be fully catalogued. The report provides transcriptions of only a small number of the 100,000 or so documents which make up this archive, so the information provided here can only provide a snapshot of consumption at Ashby.

[37] W. A. Carrington, 'Selections from the Stewards' accounts preserved at Haddon Hall for the years 1549 and 1594', *Journal of the Derbyshire Archaeological and Natural History Society*, 16 (1894), p. 69. At this date sugar was included in the category of spice.

many comers and goers'.[38] Other occasions of significant sugar consumption coincide with the visits of Thomas Manners, on 22 June 1587, and the duke of Rutland on 22 July 1587, when 2 lb of sugar was used, along with other spices, marmalade, sucket, 'bisket bread', and comfits.[39] When no guests were present, sugar, spices, and other banqueting foods were rarely consumed.

The sweet banquet, then, was a social occasion, specifically suited to the entertainment of high-ranking guests, and is likely to have played a role in early modern patronage networks. A dining practice which had originated in the royal household, it was undoubtedly fashionable, its expense useful in demonstrating wealth. Although the price of sugar fluctuated during the period in question, it should be noted that, as an imported commodity which was difficult to cultivate, it was always relatively expensive.[40] However, as its continued popularity over several decades suggests, the banquet had further significance. It provided participants with opportunities to perform their elevated social status, to display elite forms of knowledge and refined manners, and to engage with a pan-European culture of nobility.

III

The analysis of the architecture, foods, texts, and objects associated with banqueting reveals that they were highly concerned with signalling the separateness of those who had access to them from the rest of society. The locations of banqueting houses in the gardens or on the roofs of country houses are symptomatic of this desire for separation. Access to them was contingent on surmounting spatial barriers, from walls and moats to the labyrinthine routes which led to rooftop chambers. Richard Carew's projected banqueting house at Anthony in Cornwall, for example, was to be located on an island in a pond.[41] At Lacock Abbey in Wiltshire, remodelled in the 1540s, the ascent to the banqueting rooms required the negotiation of a complex route from the main reception rooms through smaller, private staircases, passing through an attic space above a long gallery. It would be impossible to reach the banqueting space without a guide, or prior awareness of the route.

These barriers emphasized the move away from the public spaces of the house, and also the privileged nature of access to the sweet banquet. The country house was organized hierarchically, and access to certain spaces was regulated by both gender and social status.[42] With the creation of rarefied

[38] University of Nottingham Middleton MS MiA 69, fo. 41v.

[39] Ibid., fos. 8v, 12r.

[40] For the price and availability of sugar in England, see Noel Deerr, *The history of sugar* (2 vols., London,1949), II, pp. 528–9; Woolgar, *The culture of food in England*, pp. 95–9.

[41] Richard Carew, *Carew's survey of Cornwall* (London and Plymouth, 1811 (first published 1602)), pp. 253–4.

[42] Maurice Howard, *The early Tudor country house: architecture and politics, 1490–1550* (London, 1987), pp. 72–3; Heal, *Hospitality in early modern England*, pp. 29–32; Alice

banqueting spaces, to which high-status guests could only gain access by invitation from their hosts, another layer of distinction was added: the banqueting house facilitated the measuring of status through social relationships.

The foods associated with the banquet, and the ways in which they were served and consumed also underlined the separateness of its participants and its difference from ordinary meals, fostering what Patricia Fumerton has termed 'an aesthetics of culinary detachment'.[43] The tableware used at banquets was highly specialized. Gilded, elaborately decorated wooden trenchers were specifically associated with the sweet banquet.[44] These tend to survive in sets of twelve, and are decorated with moralizing stories, witty songs, and rhymes and depictions of fruit and flowers. Instantly visually distinct from the plain wooden trenchers used at other meals, they are an obvious example of this trend. In England, forks were originally used exclusively for eating sweetmeats. A number of 'sucket forks' and forks for use with green ginger appear in inventories from the fourteenth century onwards.[45] An early surviving fork in the Ashmolean Museum dating from 1599 has an agate handle and silver mounts which are engraved with complex foliate decoration.[46] The precious materials and attention to detail here are testament to the luxurious nature of the banquet.

Similarly, banqueting foods were often served in delicate, expensive sweetmeat glasses, or on spice plates made from precious metals.[47] It is also likely that foods were served at the banquet in boxes. Contemporary inventories list numerous

T. Friedman, 'Architecture, authority, and the female gaze: planning and representation in the early modern country house', *Assemblage*, 18 (1992), pp. 43–4; Helen Hills, 'Theorizing the relationships between architecture and gender in early modern Europe', in Helen Hills, ed., *Architecture and the politics of gender in early modern Europe* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT, 2003), pp. 3–22.

[43] Fumerton, *Cultural aesthetics*, p. 124.

[44] Edward H. Pinto, *Treen and other wooden bygones: an encyclopaedia and social history* (London, 1969), pp. 79–81; Hazel Forsyth, 'Trenchers and porringers', in Philippa Glanville and Hillary Young, eds., *Elegant eating: four hundred years of dining in style* (London, 2002), pp. 42–3.

