A STUDY OF THE DANAID MYTH[1]

By Campbell Bonner

I

In discussing the myth of the Danaids it seems advisable to state at the beginning the features of the story that are vouched for by all or almost all of the ancient writers who repeat it. Then the important variations will be taken up, and where possible an attempt will be made to indicate which version is best authenticated. The origin of the varying accounts will be in some measure explained and attention will be directed to the parts of the story which appear to be most ancient and genuinely mythical. It may be found that those parts are not susceptible of ultimate analysis and explanation. In that event it will at least be worth while to reduce the story to its simplest and most primitive form, and to set apart all later accretions.

Rejecting then details in regard to which authorities are not in accord, the story is as follows

The Danaids were the fifty daughters of Danaus. They were persuaded or compelled to marry the fifty[2] sons of Aegyptus, the brother of Danaus, but freed themselves by slaying their husbands on the night of the marriage. They cut off the heads of the young men and threw them into the Lernaean marsh. Hypermestra[3] alone took no part in this crime, and spared her husband Lynceus. The others were condemned in the lower world to expiate their impious deed by filling a leaky vessel with water. It should be said, however, that this penalty is not mentioned until the later period of the literature.

Passing now to features of the story about which our authorities disagree, we find varying accounts of the personality of Danaus. According to the scholiast of Euripides,[4] Danaus and Aegyptus were

---

[1] Some of the conclusions reached in this paper have already been published in *Trans. of the Am. Phil. Assoc.*, 1900, pp. 27–36.

[2] Hecataeus, quoted in Schol. Eur. *Or.* 871, gives the number as less than twenty.

[3] For the spelling, cf. O. Schröder, Prolegomena to Pindar, II, § 57.

[4] On *Hec.* 886.

sons of Io, the daughter of Inachus. Their father is not named. All other writers[1] agree that they were sons of Belus, a grandson of Epaphus, the son of Io. There are also varying statements about the wives of the two brothers. Each had only one wife, according to Hippostratus.[2] Others mention several.[3]

Of more importance for the history of the myth is the question whether Danaus was purely an Argive personage or was regarded as an immigrant of African origin. The scholiast of Euripides[4] leaves us to infer that Danaus was an Argive and always lived in Argos. He says, however, that Aegyptus was expelled from Argos by his brother and lived for a time as an exile in Egypt. The other authorities agree in saying that Danaus formerly reigned in Egypt or Libya, but apprehending danger from his brother and nephews, fled to Argos with his daughters. The different version presented by the scholiast is perhaps to be explained by the fact that he, or the source from which he draws, ignores the common legend about Io's wandering to Egypt. Those writers who show that this story was familiar to them must necessarily connect Danaus and Aegyptus, as descendants of Io, with the land to which she had migrated.

In assigning reasons for the enmity between the families of Danaus and Aegyptus and for the consequent tragedy, different narratives display an inconsistency that becomes an important factor in the interpretation of the myth. Thus, from Eustathius's note on *Il.* 1, 42 we learn that Danaus fled to Argos because an oracle had warned him to beware of the sons of Aegyptus. The crime of the Danaids was committed in Argos, after their marriage. A slightly different account appears in a scholium on Eur. *Or.* 872, where it is related that Danaus consulted the oracle after the wedding, and when warned that the marriage would bring fatal consequences to him, persuaded his daughters to put their husbands to death. Nothing is said about his flight. Again, a scholiast on *Il.* 1, 42 says that a dispute about the sovereignty in Egypt was the

---

[1] Ps.-Apollod. *Bibl.* 2, 11 (Wagner), Schol. Eur. *Or.* 932, Tzetz. *Chil.* 7, *Hist.* 136, and, apparently, Aesch. *Prom.* 879, Eustath. p. 37, 10 on *Il.* 1, 42, and Schol. *ibid.*

[2] Apud Tzetz. *l. c.* Cf. also Schol. Apoll. Rhod. 3, 1186.

[3] E. g. Ps.-Apollod. *Bibl.* 2, 16 ff.

[4] *Hec.* 886.

cause of the enmity between the two brothers, that Danaus instigated the crime after being warned by the oracle, and then after the murder fled to Argos.[1] Other writers say nothing about the advice of the oracle, and find an explanation of the feud in a quarrel about the kingdom, the rights and wrongs of which are not consistently stated. The scholiast on Eur. *Hec.* 886 represents Danaus as a jealous aggressor, who exiled his brother. Pseudo-Servius[2] and Hyginus[3] on the other hand represent him as the injured party.

