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# “Please” and “I ask, I request” in *Liber vitae patrum*

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## Abstract

This paper examines the use of performative verbs meaning “I beg, I ask” and pragmatic markers meaning “please” in the 6th-century *Liber vitae patrum* by Gregory of Tours. It discusses the frequency of each verb and the possible factors that may have influenced its selection, such as imitation of previous authors, the social status of the communication agents, the requested things, and any difficulty in fulfilling the request. For example, the fact that the highest frequency was found for *quaeso* (which was perceived as an archaism already in Cicero’s time) suggests that Gregory followed the model of learned men from the 4th and 5th centuries CE who “resuscitated” this verb after its decline in the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE. The paper also examines other additional devices, such as a formula with *digneris*, and forms of address.

## Keywords

*dignari*; *digneris*; politeness; late Latin; Gregory of Tours

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## 1. Introduction

Previous research on politeness in Latin has focused mainly on the comedies of Plautus and Terentius, epistolography (Hall 2009), texts of an administrative nature (Ferri 2022), and developments towards Romance languages (Molinelli 2010, 2016; Ghezzi and Molinelli 2014, 2016). This paper builds on research on the means of expressing requests (in addition to those mentioned above, these means have been dealt with by, e.g., Unceta Gómez 2009a, 2019; Risselada 1993; Dickey 2012, 2015, 2016; Fedriani 2017) and adds the examination of their use in the sixth-century CE work *Liber vitae patrum* of Gregory of Tours, which belongs to the hagiographic genre of the "lives of saints". It is a collection of 20 stories of varying lengths about holy people (19 about men and 1 about a woman) who had some relationship to Gregory's family and the places where he worked (see James 2007: p. 14). The holiness of these people is testified to through their assistance to other people, their manner of communication, and the miracles they performed during their lifetime or that occurred after their death. The descriptions of these situations often contain direct discourse where requests and various politeness strategies may occur.

## 2. Theoretical preliminaries

Politeness in general and politeness in Latin have been studied for several decades. An overview of different approaches has been provided by, for example, Dickey (2016) and Unceta Gómez and Berger (2022). In Latin linguistics, Brown and Levinson's (1978) politeness theory is among the most influential. The core of this theory is the concept of face and its protection. It is supposed that every communication agent has a positive and a negative face, which Brown and Levinson (1978: p. 62) define as follows:

- Negative face: "the want of every 'competent adult member' that [their] actions be unimpeded by others"
- Positive face: "the want of every member that [their] wants be desirable to at least some others"

Positive face is protected through positive politeness. Using this means, the speaker lets the addressee know that he or she is accepted and appreciated and that his or her wishes are at least partially in line with the speaker's (Brown and Levinson 1978: p. 101). Negative face is protected by negative politeness (Brown and Levinson 1978: pp. 129–130). In this case, the speaker tries to mitigate the threat of the addressee's desire to act without any external constraint or impediment. A typical example of such a threat is an order, and a request used by the speaker to achieve his or her goals. Negative politeness can be expressed through a variety of strategies, such as the use of conventional formulas, questions, modal verbs and/or conditionals (could you), hedging (a bit, somewhat) and speakers' attempts to belittle themselves, and others (Brown and Levinson 1978: pp. 129–211).

This theory has also received criticism. It has been claimed that it does not hold for all cultures (Watts 2003: p. 102) and does not consider that positive and negative politeness

can be combined (Dickey 2016: p. 201) in one utterance. It has also been pointed out that it does not adequately define irony and its role in expressing politeness (Alba-Juez 1994: p. 10).

