

DANAE

The Greco-Roman Danae

The impressiveness of Perseus' story is due to his heroic actions - the killing of Medusa and the rescue of Andromeda - which are embedded in the story of his mother and are closely intertwined with her. Danae is as unclassifiable as Medusa. She is a woman, but she is the heir of the throne in the mighty Argos, which is traditionally a male role. When Danae reaches the age of marriage, Acrisius, her father, forbids her to marry, because he is afraid of his grandson. Acrisius imprisons her daughter, but a child is still born, as Zeus makes her pregnant in the form of golden rain. Acrisius condemns the mother and child to death. Danae is buried alive twice - first in an underground jail that becomes her wedding room, and second in a chest thrown into the waves of the sea. The hopeless position of Danae sailing on the sea in the chest and her rescue on the banks of the Seriphos implies the hopeless position of Andromeda trapped on the shore of the sea and rescued by the adult Perseus. Danae is finally rescued but does not marry, which was the sense of a Greek woman's existence. The myth culminates in Perseus rescuing Danae from her second incarcerator Polydectes. Like Medusa, Danae crosses insurmountable boundaries; neither of them, however, ever reaches their destination.¹

The circumstances of Danae's intercourse with Zeus are unclear, even though writings on the topic date back to Homer.² According to Pherecydes of Athens, Zeus flew through the roof in the form of liquid gold.³ The princess placed it in her lap, whereupon Zeus became visible and had intercourse with her. In Sophocles' *Antigone* we read that Danae was fertilised directly by the golden rain.⁴ This representation of Danae, into whose lap the golden rain descends, was common in Greece in the 5th-4th century BC.⁵ On the vase painting from the 480s BC, Danae sits fully dressed on a bed (94). Drops of golden rain fall from the ceiling into Danae's lap. This ethereal ejaculation causes the mattress to bend and the girl to fall from her bed. Danae's head is turned backwards, indicating her sexual ecstasy. The gesture of *anakalypsis*, the revealing of the bride to the groom, characterises Danae as Zeus' earthly wife.

Around mid-5th century BC, Pherecydes and Sophocles explicitly state that Danae was placed in a metal prison. The Athenian vase painters, however, placed Danae in the bedroom with the usual furnishings of the time. In the background, we see for instance a fancy bonnet, which the virtuous woman had used to cover her head as she went out. On another vase painting, the woman's room is characterised by a mirror in the background (95). The miraculous nature of the golden rain is

¹ Marie-Claire Beaulieu, *The Sea in the Greek Imagination* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 90-118.

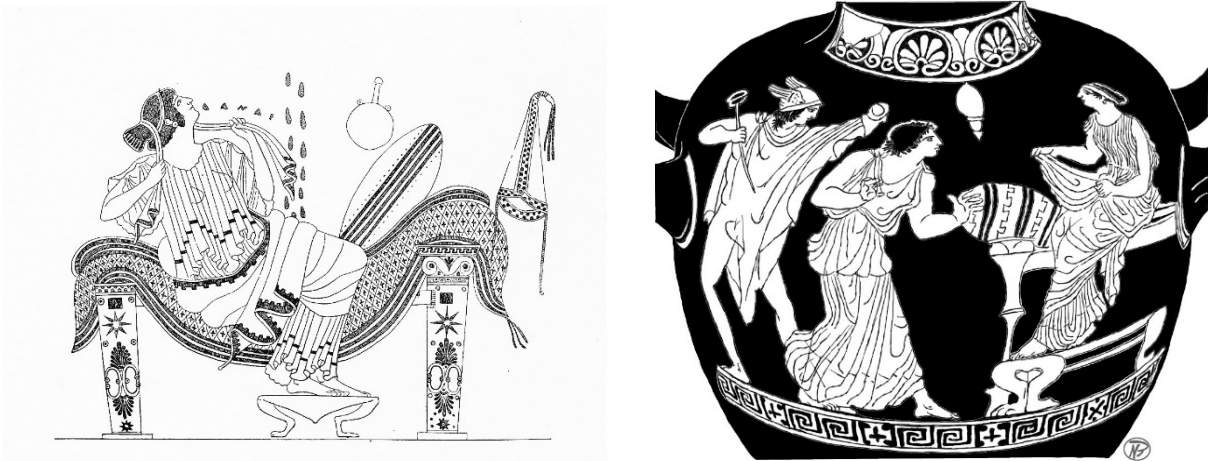
² Homer, *Iliad*, 14, 319.

³ Pherecydes, fr. 10 Fowler.

⁴ Sophocles, *Antigone*, 944-950.

⁵ Jean-Jacques Maffre, "Danae," in *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae III/1* (Zürich: Artemis, 1986), 325-337.

emphasised by the attitude of Hermes and the maid, who express their astonishment with theatrical gestures. The maid crouches and looks up; Hermes has stopped abruptly, raising his left hand, which is wrapped in a cloak, as one cannot touch sacred objects with his bare hands. Danae wears a pleated chiton reaching down to her heels. Over it she has a wrapped coat, which she raises with both hands as if wanting to catch the golden rain. The fact that Danae lies in bed fully dressed emphasises the festive character of the whole event.



94 (left). Danae and golden rain (inscription: Danae). Athenian calyx krater, 490–480 BC.

95 (right). Danae and golden rain. Athenian hydria, around 430 BC.

We find the motif of capturing the golden rain in a raised cloak also on the vase painting from the 460s BC.⁶ Danae does not lie on the bed, but sits in a chair; the mirror is “on the wall” again, and Danae has a wool basket in front of her, an item typical for women. On another vase, Danae sits in a similar pose on the bed, with Eros entering from behind, symbolising Zeus’ sexual arousal.⁷ The motif of the raised cloak is also found on the Greek gems of the classic epoch. They are oval-shaped, and therefore Danae is depicted in a standing position; her gesture, however, is the same. On the gems in Boston, she stands beside a bed,⁸ and the ring in the same collection shows not only the rain but also an eagle, representing Zeus.⁹ On the vase painting from the end of the 5th century BC, we find Danae revealing the entire upper half of her body (96). In the background, vases are hung - a hydria, which was used to dilute wine according to the Greek custom, and a large pot from which Greeks sometimes drank wine. In this case, Danae is not characterised as an honourable woman. Her nudity and the vases used during drinking parties, or symposia, indicate a hetaira, or prostitute.

In ancient Greek art, the prostitute is not always clearly distinguished from the honourable wife. The men who bought Athenian vases did not insist on the

⁶ Athens, The National Archaeological Museum.

⁷ Adolphseck (Eichenzell), Schloss Fasanerie, AV 38.

⁸ Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 98.716.