[45] Smith, 'Family and domesticity', pp. 146–7; Woolgar, *The culture of food in England*, p. 189.

[46] Steel fork with agate handle and engraved silver mounts, inscribed 'DEMOREES 1599', English, 1599, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, WA1947.191.267.

[47] A 1542 inventory of Whitehall palace lists 'nyne spice plates of grene and blewe glassw … iii of them being partly gilt' and the 1547 inventory of Henry VIII's goods lists numerous spice plates made of precious metals and glass, and several gilded forks: *The inventory of King Henry VIII: Society of Antiquaries MS 129 and British Library MS Harley 1419. The transcript*, ed. David Starkey et al. (2 vols., London, 1998), I, pp. 39–40, 428–9. Accounts from the Field of the Cloth of Gold include a payment for '16 glasses for soteilties', Brewer, ed., *Letters and papers*, III, p. 336. A banquet which accompanied a mummery at court in 1520 was served on gold and silver plate. Ibid., pp. 239–40. An account of the royal Jewel House of 1532–3 lists eighty-one spice plates of silver and silver gilt. The National Archives (TNA) E36/85, fo. 34v. On the serving of spice, also see Glanville, *Silver in Tudor and early Stuart England*, pp. 110, 214–17; Kennedy, 'Sharing and status'.

sugar and spice boxes.[48] That some boxes were used for serving rather than storing banqueting foods is suggested by their elaborate decoration and valuable materials. An English mother of pearl casket dating from c. 1600 and now in the collection of the V&A Museum may have been used to serve banqueting sweetmeats.[49] Mother of pearl, which came from the West Pacific, would have been a particularly appropriate material in which to serve exotic sugar and spices. That the casket could be presented closed again emphasizes the value of the sweetmeats inside, and mirrors the enclosed, private nature of the sweet banquet as a whole. The marked association between precious materials and banqueting foods is exemplified in a seventeenth-century recipe for marchpane from a manuscript associated with Lacock Abbey. This stipulates that only silver vessels should come into contact with the marchpane's ingredients.[50]

The specialized material culture associated with the banquet, from gilded trenchers, spice plates, and comfit boxes to sweetmeat glasses and forks, speaks of a proliferation of different types of tableware and an elaboration of table manners.[51] By the late sixteenth century, refined manners had become an important way for courtiers, nobles, and the gentry to demonstrate their high status. This was achieved through codes of conduct which emphasized self-restraint and physical separation from others.[52] These are set out in the books of manners which began to be published in England in the sixteenth century, and which indicate an increased interest in the concept of 'civility' at around the same time that the sweet banquet was adopted by the aristocracy.[53] Relatedly, scholars have identified the emergence in this period of forms of tableware which could be 'performed'. Flora Dennis, for example, has

[48] For examples of spice boxes in inventories, see John G. Nichols, ed., *The Unton inventories: relating to Wadley and Faringdon, co. Berks., in the years 1596 and 1620, from the originals in the possession of Earl Ferrers. With a memoir of the family of Unton* (Berkshire, 1841), pp. 26, 27; 'Inventory of the goods of the countess of Leicester, made in 1634–5, from the original roll on vellum', in James Orchard Halliwell, ed., *Ancient inventories of furniture, pictures, tapestry, plate &c. illustrative of the domestic manners of the English in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries* (London, 1854), p. 8; Chaloner W. Chute, *A history of the Vyne in Hampshire* (London, 1888), p. 54.

[49] As is suggested in the catalogue entry available at http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O78504/casket-unknown/, accessed 29 Mar. 2015.

[50] Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, Lacock MS (2664) box 8: Anne Talbot's book of sugarwork and preserves (uncatalogued), recipe 62: To Make a Marchpane.

[51] Valerie Taylor, 'Banquet plate and Renaissance culture: a day in the life', *Renaissance Studies*, 19 (1995), pp. 621–33; Smith, 'Family and domesticity', pp. 148–9.

[52] The classic study of this process is Norbert Elias, *The civilizing process: the history of manners*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York, NY, 1978). For more recent work dealing with these developments, see Anna Bryson, *From courtesy ot civility: changing codes of conduct in early modern England* (Oxford, 1998); Phil Withington, *Society in early modern England: the vernacular origins of some powerful ideas* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 186–92.

[53] Erasmus's *De civilitate monum puerilium* was translated into English as *A lytell booke of good manners for children* by Robert Whittington in 1532, and the same author published a translation of Cicero's *De officis* in 1534. Thomas Hoby's translation of Castiglione's *Book of the courtier* was published in 1561, and translations of Della Casa's *Treaties of the manners and behaviours* and Stefan Guazzo's *The civil conversation* appeared in 1578 and 1571 respectively.

examined several surviving sets of sixteenth-century knives, thought to be French, which bear sections of words and music for polyphonic benedictions and graces. She suggests that these may have been performed at table, by groups of diners or professional musicians.[54] There is also evidence that Italian *istoriato maiolica* was used to prompt learned conversation about the classical scenes it bore after meals.[55] Dennis argues that the 'performative' nature of dining objects was designed to induce 'either elegance or error'.[56]

The complex material culture associated with the banquet would also have provided opportunities for the performance of good manners. Banqueting trenchers in particular provide an excellent example of performative objects as defined by Dennis. Their witty verses could have been read aloud, as a form of after-dinner entertainment. A contemporary reference to the dangers of the 'lascivious songs' which accompanied banquets suggests that the rhymes, which often deal with themes of love and marriage, could be sung, requiring literacy and possibly the ability to read music.[57] Discussion of trenchers' images and verses would, in many cases, have required elite, sophisticated knowledge as they often refer to classical literature and contemporary elite culture.

