



1 Jan Gossaert van Mabuse, *Danaë*, 1527. Munich, Alte Pinakothek

Emulating sensual beauty: representations of Danaë from Gossaert to Rembrandt*

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For Julius Held's 94th birthday

Any study of Danaë representations from Gossaert to Rembrandt must begin with the first truly iconological article on a Dutch subject in a Dutch periodical: Erwin Panofsky's famous "Der gefesselte Eros: zur Genealogie von Rembrandts Danaë," which was published in 1933 in *Oud Holland*.¹ In the course of his study of traditions in the portrayal of Danaë, Panofsky stated—more or less in passing—that Jan Gossaert's *Danaë impregnated by Jupiter in the form of golden rain* of 1527 (fig. 1) must be seen as the outcome of a medieval, moralistic and didactic interpretation of the Danaë myth, in which Danaë, locked up in a tower, is an allegory of chastity.² More than 35 years later he stressed this point again—also as an aside—in his book on Titian: "Jan Gossaert would develop a charming, child-like Danaë from the medieval 'Pudicitia type'."³ In this context Panofsky

pointed to an illustration from a manuscript of around 1420 accompanying a passage in the *Fulgentius metaforalis*, a treatise with moralizations of myths compiled by the English Franciscan John Ridewall in the first half of the fourteenth century (fig. 2).⁴ There we see Danaë, dressed as a princess, seated atop a fortified tower and heavily guarded by a great many soldiers, while drops of rain fall from a little cloud above her. "That Jan Gossaert owes much to the manner of representation of the Fulgentius Metaforalis hardly needs mentioning," in Panofsky's words. What he neglected to say, however, was that there she did not function merely as a symbol of chastity, but as an image of chastity violated.⁵

From the end of the 1950s until today—from Leopold Ettlinger and William Heckscher, via Sadja Herzog and Madlyn Kahr, to Larry Silver and Craig Harbi-

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1 See E. de Jongh, "De iconologische benadering van de zeventiende-eeuwse Nederlandse schilderkunst," in F. Grijzenhout and H. van Veen (eds.), *De gouden eeuw in perspectief*, Nijmegen & Heerlen 1992, p. 308.

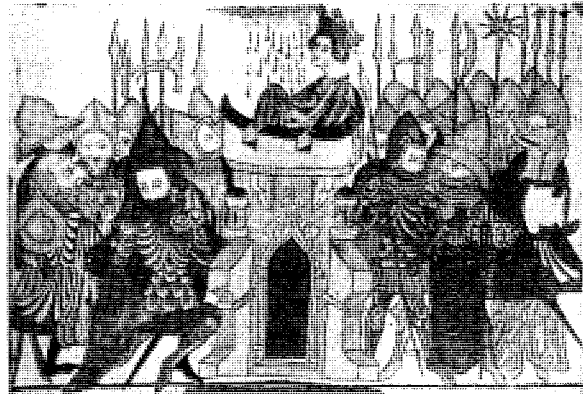
2 E. Panofsky, "Der gefesselte Eros (Zur Genealogie von Rembrandts Danaë)," *Oud Holland* 50 (1933), p. 206.

3 E. Panofsky, *Problems in Titian, mostly iconographic*, London 1969, p. 145.

4 In spite of the title, John Ridewall by no means follows the interpretation of the influential early Christian mythographer Fulgentius,

who had given the traditional reading, later repeated many times (see note 57 below). Ridewall systematically identified all mythical figures with certain virtues and carried this further than anyone else. Regarding his work see H. Liebeschütz, "Fulgentius Metaforalis," *Studien der Bibliothek Warburg* 4, Berlin & Leipzig 1926; concerning Danaë: pp. 56, 116 and pl. vii, fig. 8. See also J. Seznec, *The survival of the pagan gods*, Princeton (N.J.) 1972 (1st French edition 1940), p. 94.

5 Panofsky, op. cit. (note 2), p. 206: "Dass Jan Gossaert der Vorstellungsweise des Fulgentius Metaforalis verpflichtet ist, bedarf kaum der Erörterung." The depiction illustrates the words "situ sublimata, moenibus vallata, egestato sata, agmine stipata, prole fecundata, auro violata" ("on an elevated spot, surrounded by fortifications, in great misery, encircled by troops, pregnant with offspring, violated by gold"). The image of Danaë as an allegory of chastity refers to her being shut up in the tower, which means that the portrayal of the moment she receives the golden rain depicts this violation of her chastity by means of gold ("auro violata"). This caused W.S. Heckscher, "Recorded from dark recollection," in M. Meiss (ed.), *De artibus opuscula XL: essays in honor of Erwin Panofsky*, 2 vols., New York 1961, vol. 1, p. 192, to justly remark: "And yet, it is Pudicitia at bay." What is indeed an explicit "imago pudicitiae" is the Danaë in the ms. Casanatense of 1403, see D. Settis, "Danaë verso il 1495," *I Tatti studies. Essays in the renaissance* 1 (1985), pp. 211–12.



2 Danaë, in John Ridewall, *Fulgentius metaforalis*. Rome, Biblioteca Vaticana, Cod. Palat. Lat. 1066, fol. 228r

Si danes auri pluua. a Joue pregnans claret.
Cur spū sancto grauida. virgo non generaret
Dochte danes in eynē gulden regen entpfaben
von eynē aptgot in einem thorne/So mag auch
maria gebern/jr liebes kint ane win des sturme.



Bicit Isidorus libro octauo capitulo vltimo ante
medium. q̄ ista virgo per ſmbrem aureum appe-
cijt concubitus. vbi in telligitur pudiciam mul-
cris ab auro fuisse corruptā hec sunt verba in lra.
buij

3 Danaë, in Franciscus de Retza, *Defensorium* ..., Basel, ca. 1490, fol. 12r

son—Panofsky's interpretation has been continually repeated, augmented or varied. That Gossaert's *Danaë* represented the image of Pudicitia was accepted as a matter of course. Its relation to the miniature cited by Panofsky was also frequently underscored, as witnessed, for example, by Heckscher's statement: "...this Danaë clearly anticipates Gossaert's female figure."⁶ Making use of some of the facts that Panofsky had put forward, later authors even went one step further in their allegorical interpretation of Gossaert's painting. Panofsky had mentioned fourteenth-century texts in which Danaë, visited by Jupiter in the form of golden rain, was seen as the prefiguration of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. He referred to a text by the Dominican friar Franciscus de Retza dating from the end of the fourteenth century, in which the Danaë myth was even put forward as miraculous evidence of Mary's virginal conception.⁷ Several accompanying illustrations show Danaë locked up in a tower, being impregnated from outside—not by golden rain but by beams of light.⁸ Sometimes we even see her with her hands crossed over her breast, as though she were the Virgin of the Annunciation (fig. 3).

Panofsky had not directly connected Gossaert's painting with this Christian, theological allegorization of Danaë as a prefiguration of the Virgin, which first occurs in the *Ovide moralisé* dating from the first half of the fourteenth century.⁹ Authors after him—with the ex-

6 Heckscher, op. cit. (note 5), p. 192; L. Ettlinger, "Danae," *Reallexikon zur deutschen Kunstgeschichte*, in progress, Stuttgart & Munich 1933–, vol. 4, col. 1032. In addition to the authors mentioned in the text (see notes 11–13 below), see also the catalogue *Alte Pinakothek München*, Munich 1983, p. 233. Admittedly, S. Herzog, "Tradition and innovation in Gossaert's Neptune and Amphitrite and Danae," *Bulletin Museum Boymans-van Beuningen* 19 (1968), p. 40, sees little relationship with the illustrations, but "That Gossaert followed the tradition of the Fulgentius Metaforalis there can be little doubt."

7 This treatise dating from around 1388 is titled *Defensorium inviolatae virginitatis beatae Mariae*, see Panofsky, op. cit. (note 2), pp. 206–07, and, in more detail, Heckscher, op. cit. (note 5), p. 196.

8 See Panofsky, op. cit. (note 2), p. 207, fig. 16, and Settis, op. cit. (note 5), p. 212, figs. 30–31. The illustrations always show her placed in a tower and illuminated by beams of light. In addition, under the influence of the late fourteenth-century writings of de Retza (who taught in Vienna), there even originated German-Austrian panels which are incorporated into altars of the Virgin (with many "foreshadowings" of her), in which a chastely clad, sleeping Danaë is to be seen, Panofsky, op. cit. (note 2), fig. 15, and Settis, op. cit. (note 5), pp. 212–13, with further bibliographical references and figs. 32–33.

9 See especially Heckscher, op. cit. (note 5), pp. 196–98.

ception of Heckscher—did make the link, however, often comparing Gossaert's *Danaë* with the figure of Mary in his *St Luke drawing the Virgin* in Prague (fig. 4). By pointing out that both women are seated on the ground, are dressed in blue cloaks and have one breast bared, they stressed that Gossaert was accentuating Danaë's humility, thus placing her in the medieval tradition of pagan prefigurations of Christian virtues,¹⁰ or even citing her as a direct parallel to the *Maria humilitatis*.¹¹ The bared breast caused Madlyn Kahr to connect her to the *Maria lactans* type as well,¹² whereas Larry Silver associated her specifically with the humble Virgin of the Annunciation (he even likened the golden rain to the beam of light, like the one coming through the window in the *Annunciation* of the *Mérode altarpiece*).¹³ The Danaë representations by Correggio and Titian were often cited to emphasize the extraordinary contrast of Gossaert's figure with the sensuous nudes of these artists.

In a few cases the above-mentioned writers drew attention to Danaë's chaste appearance: Panofsky called her "...a quite decently dressed... Danaë," while Sadja Herzog even described her as "...almost fully clothed—only one breast is bared."¹⁴ Madlyn Kahr, on the other hand, remarked that "...the breast, like her bare legs, could also be construed as sexually suggestive" (without alluding to any possible consequences), and Larry Silver even thought that Gossaert "...walks a precarious tightrope between an overt erotic appeal and a transcendent canon of beauty as the embodiment of a moral ideal."¹⁵ Craig Harbison, finally, concluded his passage on Gossaert's *Danaë* with the words: "A pure nurturing Virgin has been transformed into an object of extreme sensual beauty." Nevertheless, he also saw her primarily as a parallel to the *Maria humilitatis* type (Virgin of Humility).¹⁶ Opinions on the decency of Danaë's appearance, however, appear to diverge considerably.

The idea repeatedly stressed by Panofsky, Heckscher and many other art historians of that generation—as a



4 Jan Gossaert van Mabuse, *St Luke drawing the Virgin*. Prague, Národní Galerie

reaction to older views of the Renaissance—that many medieval notions continued to flourish undiminished, especially in the north,¹⁷ was evidently so compelling that Panofsky's interpretation was not only accepted without reservation, but was even subscribed to with ever-increasing conviction. My question now is whether we ought to look at Gossaert's *Danaë* from a completely different perspective, one that links it more closely to the Italian paintings of Danaë of slightly later date. Neither the outward appearance of Gossaert's painting, the milieu in which the work originated, nor Gossaert's other paintings of mythological representa-

10 Herzog, op. cit. (note 6), p. 40.

11 In addition to the authors cited in notes 12 and 13, see also J. Snyder, *Northern Renaissance art*, New York 1985, p. 424.

12 M. Kahr, "Danaë: virtuous, voluptuous, venal woman," *Art Bulletin* 60 (1978), p. 46.

13 L. Silver, "Figure nude, historie e poesie": Jan Gossaert and the renaissance nude in the Netherlands," in W.T. Kloek et al., *Renaissance en reformatie en de kunst in de Noordelijke Nederlanden, Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 37 (1986), pp. 19–20. See also C. Harbison,

The art of the northern Renaissance, London 1995, pp. 162–63.

14 Panofsky, op. cit. (note 2), p. 206: "...eine recht dezent bekleidete... Danae"; Herzog, op. cit. (note 6), p. 40.

15 Kahr, op. cit. (note 12), p. 45; Silver, op. cit. (note 13), p. 20.

16 Harbison, op. cit. (note 13), p. 163.

17 Typical of this are pronouncements by Kahr, op. cit. (note 12), note 18, and Harbison, op. cit. (note 13), p. 162, who see this *Danaë* as an example of the continuing adherence to medieval ideas in the north.

tions can, in my opinion, justify the above-mentioned interpretations.

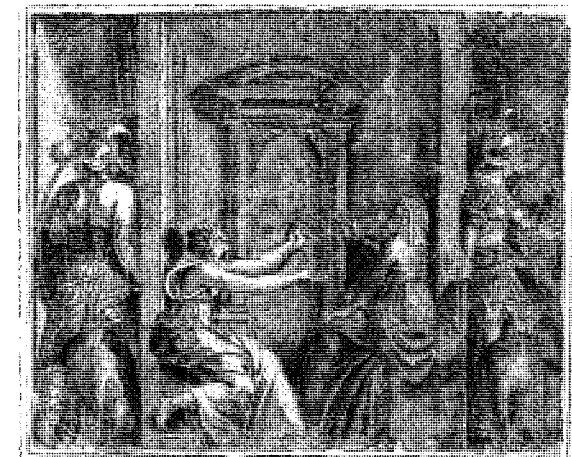
Gossaert's large panel (114 x 95 cm), dated 1527 and preserved in the Alte Pinakothek in Munich, is the first independent painting with a depiction of the imprisoned Danaë being impregnated by Jupiter in the form of golden rain. The painting originated only three to five years before Correggio's work, which was painted around 1531. Gossaert's *Danaë* therefore heads a long series of paintings, several of which—those by Correggio, Titian and Rembrandt in particular—are among the most sensual paintings in the history of European art. This, as we shall see, is no coincidence.

If, already familiar with the famous Danaës by Correggio, Titian and Rembrandt, one looks back at Gossaert's painting, then his Danaë does make a rather timid impression. But is this justifiable? If one compares her with medieval illustrations, then one cannot help but notice—in spite of Panofsky and Heckscher's certainty—that the similarities are minimal. A comparison of Gossaert's figure with his Virgin in the *St Luke* altarpiece (fig. 4) reveals just how profound the differences are: Danaë's naked, spread legs seem to make any comparison unnecessary. The erotic effect is strengthened by the cloak gliding off her shoulders and the gesture she makes with her hands, which can be interpreted either as catching the golden rain in her cloak or as pulling it back to let the golden rain enter. Moreover, her breast has no reason to be bared, in contrast to that of Mary in *St Luke drawing the Virgin*, whereas its nakedness is much more strongly accentuated—by the dark ribbon hanging from her neck, for example. Finally, her glance, with wide-open eyes and slightly open mouth, in no way indicates virginal humility.

Danaë's nakedness was not in the least self-evident at the time: in every late-medieval precedent which Gossaert could have known—and these would have been illustrations—she was completely clothed. Viewed from this angle, therefore, his Danaë was not at all so "decently dressed." And even if we look at two sixteenth-century Italian Danaës in paintings originating before Gos-



5 Baldassare Peruzzi, *Danaë*, fresco. Rome, Villa Farnesina, Sala del Fregio

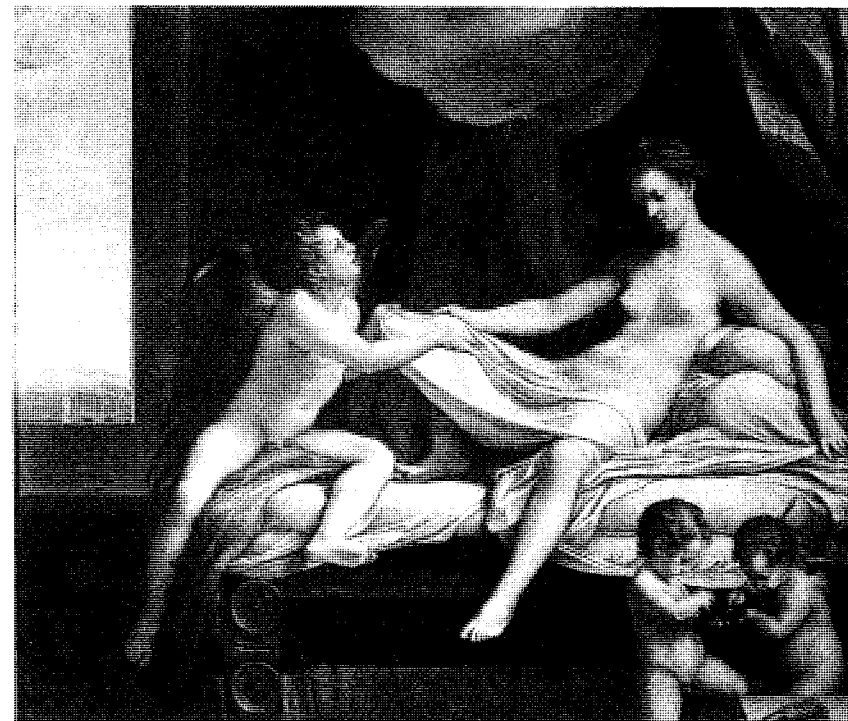


6 Anonymous sixteenth-century draftsman after a fresco by Polidoro da Caravaggio, *Danaë*. Stockholm, Nationalmuseum

saert's work—which he could not possibly have known—they prove to be completely dressed. The first is a sleeping Danaë stretched out on a canopy bed by Baldassare Peruzzi (fig. 5), a fresco—part of a frieze dating from around 1510 that includes a number of Jupiter's loves—in the Sala di Fregio of the Villa Farnesina.¹⁸ The second is a lost fresco by Polidoro da Caravaggio known

ly nude for the first time. Settis's elaborate interpretation of this "Danaë" as a chaste example of the tides of fortune turning for the better (Danaë as the one chosen for divine impregnation) seems very contrived to me (the motto on the medallion reads "hoc fugienti fortuna dicatis," "you must attribute this to fleeting fortune").

7 Correggio, *Danaë*. Rome, Galleria Borghese



only through later drawings, which was part of a fresco cycle of around 1525 representing the life of Perseus, Danaë's son (fig. 6). There a seated Danaë, again mostly dressed, stretches out her arms toward the golden rain.¹⁹

In comparing all these works we are in fact struck by the daring of Gossaert's *Danaë*. Not only is she more naked, but her demeanor even suggests that this is the moment of impregnation. The profound difference between this representation and the others mentioned above simultaneously demonstrates the work's surprising similarity in a number of respects to Correggio's

Danaë, which was painted about four years later and has always been viewed as presenting the greatest possible contrast (fig. 7).²⁰ When one considers that these two Danaës originated independently from one another, and observes how their style was formed and developed against a background of completely different formal and technical stylistic conventions—and these were crucial in determining the totally different ways in which the image of a beautiful young woman was rendered—then the similarities are more remarkable than the differences. The seated pose turned three-quarters toward

¹⁹ See R. Kultzen, "Die Malereien Polidoros da Caravaggio im Giardino del Bufalo in Rom," *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 9 (1959-60), pp. 99-120. There are two anonymous, sixteenth-century drawn copies, Kultzen, figs. 7 and 11, and one by Füssli, Kultzen, fig. 8. Remarkable, indeed, is the unmistakable relationship—as yet unnoticed, as far as I know—between Danaë's pose and that on a gem (amethyst) of the fourth century BC, where she also sits with her hands outstretched toward the golden rain; see A.B. Cook, *Zeus: a study in ancient religion*, 3 vols., Cambridge 1914-40, vol. 3, p. 470, fig. 308.

²⁰ Recent publications have all given a dating of between 1530 and 1532 (an eighteenth-century print by Desrochers after this painting even bears the inscription "Antonius Allegri Corigiensis pinxit

1531"). See, among others, E. Verheyen, "Correggio's amori di Giove," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 29 (1966), pp. 160-92; C. Gould, *The paintings of Correggio*, London 1976, pp. 130-35 and 270-71; G. Di Giampaolo and A. Muzzi, *Correggio: catalogo completo dei dipinti*, Florence 1993, pp. 128-29; M.G. Bernardini, "La Danae del Correggio e il mito della 'luce dorata'," in idem (ed.), *La Danae e la pioggia d'oro: un capolavoro di Antonio Allegri detto il Correggio restaurato*, Rome 1991, pp. 15-26; L. Ventura, in C. Cieri Via (ed.), exhib. cat. *Immagini degli dei: mitologia e collezionismo tra '500 e '600*, Lecce (Fondazione Memmo) 1996-97, pp. 302-03; M. Fabianski, "A fresh look at Correggio's Danae and its figural sources," *Paragone* 47 (1996), nrs. 8-10, pp. 90-107.