⁹ Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 99.437.

unambiguous differentiation of these two categories, a fact which is crucial to us.¹⁰ On the vase painting from the beginning of the 4th century BC, Danae also undresses so that the golden rain can fall directly into her lap.¹¹ The erotic character of the scene is emphasised by the figure of Eros standing in front of Danae. Behind Danae, there is a maid raising her hand as a sign of astonishment. The same image type is found on the bronze lid of a mirror, typically a female object.¹² On it, a servant raises both hands in amazement while little Eros crowns Danae with a wreath. The representations of Danae and Zeus in the form of golden rain, which appear in the 5th to 4th centuries BC, may be inspired by the theatre.¹³



96. Danae and golden rain (inscription: Danae). Boeotian bell krater, around 410 BC.

The series of vase paintings begins after 480 BC and on it the princess is always dressed, even though she is aware of what the golden rain really is and, as she sees the union with Zeus as an honour, is willing to cooperate. In the second half of the 5th century BC, the erotic nature of these representations is suggested by the

¹⁰ Jan Bažant, *Les citoyens sur les vases athéniens* (Prague: Academia, 1985), 65–72; Robin Osborne, *The Transformation of Athens: Painted Pottery and the Creation of Classical Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 122–150.

¹¹ London, The British Museum, 1866,0415.63.

¹² London, The British Museum, 289.

¹³ François Lissarrague, “Danaé, métamorphoses d’un myth,” in *Mythes grecs au figuré : De l’antiquité au baroque*, ed. Stella Georgoudi and Jean-Pierre Vernant (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 105–133.

presence of Eros and the nudity of Danae. In Menander's comedy from the end of the 4th century BC, one neighbour asks another whether he has heard the story of Zeus, who, in the form of rain, entered the girl's bedroom. It was undoubtedly a common subject, as the man replied: "Yes, and what about it?"¹⁴

Perhaps from the beginning, the golden rain was also a metaphor for venality. Euripides, in the lost tragedy *Danae* which premiered in the years 455–428 BC, perhaps indicated that Danae had been bribed with gold. Acrisius did not believe his daughter when she claimed that Zeus had come down to her, and thought that someone had bought her with gold.¹⁵ The erotic aspect of this encounter was later taken over by the Romans. In 159 BC, Terence's *The Eunuch* premiered, in which a young man describes his love affair to his friend. He tells him that he was with a girl in the bedroom, on the wall of which hung a painting with Danae and the golden rain. The painting excited him so much that he locked the bolt on the door. When he pauses, his friend asks what came next. He says: "What next? You idiot." Only then does his friend understand and say: "Oh, yes."¹⁶ In this context, we may mention the dispute between Athena and the blasphemous and wicked Arachne. She dared to compete in weaving with Athena, the divine patron of crafts and women's works. Arachne maliciously covered her carpet with illustrations of loves of the Olympian gods and mortal women, including Danae and Zeus. This infuriated Athena, who tore up the tapestry and the insults of the gods woven on it, as Ovid stresses in his *Metamorphoses*.¹⁷

In the time of Emperor Augustus, in which moral integrity became a subject of state interest, the unflattering image of Perseus' mother prevailed in Rome. In Virgil's *Aeneid*, completed in 19 BC, Danae was a rather negative figure. She was associated with the mythical Rutuli, the enemies of the forefather of the Romans, Aeneas, who wanted to settle in Latium. He encountered the resolute resistance of the Rutulian king Turnus, the descendant of Danae, based in the city of Ardea, founded by Danae.¹⁸ In Horace's *Ode* of 23 BC, we read that Acrisius imprisoned his daughter, but gold can overcome any guard and can break through walls better than lightning.¹⁹ Martial, who died sometime between 102 and 104 AD, asks Zeus in one epigram why he paid to Danae when Leda gave herself to him for free.²⁰ Ancient Greek and Roman artists, however, never characterised Danae as a prostitute. In Pompeian wall paintings, we often find the story of Perseus' conception. All these representations are variations of one pictorial type. Danae sits or stands and picks up the golden rain, which Amor may be pouring into her lap. On the side, we find Jupiter or his attribute, which indicates the birth of Perseus. The no-longer existing wall painting represented Danae, who opened her cloak so that Eros could pour the golden rain into her lap; to the left stands Jupiter with a sceptre (97).

¹⁴ Menander, *Samia*, 589–591.

¹⁵ Euripides, *Danae*, fr. 324.

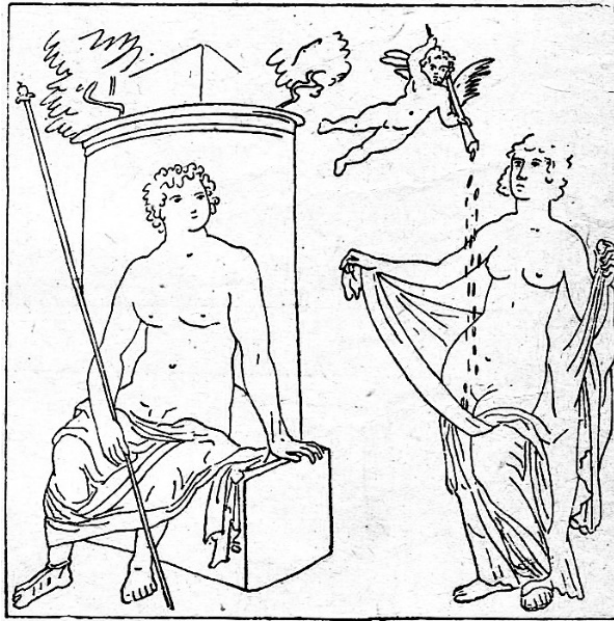
¹⁶ Terence, *Eunuchus*, 3, 5.

¹⁷ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 6, 131.

¹⁸ Virgil, *Aeneid*, 7, 409–411.

¹⁹ Horace, *Odes*, 3, 16.

²⁰ Martial 14, 175.



97. Danae and golden rain, Roman wall painting, c. 70.

Around 500 BC, Simonides colourfully described the desperate situation of a mother floating in a closed chest on a stormy sea.²¹ During the storm, the mother told her grief to the sleeping baby. On the previously mentioned Athenian vase from 490–480 BC, we find the first representation of the story of Danae. On one side, we see the scene with golden rain (94), while the opposite side is decorated with Danae with her child, who stands in a half-closed chest (98). On the left, we find a carpenter with a bow drill; on the right stands King Acrisius with a sceptre who gives orders with an outstretched hand. In Greek pictorial tradition, these two pictorial types - Danae with the golden rain and her punishment - highlight her crucial position in Perseus' myth.²² Around 456 BC Pherecydes of Athens emphasises that the child Perseus owed his own survival to Danae.²³ The theme of Danae as a self-sacrificing mother was a popular literary motif. In Euripides' lost *Danae*, which premiered in the years 455–425 BC, Danae describes to her cruel father how much she enjoyed her son.²⁴ About 170 AD, Lucian let marine nymphs tell the story of Danae. Thetis recalled the cruel fate of Danae in the chest. When her sister asked how she acted, she said: "she kept quiet about herself, submitting to her sentence, but she kept pleading for her child's life, showing it to its grandad, for it was a lovely baby. Moreover, it, unaware of its troubles, was looking at the sea with a smile on its face. Remembering them brings tears again to my eyes."²⁵

²¹ Simonides, fr. 543 PMG.

