Conticinium

The Hours We Stopped Naming



The Romans had seven names for the stages of one night; English has kept none of them. This sheet collects the Latin from the episode, adds the vocabulary of sleep, dreams and the monastic night, and offers short texts by Macrobius and Saint Benedict with a handful of exercises. No translations are given for the texts: the notes are there to help you read them yourself. An answer key for the exercises is on the last page.

1 Words from the episode

Latin	Meaning	Note
insomnium, -ii *n.*	dream	mostly plural, *insomnia*; not the same word as *insomnia*, -ae *f.* 'sleeplessness'
vigilia, -ae *f.*	wakefulness; a night watch	from *vigil* 'awake'; four *vigiliae* to the night
pervigilium, -ii *n.*	a whole night awake	*per-* 'right through'
vespera, -ae *f.*	evening	also *vesper*, -eri *m.*
crepusculum, -i *n.*	dusk	from *creper* 'dim, doubtful'
conticinium, -ii *n.*	the falling silent	from *conticescere* 'to fall silent'
concubia nox	the night of lying down	from *concumbere* 'to lie down'
intempesta nox	the dead of night	*in-* + *tempestas* 'time': the 'timeless' night
gallicinium, -ii *n.*	cockcrow	*gallus* 'rooster' + *canere* 'to sing'
diluculum, -i *n.*	first light	from *dilucescere* 'to grow light'
lucubratio, -onis *f.*	work by lamplight	*lucubrare*, from *lux* 'light'
Somnus · Mors	Sleep · Death	*somnus*, -i *m.*; *mors*, mortis *f.*; Greek Hypnos and Thanatos
incubatio, -onis *f.*	temple sleep	from *incubare* 'to lie upon, to lie in'
incubus · succubus	the demon that lies upon · beneath	*incubare · succubare*
somnium · visio · oraculum	the three dreams that mean something	Macrobius: enigmatic, prophetic, oracular
visum, -i *n.*	apparition	seen while falling asleep; from *videre*
dormitio, -onis *f.*	falling asleep; death	from *dormire*; *dormiunt in Christo*
coemeterium, -ii *n.*	cemetery	Greek for 'sleeping-place'
sellula reclinis	little reclining stool	*sellula*: diminutive of *sella* 'seat'
primo somno	in the first sleep	ablative of time
bene dormias	sleep well	present subjunctive: 'may you sleep well'

Say it aloud

The acute accent marks the stressed syllable; it is a reading aid and not part of the spelling.

insómnium · vigília · pervigílium · véspera · crepúsculum · conticínium · concúbia nox · intempésta nox · gallicínium · dilúculum · lucubrátio · sómnus · incubátio · íncubus · súccubus · sómnium · vísio · oráculum · vísum · dormítio · coemetérium · séllula reclínis · prímo sómno · béne dórmias

2 More Latin of the night

These words are not all in the episode, but they are the ones you meet most often in texts about sleep, dreams and the night office.

Sleeping and waking

sopor, -oris *m.*	deep sleep
quies, -etis *f.*	rest
dormire	to sleep
obdormire	to fall asleep
dormitare	to doze, to nod off
stertere	to snore
cubare	to lie, to be in bed
vigilare	to be awake
evigilare	to wake up
excitare	to wake someone
surgere	to get up
somnolentus, -a, -um	sleepy

Night and light

nox, noctis *f.*	night
media nox	midnight
tenebrae, -arum *f. pl.*	darkness
luna, -ae *f.*	moon
stella, -ae *f.*	star
lucerna, -ae *f.*	oil lamp
candela, -ae *f.*	candle
aurora, -ae *f.*	dawn
mane	in the morning

Dreams

somniare	to dream
phantasma, -atis *n.*	apparition
imago, -inis *f.*	image
coniector, -oris *m.*	interpreter of dreams
interpretari	to interpret
praedicere	to foretell
apparere	to appear