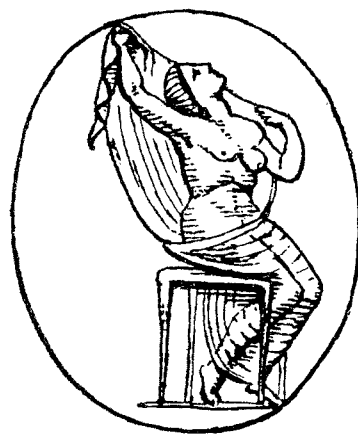
¹⁸ See C.L. Frommel, *Baldassare Peruzzi als Maler und Zeichner*, Munich 1967-68, pp. 61-64. A medallion dating from 1495 bears the image of Elisabetta Gonzaga on one side and a recumbent nude on the other, which Settis, op. cit. (note 5), pp. 207-08, interpreted as Danaë. If this does indeed represent a Danaë, then she was here rendered near-



8 Danaë, drawn after a fresco from Pompeii, Casa di Pansa. Naples, Galleria Nazionale



9 Danaë, drawn after a silver ring, fifth century BC. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts



10 Danaë, drawn after a chalcedony gemstone, fourth century BC. Present whereabouts unknown

the viewer, the body placed at an angle in the room, the legs spread with the naked left leg placed diagonally—these are striking similarities, to be sure. Also the way in which the garment covering her lap is held up by a movement seeming also to suggest that the cloak is being drawn away from the body (in Correggio's case, Cupid lends a helping hand) and the golden raindrops falling straight down from a little cloud into Danaë's lap—all this should cause us to be more surprised at the elements linking these works than at the differences between them.²¹

Both works originated in a highly cultured, courtly milieu, where there was much interest in the latest humanist trends. The work by Correggio was commissioned by Federico II Gonzaga and was most likely given by him as a present to Charles V, along with three other

loves of Jupiter.²² Gossaert's Danaë was painted at the other end of Charles's empire. It is not known for which art-lover Gossaert made his painting, though we have a good idea of the circles for which he worked: the highest nobility—faithful supporters of the Habsburg emperor—who kept courts based on the Italian model.²³

Philip of Burgundy, the illegitimate son of Philip the Good, was Gossaert's patron for 15 years. This admiral of the Burgundian-Habsburg fleet, as well as Bishop of Utrecht and Lord of Utrecht from 1517 onwards, took a profound interest in classical antiquity and surrounded himself with humanists and artists. He died in 1524, several years before this painting was made. His old friend Philip of Cleves, Lord of Ravestein, died in 1528, a year after this work was completed. According to the inventories of their estates, both were lovers of portray-

himself. A connection with his marriage in 1531 to Margherita Paleologo seems highly likely.

²³ Compare the idea, put forward by Hessel Miedema and Bob van den Boogert, that the dissemination of the new "classicizing" Renaissance forms is connected with the sphere of influence of the Habsburgs; see H. Miedema, "Die Niederlande: wieso Renaissance?", in G. Kauffmann (ed.), *Die Renaissance im Blick der Nationen Europas*, Wiesbaden 1991, pp. 405–28, esp. pp. 414–15, and B. van den Boogert, "De triomfen van de keizer: de verheerlijking van Karel V en de toepassing van antieke motieven in de Nederlandse kunst," in idem (ed.), exhib. cat. *Maria van Hongarije: koningin tussen keizers en kunstenaars*, Utrecht (Rijksmuseum Het Catharijneconvent), 's-Hertogenbosch (Noordbrabant Museum) & Zwolle 1993, pp. 220–33, esp. pp. 226–27.

²¹ By some quirk of fate both works were presumably in the same collection at one time. Rudolf II bought the painting by Correggio in 1602 (it remained in Prague until 1648); see S. Staccioli, "L'avventurosa storia della Danaë," in Bernardini, op. cit. (note 20), pp. 11–14. The painting by Gossaert was probably to be found there as well, see cat. *Alte Pinakothek München: Erläuterungen zu den ausgestellten Gemälden*, Munich 1983, p. 224. Rudolf also owned a version of Titian's Danaë, which he had received in 1600. For the Viennese version see H.E. Wehly, *The paintings of Titian*, vol. 3, *The mythological & historical paintings*, London 1975, p. 135.

²² For the discussions regarding this see the literature mentioned in note 20. It is fairly certain that the four *Loves of Jupiter* were given by Federico II Gonzaga to Charles V (who visited Mantua in 1530 and 1532), and it seems likely that Federico originally had them made for



11 Danaë, drawn after a bronze mirror, fourth century BC. London, British Museum



12 Danaë, tile with graffito, fourth century AD. Berlin, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz



13 Danaë, cake mold, third century AD. Aquinum, Museo Archeologico

als of amorous gods, and especially of mythological female nudes, such as depictions of Venus, or of Venus and Mars—works chiefly supplied by Jan Gossaert.²⁴ After the deaths of these two gentlemen there were in Gossaert's milieu other members of the nobility who kept similar courtly households, such as Hendrik III of Nassau (from whose third wife, Mencía de Mendoza, Gossaert appears to have received a stipend during the last year of his life),²⁵ Christian II, former king of Denmark and brother-in-law of Charles V, who lived in exile in Zeeland, and finally Philip's nephew, Adolf of Burgundy, Lord of Veere and Beveren.²⁶ According to van

Mander, Gossaert served at Adolf's court for several years (probably from 1524 onwards), where he supposedly "deceived" Charles V with a witty *trompe l'oeil*, when the latter was in Middelburg visiting Adolf.²⁷

The only explanation for the similarities between the paintings by Correggio and Gossaert seems to me to be that both were intended as a revival of the famous Danaë depictions of classical antiquity, and were both derived from similar antique examples. Although it has usually been assumed that there could have been no such examples,²⁸ this possibility nevertheless deserves closer consideration.

²⁴ For the mythological works made by Gossaert for Philip of Burgundy see J. Sterk, *Philips van Bourgondië (1465–1524), bisschop van Utrecht als protagonist van de renaissance: zijn leven en maecenaat*, Zutphen 1980, esp. pp. 127–46 and 218–68. For relations with Philip of Cleves see pp. 14, 72–73, 77–78, 83–84, 125–26. The latter must have received two large paintings—one with a nude Mars and Venus and the other with "une belle fille qui se désabille," probably both made by Gossaert—as gifts from Philip of Burgundy. Other representations of this sort which he owned included two paintings of *Venus*, a *Diana and Actaeon*, no fewer than four paintings of *Lucretia*, a *Cleopatra*, another female nude not further specified, two depictions of an unspecified nude couple, as well as a naked woman with an old man (the last three were to be found in "La chambre des baigneries"), and "une femme qui fait baisser son cu" à son mary." For the inventories of Wynendale Castle see J. Finot, *Inventaire sommaire des archives départementales antérieures à 1790. Nord. Archives civiles. Série B. Chambre des comptes de Lille*, Lille 1895, pp. 422–35, and G. Denhaene, "Les collections de Philips de Clèves, le goût pour le nu et la renaissance aux Pays-Bas," *Bulletin de l'institut historique Belge de Rome* 45 (1975), pp. 309–42. Both men also possessed impressive libraries containing many works of classical literature.

²⁵ See J.K. Steppe, "Het sterfjaar van Jan Gossaert," in H. Pauwels et al., *Jan Gossaert genaamd Mabuse*, exhib. cat. Rotterdam (Museum Boy-

mans-van Beuningen) & Bruges (Groeningemuseum) 1965, pp. 33–38.
²⁶ See Sterk, op. cit. (note 24), *passim*, for their contacts with Philip of Burgundy and Gossaert.

²⁷ K. van Mander, *Het leven der doorluchtighe Nederlandsche en Hooghduytsche schilders*, in *Het schilder-boeck*, Haarlem 1604, fols. 225v–26r. Gossaert "deceived" the emperor with a cloak of fake damask painted on paper, which gave the emperor great pleasure. H. Miedema, *Karel van Mander, The lives of the illustrious Netherlandish and German painters*, in progress, Doornspijk 1994, vol. 3, pp. 152–53, assumes that Gossaert was in the service of Adolf from 1524 until his death in 1532.

²⁸ Panofsky, op. cit. (note 2), p. 207, and Kahr, op. cit. (note 12), p. 45. R. Zapperi, "Alessandro Farnese, Giovanni Della Casa and Titian's Danaë in Naples," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 54 (1991), p. 165, however, pointed to the possibility that antique gems were the basis of Correggio's composition of Danaë, and also refers to the two gems reproduced in A. Furtwängler, *Die antiken Gemmen. Geschichte der Steinschneidekunst im klassischen Altertum*, 3 vols., Leipzig & Berlin 1900, vol. 1, p. XIV, nr. 25, and p. LXIII, nr. 7. Both Settis, op. cit. (note 5), pp. 226–27, and Fabianski, op. cit. (note 20), p. 93 have opposed this view, though in my opinion not convincingly. The only one to suggest that Gossaert could have seen an antique example was Heckscher, op. cit. (note 5), p. 192, and figs. 4–5.

In those days, people must certainly have been aware that portrayals of Danaë were a very popular subject in antiquity. Pliny mentions a *Danaë* by the renowned Nicias (ca. 350–300 BC), a painter whom Pliny introduced with the statement that he concentrated on painting women in particular.²⁹ Moreover, they may have read Martial's witty epigram on a painting of Danaë.³⁰ Much better known, however, and often cited in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was the mention of a painting of Danaë in Terence's comedy *The eunuch*.³¹ Both Martial and Terence probably had in mind a composition such as that by Nicias or a derivation thereof.

The popularity of this theme in antiquity is confirmed by vase paintings, murals and mosaics,³² works which were unknown in the Renaissance, however. A mural like the one in the Casa di Pansa in Pompeii (fig. 8) probably reflects the once-famous work by Nicias.³³ The seated pose, the bared upper body, the held-up tails of the drapery, the spread legs and the drops falling from the cloud directly above Danaë are elements which we also noted in the Danaë paintings by Gossaert and Correggio.

Although a portrayal such as this was not known, people might well have been aware of gems, medallions and coins, small *objets d'art* which would often have reflected motifs from the high arts of painting and sculpture. A Danaë, standing or seated, who holds up the edges of her skirt while receiving the golden rain, appears to occur from the fifth century BC onwards (fig. 9),³⁴ and the bare-breasted Danaë, again standing or seated, from

the fourth century BC (fig. 10).³⁵ All these elements are united on the back of a bronze mirror (fig. 11), as well as on a bronze coin dating from the time of Hadrian. In the first case she receives help from Cupid and is accompanied by a terrified servant.³⁶ A voluptuous Danaë on a late-antique, fourth-century tile with graffito from Rome still shows the motif of holding up the tails of the garment and even brings to mind Correggio's painting (fig. 12).³⁷ And finally, on a terracotta cake mold dating from the third century AD, a completely naked Danaë is portrayed in an almost pornographic way (fig. 13).

Much of what was known then has been lost, and much of what we know now would have been unknown then. It seems highly likely to me, though, that both Gossaert and Correggio knew a representation on a gem, medallion or other small *objet d'art*, on which the same motifs are often to be seen. Both frequented circles of eager collectors of antique medallions and gems. Not only did Federico II Gonzaga own great numbers of them (most of which had been collected by his mother, Isabella d'Este, and his uncle, Cardinal Francesco),³⁸ but Philip of Burgundy also had a considerable collection, the basis of which had undoubtedly been laid during his travels in Italy (1508–09).³⁹ Gossaert had gone along on that trip to make drawings of antique monuments.

At Philip's court—first at Souburg Castle and later at Duurstede Castle—Gossaert was given the specific task of reviving antiquity through his depictions, in close collaboration with Philip himself and his young court

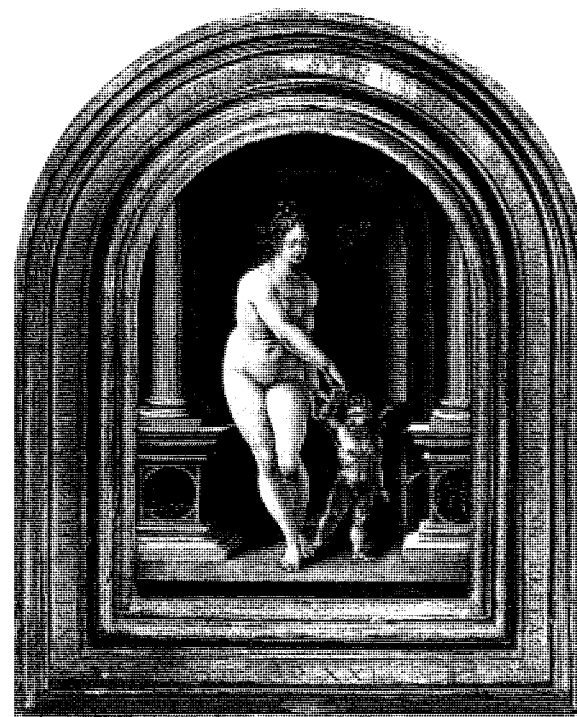
(carbuncle); Settis, op. cit. (note 5), fig. 51.

³⁶ See S. Papaspyridi-Karouzou, "Sur un miroir du Musée Britannique," *Bulletin de Correspondence Hellénique* 70 (1946), pp. 436–44. Regarding the coin see Cook, op. cit. (note 19), fig. 311.

³⁷ Panofsky, op. cit. (note 2), fig. 10, had already reproduced this graffito tile, strangely enough only because of the circle around the head of Jupiter, which in his opinion could indicate that this representation had a Christian connotation. This possibility can be excluded, however, considering the voluptuous nakedness of Danaë and the fact that nothing in the texts of this period by such Christian authors as Lactantius, Augustine and Fulgentius points in this direction. The story was cited precisely as an example of pagan amorality; see also Settis, op. cit. (note 5), p. 226.

³⁸ See J.M. Fletcher, "Isabella d'Este: patron and collector," in J. Chambers and J. Martineau (eds.), exhib. cat. *Splendours of the Gonzaga*, London (Victoria & Albert Museum) 1981–82, pp. 51–63.

³⁹ Sterk, op. cit. (note 24), pp. 22, 101, 230 and 293. Philip owned 138 or 139 antique medals, coins and cameos.



14 Jan Gossaert van Mabuse, *Venus and Cupid*, 1521. Brussels, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts



15 Jan Gossaert van Mabuse, *Hercules and Deianeira*, 1517. Birmingham, Barber Institute of Fine Arts

humanist, Gerrit Geldenhouer, called Noviomagus.⁴⁰ As far as paintings were concerned, this resulted chiefly in mythological nudes, of which a few survive, such as the large *Neptune and Amphitrite* in Berlin and the small *Venus and Cupid* in Brussels (fig. 14).⁴¹ In addition, we know several works of this type which ended up in the collections of others of his acquaintance, such as the *Salmacis and Hermaphroditus* in Rotterdam and the *Hercules and Deianeira*, now in Birmingham (fig. 15).⁴²

It appears from Philip's inventory that he had several paintings which he must have valued chiefly for their

erotic content. In a room that he probably used as a study there was a large *Venus and Cupid*, in front of which hung a blue and yellow curtain.⁴³ Hanging in a small, sumptuously appointed house where, as Sterk remarked, Philip probably amused himself in the company of young ladies, were two "exquisite scenes with the *boelscap*": presumably depictions of Venus and Mars making love.⁴⁴ Venus and Mars was also the theme first mentioned by Geldenhouer, when, in a poem in praise of painting written in 1514, he listed the pleasant subjects painting could visualize.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ See Sterk, op. cit. (note 24), pp. 95–149.

⁴¹ Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (formerly in the Bode Museum) and Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Brussels respectively; see, among others, Sterk, op. cit. (note 24), pp. 117–22 and 133–36.

⁴² Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam and The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, Birmingham respectively. See, among others, Sterk, op. cit. (note 24), pp. 125–32.

⁴³ Sterk, op. cit. (note 24), pp. 56, 137, 227, 285. Sterk thinks that the curtain did not hang in front of the painting for the sake of decency; in my opinion, however, this would certainly have been the reason.

⁴⁴ Sterk, op. cit. (note 24), pp. 58, 136, 264, 315: "costelicke taefreelkens van de boelscap." One of the paintings had a protective cover or case. In my opinion Sterk interpreted the "boelscap" incorrectly as a portrayal of Venus; the word could mean either a loose woman or the act of making love (especially extramarital love). It is therefore more likely that the clerk was referring to lovemaking, which makes a depiction of Venus and Mars the obvious interpretation.

⁴⁵ For the text translated from the Latin see Sterk, op. cit. (note 24), p. 111.

²⁹ Pliny, *Natural history*, 10 vols., London & Cambridge (Mass.) 1949–52, vol. 9, trans. A. Rackham, p. 357: "qui diligentissime mulieres pinxit."

³⁰ Martial, *Epigrams*, trans. W.C.A. Ker, 2 vols., London & Cambridge (Mass.) 1961, vol. 2, p. 501 (see note 60 below). Statius, *Thebais*, 287, also mentions a "Danaë culpata sinus."

³¹ Terence, trans. J. Sargeant, 2 vols., London & Cambridge (Mass.) 1959–83, vol. 1, pp. 293–95.

³² See especially Cook, op. cit. (note 19), vol. 3, pp. 455–78, figs. 293–301, and Settis, op. cit. (note 5), figs. 45–47, 49.

³³ Cook, op. cit. (note 19), p. 462; Cook also assumed that the statements by Martial and Terence referred to the composition by Nicias. Similar poses are also found on Boeotian vases dating from the fourth century BC, see Settis, op. cit. (note 5), figs. 46 and 49.

³⁴ Cook, op. cit. (note 19), fig. 306 (a silver ring) and 307 (a scarab), Furtwängler, op. cit. (note 28), vol. 2, pl. 61, nr. 36, and pl. 63, nr. 7 (scarabs).

³⁵ Cook, op. cit. (note 19), fig. 309 (chalcedony); the same in Furtwängler, op. cit. (note 28), vol. 2, pl. 14, nr. 25, and pl. 34, nr. 10

In the same poem Geldenhouer compared the artists on whom Philip bestowed commissions with Parrhasius, Zeuxis and Apelles—painters of antiquity who, as he says, deserved true fame, were much-loved by princes, and were praised in the songs of poets.⁴⁶ He was doubtless referring to Jacopo de' Barbari and Jan Gossaert. When he wrote in 1516 about the painters who worked for Philip at Souburg, he spoke of de' Barbari and Gossaert as “the Zeuxis and Apelles of our day.”⁴⁷ In a text dating from 1529 the selfsame Geldenhouer called Gossaert “the Apelles of our century.”⁴⁸ The artist himself must therefore have been very conscious indeed that he was following in the footsteps of the classical painters, especially Apelles. In this milieu they must also have been aware that the fame of Apelles, who supposedly surpassed all other painters of antiquity, was based primarily on his ability to paint women with unparalleled charm and grace: it was this observation that formed the opening of Pliny's long account of Apelles,⁴⁹ whose most renowned works were paintings of the naked Venus,⁵⁰ of which subject there is still a painting known by Gossaert (fig. 14).

Guicciardini's statement made in 1567, repeated a year later by Vasari and in 1604 yet again by van Mander—that Gossaert was the first Netherlander coming from Italy to introduce the art of painting “historie & poesie con figure nude”—probably reflects an opinion already current in Gossaert's day.⁵¹ Reviving and competing with the painting of antiquity, as Gossaert's task was explicitly defined when he was working for Philip of Burgundy at Souburg, must have meant primarily the

painting of “poesie con figure nude.” These were the very subjects occurring in large numbers in Pliny's well-known accounts of painters like Apelles, Zeuxis, Parrhasius and many others. Such depictions could therefore boast of great prestige, which also sanctioned their portrayal.

