

## Prayer Language in Vergil's Representations of Ritual

This paper explores the way in which formulaic prayer language was put to use by Vergil in scenes which depict ritual observance in the *Aeneid*. Such language in Vergil's hands acts as a device to articulate a central component of Roman identity. Although traditional Roman prayer language is far less frequently found in Vergil's prayers as compared to those of Livy or Ennius (Hickson 1993), in the second half of the *Aeneid*, Vergil juxtaposes Homeric prayers spoken by native Latins with the actions and formulae of traditional Roman cult. Anomalous language and inconsistencies in the *Aeneid*'s prayers reflect the difficulties of a union between literary and ritual language. Vergil's prayers, when they retain some words, constructions or phrases from Roman prayer language, serve as a subtle but dynamic tool for integrating his epic characters into Italy's cultural milieu. Similar inquiries into the inconsistencies that arise in sacrifices and prophecies of the epic have revealed a sense of competitive perspectives within the narrative and beyond, and have shown that even implicit inconsistency within language or ritual action influence plot and textual interpretation (Dyson 2001; O'Hara 1986).

There are two prayers accompanied by ritual observance in the second half of the *Aeneid* that use allusion variously to shape cultural identity. Within the prayer of the Salian priests (8.293–302) spoken on the occasion of Hercules' annual rites celebrated at Pallanteum, there are a few formulaic constructions, such as the repetition of the second person pronoun (*tu...tu...te...te*) and a double adjective in asyndeton (*arduus arma tenens* 8.299), but Vergil also draws upon Greek models (Gransden 1976 *ad loc.*) and uses unusual words, such as *dexter* (8.302) to mean "favorable" as opposed to the official formula *volens propitius* (Hickson 1993: 57). This combination of traditional and non-traditional language brings the prayer noticeably out of the religious sphere and into the literary, while still retaining a sense of proper ritual observance. The final lines of the prayer, which repeat the ceremonial invocation to request Hercules' presence at a feast in his honor (*salve, vera Iovis proles, decus addite divis / et nos et tua dexter adi pede sacra secundo* 8.301–2), closely echo lines in the fourth *Eclogue* which describe a child whose birth signals the return of the Golden Age (*adgredero o magnos (aderit iam tempus) honores / cara deum suboles, magnum Iovis incrementum!* 4.48–9). As the prayer of the Salian priests alludes to this passage, it looks ahead to Vergil's own time, and the inconsistency created by simultaneously using allusion and non-formulaic language alongside formulaic prayer language subtly indicates a program larger than a request for Hercules' presence at their feast. By merging the two time periods within the prayer, Vergil conflates the prayer spoken on behalf of Aeneas and his companions with one for Vergil's audience and the Augustan age, and the identities of the native priests with their future Roman counterparts. Vergil employs allusion and ritual language in prayers of Aeneas and his allies to lend credibility to their claim to establish the Roman race and its customs, as well as endow these men with fundamental characteristics of Roman identity. Conversely, in Book Ten when the Latin women go to the temple of Pallas Athena and pray for protection against Aeneas (*armipotens, praeses belli, Tritonia uirgo, / frange manu telum Phrygii praedonis, et ipsum / pronum sterne solo portisque effunde sub altis* 10.483–5), the prayer does not use Roman prayer language. Instead, it follows closely a Homeric model (*Il.* 6.305–7), which also calls upon Athena, asks her to break the enemy's weapon and requests that their enemy be laid prone before the gates. The absence of Roman formulaic language from the prayers of the Latin women, who are part of Rome's ancestry and where the audience could envision the origin of their own ancient prayer language, alienates these women from a central aspect of Roman identity and assimilates them to the Trojans of the Homeric poems.

## Bibliography

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