

FRANCES V. HICKSON

ROMAN PRAYER LANGUAGE
LIVY AND THE AENEID OF VERGIL



Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden GmbH

Frances V. Hickson
Roman Prayer Language
Livy and the Aeneid of Vergil

Beiträge zur Altertumskunde

Herausgegeben von
Ernst Heitsch, Ludwig Koenen,
Reinhold Merkelbach, Clemens Zintzen

Band 30



Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden GmbH

Roman Prayer Language Livy and the Aeneid of Vergil

Von
Frances V. Hickson



Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden GmbH 1993

ISBN 978-3-663-12347-7
DOI 10.1007/978-3-663-12346-0

ISBN 978-3-663-12346-0 (eBook)

Die Deutsche Bibliothek – CIP-Einheitsaufnahme

Hickson, Frances V.:

Roman prayer language: Livy and the Aeneid of Vergil /
von Frances V. Hickson. – Stuttgart: Teubner, 1993
(Beiträge zur Altertumskunde; Bd. 30)

Zugl.: Chapel Hill, Univ. of North Carolina, Diss., 1986 u. d. T.:

Hickson, Frances V.: Voces precatationum

ISBN 978-3-663-12347-7

NE: GT

Das Werk einschließlich aller seiner Teile ist urheberrechtlich geschützt.

Jede Verwertung außerhalb der engen Grenzen des Urheberrechts-
gesetzes ist ohne Zustimmung des Verlages unzulässig und strafbar.

Das gilt besonders für Vervielfältigungen, Übersetzungen,
Mikroverfilmungen und die Einspeicherung und Verarbeitung
in elektronischen Systemen.

© Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden 1993

Ursprünglich erschienen bei B. G. Teubner Stuttgart in 1993

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 1993

magistris meis

Table of Contents

Abbreviations	xi
Preface.....	xiii
A Prologue to Roman Petitionary Prayer.....	1
Petitionary Prayer in Roman Religion.....	4
Occasions of Petitionary Prayer.....	4
Speakers	5
Orality of Prayers.....	6
The Power of Words	7
Structure of Prayers.....	9
Ancient Sources	11
Chapter I: The Predecessors of Livy and Vergil	17
Livy and Epic Poetry	17
Prayers in Earlier Historiography	19
Poetic Influence on Prayers in Livy.....	23
Ennian Influence on Prayers in the <i>Aeneid</i>	27
Homeric Influence on Prayers in the <i>Aeneid</i>	28
Chapter II: The Invocation	33
The Language of Livy and Vergil.....	35
I. Verbs of Invocation.....	35
II. Descriptive Clauses	36
Chapter III: Simple Petitions.....	45
The Language of Livy and Vergil.....	45
I. Verbs of Petition.....	45
II. Requests	51
A. Divine Attitude.....	52
Divine Approval and Consent.....	52
Divine Favor	56
Pity	62
B. Human Concerns	62
Propitious Outcome.....	63
Adjectival Constructions	63
Synonyms	65

	Verbal Constructions.....	67
	Preservation.....	79
	Aid.....	81
	Aversion of Danger	83
	Curses	88
Chapter IV: Vows.....		91
Religious and Legal Obligations		92
Occasions.....		93
Audience and Function		95
The Language of Livy and Vergil.....		96
I. Verbs of Vowing.....		96
II. Requests		98
III. Cautionary Formulae.....		102
Chapter V: Oaths		107
Occasions.....		111
Audience.....		112
Function.....		113
The Language of Livy and Vergil.....		114
I. Verbs of Oath-taking.....		114
II. Formulae Regarding Perjury		124
III. Self-Curses.....		127
IV. Asseverations		129
Chapter VI: Comparisons.....		133
Treaty Oaths		133
Vows		137
Simple Petitions.....		138
Chapter VII: Conclusions.....		141
Vergil's <i>Aeneid</i>		141
Livy's History		144
Appendices:.....		149
1. Petitionary Prayers		151
Livy		151
<i>Aeneid</i>		161
2. Vows		167
Livy		167
<i>Aeneid</i>		171