Because of this, some authors have created their own approaches to overcome the weak points of Brown and Levinson's theory (for an overview of their application to Latin, see, e.g., Unceta Gómez 2009a, Dickey 2016, Unceta Gómez and Berger 2022) or tried to modify and adapt Brown and Levinson's theory to specific cultures. In Latin linguistics, such a modification has been made by Hall (2009), who distinguished affiliative politeness, redressive politeness, and politeness of respect. While affiliative and redressive politeness correspond approximately to Brown and Levinson's positive and negative politeness, respectively, politeness of respect is a new category. According to Hall (2009: p. 9), it expresses an attitude referred to in Latin as *verecundia*. He characterizes it as knowing one's place in society and using appropriate terms when addressing those above and below (p. 8). Based on his research of Cicero's letters, Hall suggests that this type of politeness is particularly evident in the relationships between aristocrats, who displayed a great deal of care about their social status and dignity (*dignitas*) (p. 12) and were measured and moderate even in less formal situations (p. 9). The most recent categorization of the Latin politeness system in republican times was provided by Unceta Gómez (2019). He distinguished four categories according to combinations of four parameters: connection, separation, i.e. (non) intimacy of the relationship on the one hand, and politic<sup>1</sup> (i.e. the standardized and expected behaviour), polite (i.e. the behaviour going beyond the socially expected and "neutral" behaviour) on the other hand. The resulting categories are summarized in his table on page 307, here quoted as Table 1.

	<b>Politic <i>decorum</i></b>	<b>Polite <i>honorificentia</i></b>
Connection	Affiliation <i>urbanitas</i>	Intensification of closeness <i>comitas</i>
Separation	Deference <i>verecundia, humilitas</i>	Redress <i>modestia, humilitas</i>

**Table 1.** The Latin politeness system by Unceta Gómez (2019: p. 307).

In addition to theoretical approaches, many Latin linguists have focused on the expression of requests, as mentioned above. They have examined especially the means for expressing "please" and "I ask", their incorporation into the sentence and discourse, their pragmatic function in discourse, their distribution by gender, and their use in different genres. They have shown that the frequency, meaning, and function of individual verbs changed over time. For example, *amabo* "please be so kind" is typical of comedies of the archaic period, but it also occurs in later authors, including Cicero, although less frequently. In addition, while Plautus put this word almost exclusively into the mouths of women and men only in the case of extramarital love relationships (Unceta Gómez

<sup>1</sup> See Watts (2003: p. 161).

2009a: p. 74), Cicero used it when addressing, for example, Atticus or his brother Quintus in his letters. The frequency of use also changed in the case of *quaeso*, which was used in the middle (Unceta Gómez 2009b: pp. 251, 254–255) or high style (Dickey 2016: p. 208). A search for *quaeso* in the *Brepolis* database shows that its frequency diminished in the first century CE and the decline continued in the second and third centuries CE. In contrast, its use increased considerably in the fourth and especially the fifth centuries and was still abundant in the sixth century. Then, it decreased in the seventh and eighth centuries, but not as much as in the second and, primarily, third centuries CE. It should be added, however, that a few authors may have strongly influenced the figures. In the fourth and fifth centuries, for example, Augustine used *quaeso* in 258 utterances and Symmachus in 103. (In comparison, *quaeso* occurs 216 times in Cicero's works and 149 times in Plautus' comedies.) It may be assumed that it is no coincidence that Augustine and Symmachus, as the most prominent learned men of their time, used the archaic *quaeso* so often. They may have wished to consciously build on the classical usage, though not necessarily in all aspects.

Another example of development is *rogo*, which only gradually acquired the meaning "to beg, to request". While in Archaic Latin it meant only "to ask a question", in Cicero's texts it also has the meaning "to beg, to request" (Unceta Gómez 2009a: pp. 148–150; Halla-aho 2010: p. 233). Moreover, *rogo* subsequently spread as a neutral verb meaning "to beg, to request" and became a commonly used expression in administrative language and informal speech (see Dickey 2015: pp. 19–21).

Dickey (2012: p. 733; 2016: p. 208), basing herself on an analysis of Cicero's letters, also claimed that the choice of verb meaning "to request, to beg, to ask, please" may have been influenced by the difficulty of fulfilling a given request. She argued that Cicero used *velim* for the easiest requests to fulfil, *quaeso* for slightly more difficult ones, followed by *rogo* and finally by *peto* for the most challenging requests. However, as Dickey (2015: p. 20) pointed out, his addressees did not follow Cicero's usage but used *rogo* for all types of requests, whereas *quaeso* does not appear in their letters.