This is exemplified in an early seventeenth-century set, the 'Twelve Wonders of the World'. The verses on them were written by John Davies for Thomas Sackville, 1st earl of Dorset, and were intended specifically to be used on trenchers at new years' celebrations around 1600.[58] They were published in 1608, and musical settings for them were printed in 1611, suggesting that they were intended to be sung.[59] The characters depicted on the trenchers and described in the verses are a courtier, a divine, a soldier, a lawyer, a physician, a merchant, a country gentleman, a bachelor, a married man, a wife, a widow, and a maid. The verses themselves bear numerous allusions to elite culture. That of the country gentleman, for example, describes noble pastimes such as hawking and hunting and reflects on principles of good government:

> Though strange outlandish spirits praise towns, and country scorn,
> The country is my home, I dwell where I was born:
> There profit and command with pleasure I partake,
> Yet do not hawks and dogs my sole companions make.
> I rule, but not oppress; end quarrels, not maintain;
> See towns, but dwell not there t'abridge my charge or train.

[54] Dennis, 'Scattered knives and dismembered song'.

[55] Richard A. Goldthwaite, 'The economic and social world of italian Renaissance maiolica', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 42 (1989), pp. 23–6; Dennis, 'Scattered knives and dismembered song', p. 176.

[56] Ibid.

[57] T. Salter *A mirrhor mete for all mothers, matrones and maidens* (London, 1578), p. 25.

[58] As outlined in the catalogue entry, available at http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O78997/twelve-wonders-of-the-world-set-of-roundels-unknown/, accessed 25 May 2015.

[59] G. Watson and I. R. Willison, *The new Cambridge bibliography of English literature* (5 vols., Cambridge, 1969–77), II, p. 1354.

The soldier's and the widow's verses refer to classical mythology:

> My occupation is the noble trade of Kings,
> The trial that decides the highest right of things;
> Though Mars my master be, I do not Venus love,
> Nor honour Bacchus oft, nor often swear by Jove;
> Of speaking of myself I all occasion shun,
> And rather love to do, than boast what I have done…
>
> Though I no more will have, I must not love disdain;
> Penelope herself did suitors entertain.[60]

In reading or singing aloud, and discussing the verses, banquet participants would have had opportunities to demonstrate their in-depth knowledge of contemporary aristocratic culture, theories of government, and ancient mythology. Their performance also required literacy, and, if the verses were to be sung, the ability to read music. Like the knives analysed by Dennis, they not only provided opportunities for the demonstration of knowledge, refinement, and therefore social status, but could also test these qualities, and potentially expose imposters.

The trenchers' references to classical culture are particularly significant when considered in light of the fact that the banquet itself was intended as a creative emulation of the ancient symposium/convivium. As is explored below, this contributed to the Renaissance project of articulating elite, humanist identities through dining practices.

IV

The association between the banquet and the symposium is made clear in the preface to Thomas Elyot's *Banket of sapience*, first published in 1539. Elyot describes how, in the spring,

> in whome is any sparke of gentylle courage, requireth to solace and bankett with mutual resort, communicatyng together their fantasyes and sundry devyses, which was not abhored of the moste wyse and noble philosophers, as may appiere to them that have wytsaufed to read the workes of Plato, Xenophon and Plutarche, whyche they named symposia, callyd bankettes in Englyshe.[61]

An examination of the social practices and intellectual and visual culture associated with the sweet banquet in light of Elyot's words suggests that it should be understood as a means by which early moderns engaged with the symposium or convivium. Banquet settings in particular were designed and decorated to create an appropriate atmosphere. This was intended to evoke both the

[60] The verses are printed in full in John Davies, *The complete poems of Sir John Davies* (2 vols., London, 1876), II, pp. 65–71.

[61] In this introduction, Elyot also draws a clear distinction between 'dinner', 'supper', and the banquet. Thomas Elyot, *The banket of sapience gathered oute of dyuers and many godlye authoures* (London, 1539), sig. A2r–v.

ancient world and contemporary European models and to provoke the types of discussion described by Elyot. He outlines the sources of knowledge about the symposium in sixteenth-century England with his list of ancient authors: Plato, Xenophon, and Plutarch, all of whom produced symposium literature.[62] Plato and Xenophon's symposia are imagined symposiac dialogues, whilst Plutarch's *Symposium of the seven wise men* is a collection of philosophical sayings like Elyot's *Banket*.