3. Oaths	173
Livy	173
<i>Aeneid</i>	177
4. Distribution of Prayers	179
A: Vergil's <i>Aeneid</i>	179
B: Livy	181
Bibliography.....	183
Indices	195
1. Index Rerum	195
2. Index Verborum.....	198
3. Index Locorum.....	200

Abbreviations

The names of ancient authors and their works are normally abbreviated according to the conventions of standard English reference works; these abbreviations may be found in the *Index Locorum*. Abbreviations for periodicals follow those of *l' Annee Philologique*. Secondary literature is generally cited by the author's last name and the date of publication if necessary for clarity. Full references appear in the Bibliography. Other abbreviations are as follows:

Lewis and Short=Lewis, Charlton and Short, Charles, ed. *A Latin Dictionary*. Oxford 1975.

Mommsen *StrR.*=Mommsen, Theodor. *Römisches Strafrecht*. Leipzig 1899; reprint Graz, 1955.

Mommsen *StR.*=Mommsen, Theodor. *Römisches Staatsrecht. Handbuch der römischen Alterthümer*. Vols. 1-3. Leipzig³ 1887-1888.

OLD=Glare, P. G. W. ed. *Oxford Latin Dictionary*. Oxford 1982.

RE=Pauly-Wissowa's Real-encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft. Stuttgart 1893- .

TLL=Thesaurus Linguae Latinae. Leipzig 1900-.

VIR= *Vocabularium Iurisprudentiae Romanae*. Berlin 1903-1987.

Preface

This study represents an extensive revision of my dissertation, *Voces Precationum: The Vocabulary of Prayer in Livy and the Aeneid of Vergil*, accepted by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in May 1986. The study has been expanded to include chapters on vows and oaths.

I dedicate this work to the many teachers who have inspired, guided, and encouraged my study of classical languages and cultures over the years. Their number is too great to name all individually, but I wish to single out three individuals. I gladly acknowledge my greatest debt of gratitude to Jerzy Linderski, who has been my professor, dissertation advisor, mentor and friend. His support and encouragement of my work date back to the very first semester of my graduate studies and have never failed. I wish to address a special word of thanks to Laura V. Sumner and Lucille C. Jones, my professors of Classics at Mary Washington College in Fredericksburg, Virginia.

I also wish to express my appreciation to a number of individuals whose advice and assistance have been essential to the realization of this project. L. Koenen, editor of this series, offered helpful suggestions on content and patiently advised me on the preparation of camera-ready copy. Others who took time out from their own work to read my manuscript and offer comments were my colleagues A. Bennett, B. Jordan, and R. Renehan. My graduate assistants W. Morison and D. Dumont spent many hours proof-reading and formatting, not to mention their numerous trips to the library. S. Gardner contributed her journalistic experience in editing. F. Nennig and K. Carver, members of the staff of the UCSB Department of Classics, contributed valuable assistance.

Several institutions provided support as well. The National Endowment for the Humanities and the David and Lucille Packard Foundation provided funds for the APA's Fellowship in Latin Lexicography. During my tenure at the Thesaurus Linguae Latinae (1986-1987), the General Director, P. Flury and others provided rigorous training in lexicographical method. All those who have had the privilege of access to the TLL archives and library will appreciate what this means to a scholar working

in our field. The University of California at Santa Barbara generously granted a Faculty Career Development Award for two quarters of sabbatical leave in 1988-1989. During that sabbatical, the authorities of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill graciously appointed me a Visiting Scholar with access to all libraries and services. My former professors in the Classics Department there welcomed me with collegial hospitality and assistance. I single out the fact that T. R. S. Broughton and J. Bolter made the use of their personal offices available to me. The staff, especially D. Stolle, guided me through various bureaucratic labyrinths.

My gratitude to friends for support and encouragement cannot adequately be expressed. I should like to mention in particular the Shugart family who opened both their home and their hearts to me during my sabbatical and subsequent visits to Chapel Hill. Others who shared in this project include C. de Catanzaro, G. Commins, J. Cromartie, S. Gardner, R. Hahn, D. Keller, C. Konrad, A. Mallard, L. Moes, T. Moore, T. Papillon, and J. Rudestam.