One of them was Danaë, of whom, as already mentioned, there had been a famous painting by Nicias, while Martial had written an epigram on a painting of this theme. It was also a subject, according to Ovid's account in the *Metamorphoses*, which was depicted on the tapestry with which Arachne challenged Minerva, successfully but to her everlasting misfortune. There it was one of the many scenes of innocent young women who were deceived by Jupiter and other gods of Olympus.⁵²

Through Terence's mention of a painting of Danaë, however, it became more than just one of the many appealing classical subjects to be imitated and emulated. Terence described in *The eunuch* how a young man named Chaerea recounts that, disguised as a eunuch, he had managed to enter the house of a courtesan, where, as he had hoped, he was left alone with a young girl, still a virgin, with whom he had fallen in love. On the wall of the room where they were sitting hung a painting with a depiction of Jupiter descending as golden rain into Danaë's lap. Looking at this painting he became aroused and thought that if the supreme ruler of the gods was permitted to do such a thing, why should he, a mere mortal, not be allowed to imitate him? Incited by this painting he then raped the girl.⁵³

vols., Florence 1568, vol. 3, p. 858. Van Mander, op. cit. (note 27), fol. 225v. Guicciardini refers simply to the painting of nudes as something new, distinguishing between “historie” and “poesie”: biblical history paintings with nudes (Adam and Eve, Bathsheba, etc.) as opposed to mythological stories and other poetic “fabrications.” Vasari misconstrues this somewhat: he interprets it as meaning that Gossaert had introduced the true manner of making history paintings with nudes, as well as the painting of “poesie” (meaning in the first place mythological subjects taken from the poetic fables of antiquity). Van Mander adopted this from him: “...en te maken Historien vol naeckte beelden, en alderley Poeterijen” (“...and to make histories full of nudes, and all kinds of subjects from poetic fables”). It seems to me not entirely correct to translate this with “pictures full of nudes and all kinds of allegories,” as is done in Miedema, op. cit. (note 27), vol. 1, p. 161.

⁵² Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. F.J. Muller, 2 vols., London & New York 1928, vol. 1, p. 297; together with Europa, Asteria, Leda, Antiope, Alcmena et al.

⁵³ Terence, cit. (note 31).

This is a passage which must have been known to many in the sixteenth century, in the first place because Terence's comedies—if the large number of editions starting in the early sixteenth century (and their use in the Latin schools) is anything to go by—were undoubtedly among the most frequently read classical literature.⁵⁴ This passage in particular, however, became famous because Augustine quoted it no less than four times: in the *Confessions*, in *The city of God* and in his *Letters*.⁵⁵ It was one of his favorite examples of the scandalous nature of the many lascivious fables about pagan gods: evil inventions, so he said, which, as Terence had clearly shown, kindled the flames of passion and spurred one on to imitate them (in this case via a portrayal of the story). In *The city of God* he cited the Danaë story yet again—along with that of the rape of Ganymede—as an example of the outrageous and slanderous stories that were made up about the gods. He also remarked in passing that the fabrication that Jupiter, in the form of golden rain, lay with Danaë naturally means that female chastity is easily corrupted by gold.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ See P.J.M. van Alphen, *Nederlandse Terentius-vertalingen in de 16de en 17de eeuw* (diss.), Nijmegen 1954, pp. 1–12, and P. Minderaa and C.A. Zaalberg, *G.A. Bredero's Moortje*, Leiden 1984, pp. 10–13. Comedies by Terence were so popular at the Latin schools because they were seen by humanists as the prime model of pure and elegant Latin. From the beginning of the sixteenth century onwards, countless anthologies and editions were published—most of them intended for use in schools—of all the comedies together and of *The eunuch* separately.

⁵⁵ St Augustine's *Confessions*, 2 vols., London & Cambridge (Mass.) 1950–51, vol. 1, trans. W. Watts, pp. 47–51; St Augustine, *The city of God against the pagans*, London & Cambridge (Mass.) 1957–60, 7 vols., vol. 1, trans. G.E. McCracken, pp. 163–67, and vol. 5, trans. E.M. Sanford and W.M. Green, pp. 407–11; St Augustine, *Select letters*, London & Cambridge (Mass.) 1965, trans. J.H. Baxter, pp. 157–59.

⁵⁶ St Augustine, *City of god*, cit. (note 55), vol. 5, p. 409: “...ubi intellegitur pudicitia mulieris auro fuisse corrupta.”

⁵⁷ Horace, *Odes and epodes*, trans. C.E. Bennett, London & Cambridge (Mass.) 1927, p. 233: “Tower of bronze, doors of oak, and the strict guard of watch-dogs had quite protected imprisoned Danaë from nocturnal lovers, had not Jupiter and Venus laughed at Acrisius, anxious keeper of the hidden maiden. For they knew the way would be safe and open, when the god had turned to gold. Gold loves to make its way through the midst of sentinels and to break through rocks, for 'tis mightier than the thunderbolt.” G. Boccaccio, *Genealogia deorum gentilium*, ed. V. Romano, 2 vols., Bari 1951, vol. 1, p. 93 (chs. 32 and 33), and vol. 2, p. 772 (ch. 9) (the last reference is to Terence's story). Furthermore, G. Boccaccio, *De casibus illustrium virorum*, Bern 1539, vol. 1, fol. xiii. One also finds this interpretation in various epigrams in the *Greek anthology* (nrs. 33, 34, 217, e.g. “Zeus bought Danaë for a gold

This interpretation, pointing to the supreme power of gold and money, had been the standard reading of the story since the time of Horace. Often repeated in early Christian times, it flourished again in countless variations after the publication of Giovanni Boccaccio's influential *Genealogia deorum gentilium*.⁵⁷ In the sixteenth century it was this account which recurred time and again in mythological handbooks and commentaries on the *Metamorphoses*. The image of Pudicitia which arose in the late middle ages and was championed by Panofsky, was never very widespread, and as far as I know played no role in the sixteenth century.⁵⁸ The sort of theological allegorization such as that proposing Danaë as a prefiguration of the Virgin, which must have been quite well known in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries through the *Ovide moralisé* and Pierre Bersuire's *Ovidius moralizatus*, had meanwhile fallen from grace in humanist circles. Erasmus, highly thought of in Gossaert's circle, roundly rejected such mixing of the divine and the pagan, and in serious, sixteenth-century commentaries on myths such interpretations of the Danaë

coin. I can't give more than Zeus did”) and it was adopted and elaborated upon in early Christian times by the mythographers Fulgentius, 1, 19: “...when Danaë was seduced by a golden shower” it was, he explains “not rain but coins,” and Lactantius, 1, 2: “violating Danaë he [Jupiter] poured golden coins into her lap”; see Kahr, op. cit. (note 12), p. 45, note 17. This was continued in the middle ages in commentaries on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which is why this explanation ended up in the first printed edition of Ovid translated into Italian, *Ovidio Metamorphoseos vulgare*, Venice 1497 (which was derived from Giovanni del Vergilio's fourteenth-century *Metamorphoses* adaptation in Latin prose). It also occurs in the first French edition of Ovid, published in 1484, in this case, however, next to that of Danaë as a prefiguration of the Virgin (see note 59 below).

⁵⁸ In the first edition of the *Metamorphoses* printed in the vernacular, Mansion's edition of 1484 (see note 59) and the *Ovidio Metamorphoseos vulgare* of 1497 (see note 57), which were both derived from renowned and usually widely known fourteenth-century interpretations, the Pudicitia allegory does not occur. A special case is the triumph of Danaë in Francesco Colonna's *Hyperotomachia Poliphili*, Venice 1499 (reprint New York & London 1976), fols. k.viii-v and lr-v; see also G. Pozzio and L.A. Ciapponi (eds.), 2 vols., Padua 1964, vol. 2, p. 137 with commentary. This is part of a series of triumphs of Jupiter's loves (the others are Leda and Europa), who represent “gli affetti e effetti di amore vario.” Here Danaë is characterized as a chaste maiden and her triumphal chariot is pulled by six unicorns. The context in which Danaë appears here and the neo-Platonic views on which this curious tribute to love is based are very specific, however, and have little to do with the usual images of Danaë.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 112, 180.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 112.

⁴⁹ Pliny, op. cit. (note 29), vol. 9, p. 319. Regarding the painting of nude feminine beauty as paradigmatic of the highest goal attainable in art see E.J. Sluiter, “Venus, Visus en Pictura,” in R. Falkenburg et al., *Goltzius-studies: Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1617), Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek 42–43 (1991–92)*, Zwolle 1993, pp. 338–96, esp. pp. 361–71.

⁵⁰ This is true not only of the famous Venus, which he painted for Alexander the Great with Campaspe as his model and which was still greatly admired by the Emperor Augustus. Apelles was also working on a painting of Venus, which was supposed to surpass its predecessor, when death overcame him (“as though nature would no longer tolerate yielding in beauty to inanimate paint,” adds K. van Mander, *Het leven der oude antieke doorluchtige schilders, in Het schilder-boeck*, Haarlem 1604, fol. 80r–v; Pliny, op. cit. (note 29), vol. 9, p. 329.

⁵¹ L. Guicciardini, *Descrittione di tutti i Paesi Bassi*, Antwerp 1567, p. 98; G. Vasari, *Le vite de' piu eccellenti pittori, scultori, et architettori*, 3

story do not recur.⁵⁹

The Danaë story was therefore seen mainly as an example of the corrupting power of gold, which nothing, not even feminine honor and virtue, could withstand—obviously a suitable subject for a painting on display in the house of a courtesan, the place where the work described by Terence in *The eunuch* was hanging. For Martial as well, a painting of Danaë had been the cause of a humorous reference to mercenary love: “Why of you, Ruler of Olympus, did Danaë receive her price, if Leda unbought was kind to you?”⁶⁰ Especially through Augustine’s severe condemnation, the portrayal of this theme became the classic example of a representation capable of arousing intense erotic feelings in the viewer. At various times in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries this passage would be cited again as proof of the power of the image over the senses, particularly of the provocative effect of erotic paintings,⁶¹ and it must have been precisely this quality that made the subject so appealing. Not only could one compete with famous painters of antiquity, as a truly contemporary Apelles or Zeuxis, by portraying “poesie con figure nude,” and above all the naked female grace for which Apelles was so renowned, but it was also a challenge to vie with the classic prototype of a painting that was said to have had such a powerful effect on the senses.

59 This rejection was at last voiced officially at the Council of Trent, whereupon the “allegorical or tropological” commentaries on Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* were put on the blacklist. B. Guthmüller, *Ovidio Metamorphoseos vulgare. Formen und Funktionen der volkssprachlichen Wiedergabe klassischer Dichtung in der italienischen Renaissance*, Boppard am Rhein 1981, p. 190, pointed out that this was not a rejection of “allegorizing” in general, as Seznec thought, op. cit. (note 4), pp. 274–75, see also pp. 95–96, but of Christian allegories in particular. For Erasmus’s opinion see E. Panofsky, “Erasmus and the visual arts,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 32 (1969), pp. 211–13. Erasmus was greatly admired by Philip of Burgundy (who tried to entice him into his service) and by his court humanist Geldenhouer; see Sterk, op. cit. (note 24), pp. 52–53. Furthermore, this kind of allegorizing was strongly condemned by Martin Luther, *Ennaratio in Genesis*, XXX, 9–11, in *Werke: kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Weimar 1912–, vol. 43, p. 688, whom Geldenhouer admired early on, this putting an end to his friendship with Erasmus. See also E.J. Sluijter, *De “heydensche fabulen” in de Noordnederlandse schilderkunst, circa 1590–1670* (diss.), Leiden 1986, pp. 304–05. The comparison with the Virgin is still to be found in the *Metamorphoses* adaptation by Colard Mansion, *Cy commence Ovide*, Bruges 1484, fols. 133v–34r, which was based on the *Ovide moralisé* and *Ovidius moralizatus* by Bersuire (both dating from the first half of the fourteenth century). Such editions were severely frowned upon in humanist circles, however, see Sluijter, pp. 296–98.

If one wanted to, one could also tie it in with a cautionary moral about the corrupting power of money and the weakness of the female sex. If we were to imagine that Gossaert’s painting was accompanied by a text expressing a moral (and we know that this was sometimes the case from Geldenhouer’s account, who said that Gossaert was assisted at Souburg by poets employed to provide the paintings with verses),⁶² then such a humanist versifier would undoubtedly have chosen in this case an ingenious paraphrase of the moral expressed by Horace, Augustine and Boccaccio. This, after all, was constantly repeated in sixteenth-century myth commentaries, and is also incorporated into the inscriptions of all Danaë prints bearing a text which were produced later on in the sixteenth century.⁶³ In this way Danaë, too, could be assimilated into the long series of seductive, sinful or fallen women which were such popular subjects in the sixteenth century—such as the women in other mythological love scenes depicted by Gossaert: the lustful Salmacis, the jealous Deianeira, and Venus, the embodiment of female temptation and the instigator of it all. According to Boccaccio, Danaë also showed that women were the most greedy of beings, and fickle, unfaithful and wanton to boot.⁶⁴

A gem or medallion would have been the starting point in devising a composition that would ultimately

60 Martial, op. cit. (note 30), vol. 2, p. 500: “Danae picta. Cur a te pretium Danae, regnator Olympi, accepit, gratis si tibi Leda dedit?”

61 C. Ginzburg, “Titian, Ovid, and sixteenth-century codes for erotic illustration,” in idem, *Clues, myths, and the historical method*, Baltimore & London 1989, p. 81. See also S. Grohè, *Rembrandt’s mythologische Historien*, Cologne 1996, pp. 249–56 (Ph.D. diss., Bochum 1992), who voiced these views with respect to Rembrandt’s painting, while I did the same regarding Goltzius’s *Danaë* in Sluijter, op. cit. (note 49), p. 378, esp. note 202. See also J. de Jong, “Prelaten en naakte ledematen: intenties, waarderend en veroordeling van Titiaans Danaë,” *Akt* 17 (1993) 2, pp. 4–8.

62 Sterk, op. cit. (note 24), p. 101. A nice example of the combination of text and image in a painting by Gossaert is the oft-cited *Venus* in Brussels (fig. 14), which has a double frame with a verse in Latin on the outermost frame: “Nate effrons homines superos que lacessere suet non matri parcis: parcito ne pereas” (“Shameless son, you who are used to vexing men and gods, you don’t spare your mother: stop at once so that you don’t come to your ruin.”)

63 Compare the prints with *Danaë* depictions by Giulio Bonasone (fig. 17; see also note 72), Johannes Wierix (fig. 23, see also note 111), and Frans Menton after Frans Floris (fig. 26; see also note 111).

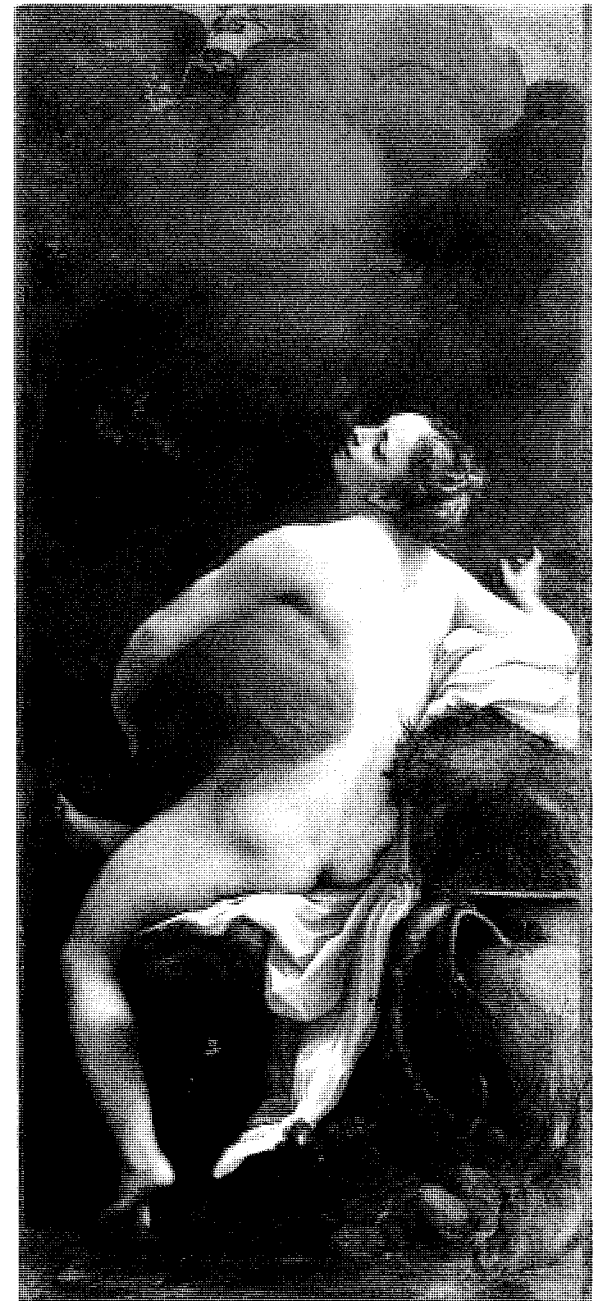
64 Boccaccio, *De casibus*, cit. (note 57), vol. 1, fol. xii: “Avarissimum quippe animal est foemina, iracundum, instabile, infidele, libidinosum,” which is quoted by Heckscher, op. cit. (note 5), p. 194.

have to compete with the great paintings upon which these small *objets d’art* from antiquity were based. This idea must have occurred at practically the same time to both Gossaert, Correggio and/or their patrons. Correggio—who employed new forms and techniques developed mainly in Venice and Lombardy to render the human body and human skin convincingly—achieved a much more sensual effect than did Gossaert. Yet this should not detract from the fact that the latter must also have striven to do the same, using the methods given him by his own background.

It is remarkable that Erasmus, in his *De Ciceronianus* of 1528, cited the representation of Danaë as an example, when, in his discourse criticizing unquestioning “Ciceronianism,” he complained about lovers and connoisseurs of antiquity who were no longer interested in Christian images and representations, showing interest and admiration only for what had been produced by pagans, including the most trifling medallions and inscriptions.⁶⁵ They justified this by citing the immense prestige enjoyed at that time by all things antique, but Erasmus said this was only a front, a pretext to lead innocent young people astray. In the “sanctuaries” of such Ciceronians one would find no representations of the Crucifixion, the Holy Trinity, or the apostles. After all, they found Jupiter raining down into Danaë’s lap much more attractive a theme than Gabriel announcing the incarnation of God to the Virgin, and Ganymede being abducted by the eagle more appealing than Christ’s Ascension.⁶⁶ Erasmus’s mention of Danaë was of course an implicit reference to Terence and Augustine. Moreover, Augustine had already cited Danaë and Ganymede together when railing against the scandalousness of pagan fables. What both of them could have had in mind was the existence of a passage regarding a portray-

65 W. Welzig, *Erasmus von Rotterdam, Ausgewählte Schriften: lateinisch und deutsch*, 8 vols., Darmstadt 1967–80, vol. 7, *Dialogus cui titulus Ciceronianus sive de optimo dicendi genere / Der Ciceronianer oder der beste Stil. Ein Dialog*, pp. 175–79.

66 It is remarkable that Erasmus, in giving these two examples as opposites, cited the very same biblical scenes between which a “typological” connection had at one time been created. In order to lend weight to his arguments he seems implicitly to ridicule what he thought was the height of stupidity: the comparisons that used to be made between pagan and sacred stories (see note 59), and perhaps still were by less highly educated readers of the copies of the *Ovide moralisé* that appeared in the vernacular from time to time.