These ancient works define symposia in opposition to public, civic meals (*deipnon*), as exclusive events focused on 'drinking together'. The typical group size was fourteen to thirty, and participants reclined on couches. The symposium centred around politics and pleasure and, in early modern Europe, was understood to have been an elite, intellectually focused event.[63] The exclusivity of the banquet, which typically involved only twelve participants, and its location in specialized banqueting houses which emphasized its separateness from other, more public forms of feasting, can be seen as mirroring the symposium.[64] Symposium literature, and particularly the sources cited by Elyot, characterize the symposium as a site for intellectual as well as bodily nourishment, so much so that they have been understood in later scholarship as being defined by erudite conversation.[65] Further investigation of the rich visual and material culture associated with early modern banqueting indicates that erudition was also central to this interpretation of the symposium.

[62] On the availability of these sources at the time, see Martha Hale Shackford, *Plutarch in Renaissance England* (Wellesley, 1929), pp. 22–4; Sears Jayne, *Plato in Renaissance England* (Dordecht, 1995), pp. 85–8; Fred Schurink, 'Print, patronage and occasion: translations of Plutarch's "Moralia" in Tudor England', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 38 (2008), pp. 86–101. Although Plutarch's *Moralia* were not translated into English in full until 1603, Schurink presents evidence for their circulation in manuscript form before this date. Elyot would have known Xenophon's *Symposium* in Greek, although it was translated into Latin by Janua Cornarius in 1548, in a work which makes explicit comparisons between ancient and early modern convivia. *De conviviorum* (Basel, 1548). Plato's *Symposium* was available in Latin from 1484.

[63] For secondary literature on ancient symposia and convivia, see Wolfgang Rösler, 'Wine and truth in the ancient Greek symposium', in O. Murray and M. Tucusan, eds., *In vino veritas* (London, 1995), pp. 106–12; D. Konstan, *Friendship in the classical world* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 44–7; Katherine M. Dunbabin, *The Roman banquet: images of conviviality* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 4–5. On the Renaissance appropriation of the symposium, see Jeanneret, *A feast of words*, esp. pp. 16–48; François Quiviger, 'A Spartan academic banquet in Siena', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 54 (1991), pp. 206–25; Claudia Goldstein, *Pieter Brueghel and the culture of the early modern dinner party* (Burlington, VT, and Farnham, 2013), pp. 13–14. Goldstein also demonstrates that Thomas More attended humanist dinner parties in Antwerp. Although the sweet banquet as a recreation of the symposium has not been studied before, it has been recognized that societies connected with the Inns of Court, universities, and London taverns were concerned with reviving classical cultures of revelry and used Xenophon and Plutarch as sources. See Michelle O'Callaghan, *The English wits: literature and sociability in early modern England* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 5, 60.

[64] This number of participants is suggested by the size of surviving banqueting houses and the fact that banqueting trenchers are usually found in sets of twelve.

[65] Jeanneret, *A feast of words*, pp. 1–2.

Elyot underscores the link between the contemporary banquet and the learned conversation of the convivium tradition with his instruction to the reader to 'beholde sentences sundry and dyvers, whyche I doo applye unto bankettynge dyshes, made and seasoned by Sapyence her selfe, and served forthe to the table by theym whyche dyd wryte or pronounce them'.[66] There is also evidence that the metaphorical association of banqueting foods with witty and erudite sayings could be expressed in more explicit ways. Early modern recipe books instruct their readers to make letters from sugar paste, raising the possibility that these may have been used at banquets to spell words or to suggest conversational themes.[67] John Murrel even instructs that these should take the form of 'faire capital Romane letters', again underscoring the classical connotations of the banquet.[68] A recipe in the anonymous *Closet for ladies and gentlewomen* describes how to make 'a walnut, that when you crack it, you shall find Biskets and Carrawayes in it, or a pretty posey written'.[69]

The connection between literature and the banquet is also reflected in a set of oblong trenchers in the collection of the Ashmolean Museum.[70] The trencher box here is particularly noteworthy as it is designed to emulate the binding of a book. In this way, the rhymes on the trenchers are likened to the contents of a book, and this is perhaps a witty reference to works such as Elyot's *Banket of sapience* and the sayings they contained. The association between the banquet and humanist learning is typified by a published account of a masque and banquet presented to the royal children in 1635. The masque included a pageant of the seasons, followed by a dialogue on education between the allegorical figures of Minerva and Time. It culminated with the presentation of a banquet of books filled with sweetmeats. The names of the confections here were clearly selected as a play on those of the classical authors whose works they filled, for example 'Cato in bisket cakes, and sugar plates in Plato. Erasmus full of preserv'd raspices…damesons in Damascenus and preserv'd lemons here in Levinus Lemnius.'[71] The sweets themselves are therefore conflated with the words of the ancient writers.

The association with the ancient world is further underscored through the architecture and interior decoration of surviving banqueting houses, which is indicative of efforts to create classicizing settings. The 'ambulatory' in the

[66] Elyot, *The banket of sapience*, sig. A2v.

[67] Hugh Platt, *Delights for ladies to adorn their persons, tables closets and distillatories* (London, 1594), recipe 18; Thomas Ruthven, *The ladies cabinet enlarged and opened* (London, 1655), p. 21. These authors do not describe the ways in which these items may have been used, so any speculation with regard to this is necessarily conjectural.