Santa Barbara, California

August 1992

*Ex homine remediorum primum maximae
quaestionis et semper incertae est polleantne
aliquid verba et incantamenta carminum.*

Pliny, *Historia Naturalis* 28.10

A Prologue to Roman Petitionary Prayer

For the ancient Romans, the wording of prayers was a matter of crucial importance. In response to his own question, “do ritual words and incantations possess any power?” Pliny adduces numerous examples of the scrupulous use of prayers and incantations at every period of Roman history and in all areas of life to show that the Romans, in his opinion, both publicly and privately, maintained a genuine belief in the power of ritual words (28.10-11). Roman cult, especially that of the state, set high value on the careful repetition of precise formulae, which long experience had shown to be an effective means of communicating with the divine beings whose good-will was essential for the safety and prosperity of the state and its citizens. In their private lives as well, the Romans used numerous religious formulae to express their thoughts and feelings. There were formulae for capturing the attention of the gods, declaring the purpose of prayers, setting forth requests, and identifying beneficiaries. In the state cult, much effort was invested in practices that assured the preservation and correct repetition of traditional formulae. At the same time, the necessity for precise identification of divinities and requests required adaptability to varying situations. The study of prayer language shows both synchronic and diachronic variations which evidence this quality.

It was not only in the composing and speaking of prayers that the Romans manifested their faith in the power of language. The modern reader will more readily understand such a belief concerning the composition of literature. Language has the power to capture the attention of a human audience, as well as a divine one, and to shape its response to a work of literature. The fundamental process of writing is the choice of words and their arrangement. By setting familiar language in familiar contexts, an author summons up in the audience clusters of images attached to previous encounters with that language in writing or speech.

The use of words in new or unusual arrangements and contexts evokes fresh responses, mingling images associated with different settings.

The power of such authorial choices is most obvious when the text under examination is one in which the surrounding culture dictates the use of traditional language, as in ancient Roman prayers. When literary authors employ traditional religious formulae, they bring a wealth of communal experiences to their texts. Alternatively, they can borrow language from literature, rather than from life, thus creating an interplay between cultural and literary experiences. Or if authors choose to do so, they can select words and arrange them so as to compose entirely new phrases and to create new images. The study of such literary choices in specific texts offers insights into the cultural and literary environment of those texts and into possible audience response.

Two Roman authors, Livy and Vergil, provide an especially good opportunity to examine the creative choice between formulaic language and literary interpretations in the context of prayers. Both Livy's history and Vergil's *Aeneid* contain numerous prayers of varying type and content. Both works share the cultural context of the Augustan period. Furthermore, both authors are reputed authorities on Roman religion. Modern scholars often cite the prayers of Livy's history as authentic or at least as modernized versions of archaic prayers.¹ The ancient Romans themselves proclaimed Vergil's expertise; in Macrobius' *Saturnalia*, Praetextatus goes so far as to call Vergil *pontifex maximus* (1.24.16).²

The present study focuses on the language of prayers in these two works.³ The approach is lexical and its objective is two-fold: to show the

1 For example, Fowler writes, "in two or three cases Livy has copied the formula from the *tabulae* of the pontifices" (204). On the *tabulae*, see Frier, esp. 83-105.

2 On ancient opinions of Vergil, see Lehr 11, 15-16. Adde Macrobius, Sat. 3.2.1, 7, 10.

3 The essential foundation for the study of Roman prayer is Appel's *De Romanorum Precationibus*. Appel sometimes demonstrates a too ready acceptance of prose texts, particularly Livy, as sources for authentic Roman prayers. From such a perspective, it is not surprising that he neglects Livy's phraseology when not well attested as technical, e.g. *arcere* (126). For more specialized studies, I refer the reader to the works of Block, Gagnér, Highet, Jeanneret, Lehr, Ogilvie (1969), Secknus, Shatzman, and Swoboda-Danielewicz. In addition to these author-specific studies, there are detailed investigations of certain religious words and word families: Cipriano on *fas*; Erkell, Fugier, and Zieske on *felix*; Schilling (1954), Versnel (1981), and others on verbs of petition. There is also the thorough article by Alvar (1985) on the formula *sive deus, sive dea*.

