

*Convivium et Epulum: Hellenistic Banqueting and Drunkenness in Livy's Ab Urbe Condita*

This paper seeks to uncover the role of banqueting and drinking in Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita*, particularly in relation to Roman interaction with Hellenistic kings, and to use this to explore how Livy interpreted Hellenistic court culture. A great deal of attention has been paid to the "court societies" of the Hellenistic kingdoms (Strootman 2014), and some work has been done about the role of banqueting in this political system (Vössing 2004). Many scholars cite Livy as a corroborating, and occasionally principal, source on these issues, but, no one has approached the topic of banquets and drunkenness in the work of Livy, specifically. A clearer understanding of Livy's depiction of this will show that Livy was not relying on Greek writers, like Polybius, to inform his depiction of Hellenistic kings. Rather, Livy is interpreting Hellenistic court life in a distinctly Roman way, informing our insights into how Romans understood Hellenistic court and diplomatic practices.

It would be possible to argue that Livy's description of Hellenistic kings and their overindulgent, drunken behavior simply conforms to the cliché of these individuals so popular in Hellenistic writing, or to the traditions of Roman moralism, in the vein of Cato. However, I believe that Livy's uses of drunkenness and banqueting go much deeper. His portrayal of these activities is the result of two factors. First, like many other ancient writers, Livy uses the trope of drunkenness as the behavior of non-Romans. Second, he misunderstands the role that banquets and wine played in Hellenistic court practices. The paper begins with an assessment of Livy's general attitude towards banqueting and wine drinking, finding, perhaps unsurprisingly, that drunkenness and excessive banqueting are activities in which only foreigners participate. While Romans do occasionally attend banquets, there was a proper way to do so (D'Arms 1995 and Vössing 2004).

The argument then progresses to the topic of banquets and drunkenness at the Hellenistic court. Banqueting was an essential element in the politics of the Hellenistic court, originating in the Macedonian symposium (Carney 2007). Banquets, which in the Macedonian tradition involved heavy drinking, were the key venue in which a king could establish primacy, exhibit generosity, and entertain guests (Murray 1996). The centrality of drinking is misunderstood by Livy, which leads him to believe that such behavior is, at the very least, a symptom of catastrophe and almost certainly a catalyst for misfortune. The prime instance is Gracchus' diplomatic encounter with Philip in 190 BCE and the ensuing contact between the king and the Scipiones. These encounters demonstrate the role that banqueting played in official royal receptions, and the importance of mutual wine drinking in the formation of friendships. But it also demonstrates Livy's failure to interpret such behavior as a part of court practice, rather than as simple foolishness.

This paper also addresses the role banqueting and drinking played in the internal politics of the Hellenistic court. Again, Philip V's court is the example, with the feud between his sons Perseus and Demetrius erupting due to a drunken night of miscommunication and misinterpretation. Livy believes that were it not for their drunkenness, Demetrius would not have been assassinated. But in fact, drunkenness would have been socially expected from these Hellenistic princes. Throughout the paper, comparable episodes from Polybius are used to support the interpretation that Livy views Hellenistic kings in a distinctive and non-Greek fashion. He is eager to mention drunkenness, and to attribute misfortune to it, much more than is Polybius. Livy is drawing on a Roman rhetorical tradition where drunkenness and crisis are inextricably tied (Mortensen 1999).

Not only does Livy's understanding, or misunderstanding, of banqueting and drunkenness inform our understanding of his rhetoric and opinion about proper behavior, it also allows us to investigate the role of these activities in the relationships between Romans and the Hellenistic kings in the third century BCE.

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