[68] John Murrel, *A daily exercise for ladies and gentlewomen* (London, 1617), recipe 89. Roman letter forms would also have been easier to sculpt than other contemporary scripts.

[69] *The closet for ladies and gentlewomen* (London, 1608), p. 33.

[70] Accession number AN2009.6.

[71] Sir Francis Kinnaston, *Corona Minervae: or a masque presented before Prince Charles His Highnesse, the duke of Yorke his brother, and the Lady Mary his sister, the 27th of February at the colledge of the Museum Minervae* (London, 1635), sigs. C3r, C4v.

grounds of Horton Court in Gloucestershire, for example, takes the form of a Florentine loggia and was built by the diplomat and courtier William Knight between 1517 and 1521. That such spaces were used for banquets is suggested by Florio's 1598 definition of the loggia as 'a faire hall, a dining chamber, a terrace or walking place, a banquetting house' and an early seventeenth-century painting of the myth of Phaëton, which features figures dining in a loggia very similar to that at Horton Court.[72] The loggia form, as Paula Henderson has noted, is reminiscent of the ancient Greek stoa, traditionally the setting for philosophical discussions, making it a particularly appropriate setting for the banquet/symposium with its focus on erudition.[73]

The banqueting chamber at Lacock Abbey, built by William Sharington in the 1540s, also employs classicizing ornament (Figure 6). It takes the form of a Renaissance style ocagonal tower which was reached via a balustraded walk across the leads and topped with a further balustrade.[74] The original marble table, which survives inside the banqueting house, is decorated with the figures of Dionysos, Ceres, and the ancient gourmand Apicius (Figure 7). Sharington was at the intellectual centre of a classicizing 'academy' which revolved around Edward Seymour, 1st duke of Somerset in the late 1540s when the tower was being built. As such, the use of classical ornament at Lacock displayed not only his awareness of continental trends, but also his links to prominent courtiers.[75]

Later banqueting houses also referred to classical and Renaissance models. An example at Gorhambury, built by Francis Bacon around 1610, was described in the early modern period as being 'Roman' in style.[76] William Cecil's banqueting house at Theobalds featured pillars and classicizing portrait busts which Cecil had imported from Venice.[77] Above this was a round banqueting room 'excellently well Painted all the seeing over with naked men & women', which suggests that the painted decoration was also based on classical or contemporary renaissance models.[78] A monumental, barrel-vaulted Roman staircase at Cecil's Burghley House led to the banqueting spaces on the roof,

[72] John Florio, *Queen Anna's new world of words or dictionarie of the Italian and English tongues* (London, 1611), p. 288; Unknown Artist, *Story of Phaëton*, c. 1605, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, WAG 6221.

[73] Paula Henderson, 'The loggia in Tudor and early Stuart England: the adaptation and function of classical form', in Lucy Gent, ed., *Albion's classicism: the visual arts in Britain, 1550–1660* (New Haven, CT, and London, 1995), p. 134.

[74] On banqueting at Lacock, see Stewart 'The sweet banquet', pp. 124–9.

[75] D. Evett, *Literature and the visual arts in Tudor England* (Athens, GA, 1990), p. 53; David Howarth, *Images of rule: art and politics in the English Renaissance, 1485–1649* (Berkeley, CA, and Los Angeles, CA, 1997), pp. 21–2.

[76] John Aubrey, *Aubrey's brief lives*, ed. Oliver Lawson Dick (London, 1949), p. 15.

[77] Donna Kurtz, 'The concept of the classical past in Tudor and early Stuart England', *Journal of the History of Collections*, 20 (2008), p. 192.

[78] TNA E317/Herts., no. 26, fo. 36.

Fig. 6. Rooftop walk to banqueting house, Lacock Abbey, Wiltshire, remodelled 1540s. Photograph by the author, reproduced by kind permission of the National Trust.

and was the only example of its kind in England at the time.[79] The use of highly ornamented Roman architectural forms emphasized the move from the public spaces below to the private roofscape, and also the privileged nature of this

[79] Jill Husselby, 'The politics of pleasure: William Cecil and Burghley House', in Pauline Croft, ed., *Patronage, culture and power: the early Cecils* (New Haven, CT, and London, 2002), p. 41.

Fig. 7. Carving on marble table inside banqueting chamber at Lacock Abbey, c. 1540s. Photograph by the author, reproduced by kind permission of the National Trust.

ascent. It is also likely to have set the scene and raised anticipation for the rarefied banquet/symposium on the roof. Similarly, the doorway to the late sixteenth- or early seventeenth-century banqueting house at Melford Hall in Suffolk is framed by a classicizing portico, which also seems to have emphasized the shift from the everyday world to that of the symposium.

Further analysis of the markedly classicizing interior decoration of a number of surviving banqueting houses suggests that it was designed to prompt the erudite conversation associated with the symposium. Within the loggia at Horton Court, for example, are four stucco roundels which show Hannibal of Carthage, Augustus, Nero and Atilla the Hun (Figure 8). Nicholas Cooper has argued that Augustus represents the type of the virtuous ruler, with Nero

Fig. 8. Stucco roundels depicting Hannibal of Carthage (top) and Julius Caesar in ambulatory at Horton Court, Gloucestershire, c. 1517–21. Conway Library, The Courtauld Institute of Art, London.