²² Jean-Jacques Maffre, "Akrisios," in *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae I/1* (Zürich: Artemis, 1981), 449–452; Ilaria Sforza, "L'eroe affidato alle acque: valenze dell'arca dall'epica al mito," *Gaia: Revue interdisciplinaire sur la Grèce Archaique* 16 (2013): 211–228.

²³ Pherecydes, fr. 10 Fowler.

²⁴ Euripides, *Danae*, fr. 323.

²⁵ Lucian, *Dialogues in the Sea*, 12. Translated by M.D.Macleod.



98. Acrisius shuts Danae with a small Perseus in a chest. Athenian krater, 490-480 BC.

Numerous Athenian vase paintings from the 5th century BC show Acrisius putting Danae with a small Perseus into the chest. They were inspired by what the Athenians knew from the theatre stage. In one of the oldest scenes, the carpenter with a bow drill is still working on the ark; on the left, Acrisius energetically points to Danae, who stands behind the chest, her high status indicated by a sophisticated coiffure.²⁶ She turns to a servant with the small Perseus in her arms and turns her head back to Acrisius to give her last look of indignation. She is aware of the divine origin of her child and attempts to protect him at all costs. She refuses to step into the chest; she and the maid raise their hands with their palms turned to Acrisius as a sign of protest against the cruel royal decree. The vase painters also represented the next stage - Danae is already with Perseus in the chest, but the lid is not yet closed. The princess no longer protests but holds a fist to her chin, which is a gesture of mourning. Little Perseus stretches a hand to Acrisius, who is silent and stands with his royal sceptre between him and his daughter.

On another vase painting, the headdress characterises Perseus' mother as a princess.²⁷ She has realised that her protests are in vain and she fully devotes herself to the child, who looks up to her. At the chest stands a maid, who raises her hand in a gesture of farewell. Behind her is another maid, whose sadness is expressed by her bowed head and arms crossed over her chest. On the left is Acrisius, who leans on the stick with his right hand lifted to his chest. Several vase paintings depicted the chest landing at Seriphos, where fishers discovered it on the shore (99). A fisherman characterised by a felted cap on his head opens the chest while his companion takes off his cap as a sign of reverence as princess Danae and Perseus rise from it. In the middle of the 3rd century BC, the Greek painter Artemon created a painting of the chest with Danae.²⁸ However, we do not know what it looked like. In Pompeii, there is a Roman wall painting depicting Danae with a small Perseus on her lap as she sits on the seashore next to a chest with two fishermen. On the mosaics of Gaziantep,

²⁶ Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 13.200.

²⁷ Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 03.792.

²⁸ Pliny the Elder, *Natural history*, 35, 139.

Turkey, from the turn of the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD, Danae with a small Perseus emerges from an open chest surrounded by fishermen. ²⁹



99. Danae in a chest on Seriphos. Athenian bell krater, 460–450 BC.

The myth of Perseus is exceptional because a great deal of attention is paid to the hero's childhood. The ancient Greeks also paid attention to the little Hercules, but only because he carried out his first heroic action just after birth. Little Perseus, however, lived in the Greek imagination exclusively as a defenceless child. In this, he was similar to the new-born Jesus Christ, who above all aroused compassion in Christian art. Perseus' mother, like the Virgin Mary, had to face many adversaries and risked her own life to save her divine son.

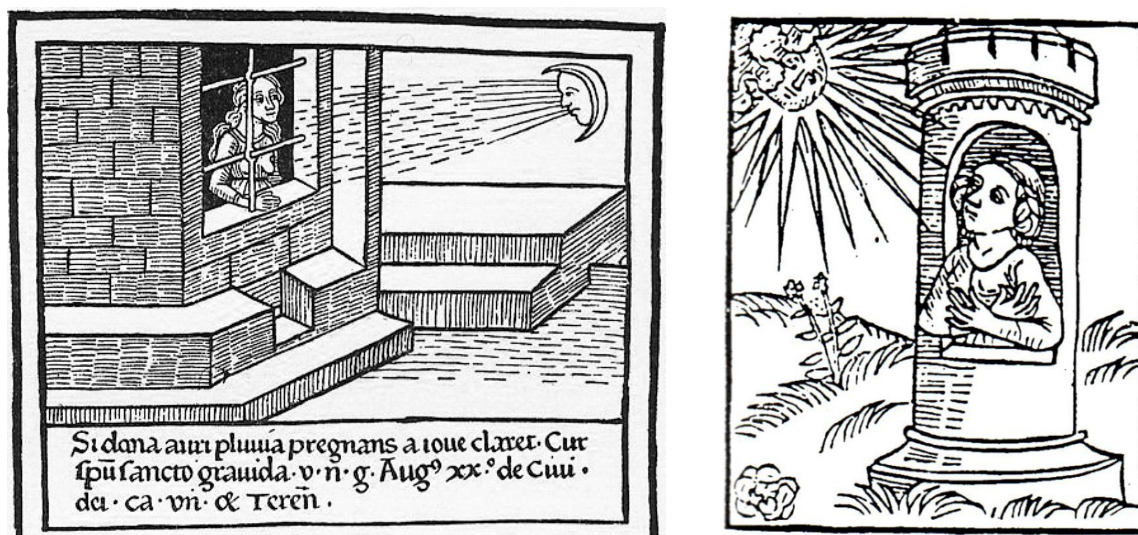
Pious and Venal Danae

At the beginning of the 14th century, Danae and Perseus were considered pagan counterparts of the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ. In this way, they were written about in both of Ovid's commented translations, *Ovide moralisé* and *Ovidius moralizatus*.³⁰ In 1388, Francis de Reza referred to the Danae myth in his defence of the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary. In the illustration to this treatise, which originated in the 1470s, Danae is depicted in a tower; the rays of a half-moon, with a human face indicating God, point toward the tower (100). In the text below this woodcut, we read: "when Danae could be known for being impregnated with golden rain, why could Mary not be made pregnant by the Holy Spirit." On a slightly

²⁹ Mehmet Önal, *Zeugma Mosaics: A Corpus* (Istanbul: A Turizm Yayınları, 2009), 121.

³⁰ Salvatore Settis, "Danae verso il 1495," *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 1 (1985): 207–237 and 287–307.

younger woodcut, there is a similar scene, but the moon has replaced the sun, which is also shown with a human face (101).³¹ With the reinterpretation of Danae, the golden rain was also reinterpreted and became a celestial phenomenon indicating the presence of God. Danae has her hands crossed on her chest in a gesture known from the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary.



100 (left). Johann Eysenhut, Danae in tower. Woodcut, 1487-1488.

101 (right). Danae in tower. Woodcut, 1490.