### 3. "Please" and "I ask, I request" in *Liber vitae patrum*

*Liber vitae patrum* contains 26 requests with a mitigation device meaning "please" or a verb "I ask, I request, I beg" (in 23 cases in the first person singular and in 2 cases in the first person plural). Sixteen instances of these devices are highly grammaticalized pragmatic markers *quaeso* and *obsecro*, which are typically parentheticals. The following tables present the frequency of individual devices and their syntactic integration into the sentence.

		Number	Parenthesis	Ut + subjunctive	Subjunctive without a conjunction
Performative verbs "I ask"	<i>Peto</i>	2		2	
	<i>Rogo</i>	6		6	
	<i>(De)precor</i>	2		2	
<b>Total</b>		<b>10</b>		<b>10</b>	

**Table 2.** The frequency of verbs "I ask".

		Number	Parenthesis	Ut + subjunctive	Subjunctive without a conjunction
Pragmatic markers "please"	<i>Quaeso</i>	14	13		1
	<i>Obsecro</i>	2	2		
<b>Total</b>		<b>16</b>	<b>15</b>		<b>1</b>

**Table 3.** The frequency of verbal markers "please".

Before analyzing individual verbs and markers, it should be remarked that approx. 75% of directive speech acts in *Liber vitae patrum* are expressed by the imperative without "I ask" or "please", albeit the imperative is sometimes accompanied by a form of address or another politeness device, which mitigates the request. It suggests that both verbs "I ask, I request", and the marker "please" are not used by chance.

### 3.1 Syntactic structures

The tables show that a parenthetical "please" was the most frequent, followed by *ut/ne* clauses after a verb "I ask". The subjunctive without a conjunction was marginal. A parenthetical "please" appears either in the middle of the predication (1), (2) or at the border between two clauses (3). The instance (2), although it contains *ne deficiat* "(wine) shall not be lacking", is listed as an example of a parenthetical *quaeso* because the non-parenthetical verbs always occur before the *ut/ne* clause or the subjunctive, see *quaeso* in (4).

- (1) "*Inpone, quaeso, manus tuas super oculos eius.*" (Greg. Tur. *vit. patr.* 5, 1)  
"I beg you, place your hands on the eyes of this man." (Transl. by James 2007: p. 29)
- (2) "*Ne deficiat, quaeso, Domine, de hoc vasculo vinum, donec cunctis ministretur in abundantiam.*" (Greg. Tur. *vit. patr.* 3, 1)  
"O Lord, I pray that wine shall not be lacking in this jar until all have received an abundance." (Transl. by James 2007: p. 19)

- (3) "(...) *Veni, obsecro, et<sup>2</sup> videam te, priusquam obiam.*" (Greg. Tur. *vit. patr.* 10, 4)  
 "(...) Come then, I pray you, that I may see you before I die." (Transl. by James 2007: p. 75)

The only example of the subjunctive without a conjunction may be *quaeso* at the beginning of clause (4):

- (4) "*Quaeso, Domine, numquam de hac generatione provehatur quisquam ad episcopale sacerdotium, qui episcopum non obaudit.*" (Greg. Tur. *vit. patr.* 4, 3)  
 "I ask, o Lord, that no one from this family ever be elevated to the episcopal rank, for it has not listened to its bishop." (Transl. by James 2007: p. 25)

A parenthetical "please" is preceded by the imperative or the present subjunctive in all except two cases. In one of them, it is preceded by the negation *ne*<sup>3</sup> and in another by the particle *prorsus* "precisely, certainly, exactly"<sup>4</sup>. The majority of these requests are positive and only four are negative. The parenthetical "please" and the request were not separated by a clause that could explain and/or mitigate the request. In contrast, such clauses sometimes occur before (5) or after (6) the conjunction in *ut/ne* clauses.

