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(sic) Argus: Bilingual Wordplay in Statius Silvae 5.4.11-13

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Ἰερός Argus: Bilingual Wordplay in Staius *Silvae* 5.4.11-13

In *Silvae* 5.4, the shortest and most frequently anthologized of Staius' occasional poems, the forlorn narrator prays that a visitation by Somnus might relieve his insomnia.¹⁾ After wondering what he did to cause his misfortune, contrasting his distress with the quietude found in nature, and recounting the duration of his sleeplessness, the narrator despairs of being able to endure further, even if he were endowed with the physical attributes of that ever-wakeful guard, Argus:

Unde ego sufficiam? Non si mihi lumina mille
quae sacer alterna tantum statione tenebat
Argus et haud umquam uigilabat corpore toto (*Silu.* 5.4.11-13)

Although the appearance of Argus in a poem treating insomnia is not surprising, the unprecedented attribution of the epithet *sacer* has proved nettlesome to critics. Many have sought to rationalize Argus' connection to the divine; others have advocated emending the text. This unconventional epithet, however, recalls similar Homeric descriptions of guards as ἰερός, suggesting that Staius is using allusion to signal the presence of a sophisticated form of bilingual wordplay—a *calque sémantique*, in which the conventional meaning of the seemingly incongruous *sacer* is supplanted by that of a recognizable Greek analogue.

Coming near the poem's mid-point, the phrase *sacer Argus* appears in a passage whose stylistic and allusive qualities serve to draw attention to the strange epithet. The separation of noun from adjective in the phrase parallels the hyperbata that conclude the poem's opening question (*donis . . . / Somne, tuis*, 2-3) and the poem's first half (*Tithonia . . . / . . . miserata*, 9-10). These three hyperbata are conspicuous in the poem, since the constituents of other noun-adjective phrases in *Silu.* 5.4 are collocated in an almost prosaic manner.²⁾ Moreover, the separation of *sacer* and *Argus* results in the vertical juxtaposition of the words near the start of consecutive

¹⁾ For general discussions of *Silu.* 5.4, see Gibson 1996 and 2006; for the possible erotic symbolism in the poem, see Pomeroy 1986; and of Argus generally, Raimondi 2000.

²⁾ Apart from these hyperbata, the only stylistically marked noun-adjective pairs before *sacer Argus* are the chiasmic *fessos curvata cacumina somnos* (4) and the enjambed *aegras / stare genas* (7-8). Likewise, after *sacer . . . Argus* Staius resumes the close collocation of nouns and adjectives, with *extremo me tange cacumine* (18) as the most dissociated pair.

lines, an arrangement that often signals a phrase worthy of attention and frequently suggests the presence of wordplay.³⁾

Traglia recognized that this passage resembles complaints—common since Homer (*Il.* 2.488-93)—about the limits of poetic capacity.⁴⁾ Specifically, Statius' lament has structural and semantic affinities with *Georgics* 2.42-4, in which the Vergilian narrator claims, likely in jest, that he could never exhaust the subject of arboriculture, even if he possessed one hundred tongues in as many mouths (*non, mihi si linguae centum sint oraque centum*).⁵⁾ As Gibson has noted, the narrator of *Silv.* 5.4 has humorously exploited this metapoetical trope to comment on the personal suffering caused by his own sleeplessness.⁶⁾ Of course, this apparent displacement from the metapoetic to the personal is only superficial. By deploying a grandiose topos in this, the most modest of the *Silvae*, and by recalling Vergilian (and other) passages that skillfully manipulate the topos, Statius implicitly draws attention to his standing as a learned poet. His use of the phrase *mille lumina* further underscores the passage's humor, hyperbole, and poetical gamesmanship, as the unexpectedly large number of Argus' eyes surpasses by an order of magnitude the *centum ora* that were insufficient for Vergil: just as Vergil's *centum ora* surpass Homer's δέκα στόματα (*Il.* 2.489), so Statius trumps Vergil, albeit with a facetious twist.⁷⁾ The unparalleled characterization of Argus as *sacer*, therefore, appears in a stylistically notable phrase embedded within a passage that draws attention to its engagement with and deviation from poetic tradition. This is a passage and a phrase that demand a reader's attention.

³⁾ For the use of vertical juxtaposition as a signal of wordplay and an invitation to interpretation, see O'Hara 1996, 86-8; Weber 1990 *passim*.