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cast against him as evil ruler, while Hannibal and Atilla the Hun similarly contrast 'good and bad outsiders'.[80] The roundels are carved in contrasting styles: Nero and Augustus are highly reminiscent of classical coins and medals, with naturalistic detailing in the faces and classicizing drapery. Hannibal and Atilla are rendered differently, with Hannibal forward facing, and both treated in a more stylized, gothic manner.

This is a sophisticated decorative programme, which demonstrates the well-travelled patron's knowledge of fashionable Italian models. William Knight had plenty of opprtunity to gain first-hand knowledge of these, having spent part of his early career in Italy. He was in Ferarra studying law in 1501 and travelled to Rome in 1506. His subsequent diplomatic activities saw him travel to the Low Countries, France, and Switzerland, and in 1526–7 he again travelled to Rome, tasked with obtaining a dispensation allowing Henry VIII to remarry.[81] The roundels here also provide evidence of an awareness of contrasting styles, with the gothic style employed for the representations of the non-Roman figures.

A more elaborate scheme decorated Nicholas Bacon's banqueting house at Gorhambury, built prior to Francis Bacon's 'Roman' example on the same estate. Depicted on the walls were the liberal arts, accompanied by 'heads of Cicero, Aristotle and other illustrious ancients and moderns who had excelled in each' with 'verses expressive of the benefits derived from the study of them'.[82] The 'heads' here may have been roundels or busts, and their description is similar to the the imported busts of Roman emperors in Cecil's banqueting house at Theobalds. The countess of Arundel's 'Pranketing roome' at Tart Hall provides another example of the use of portrait sculptures of ancient figures in banqueting spaces. In 1641, it contained four 'curious marble head statues'.[83] The pranketing room was a hybrid space which served as both a collectors' cabinet and banqueting chamber, and the statues can be assumed to be classicizing busts.[84]

Surviving prints designed to be pasted onto trenchers also demonstrate an interest in contemporary interpretations of ancient literature. A set in the

[80] Nicholas Cooper, *Houses of the gentry, 1480–1680* (New Haven, CT, and London, 1999), pp. 20–1.

[81] Richard Clark, 'Knight, William (1475/6–1547)', *Oxford dictionary of national biography* (Oxford, 2004; online edn, May 2005), www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/15738, accessed 18 May 2015.

[82] John Nichols, *The progresses and public processions of Queen Elizabeth* (3 vols., London, 1823), II, p. 59.

[83] Juliet Claxton, 'The countess of Arundel's Dutch pranketing room: "An inventory of all the parcells or purselin, glasses and other goods now remayning in the pranketing roome at Tart Hall, 8th Sept 1641"', *Journal of the History of Collections*, 22 (2010), p. 187, appendix p. 32. Claxton considers the word 'pranketing' to be a hybridization of 'banquet' and 'pranking' and notes that the space has many of the characteristics of the banqueting house, ibid., p. 188.

[84] Ibid.

British Museum is derived from Marcus Gheeraerts the Elder's illustrations for Aesop's fables.[85] In sixteenth-century England, as elsewhere in Europe, the *Fables* were widely used in the teaching of Latin, and were recommended by Thomas Elyot and other educational theorists.[86] Their appearance on banqueting trenchers is likely to have given banqueting participants opportunities to demonstrate their access to a fashionable, humanist education.

V

Based on the preceding evidence, it is clear that the depiction of classical figures and references to ancient literature was a trend in the decoration of banqueting houses belonging to high-status English people in the period between c. 1520 and 1640. In establishing the motivations behind this impulse, it is necessary to consider it in light of the appropriation of the convivium tradition elsewhere in Europe and the ways in which humanists in this period approached ancient historical and literary examples. As Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton have demonstrated, in early modern England, noblemen mined classical texts for information on military strategy, career advancement, and political theory which could be applied to contemporary situations. Ancient historical examples were thus considered capable of triggering political action.[87]

The use of visual depictions of classical figures and scenes from ancient myth and history to provide models for behaviour and to prompt dinner table discussion was common in Renaissance Europe. Jerome de Busleyden's feasts in early sixteenth-century Antwerp took place in a space decorated with scenes from classical mythology and the Bible. Claudia Goldstein has suggested that these were intended to prompt discussion in the mode of the convivium.[88] Similary, Erasmus's 'Godly Feast' in his *Colloquies* describes a dialogue which takes place over a meal in a garden pavilion decorated with biblical and classical scenes. These included the Last Supper, Dives and Lazarus, and Alexander the Great. The images were intended to 'warn us to be temperate at feasts and defer us from drunkenness and sensuality'.[89] On the upper floor were images of the

[85] British Museum 1870,0514.1179–1870,0514.1190, www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=1527521&partId=1, accessed 23 Dec. 2015.