Certain scholars have held that the Danaids fled from Egypt and afterwards murdered their cousins in order to escape an incestuous marriage with them. This they infer from two passages in Aeschylus; first, *Prom.* 879 ff. (Wecklein) ·

> πέμπτη δ' ἀπ' αὐτοῦ γέννα πεντηκοντάπαις
> πάλιν πρὸς Ἄργος οὐχ ἑκοῦσ' ἐλεύσεται
> θηλύσπορος, φεύγουσα συγγενῆ γάμον
> ἀνεψιῶν;

and *Suppl.* 9

> γάμον Αἰγύπτου παίδων ἀσεβῆ τ'
> ὀνοταζόμεναι.

But as Wecklein has pointed out, marriages between cousins were not considered improper by either Greeks or Egyptians.[4] As for the passage in the *Prometheus*, the word συγγενῆ does not necessarily give the reason for the flight. The adjective may be merely descriptive. In other passages also it may be contended that the marriage of the Danaids is called unholy, not because of the relationship existing between the parties, but because the maidens were compelled to marry against their will.

Omitting for the present some isolated and unimportant traditions about the journey of Danaus and his arrival in Argos, let us pass to the accounts of the crime of the Danaids. The bloody deed took place in Argos after the marriage according to most authorities, but as has

---

[1] The scholiast claims to be quoting from the second book of Apollodorus.

[2] On *Aen.* 10, 497.

[3] Hyg. *Fab.* 168 (p. 31, Schmidt).

[4] *Sitzungsber. der k. b. Akad. zu München*, 1893, p. 424.

been pointed out above, the scholiast on *Il.* 1, 42 makes Egypt the scene of its commission. So also the author of the epic *Danais*, if we may argue from the verses

> καὶ τότ' ἄρ' ὡπλίζοντο θοῶς Δαναοῖο θύγατρες
> πρόσθεν ἐυρρέος ποταμοῦ Νειλοῖο ἄνακτος.[1]

The circumstances of the murder itself are very briefly described. Pseudo-Apollodorus[2] says that after the wedding-feast Danaus gave daggers to his daughters, and all of them except Hypermestra[3] slew their husbands as they slept. The next day they sunk the heads of the murdered youths in the Lernaean marsh, and buried their bodies before the city.

Other accounts differ from this only in trivial details. There is, however, a noteworthy variance in the statement of the motives that prompted Hypermestra to spare Lynceus. According to Pseudo-Apollodorus[4] and certain scholia on Pindar[5] and Homer,[6] she did so because Lynceus had respected her chastity and allowed her to remain a virgin. But the scholiast on Eur. *Hec.* 886 says that her action was due to her affection for Lynceus, arising from her connubial relation with him. Aeschylus followed a like tradition, as appears from *Prom.* 891 f., μίαν δὲ παίδων ἵμερος θέλξει τὸ μὴ | κτεῖναι σύνευνον, κτλ.

The same inference may be drawn from the fact that in the lost play, *Danaides*, the poet appears to have represented Aphrodite as pleading the cause of Hypermestra, when she had been put on trial for disobeying her father's command.[7] The goddess undertook the defense of Hypermestra, not because she had shown herself merciful, but because of her love for Lynceus.[8]

---

[1] That these verses refer to preparation for some conflict appears from the words of Clement, who quotes them in *Strom.* 4, 19, 122. They are so understood by Wecklein, *l. c.* p. 393. Ed. Meyer refers them to the preparation for the voyage to Argos; *Forsch. z. alt. Gesch.* p. 82, n. 3.

[2] *Bibl.* 2, 21–22.

[3] Eustath. on Dion. Per. 805 says that Bebryce also spared her husband Hippolytus. This appears to have been no part of the original legend; but cf. Eust. on *Il.* 1, 42 (p. 37, 10 ff.) and the scholiast on the same passage.

[4] *Bibl.* 2, 21. [5] On *Nem.* 10, 10. [6] On *Il.* 4, 171.

[7] Aesch. *Fragm.* 44, Wecklein.

[8] Ovid's letter of Hypermestra (*Her* 14) throws little light on the above-discussed divergence of the traditions. In v. 55 the heroine says *femina sum et virgo natura*

Various writers recount numerous incidents that are said to have taken place after the murder of the fifty youths, but their narratives differ greatly. Here again the writer of the scholium on Eur. *Hec.* 886 differs from most of our sources in saying that Lynceus avenged his brothers by putting to death Danaus and all his daughters except Hypermestra, to whom he owed his deliverance. With her he ruled over the kingdom of Argos. Ovid probably used this version of the story, for he seems to know that the death of the Danaids followed close upon their crime. He does not, however, expressly state that Lynceus was the avenger. The verses in question are *Her.* 14, 115–118:

> De fratrum populo pars exiguissima restat.
> Quique dati leto, quaeque dedere, fleo;
> Nam mihi quot fratres, totidem periere sorores:
> Accipiat lacrimas utraque turba meas.