Bed and room

lectus, -i *m.*	bed
cubile, -is *n.*	bed, lair
cubiculum, -i *n.*	bedroom
dormitorium, -ii *n.*	dormitory
stratum, -i *n.*	bedding
culcita, -ae *f.*	mattress
cervical, -alis *n.*	pillow
cella, -ae *f.*	cell, room

The monastic night

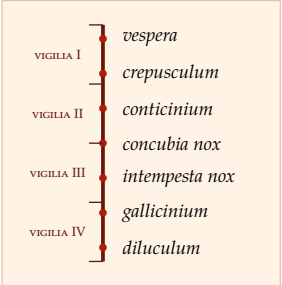
completorium, -ii *n.*	Compline
vigiliae, -arum *f. pl.*	Vigils
laudes, -um *f. pl.*	Lauds
signum, -i *n.*	signal, bell
opus Dei	the work of God, the office
psalmus, -i *m.*	psalm

3 What the texts say

Three nights

A night on the lake, the night Troy fell, and a hermit's night at Zobor.

> *Et circa quartam vigiliam noctis venit ad eos ambulans super mare.*
> *Tempus erat quo prima quies mortalibus aegris incipit.*
> *… quietem nocturnam talem … que magis tormenti et afflictionis, quam requiei nomen habere potuit.*



The Roman night: seven stages, four watches

Notes. Sources: Mark 6:48 (Vulgate) · Virgil, *Aeneid* 2.268–269 · Maurus of Pécs, *Life of Zoerard and Benedict* (1064) · *circa* + accusative, 'about' · *ambulans*: present participle · *super* + accusative, 'upon' · *quo* 'at which' · *prima quies* 'the first rest' · *mortalibus aegris*: dative, 'for weary mortals' · *que* = *quae* · *magis … quam* 'rather … than' · *tormentum* 'torture'; *afflictio* 'suffering'; *requies*, -ei *f.* 'rest' · *nomen habere* 'to bear the name'.

Questions. (a) Which of the four watches is the last before dawn? Find it on the diagram. (b) Virgil says *prima quies*. Does the phrase prove that a second sleep followed? Compare the dispute over *primo somno* in the episode. (c) Which three genitives depend on *nomen*?

Text 1 · Macrobius, *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis* I.3.2 (c. 400)

The five kinds of dream. The Greek terms are transliterated here in square brackets.

> *Omnium quae videre sibi dormientes videntur quinque sunt principales et diversitates et nomina. Aut enim est* [*oneiros*] *secundum Graecos quod Latini somnium vocant, aut est* [*horama*] *quod visio recte appellatur, aut est* [*chrematismos*] *quod oraculum nuncupatur, aut est* [*enhypnion*] *quod insomnium dicitur, aut est* [*phantasma*] *quod Cicero, quotiens opus hoc nomine fuit, visum vocavit.*

Notes. *omnium quae*: 'of all the things which' · *videre sibi videntur*: 'they seem to themselves to see'; *videri* 'to seem' · *dormientes*: present participle used as a noun, 'sleepers' · *principalis* 'chief' · *diversitas* 'kind, variety' · *aut … aut* 'either … or' · *secundum* + accusative, 'according to' · *recte* 'rightly' · *nuncupare* 'to name' · *quotiens* 'whenever' · *opus fuit* + ablative, 'there was need of'.

Questions. (a) How many verbs of naming can you find, and how many are passive? (b) Which of the five Latin terms does Macrobius credit to Cicero? (c) What is the subject of *videntur*? (d) Which two of the five mean nothing, according to the episode?

Text 2 · The Rule of Saint Benedict, ch. 22 (sixth century)

Quomodo dormiant monachi: how the monks are to sleep.