The repeated use of *ut* in (6) reintroduces and emphasizes the beginning of the *ut* clause signalled already by the first *ut*. Similarly, *ut* in example (7) signals a directive complement clause, whereas *ne* reintroduces it and adds negation. The repetition of the conjunction is not, however, a rule (cf. Greg. Tur. *vit. patr.* 12, 3).

- (5) "*Rogo, si fieri potest, ut me modicum susteneas, ...*" (Greg. Tur. *vit. patr.* 10, 4)  
 "I beg you, if it is possible, wait for me a little..." (Transl. by James 2007: p. 75)
- (6) "(...) *Rogamus enim, ut, quia haec ab oculis nostris absconditur, ut saltem digneris oleum salemque benedicere, de quo possemus aegrotis benedictionem flagitantibus ministrare.*" (Greg. Tur. *vit. patr.* 19, 4)  
 "We beg you, then, since you are going from our eyes, that you deign at least to bless some oil and salt that we can give to the sick who ask for a blessing." (Transl. by James 2007: p. 123)
- (7) "(...) *Nunc precor, ut, quia tempus resolutionis meae adest, ne dimittas me ab hoc mundo cum dolore discedere, ...*" (Greg. Tur. *vit. patr.* 8, 3)  
 "(...) Now that the time of my release has come, I beg you not to let me depart this world in sadness..." (Transl. by James 2007: p. 52)

2 MGH did not display the variant reading *et*. Even if the conjunction *ut* was present, it would be a final clause but not a directive complement clause.

3 Greg. Tur. *vit. patr.* 9, 2.

4 Greg. Tur. *vit. patr.* 2, 2.

In some cases of *ut/ne* clauses, the verb meaning "to ask, to request" is preceded by either *ideo*<sup>5</sup> "for that reason, therefore" (8) or *enim*<sup>6</sup> "indeed, certainly, in fact", which links the sentence to the previous argumentation.

- (8) "(...) **Ideo**ue rogo, **ut** eminus a monasterio requiescam." (Greg. Tur. *vit. patr.* 1, 6)  
 "(...) That is why I ask to rest far from the monastery." (Transl. by James 2007: p. 10)

### 3.2 Verb choice

Given the orthographic, morphological, and syntactic deviations from classical language in Gregory's work, it might seem surprising that the most frequent device is *quaeso*, which, according to Unceta Gómez (2009a: p. 76), was already in decline in Petronius and, according to Dickey (2015: p. 27), was archaic in Fronton's lifetime. Rather, one would expect to find *rogo* instead, which is, for example, the most frequent verb meaning "to beg, to ask" in Pliny's letters (Coleman 2012: p. 199) and is part of the usual phraseology in non-literary letters (Halla-aho 2008: pp. 81 and 95). The high proportion of *quaeso* is therefore, from my point of view, a piece of evidence on how Gregory's work mixes a proclaimed poor mastering of language, a defence of simplicity and the priority of content over form, a declared rejection of pagan authors while being well acquainted with them, a desire for stylistic elaborateness including a deliberate use of rhetorical devices, and unintentional use of traits indicative of the development of the language (cf. Bourgain 2015: pp. 159–170). Gregory thus followed the attitudes and practices of the Church Fathers. Still, the difference is that his "deviations" from classical orthography and morphology are much more frequent and his style is much more distant from the classical standard. However, the frequent use of *quaeso* cannot be explained only by a good knowledge of authors such as Augustine because, as mentioned above, this verb was also commonly used by the "pagan" Symmachus. Gregory was likely following the archaizing tendencies that characterized many Late Latin texts. The choice of a noticeable lexical unit, such as *quaeso*, could give the text the appearance of archaism without difficulty.

Other factors that might have influenced the verb choice and are therefore worthy of examination are:

- the type of requested thing, which is interrelated with the difficulty of fulfilling requests; and
- social status and the relationship between the speaker and the addressee, described in terms of hierarchy and the scale closeness – distance (see Unceta Gómez 2019: p. 306).