[86] P. I. Green, *Humanism and Protestantism in early modern English education* (Aldershot, 2009), p. 163.

[87] Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, '"Studied for action": how Gabriel Harvey read his Livy', *Past and Present*, 129 (1990), pp. 30–78.

[88] Goldstein, *Pieter Brueghel and the culture of the early modern dinner party*, p. 14.

[89] 'The Godly feast' in *The colloquires of Erasmus*, trans. Craig R. Thompson (Chicago, IL, 1965), p. 76. This passage is indicative of the moral ambiguity surrounding dining practices in early modern Europe. Whilst meals could be sites for temperance and echoed the liturgy, they could also incite more troubling behaviour. The banquet, in particular, was often associated with gluttony, political conspiracy, and sexual promiscuity. A detailed exploration of these associations is beyond the scope of this article. For more, see Paul S. Lloyd, *Food and identity in England, 1540–1640: eating to impress* (London and New York, NY, 2015), pp. 171–6;

life of Jesus as well as portraits of the popes and the Caesars 'to help us remember history'.[90] A 1607 carnival feast hosted in Siena by the Accademia de' Fimonati took place in a room decorated with classical figures and featured tables adorned with scenes from the *Fables*, all of which were intended to provoke learned discussion.[91]

In light of this, it is likely that the images of classical figures in English banqueting houses were intended to serve the same purpose. In providing examples of good and bad government and aids to memory, they could be actively read like texts, the histories they evoked providing material for learned discussion in the convivium tradition. This is particularly appropriate at the homes of Knight, Nicholas Bacon, Cecil, and the countess of Arundel, all prominent courtiers. The display of this form of decoration also made statements about status in that the busts inhabited the space of the banqueting house alongside the banquet's living participants, inviting comparisons between them and the ancient statesmen depicted.

The banquet's emphasis on literacy, erudition, and knowledge of the ancient world is connected to changing attitudes to education in early modern England and elsewhere. The centralization of the state under the early Tudors, along with the development of modern diplomacy in the early sixteenth century, had seen increased demand for educated statesmen. Nobles hoping to serve in government positions now required not just martial might, but literary, linguistic, and legal skills.[92] The same period saw the publication of educational treatises throughout Europe. Works by Juan Louis Vives, Erasmus, and, in England, Thomas Elyot's *The governour* provided instruction on the education of noblemen. They advocated a humanist, liberal arts curriculum, and Elyot in particular recommended the study of ancient history with its examples of good and bad government.[93] The visual culture associated with the banquet provided opportunities to demonstrate precisely this form of education. The discussion of busts of ancient rulers, epigrams dealing with court culture and

Normore, *A feast for the eyes*, pp. 104–11. On banqueting in particular, see Stewart, 'The sweet banquet', pp. 62–5, 190–2.

[90] Ibid., pp. 77–8.

[91] Quiviger, 'A Spartan academic banquet', pp. 207, 224.

[92] Warren Boutcher, 'Humanism and literature in late Tudor England: translation, the continental book trade and the case of Montaigne's Essais', in Jonathan Woolfson, ed., *Reassessing Tudor humanism* (Basingstoke and New York, NY, 2002), pp. 244–5; J. H. Hexter, *Reappraisals in history* (London, 1961), pp. 63–9; Joan Simon, *Education and society in Tudor England* (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 63–70, 99–155.

[93] Thomas Elyot, *The boke named the governour* (London, 1531). The third book is made up of ancient examples of good and bad governance. One anecdote, which warns against luxurious dining when food is in short supply, appears to refer to the contemporary practice of banqueting. It sees Augustus indulge in 'a secret souper or banket, havynge with hym sixe noble men his frendes and sixe noble women…[they] fared sumptuously and delicately the city of Rome at that tyme being vexed with skarcitie of grayne: he therefore was rente with curses and rebukes of the people', fo. 229r.

government, classicizing architectural settings, and the conception of the banquet as a modern symposium confirmed attendees' status as governors, participating in a pan-European courtly culture of revived antiquity.

The opportunities afforded by the banquet in demonstrating this status as members of a ruling class were particularly valuable as the period in which this dining practice emerged was characterized by a sense of class instability, and widespread anxiety regarding a perceived increase in social mobility. This originated at the court of Henry VIII, where the centralization of government resulted in increased opportunities for educated men who were not of noble birth: men like Cardinal Wolsey and Thomas Cromwell. In addition, the period after the dissolution of the monasteries saw large amounts of land exchange hands, providing opportunities for new families to acquire this essential status marker; William Sharington was one such beneficiary with the purchase of Lacock Abbey. Like her father, Elizabeth I appointed non-nobles as councillors; both Nicholas Bacon and William Cecil were examples of this phenomenon. James I's inflation of the honours system in the early seventeenth century maintained a sense of large numbers of people coming up in the world.[94]

This impression was not confined to court society, and there was a perception, underpinned by fact, that the numbers of the gentry were rapidly increasing between 1540 and 1640.[95] England was particularly vulnerable to class instability because of the presence of the gentry, a group categorized not by blood or title but by the characteristic of 'gentleness' or 'nobility'. Because of the ambiguity surrounding class distinctions outlined above and the emphasis on distinctiveness in definitions of nobility, elites became increasingly concerned with signalling their difference from the rest of society. This was achieved by physically and conceptually separating themselves from it and through the demonstration of noble virtues.[96] The qualities which constituted nobility or 'gentleness' were much discussed in contemporary conduct literature, and have also been subject to a good deal of modern scholarly enquiry.