In harmony with this version is the belief — widespread in the later period, if not in the earlier — that a special and peculiar punishment was assigned to the Danaids in Hades. For such a belief could hardly have arisen if there had been a consistent tradition that the Danaids escaped punishment on earth and filled out the measure of a prosperous life.

Pindar is our first authority for a version directly opposed to that just mentioned. In *Pyth.* 9, 111 ff., he tells how Danaus caused all[1] his daughters to stand at the goal of a race-course, and bade the suitors who had presented themselves decide by the swiftness of their feet which maiden each should marry. By this is meant, as we learn from a similar story in Paus. 3, 12, 2, that the victor had the right to select

---

mitis et annis. But Palmer is probably right in contending that the word *virgo* is used only with reference to her tender years. See his note on *Her.* 6, 133. The emendation that Palmer proposes for *Her* 14, 42 would bring this poem into line with the tradition of Schol. Eur. *Hec.* 886. Another correspondence with the scholiast had been observed by Palmer in vv. 116 f. — Again in Hor. *Carm.* 3, 11, there is doubt as to which tradition the poet followed. Perhaps he sought to combine the two, as Kiessling suggests. See his note on v. 33.

[1] Pindar gives the number of the girls as forty-eight, because, as the scholiast remarks, Hypermestra was already married to Lynceus, and Amymone had found a lover in Poseidon.

his bride first, the man that came second chose from the remaining ones, and so on, until, as Pindar relates, all were married before noon. All this of course took place after the murder of the sons of Aegyptus, as is explicitly stated in Pseudo-Apollodorus[1] and Hyginus.[2] The latter adds that the second husbands of the Danaids were Argive youths, and says that the second marriage took place after the death of Danaus. In regard to this last point he differs from other authorities.

Pausanias's account of the athletic wooing of the Danaids, which was mentioned in the foregoing paragraph, differs somewhat from Pindar's story. According to Pausanias, the stigma of murder clung to the maidens so that nobody would marry them. Danaus therefore made it known that he would give his daughters to any suitors that might be attracted by their beauty, and that he would not expect the customary wedding-gifts. Not many suitors appeared. For those who came Danaus held a contest in the manner described above. But some of the Danaids were left over and had to wait until their father could summon other suitors and establish another contest.

Pindar evidently chose the more flattering form of the legend. It is worthy of note that in *Nem.* 10, 6 he praises Hypermestra because she spared her bridegroom, yet in *Pyth.* 9, 111 ff. says nothing about the guilt of her sisters. From this it may be conjectured that he had in mind some such white-washing version as that of Pseudo-Apollodorus (*Bibl.* 2, 22) — *καὶ αὐτὰς ἐκάθηραν Ἀθηνᾶ τε καὶ Ἑρμῆς Διὸς κελεύσαντος*. With this statement we may perhaps connect the tradition that Danaus was brought to trial and called to account for the crime that his daughters committed at his instigation. The trial is mentioned in Eur. *Or.* 871 ff.

> ὁρῶ δ' ὄχλον στείχοντα καὶ θάσσοντ' ἄκραν,
> οὗ φασι πρῶτον Δαναὸν Αἰγύπτῳ δίκας
> διδόντ' ἀθροῖσαι λαὸν εἰς κοινὰς ἕδρας,

and in the schol. *ad loc.*· *αὐτὸς γὰρ ὁ Αἴγυπτος ἦκεν εἰς Ἄργος τιμωρήσων τὸν φόνον. Δαναὸς δὲ μαθὼν ἐξῆγεν εἰς ὅπλα τοὺς Ἀργείους, ἀλλὰ Λυγκεὺς πείθει λόγοις ὁρίσασθαι τὴν ἔχθραν, καὶ καθιστῶσι δικαστὰς αὐτοῖς Αἰγυπτίων καὶ Ἀργείων τοὺς ἀρίστους.*

---

[1] *Bibl.* 2, 22.

[2] *Fab.* 170 *ad fin.* (p. 34, Schmidt).