insights which that language gives into one important aspect of Roman religion and into the writings of these two great Roman authors. This prologue provides a general introduction to prayers in Roman religion. The first chapter considers the relationship between prayers in Livy's history and Vergil's *Aeneid* and those found in their predecessors. Discussions of the content and conceptual bases of petitionary prayers appear in chapters two through five. For the reader who is interested in the particular language of prayers in Livy and Vergil, whether from the perspective of a classical philologist or an historian of religions, these chapters continue with a lexical analysis of specific words and phrases characteristic of Roman cultic prayer. Also included is language of a purely literary origin which the authors, especially Vergil, used in lieu of technical phraseology. Chapter six considers a small number of prayers that occur in similar contexts in Livy and Vergil and compares their language. The study concludes with a general summary of observations made in previous chapters about Livy and Vergil's usage of individual words and formulae. While my main interest is Roman religion and my chief approach is lexical, I hope, nevertheless, that some of my materials and results may be of interest to literary historians.

Because of the size of the topic, I have limited this study in several ways. I have restricted analysis of the historical development of language almost solely to usage in prayers and only occasionally mentioned related religious uses, such as augural; there has been no attempt to provide a broad analysis of each item in non-prayer contexts. The study does not include nouns or adjectives occurring only in epithets, such as *pater*, which, despite implicit religious concepts, function primarily as respectful terms of address. I have also limited the types of prayer examined. Although the English word "prayer" has come to indicate several different types of speech addressed to a god or gods (adoration, confession, lamentation, petition, and thanksgiving), only petition appears with frequency among the surviving prayers of Roman cult. Because of this prominence and in order to maintain some degree of topical unity, I have restricted this study to petitionary prayers, including the sub-types of vow and oath. Other types such as thanksgiving and dedication must await a separate study.

Petitionary Prayer in Roman Religion

Prayer, that form of human speech which explicitly or implicitly addresses immortals, was the most ubiquitous phenomenon of Roman religion, more so even than sacrifice since in addition to accompanying all sacrifices and other rituals, it also existed as an independent act. As an accompaniment of rituals, it described and explained the acts by which the Romans sought to ensure the *pax deum*, “peace with the gods.” Prayer indicated for whom the ritual was intended and described its contents, for example, a libation or the sacrifice of an animal. It also indicated the purpose of the ritual such as expiation, propitiation, or aversion of evil. As an independent phenomenon, prayer addressed some of the same purposes as rituals but could do so in more varied circumstances. A vow could be announced in the midst of battle; an apotropaic exclamation, in the midst of conversation. Furthermore, not every situation required a ritual action; a prefatory formula, for example, sufficed before an assembly of the people.

The most common type of prayer among the Romans, as well as that most illustrative of the spirit of their religion, was the petitionary prayer, simply defined as a request made by a human being to an immortal. The Latin words *precor*, *preces*, and *precatio*, which English speakers regularly translate as “pray” and “prayer,” are essentially words of petition. The basic Roman concept of religion was practical, concerning itself with obtaining earthly “peace” and prosperity. Among the various petitionary prayers attested in ancient Rome, two variations stand out as distinctive by virtue of their language: the vow, a promise conditional upon the fulfillment of a petition, and the oath, a petition for witnesses and the punishment of perjury. Therefore, these two sub-types each receive separate discussions in this study.

Occasions of Petitionary Prayer

Daily life, public and private, in ancient Rome presented many occasions for petitionary prayer.⁴ The most obvious occasions were those marked as sacred by their overt religious associations. These included regular cultic observances with their varied rituals. They might be major public events such as the festival of the Parilia or minor domestic ones

⁴ See Appel 56-63 for detailed examples of prayers including vows and oaths.

such as the offering before a meal. Proximity to a sacred place, a temple or shrine, might also evoke a spontaneous private petition. Other sacred occasions were concerned with divination. On official occasions, as at the inauguration of Numa, the legendary second king of Rome, specific petitions requested the manifestation of divine will (Liv. 1.18.9=App. 5). Alternatively, if unsolicited signs appeared, such as the vision of Mercury that addresses Aeneas in a dream, observers responded with petitions for the fulfillment of favorable omens or the aversion of unfavorable ones (*Aen.* 4.265-278).