⁴⁾ Traglia 1980, 11; for a discussion of this topos, see Hinds 1998, 34-47.

⁵⁾ Many critics have seen comic intent in Vergil's *adynaton*: e.g. Farrell, who deemed the passage "one of the most broadly humorous in the *Georgics*" (1991, 232 n. 57). Shortly before Statius' time, the trope was openly mocked by Persius (5.1-2 *uatibus hic mos est, centum sibi poscere uoces / centum ora et linguas optare in carmina centum*). Verg. *G.* 2.43-4a is a Vergilian doublet, appearing again at *A.* 6.625-6a. On the multiple points of allusive contact in Vergil's passage and its skillful manipulation of the topos, see Hinds 1998, 34-8 and Gowers 2005.

⁶⁾ Gibson 2006, 389: "instead of being unable to create poetry, Statius is unable to 'create' sleep without divine assistance". On the use of the trope to articulate the depths of personal suffering, albeit without humorous effect, cf. *Ov. Tr.* 1.5.53-6.

⁷⁾ Most Roman authors attribute 100 eyes to Argus: e.g. *Ov. Met.* 1.625, *Phaed. Fab.* 2.8.18, *Claud. Stil.* 1.312; in *Ov. Am.* 3.4.19, Argus has 200; cf. *A. Pr.* 568 (τὸν μυρτωπὸν . . . βούταν). The discrepancy between the numbers found in Statius and other Latin authors led Markland to conjecture *centum* for *mille* (Courtney 1990, *ad loc.*); but as Gibson recognized (2006, 389), Silius also gives Argus 1000 eyes (*non mille premendi sunt oculi . . . custos / Inachiae . . . iuvencae*, *Sil.* 10.345-7).

Yet Statius' unprecedented ascription of the epithet *sacer* to Argus has long been deemed problematic. Nowhere else is Argus described as *sacer* (or a synonym); instead, there is an overwhelming tendency for Roman poets to employ epithets that emphasize Argus' distinctive physiognomy or his service as a guard.⁸⁾ Furthermore, despite the fact that *sacer* has a capacious semantic range—from 'sacred, holy, hallowed, consecrated to, or protected by a deity, inviolable, divine' to 'cursed, forfeited to a god, execrable', and extending even to 'imperial' in Statius—it is not self-evident why Statius would attribute any of these traits to this quintessential guard at this point in the poem.⁹⁾ Seeking a solution to this enigma, many interpreters have followed Vollmer's gloss of *sacer* as "weil von Hera bestellt" and understood *sacer* as a suggestive nod to Argus' relationship with the goddess: e.g. Mozley ("sacred (as being sent by Juno)"), Wijdeveld ("Juno's knecht"), Shackleton Bailey ("protected by Juno"), and Nagle ("Juno's bird-to-be").¹⁰⁾ Alternatively, the connection to Juno signaled by *sacer* has been understood as 'cursed' (*OLD* s.v. *sacer* 2) and therefore as emphasizing the harmful consequences of Argus' relationship with Juno. This interpretation has found support from Izaac ("le maudit Argus"), Traglia ("l'escrando Argo"), and Newmyer ("cursed' because Juno sent him to keep watch over Io").¹¹⁾ As this difference of opinion suggests, neither of these interpretations has been fully persuasive—at least in part because no satisfactory explanation has yet been offered for what this elliptical reference to Juno might signify. One riddle would yield to another; the strange and tantalizing would be revealed as banal or inscrutable.

Other scholars have advocated emending the text to remove the difficulties posed by *sacer*.¹²⁾ Delz, who understood *sacer* as meaning 'cursed' ("diesen starken

⁸⁾ Argus as guard: Acc. *trag.* 386 (*custodem adsidium*), Verg. *A.* 7.791 (*custos uirginis Argus*), V.Fl. 4.367 (*custos Argus*), 4.382-3 (*citius... Argus... durus seruauit*), see also Pl. *Aul.* 555-6 (*Argus seruet... custodem*); Argus as 'all-seeing': Prop. 1.3.20-1 (*intentis... fixus ocellis / Argus*), Ov. *Am.* 3.4.19-20 (*centum fronte oculos, centum... gerebat / Argus*), Ov. *Ars.* 3.618 (*quot fuerant Argo lumina*), Ov. *Met.* 1.664 (*stellatus submouet Argus*), a line alluded to by Statius at *Theb.* 6.277 (*inocciduis stellatum uisibus Argum*); see also Serv. *Aen.* 7.790 (*Argum, oculatum omnibus membris... quem Graeci panopten appellant*).