16 Correggio, *The rape of Io*. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum

al of Ganymede which somewhat recalled Terence's remarks concerning Danaë. This was an episode from the *Satyricon* by Petronius, where a young man is intensely aroused by seeing a number of "loves of the gods" by the hand of Apelles, of which the first one mentioned was the eagle who carried Ganymede off to Olympus.⁶⁷

One may well ask whether these two provocative passages from antiquity actually served as the point of departure for Correggio's *Danaë* and *Ganymede*, after which the series of four *Amori di Giove* (Loves of Jupiter) was completed with *Leda and the Swan* and *The rape of Io* (fig. 16), as logical choices from the oft-recorded loves of Jupiter.⁶⁸ These are also subjects which, like the Danaë depiction, show the god making love to mortal beauties—beauties taken by Jupiter in a false, seemingly innocent shape. They are representations which, through their lifelike portrayal of sensuality, seem to have the intention of eliciting the response described by Aretino ten years later after seeing Michelangelo's *Leda*: any male viewer would naturally wish to take Jupiter's place.⁶⁹ And this was of course exactly what Terence had described as happening to Chaerea upon beholding the painting of Danaë. The very fact that the divine violator did not appear in human form made it possible to depict the moment of intercourse: sexual fantasies were all the more stimulated by this implicit manner of portrayal. On the other hand, the palpable sensuality of these depictions is relieved by the unmistakably comical nature of the forms in which Jupiter makes love. Humor seems to be an important ingredient in Correggio's paintings.

Federico Gonzaga, who probably had these works made for himself, must have been a lover of erotic art, as witnessed by a letter addressed to him by Aretino in 1527, containing an enthusiastic description of a Venus by Sansovino which he, Federico, would find very

67 Petronius, trans. M. Heseltine, London & Cambridge (Mass.) 1969, p. 165. Franciscus Junius, *The painting of the ancients*, ed. K. Aldrich and P. and R. Fehl, 2 vols., Berkeley, Los Angeles & Oxford 1991, vol. 1, pp. 216–17, would later quote them together as examples of morally offensive episodes which one should not depict, the more so because they even incited imitation. Peter Hecht pointed this passage out to me. Samuel van Hoogstraten borrowed this from Junius nearly word for word in his *Inleyding tot de hoohe schoole der schilderconst*, Rotterdam 1678, p. 94.

68 See Verheyen, op. cit. (note 20), pp. 183–86, for Jupiter's loves in Italian Renaissance literature. For the divergent hypotheses regarding the origins of the four paintings by Correggio, see, among others, Ver-



17 Giulio Bonasone, *Danaë*, engraving

pleasing: "...a Venus so real and so lifelike that she fills the thoughts of all who admire her with lust."⁷⁰ Such literary pronouncements concerning the erotic effect of seemingly "real" depictions—and several others will be cited below—were either inspired by, or were variations of, texts from antiquity. In this case implicit reference was made to Pliny's account of Praxiteles' *Venus of Knidos*, on which statue a young man had left the traces of

heyen, *passim*; Gould, op. cit. (note 20), pp. 130–35; Bernardini, op. cit. (note 20), p. 22. The fact that they depict two nude figures seen from the back (vertical format) and two nude figures seen frontally (horizontal format) demonstrates, in my opinion, that Correggio was also interested in combining nudes seen from various angles, as was Titian later on when he combined a *Danaë* with *Venus and Adonis*. See also P. Fehl, *Decorum and wit: the poetry of Venetian painting*, Vienna 1992, p. 120.

69 See note 88.

70 Quoted by Verheyen, op. cit. (note 20), p. 183, note 122: "Credo che Mess. Jacopo Sansovino rarissimo vi ornerà la camera di una Venere sì vera e sì viva, che empie di libidine il pensiero di ciascuno che la mira."



18 Maître LD (Léon Davent) after a fresco by Primaticcio, *Danaë*, engraving. Leiden, Prentenkabinet van de Universiteit Leiden

his arousal. This does not mean to say, however, that we should not attach any importance to such utterances. The very fact that they were commonplace in this period means that such ideas must have formed an important frame of reference in the consciousness of both the artist and the informed viewer. The artist anticipated these thoughts when producing a nude, while for the viewer they were a determining factor in his expectations and response.

As mentioned above—and Carlo Ginzburg observed this years ago with respect to Titian's *Danaë*—Augusti-

ne's condemnation ensured that depictions of Danaë came to be seen in the sixteenth century as the prototype of a portrayal which aimed at arousing the viewer sexually.⁷¹ Correggio's splendid painting was immediately followed by the most extreme consequence of these views: Giulio Bonasone's crude, truly pornographic print, which was made around 1540 (fig. 17). As far as we know, this "porno-Danaë"—accompanied by a text which turned the traditional reading into a dirty joke—remained a once-only affair.⁷² Correggio's work also inspired artists to more worthy forms of emulation during this period: at the beginning of the 1540s Primaticcio

71 As Ginzburg, op. cit. (note 61), p. 81, expressed it, "Thanks to the condemnation by Augustine, the scene of love between Jove and Danaë... came to be considered in the sixteenth century the very prototype of the image created to excite the beholder sexually." Since Amrogio Catarino Politi did this explicitly for the first time in 1542 (see Ginzburg, pp. 77–78), the subject was cited specifically as an example of the stimulating power of erotic paintings (by Johannes Molanus, Francesco Bocchi and Gregorio Comanini as well). Politi cited it by way of analogy, to show what the effect of sacred representations can be; the later authors did it merely by way of condemnation. For Molanus see D. Freedberg, "Johannes Molanus on provocative paintings," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 34 (1971), p. 243. For Bocchi and Comanini see P. Barrochi (ed.), *Trattati d'arte del cinquecento*, 3 vols., Bari 1962, vol. 3, pp. 148 and 327–28. In the Netherlands the example was cited by Cats, van Beverwijck and van Hoogstraten.

Jacob Cats, *Alle de mercken*, 2 vols., Amsterdam 1712, vol. 1, p. 387, referred in a footnote to the passage in Terence and its quotation by Augustine, when he railed against "licentious pictures" in *Houweelyck* (1625). In 1642 Johannes van Beverwijck, *Schat der gesontheit*, in *Alle de mercken*, 4 vols., Amsterdam 1652, p. 46, also referred to this "notable example" when he spoke about "amorous and licentious paintings, which easily cause unchasteness," as did Samuel van Hoogstraten (see note 67).

72 The inscription reads: "Ogn'alto muro ascende ogni gran fosso/ Trappassa la virtù del lucid'oro/ Ecco chi'io t'apro luna et faltra cossa" ("Every high wall and each wide moat can be passed by the virtues of gleaming gold/ See how I open both the one and the other for you"); "both the one and the other" obviously mean both the locked tower and Danaë's vulva: we are vouchsafed a glance in both.



19 Titian, *Danaë*. Naples, Galleria Nazionale di Capodimonte

produced a *Danaë* as the central representation in the Galerie François I in Fontainebleau (fig. 18),⁷³ and finally, Titian created the most worthy successor to Correggio's work with his masterpiece dating from 1544—his first *Danaë*, now in the Museo di Capodimonte in Naples (fig. 19).

What subject was more suited to Titian, who had competition in his blood—"jousting" (*giostrare*), as Ludovico Dolce called Titian's permanent vying with classical and contemporary artists—when he was commis-

sioned to paint the most sensuous nude possible for a princely patron?⁷⁴ For this was surely the point when Alessandro Farnese commissioned him in 1544 to paint a nude, after seeing the one he had made several years earlier for the Duke of Urbino (fig. 20).⁷⁵

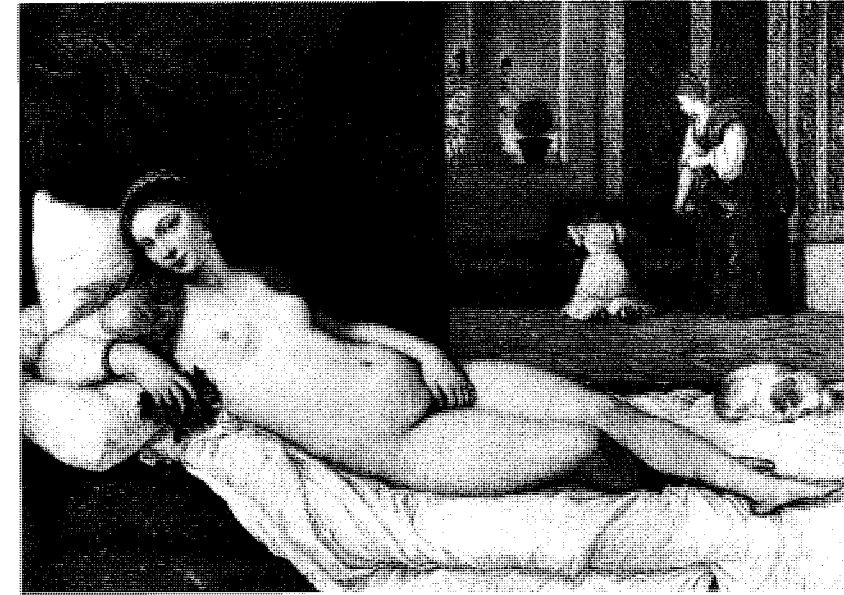
Roberto Zapperi assumed, on the basis of X-radiographs, that the commission was not originally for a *Danaë*, but rather for a nude in the manner of the Duke of Urbino's, and therefore with no reference to a specific mythological theme.⁷⁶ While Titian was still working

⁷³ The datings vary from 1537 to 1542. See D. Rondorf, *Der Ballsaal im Schloß Fontainebleau. Zur Stilgeschichte Primaticcios in Frankreich* (diss.), Bonn 1967, p. 71.

⁷⁴ See R. Wedgewood Kennedy, "Apelles Redivivus," in L. Freeman Sandler (ed.), *Essays in memory of Karl Lehmann*, New York 1964, p. 163.

⁷⁵ The letter from della Casa to Alessandro Farnese was published for the first time by C. Hope, "A neglected document about Titian's

"*Danaë*" in Naples," *Arte Veneta* 23 (1977), pp. 188–89.
⁷⁶ Zapperi, op. cit. (note 28), pp. 163–64. The Venus belonging to the Duke of Urbino was always described as "la donna nuda," regarding which see also C. Hope, "Problems of interpretation in Titian's erotic paintings," *Tiziano e Venezia*, Vicenza 1980, pp. 118–19. Only Vasari calls her "una Venere giovinetta." He probably used "Venus" as a generic term for a beautiful naked woman. The "future" *Danaë* was also indicated by della Casa only as "una nuda."



20 Titian and workshop, *Venus of Urbino*. Florence, Uffizi

on the painting for Alessandro Farnese, Monsignor Giovanni della Casa, papal nuncio to Venice, wrote in the autumn of 1544 the oft-quoted letter in which he assures Alessandro Farnese that, upon seeing the nude that Titian was now painting for him, even Cardinal San Sylvestro (official theologian of the Curia and the church's chief censor) would be possessed by the devil.⁷⁷ Della Casa added that the nude which Farnese had seen at the Duke of Urbino's was a Theatine nun in

comparison to the woman that Titian was now painting.⁷⁸ In the same letter della Casa also asked about a sketch of a certain young woman by the miniaturist Giulio Clovio, so that Titian might make a portrait of her, and moreover give the nude her face. Zapperi argued that this must have been a portrait of a certain Angela, a courtesan favored by Cardinal Alessandro Farnese.⁷⁹

It must have been at a later stage—when Titian had

⁷⁷ Zapperi, op. cit. (note 28), p. 163. This refers to the Dominican Tommaso Badia, "the pitiless chastizer of womanizing prelates," as Zapperi called him.

⁷⁸ The letter was quoted in full by Hope, op. cit. (note 75), p. 189, and Zapperi, op. cit. (note 28), p. 171. The passage in question reads: "...una nuda che faria venir il diavol adosso al cardinale San Sylvestro; et quella che Vostra Signoria Reverendissima vide in Pesaro nelle camere de 'l Signor duca d'Urbino è una teatina appresso a questa."

⁷⁹ Zapperi, op. cit. (note 28), pp. 161–63. Recently R. Goffen, *Titian's women*, New Haven & London 1997, pp. 216–18, fiercely challenged the suggestion that it could have been Titian's intention to intimate that *Danaë* was a courtesan and that he inserted the face of this Angela into the painting. She also denied that an important aim of the painting could have been intense titillation. She dismissed both della Casa's suggestion regarding the portrait of the courtesan and his statement concerning the sensuousness of the nude as mere reductive banter. She thought (pp. 220–24) that the intense, emotional reaction with which Titian's *Danaë* receives Jupiter's love argues against this, failing to see that such a convincingly rendered emotion only makes the image

of a courtesan all the more desirable. The fact that Titian's nudes "transcend their own glorious sensuality and become the exalted embodiment of beautiful art and the artist's creative genius" (p. 242) in no way rules out the possibility, as Goffen thought it did, that intense arousal of the male senses was an important aim as well. In her wish to exonerate Titian at any price from something so base (in her eyes), she overlooked the fact that della Casa knew what he was talking about: he was a connoisseur (of whom Vasari wrote that he was working on a treatise on art) and he had talked to Titian when the latter was working on the painting. His writing that Titian wanted to insert the courtesan's face as a favor to the cardinal presupposes, moreover, that both Titian and della Casa assumed that Farnese would think it a good idea. As C. Santore, "Danaë: The renaissance courtesan's alter ego," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 54 (1991), p. 145, said: "Titian was not a fool: he would not have made the suggestion if there was any likelihood that the Cardinal might find it distasteful." Finally, let it be noted that the face of the Farnese *Danaë* differs from the type of Titian's later *Danaës*, though I do not share Zapperi's opinion that it is the spitting image of a young woman in a portrait by Titian which is also to be found in Naples.

arrived with the painting in Rome, where he had set up a studio in the Belvedere in 1545 at the invitation of Alessandro Farnese—that the artist decided to turn the nude into a Danaë, so that she would be framed by a *poesia*: “...una femina ignuda figurata per una Danaë,” as Vasari aptly described her.⁸⁰ If Titian actually effected the change by giving the figure the features of the courtesan, as della Casa’s letter suggests, then the myth of Danaë naturally offered a classically inspired context which could not have been more appropriate.⁸¹ Indeed, in the literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, fictional courtesans occasionally compared themselves to Danaë.⁸² The interpretation, repeated and varied endlessly since the time of Horace and Augustine, that Jupiter, the supreme god, availed himself of gold and money to seduce this great beauty, made the image a self-evident one. It is therefore understandable that Titian—after Bonasone and Primaticcio had already happened upon the idea—depicted the golden rain as a shower of gold coins.

Zapperi thought that the idea of clothing the nude in mythological trappings, whereby Titian understandably chose to transform her into a Danaë, had been inspired by the need to give a pretext sanctioned by antiquity to a painting that would otherwise have been too compromising for a cardinal.⁸³ In my opinion, the most important stimulus for Titian at this crucial juncture in his career would have been the many possibilities this



21 Rosso Fiorentino (?) after Michelangelo, *Leda*. London, The National Gallery

theme offered to compete with both antiquity and his contemporaries. Correggio’s breathtaking *Danaë* would have provided the most powerful impetus, a painting which, after all, could compete in sensuality with Titian’s own *Venus in Urbino*.⁸⁴ Titian would certainly have admired Correggio’s *Danaë* in Mantua. A century later Marco Boschini even wrote that Titian, who was deeply impressed by Correggio’s work, admired his *Danaë* most of all.⁸⁵ Philip Fehl described beautifully how it must be viewed in the spirit of competition that

London (Royal Academy) 1986, p. 193, as well as by a notorious work by Anne-Louis Girodet dating from 1799, *Mlle Lange as Danaë*, which was intended as a villainous satire on this celebrated actress; see G. Bernard, *Anne-Louis Girodet*, Paris & Brussels 1975, pp. 37–38; and cat. *European paintings from the Minneapolis Institute of Arts*, New York 1971, nr. 94. My thanks to Peter Hecht for drawing my attention to these two paintings.

83 Zapperi, op. cit. (note 28), p. 164.

84 See also Fehl, op. cit. (note 68), pp. 107 and 120–21. It seems obvious to me that Titian was competing with Correggio by borrowing the broad outlines from the latter’s *Danaë* as regards pose and composition, which means that, formally speaking as well, this painting was his most important source of inspiration, as stressed by Fehl and others. It is strange that Goffen, op. cit. (note 79), pp. 229–32, in particular considered the elements which, in her view, were derived from Michelangelo’s *Leda* (as part of the competition with Michelangelo) much more striking and of far greater importance than those borrowed from Correggio’s work (and did not even mention Primaticcio in this context), whereas these similarities are considerably less convincing.

85 M. Boschini, *La carta del navigar pittoresco*, ed. A. Pallucchini, Venice 1966, pp. 333–34.

“...the great Cupid (who is, of course, not in Ovid) has entered Titian’s painting and, with a gesture that seems to complete the beckoning gesture of Correggio’s turns to leave the scene of his victory and triumph, ready to exert his power on another willing victim.”⁸⁶ At that time Titian would also have seen the print which Léon Davent made after the fresco by Primaticcio in the Galerie François I (fig. 18), for he must certainly have been aware of this composition when he created his own *Danaë*.

Titian could not have chosen a more suitable subject with which to establish his name once and for all in the highest Roman circles of connoisseurs and artists as the painter of the most beautiful, most lifelike female nudes imaginable. It was a subject that could be seen not only as a response to Nicias, the famous specialist in feminine beauty of classical times, and to the “prototype” described by Terence of a sexually provocative painting, but also as an emulation of the most sensuous nudes of contemporary reality: those of Correggio and Primaticcio as well as his own. The words of della Casa certainly made one thing clear: everyone concerned took it for granted that this painting would surpass the nude, apparently already famous, which he had made for the Duke of Urbino and which had so impressed Alessandro Farnese.

The nature of the theme, concerning one of Jupiter’s loves, also made it the perfect subject with which to challenge Michelangelo’s *Leda* (fig. 21), perhaps not so much the painting itself as Aretino’s description of it dating from 1542. In this way he could show that his painting was much more worthy of Aretino’s *ekphrasis*.⁸⁷ Aretino described Michelangelo’s work as follows: “One of the two pictures is a Leda, but in a manner tender of flesh, elegant of limb and slender of figure, and so sweet, soft and gentle of attitude, and with so much naked grace in all parts of the nude that one cannot gaze upon her without envying the swan who takes pleasure

86 Fehl, op. cit. (note 68), p. 107.

87 See also P. Watson, “Titian and Michelangelo: the *Danaë* of 1545–1546,” in W. Stedman Sheard and J.T. Paoletti (eds.), *Collaboration in Italian Renaissance art*, New Haven & London 1978, pp. 249–50.

88 P. Aretino, *Lettere*, ed. F. Flora, Turin 1960, vol. 1, p. 936; quoted by Watson, op. cit. (note 87), p. 251 note 7: “L’una de le due immagini è Leda, ma in modo morbida di carne, vaga di membra e svelta di persona, e talmente dolce, piana e soave d’attitudine, e con tanta grazia ignuda da tutte le parti de lo ignudo, che non si può mirar senza invidi-

in it with a tenderness so lifelike that it seems, as he extends his neck to kiss her, that he wishes to exhale into her mouth the spirit of his divinity.”⁸⁸ If one forgets for a minute that Aretino is speaking of Leda, then this description of the effect of such verisimilitude is naturally much more applicable to Titian’s *Danaë*—certainly where he speaks of “morbida di carne, e talmente dolce, piana e soava d’attitudine, e con tanta grazia ignuda da tutte le parti de lo ignudo.” For Titian such words must have been an irresistible challenge which he met to perfection in this *Danaë*.

Ludovico Dolce’s famous description of the Venus figure in Titian’s later *Venus and Adonis* is also entirely appropriate to this *Danaë*, showing, as Ginzburg wrote, an important aspect of what Titian was striving for: “I swear, my lord, that there is not to be found a man so acute in vision and judgment, who seeing it would not believe it to be alive; nobody so chilled by the years, or so hard of constitution, who would not feel warmed, touched and feel his blood move in his veins. Nor is it a marvel, for if a marble statue could so stimulate one with its beauty, penetrating the marrow of a young man so much that he left a stain, what would he do before this image, which is of flesh, which is beauty itself, which seems to breathe?”⁸⁹

The *Danaë* Titian made for Farnese is generally seen by art historians as a key piece in his stylistic development, a painting laid down directly in paint on the canvas without any underdrawing, and one in which all traces of linear and sculptural effects—which were still present to some extent in slightly earlier paintings—have disappeared. It is a demonstration of a naked body made completely of subtle shifts of color melting into one another, applied with somewhat dry paint on a rather coarsely woven canvas. Titian’s striving to obtain, by means of the paint, the effect of nearly tangible, breathing skin has here reached its first peak. That this had actually been his aim was confirmed already in 1533 by the

are il cigno, che ne gode con affetto tanto simile al vero che pare, mentre stende il collo per basciarla, che le voglia essalare in bocca lo spirito de la sua divinità.”