On some 15th century depictions, the golden rain falls from above, and Danae catches it in her cloak, as was the rule in ancient times. We find this pictorial type in the illustration for Ridewall's work from around 1420³² and *Hypnerotomachia* (102). In the later text, the hero describes a series of triumphal chariots he saw in a parade celebrating God's love. This is very important for us because it shows how this topic was interpreted at that time. Unicorns symbolising purity pulled Danae's chariot. The pictorial type of Danae capturing the golden rain into her raised robe was not necessarily taken directly from ancient monuments. Apparently due to the influence of ancient depictions of Danae, Mary was depicted in the same manner from the beginning of the 15th century. In the first half of the 16th century, this concept was widespread in transalpine Europe, as suggested by Danae's representation from 1537 by Hans Kels.³³ The princess, characterised by a crown on her head, is fully dressed and stands in front of her prison in the form of a tower. The golden rain falls diagonally into the skirt that Danae raises to catch it. Perseus is represented as an adult figure in full armour and is incorporated into the rays. The motif is known from the representation of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, where we find Jesus Christ in place of Perseus.

³¹ Ovid and Horace inspired the medieval concept of Danae's prison as a tower (Ovid, *The Loves*, 2, 19, 27; Ovid, *The Art of Love*, 3, 416; Horace, *Odes*, 3, 16, 1).

³² Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Cod. Palat. Lat. 1066, 228r.

³³ Latin inscription: "Danae, the daughter of the King of Argos." Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, KK 3419-KK 3449.



102. Triumphal chariot with Danae. Woodcut, 1499.

Danae is depicted as the Virgin Mary in the painting made for the Burgund court by Jan Gossart in 1527 (103).³⁴ The princess sits in an ancient Ionic circular temple, reminiscent of the temple of Vesta on the Forum Romanum in Rome. Gossart may have known from Vitruvius that the Ionic order was appropriate for the temples of Junona, Diana, and other virtuous goddesses.³⁵ In any case, the painter emphasised the sacral context of the representation of the virtuous Danae in the architecture of the temple. The real golden rain drops link Danae with the heavens. Through the columns of the temple, we see buildings in Gothic and classical style in the background, which suggests that the event is crucial for the entire population of the earth. Danae is conceived as a Madonna, which is indicated by her azure cloak and a whole host of other details. However, the interpretation of Gossart's painting, which was based exclusively on medieval tradition, was questioned in the 1990s.³⁶ In the picture, we find features that could point in a completely different direction. Danae is shown with pink cheeks and parted lips; her knees are opened, and she pulls her skirt high up to her thighs with both hands although the event does not require it. Contact with the divine golden rain would take place even if the princess were completely shrouded. Her uncovered breast is also an erotic motif, as she reveals not only her breast but also a significant portion of her abdomen.

³⁴ Maryan W. Ainsworth, ed., *Man, Myth, and Sensual Pleasures: Jan Gossart's Renaissance: the Complete Works* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2010), no. 35, pp. 232–235.

³⁵ Vitruvius, 1, 2, 5.

³⁶ Marisa Bass, *Jan Gossart and the Invention of Netherlandish Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 116–130.



103. Jan Gossart (Mabuse), Danae. Oil wood, 1527.

The unusual perspective of Gossart's image, in which all lines converge to the centre of Danae's body, also bears significance. Her womb is in the centre of the composition of this painting, and it also dominates its content. The position of the princess accentuates this. In Gossart's time, women gave birth on low chairs, just as Danae is depicted here. However, she does not sit on a stool, but on red pillows with huge ornate tassels at the corners. The pillows evoke the bedroom, bodily pleasure and eroticism. The painting is the first of a series of famous paintings depicting the sensual Danae for the humanistic courts. Gossart's Danae summarises the medieval conception of the Perseus myth, but at the same time it heralds its early modern reading. Danae's womb not only gave birth to Perseus, but was also a source of artistic creation. The girl who received God in her prison was predestined to be the mother of all art. The monumental inscription on the step leading to Danae indicates this fact. It announces that Gossart (IOANNES MALBODIVS PINGEBAT 1527)

created the painting. This inscription is on the axis of the image, which intersects Danae's lap.

At Baldassare Peruzzi's fresco in the Villa Farnesina from 1508, Danae received the golden rain on a bed. She is dressed, however, and sleeps with her head turned away from the rain as if she had nothing in common with God's appearance. On an Italian majolica plate from 1520, we find a similar depiction. In this case, the princess is naked and her legs are slightly spread, but her head is turned away from the golden rain and her eyes are closed.³⁷ At the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries, Danae's pictorial type was modified to approach ancient patterns - the golden rain began to fall from above, Danae began to appear on a bed, and was at times naked. However, this innovation did not imply Danae's immorality. This concept influenced Flemish tapestry in the second quarter of the 16th century, which depicts the whole myth. On the left, Acrisius puts Danae, accompanied by two court ladies, into confinement. The tower's interior is depicted in the middle; Danae sits on a bed and Zeus descends to her in the form of golden rain, but simultaneously appears in a real shape.³⁸ On the right, we see the punishment - Danae sails in a boat with the small Perseus, who she holds in her arms; Acrisius and the ladies are on the shore.

At the beginning of the 16th century, the pictorial type of Danae and the golden rain was primarily seen as a prefiguration of the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary. Although St Augustin understood the myth as an example of a virtue corrupted by gold,³⁹ and Fulgentius commented on Danae's myth quite clearly, the golden rain was not raindrops, but money.⁴⁰ The text mentioned above by Ridewall, which paraphrased Fulgentius, shows an illustration from 1420 in which we see Danae, who has lost her chastity.⁴¹ The relevant text states that she was "raped with gold."⁴² Giovanni Boccaccio was instrumental in bringing about the negative image of Danae. In his work *The Genealogy of the Pagan Gods*, which he published in 1360, he wrote that Danae's illegal lover climbed secretly onto the roof, and from there descended into the girl's bedroom. When she became pregnant, she boarded a ship filled with all the valuables she could collect and departed.⁴³ Jupiter, who is handing over the gold to Danae, is found in the Alsatian book illustration from 1469.⁴⁴

In the representations of Danae and the golden rain, explicit sexual references began to appear in Italian art in the second quarter of the 16th century.⁴⁵ In these

³⁷ London, Victoria and Albert Museum.

³⁸ Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 50.2627.

³⁹ Augustine, *The City of God* 8,13.

⁴⁰ Fulgentius, *Mythologies*, 1, 19.

⁴¹ Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Cod. Palat. Lat. 1066, 228r.

⁴² Hans Liebschütz, *Fulgentius Metaforalis: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der antiken Mythologie im Mittelalter* (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1926), 116.

⁴³ Boccaccio, *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods*, 2, 33.

⁴⁴ Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Ms. Ludwig XV 9, fol. 237v.

