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The Roman Triumph, Hercules and the Banquet to the People

This paper will focus on the grand banquets that the triumphing Roman generals offered to the people in occasion of the celebration of their triumph. Such a practice is securely attested in literary accounts for the first century b.c., but many issues are still in want of an explanation, including when the banquet to the people was included as part of the triumphal ceremony.

The questions that will be addressed will include the problem of where the banquets took place, when this custom was introduced in Rome for the first time, and the possible influence of Hellenistic royal models on the behavior of Roman generals.

Atheneus attests a close connection between the cult of Hercules and the banquet offered to the people in occasion of the triumph. The god, in earlier times the receiver the tithe from one's commercial profit, started receiving also the offerings from the booty of victorious generals. The epithet of *Invictus*, indicating a connection with the war sphere, accompanies the figure of Hercules worshipped at the Ara Maxima since the late fourth century b.c. The distribution of food among the people following the sacrifices held at the altar was by the first century b.c. formalized in a lavish banquet, in contraposition with the *coena triumphalis* held in the temple of Jupiter on the Capitol. It is in this period that various famous generals like Lucullus and Crassus are said to have offered a tithe to Hercules and a large banquet to the Roman people.

In this paper I will propose that the banquets took place in the precinct of the Ara Maxima, where the generals were offering their tithe, and that the cult of Hercules underwent several changes in relation to the evolution of the triumphal ceremony. I will also propose that Roman generals were influenced in this behavior by practices long attested in the Hellenistic world.

Indeed, the similarity between this Roman celebration and those put up by Hellenistic kings, such as the grand procession of Ptolemy Philadelphos in Alexandria, points to a Hellenistic influence. The paper will argue that it is possible to delineate with more accuracy the period when the practice started in Rome, proposing that Aemilius Paulus, the winner of Pidna in 168 b.c., offered a banquet to the Roman people in occasion of the celebration of his triumph in 167 b.c. Although no literary text on his triumph makes explicit mention of the banquet, several elements point in this direction, including the fact that already while conducting his military campaigns in Greece, Aemilius Paulus followed the "rules" of Hellenistic munificence, competing with Antiochus Epiphanes in offering games, celebrations, feasts and banquets to the people.