89 Ginzburg, op. cit. (note 61), pp. 81–82, quoted this letter in full in 1978, after R. Pallucchini, *Tiziano*, 2 vols., Florence 1969, vol. 1, pp. 140–41, had quoted an expurgated version. For the original text see C. Ginzburg, “Tiziano, Ovidio e i codici della figurazione erotica del Cinquecento,” *Paragone* 29/339 (1978), p. 8.

80 From this description it may be inferred that Vasari saw the painting primarily as the portrayal of a nude woman and only secondarily as a mythological subject. Indeed, Dolce called her only “quella bellissima nuda per il Cardinal Farnese,” see M. Roskill, *Dolce’s “Aretino” and Venetian art theory of the cinquecento*, New York 1968, pp. 110–11. To think that we are meant to deduce from this that Vasari described her in this way because he knew that she was actually a courtesan who had been depicted as Danaë, as assumed by Santore, op. cit. (note 79), p. 415, is perhaps going too far.

81 See notes 57 and 60.

82 Various examples of this in Santore, op. cit. (note 79), pp. 412, 414, 416–17. A nice one from this period is found in J. du Bellay, “La vieille courtisane,” in *Poësies*, ed. M. Hervier, Paris 1954, p. 159, who described a courtesan who had a painting of Danaë hanging like a coat of arms above her door: “Et sur la porte avois mis pour devise, / La pluye d’or de la fille d’Acise: / Voulant par là honnestement monstrer / Que par l’or seul on y pouvoit entrer.” This was published in 1558, shortly after du Bellay’s return from Rome. That the image of Danaë as a courtesan continued to flourish in painting until the end of the eighteenth century is demonstrated by a painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds in which Kitty Fisher, renowned actress and courtesan, is portrayed as Danaë, see N. Penny (ed.), exhib. cat. *Reynolds*, Paris (Grand Palais) &



22 Hendrick Goltzius, *Danaë*, 1603. Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Museum of Art

praise of his friend Pietro Aretino, who spoke of “the glorious, marvellous, and great Titian, whose coloring breathes no differently from flesh that has pulse and life.”⁹⁰ In 1557 Dolce described the objective of Titian’s style in the following words: “Titian... moves in step with nature, so that every one of his figures has life, movement and flesh which palpitate. He has shown in

his works no empty gracefulness, but a palette which is properly appropriate; no artificiality in ornament, but a masterly concreteness; no crudity, but the mellowness and softness of nature. And the highlights and shadows in his creations always contend and interplay with one another, and fade out and decrease in the very same way as nature itself has them do.”⁹¹

world and his legacy, New York 1982, p. 16.

⁹¹ Roskill, op. cit. (note 80), pp. 184–85 (with the Italian text). Regarding this see Rosand, op. cit. (note 90), pp. 15–21.

⁹⁰ P. Aretino, *Tutto il teatro*, ed. Antonio Pinchera, Rome 1974, p. 137: “...ci è il glorioso, mirabile e gran Tiziano, il colorito del quale respira non altrimenti che le carni che hanno il polso e la lena,” quoted by D. Rosand, “Titian and the critical tradition,” in idem (ed.), *Titian, his*

Titian had probably done his utmost at just this time in order to provoke the connoisseurs in this bastion of Michelangelesque *disegno* with his amazingly innovative (especially to Roman eyes) and illusionistic painting technique, which must have been absolutely dazzling. The clash between two different conceptions would have been the immediate result, if we can believe what Vasari wrote many years later. He described the visit that he and Michelangelo made to Titian’s studio in the Belvedere, where they admired his *Danaë*. He went on to say that Michelangelo “...praised it greatly as was polite. After they had gone, Buonarrotti, talking about Titian’s work, praised him a good deal, saying he liked his coloring and style, but that it was a pity good design was not taught in Venice from the first, and that her painters did not have a better method of study. Such that if this man, said he, were aided by art and design as he is by Nature, especially in imitating from life, he would not be surpassed, having a very fine wit and a most charming and lifelike style. This is very true, for without design and a study of selected ancient and modern work, skill is useless, and it is impossible by mere drawing from life to impart the grace and perfection of Nature so that certain parts frequently lack beauty.”⁹²

In response, therefore, to this sensuous *Danaë*—the painting in which Titian, in Rome of all places, had perfected his style of painting nudes—Vasari clearly articulated the contrast between the Florentine-Roman and the Venetian notions, *disegno* as opposed to *colorito*, and vehemently criticized the latter by invoking the author-



23 Hieronymus Wierix, *Danaë*, engraving. Brussels, Bibliotheek Albert I, Prentenkabinet

ity *par excellence*: Michelangelo.⁹³ That Vasari saw all of this in terms of competition is apparent from his choice of words, and Titian, a painter who must always have regarded himself as the Apelles of his day,⁹⁴ would certainly have provoked the comparison. And so this *Danaë* entered treatises on art as the prime example of Venetian painting.⁹⁵

Karel van Mander adopted this passage from Vasari in its entirety when, in *Het leven der moderne, of dees-tijtsche doorluchtighe Italiaensche schilders*, he recorded Titian’s life in detail. Adding to Vasari’s account as though

⁹² G. Vasari, *Le vite de’ più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori* (1568), ed. G. Milanesi, 9 vols., Florence 1878–85, vol. 3, pp. 574–75. The English translation is from F. Valcanover *et al.*, exhib. cat., *Titian: prince of painters*, Venice (Palazzo Ducale) & Washington (National Gallery of Art) 1990, p. 267.

⁹³ The fact that Michelangelo admired Titian’s *Danaë* in Rome was already mentioned by Dolce in his *Dialogo*, published in 1557; see Roskill, op. cit. (note 80), pp. 110–11. It is possible, as suggested by Goffen, op. cit. (note 79), p. 240, that Vasari reacted to Dolce’s description of Michelangelo’s positive reaction by ‘rectifying’ the matter according to Florentine-Roman norms, many years after the fact, in his second edition of 1568.

⁹⁴ See Wedgwood Kennedy, op. cit. (note 74), *passim*. Dolce wrote that Titian was superior to all painters of antiquity and the present day, and that even Apelles would not refuse to honor him; see Roskill, op. cit. (note 80), p. 195. According to Ridolfi, when Titian was made a knight in 1533 he was called “huius saeculi Apelles” by Charles v. Titian himself wrote to Charles v: “What painter ancient or modern can boast and glory more than I, being graciously chosen by such a king,

and of my own will consecrated to serve him? I certainly hold myself to be that good and give myself to understand to have been so for a long time, so that I dare say I do not envy that famous Apelles so dear to Alexander the Great: and I say so with reason.... After Alexander, no other has ever been more like him than Your Majesty.... Even if in truth my little value be greatly insufficient to compare with the excellence of that singular man [Apelles], for me, however, it is sufficient that, as he was in the good graces of his king, thus I likewise feel myself to be in the good graces of mine. Because the authority of his benign judgment... makes me comparable to and perhaps even more than Apelles was in the opinion of men.” The letter is dated 22 September 1559, and is quoted from Goffen, op. cit. (note 79), p. 215.

⁹⁵ In this context it can hardly be a coincidence that Pliny had written the following, precisely about Nicias: “...lumen et umbras custodiit atque ut eminent e tabulis picturae maxime curavit” (“Nicias kept a strict watch on light and shade, and took the greatest pains to make his paintings stand out from the panels”); Pliny, op. cit. (note 29), vol. 9, p. 357.

he had detected an omission, he compared Titian and Charles v to Apelles and Alexander.⁹⁶ When van Mander was in the process of writing his *Levens*, he would surely have spoken with Goltzius, who in 1603 made his lifesize *Danaë*, a work which van Mander also praised copiously in the biography he wrote of his friend (fig. 22).

One can think of various reasons to explain why Goltzius, who had only recently turned to painting, chose the Danaë theme for his first lifesize nude—precisely when he wanted to present himself as a master in painting such nudes. Elsewhere I have attempted to show in detail that Goltzius was preoccupied with ideas regarding the effect of portrayals of nudes on the viewer, owing to ever-present notions concerning the powerful effect attributed to the sense of sight, especially when it involved the arousal of love and lust.⁹⁷ And, as we shall see further on, he would have been only too aware of the fact that Danaë was an exemplary theme for a painting which purported to cause intense stimulation of the viewer's senses. This even gave him the opportunity to play a clever and amusing game with the subject—a subject, moreover, which enabled him to assume a place among the most famous painters of nudes, at the same time taking up a position in the dispute as to the correct manner of painting, all of which the very ambitious Goltzius must have found irresistible.

He was, after all, a well-nigh compulsive emulator, and one for whom style, the manner of depiction itself, was also an important element of imitation and emulation.⁹⁸ Van Mander emphasized this several times in his biography. He wrote that Goltzius, from a very young age, not only tried to imitate the beauty and diversity of nature, "...but he has also admirably applied himself to imitate the various styles of the best masters such as those of Heemskerck, Frans Floris, Blocklandt and Frederick [Federico Zuccaro] and finally Spranger, whose lively manner he imitated very truly."⁹⁹ And after having mentioned his series of prints with depictions of the

life of the Virgin (in which Goltzius imitated, in his own inventions, the styles of six different masters), van Mander stated that Goltzius was a veritable Proteus or Vertumnus in art, "because he can take on the different shapes of all possible styles."¹⁰⁰ Van Mander went on to say that Goltzius, after returning from Italy, was no longer so satisfied with the art that he saw in his own country, because "he had impressed the beautiful Italian paintings as firmly in his memory as in a mirror, so that wherever he went he still saw them continuously before him; now it was the soft graciousness of Raphael that he enjoyed, then the natural fleshiness of Correggio, then the advancing highlights and deep-retiring, rubbed-back shadows of Titian, the beautiful silken materials and well-painted things of Veronese and others in Venice."¹⁰¹ Other painters were fond of hearing him talk about this, continued van Mander, "for he spoke all about glowing flesh parts, glowing shadows and such unfamiliar or little-heard expressions." Van Mander suggested that for this reason it was inevitable that Goltzius would turn to painting, and these words definitely suggest that it was Titian in particular who had made the deepest impression on him: "glowing flesh parts" and "glowing shadows" are, after all, terms which are eminently suited to describing this master's art.

In his first large nude, therefore, Goltzius joined battle with the painter of female nudes *par excellence*. Admittedly he did not adopt the pose of Titian's *Danaë*—he was probably not familiar with the composition—but this nude, turned toward the viewer and stretched out on a bed, would have represented for him a preeminent Venetian type. A print by Hieronymus Wierix (fig. 23) was presumably the formal source of inspiration. In this print Danaë is portrayed by means of the Titianesque Venus type: her pose is a direct reflection of the many versions produced by Titian and his workshop in the late 1540s and early 1550s (fig. 24).¹⁰²

Goltzius, who adopted this Venetian Venus type, did

⁹⁸ The finest example is the series of *Meisterstiche* depicting the life of the Virgin, in which Goltzius, in six of his own inventions, imitates the styles of two northern engravers (Dürer and Lucas van Leyden) and four Italian painters (Barocci, Bassano, Parmigianino and Titian), the latter as though they were reproductive engravings after their works. See W. Melion, "Hendrick Goltzius's project of reproductive engraving," *Art History* 13 (1990), pp. 458–87.

⁹⁹ Miedema, op. cit. (note 27), vol. 1, fol. 284r.

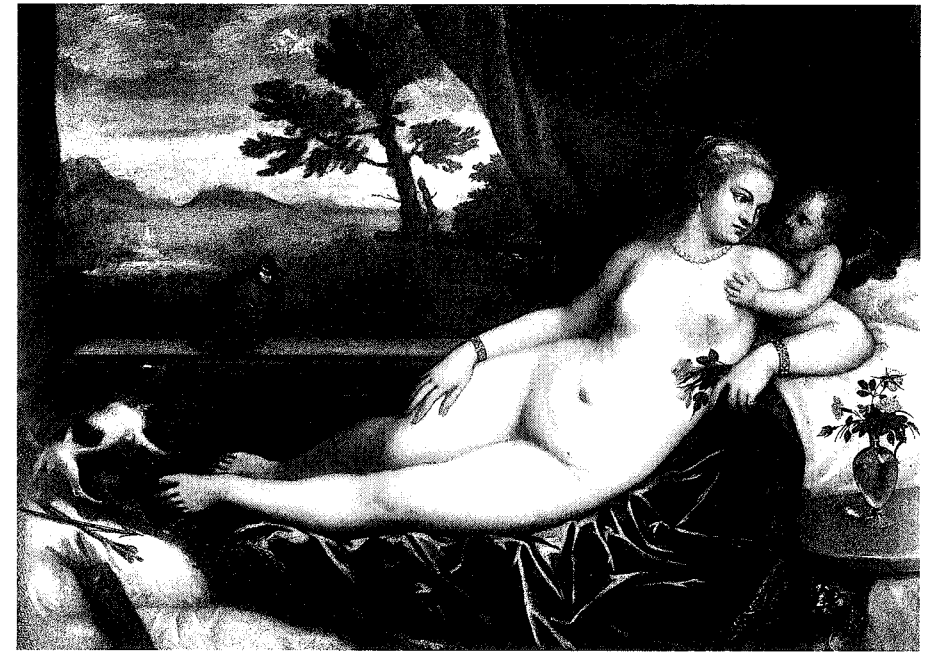
¹⁰⁰ Ibid., fol. 285r.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., fol. 285v.

⁹⁶ Karel van Mander, *Het leven der moderne, of dees-tijtsche doorluchtighe Italiaensche schilders*, in *Het schilder-boeck*, Haarlem 1604, fol. 176v. For a detailed discussion of the relationship of van Mander's Titian biography to that by Vasari, see A. Golahny, *Rembrandt's paintings and the Venetian tradition* (diss.), New York 1984, pp. 30–45. Van Mander emphasized even more strongly Titian's role as "inventor" of the new Venetian manner of painting without preliminary drawing, by attributing this not to Giorgione but to Titian alone, Golahny, pp. 33–37 (see also note 159 below).

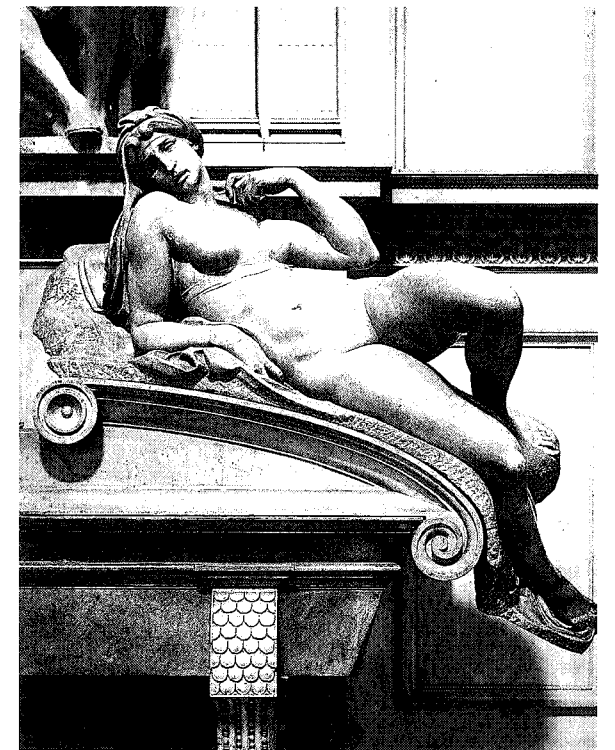
⁹⁷ Sluijter, op. cit. (note 49), *passim*.

24 Titian and workshop,
Venus and Cupid.
Florence, Uffizi



his best to work like a Dutch Titian in "the newest beautiful manner of working" and to render "glowing flesh parts" and "advancing highlights and deep-retiring, rubbed-back shadows."¹⁰³ He also made an effort, however, to heed Vasari's criticism: he took pains to portray his nude with clear and precisely drawn contours, while ensuring that the anatomy within those contours was clearly structured. He also lent extra emphasis, within the framework of this Venetian Venus type, to his study of Michelangesque *disegno* by incorporating the pose of Michelangelo's *Dawn* (fig. 25): the shoulder pressed

25 Michelangelo, *Dawn*. Florence, San Lorenzo, Medici Chapel



¹⁰² The pose of Wierix's *Danaë* is most closely related to that of the *Venus* by Titian and his studio, which is now in the Uffizi in Florence (fig. 24).

¹⁰³ In the life of Frans Badens, Miedema, op. cit. (note 27), vol. 1, fol. 208v, van Mander used the characterization "the newest beautiful manner of working" ("de jonghste schoon maniere") which was brought from Italy to the Netherlands and which was "very beautiful, flowing and glowing" ("seer schoon vloeyende en gloeyende"). On the 'Venetian' manner see H. Miedema and B. Meijer, "The introduction of colored ground in painting and its influence on stylistic development, with particular respect to sixteenth-century Netherlandish art," *Storia dell' Arte* 35 (1979), pp. 94–95, and recently P. Taylor, "The glow in late sixteenth and seventeenth-century Dutch painting," in E. Hermens (ed.), *Looking through paintings: the study of painting techniques and materials in support of art historical research*, *Leids Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 11, Baarn 1998, pp. 159–68.



26 Frans Menton after Frans Floris, *Danaë*, engraving. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Rijksprentenkabinet

upwards, the position of the head, and the raised leg undoubtedly refer to this. He had previously drawn a variation of Michelangelo's *Dawn*, presumably after a plaster cast which he owned.¹⁰⁴

It is clear that when van Mander praised Goltzius's painting, he recognized the attempt to unite both of these aspects: "Eventually, in 1603, he made on a large canvas, life-sized, a sleeping nude *Danaë* reclining in a most beautiful manner. This nude is painted miraculously

fleshily and plastically—and displays great study of contours and structure."¹⁰⁵ The terminology used by van Mander in this description is apt indeed, because the words "painted miraculously fleshily and plastically" clearly refer to the Venetian manner, and "great study of contours and structure" to the ideal of *disegno*. It must have been Goltzius's ambition to combine both manners to arrive at the "perfect" nude.¹⁰⁶

Goltzius was apparently well aware—more so than any other painter—that this was a subject redolent of both money and sexual stimulation, as evidenced by the accessories with which he surrounded Danaë. The old woman beside her had meanwhile become a traditional element in representations of Danaë's impregnation, after Primaticcio had first introduced her in this subject, followed by Titian in his second *Danaë* for Philip II. She is also to be seen in the above-mentioned print by Hieronymus Wierix and in the engraving by Frans Menton after Frans Floris, which Goltzius probably also knew (fig. 26).¹⁰⁷ The insertion of this old woman as a pictorial contrast emphasizes the beauty and youth of Danaë and also serves to visualize the transience of all earthly desires.¹⁰⁸ We encounter this contrast again in subjects with other beautiful temptresses, such as Salome, Bathsheba and Delilah.¹⁰⁹ As many paintings demonstrate—countless depictions of the Prodigal Son among the harlots, for example—she can also be seen as the stereotype of the procuress, while at the same time embodying the image of Avarice, always portrayed as an old woman.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁴ B. Broos et al., exhib. cat. *Great Dutch paintings from America*, The Hague (Mauritshuis) & San Francisco (Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco) 1990, p. 243, pointed out the similarity with Michelangelo's *Dawn*. For the drawing (S. Higgons Collection, Paris), which Reznicek dates after 1600, see E.K.J. Reznicek, *Die Zeichnungen von Hendrick Goltzius*, 2 vols., Utrecht 1961, vol. 1, pp. 456–57, nr. 442, and vol. 2, fig. 336 (for the two plaster casts after the Medici tombs by Michelangelo which Buchelius saw at Goltzius's, see *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 449).