⁴⁵ Erwin Panofsky, "Der gefesselte Eros," *Oud Holland* 50 (1933): 193-217; Madlyn Millner Kahr, "Danaë: Virtuous, Voluptuous, Venal Woman," *The Art Bulletin* 60, no. 1 (1978): 43-55; Cathy Santore, "Danaë: The Renaissance Courtesan's Alter Ego," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 54, no. 3 (1991): 412-427; Eric Jan Sluijter, "Emulating Sensual Beauty: Representations of Danaë from Gossart to Rembrandt," *Simiolus* 27 (1999): 4-45.

paintings, the relationship between the princess and the golden rain changed radically. The first step is represented in Correggio's painting from around 1531, which is the beginning of an entirely new pictorial tradition (104).⁴⁶ The painter created a breakthrough painting as part of a set of paintings with Zeus' loves that he painted for Federico II Gonzaga in 1531-1532. The set was to decorate the duke's villa, Palazzo Te outside Mantua. Correggio's Danae is not a mature woman, but a very young girl. She actively participates in the event and does not conceal the pleasure she enjoys. She is completely naked, her legs are spread, and she does not look upward like the ancient images illustrating this myth. She looks with a slight smile down at her body, evidently delighted by the divine presence within her lap. Eros, sitting at her feet, looks up curiously at the golden cloud but forms a unity with Danae. This unity is expressed by the fact that Eros, together with Danae, pulls the blanket so the golden rain can penetrate the princess's vagina.



104. Correggio (Antonio Allegri), Danae, oil on canvas, around 1531.

The figures of Danae and Eros are remarkably similar - their bodies, arms and legs form pairs of parallel diagonals that dominate the painting. Danae carries out God's will, and Eros assists her. A pair of small putti is sitting by the bed, fully occupied with studying Eros' arrows. By using them to etch on the stone, they try to find out which of them is of gold and excites love, and which is of lead and has the

⁴⁶ Lorenz Dittmann, *Die Wiederkehr der antiken Götter im Bilde: Versuch einer neuen Deutung* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2001), 68-74; Anna Coliva, ed. *Correggio e l'antico* (Milan: F. Motta, 2008), 134.

opposite effect. Only one of these putti has wings, so it is probably Eros and Anteros, the embodiment of the Love of Heaven and the Love of the Body. Erotic curiosity, which is the path to god for Danae, is transformed into innocent child's play in the pair of Erotes.

In the gallery of Château de Fontainebleau, Francesco Primaticcio created a series of mythological wall paintings for French King Francis I in 1533–1540. In the representation of Danae and the golden rain, the painter enriched the pictorial type with two motifs (105). The raindrops were replaced with coins, which we also find on the relief by Hans Kels from 1537 mentioned above. The second of Primaticcio's innovations is the old servant, which is represented on the right. In the Italian Renaissance, the old servant embracing a jar was a generally understood personification of corruption and greed. This contrasting figure emphasised the beauty of Danae, but also her venality. The pairing of seductive beauty and an ugly old woman can also be understood as the polarity of the eternal love of God and the transience of earthly possessions and the illusion of pleasure that our senses give us. We can also see it as a warning that even the beautiful Danae will age and soon become ugly. In the 1530s, Zeus embracing Danae stressed the explicit erotic content of the scene with the golden rain. In 1531–1532, Perin del Vaga designed a series of tapestries depicting Zeus' loves for the Salon of Zeus in the Palazzo Doria in Genoa.⁴⁷ In the scene with Danae, Zeus is represented not only as the golden rain but also assumes a human form and embraces the princess. In the 1550s, this pictorial type appears on wall paintings in Roman palaces decorated by the pupils of Perin del Vaga.⁴⁸



105. Francesco Primaticcio, Danae, wall painting, 1533–1540. Leon Davent, etching, 1542–1547.

⁴⁷ Bernice F. Davidson, "The Furti Di Giove Tapestries Designed by Perino Del Vaga for Andrea Doria," *The Art Bulletin*, 70, no. 3 (1988): 424–450.

⁴⁸ Jan L. de Jong, "Love, Betrayal, and Corruption: Mars and Venus and Danaë and Jupiter in the Palazzi Stati-Cenci and Mattei di Paganica in Rome," *Source. Notes in the History of Art* 19 (1999): 20–29.

Titian's Danae from around 1544 is very well aware of the golden rain. She has raised her knees and spread her legs. Unlike Correggio's princess, she looks upward to the golden rain, which has the shape of coins that fall into her lap.⁴⁹ Eros does not participate directly in the event; he only sees that it takes place successfully. He stands on guard fully armed with a quiver hanging on his shoulder and a bow in his hand. He looks back at the golden rain, but he is turned to the opposite direction and stretches his right hand in this direction to prevent anyone from disturbing the lovers. Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, the great-grandson of Pope Paul III, commissioned the painting. In Danae, he recognised with delight his mistress Camilla, a former prostitute and brothel owner.⁵⁰ The audience of the time perceived Titian's Danae as a modern picture that was full of classical allusions. Danae's pose is a variation on the recumbent characters from ancient Roman sarcophagi. Eros is a variation on the pictorial type of the god of love stretching his bow, a type probably made by the Greek sculptor Lysippos in the 4th century BC, which was known from several copies in Titian's time.⁵¹

Titian later painted at least five other variations of this theme; the erotic dimension is more intense from picture to picture, evidently in order to meet the prevalent taste of that time. In the painting he created for Philip II, the erotic dimension completely dominates. The princess is entirely naked; her legs are not only spread, but she also places her left hand on the inside of her thigh.⁵² The spread legs evoke fertility, and the hand between her legs indicates auto-erotica, which was closely related to ideas of the time. Doctors believed that conception could not occur without a female orgasm. In the 16th century, Danae could be interpreted in two ways - as a saint or a prostitute. Titian was fully aware of this dichotomy, and on it he based the concept of his painting, which consists of two contrasting halves. The dividing line is in the diagonal connecting the upper left corner with the lower right corner. To the left, in full light, is the young, beautiful and loving Danae; to the right in the dark is the old, ugly and avaricious maid. The old woman catches golden coins, which is a gesture with which Titian also portrayed Danae, but the sense of gesture here is overturned, love-desire is replaced by greed for money. The framing of this mismatched couple enhances the contrast; behind Danae we see a purple velvet curtain, while behind the old woman is a cold stone wall. Titian, however, did not delve into either of Danae's identities - she is neither a saint nor a prostitute, but a woman fully devoting herself to sex. In Titian's work, the golden rain falls directly into the woman's open lap; it is neither God's grace, nor money, but male sperm.

⁴⁹ Naples, Museo di Capodimonte, Q 134. Cf. Annachiara Alabiso, ed., *La Danae di Tiziano del Museo di Capodimonte: Il mito, la storia, il restauro* (Naples: Electa, 2005).

⁵⁰ Roberto Zapperi, "Alessandro Farnese, Giovanni della Casa and Titian's Danae in Naples," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 54 no. 159 (1991): 159-171.

⁵¹ Bober and Rubinstein, *Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculpture*, 98, no. 50.

⁵² Titian, Danae. Oil canvas, around 1550. Madrid, Museo del Prado, P00425. Cf. Ingrid D. Rowland, *From Heaven to Arcadia. The Sacred and Profane in the Renaissance* (New York: New York Review, 2008), 119-133; Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat, *The Visible and the Invisible: On Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 138-139.

