By the end of the fifteenth century, Michael Fabricius Ferrarinus (died sometime between 1488 and 1493), prior of the Carmelite cloister in Reggio Emilia, had launched in his *Chronicle* (ca. 1477–1484) the rumour that ‘super ripam Danuui’ a fountain had been found with an ancient sculpture of a sleeping nymph. According to Ferrarinus, the ensemble bore a peculiar *tetrastichon* epigraph:

Huius nympha loci, sacri custodia fontis,  
Dormio, dum blandae sentio murmur aquae.  
Parce meum, quisquis tangis caua marmora, somnum  
Rumpere. Sive bibas sive lavere tace.

Otto Kurz, Millard Meiss, Michael Liebmann, Leonard Barkan, Zita Ágota Pataki, Franz Matsche, and Matthias Müller have all discussed the impact of this rumour as prototypical for the Renaissance sculptures of the sleeping nymph in Rome and for the development of the well-known genre of the sleeping Venus in painting.1 Building on their work, this essay contextualises the phenomenon of the sleeping nymph and its textual and artistic *Nachleben*

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from the point of view of the locus amoenus as silence. Combining an icono-
logical, an aesthetic-philosophical and an anthropological approach, this essay
contributes to a better understanding of sleep, voyeurism, and silence within
the context of the nymph’s particular genius loci.

The Birth of an Artistic Motif: Status Quaestionis

In 1512, a sculpture of a sleeping, half-naked woman and part of an antique
fountain were discovered and displayed in the Belvedere of the Vatican
[Fig. 4.1]. We know about the sculpture and the way it was set up because of a
drawing by Francisco de Holanda (1517–1585) from 1539 [Fig. 4.2]. Today the
sculpture of this woman lying in the niche of a cave is considered to be Ariadne.
At the time, it was thought to represent Cleopatra. Both the setting and the
pose of the scantily clad goddess refer to the then current genre of nymphean
sculpture, a prototype of which was reportedly located on the banks of the
Danube. The alleged group of sculptures on the Danube bore a Latin epigram.
The epigram was included in a compilation by Michael Fabricius Ferrarinus,
prior of the Carmelite cloister in Reggio Emilia. Ferrarinus writes: ‘Super ripam
Danuvii in quo est sculpta nympha ad amoenum fontem dormiens, sub figura
est hoc epigramma.’ (‘On the banks of the Danube there is a sculpture of a
sleeping nymph at a beautiful spring and under the image is also an epigram.’) The epigram reads:

Huius nympha loci, sacri custodia fontis,
Dormio, dum blandae sentio murmure aquae.

in der nordalpinen Renaissance. Wiederentdeckung einer methodischen Nachbarschaft
Bulletin 57.3 (1975) 357–365. The drawing of the Cleopatra fountain by Francisco de Holanda
is located in the Escorial Ms. A/E ij 6, fol. 8; see MacDougall, fig. 1. See also: MacDougall E.B.,
Fountains, Statues and Flowers. Studies in Gardens of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries
3 Brummer H.H., The Statue Court in the Vatican Belvedere, Stockholm Studies in the History of
Art 20 (Stockholm: 1970) 154; Amelung W., Die Sculpturen des Vatikanischen Museums, vol. 1
(Berlin: 1903) 636, n. 414.
4 Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms. lat. 6128, fol. 114; Reggio, Biblioteca Communale, cod.
c. 398, fol. 28. The manuscript from Paris is dated after 1477; Reggio’s manuscript is dated
1486. All translations are mine if not indicated otherwise.