¹⁰⁵ Miedema, op. cit. (note 27), vol. 1, fol. 286r.

¹⁰⁶ Here, perhaps, one hears the commentary of Paolo Pino, *Dialogo di pittura*, ed. R. and A. Palucchini, Venice 1947, p. 131, who thought that whoever was able to unite the qualities of Michelangelo and Titian would be "lo dio della pittura."

¹⁰⁷ Following Natalis Comes, *Mythologiae* (French translation by I. de Montlyard, 1599, see ed. I. Baudoin, 2 vols., Paris 1627, vol. 2, p. 830), van Mander mentions in his account of the story that Danaë was locked up with a "Voester" (wet nurse), see K. van Mander, *Wileghingh op den Metamorphosis*, in *idem, Het schilder-boeck*, Haarlem

1604, fol. 37v. In older versions of the story, the wet nurse occurs only in the *scholia* of Apollonius of Rhodes, from which Conti must have borrowed his text literally—the subterranean chamber of bronze, mentioned by both Conti and van Mander, is also derived from this source. See C. Wendel, *Scholia in Apollonium Rhodium Vetera*, Berlin 1935, p. 305.

¹⁰⁸ See Sluijter, op. cit. (note 59), pp. 453–54, notes 119/5 and 120/1–2, and pp. 251–52, on this combination with respect to representations of Vertumnus and Pomona.

¹⁰⁹ See E.J. Sluijter, "Rembrandt's Bathsheba and the conventions of a seductive theme," in A. Jensen Adams (ed.), *Rembrandt's Bathsheba reading King David's letter*, Cambridge 1998, pp. 51 and 56, for the old woman in depictions of Bathsheba, in which she is explicitly called a procuress, both in descriptions by van Mander (a painting by Badens) and by Philips Angel (a work by Lievens).

¹¹⁰ The old woman is a familiar presence in brothel scenes, not only in northern art of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries but also in Italy, where she is known in both the visual arts and literature as a companion of prostitutes; see Santore, op. cit. (note 79), pp. 417–19. For a



27 Frans Francken II, *The story of the Prodigal Son* (the *Carousing* in the centre). Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum

Her presence in a scene concerning money and lust, and the inscriptions on the print after Floris and on the one by Wierix underline such connotations, is obviously very apt.¹¹¹ A brothel scene with a procuress and a portrayal of Danaë even occur together in an early seven-

teenth-century depiction of the *Carousing of the Prodigal Son* by Frans Francken II (fig. 27), which is surrounded by a series of other representations of the parable. In the center, a "modern" Prodigal Son sits on the right, embracing a courtesan while being addressed by an old

large number of sixteenth-century examples of Prodigal Sons and brothel scenes, with the old woman as procuress see the illustrations in K. Renger, *Lockere Gesellschaft*, Berlin 1970. The traditional portrayal of the stereotype of the procuress or madam as an old woman probably evolved as a way of incorporating the image of Avarice. In the print depicting the squandering in the brothel from the allegorical Prodigal Son series by Cornelis Anthonisz, we see, not surprisingly, the word *Avaritia* above the old procuress (Renger, fig. 4). In her first appearance in representations of Danaë, in Primaticcio and in Titian's later versions, she clearly represents both a procuress and—greedily catching coins or gathering them together—an image of Avarice.

¹¹¹ The inscription on Floris's print reads: "Quid non mortalia pectora cogis, auri sacra fames" ("To what length do you not drive the hearts of men, O cursed greed for gold!"). The inscription on Wierix's print, a rather labored variation on Horace's words, reads: "Inclusam Danaen risit Venus alma Jovemque conversum in pretium gremiu(m)que implere puellae conctaque caeruleis penetrare sub orbib(us) aurum" ("The nurturing Venus laughed because Danaë was locked up and Jupiter transformed himself into gold, filling the girl's womb, and because under the blue skies of heaven gold is almighty"). I am indebted to Arnout Visser for his help with the translation from the Latin.



28 Otto van Veen, *Quid non auro pervium*, from Otho Vaenius, *Q. Horatii Flacci emblemata*, Antwerp 1607

procuress: above their heads hangs a painting of Danaë (also accompanied by an old woman).¹¹²

In his painting Goltzius shows not only a shower of coins: all around Danaë piles of coins and other golden objects are strewn about, a pointed reference to the idea—repeated in detail by van Mander in his *Wtlegghingh op den Metamorphosis*—that nothing can resist the power of money and gold.¹¹³ This idea is represented very literally in an emblem by Otto van Veen in his *Q. Horatii Flacci emblemata* of 1607 (fig. 28):¹¹⁴ money breaks through walls and soldiers give themselves up, while Danaë and the old woman are visible in the background. Pieter Isaacs did something similar in a *Danaë* which he drew in an *album amicorum*: in the background, seen through a window, cannons are firing at strong town walls, in contrast to the gold which easily surmounts “the highest walls... strongest chains, iron barriers, locks, bolts, gates and doors” (fig. 29).

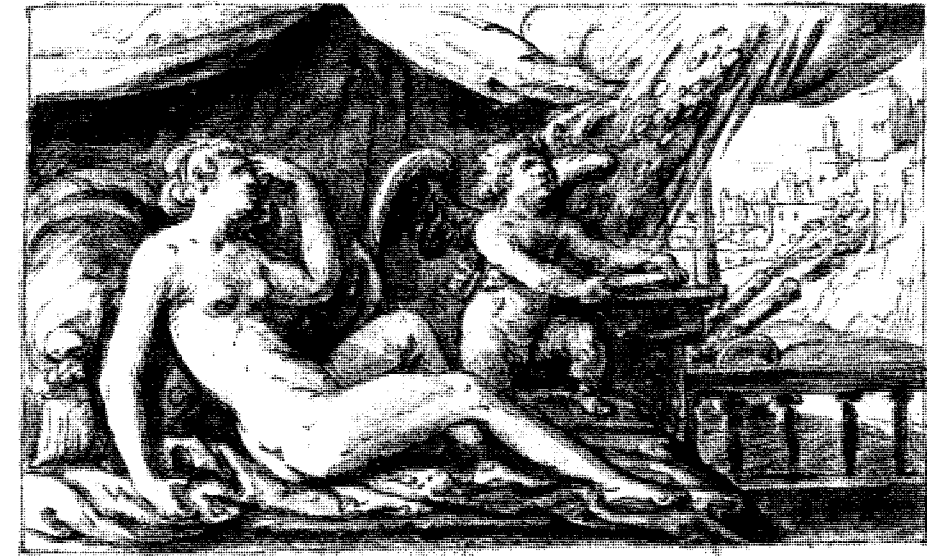
It was certainly not Goltzius’s aim, however, to provide us with a moralizing lesson in this vein. He was concerned with much more appealing and amusing matters.¹¹⁵

While, in antiquity, Terence had already placed a painting of Danaë in a comic context and Martial had provided witty commentary on a painted Danaë, while

tichste opgheschorte wijnbrouwen sachtlijck doen sinckende, t’onder brengende schaemte, deught, trouw, eer, en goede Wetten, en alles wat den Mensch noch weerdigher als het eyghen leven behoorde te wesen” (“...shows us nothing other than that through riches and gifts, due to the power of the most foolish avarice, one can accomplish and bring about everything: because Jupiter doubtless charmed and deceived his girlfriend and her wet nurse with great gifts of gold: so that one might well say that gold, beloved and desired everywhere, destroys and conquers everything, penetrating to the deepest, most hidden hollows of the Earth, climbing over the highest walls, sullyng, wrecking and breaking through the strongest chains, iron barriers, locks, bolts, gates and doors, yea defiling the purest and most sincere hearts and breasts, and causing the most seriously raised eyebrows to sink softly, bringing to ruin shame, virtue, loyalty, honor and good rules, and everything a man should consider more worthy than his own life”). The first part of this interpretation, derived mainly from the ode by Horace, is based on Comes (see note 107 above), while the second part is an elaboration of Horologgi’s explanations added to the translation of the *Metamorphoses* by G.A. dell’Anguillara, *Le metamorfosi di Ovidio con le annotazioni di M. Giuseppe Horologgi*, Venice 1583, p. 76.

¹¹⁴ O. Vaenius, *Q. Horatii Flacci emblemata*, Antwerp 1607, pp. 126–27.

¹¹⁵ What follows is a more detailed version of the interpretation of this painting given in Sluijter, op. cit. (note 49), pp. 276–378.



29 Pieter Isaacs., *Danaë*, drawing from the *album amicorum* of Ernest Brinck van Harderwijk, fol. 246. The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek

Correggio had created an image full of light-hearted humor (and Bonasone one with coarse humor), Goltzius, in his painting, clearly turned the whole scene into a comedy. This is obvious from the fact that everyone—except Danaë herself—laughs or grins, a highly exceptional occurrence in a history painting.

“Next to her is a subtle old woman with a glowing face and also a cunning Mercury, and I do not know of more amiable little children who come flying in with a talon-purse, and other things,” wrote van Mander, doubtless with tongue in cheek, about this painting.¹¹⁶ That the picture tells a story of sex and money is made crystal clear by the leftmost Cupid: he flies merrily around with the *stokbeurs* (money pouches held on a short staff, called a talon-purse in the translation quoted above) mentioned by van Mander—an enormous specimen, which is not only a reference to financial transactions but also—through its form—an unambiguous allusion to masculine lust. The old procuress grinningly attempts to awaken Danaë, who does seem to realize

what is going on, as witnessed by her blissful smile and her remarkable right hand with its outstretched middle finger.¹¹⁷

To the right of the grinning old woman we see the laughing head of Mercury with his winged helmet and caduceus. Mercury, however, is completely out of place in this story, so he must have been put there for a special reason. He was, of course, the god of commerce, financial gain and even deceit, but he was always seen as the personification of sharp wit and eloquence as well, and in this role he was also patron of the arts.¹¹⁸ For Goltzius, Mercury as patron of the artist had a special meaning, and he portrayed him many times as such. In his series of “planetary children” we see the people over whom Mercury rules, gathered together under his statue (fig. 30): here a painter stands in front of his easel (working on a canvas or panel displaying a female nude), there a sculptor is at work, and in the foreground we see learned rhetoricians.¹¹⁹ In the well-known painting in the Frans Halsmuseum, Mercury is even depicted as a

¹¹⁶ Miedema, op. cit. (note 27), vol. 1, fol. 286r.

¹¹⁷ Regarding the gesture of the outstretched middle finger, see L. Steinberg, “Eve’s idle hand,” *Art Journal* 35 (1975–76), pp. 130–35.

¹¹⁸ See what van Mander has to say about Mercury in *Wtbeeldinge der figuren*, in idem, *Het schilder-boeck*, Haarlem 1604, fol. 127r. For Mercury as protector of the arts and the ideal of “eloquent” artists, see

T. Da Costa Kaufmann, “The eloquent artist: toward an understanding of the stylistics of painting at the court of Rudolf II,” *Leids Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 1 (1982), 119–48.

¹¹⁹ The inscription, translated from the Latin, reads: “The charm of my eloquent tongue is my recommendation to the gods, and I teach the various arts to primitive mortals.”

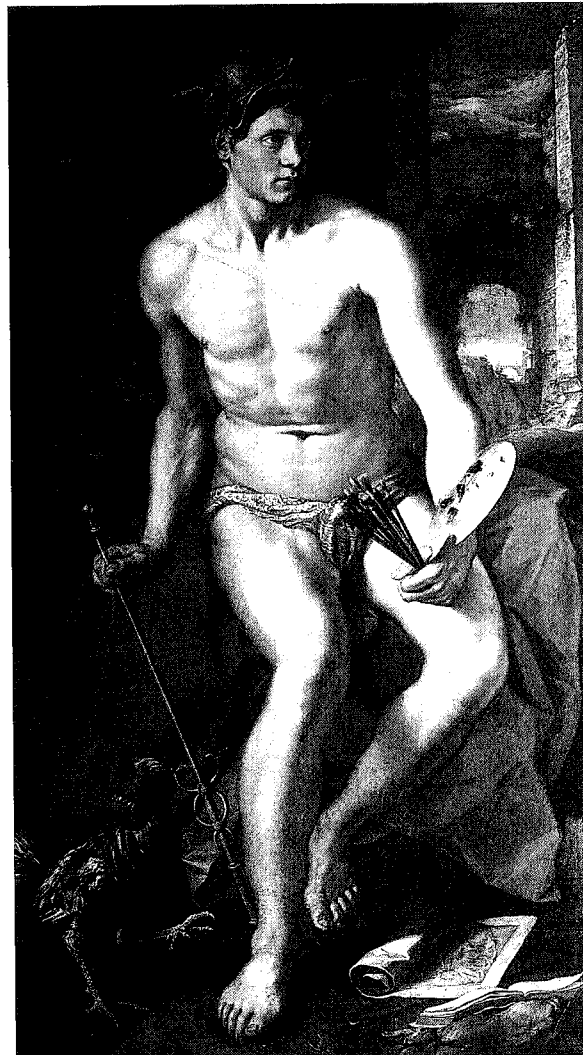


30 Hendrick Goltzius, *Mercury and his children*, engraving. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Rijksprentenkabinet

painter, with a palette and brushes in one hand and in the other his caduceus as if it were a maulstick (fig. 31). That Goltzius would be depicted in a portrait engraved posthumously by his stepson Jacob Matham (fig. 32) flanked by Mercury as the representative of *Spirito* (as written above Mercury's head),¹²⁰ almost seems self-evident, considering the fact that the caduceus also formed the central motif in the emblematic representation of Goltzius's own device "Eer boven Golt" ("Honor above gold"; fig. 33). There the caduceus, symbol of intellect and eloquence, stands on a mountain of coins, gold objects and a *stokbeurs*, all referring to his name. The caduceus is crowned by the laureled cherub's head turned toward the sun, a sign of honor and virtue.¹²¹

This "cunning Mercury," god of commerce and financial gain, but also of spiritedness and eloquence and at the same time patron of the painter, points—with a

broad grin on his face—his caduceus at the eagle, symbol of Jupiter whose lust was aroused at the sight of Danaë and from whom emanates a flash of lightning which turns into a shower of coins as it falls. This eagle, however—and Goltzius was the first to introduce it into a Danaë depiction—undoubtedly refers simultaneously and cleverly to the sense of sight, of which the eagle was the most common attribute. Goltzius in particular portrayed *Visus* many times (fig. 34, for example).¹²² As appears from countless texts (including the inscriptions to



31 Hendrick Goltzius, *Mercury*, 1611. Haarlem, Frans Halsmuseum (on loan from The Hague, Het Mauritshuis)



32 Jacob Matham, *Portrait of Hendrick Goltzius*, 1617, engraving. Leiden, Prentenkabinet van de Universiteit Leiden



33 Hendrick Goltzius, *The artist's emblem: Eer boven Golt*, drawing from the *album amicorum* of Ernest Brinck van Harderwijk, fol. 256. The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek

the prints engraved after Goltzius's *Visus* inventions), it is the sense that is regarded at once as the highest and the most dangerous, because it is capable of kindling lust as no other, and of provoking sinful thoughts and deeds.¹²³

In this way Goltzius wittily shows that the eloquence and power of persuasion of the painter—represented by Mercury—is capable, by means of the desirable beauty he has created, of enticing the highest of the gods into pouring forth golden rain, or rather of presenting the true connoisseur with such a tempting sight that he is lured into buying the painting, for it is he who ultimately falls in love with this Danaë and is willing to pay a lot of money to own her. Goltzius's signature—this was the only time he signed a painting with his full name—is

¹²⁰ Matham, B.22; on the other side sits *Disegno*.

¹²¹ For the caduceus as the symbol of the power of eloquence, see C.P. Valeriano Bolzani, *Hieroglyphica*, Lyons 1611, p. 157. For its use as the attribute of rhetoric, see the series after inventions by Goltzius which were mostly engraved by Drebbel: (B. [Drebbel after Goltzius] 4). There are three drawn versions of Goltzius's own device; see Reznicek, op. cit. (note 104), vol. 1, nrs. 195–97, figs. 354–55, 428.

¹²² See Sluijter, op. cit. (note 49), pp. 341–44, and figs. 237–38, 240.

¹²³ Ibid., pp. 352–62.



34 Nicolaes Clock after Hendrick Goltzius, *Visus*, 1596, engraving. Leiden, Prentenkabinet van de Universiteit Leiden

34 Nicolaes Clock after Hendrick Goltzius, *Visus*, 1596, engraving. Leiden, Prentenkabinet van de Universiteit Leiden

124 Noted by L.W. Nichols, "Onsterfelijkheid in smetteloos naakt," *Kunstschrift (Openbaar Kunstbezit)* 29 (1985), p. 158.

125 For an untenable moralizing interpretation, with Danaë as a symbol of chastity, see Broos *et al.*, op. cit. (note 104), pp. 242–43. Van Thiel saw a moralization which in my opinion is just as unlikely, see G. Luijten *et al.*, exhib. cat. *Damn of the golden age: northern Netherlandish art 1560–1620*, Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum) & Zwolle 1993, p. 544.

126 This concerns a work by a painter better known by the name of Ferrau da Faenza; see G.B. Marino, *La Galeria del cavalier Marino: distinta in pitture & sculture*, Venice 1664 (ed. princ. 1620), p. 20: "Danae Di Ferrau Finzoni: Si ricca è di bellezze/ Questa Danae gentili,

placed on the jewel box overflowing with money and "golt" (gold) at the left, indicating that the painter is actually the one who profits.¹²⁴ Thus his own high-flown motto is playfully ridiculed and incorporated into this clever jest.¹²⁵

This thought is not so far-fetched: others besides Goltzius came up with similar ideas, as witnessed by the fact that Gianbattista Marino, in a poem published in 1620 on a painting of Danaë by Ferrau Finzoni, actually compared the golden rain with which Jupiter "buys" the living Danaë with the much larger sum of money one must pay to own Ferrau's painted Danaë.¹²⁶ Several decades later Vondel would twice deliver himself of witticisms concerning the temptation and deception of the viewer willing to pay for such things, in poems on paintings of Danaë and Venus respectively.

In his verse on a sleeping Venus by Philips Koninck, Vondel in no way confused a painting of Venus with one of Danaë, as has been assumed—he knew what he was talking about. Praising the depiction of Venus because it resembled not a painting but a body of flesh and blood, he followed this up by saying that Jupiter, enamored of this beauty, descended in the form of golden rain. In contrast to Zeuxis, who only fooled birds, Koninck deceived the "chief among the gods with a painting." Vondel thus cited the comparison with Danaë in order to make the joke that the true-to-life appearance of the nude had seduced the "chief among the gods" (flattering praise for the highly placed owner) to pour forth a shower of money.¹²⁷

Vondel's verses about a Danaë by Dirck Bleker state that the beauty of the naked Danaë is capable of charming a god who can get anything he wants with gold ("What cannot be opened with golden keys! A philanthropist fears not alert guards"). But this womanizing god evidently allows himself to be deceived by appearances, because he "...finds nothing but paint and canvas." The

ch'accoglie in grembo/ Le celesti ricchezze,/ Che quell'istesso pretioso nembro,/ Che fù mercè possente/ A comprarla vivente,/ Fora vil prezzo, horche'l Finzon l'ha finta/ A pagarla dipinta." ("So rich in beauty/ Is this charming Danaë, who, in her womb/ Receives divine riches/ That the same costly cloud/ Which was a powerful means/ To buy her alive,/ Would be a pittance, now that Finzoni has portrayed her,/ If one would like to buy her as a painting.") My thanks to Paul van Heck for his help with the translation from the Italian.

127 J.F.M. Sterck *et al.* (eds.), *De werken van Vondel*, 11 vols., Amsterdam 1927–40, vol. 10, p. 630.

greedy Danaë has also been deceived, because for her the coins are, after all, only an illusion. Vondel ends the verse with the lines: "Thus the maiden lets trade flourish: / Thus art even outwits a god."¹²⁸ The picture of the beautiful Danaë therefore ensures that financial transactions take place,¹²⁹ while the "god" who has let himself be taken in by art is of course also in this case the owner who paid to possess this beautiful illusion.