⁹⁾ On the semantic range of *sacer*, see Bondardo 1996-7; Santi 2004; Morani 1981; and Sabbatucci 1951-2; for the development of *sacer* as denoting 'imperial', see Coleman 1988, 56-7.

¹⁰⁾ Vollmer 1898, 547; Mozley 1961; Wijdeveld 1940-1; Shackleton Bailey 2003; Nagle 2004. If *sacer* is to be understood as indicating a connection to a divinity, then Juno would be the obvious candidate.

¹¹⁾ Frère and Izaac 1961; Traglia and Aricò 1980; Newmyer 1987.

¹²⁾ Both Courtney 1990 and Shackleton Bailey 2003 retain *sacer*. Previous proposals include Heinsius' nonsensical *uafer*. As is the case for all of the *Silvae* (save 2.7), *Silvae* 5.4 survives only in the single problematic manuscript, M. Consequently, textual analysis can

Fluch") and therefore discordant with the poem's lighthearted tone, conjectures that epithet be changed to *piger*.¹³⁾ In his commentary on *Silvae* 5, Gibson dismisses Vollmer's gloss as "unconvincing" and accepts the conjecture of Delz. Gibson notes that "with this conjecture, an epithet often applied to Sleep (cf. e.g. *Silv.* 1. 6. 91, 3. 2. 73) is applied to Argus who is attempting not to fall asleep", and as a result the jocularity sought by Delz is restored.¹⁴⁾ Yet, it is not necessary—and perhaps improbable—for this instance of *sacer* to have the sense required by Delz. In the other passages in which Statius deploys *sacer* with a negative connotation, context renders this meaning unmistakable, even when the object or character being so described is the subject of frequent animadversion (e.g. Harmonia's jinxed necklace at *Theb.* 2.298-9 and 4.198-9; or Oedipus at *Theb.* 2.442).¹⁵⁾ At any rate, emending solely on the basis of this contested interpretation seems injudicious.

Delz concludes his brief note, however, with an intriguing but unelaborated observation, commenting that in antiquity Argus' name was thought to be derived from ἀεργός (e.g. Fulg. *Myth.* 1.18).¹⁶⁾ *Piger*, therefore, could stand not merely as a transferred epithet of Somnus, but as an example of etymological wordplay, with the Latin *piger* glossing the Greek ἀεργός.¹⁷⁾ Etymological wordplay of this type is common in Latin literature, and because of his distinctive upbringing and training, Statius could be expected to engage such interactions between Latin and Greek with panache.¹⁸⁾ Indeed, as Holford-Strevens reminds us, Statius deserves to be approached as "α Πόπλιος Παπίνιος Στάτιος who made himself into P. Papinius Statius, and [...] his writings should be diligently read for their Greek sources,

offer no insight on this passage; for recent discussions of the manuscript tradition of the *Silvae*, see Gibson 2006, l-iii; Coleman 1988, xxxii-iv; Van Dam 1984, 10-11; and Courtney 1990, v-xxix.

¹³⁾ Delz 1992, 251.

¹⁴⁾ Gibson 2006, 389. Although the association of *piger* with *somnus* is less frequent than Gibson and Delz imply (Delz 1992, 251: "*piger* is öfters Attribut zu Somnus"), the phrase does appear in *Silv.* 3.2 (*ante rates pigro torpebant aequora somno*), as well as in Statius' contemporary Martial (12.57.15 *numerare pigri damna quis potest somni?*; and cf. Mart. 11.36.5 *Hypne, quid expectas, piger?*).

¹⁵⁾ Cf. Statius' use of *sacer* to describe youths killed in fulfillment of prophecies: *Theb.* 4.729 (*Ophelten*) and 10.757 (*pius Menoecus*).

¹⁶⁾ Delz 1992, 251.

¹⁷⁾ For wordplay of this type, see O'Hara 1996, 64-5.