5 Greg. Tur. *vit. patr.* 1, 5; 1, 6; 12, 3.

6 Greg. Tur. *vit. patr.* 19, 4.



Regarding the first category, *quaeso* is used, for example, for requests for material help for the poor<sup>7</sup>, a prayer (10), information<sup>8</sup>, mercy (9), a return to a good life (11), and a miraculous supply of wine (2), i.e. for requests with very different levels of difficulty. *Rogo* is associated, for example, with a request concerning a burial place (8), a request to confer the office of bishop on a particular person (14), and a request to avoid idle words (15); *obsecro* expresses requests to be visited before death (3) and to be transported to the tomb of a saint<sup>9</sup>; *deprecor* a request to be released from prison (9); and *precor* a request to have a last wish granted before death (7). Thus, the verb choice does not seem to have been influenced by either the type of the requested thing or the difficulty of fulfilling the request. This finding is not surprising since even in Cicero's time the "difficulty scale" *velim – quaeso – rogo – peto* was not accepted by the entire community of speakers, as Dickey (2012: p. 733; 2016: p. 208) showed in the responses from Cicero's addressees (see above).

The relationships between communication agents can be divided into several main groups according to their social status and the closeness or distance between the speaker and the addressee. The first is the relationship of people to God. Although God's hierarchical supremacy is absolute, a believer's relationship to God includes intimacy and, hence, a certain degree of closeness. In these cases, Gregory used the verb *quaeso*<sup>10</sup> and the address *Domine* "Lord". When he opted for an imperative without *quaeso*, he added a form of address such as *Domine* "Lord" or *Deus* "God"<sup>11</sup>.

The second group includes the relationship of ordinary society members to a secular authority, for example the king. This relationship is characterized by the distance and the hierarchically high position. The requests addressed to authorities are introduced by the verbs *peto*<sup>12</sup>, *precor* (7), and *rogo* (14) and concern requests for obtaining an office and material help. If an imperative without a verb "I ask" is employed, the imperative is always accompanied by a form of address or a mitigation device, e.g. *si placet potestati vestrae* "if Your Potency agrees" (Greg. Tur. *vit. patr.* 1, 5).

The third type of relationship is established between society members and holy people and/or pious church leaders, who can acquire a higher social status because of their piety, uniqueness and ability to help others or intercede with God. The verbs used in the requests in this group are *quaeso* (9), (10); *deprecor* (9); and *rogo* (6). However, orders in imperative addressed by kings to holy persons show that the hierarchical position of holy persons is not fixed and depends on their interlocutors' position and situation. The same holds true for the parameter closeness – distance. For example, the request in (9), addressed to a holy man after his death, starts with a formal request. However, when

7 Greg. Tur. *vit. patr.* 4, 4.

8 Greg. Tur. *vit. patr.* 1, 3.

9 Greg. Tur. *vit. patr.* 2, 2.

10 Greg. Tur. *vit. patr.* 3, 1; 4, 3; 9, 2; 10, 4.

11 Greg. Tur. *vit. patr.* 17, 5.

12 Greg. Tur. *vit. patr.* 1, 5.

the holy man appears, the speaker switches to an imperative with *quaeso*, which does not sound so official and is similar to a prayer to God.

- (9) "(...) **Deprecor** nunc, ut me illa supereminenti pietate visitare digneris, quae in reliquorum absoluteione victorum saepius claruisti." Et post paululum obdormiens, apparuit ei vir beatus, dicens: "Quis es tu, qui nomen Niceti invocas? Aut unde nosti, quis fuerit, quod eum obsecrare non desinis?" At ille causam delicti ex ordine reserans, adiecit: "Miserere, **quaeso**, mihi, si tu es vir Dei quem invoco." Cui sanctus ait: "Surge in nomine Christi et ambula liber; a nullo enim comprehenderis." (Greg. Tur. vit. patr. 8, 7)