In the case of Goltzius's *Danaë* we know that the first owner was a well-known connoisseur and collector: "...this piece is in Leiden with the art-loving Mr Bartholomeus Ferreris, to be seen in his cabinet or collection together with other handsome works," writes van Mander. This Bartholomeus Ferreris, who undoubtedly had north Italian roots, was the manager of the Leiden Lending Bank. He had at one time been trained as a painter—according to van Mander, by none other than Anthonis Mor and the Pourbus brothers—and had also practiced art for his own pleasure. Van Mander had dedicated his lives of the Italian painters to him.¹³⁰ Well-acquainted with the power of money through his job as a financier, and knowing the value of art works from his experience as a collector, Ferreris undoubtedly found this painting highly amusing.¹³¹ He would certainly have been able to appreciate the erotic appeal of the nude, which must have displayed a resemblance to life hitherto unknown to Dutch eyes: "painted miraculously fleshily," as van Mander said of it.

128 Ibid., vol. 5, pp. 495–96: "Wat sluit geen goude sleutels open! / De snoeplust vreest geen scherpe wacht.../ Maer vint' er niets dan verf en doeck/ En zy een' schijn van roode schijven/ Zoo laet de Maeght den handel drijven: / Zoo valt de kunst een' Godt te kloek."

129 By joking about the maiden letting trade flourish, Vondel was perhaps also implying that the real nude is often a prostitute who poses for money (though she receives only a fraction of what the painter earns with her image). On the motif of the immoral model see Sluiter, op. cit. (note 49), p. 371, esp. note 167 (pp. 390–91), with further references.

130 See van Mander, op. cit. (note 96), fol. 92r–v. A short biography of Ferreris is to be found in M.K. Wurfbain, *Catalogus van de schilderijen en tekeningen, Stedelijk Museum De Lakenhal*, Leiden 1983, p. 142 (in which a painting is attributed to him—wrongly, in my opinion) and in M.J. Bok, "Art-lovers and their paintings: van Mander's *Schilder-boeck* as a source for the history of the art market in the northern Netherlands," in Luijten *et al.*, op. cit. (note 125), p. 155. In 1587–88 Ferreris must have been headman of the Delft Guild of St Luke; in 1598 he became a business partner of his brother-in-law, Jan François Susio. As *tafelhouder*, or manager of the Leiden Lending Bank (a pawnshop), he succeeded the fraudster Sion Luz, another important connoisseur and art collector often mentioned by van Mander; see T.H. Lunsingh

Ferreris acquired a painting which Goltzius must have viewed as an important "demonstration piece" designed to direct connoisseurs' attention to his ability to paint lifesize female nudes in the latest Italian manner: a work which pointedly challenged a legendary painting of classical antiquity and the two greatest Italian painters of nudes, Titian and Michelangelo, the former a representative of the convincing imitation of nature by means of color and the latter of the ideal perfection of line. This painting enabled Goltzius to place himself in the great Italian tradition, and he did so with a subject that was exemplary of the effect an image can have upon the senses, at the same time being a theme—the female nude—that could be viewed as a paradigm of the highest goal any "Apelles" could strive for.

No one will blame Goltzius for not succeeding in surpassing Titian: that task would fall to Rembrandt.

Among the works which Goltzius viewed as a challenge was perhaps also a painting mentioned by van Mander—one made by his friend Cornelis Ketel. Van Mander spoke of "a Danaë with the golden shower, a large piece with life-sized figures." Seeing as he described this Danaë a bit further on as lying on a bed "with her legs apart,"¹³² we must be dealing here with a work which, as regards the placing of the figure, follows more closely the type by Correggio and Titian, or, more likely, the print after Frans Floris (fig. 26).¹³³ That is certainly the

Scheurleer *et al.* (eds.), *Het Rapenburg*, 6 vols., Leiden 1986–92, vol. 6a, pp. 83–86. The Lending Bank was not a success: in 1606 Ferreris and Susio declared bankruptcy.

131 Remarkable indeed is the fact that van Mander, in his dedication of *Het leven der... Italiaensche schilders*, op. cit. (note 96), fol. 92r–v (wrongly printed as fol. 72), expands on just this relationship between art and money, stating, among other things, that even lead is worth its weight in gold if it is painted by a great artist, concluding that anyone who finds money useless cannot value art for what it is worth. According to van Mander, Ferreris owned a number of rather valuable works by great masters: Lucas van Leyden, Quinten Massys, Hans Holbein, Michiel van Miereveld and Cornelis Cornelisz. van Haarlem (fols. 214r, 216r, 223v, 218v and 293 respectively). Van Buchell also had glowing praise for a *Crucifixion* by Bruegel of 1559; see G.J. Hoogewerff and J.Q. van Regteren Altena, *Arnoldus Buchelius, "Res pictoriae,"* The Hague 1928, p. 78.

132 Miedema, op. cit. (note 27), vol. 1, fols. 279v–80r.

133 See also the *Danaë* by Denys Calvaert (Hull, Ferens Gallery, 1963), photograph Netherlands Institute for Art History (hereafter cited as RKD; reproduced in Santore, op. cit. (note 79), p. 425, and an anonymous, late sixteenth-century *Danaë* (Stockholm, private collection, 1960), photograph RKD, as "manner of Lambert Sustris."



35 Anonymous artist, *Danaë*. Cognac, Musée Municipal

case with a lifesize *Danaë* in the Musée Municipal in Cognac which was incorrectly attributed to Goltzius. One may ask oneself whether this is actually the piece by Ketel (fig. 35).¹³⁴

Ketel's painting gave van Mander the opportunity "to relate a farcical incident." Here again the *Danaë* theme emerges as a source of jesting. A peasant who saw the painting hanging in the entrance hall of the painter's

house had asked Ketel's wife if he might be allowed to examine it, because it interested him greatly and he thought he understood it. The peasant then supposedly said: "Dear lady, are you able to do that? Then you will earn a good living for yourself."¹³⁵ The *double entendre* is clear: the words of the peasant can be understood in various ways, for "maken" (to do) can here mean "produce," "perform," "bring about," or "play the role of." In the first place, one can interpret this as the naive peasant thinking that Ketel's wife had made the picture and could therefore earn a good living by painting life-size nudes. Alternatively, it could mean that he thought that she would be able to earn a pretty penny as a model posing for such paintings. After all, she had caused a downpour of coins. And there is yet another interpretation: that the peasant felt that she would earn a handsome living if she could do this, that is to say play the role of *Danaë*, the seductive courtesan who amasses gold with her beauty.

After this somewhat risqué witticism van Mander then ridicules, in no uncertain terms, the old Christian reading of the *Danaë* story from late-medieval writings. The peasant, van Mander tells us, said he knew what the painting meant: it was the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary, thought the peasant, priding himself on his superb judgment and insight. He took a flying cupid to be an angel,¹³⁶ "and *Danaë* who lay naked and with her legs apart on a beautiful, rich bedstead, as Mary." The peasant, "thus... departed with his coarse understanding as wise as before."¹³⁷

Van Mander arranged a confrontation of the classic example of an erotic representation with the stereotype of the ignoramus who knows nothing about art, in order to demonstrate that paintings like this are not intended for the eyes of such people. Those contemptible fools, knowing nothing about the prestige of pictorial and

the attribution of the latter work. An interesting detail in the Cognac picture is the mask of deceit on the old woman's back.

¹³⁵ Miedema, op. cit. (note 27), vol. 1, fol. 28or.

¹³⁶ Although there is a winged Cupid in the painting in Cognac, he is not flying but fondling *Danaë*. Van Mander may have invented it only for the story. A flying cupid of rather robust proportions is present, however, in the drawing with a depiction of *Danaë* attributed to Gerrit Pietersz, in the collection of the University of Göttingen; see Foucart, op. cit. (note 134), fig. 4.

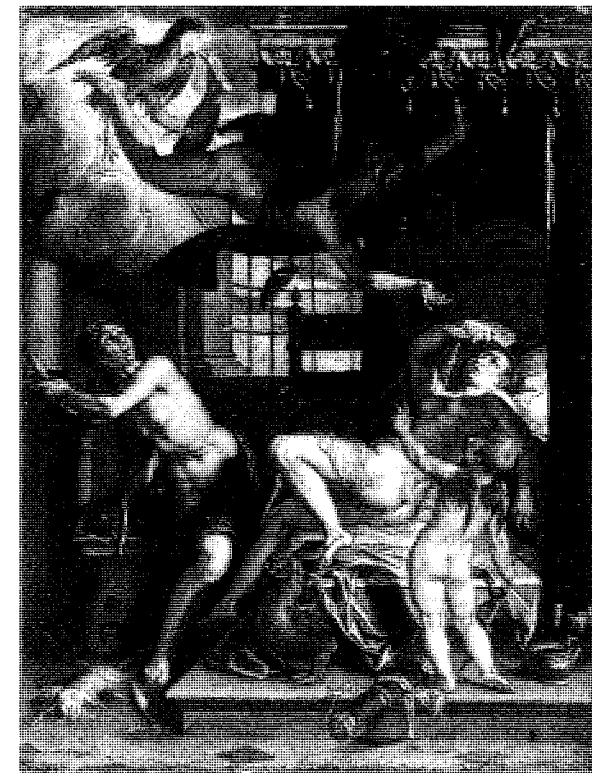
¹³⁷ Miedema, op. cit. (note 27), vol. 1, fol. 28or.

¹³⁴ The work was published by J. Foucart, "Du Palais-Royal au Louvre: le Jupiter et Danaë de Joachim Wtewael," *La Revue du Louvre* 31 (1981), p. 116, fig. 3 (as Hendrick Goltzius), and was previously attributed alternately to the Flemish school of the sixteenth century, the school of Fontainebleau, Goltzius or his school, or the school of Prague. Only recently there surfaced a large, signed and dated (1580) history piece that can be attributed to Ketel with certainty, see T. Schulting, "'Sterckheyt van Wijsheyt en Voorsichticheyt verwonnen': overwegingen bij een allegorie van Cornelis Ketel," *Oud Holland* 111 (1997), pp. 153–62. However, this painting is undoubtedly of much earlier origin than the *Danaë* and unfortunately does not provide any clues as to

poetic traditions, will only see the painting as a manifestation of the immorality of the painter and his model, who are willing to do anything for money.¹³⁸ The current reading of the *Danaë* story, which revolves around money, is used here to lend weight to this witticism for the good listener. And when such simple souls think they understand it, things only get worse: they are certain to arrive at idiotic interpretations. In this dismissive way a mockery is made of theological allegory, that was seen as perfectly ridiculous, which van Mander—and for nearly a century many others with him—was dead set against.¹³⁹

At the same time van Mander showed that only a peasant—knowing nothing of decorum—could assume that the Virgin would be depicted "with her legs apart."¹⁴⁰ It seems to be a box on the ears of twentieth-century art historians who interpreted Gossaert's *Danaë* as a prefiguration of the *Maria humilitatis* and who even went so far as to assume that a *Danaë* by Joachim Wtewael "...connotes modesty and chastity, as she had in the middle ages, when *Danaë* was viewed as a prefiguration of Mary" and also as "a warning against mercenary love" (fig. 36).¹⁴¹ Van Mander—and Wtewael as well—would probably have found this incredibly funny, the more so because in this painting any semblance of a "miraculous" impregnation is removed by showing Jupiter in very bodily form, which would have caused even van Mander's peasant to think twice.

Inspired perhaps by van Mander's descriptions of the *Danaës* by Ketel and Goltzius, Wtewael had also turned to this subject, which resulted in a truly hilarious rendering of the story on a very small copper plate.¹⁴² Not only does the eagle emerge through the ceiling of *Danaë*'s room, but Jupiter himself descends in the midst of a shower of coins, as though he were a very corporeal and extremely clamorous angel of the Annunciation.¹⁴³ With this bodily Jupiter, Wtewael probably wanted to make the depiction both especially funny and scrupu-



36 Joachim Wtewael, *Danaë*. Paris, Musée du Louvre

lously correct. In van Mander's detailed description of the *Danaë* story in the *Wtlegghingh*—a description which he copied literally from Natale Conti's mythological handbook and that deviates from the usual version—Jupiter actually assumes his own shape again and finally does what all lovers long to do: "Jupiter... changed himself into golden rain or gold drops, slid through the roof tiles, and let himself fall into the lap of his lady friend, who tucked these golden drops into her bosom. He then assumed his true form, enjoying the desired fruit, which

¹³⁸ See Sluiter, op. cit. (note 49), pp. 370–71, esp. notes 165–67 and 210, for the motif of the artist who finds erotic stimulation in the painting of nudes, which could also deteriorate into the stereotype of the painter and his model as lechers.

¹³⁹ Van Mander, *Wtlegghingh*, cit. (note 107), fol. iiir–v. On this see Sluiter, op. cit. (note 59), pp. 315, 317 and 305–06.

¹⁴⁰ For this reason Hessel Miedema, *Karel van Mander, Den grondt der edel vry schilder-const*, 2 vols., Utrecht 1973, vol. 2, p. 454, interpreted the story mainly as a demonstration of decorum.

¹⁴¹ A.W. Lowenthal, *Joachim Wtewael and Dutch mannerism*, Doornspijk 1986, p. 120.

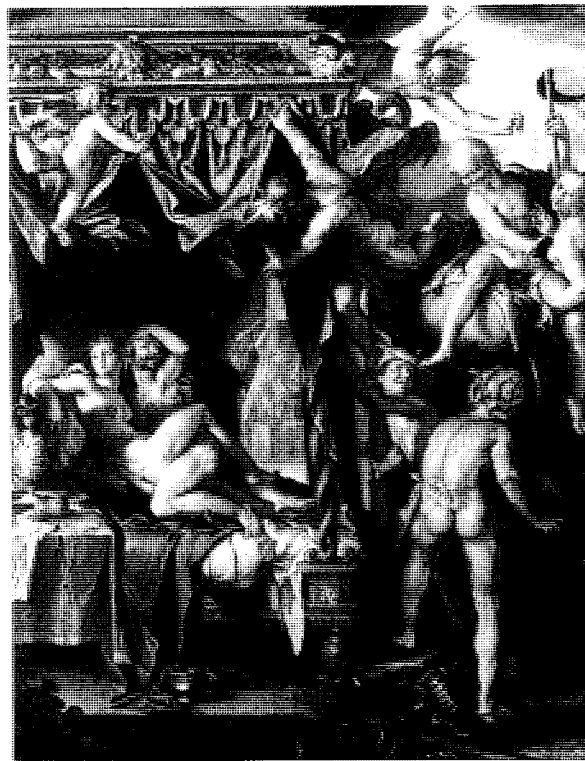
¹⁴² Ibid., pp. 119–20, cat. nr. A-45, dates the painting ca. 1606–10.

¹⁴³ The figure of Jupiter even recalls the angel in Tintoretto's *Annunciation* in the Scuola S. Rocco, which Wtewael undoubtedly saw during his travels through Italy; compare also the angel in Wtewael's own *Annunciation to the shepherds*, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Lowenthal, op. cit. (note 141), nr. A-9, fig. 11.

all lovers are burning to obtain."¹⁴⁴ The large spool held up by the old woman and the bundle of arrows sticking out of the picture in the foreground indicate Jupiter's longing, while the wooden spinning frame in the crone's right hand, which we look into from above, the slippers with their openings turned toward the viewer, and the chamberpot next to the bed all display Danaë's vulnerability. The bird sitting on the bars of the window undoubtedly has the same function as the birds in sixteenth-century brothel scenes which often sit in cages at the entrances to such establishments.¹⁴⁵ While Goltzius portrayed the old woman with a bare, withered breast—in stark contrast to Danaë's firm body—Wtewael went one step further by depicting the old woman practically naked. The somewhat distasteful confrontation of young and old seems therefore to have taken on the character of a satire on the motif.

That Danaë and the old woman are mightily shocked is understandable, given the great speed and unbridled energy with which Jupiter hurtles toward them. Danaë shades her eyes from the blinding light streaming from the clouds and turns the lower part of her body away in fright, thereby exposing to view her genitals, covered merely with a diaphanous cloth. Only Cupid—in a relaxed *contrapposto* and with a gesture as though he were stage-managing the whole scene—looks on in satisfaction as everything goes according to plan. Perhaps this small painting formed an ensemble with the equally amusing *Mars and Venus* in the Getty Museum (fig. 37).¹⁴⁶ This is one of the very rare paintings in which copulation visibly takes place: the poor couple is rudely disturbed in this activity, however, by the gods who gather round them, laughing merrily.¹⁴⁷

A drawing by Wtewael that probably preceded his *Danaë* (which would make it the depiction of an earlier



37 Joachim Wtewael, *Mars and Venus*. Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum

the Prodigal Son), 65 (Brunswick Monogrammist), and 81 (Jan Sanders van Hemessen).

¹⁴⁶ See Lowenthal, op. cit. (note 141), pp. 118, with the statement that the Danaë portrays "chaste love," as opposed to the "licentious love" in the other scene. The copper plates have the same format; the beds are practically mirror images of one another. The scale of the figures is slightly different, though. More likely than the chance of their being pendants, as Lowenthal assumed, it seems to me that they form a series of small erotic works for the decoration of an art cabinet.

¹⁴⁷ The deadly earnest with which this small painting—and the related version in the Mauritshuis—is usually interpreted is rather bewildering; see, among others, Lowenthal, op. cit. (note 141), pp. 98 and 118, and B. Broos, *Meesterwerken in het Mauritshuis*, The Hague 1987, pp. 417–20.

¹⁴⁴ Van Mander, *Wtlegghingh*, cit. (note 107), fol. 37v: "Iuppiter... veranderde hem in gulden reghen oft goudt-druppels, glijdende door de dack-tegelen, liet hem vallen in den schoot van zijn vriendinne, de welke dese gulden druppels stack in haren boesem. Doe hernam hy zijn recht ghestalt, ghenuttende de begeerde vrucht, daar alle Minnaers nae vlammeende zijn," and Comes, op. cit. (note 107), vol. 2, p. 831. Another variation in which Jupiter assumes his own shape is found in Dell' Anguillara, op. cit. (note 113), vol. 4, 375–76. Jan de Jong discovered frescoes in Rome with portrayals of Danaë (which he dated to the 1550s), in which she is seated on the bed, making love to Jupiter while golden rain pours down; see J. de Jong, "Love, betrayal and corruption: *Mars and Venus*, and *Danaë and Jupiter* in the Palazzi Stati-Cenci and Mattei di Paganica in Rome," to be published in *Source*.

¹⁴⁵ See, for instance, Renger, op. cit. (note 110), figs. 6 (Master of



38 Joachim Wtewael, *Danaë*, drawing. Munich, Staatliche Graphische Sammlung

idea) also shows Jupiter in his own shape, although only the upper part of his body emerges from the clouds (fig. 38).¹⁴⁸ Van Mander's description of the "amiable little children who come flying in with a talon-purse" in Goltzius's painting probably inspired Wtewael to strengthen the comic nature of this invention by having Jupiter himself appear with the same suggestively shaped attribute: supporting the bags with one hand and clasping the stick with the other, he shows what his intentions are, while coins are already dribbling out of the purse. Wtewael would not have seen the painting by Goltzius. The pictorial scheme of the Danaë motif in the background of Otto van Veen's above-mentioned emblematic print with the motto "Quid non auro pervium?" (What does gold not make accessible?) doubtless helped him in devising this composition (fig. 28). It must have been Wtewael's aim to amuse the owner and his male guests by exploiting to the fullest the erotic humor inherent in the subject, first in a drawing and then

on a small copper plate which could be viewed while holding it in the hand.