¹⁸⁾ Wray, when discussing the wordplay in the title of the *Silvae*, comments that, "as a bicultural poet and the son of a bicultural poet-professor, Statius will have been keenly attuned to these resonances of the Greek word and richly capable, if he chose, of making its Latin counterpart resonate in nuanced sympathy" (2007, 135-6).

their Greek allusions, and their Greek intertextualities".¹⁹⁾ Therefore, with the example of Delz's conjecture and the admonition of Holford-Strevens in mind, could the troublesome *sacer* itself be an example of bilingual wordplay, whose recognition would obviate the need to emend the poem?

A simile in the *Aeneid*, in which Vergil describes an *accipiter* ('hawk') as a *sacer ales*, suggests the Greek analogue most likely evoked by *sacer*:

quam facile accipiter saxo sacer ales ab alto
consequitur pennis sublimem in nube columnam. (Verg. *A.* 9.721-2)

Just as *sacer Argus* has given contemporary readers pause, the description of the *accipiter* as *sacer* has raised interpretative questions since antiquity. Commenting on this passage, Servius mentions several possible reasons for Vergil's use of *sacer*, including the hawk's association with Mars and the hostility it provokes from other birds—note the same ambiguities modern critics and translators have perceived in Statius' phrase. According to Servius, however, Vergil's intention in calling the hawk a *sacer ales* was to engage in a bit of etymological wordplay: *sacer* recalled the Greek name of the bird, ἰέραξ, which was associated in turn with ἱερεύς and ἱερός.²⁰⁾ Recognizing that *sacer* may evoke ἱερός, however, does not in itself resolve the mystery of *sacer* in Statius' poem. Nowhere in extant Greek literature does Argus receive the epithet ἱερός or a synonym; instead, Greek authors, like their Roman counterparts, typically ascribe to Argus epithets that emphasize his position as watchman (e.g. βουκόλος, φύλαξ), his physical attributes (πανόπτης), or his parentage (γηγενής).²¹⁾

¹⁹⁾ Holford-Strevens 2000, 53; the recognition of Greek allusions is especially relevant for appreciating the *Silvae*, in which Statius routinely manipulates Hellenic and Roman elements (e.g. bilingual punning on the names of addressees in *Silu.* 4.9 and throughout *Silu.* 2; the travel between Greek and Latin spheres in *Silu.* 3), and whose very title (ὑλη-*silvae*) highlights the possibilities and limitations of bilingual wordplay (Wray 2007). As *Silu.* 5 was published posthumously, these examples are illustrative of the nature of Statius' minor verse, and should not be assumed to be prescriptive for *Silu.* 5.4.

²⁰⁾ Serv. *Aen.* 11.721 *aut, quod uerius est, Graecum nomen expressit: nam ἰέραξ dicitur, hoc est sacer*; see also O'Hara 1996, 232; Horsfall concurs with Servius' assessment, commenting that Vergil's reference is "learned and verbal, therefore (in all probability), not cultic" (Horsfall 2003, 394).

²¹⁾ Hes. fr. (West-Merkelbach) 294, line 1 (κρατερόν τε μέγαν τε / τέτρασιν ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ὀρόμενον); A. *Supp.* 305-6 (πανόπτην οἰοβουκόλον... παῖδα γῆς); Acusilaus *Hist. Fragmenta* (Jacoby) 27.1-2 (τὴν βοῦν φύλακα... τὸν πανόπτην); A. *Pr.* 567 (γηγενοῦς), 677-8 (βουκόλος δὲ γηγενής / ἄκρατος ὄργην); B. 19.19-20 (Snell-Maehler; ὄμμασι βλέπον-/τα πάντοθεν ἀκαμάτοις); Pherecyd.Hist. fr. 22a, line 1 (πανόπτην); E. fr. (Nauck) 1063, line