This Danae was identified as an image of erotic desires in a private letter written at the time the painting originated.⁵³

Titian may have been inspired by the way Bonasone had taken on this subject; his Danae of 1545 could not have expressed sexual arousal more openly.⁵⁴ The naked princess not only spreads her legs wide towards the viewer, but her head is also tossed backwards with an open mouth into which the stream of coins is directed. An ambiguous commentary is also added to the engraving: "I cross the high wall and the trench, the shining gold penetrates the virtues, I open one and the other." Opening one and the other may relate to the fact that Zeus entered the prison and the body of Danae or that he entered her body in two places. After the Council of Trent was concluded in 1563, the explicitly erotic conception of the myth about Danae was no longer tolerated. Bonasone's and Titian's completely naked Danae, with her legs spread, did not find any followers in the next few centuries.



106. Jacopo Tintoretto, Danae. Oil canvas, c. 1553–1555.

Tintoretto's Danae of 1553–1555 looks like a critical reaction to Titian's exalted eroticism, even though the princess is also naked and the golden rain falls from above (106). In Tintoretto's version, there is no hint of erotic passion. The scene takes

⁵³ Maurice Brock, "L'anecdote de Pline sur l'Aphrodite de Cnide dans quatre lettres, de Bembo à Dolce," in *Le mythe de l'art antique*, ed. Emmanuelle Hénine and Valérie Naas, (Paris: CNRS éditions, 2018), 352–355.

⁵⁴ Dresden, Kupferstich-Kabinett, A 124657.

place in the bedroom of a courtesan characterised by a lute, which we find on the sill of the window. It is a bedroom, but a purely commercial atmosphere reigns in it. Danae's right hand is full of coins; in her left hand she holds a coin which she puts in the chest. At the same time, she looks suspiciously at the servant catching the money in her apron. The painting is dominated by the realistically painted money; the multi-layered mythical story is replaced by an anecdote - this was the way Danae was presented in visual arts at the turn of the 16th and 17th century. In the painting by Hendrick Goltzius, the golden rain accompanies Amor, who holds pouches of money in his hand that are reminiscent of the male genitalia. A penis with testicles composed of a "stockbeurs" or money pouches placed on a stick can also be found in the drawing by Joachim Wtawael in Munich. In the Louvre, there is a painting of Wtawael with Zeus descending to the terrified and naked Danae, a parody of the Angel from the scene of the Annunciation.⁵⁵

In his book on Dutch painters, published in 1604, Karl van Mander mentions his friend Cornelis Ketel's painting Danae and the Golden Rain. The painting was supposedly hanging in the hall of the painter's house when a villager passed by and saw it. He asked Ketel's wife for permission, and when he looked at the picture thoroughly, he said he knew what was on it. As Mander noted, "he identified the flying Eros as an angel, and Danae, who lay with her legs stretched out on a luxurious and richly decorated bed as the Virgin Mary." For Mander, the anecdote was an opportunity to laugh at the medieval allegorical interpretation. The story concludes with the statement: "the villager left with his ignorant view as wise as he was before."⁵⁶ The story shows that the medieval allegorical interpretation of the myth of Danae and the golden rain was not forgotten at the beginning of the 17th century, but the members of the intellectual elite no longer shared it.

Rembrandt's Danae of 1636 is an exceptional painting in many ways.⁵⁷ She lies naked on the bed and looks up excitedly at the golden rain, which does not form coins but a dazzling light that flows directly toward Danae. There is also a maid, who had been a frequent part of these scenes since the second half of the 16th century. The role of the maid on Rembrandt's picture is unambiguous - her left-hand removes the curtain covering the bed, keys hang from her wrist, and in her hand she holds a money pouch. She has used the key to allow Zeus to enter and the pouch holds the money that she received for doing so. However, Rembrandt's Danae does not look like an agitated lover; she does not lie with her legs spread and her body is turned away from the golden rain. However, the princess turns her head to it with a joyous smile - her relaxed pose, the casually raised right hand, and the half-opened mouth make it seem as if Danae was greeting an old friend. She carefully watches him in order to ascertain what mood her close acquaintance is in today.

There are two opposing signs in Rembrandt's image. In front of the bed, there are slippers on the floor, which were a metaphor for female genitalia in the

⁵⁵ Francesca Alberti, "Bizzarri componimenti e straordinarie invenzioni: la Danae de Tintoret, une peinture comique," *Studiolo* 7 (2009): 11-39.

⁵⁶ Karel van Mander, *Het Schilder-boeck* (Haarlem: Passchier van Wesbusch, 1604), 280r; Sluijter, *Emulating Sensual Beauty*: 36-37.

⁵⁷ Oil canvas, 1636. St Petersburg, Hermitage museum, ГЭ-723. Cf. Eric Jan Sluijter, *Rembrandt and the Female Nude* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 221-249.

Netherlands at that time; over Danae's head, we see Eros, who is crying with his hands tied. This motif is ambiguous; it can either be Eros or a gilded statuette of him that forms the decoration of the bed. Like Titian's Danae, this version by Rembrandt is by no means an allegory or an abstract symbol, but a study of human sexuality. Unlike Titian, however, Rembrandt entirely focused on the feminine body, which he turned entirely to the viewer and did not hide anything at all. In addition, he placed the body on a white bed in the centre of a dark picture field, creating the illusion that it was in the forefront of the painted canvas, making her body readily available to the viewer. There is nothing abstract about the appearance of Danae's body for which we might need to use our imagination. Her legs, hands, stomach and breasts respond to the environment in which the painter has represented them. The viewer has the impression that he might touch Danae's belly, which droops down onto the bed sheet, or feel how her left breast presses against her hand.

Rembrandt's concept of sexuality is thoroughly medieval in that Danae stands for the female element, which is characterised by passivity, physicality and closeness to nature. In Rembrandt's painting, the ancient Greek story of Zeus and Danae visualises substance (the principle of masculinity) confronting form (the principle of femininity). An opposite to Danae is the light, which embodies activity, spirituality and culture. Aristotle's hylomorphism, which was adapted by medieval Europe, taught that the whole world consists of a purely potential substance and an active form, but it is realised exclusively in matter. Danae is the antipode of Zeus, in the same way that a woman is the antipode of a man with whom she forms an integral unity.⁵⁸

The painting of Danae ascribed to Artemisia Gentileschi, one of the earliest woman painters of the early modern age, has only recently become the focus of scholars (107).⁵⁹ Artemisia was the daughter of Caravaggio's follower, Orazio Gentileschi. The image allegedly dealt with her traumatic personal experience. Her father's friend and companion Agostino Tassi raped her, and that is why the picture became one of the icons of the feminist movement of the end of the 20th century. The naked, deathly pale Danae is exposed to the golden rain; a few golden coins are stuck in her lap between her tightly pressed thighs, which we do not find in any other treatment of this subject. Her crossed legs, the convulsive gesture of her right hand, and head that is thrown backwards show that Danae is in pain. She turns away from the golden rain; her eyes and her lips, similarly to the fingers of her right hand, are firmly closed. Danae's attitude towards the golden rain contrasts with the servant, who looks up to the source of the coins and snatches them into her apron. The meaning of the painting is, however, a subject of dispute. Danae distances herself from the golden rain in many ways, yet she exposes her body to it as indicated by her left arm, which is raised to her head. After all, it is also a possibility that Artemisia's father, Orazio Gentileschi, painted this work.