"(...) I beg you now to deign to visit me with that excellent kindness by which you have so often shone in the deliverance of others who are in chains." Shortly afterwards, as he slept, the blessed man appeared to him, and said "Who are you, who call the name of Nicetius? And how do you know who he was, since you do not cease to pray to him?" Then the man told him all about his case, and added, "Have pity on me, I beg you, if you are the man of God whom I invoke." The saint said to him, "Rise up, in the name of Christ, and walk free: you will not be restrained by anyone." (Transl. by James 2007: p. 58)

Another example that evidences the importance of a concrete situation is (10). Here, a well-to-do man, punished with blindness for preventing his servant from attending church, asks the abbot for prayer and demonstrates his willingness to permit his servant to serve God. At this moment, the nobleman is in need, which implies a lower position. This is also suggested by the use of the verb *supplicare* "to pray or beg humbly, supplicate".

- (10) "**Supplica**, **quaeso**, pro me Dominum et accipe hunc servum ad eius cultum; forsitan promerebor recipere lumen amissum." (Greg. Tur. vit. patr. 5, 1)

"Plead to the Lord on my behalf, I beg you, and take this slave into His service: perhaps I will then deserve to recover the light which I have lost." (Transl. by James 2007: p. 29)

The request in (6), addressed to the dying superior by nuns, is expressed by *rogamus ut saltim digneris oleum salemque benedicere* "We beg you, (...) that you deign at least to bless some oil and salt", which is a formal request. It may express reverence to the holy woman and indicate the distance in their relationship. In another situation<sup>13</sup>, the same holy woman is asked for help by *puella* "girl", who uses only an imperative without addressing her or using a mitigating device. However, the bare imperative for addressing the holy people is an exception.

The fourth group includes the relationship of a holy person towards ordinary people and lower-placed individuals and groups. The holy person uses *quaeso* as part of an

<sup>13</sup> Greg. Tur. vit. patr. 19, 2.

appeal to follow God (11), pray<sup>14</sup>, and help others<sup>15</sup>. The verb *rogo* can also appear in this type of relationship (15). In this case, however, the holy man does not express an appeal but admonition (see below).

- (11) "(...) *Relinque, quaeso, terrenum dominum et sequere Deum verum, caeli terraeque factorem, cuius nutu omnia gubernantur, ...*" (Greg. Tur. *vit. patr.* 12, 2)  
 "(...) I beg you to abandon your worldly master and follow the true God, the creator of heaven and earth, who governs all by His will, ..." (Transl. by James 2007: p. 82)

The fifth group covers the relationship between family members – brothers<sup>16</sup>, a husband and wife<sup>17</sup>, and a mother and her child<sup>18</sup>. The relationship between two pious brothers may be characterized as close and equal (the verbs used are *quaeso* and *rogo*). In contrast, a husband is supposed to have been in a hierarchically higher position than his wife (who asks him using *quaeso*), and a mother than her child (who employs *obsecro*) at that time. Despite the difference in hierarchy, these relationships are likely to be characterized by a certain degree of closeness.

A holy man's request addressed to a local bishop appears only once and is expressed by the verb *obsecro* (3). It occurs in an urgent situation because the holy man is dying and wants to meet the bishop before his death. Although urgency is also present in the abovementioned request addressed by an ill child to his mother, instances such as (9) indicate that the verb *obsecro* is not the only verb employed when a person is in need.

In addition to these groups, there is one instance in the Life of Saint Nicetius where the author addresses the readers with an appeal accompanied by the verb *quaeso* (12).

- (12) *Intuemini, quaeso, et advertite cautelam viri Dei!* (Greg. Tur. *vit. patr.* 8, 2)  
 Consider, I beg you, and note well the precaution of this man of God! (Transl. by James 2007: p. 51)

The above examples show that the correlation between the social status of participants and the verb used is not unambiguous. However, certain tendencies can be observed. For example, *quaeso* does not appear in requests addressed to the king or any other person endowed with secular power. It means in a situation characterized by a high difference in hierarchy and distance. It is a rule which Gregory seems to observe in his other works.

