QUIS MAGNA TUENTI / SOMNUS?
SCENES OF SLEEPLESSNESS (AND INTERTEXTUALITY)
IN FLAVIAN POETRY

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1. Sleep, Insomnia, and Poetics

In recent studies on Flavian literature,¹ the theme of sleep and sleeplessness, has heretofore been approached mostly thematically² and focused on single authors.³ I consider this area of study still to be a harbinger of analysis that defines, both intra- and intertextually, the aesthetics and poetics of Statius, Valerius Flaccus, and Silius Italicus in relation to their epic models. There are many differences among the individual authors, as there are also similarities.

It is well known that sleep (richly and variously characterized and at times personified) and sleeplessness feature prominently in Greek and Latin epic poetry.⁴ The intertextual fabric of the poetics of sleep and dreams⁵ in Statius, Valerius Flaccus, and Silius Italicus⁶ is greatly indebted, as is true with other themes as well,⁷ to the presence of ὕπνος in Homer and in Apollonius Rhodius. Though belonging to a different literary genre, Statius’ Siluae comprise, just as the epic poems do, a rich array of passages dedicated to sleep and wakefulness, in a unique recurrence of themes that not only

² Carrai (1990) studies the invocation of sleep in Italian literature; on Statius, see 18–26.
³ See, e.g., the most recent work by Scioli (2005).
⁴ Extensively discussed in Scioli (2005) 186–204.
⁵ On dreams in classical antiquity, see especially Bouquet (2001); but also Dodds (1951) 102–134; Steiner (1952); Kessels (1978); Scioli (2005) 35–110; Harris (2009).
⁶ For the lack of comprehensive studies attempting a synthesis analysing the three authors, see Ripoll (1998) 2.
⁷ On various aspects of the Greek influence on the Flavian epicists see, e.g., Juhnke (1972); Burck (1981); Hardie (1983) 75–102; Smolenaars (1991); Ripoll (2001); Zissos (2002) 72–92; Galli (2007a) 9–18; Manuwald (2007); Gibson (2010) 53 and n. 22; Bonadeo, Canobbio, and Gasti (2011); Littlewood (2011) xxxviii–xxxix; and the essays in this volume.
reminds us of the *Thebaid* and the *Achilleid* and their earlier models, but also develops along noticeably original lines.\(^8\)

In these texts, we encounter various categories of beings subject to sleeplessness (divine, human, and animal). The causes of insomnia are habitually explicit in both the Greek and Latin poets, apart from rare cases such as Statius’ fascinating poem, *Siluae* 5.4. There are those insomnias imposed and suffered by a subject and other insomnias sought after and desired by the same subject.

2. *Leaders in Command (Poetics and Intertextuality)*

The first category of insomniac subjects examined is related to the leaders in command (the single-character type). Contrasted to the abandonment, typical of sleep, this type is characterized by the control of reality, typical of sleeplessness. In other words, this is a “masculine” insomnia connected to the pressing responsibility characteristic of the ruling classes. The Virgilian model serves as intermediary between the Greek poets and Flavian poetry.\(^9\)

During the massacre of Lemnos, already celebrated for the predominance of sleep in the episode,\(^10\) Hypsipyle exclaims of her father, as Thoas is already awake and immersed in the anxieties of the surrounding noise and turmoil: *quis magna tuenti / somnus?* (“what sleep for him that has great charge?” Stat. *Theb*. 5.241–242). Likewise, as Hannibal in Gades finds rest in sleep (*belligeramque datur somno componere mentem*, “and he was able to rest his warlike mind in sleep,” Sil. 3.162), Mercury proclaims that it is repugnant for a leader to pass the whole night in a sleep that wards off the duties of a leader, instead of being involved in war: *turpe duci totam somno consumere noctem, / o rector Libyae. uigili\(^11\) stant bella magistro* (“Ruler of Libya, it becomes not a leader to pass the whole night in slumber: war prospers when the commander wakes,” Sil. 3.172–173). There are differences between the two passages. In Statius, the rhetorical interrogative results in a simple aside that comments on the action without exhortation; the structure of the dialogue remains within the human sphere; the figure of the *dux* is that of an old man who still has not realized the enormity of the situation but, almost as if

\(^{8}\) See Vessey (1973) 41.

\(^{9}\) Cf. *Aen*. 1.305.

\(^{10}\) See in particular the scene of quiet and sleep in Lemnos (*morituram ... urbem, Theb*. 5.198), except for the women possessed by a homicidal *furor* (5.195–201).

\(^{11}\) For the link *uigil ... magister* in Latin poetry, cf. V. Fl. 8.202.