[94] Lawrence Stone and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone, *An open elite? England, 1540–1880* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 16–20, 399–40; D. M. Palliser, *The age of Elizabeth: England under the later Tudors, 1547–1603* (London and New York, NY, 1992), p. 100.

[95] David Starkey, 'The age of the household: politics, society and the arts, c. 1350–1550', in Stephen Medcalf, ed., *The later middle ages* (London, 1981), p. 227; Frank Wigham, *Ambition and privilege: the social tropes of Elizabethan courtesy theory* (Berkeley, CA, Los Angeles, CA, and London, 1984), pp. 6–7; Felicity Heal and Clive Holmes, *The gentry in England and Wales, 1500–1700* (Basingstoke and London, 1994), pp. 10–16; Henry French, 'Gentlemen: remaking the English ruling class', in Keith Wrightson, ed., *A social history of England, 1500–1700* (Cambridge, 2017), p. 273.

[96] J. A. Sharpe, *Early modern England: a social history, 1550–1760* (London, 1987), pp. 163–8; Heal and Clive, *The gentry*, pp. 6–10; Bryson, *From courtesy to civility*; Peter Burke, *Popular culture in early modern Europe* (Aldershot, 2002), pp. 270–81; Lloyd, *Food and identity in England*, pp. 177–81; French, 'Gentlemen', p. 269.

Thomas Elyot's manual for the training of elite youths, *The governour*, includes a chapter outlining 'what very nobilitie is'. Elyot explains that nobility originates with inherent virtue demonstrated through magnanimity, justice, liberality, temperance, and martial skill. This results in positions of authority, the practice of good government, and the accumulation of wealth. Both virtue and wealth are augmented in subsequent generations through a combination of breeding, good upbringing, and education. This led to a distinctive way of life, characterized by education, magnificence, hospitality, and the contemplation, discussion, and practice of government.[97]

Whilst modern scholarship has revealed that the category of the 'gentry' was an ambiguous and often unstable one, Elyot's definition does give an accurate sense of a status group characterized by a number of intersecting features. These included land ownership, wealth, participation in government, and a particular way of life.[98] Henry French has recently argued that while the emphasis on features such as lineage in the way in which the gentry defined themselves might have made their power appear permanent and inevitable, the very instability of the category of gentry meant that this power was constantly threatened and in need of reinforcement.[99] In this light, it is highly significant that the sweet banquet provided opportunities to put many of the defining features of gentry status into practice.

It is particularly telling that the banquet became popular in the homes of wealthy English people during a period (1520 to 1640) which was marked by both a new emphasis on education and a perceived increase in class mobility. Of the key figures associated with the banquet in this article, William Sharington, Thomas Elyot, William Knight, Nicholas Bacon, and William Cecil, it should be noted that none came from particularly illustrious backgrounds. Bacon, in particular, the son of a yeoman farmer who rose to be Elizabeth's lord keeper and, in effect, chancellor of the realm, was just the sort of newly ennobled but highly educated courtier perceived as threatening the social hierarchy. This suggests that the practice of banqueting was particularly valuable to those whose elite status was relatively recent, and therefore perceived as insecure.

The banquet was effective in signalling elite separateness because it gave its participants opportunities to perform their status and belonging to an exclusive group. The acts of moving to the banqueting space and engaging with the foods,

[97] Elyot, *The governour*, fos. 111–14. For more on early modern ideas of nobility, see J. P. Cooper, 'Ideas of gentility in early modern England', in G. E. Aylmer and J. S. Morrill, eds., *Land, men and beliefs: studies in early modern history* (London, 1983), pp. 43–77; Heal and Holmes, *The gentry*, pp. 1–17; R. Malcolm Smuts, *Culture and power in England, 1585–1685* (Basingstoke, 1999), pp. 9–12.

[98] Keith Wrightson, *English society, 1580–1680* (London, 1983), pp. 17–38; Heal and Holmes, *The gentry*, pp. 6–19; French, 'Gentlemen', pp. 269–72; Sharpe, *Early modern England*, p. 163.

[99] French, 'Gentlemen'.

objects, and interior décor they found there signalled not only wealth, but access to particular, elite forms of education, the practice of good government, an awareness of a pan-European culture of revived antiquity and refined manners. All of this fostered the illusion of longstanding nobility. As Dennis has pointed out, in an environment in which class lines appeared to be blurred, and it was increasingly easy to purchase the material signs of social status, it became more and more difficult, and therefore imperative, to perform them.[100]

[100] Flora Dennis, 'Resurrecting forgotten sound: fans and handbells in early modern Italy', in T. Hamling and C. Richardson, eds., *Everyday objects: medieval and early modern material culture and its meanings* (Farnham and Burlington, VT, 2010), p. 198.