The literary engagement of Greek by Latin authors, of course, is not restricted to etymologizing and translation. The deployment of an incongruous Latin adjective with a recognizable Greek analogue suggests that Statius could be engaging in another form of bilingual wordplay: the *calque sémantique* or ‘loan-shift’. In this variation on the simple calque, a word acquires a new meaning from a foreign analogue with which the indigenous term is thought to share a prior point of semantic contact (e.g. *ludus* ‘game’ comes to mean ‘school’ by analogy with Gr. σχολή).²²⁾ As Nicolas has demonstrated, Roman authors often engage in such ‘loan-shifting’ to expand the semantic range of Latin words. Although loan-shifting is not the sole province of recondite poets, several examples of the phenomenon have already been identified in the *Silvae*. For example, in the phrase *castior amnis* (*Silu.* 4.7.12), the meaning of *castus* (usually ‘chaste’) has been expanded by analogy with its Greek synonym, καθαρός, which can mean ‘chaste’ or ‘unsullied’.²³⁾ The sophistication with which Statius can deploy *calques sémantiques* is amply demonstrated by *Silu.* 4.9, in which the name of the poem’s addressee, Grypus, provides an opportunity for a calque that intimates the subject of the poem—literary taste. As Coleman notes, the name Grypus “is derived from γρύψ (= ‘griffin’), but the adjective γρυπός = *nasutus* (‘hook-nosed’); *nasutus* has a secondary metaphorical meaning, describing a person with discerning taste”.²⁴⁾ Through this loan-shift, therefore, Statius cleverly associates the Greek-derived name of the poem’s addressee with the metaphorical meaning of *nasutus*—the implications of which Grypus could only detect if he is worthy of his *nomen*.

As with καθαρός in the example above, the semantic range of ἱερός is broader than that of its Latin analogue *sacer*, and encompasses meanings that are more appropriate to the context of *Silu.* 5.4 than those inherent in the Latin adjective. Indeed, there are several Homeric passages in which ἱερός modifies nouns with no

14 (τὰς πυκνοφθάλμους κόρας); Ar. *Ecol.* 80 (τοῦ πανόπτου); Asclepiades Myth. fr. 17, line 1 (πανόπτην); Mosch. *Bucol. Europa* 57 (ἀκοιμήτοισι κεκασμένος ὀφθαλμοῖσι); Ps.-Apollo. (τὴν βοῦν φύλακα . . . τὸν πανόπτην).

²²⁾ Coleman 1975, 106. *Calques sémantiques* are the subject of extensive treatment by Nicolas (1996); on the phenomenon generally, see also Adams 2003, 461-4. For other literary examples of this type of calque, see Pl. *Mil.* 728 *pro uirtute* (- ἀρετή, ‘value’) *ut ueneat*; and Hor. *Carm.* 1.27.9: *seueri* (- αὐστηρός, ‘dry’) *Falerni?* (Nisbet-Hubbard 1970, 313).

²³⁾ Coleman 1988, 201; cf. Adkin 2005, which advances the argument that this *locus* is not a *calque sémantique* but a rare Latin example of *transumptio*.

²⁴⁾ Coleman 1988, 221.

apparent connection to the divine; and in two of these, significantly, it is guards who are described as *ιερός*: *φυλάκων ιερὸν τέλος*, *Il.* 10.56; *ιερούς πυλαωρούς*, 24.681. These 'unholy' uses of *ιερός* in Homer have themselves occasioned considerable discussion, and we might seem to have simply substituted one problematic descriptor for another. Indeed, these passages elicited frequent comment by Homeric scholiasts, who advanced tenuous connections to the divine or offered idiosyncratic glosses, as they do for the phrases describing guards, in which *ιερός* is glossed as *μέγας* (10.56) and *πιστός* (24.681). Since Latin poets and educated readers would likely have been familiar with Hellenistic commentaries, especially those on Homer, it is possible that Statius' allusion could have engaged the meanings associated with Homer's guards.²⁵⁾ Statius' *calque sémantique*, however, could also evoke the more general meaning of *ιερός*, which is nicely summarized by S. West in her comment on *ιερὴ ἕς Τηλεμάχιο* (*Od.* 18.60):

The precise meaning of *ιερός* remains elusive because of the wide range of nouns attached to it in Homeric language. Many of these nouns allow the standard post-Homeric meaning 'sacred', but others make this sense unlikely, such as 'dusk' (*κνέφας*), 'gate-guardians' (*πυλαωροί*), 'army' (*στρατός*), 'band of guards' (*φυλάκων τέλος*), and 'fish' (*ἰχθύς*). It is generally agreed that the semantic range of *ιερός* extends from 'sacred' to 'vigorous', with the latter extending from 'strong' to 'active'.²⁶⁾

Consequently, the semantic range of *ιερός* does encompass meanings appropriate for guards, who when described as *ιερός* are not being associated with a god, but rather characterized by their strength and vigor.