⁵⁸ Hammer-Tugendhat 2015, 143–145.

⁵⁹ Elizabeth S. Cohen, "The Trials of Artemisia Gentileschi: A Rape as History," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 31, no. 1 (2000): 47–75; Judith W. Mann, et al., *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi* (New York: Yale University Press, 2001).



107. Artemisia Gentileschi, Danae and the golden rain. Oil copper, around 1612.

The image of Cleopatra, painted at the same time by Artemisia Gentileschi or her father, Orazio, may be the key to the painting. The Egyptian queen is depicted in an identical pose, the only difference being that in her right hand she clings to a poisonous snake instead of gold, with which she will soon commit suicide. This would indicate that the image of Danae also depicts a tragedy. Only two things can be said reliably about these images. The paintings of Danae and Cleopatra are painted in a naturalistic way; the lying figure ought to be perceived by the viewer as a specific woman. At the same time, however, the viewer should perceive it as part of the classical tradition. The paintings of Danae and Cleopatra draw inspiration from the famous marble sculpture from the Vatican collections, which was considered to be a representation of Cleopatra at that time.⁶⁰

Danae's paintings by Rembrandt and by Artemisia or Orazio Gentileschi are exceptions to the rule. Countless representations of Danae with the golden rain, which originated in the 17th and 18th centuries, were ostensibly a criticism of sensuality, but, in fact, they provided an alibi for displaying a naked female body with all the racy details. Of course, the eroticism of these images was within the strict limits of the norm of the day. Danae was an ambiguous figure since the time of

⁶⁰ Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture 1500–1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), no. 24.

ancient Greece and Rome. She was a self-sacrificing mother and a virtuous woman, the precursor of the Christian Mary; but, at the same time, she was considered a loose woman, the embodiment of bodily lust and moral corruption. While the virtuous form of Danae was primarily depicted in ancient times and the European Middle Ages, from the second quarter of the 16th century until the 18th century artists most often portrayed her in her wicked form.

In Baroque art, classical myths were often used as mere amusement, but in the neo-classicist art of the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries they, as a rule, edified the minds of the audience and revealed the secrets of the cosmos and the human being, the labyrinth of the soul and the mystery of life's course. The typical example is the *Night of Danae* by Anne-Louis Girodet of 1798.⁶¹ The French neo-classical artist portrayed Danae under the open night sky for the first time. The period commentary, which the painter himself probably wrote, points out that he distanced himself from Danae's "materialistic" interpretation as a venal woman and took her image as an allegory of the intersection of the heavenly and earthly. The mirror that Amor shows to Danae has a dual role in the painting; it refers to Danae's encounter with God, but also to the son who will be its result because mirroring has played a key role in the son's life story. The cosmic dimension of Danae is emphasised not only by the night sky with the shining stars but also by the fact that Danae is depicted in the attitude in which Venus was depicted as she was born from the sea foam.

In his second image of Danae, which Girodet painted one year later, he conceived the myth in a very different way. The picture is called *Miss Lang as Danae* or *New Danae*, and the painter unequivocally accepted the materialistic interpretation of the mythical princess. It was a biting satire on Anne-Françoise Elisabeth Lange, an actress famous for her immoral life. Girodet painted her portrait and displayed it at the Parisian Salon, but the actress did not like the painting and wanted the money back that she had paid for it. The offended Girodet took revenge. He painted a new version of her portrait that he was still able to expose to the Salon before its closing (108).⁶² At a glance, the painting seems to represent the beautiful naked actress in the role of Danae; she sits on the bed, and a rain of gold coins comes down from the sky. However, a close-up view reveals many details that entertained the audience of the time. Firstly, there is a turkey with a wedding ring staring at Danae's lap with its tongue stuck out while Amor strips it of its feathers from behind. The turkey depicted wealthy Brussels entrepreneur Michel-Jean Simons, the actress' husband. There is also a cracked mirror demonstrating Miss Lange's lack of self-reflection, a bleeding dove struck by a coin, the collar of which bears the inscription "Loyalty," a rat in a cage, a spider whose web has caught several coins, flame-burned moths and many other details and countless literary allusions. The painting aroused tremendous attention, but the painter was criticised as this was not what the public expected from a painting inspired by classical mythology. After the Salon ended, Girodet hid the painting and showed it to no one.

⁶¹ Leipzig, Museum der bildenden Künste.

⁶² Dorothy Johnson, *David to Delacroix: The Rise of Romantic Mythology* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 60–63.



108. Anne-Louis Girodet, Mlle. Lange as Danae, or New Danae, oil canvas, 1799.

In the last quarter of the 19th century the spiritual conception of Danae came to the fore in England. In the album called *The Flower Book*, Edward Burne-Jones returned to Danae as Jan Gossart had portrayed her, i.e. as a prefiguration of the Virgin Mary.⁶³ The mythical princess wears a dark, uncut dress that covers her entire body. She stands with her head turned toward the heavens, from which golden drops fall. Her chastity is indicated by the fact that she is in a small room with the window closed in accordance with the ancient tradition; it is a metal prison, which is suggested by the rivets on the metal plates. Thomas Sturge Moore wrote a poem about Danae that he published with woodcuts by Charles Ricketts. On one illustration, she looks out of a small window. On the second, she stares at the trio of massive rays of light that penetrate from the window into the room and hit the floor of her prison. The inscription reads: "She kneels in awe beholding lavish light."⁶⁴ Danae's status is defined by a secure prison, an embroidery frame indicating her daily occupation and, above all, a lily vase standing on the ground beside the rays of light. The lily was a traditional symbol of the Virgin Mary's immaculate virginity. Burne-Jones and Ricketts emphasised the role of Danae as the rescuer of humanity.

⁶³ London, The British Museum, 1909,0512.1.19. Edward Coley Burne-Jones, *The Flower Book* (London: H. Piazza et cie, 1905).

⁶⁴ London, The British Museum, 1910,0324.4. T. Sturge Moore, *Danae. A Poem* (London: Hacon & Ricketts, 1903).

Her connection with the golden rain becomes a hierogamy, the sacred union of the earth and the heavens, of a mortal woman and a god. In the depictions of both authors, the princess' prison plays an important role. Thanks to the isolation from the world of sensual perceptions, Danae is strengthened spiritually; she has given up her human essence to be able to unite with God.



