The Roman Character of Latin Literary Prayer Language

Public and private religion was an important component in Roman life. It is not surprising, then, that the Romans' experience of religion had a strong influence on their literature. One key aspect of Roman religion was prayer. Scholars have already studied the usage of prayer language in both Greek and Roman authors. These previous studies can be divided into two groups: 1) works that generally focus either on Greek (Pulleyn 1997) *or* Latin (Hickson 1993) prayer language; and 2) works that explore both, but highlight their common features (Chapot 2001).

The present study, however, will revisit previous scholarship, in order to identify the aspects which are characteristically "Roman" in the prayer language used by Latin authors. Special focus will be given to the vocabulary, structure, and literary context of prayers. The study will focus on an analysis of the prayer language used in three Latin works: Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita,* Catullus 34, and Horace's *Carmen Saeculare.* Hickson has identified 128 prayers in Livy, which occur in a variety of forms, such as prayers of petition, oaths, and vows. One of these, for example, is the address to Jupiter (1.24) which was used in declaring war on an enemy people (Grimal 1978). Catullus 34 is a hymn to the goddess Diana, and the *Carmen Saeculare* is a hymn addressed to several Roman deities upon the occasion of Augustus' *Ludi Saeculares* in 17 B.C.E. Both take the form traditional *carmina,* which were historically associated with magic and incantation (Putnam 2000).

This study will shed light upon our understanding of Roman prayer language in three ways. First, it will explore whether the authors used the formulaic character of Roman prayer in their literary works or they employed an original type of prayer. Second, it will give insight into the language and contexts of non-literary prayers (i.e., prayers spoken in ancient Rome but of which we have very few records). Finally, in identifying the elements which distinguish Roman prayer language, it will help us to understand the uniqueness of Roman religion.

Works Cited

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