This sense of *ιερός* would be congruent with the context of *Silv.* 5.4, in which the narrator compares his own vigor unfavorably to that of Argus. It should be noted that this point of contact with Homer is conditioned by additional programmatic and verbal resonances between *Silv.* 5.4 and the *Iliad*. The image of the solitary insomniac in *Silv.* 5.4 recalls "the contrast between the sleepless individual and calm surroundings" that recurs at several crucial narrative moments in the

²⁵⁾ Schlunk 1974, 107.

²⁶⁾ S. West in Russo 1993, 50; see also Locher 1963 ('sacred'); Hooker 1980, 26-7 ('strong', especially 'as expressed in vitality, activity, or motion'); West 1988, 155, 157-8 ('full of impetus'); Edwards 1985, 109 ('be active', 'life-giving', 'life-partaking'). This understanding is not universally accepted, see Richardson 1985, 347: "the epithet indicates the solemnity of their commission"; Hainsworth concurs, "*ιερός* compliments the dignity and importance of these sentinels" (1988, 163).

Iliad (Il. 2.1-15, 10.1-16, 24.1-11).²⁷⁾ This correspondence is further reinforced by specific verbal cues. For example, a phrase referring to the ‘gifts’ (*donis... tuis*, 2-3) of sleep (cf. καὶ ὕπνου δῶρον, Il. 7.482) also includes a line beginning with the vocative *Somme* (cf. Ὕπνε, Il. 14.233, 264).²⁸⁾ To readers attuned to such connections, *Silv.* 5.4 could be seen to characterize the exemplary guard, Argus, with an intentionally problematic adjective (*sacer*) in a stylistically marked phrase and poetically significant passage that suggests a similarly contested description of guards as ἱερός in Homer.²⁹⁾ By underscoring the Greek associations of the phrase, these Homeric resonances help to signal the *calque sémantique*, which displaces the incongruous meanings of *sacer* with the more appropriate sense of ἱερός.³⁰⁾ With the unusual epithet *sacer*, therefore, Statius presents a tantalizing puzzle, one that yields both an otiose interpretation—a connection with Juno—and also the more sophisticated *calque sémantique*, the recognition of which requires a subtle understanding of the literary interplay of Latin and Greek.

Scholars have increasingly recognized that the ancient readers of erudite Latin poetry would be aware of this sort of literary play.³¹⁾ In his meditation on the related phenomenon of learned etymological wordplay, O’Hara describes such readers, who were “able to read clues and recognize allusions to etymological controversy, adaptations of earlier poetic wordplay, or simply new suggestions about derivations for words.”³²⁾ Perceiving such wordplay, of course, is a challenge. But, as demonstrated by Servius’ discussion of the *sacer ales* in Vergil and Statius’ play with the name of Grypus, such recognition seems to be within the interpretative capacity of a learned audience, especially when the wordplay is properly signaled, as it is with *sacer* in *Silv.* 5.4. Indeed, the pleasure of apprehending such interpretative riddles is doubtless an important part of the aesthetic experience of reading poetry like the *Silvae*. And perhaps these are the sorts of mental gymnastics Statius might ascribe to an insomniac poet on a sleepless night, and the sort of bilingual

²⁷⁾ Gibson 2006, 384.

²⁸⁾ Gibson 2006, 384.

²⁹⁾ Even in Statius’ brief passage, Argus’ service as a guard is emphasized (*statione, uigilabat*).

³⁰⁾ Whether the allusion activates the wordplay or the wordplay is reinforced by the allusion is a literary version of the chicken and egg conundrum. Expecting a reader to adhere to a particular unidirectional sequence of thought and recognition in such moments of rich allusion and wordplay misunderstands the diverse ways in which authors can signal and readers can apprehend such literary phenomena.

³¹⁾ See esp. O’Hara 1996, Paschalis 1997, Vallat 2003, 169-70; on ancient bilingualism generally, Adams 2003, esp. pp. 9-14 on “elite bilinguals”; also Horsfall 1979; for a more skeptical opinion of Roman claims to competence *utraque lingua*, see Dubuisson 1992.

³²⁾ O’Hara 1996, 104.

wordplay for which we should be on guard in other Latin poems, especially those by Πόπλιος Παπίνιος Στάτιος.

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