

Wortphilologie of praefatam

Praefatam – the singular, perfect, passive, accusative and feminine participle of *praefor*. The word is used only once in the *Waltharius*, at line 437 in the sentence “... *Portitor exurgens praefatam venit in urbem ...*.” In this instance, as the note on the line suggests, *praefatam* is essentially equivalent to *supra dicta*, or perhaps the *iam dictus* seen several places throughout the poem. The line translates as “the ferryman arising went into the aforementioned city.” The meaning *praefatam* carries in the *Waltharius* is not the same meaning it had in Classical Latin. It was not until later during Late and Medieval Latin that it came mainly to be used as “stated before.”

The word *praefor* itself comes from the combination of *prae*, an adverb meaning “before” or “in front”, and *for*, the defective verb meaning “to speak” or “to say.” In the classical authors the word had several related meanings that all indicated in an active sense the intention of saying something beforehand, by the way of a preface (*exempli gratia a praefatio*). An excellent example of the general sense of the word occurs in Livy’s *Ab Urbe Condita* 3.45.1, which reads “*Appius decreto praefatur quam liberati fauerti eam ipsam legem declerare....*” Livy means for the word to show how Appius talked first about how liberty was upheld by that very law *et cetera*, *i.e.* he literally “spoke before” about it. It could also be used in the sense of opening a conversation by *honorem vel ueniam praefari*, by opening with a request for an indulgence or an expression of respect.

The word could also carry with it a religious connotation in classical authors. A line from the Vergil's *Aeneid* is a prime example: ““*praefatus divos solio rex in fit ab alto*” (11.301). *Praefatus* can mean to address beforehand with a preliminary prayer. Only after first having invoked the gods does the king give his sentence from his lofty throne.

The use of the word in the *Waltharius*, however, does not fit in well with either of those definitions. As Rome and the Latin language developed the word begins to take on the new and, I suggest, more legal and therefore logical definition or “previously stated.” More and more it is used in the passive participle form than the active form of the verb. The earliest records we have of such a post-classical use is the from the prominent 2nd and 3rd century A.D. Latin jurist Iulus Paulus, in the *Digesta Iustiniani* – the compendium of Roman Civil law made by the order of Justinian in the 6th century. In 20.4.12, an instance reads “*condemnatus ex praefatis causis*,” and at 10.3.19 another reads “*praefata iura aut mensura aut temporibus dividantur*.” Someone is condemned for the “previously stated” reason, and either the “aforesaid” laws or measures are torn apart by time. It is important for a jurist to present arguments clearly and logically by proceeding from one solid step to another. Perhaps there was a need for more specific and specialized logical language that *praefatam* helped meet.

Another early post-classical instance we have is not quite a legal text but rather is a polemic from the 1st and 2nd century Christian author Tertullian. In his *Caput IX* of his *Liber adversus Hermogenum*, while mounting one of his arguments he writes *praefatam Scripturam*, the aforesaid scripture. Somewhat like a legal text, Christian polemics, along

with general Christian discourse, use the scripture as sound and logical starting points for arguments. *Praefatam* with such a meaning easily allows such discourse to progress.

Most of the post-classical records we have of *praefatam* occur in Christian literature when not in juridical texts. Several of the *epistulae et decreta* of Popes make us of the word: “*praefatam apostolicam et summam ... sedem*” (Pope (antipope) Felix II to Athanasius of Alexandria, c. 360); ““*nunc praefatam regulam omnes teneant sacerdotes*” (epistle 1 of Pope Siricius, c. 390). Even in the early 5th century Vulgate Bible of Jerome does it appear, in Daniel, 5.13, “*ad quem praefatus rex ait.*”

The word continues to be used by Christian authors all the way up to beyond the Venerable Bede of the 7th and 8th centuries. His usage is of note by virtue of the fact that he uses the very phrase *praefatam insulam*, the very same phrase as in the *Waltharius*, close to ten times in his works. Rough contemporaries like the French chronicler Aimoinus Floriacensis used the phrase “*apud praefatam urbem,*” as he did in his chronicle of the Franks. Thietmar of Merseburg used the same phrase as well in his German chronicles.

What occurs after the decline of Classical Latin is the introduction in legal and Christian literature of a legal meaning to the definition of *praefor* in the form of the passive participle. The eventual development from this logical thinking led, in the monks like Bede and the assumed author of the *Waltharius*, to a common turn of phrase for the easy continuation of thought and subject matter which we find in line 437.