In addition to these clearly sacred occasions, some apparently profane experiences elicited petitions for the manifestation of divine power. Frequently the situation was an ambiguous one, a situation that could have either positive or negative outcomes. The petitioner asked that the divinity exert its power for the aversion of harm and for the procurement of success or prosperity. Such an occasion especially existed at times when some new activity or undertaking was about to commence, for example, civil meetings, wars, journeys, or marriages. At other times, the feared danger was immediate, as in the face of military rout, famine, or disease.

Speakers

The persons who spoke these prayers varied according to the setting, especially as distinguished by public or private occasions. Public religion was in the hands of representatives of the state, both religious and civil. In certain cultic observances, the priests of individual deities (*flamines*) offered appropriate prayers. But when the ceremony was of overtly public interest, such as a vow for the welfare of the state, a magistrate would speak words that were dictated to him by a *pontifex*. On some occasions, both officials and private citizens offered prayers together. In times of danger, present or anticipated, the senate could ask that all men, women, and children address prayers to the gods in what was probably the most dramatic of these cultic occasions, the collective prayer (*supplicatio*) before the altars of all the gods.⁵ In domestic cult, the *paterfamilias* normally offered prayers for the welfare of the entire household, for example, those prayers which, along with an offering, preceded the chief

⁵ On the three types of *supplicatio* (expiatory, propitiatory, and gratulatory), see Halkin 9-13 with literature.

daily meal. When necessary, however, the *paterfamilias* could ask someone else to stand in for him, as an absentee landlord might ask a steward to do (e.g. Cato *Rust.* 141). Individuals could, of course, always offer their own private prayers in personal situations. Brief exclamatory prayers, especially oaths, colored the everyday speech of many Romans.

Orality of Prayers

Ancient prayers were spoken aloud or silently or murmured under the breath, depending primarily on the purpose of the speaker.⁶ Naturally, prayers on behalf of a community, whether the state or a private cult, were generally recited aloud. Thus the vows announced by a general before departing on a military expedition (*profectio*) would be spoken loudly and clearly before a crowd of his troops and onlookers. So too, prayers offered on behalf of an estate with its human occupants would be spoken aloud so that the participants in the ceremony might hear them. Even solitary prayers of persons making individual requests were often spoken aloud.

There were other occasions when silent or quiet prayer was desirable, such as private requests relating to health or heart. In exceptional cases, public priests too had occasion to pray silently; Plutarch mentions such at the entombment of an unchaste Vestal (*Num.* 10.4-7). The Romans, however, generally associated murmured prayers with malevolent purposes. Horace dramatizes the point well:

Vir bonus, omne forum quem spectat et omne tribunal,
 quandocumque deos vel porco vel bove placat,
 "Iane pater!" clare, clare cum dixit "Apollo!"
 labra movet metuens audiri: "pulchra Laverna,⁷
 da mihi fallere, da iusto sanctoque videri,
 noctem peccatis et fraudibus obice nubem"
 (*Epist.* 1.16.57-62).

If prayers of this sort were too embarrassing to be said aloud, how much more so magical spells for evil purposes.

⁶ On the orality of ancient prayer, see Versnel (1981) 25-28 with literature; Wagenvoort (1980) 197-209; Appel 209-212. On incantations, see Sudhaus 197-199.

⁷ Laverna was a goddess of theft.

