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**Feasting after Pharsalus: Reflections on Lucan's Caesar (BC 7,787ss.)**

Caesar's banquet in view of the unburied casualties after the decisive battle of Pharsalus is one of the most remarkable examples for Lucan's complex sense-construction as well as for Caesar's monochrome characterization in recent scholarship. Amazingly enough, an individual interpretation of this episode can rarely be found, whereas, of course, it is the favorite proof of the sadistic, Schreber-like mentality of a victorious usurpator gone mad (Bartsch 1997, Johnson 1987). Not only are comparisons to other ghastly banquets (e.g. Marius, Lucan BC 2,118ss.) taken at face value meaning of Lucan's depiction, but also ever-present excesses of post-war violence, transmitted daily by the media, make an assessment extremely difficult. Due to its cinematic qualities, in recent literature the episode is sometimes even reclaimed as a predecessor of today's horror-flicks. Consequently the commonly attested "Hannibalic" traits of Caesar attain a rather unexpected new dimension.

In regard to Lucan's Caesar, scholarship tends to paint monistic pictures in shades of dark grey to black, though - at best - the *Bellum Civile* allows ambiguous readings only. In spite of the emblematic effect of all the Caesar-episodes, his motives remain, for the most part, unexplained and are therefore open to various and contradicting interpretations. This effect is enhanced by the fact that Caesar is perceived with a 'perspective-ness' through the eyes of a biased narrator.

Certainly, a positive reading of the banquet-scene is out of the question. Yet, at a second and third glance significant details of the Lucanian banquet scene emerge: there is, for instance, no description of the banquet (food, table, servants), there are no guests except wild animals with a very selective appetite. While it could seem that Lucan has, for once, missed a chance for gory realism, precisely this renunciation is a path to another level of interpretation: as in other Caesar-episodes, religious undertones, a 'sacralisation', can be observed: Caesar is the best diviner of the gods' will, he himself being a quasi-divine character acting with uncanny swiftness and sometimes with 'inhumane' viz. divine (unpunished) wrath and violence. Seen from the perspective of his later divinisation, the banquet on the battlefield (only present in *epulis paratur*, 7,792) can be interpreted as a thanksgiving sacrifice to the gods, if not a sort of ghastly *lectisternium*.

Most of the interpreters, due to our culturally determined prejudices, support the narrator's invectives against 'Caesarian' Caesar without considering that his statements - part of a polyphone poetic work - should be interpreted, too. The underlying 'religious' dimension and the different cultural stance towards the burial of casualties, complicated by various intertextual references, do not allow us to read Caesar monistically as the 'evil' transgressor, but mark him in irresolvable ambivalence as a larger-than-life agent of fate who paves the way to the establishment of a necessary new political order with violence and destruction.