Even among the ancients it seems to have been a disputed question whether Aegyptus came to Argos or not. From the Euripidean fragment (229 Nauck) quoted in Ar. *Ran.* 1206

> Αἴγυπτος, ὡς ὁ πλεῖστος ἔσπαρται λόγος,
> ξὺν παισὶ πεντήκοντα ναυτίλῳ πλάτῃ
> Ἄργος κατασχών,

it appears that the weight of ancient testimony was in accord with the scholium quoted above on *Or.* 871. Yet in another scholium on the same passage in the *Orestes* a different view is expressed ἡ πολλὴ δόξα κατέχει μὴ ἀφῖχθαι τὸν Αἴγυπτον εἰς Ἄργος, καθάπερ ἄλλοι τέ φασι καὶ Ἑκαταῖος γράφων οὕτως [*FHG* IV, p. 627*a*]· ὁ δὲ Αἴγυπτος αὐτὸς μὲν οὐκ ἦλθεν εἰς Ἄργος, παῖδας δὲ . . . ὡς μὲν Ἡσίοδος [*frag.* 50] ἐποίησε πεντήκοντα, ὡς ἐγὼ δέ, οὐδὲ εἴκοσι. καὶ Διονύσιος ὁ κυκλογράφος [*FHG* IV, p. 653*a*] ἐν τούτῳ τὰ παραπλήσιά φησι. Φρύνιχος δὲ ὁ τραγικός φησι σὺν Αἰγυπτίοις τὸν Αἴγυπτον ἥκειν εἰς Ἄργος. Eustathius also (on *Il.* 1, 42) speaks of certain historians who maintained the view that Aegyptus came to Argos. Pausanias (7, 21, 13) even says that the tomb of Aegyptus was shown at Patrae, whose inhabitants related that he fled to the neighboring town of Aroe after his sons were murdered in Argos.

Returning to the trial of Danaus, we are not told that the Danaids were brought to judgment along with their father. The scholia on *Or.* 871 have nothing bearing on this point. But as we have seen above, Pseudo-Apollodorus — who, it should be observed, does not mention the trial of Danaus — says that Athena and Hermes cleansed the Danaids of their guilt. This may point to a tradition that they were brought to trial and that the two divinities played a part similar to that of Athena in the *Eumenides*.[1]

Distinct from this is the story that Hypermestra was brought to trial for disobeying her father and allowing Lynceus to escape. This situation, as was said above, was treated in the *Danaids* of Aeschylus, and Aphrodite was represented as defending Hypermestra — that is, if Hermann is right in his explanation of the beautiful fragment[2] pre-

[1] Cf. Ed. Meyer, *Forschungen z. alt. Gesch.* I, p. 84.

[2] 44 Weckl.

served in Athenaeus 13, p. 600 B. His view is supported by the following passages in Pausanias (2, 19, 6).

τὰ δὲ ξόανα Ἀφροδίτης καὶ Ἑρμοῦ, τὸ μὲν Ἐπειοῦ λέγουσιν ἔργον εἶναι, τὸ δὲ Ὑπερμήστρας ἀνάθημα. ταύτην γὰρ τῶν θυγατέρων μόνην τὸ πρόσταγμα ὑπεριδοῦσαν ὑπήγαγεν ὁ Δαναὸς ἐς δικαστήριον, τοῦ τε Λυγκέως οὐκ ἀκίνδυνον αὐτῷ τὴν σωτηρίαν ἡγούμενος, καὶ ὅτι τοῦ τολμήματος οὐ μετασχοῦσα ταῖς ἀδελφαῖς καὶ τῷ βουλεύσαντι τὸ ὄνειδος ηὔξησε. κριθεῖσα δὲ ἐν Ἀργείοις ἀποφεύγει τε καὶ Ἀφροδίτην ἐπὶ τῷδε ἀνέθηκε.[1] 2, 21, 1. τὸ δὲ τῆς Ἀρτέμιδος ἱερὸν ἐπίκλησιν Πειθοῦς.[2] Ὑπερμήστρα καὶ τοῦτο ἀνέθηκε, νικήσασα τῇ δίκῃ τὸν πατέρα, ἣν τοῦ Λυγκέως ἕνεκα ἔφυγε.

Pseudo-Apollodorus, who says that Hypermestra was imprisoned by her father, makes no mention of a trial. The same is true of Horace, *Carm.* 3, 11, and Ovid, *Her.* 14. The first named writer differs from the other two in stating expressly what they leave uncertain — that Danaus afterwards restored Hypermestra to her lover. But whether she was married with her father's consent or Lynceus liberated her by force, most authorities say that the couple reigned over Argos and became the parents of Abas, the ancestor of the Argive kings.

