LOYALTY AND THE LYRE:  
CONSTRUCTIONS OF *FIDES* IN HANNIBAL’S CAPUAN BANQUETS

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1. *Introduction: The Greco-Roman Ethos of Conviviality*

The sanctity associated with communal dining derived from its religious origins: a ritual sacrifice followed by a communal feast with libation and prayer addressed to a divine recipient.¹ Banquets were the natural sequel to sacrifice. The πίστις, or *fides*, implicit in a sacrificial contract between gods and men, was extended, in the topos of the epic banquet, to guest-friendship between host and stranger through which a new alliance or agreement might be ratified in an ambiance of gracious hospitality. The host’s wealth and position was indicated by valuable, antique tableware and throngs of serving men, while his god-fearing character was illustrated by a formal libation or sacrifice to the gods. The theme of the bard’s song provided a reflective intermezzo on a theme symbolically relevant to the epic narrative,² while his musical skill has the power to stir the emotions of his listeners. In the Greco-Roman world commensality, enhanced by the music of the lyre, was not only a measure of civilized leisure,³ but a source of civic harmony.⁴ In this setting men were inspired by *carmina conuiualia*, in praise of illustrious men, to formulate the essence and value of civic virtue. In his fifth *Pythian* ode, Pindar celebrates Apollo for having bestowed the gifts of the lyre and the communal banquet on men whom he has inspired to cultivate peace and stable government.⁵ His first *Pythian* begins with praise for Apollo’s lyre, as the bringer of peace and harmony, but Pindar goes on to formulate

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³ Plb. 4.20–21.
⁴ See Habinek (2005) 40–43 on the banquet as a stabilizing civic institution uniting the aristocratic rulers.
the antithesis of convivial concord: enemies of Zeus, driven by hubris and arrogance, who recoil in horror from the delights of the lyre and the convivial feast. These he defines more precisely as rebellious Giants, unjust tyrants and, with topical relevance at the time, belligerent Etruscans or Carthaginians, imputing their inability to comprehend the blessings of conviviality to moral inadequacy and lack of finesse.\(^6\) The myth, or literary symbol, which represented the clash of barbarism with the civilized Greco-Roman world was the Battle of Lapiths and Centaurs at the wedding feast of Pirithous and Hippodameia.

In Roman cult, Jupiter replicated Zeus’ patronage of civic order, binding oaths and military alliances. Further he had a close association with civic banqueting: Rome’s most important sacrificial banquet, the *epulum Iouis*, was celebrated in his honor on September 13th during the *Ludi Romani*. In a sense the participants were sharing a contractual banquet with the god who presided over Roman *foedera*.\(^7\) Silius depicts the arrogance and monstrous impiety of Rome’s greatest enemy as a gigantomachic obsession to overthrow Tarpeian Jupiter. Nowhere in Roman literature was tyrannical cruelty more vividly exemplified than at the tyrant’s feast. Discussing a certain Flaminius who executed a criminal during a banquet, Seneca the Elder, makes the point that banquets are no place for execution since such an action surpasses tyrants in cruelty.\(^8\) A short review of the recurrence of convivial abuse in Flavian literature will indicate how the epic banquet offered Silius a multifaceted opportunity to expose Hannibal’s moral flaws, fulfilling, at the same time, Pindar’s criteria of an “enemy of Zeus.”

2. *Abuses of Conviviality in Roman Imperial Literature*

Distortion of the true ethos of conviviality was a consequence of the influx of wealth and consumerism which accompanied Rome’s imperial growth. In the late Republic political invective associated gluttony and profligacy with \(^6\) Pind. *Pyth.* 1.1–8. The poem was written in honor of “Hieron of Etna” (line 32) whose Deinomenid dynasty had defeated the Carthaginians at Himera in 480 and the Etruscans at Cumae in 474 BCE.

\(^7\) Habinek (2005) 42.

\(^8\) Sen. *Contr.* 9.2.4: *scelus est in conuiuo damnare hominem: quid occidere?* (“it is a crime to condemn a man at a banquet; how much worse to kill him?”). Seneca compares this with tyrant behavior (9.2.7), noting the impropriety of a Roman official who mixes execution with private dining (9.2.24). See also Seneca’s discussion in the *De ira* (*Dial.* 4.33.3–5.18.1). Abuse of this kind is discussed by Corbeill (1997) 107–110 and De Blois (2010).