The Power of Words

The hallmark of Roman cultic prayer was concern for the precise formulation and repetition of ritual language.⁸ For the encyclopedist Pliny the Elder, this concern provided evidence of the trust that people placed in the efficacy of “ritual words and incantations.” Describing the state cult, he writes:

Ex homine remediorum primum maximae quaestionis et semper incertae est, polleantne aliquid verba et incantamenta carminum? Quod si verum est, homini acceptum fieri oportere conveniat, sed viritim sapientissimi cuiusque respuit fides, in universum vero omnibus horis credit vita nec sentit. Quippe victimas caedi sine precatione non videtur referre aut deos rite consuli. Praeterea alia sunt verba inpetritis, alia depulsoriis, alia commendationis, videmusque certis precationibus obsecrasse summos magistratus et, ne quod verborum praetereatur aut praeposterum dicatur, de scripto praeire aliquem rursusque alium custodem dari qui attendat, alium vero praeponi qui favere linguis iubeat, tibicinem canere, ne quid aliud exaudiatur, . . . (HN 28.10-11).⁹

For recurring situations, the language of an entire prayer was fixed (*certa verba*). On other occasions, which varied in particulars, but maintained certain consistent elements, the language could be modified to fit the specific situation (*concepta verba*).¹⁰ Thus, Livy presents the formula for demanding reparations from a foreign state with an indefinite phrase where the name of a particular party should be specified: “*audi, Iuppiter,*” *inquit*; “*audite, fines*”—*cuiuscumque gentis sunt nominat*;—“*audiat fas*” (1.32.6=App. 142). The proper wording of prayers used in the state cult was preserved in priestly books, from which the prayers were read on ritual occasions (cf. Cic. *Dom.* 140; Gell. *NA* 13.23.1). This was particularly important in the case of archaic prayers that the speakers

8 For the ancient references on this subject, see Wissowa 396-398. On the ritual gestures accompanying prayer, see Appel 184-214; Sittl 174ff.

9 On this passage, see Köves-Zulauf, esp. 24-63. On commendation as a type of prayer, see the review of this book by Linderski.

10 For this terminology, see Linderski (1986a) 2266-2267 with n.476.

themselves no longer understood, as Quintilian remarks of the archaic Salian hymn (*Inst.* 1.6.40).¹¹

In spite of all precautions, mistakes could and did occur in the recitation of prayers. Livy, for example, tells of an occasion when the Latin Festival was invalidated because “in one sacrifice the magistrate from Lanuvium had omitted the words *populo Romano Quiritium*” (41.16.1). As a result, the ceremonies had to be renewed (*instauratio*) and the people of Lanuvium offered new sacrifices (cf. the Iguvine tablets 6B 48). Obviously, the Roman state took this matter very seriously; omission of the name of the Roman people would mean that they would not receive the benefits requested in the prayer. Cicero mentions other flaws in prayer that could invalidate religious proceedings in his speech *de Domo Sua*. Here he asks the pontiffs to declare invalid the consecration of his house performed by his enemy Clodius. He cites the inexperience of a young priest, who dictated the formulae of consecration *mente ac lingua titubante*. He also criticizes the faulty repetition of those formulae by the magistrate Clodius, who *praeposteris verbis, ominibus obscenis, identidem se ipse revocans, dubitans, timens, haesitans omnia aliter ac vos (sc. pontifices) in monumentis habetis et pronuntiarit et fecerit* (*Dom.* 139, 140).

The concern with language in cultic prayer went beyond precise recitation of set prayers and extended to the scrupulous composition of formulae. Here religious anxiety before the unpredictable power of the gods led to linguistic attempts to eliminate some of the potential mistakes that could cause petitions to go unanswered or to be answered otherwise than intended. The resulting language bears certain similarities to legal diction. In vows, there appear precautionary statements to ensure the validity of votive offerings despite unintentional mistakes in procedure, for example, *si atro die faxit insciens, probe factum esto* (22.10.6=App. 123). The same religious anxiety brought about the piling up of synonyms throughout prayers, for example, *precamur o[r]amus obsecramusque* (CIL 6.32329.13=Pighi 157.13) or *quod bonum faustum felixque sit* (CIL 6.30975=ILS 3090). In the invocation of the gods, this concern created a multiplication of divinities, epithets, descriptive predicates, and sometimes generic substitutes such as *vel quo alio*

11 E.g. *cozeulodorieso. omnia vero adpatula coemisse. | ian cusianes duonus ceruses dunus lanusve | vet pom melios eum recum* (Morel, FPL *Carm. Sal. frg.* 3). The hymn of the Arval brotherhood also contains obscure phrasing (Henzen CCIV).