When the requests to God are accompanied by "please", the verb *quaeso* and the address *Domine* are used in all cases found in *Liber vitae patrum*. A glance at other works of Gregory of Tours shows that the association of *quaeso* with requests to God is not exclusive since *rogo* appears twice in the *Liber de miraculis Andreae apostoli*<sup>19</sup>. Since both

14 Greg. Tur. *vit. patr.* 13, 2.

15 Greg. Tur. *vit. patr.* 4, 4.

16 Greg. Tur. *vit. patr.* 1, 3; 1, 6.

17 Greg. Tur. *vit. patr.* 8, 1.

18 Greg. Tur. *vit. patr.* 2, 2.

19 Greg. Tur. *Andr.* 7 and 23.

the king and God are hierarchically high, the devices used for a request suggest that the relationship with God is perceived as closer.

*Rogo* tends to be a neutral verb because it appears in different types of relationships and requests for different things. The remaining verbs are too few in number to draw any conclusions from their occurrence.

### 3.3 Combination with other means for expressing politeness

"I ask" and "please" are sometimes accompanied by other devices that can emphasize the polite tone of the utterance. The first is *digneris* "you deign, you condescend", which appears in two subordinate *ut/ne* clauses mentioned above. In the first case, a prisoner makes a request of Saint Nicetius (9); in the second case, nuns make a request of their dying superior (6). The politeness formula *rogo (ut) digneris (facere)* "I ask you to deign to do", "I beg you to do kindly", lit. "I beg you to consider yourself worthy of doing this" occurred for the first time (if literary authors are considered) in epistles from Pliny to Traian. According to Coleman (2012: pp. 200–201), it is attested on papyri and tablets from Vindolanda and was part of official language. Its origin may have been linked to the concept of *dignitas*; this means the respect that was associated with one's position in the social hierarchy and that, according to Hall (2009: p. 12) and Barrios-Lech (2022: p. 62), was very important for Roman aristocrats.

Furthermore, the development of this construction implies a shift in meaning for *dignor* from "I believe it coincides with someone's dignity to do something" to "I believe it coincides with my dignity to do something". However, even in the case of Pliny's letters (where *digneris* occurs in only six instances), it is unclear why Pliny used *digneris* in individual cases because he also employed other means to address the emperor. The same also holds for *digneris* in *Liber vitae patrum*. It seems that the formula *rogo (ut) digneris* (and the imperative *dignare* + infinitive) can underscore the distance between the speaker and the addressee and the supplicant's humbleness.

Although it can be assumed that *dignitas* was perceived differently in the sixth century than in classical times, its importance persists. In *Liber vitae patrum*, this is indicated by the fact that the subject of the verb *dignari* in various tenses, modes, and persons is typically God (13), holy people, or people endowed with secular power.

(13) *Nulli tamen fratrum patefecit locum, quod ei Dominus dignatus est revelare.* (Greg. Tur. *vit. patr.* 1, 3)

He used to do this each year, and he did not reveal to any of the brothers the place which the Lord had shown to him. (Transl. by James 2007: p. 7)

The second way to mitigate the request is to use a wish in the third person and combine it with "please" or a verb "I ask". Gregory used this strategy in five utterances – three times in a request to God (2), once in a request for an office addressed to a king (14), and once in a request of a holy man addressed to his brothers from the community

(15). In this last example, the request was uttered after a conflict between the holy man called Nicetius and a priest who had told him a message. Nicetius was very angry, and after a reconciliation with the priest, he asked all the priests not to tell him such words any more. In this case, the communicative effect of *rogo* can depend on the tone of the utterance. It may mitigate the admonition or (which seems more likely in this situation) underscore that the request must be respected. Whether the address *dilectissimi fratres* "dear brothers" should be interpreted as ironic or usual and neutral in this context is questionable.