From his fellow townsman Abraham Bloemaert we know only a Danaë invention engraved by Jacob Matham in 1610 (fig. 39).¹⁴⁹ Here Danaë is still completely unaware of what is about to happen, even though the crowned head of Jupiter sticks out of the clouds and seems to be spewing forth coins. Bloemaert must have borrowed this motif from one of Titian's later Danaë versions (the one now in Vienna), of which there was an engraving.¹⁵⁰

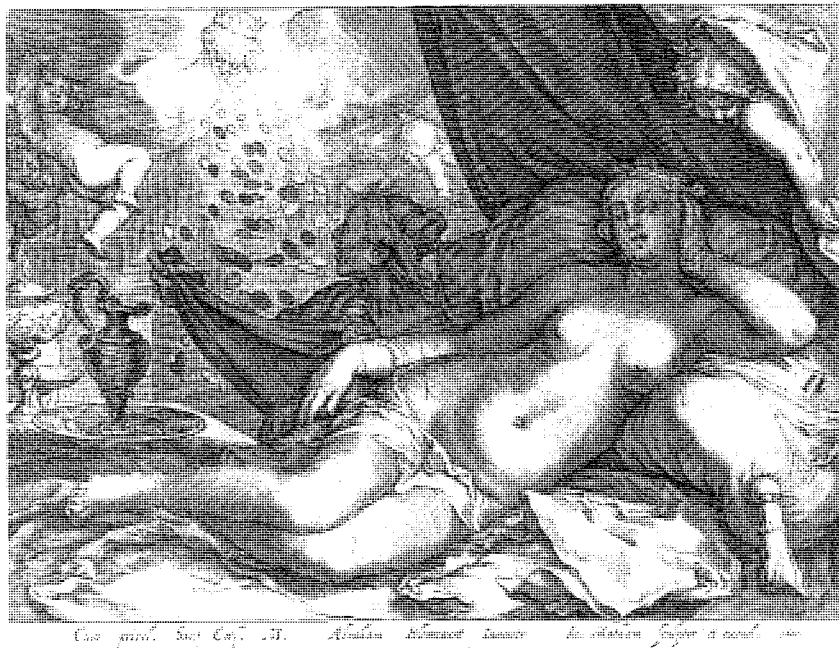
A younger generation of Dutch painters, active in the second and third decades of the seventeenth century, made hardly any erotic depictions with nudes. It is no wonder, then, that no Danaës are known from their hands. Starting in the 1640s, however, the subject made a comeback with several painters who began to concentrate again on depicting female nudes. It was probably

¹⁴⁸ See Lowenthal, op. cit. (note 141), p. 120, who dates the drawing to the same period.

¹⁴⁹ Perhaps it was Bloemaert's friend Aernout van Buchell who encouraged Bloemaert to do this. We know that van Buchell saw Goltzius's *Danaë* in June 1605 at Ferreris's in Leiden; see Hoogewerff and van Regteren Altena, op. cit. (note 131), p. 78.

¹⁵⁰ The old woman seen in full profile, who holds up her apron to catch the coins, is also a motif inspired directly by Titian, but then by

another version. It seems most likely that Bloemaert knew a workshop version that united both motifs, such as the one now in the Hermitage; see H.E. Wethey, op. cit. (note 21), vol. 3, cat. nr. x-12, fig. 199. For the print, which dates from the second half of the sixteenth century, see M. Catelli Isola, exhib. cat., *Immagini da Tiziano. Stampe dal sec. XVI al sec. XIX*, Rome (Villa Farnesina, Gabinetto Nazionale delle Stampe) 1976–77, nr. 36.



39 Jacob Matham after Abraham Bloemaert, *Danaë*, 1610, engraving. Leiden, Prentenkabinet van de Universiteit Leiden

Rembrandt who first took up the thread (fig. 40). And only Rembrandt—aware of all the implications of the theme—succeeded in competing with Titian.

He would undoubtedly have had the same ambitions as Goltzius. Here was another painter—and this cannot be accidental—who chose this subject at a crucial point in his career. Just as in Goltzius's case, Rembrandt's *Danaë* was the first lifesize nude he painted, after experimenting a number of times with nudes in a small format.¹⁵¹

In painting this ambitious work, which he began in 1636 and radically revised around the mid-1640s,¹⁵² he would certainly have been challenged and stimulated by Vasari's critical comments (via van Mander's version) on Titian's *Danaë* as the foremost example of Venetian painting.¹⁵³ The fact that van Hoogstraten, Rembrandt's

pupil at the time he finished his *Danaë*, also cites this anecdote twice—when speaking about imitating nature by means of color, as opposed to depicting the most beautiful that nature has to offer with the help of the art of drawing—suggests that there had been lively discussions on this subject in Rembrandt's studio during his apprenticeship.¹⁵⁴

Titian must have been *the* great example for Rembrandt in many respects, as evidenced by numerous works. His intense interest in the Italian, which must have been based at least in part on his knowledge of van Mander's biography of this master, was discussed in detail by Amy Golahny and also splendidly elucidated by Ernst van de Wetering in his study of the development of Rembrandt's painting technique.¹⁵⁵ In addition, it seems indisputable that Rembrandt knew that the

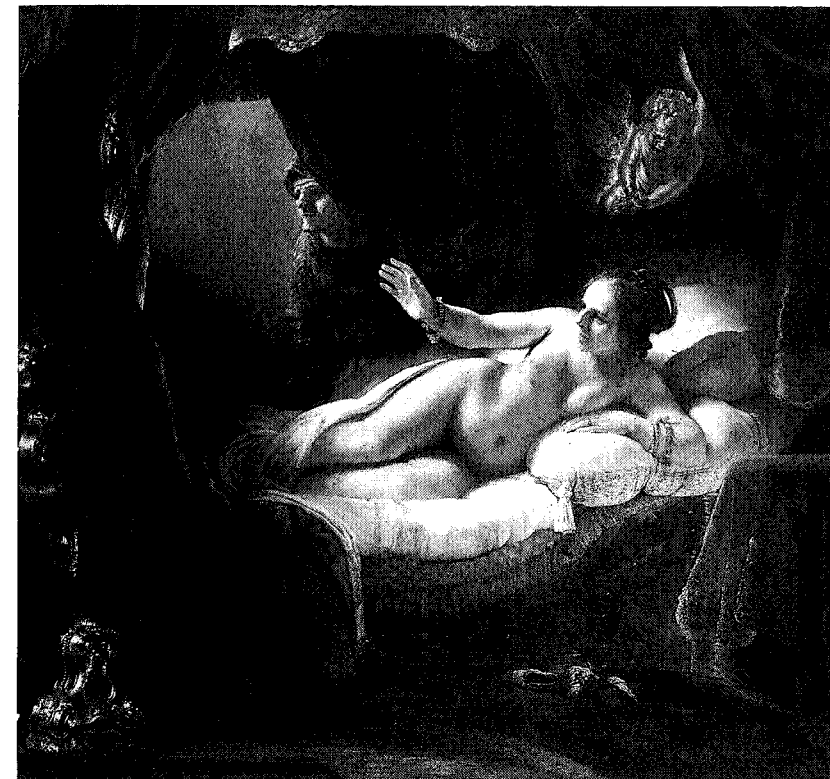
¹⁵¹ See E.J. Sluiter, "Rembrandt's early paintings of the female nude: Andromeda and Susanna," in G. Cavalli-Björkman (ed.), *Rembrandt and his pupils*, Stockholm 1993, pp. 31–54, and for *Diana with Actaeon* and *Callisto* see Sluiter, op. cit. (note 59), pp. 90–94 and 195–97.

¹⁵² For views on the dating see J. Bruyn *et al.*, *A corpus of Rembrandt paintings*, in progress, The Hague, Boston & London 1989–, vol. 3, pp. 209–23, nr. A 119, esp. p. 219.

¹⁵³ This was already pointed out by Golahny, op. cit. (note 96), pp. 137–42. See also Grohé, op. cit. (note 61), p. 241.

¹⁵⁴ Van Hoogstraten, op. cit. (note 67), pp. 36 and 288. See also Golahny, op. cit. (note 96), pp. 236–38.

¹⁵⁵ Golahny, op. cit. (note 96), chs. 5 and 6. E. van de Wetering, *Rembrandt: the painter at work*, Amsterdam 1997, ch. 6, esp. pp. 162–69.



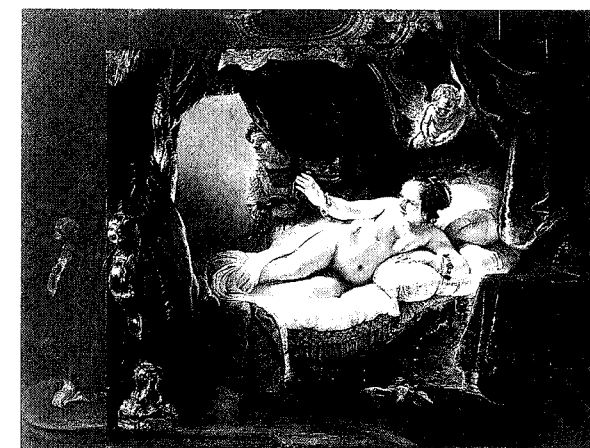
40 Rembrandt, *Danaë*. St Petersburg, Hermitage

Danaë depiction could be seen as an example of a painting with great sensual appeal. From the fact that the best-selling authors Cats and van Beverwijck referred to Terence's story in their discussion of the dangers of paintings displaying nudes and other "licentious" representations, and that van Hoogstraten later did the same, it appears that this would have been quite obvious, especially to a painter concerned with the portrayal of female nudes.¹⁵⁶

When Rembrandt chose *Danaë* as the subject of his first lifesize nude, he may also have done so to compete with Goltzius's painting. He could have seen it in his youth in Leiden at the home of Ferreris, who, as an amateur painter and connoisseur, undoubtedly provided young, talented artists with the opportunity to visit his valuable collection.¹⁵⁷ Perhaps it was even one of the few

¹⁵⁶ See note 71.

¹⁵⁷ In any case Ferreris must still have been alive and living in Leiden in 1628; see Bok, op. cit. (note 130), p. 155. It appears from the



41 Rembrandt, *Danaë*, reconstruction of the original format, made for the Rembrandt Research Project (with thanks to E. van de Wetering)

fact that van Mander and Buchelius both knew his collection that he was probably fond of showing it to other connoisseurs.

large-scale female nudes by a renowned master which Rembrandt had actually seen, thus presenting him with a challenge, for such representations were certainly rare at that time. Although at first glance there seems to be scant resemblance, many elements may point to recollections of Goltzius's work—the scale of the nude, the lower part of the body turned outwards, the slightly raised right leg, the somewhat oblique placing of the bed in the room, the bulky white cushions with their rounded forms which bend with the shape of the nude, the draperies on the righthand side, the Cupid above Danaë's head and the slippers in front of the bed.¹⁵⁸

When Rembrandt wanted to persuade the viewer with *his* answer to this “exemplary” theme, he (unlike Goltzius) wholeheartedly sided with Titian, of whom van Mander, in imitation of Vasari, had written that he had “begun to make his things softer, more three-dimensional and in a much more beautiful manner: nevertheless painting things from life without preparatory drawing as best he could, taking pains to depict with the colors everything he observed, be it hard or soft.”¹⁵⁹ Seldom has seemingly “breathing” skin been suggested with paint in such a convincing way, and seldom has such an optimal effect of sensual beauty been achieved. Like Titian, Rembrandt must have seen as his most important objective the spectacular suggestion of true-to-life corporality by means of color and paint texture. The

words of Joachim von Sandrart, who must have known Rembrandt between 1637 and 1645 when he was living in Amsterdam, certainly reflected Rembrandt's aims when he wrote (admittedly 30 years later), “...that he was capable of breaking the colors [varying the tonal values] according to their own nature with great ingenuity and artfulness, and was thus able to render nature on a panel with faithful and lively genuineness and to portray it as harmoniously as in real life, whereby he opens the eyes of all who, following the common usage, tend more to fill in the colors than to paint, because they place the hard and glaring nature of colors next to one another in a most unsubtle way.”¹⁶⁰ It is precisely this *Danaë* which shows to such good effect Rembrandt's transition to a warmer palette, a “more subtle alternation of large fields of light and half-shadow” and “a pictorial interplay between form and tonal and color values.”¹⁶¹

The change in Rembrandt's style during this period is also visible in the work itself: when he revised the painting around the mid-1640s he thoroughly painted over only the body of Danaë and her immediate surroundings, including the white bedclothes, the old woman and the table. On the other hand, the more detailed and more sharply modelled style in which the bed is rendered remained unchanged.¹⁶² At the same time he must have cropped the canvas drastically: strips of considerable width were cut off the sides in particular, the

most substantial being about 40 cm on the lefthand side (fig. 41).¹⁶³

The narrower framework of the definitive version compels the viewer to focus more intensely on Danaë's naked body. By removing the strip on the left containing the second bed-post, the clear spatial positioning of the bed has been lost.¹⁶⁴ Cropping has however caused the remaining gilt bed-post, the drawn-back curtain hanging by it, the remaining ornamented border at the upper edge and the curtain pushed back at the right to function all together as a richly accentuated frame. They now form a luxurious setting for the nude, who rests like a jewel on cushions strongly reflecting the light.

This monumental frame is emphasized by the shimmering radiance of the rather sharply defined and painstakingly painted reflections of light, contrasting with the softly modelled nude which it encloses. Even its illumination distinguishes this framework from what is seen inside it: the light—falling on the sculptured bed (including Cupid) and the accompanying draperies—comes from the upper left and directly from the side. The light falling on the nude has been altered, however. Here the effect of backlighting has been created: a strong, golden glow brushes across Danaë from a rather low angle at rear left. The undulating contours of her body are given extra emphasis, for its strongly lit upper side stands out against the dark background and the transparent shadow

of the lower side of her body is clearly visible against the brightly lit bedclothes. Danaë's body is somewhat more taut and stylized than those of Rembrandt's earlier *Andromeda* and *Susanna*,¹⁶⁵ but the rather stocky proportions—the stomach hanging down a bit and the left breast pushed up, elements not found in the work of any of his predecessors—stress the lifelike quality and approachability of her naked body. Rembrandt doubtless strove in the most consummate way to elicit the sort of response from connoisseurs that we know so well from several poems on erotic paintings written by Vondel and Vos: a response, said to cause much arousal, in which the viewer imagines the nude to be alive.¹⁶⁶

Rembrandt maintained the image of a chained and crying Cupid, cleverly referring to Danaë's deplorable situation, locked up and therefore deprived of love.¹⁶⁷ This contrasts with the joyous expression on her face, which points to the dramatic change in her condition. The old woman was retained as a contrast to the young beauty, but otherwise Rembrandt eliminated everything that might detract from the viewing of the naked body. The color gold is present in the painting in plentiful supply, but Rembrandt removed the jewels which lay on the table next to Danaë in the first version, and—in stark contrast to Goltzius and all his other eminent predecessors—stripped the depiction of all reference to money.¹⁶⁸ Any jesting about the connection between

¹⁵⁸ Otherwise it would have been mainly prints which he had in mind when devising the pose and composition of this recumbent nude. Many sources of inspiration have been pointed out over the years. In my opinion Rembrandt certainly knew the print by Hieronymus Wierix (fig. 23), and the engraving by Jacob Matham after Abraham Bloemaert was also of importance (fig. 39). The position of the legs and abdomen, the placing of the old woman (especially in the first version), and the pillow recall the latter invention. The famous etching by Annibale Carracci with *Jupiter and Antiope* (B. 204) doubtless inspired him as well. It has often been assumed that a Danaë composition by Annibale Carracci influenced Rembrandt; see Panofsky, op. cit. (note 2), p. 212, Kahr, op. cit. (note 12), p. 51. On this see Grohé, op. cit. (note 61), pp. 243–44, who, following Ann Tzeuschler Lurie, also examines a Danaë by Orazio Gentileschi which certainly displays similarities, though in my opinion cannot have been of direct importance. The extent to which Rembrandt was inspired by a Danaë by Padovanino, mentioned in 1657 in the inventory of the art dealer de Renialme, remains a matter for conjecture; see Bruyn *et al.*, op. cit. (note 152), p. 220.

¹⁵⁹ Van Mander, op. cit. (note 96), fol. 174v: “...begon zijn dingen poeseliger, meer verhevender, en op een schoonder manier te maken:

gebruyckende evenwel ten besten dat hy mocht, zijn dingen sonder teyckenen te schilderen nae t'leven, waernemende met den verwen uyt te beelden alles wat hy daer in sagh, t'zy hardt oft soet.” Vasari's version of this passage referred to Giorgione, but van Mander transferred the reference entirely to Titian; see Golahny, op. cit. (note 96), pp. 33–34.

¹⁶⁰ A.R. Peltzer, *Joachim von Sandrarts Academie der Bau- Bild- und Mahlerey-Künste von 1675*, Munich 1925 (ed. princ. Nuremberg 1675), pp. 202–03: “...dass er die Farben sehr vernünftig und künstlerisch von ihren eigen Art zu brechen, und nachmalen damit auf der Tafel, der Natur warhafte und lebhaftige Eingältigkeit, mit guter Harmonie des Lebens, auszubilden gewußt, womit er dann allen denen die Augen eröffnet, welche, dem gemeinen Brauch nach, mehr Färber als Mahler sind, indem sie die Härteigkeit und rauhe Art der Farben ganz frech und hart neben einander legen.” In spite of his negative views, meanwhile colored by Classicism, this characterization by Sandrart was undoubtedly based on his own observations and recollections.

¹⁶¹ Bruyn *et al.*, op. cit. (note 152), p. 219.

¹⁶² See *ibid.*, pp. 209–14 and 216–20.

¹⁶³ See E. van de Wetering, “Het formaat van Rembrandts Danaë,” in M. Adang *et al.*, *Met eigen ogen: opstellen aangeboden... aan Hans L.C. Jaffé*, Amsterdam 1984, pp. 67–72, and van de Wetering, op. cit. (note 155), pp. 126–27. Strangely enough, neither van de Wetering nor the *Corpus* suggests that Rembrandt could have done this himself (they assume that it happened much later). This is rightly suggested by Grohé, op. cit. (note 61), p. 233. I do not doubt, and neither does he, that the cropping is connected with the other changes; moving the old woman and the rear curtain to the right fits into this version of events.

¹⁶⁴ See Bruyn *et al.*, op. cit. (note 152), p. 218, fig. 9, and van de Wetering, op. cit. (note 155), p. 127, fig. 167.

¹⁶⁵ Regarding these naturalistic nudes, whose forms and proportions seem to represent a sexually desirable type for that period, see Ann Hollander, *Looking through clothes*, New York & London 1975, pp. 160 and 108; see also Sluijter, op. cit. (note 151), pp. 35–36, and *ibid.*, op. cit. (note 109), pp. 69–70.

¹⁶⁶ See, for instance, K. Porteman, “Vondels gedicht *Op een Italiaensche Schildery van Susanne*,” in G. van Eemeren (ed.), *'t Onderzoek leert: studies... ter nagedachtenis van L. Rens*, Louvain & Amersfoort 1986, pp. 310–18. Cf. also Cats, *Houwelijk*, cit. (note 71), p. 162, whose warning against obscene paintings includes the statement that the better the painter and the more lifelike his picture, the greater the harm

done. See further Sluijter, op. cit. (note 59), pp. 270–75, and *ibid.*, op. cit. (note 49), pp. 355–59, *ibid.* op. cit. (note 151), pp. 44–46. As noted previously, the motif of taking the image for a living being (and at the same time realizing that it is only paint) is admittedly a classic literary *topos*, though this in no way diminishes its significance. Both the painter and the poet or connoisseur and viewer would have capitalized on such thoughts. Apart from this, we must also realize that mentally “bringing [an image] to life” really does take place in the case of an erotic picture that arouses the viewer sexually; see D. Freedberg, *The power of images: studies in the history and theory of response*, Chicago & London 1989, ch. 12: “Arousal by image.”

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Panofsky, op. cit. (note 2), p. 216.

¹⁶⁸ I cannot exclude the possibility that the coins were in fact present in the first version (I even think I see small spots around the hand in the X-radiograph; Bruyn *et al.*, op. cit. (note 152), p. 213, fig. 3). An anonymous Danaë which was sold in 1971 as a Salomon Koninck (see note 172) seems in a number of respects to reflect the first version, as may be seen in the arm, the hand and the legs; there the coins stream from an intense, glowing light at upper left, diagonally down to the outstretched hand of Danaë. This would also explain the original direction of the light in Rembrandt's painting—from the upper left and directly from the side, as opposed to diagonally from the back.