109. Max Slevogt, Danae. Oil canvas, 1895.

By returning to the medieval conception of Danae, the above-mentioned English artists returned in a certain way to how Danae was perceived in ancient Greece. This attitude changed at the very end of the 19th century, when the issues of the time brutally transformed the representation of classical myths. German painter Max Slevogt approached the Perseus myth in a manner similar to the aforementioned Lovis Corinth. Slevogt updated the Renaissance concept of Danae as a prostitute in such a ruthless way that the painting produced a scandal when it was exhibited (109). In the foreground of the painting, the traditional character of the greedy old hag is catching coins falling from the sky. Behind her is a bed with Danae, who lies on her back; her hands are under her head to signify that she accepts her fate. Nevertheless, she bows her head, closes her eyes and purses her lips – by doing so, she makes it clear that she is distancing herself from everything that is happening around her. Her coarse face is worn and her body is greenish. The angle from which she is depicted gives her the semblance of a dead body on a bier.

In Slevogt's picture, this woman is not a figure of the ancient myth, but a tired prostitute who rests after her client has left her while the business is handled by a

greedy procuress. Slevogt commented unequivocally on the picture: “It was intended to be a display of pimping, to where the majority of gold flows. The image was meant to show that beauty is not needed to earn money. I wanted to call the painting ‘Modern Danae’ or ‘Pimping.’”⁶⁵ The organisers of the Munich Art Nouveau exhibition of 1899 removed the painting before its opening. At that time, the public still expected a timeless idealisation in representations inspired by classical myths. In paintings of Danae, they wanted decent eroticism; critical commentary of topical issues was out of the question.



110. Gustav Klimt, Danae. Oil canvas, 1907.

Around 1900, the situation changed beyond recognition. In 1907, Gustav Klimt's Danae was an immediate success at the “Kunstschau” in Vienna (110).⁶⁶ In his version of Danae, he also provocatively abandoned the established tradition, but did so several years later in a different city and in an entirely different way. Klimt knew ancient art very well and often took inspiration from it, but in his Danae, sexuality completely dominates. While for Slevogt the ancient theme was a pretext for the critique of prostitution, Klimt understands Danae as a straightforward expression of the principle of life. The naked princess is shown in a close-up view, her thick thigh covering a substantial part of the image. The centre of the picture is her breast with a prominent nipple; the princess has a red face and open mouth,

⁶⁵ Hans-Jürgen Imiela, *Max Slevogt. Eine Monographie* (Karlsruhe: Braun 1968), 36.

⁶⁶ Monique Halm-Tisserant, “De Makron à Klimt.” *Revue de l'Art* 96 (1992): 77–81; Warren, *Art Nouveau and the Classical Tradition*, 95–97.

revealing her lower teeth, while the fingers of her right hand are stiffened in a convulsive gesture. All of this is a sign of sexual excitement, which is rendered naturalistically. The reddish hair of Danae characterises her as a sultry woman, but various other features indicate that this is not a depiction of a relationship between a woman and her sexual partner, but of a cosmic act. The golden rain that penetrates Danae's womb is so powerful that it goes beyond the human scale. Danae does not comment on this monstrosity; she wholly concentrates on her body, her eyes are closed, and she is cramped in the foetal position, which is also suggested by her hair, which looks as if it was floating in water. She is a lover, a mother and a stillborn child in one. What is celebrated in the picture is not just sex and fertilisation, but above all the mystery of life. Klimt's painting is a typical example of the modern search for the "deeper significance" of classical myths.⁶⁷

American Surrealist photographer George Platt Lynes also stressed the cosmic dimension of Danae's conception. In the 1930s, he created a series of attractive trick pictures illustrating ancient erotic myths. In his conception, Zeus is a naked man covered with gold coins who descends to the sleeping, naked Danae. He does not enter her lap, but her head; the golden rain is neither an allegory of Danae's venality nor a disguise of the immoral Zeus. It is what it was in the ancient myth – the interpenetration of the divine and human sphere. Platt Lynes' photography is not typical for the 20th century; the majority of artists did not care for classical myths. As we have said above, the situation began to change only at the end of the 20th century. In the work of American realist painter Jack Beal, the ancient mythical stories were dissolved in the petty details of modern everyday life. Mythical figures are represented by his friends and family members, whom he depicts in ordinary situations. His Danae from around 1972 is a naked woman lying in a room filled by violent sun rays.⁶⁸ A girl sitting next to her refers to the servants who have been part of this pictorial type since the 16th century. The girl's subordinate position is indicated by the kitchen towel that she has thrown on her chair, and by the fact that she is in the shade, unlike the woman fully exposed to the sun. The picture does not refer to the ancient myth, but to the post-ancient pictorial tradition, in which sun rays characterised Danae as a prefiguration of the Virgin Mary.

The feminist movement legitimised its innovative attitudes by reference to tradition, including the Danae myth. In 1992, Phyllis McGibbon, by then thirty-three years old, presented her "Incubation Shadows" in California's Santa Ana. The room with painted bronze walls evoked the bronze prison of Danae.⁶⁹ There were shadowy drawings on the walls with naked Danae. She sat and held a pan in her hands as if she were panning for gold, she pretended to defend herself, or she lay lifelessly on her back with her legs lifted. In the middle of the ceiling, there was a hole through which light flowed. From this hole, test-tubes partially painted in gold were hung at different heights. The tubes evoked the golden rain and resembled the male genital organs. At the same time, Zeus' violation of Danae was ironically commented on by

⁶⁷ Warren, *Art Nouveau and the Classical Tradition*, 97–98.

⁶⁸ New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, 74:82.

⁶⁹ Klaus Kilinski II, *Greek Myth and Western Art: The Presence of the Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 170–172.

the tubes, which evoked artificial insemination, in which the role of man is minimised and the role of the erotic is non-existent. Another parody of the golden rain was the straw spread on the ground beneath the hole. The gold falling from the heavens becomes worthless straw on the ground and has only one feature in common with gold – its colour.

In his installation in the Russian pavilion of the Venice Biennial in 2013, Vadim Zakharov updated the morality of the power of money to buy everything, including love. On the floor of the pavilion, there was a large square hole surrounded on all four sides with a railing with a prayer stool. Visitors who knelt here could pray to the rain of the gold coins falling from the glass pyramid on the ceiling to the room below.⁷⁰ Only women could enter the lower room, where a large heap of money lay on the floor. This was an exclusively female space, a kind of giant uterus. The women were given umbrellas so as not to be hurt by the falling coins, and they could transfer the coins from the pile into the next room (111). There they could throw the money into a tin bucket that stood on the floor in the middle of this room on the lap of a magnified reproduction of Rembrandt's Danae. The bucket was hung on a rope running through a circular opening in the ceiling. When the bucket was filled with coins, it was pulled up to the hall with the square hole and prayer stool. The man in the suit puts the contents of the bucket into a carrier that transported the coins to the glass pyramid above the square hole. From there, the coins fell down again. An inscription accompanied the installation on the upper floor, which was accessible to men: "Gentlemen, the time has come to confess our Rudeness, Lust, Narcissism, Demagoguery, Falsehood, Banality, and Greed, Cynicism, Robbery, Speculation, Wastefulness, Gluttony, Seduction, Envy, and Stupidity."



111. Vadim Zakharov, Danae, Venice Biennial in 2013.

⁷⁰ Vadim Zakharov, *Danaë. Russian Pavilion, 55th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia*, ed. Udo Kittelmann (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz 2013).