(14) "**Rogo**, " ait, "ut Nicetius presbiter, nepus meus, ecclesiae Lugdunensi **substituatur** episcopus." (Greg. Tur. *vit. patr.* 8, 3)

"I ask," said the bishop, "that the priest Nicetius, my nephew, shall succeed me as bishop of Lyons." (Transl. by James 2007: p. 52)

(15) "**Rogo**, dilectissimi fratres, ut verba inutilia, quae ignave musitantur, aures meas non **verberent**, quia non est dignum, ut homines rationabiles irrationalium hominum procacia verba suscipiant (...)" (Greg. Tur. *vit. patr.* 8, 3)

"I beg you, my dear brothers, not to let useless words which are muttered idly come to my ears, because it is not suitable for reasonable men to hear the vain speech of irrational men (...)" (Transl. by James 2007: p. 53)

A request can also be expressed as a wish or in the first person, accompanied by "please" or "I ask". For example, instead of "I ask you to do something so I can...", it can be said "please, I can..."; see (8) and (16). Thus, a wish includes a request addressed to another person who is considered able to fulfil it. The addressee can be expressed explicitly, as in (16) through the vocative *Domine* "Lord". It may be considered a conventionalized manner of prayer which originated from an indirect expression of a directive speech act.

(16) "**Ne, quaeso, Domine, revertar** ad has pravitates, quas dudum te confessus oblitus sum." (Greg. Tur. *vit. patr.* 9, 2)

"I beg you, Lord, not to allow me to return to those abominations which I have long forgotten in Your worship." (Transl. by James 2007: p. 68)

The last additional politeness device in the utterances with "please" or "I ask" is the use of forms of address. This device occurs in seven instances where the vocative is used. *Domine* for addressing God is found in four instances; see, for example, (2) and (4). (The choice of *Domine* for addressing God might have been influenced by Bible translations, as suggested by Tertullian's addressing *Adonai Domine*.<sup>20</sup> The history of this address in previous non-Christian texts was thoroughly examined by Dickey 2002).

20 *Et dixi: Adonai Domine, tu scis.* And I said: "Adonai, Domine, you know." (Tert. *resurr.* 29).

The remaining forms of address include *dilectissimi* "dear"<sup>21</sup>, *dilectissimi fratres* "dear brothers" (15), and *dulcissime coniunx* "sweet husband"<sup>22</sup>. In one instance<sup>23</sup>, the verb "I ask" is accompanied by *potentiae vestrae* "Your Potency". The last expression is employed for addressing the king and demonstrates the use of abstract terms as forms of address that spread in Late Latin (see Coleman 2012: p. 195).

## Conclusions

This paper has described the use of "please" and "I ask, I request" in the *Liber vitae patrum* of Gregory of Tours to express polite requests. The most frequent verb is *quaeso* (14 instances), followed by *rogo* (6 instances), (*de*)*precor* (2 instances), *obsecro* (2 instances), and *peto* (2 instances). As for syntactic constructions, parentheses prevailed with *quaeso* and *obsecro*, while the remaining verbs preferred *ut/ne* clauses.

Verb choice does not seem to have been related to the difficulty of fulfilling the request or the type of the requested thing. In contrast, the hierarchical position in society and closeness or distance in relationships seem to have played a role. Requests to the kings, placed in high positions in the social hierarchy and keeping distance from society members, never contain *quaeso*. However, this expression regularly occurs when asking God. Thus, the relationship with God seems to have been perceived as closer and more intimate. *Rogo* occurs for requests between communication agents with different social statuses and for asking for different things. This seems to confirm the development of *rogo* as a neutral verb of requesting. The other verbs are too few to draw any conclusions.

"Please" and "I ask" are sometimes accompanied by other expressions that may emphasize the politeness of a request. These means include two instances of *digneris* in *ut/ne* clauses and wishes and desires expressed in the third and first person, which can be classified as indirect expressions of directive speech acts. The last additional politeness strategy is to accompany the request with an address, which occurs in eight cases.

The low number of cases does not allow general conclusions for Late Latin politeness to be drawn. However, examining "please" and "I ask, I request" in one work may indicate possible trends that are worthy of further research.

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21 Greg. Tur. *vit. patr.* 13, 2.

22 Greg. Tur. *vit. patr.* 8, 1.

23 Greg. Tur. *vit. patr.* 1, 5.

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