> *Singuli per singula lecta dormiant.* […] *Candela iugiter in eadem cella ardeat usque mane. Vestiti dormiant et cincti cingulis aut funibus, ut cultellos suos ad latus suum non habeant dum dormiunt, ne forte per somnum vulnerent dormientem.* […] *Surgentes vero ad opus Dei invicem se moderate cohortentur propter somnulentorum excusationes.*

Notes. *singuli per singula lecta*: 'each in a bed of his own' · *dormiant*, *ardeat*, *cohortentur*: present subjunctives, 'let them …' · *iugiter* 'continually' · *usque mane* 'until morning' · *vestitus* 'clothed' · *cinctus* 'girded'; *cingulum* 'belt'; *funis* 'cord' · *ut … non habeant*: 'in such a way that they do not have' · *cultellus* 'small knife' · *latus*, -eris *n.* 'side' · *ne forte* + subjunctive, 'lest by chance' · *vulnerare* 'to wound' · *invicem se* 'one another' · *moderate* 'gently' · *cohortari* 'to encourage' (deponent) · *somnulentus* 'sleepy' · *excusatio* 'excuse'.

Questions. (a) What burns all night, and where? (b) What must the monks not have at their side, and why? (c) Find the deponent verb. (d) Whose excuses does the last sentence expect?

4 Exercises

A · From dusk to dawn

Put the seven names of the Roman night in order, beginning with the evening: *concubia nox* · *conticinium* · *crepusculum* · *diluculum* · *gallicinium* · *intempesta nox* · *vespera*.

B · What is inside the word?

Match each word to the Latin or Greek word it is built on.

1 conticinium	2 gallicinium	3 lucubratio
4 incubus	5 diluculum	6 coemeterium

a lux ‘light’	b incubare ‘to lie upon’	c conticescere ‘to fall silent’
d koiman ‘to put to sleep’	e gallus ‘rooster’	f dilucescere ‘to grow light’

C · Which dream?

Sort these dreams as Macrobius would: *insomnium* · *oraculum* · *somnium* · *visio* · *visum*.

1. A hungry man dreams of bread.
2. Your dead father appears and tells you plainly what to do.
3. You see an event exactly as it later happens.
4. A truth is hidden under strange figures and needs an interpreter.
5. As you drift off, something sits on your chest.

D · Let them sleep

Benedict legislates in the subjunctive, as in *dormiunt* → *dormiant*. Turn each statement into a wish or a rule.

1. *candela ardet*	3. *cultellos habent*	5. *frater vigilat*
2. *monachi surgunt*	4. *bene dormis*	6. *silentium est*

E · Your own night

Describe last night in three sentences, each beginning with a Roman hour in the ablative of time, for example *Conticinio* …, *Intempesta nocte* …, *Gallicinio* … Useful verbs: *legere*, *lucubrare*, *dormire*, *vigilare*, *somniare*, *surgere*.

5 Further reading

Helen Askitopoulou, “Sleep and Dreams: From Myth to Medicine in Ancient Greece,” *Journal of Anesthesia History* (2015) · Niall Boyce, “Have We Lost Sleep? A Reconsideration of Segmented Sleep in Early Modern England,” *Medical History* 67/2 (2023) · A. Roger Ekirch, *At Day’s Close: Night in Times Past* (2005) · W. V. Harris, *Dreams and Experience in Classical Antiquity* (2009) · Marina Miladinov, *Margins of Solitude: Eremitism in Central Europe between East and West* (2008). The full list of sources is in the episode description.

Answer key

A vespera · crepusculum · conticinium · concubia nox · intempesta nox · gallicinium · diluculum.

B 1c · 2e · 3a · 4b · 5f · 6d.

C 1 insomnium · 2 oraculum · 3 visio · 4 somnium · 5 visum.

D 1 candela ardeat · 2 monachi surgant · 3 cultellos habeant · 4 bene dormias · 5 frater vigilet · 6 silentium sit.

Three nights (a) the fourth, *vigilia quarta* · (b) no: *prima quies* can simply mean the first, deepest rest of the night · (c) *tormenti*, *afflictionis*, *requiei*.

Text 1 (a) five: *vocant*, *appellatur*, *nuncupatur*, *dicitur*, *vocavit*; three are passive · (b) *visum* · (c) *dormientes* · (d) *insomnium* and *visum*.

Text 2 (a) a candle, in the room where they sleep · (b) their knives, so that no sleeper is wounded · (c) *cohortentur* · (d) those of the sleepy.