The most ancient writers that touch upon the story of the Danaids are silent in regard to their peculiar punishment in Hades. It is first mentioned in the *Axiochus*, p. 371 E

ὅσοις δὲ τὸ ζῆν διὰ κακουργημάτων ἠλάθη, ἄγονται πρὸς Ἐρινύων ἐπ' ἔρεβος καὶ χάος διὰ ταρτάρου, ἔνθα χῶρος ἀσεβῶν καὶ Δαναΐδων ὑδρεῖαι ἀτελεῖς καὶ Ταντάλου δῖψος καὶ Τιτύου σπλάγχνα καὶ Σισύφου πέτρος ἀνήνυτος, οὗ τὰ τέρματα αὖθις ἄρχεται πόνων.

[1] The place of the trial is mentioned in passing in 2, 20, 7.

[2] The edition of Hitzig-Blümner has this note: "Artemis trägt diesen Beinamen als Ehegöttin; gemeint ist die Ueberredung zur Liebe, vgl. 1, 43, 6 und die Artemis λυσίζωνος, Preller-Robert 319." But it seems to me very probable that Ἀρτέμιδος in the text is a slip for Ἀφροδίτης. The passage quoted above, 2, 19, 6, indicates that Hypermestra was under the special protection of Aphrodite, whose image she erected. Cf. also 2, 37, 2, where the words θυγατέρας Δαναοῦ may refer especially to her. Besides, while the name Πειθώ is often given to Aphrodite (cf. Preller-Robert 508, 2), I know of no instance where Artemis has it except one quoted by Bruchmann from a certain magical hymn edited by C. Wessely in *Denkschr. d. Wien. Akad.* XXXVI (1888) 2, p. 30 (cf. esp. v. 18), where the goddess is invoked under some dozens of more or less appropriate names, Πειθώ among them.

Yet in later writers this punishment is frequently mentioned, and mentioned as a thing universally known. Hence the silence of earlier authorities may be fortuitous. Plato, in *Gorg.* 493 A–C, and some other authors after him, assign the task of filling a leaky vessel to impious souls in general, and in particular to those who had never been initiated into the mysteries. From this circumstance certain scholars have drawn the inference that this singular punishment was first said to be inflicted upon the uninitiated and later transferred to the Danaids for some reason or other. This theory has provoked some controversy and will be discussed at length in the course of this article.

Other variations, mostly of minor importance, will be noted in the discussion of single features of the story or omitted altogether. The reader who is familiar with the fable has perhaps missed the story of Amymone, which for special reasons I have reserved for treatment in a separate chapter. The purpose of the foregoing pages has been to give an idea of the ramifications of the myth, the inconsistencies of which can be explained only on the supposition that historians and poets gave their fancy free rein in relating many parts of it, and thus to prepare the reader for the conclusion that a close investigation compels us to reject many elements of the story and to reduce it to a comparatively small genuinely mythical nucleus.

II

For the purpose of the present investigation it is important to understand the part that Danaus plays in Greek legend. The form of the name indicates that he is merely the eponymous ancestor of the Danaan race, as Achaeus is the eponym of the Achaeans and Aeolus of the Aeolians. Hence the acts attributed to him are such as might be expected of the legendary founder of a people. Some writers maintained that to him, not to Cadmus, was due the invention of the alphabet.[1] Again Danaus, or Athena for him, was said by some writers

[1] Bekk. *Anec. Gr* p. 783 (Müller, *FHG*, II, p. 5) Πυθόδωρος δὲ ἐν τῷ Περὶ στοιχείων, καὶ Φίλλις ὁ Δήλιος ἐν τῷ Περὶ χορῶν Δαναὸν πρὸ Κάδμου μετακομίσαι αὐτά [i. e. τὰ στοιχεῖα] φασιν. ἐπιμαρτυροῦσι τούτοις καὶ οἱ Μιλησιακοὶ συγγραφεῖς, Ἀναξίμανδρος καὶ Διονύσιος καὶ Ἑκαταῖος, οὓς καὶ Ἀπολλόδωρος ἐν Νεῶν καταλόγῳ παρατίθεται. Cf. also Nonn. *Dionys.* 4, 259 ff.

to have built a ship even before the Argo, which was commonly held to have been the first vessel ever made.[1] He also introduced into Greece from Egypt the art of digging wells;[2] but in regard to this point there may have been some confusion between Danaus and the Danaids, for the Hesiodic verse quoted by Eust. *Il.* 4, 171, Ἄργος ἄνυδρον ἐὸν Δαναὸς ποίησεν ἔνυδρον, appears in Strabo, 8, p. 371, in the form Ἄργος ἄνυδρον ἐὸν Δαναοὶ θέσαν Ἄργος ἔνυδρον.

Furthermore, Danaus was the reputed founder of certain contests, which, as the legend has it, he established on the occasion of the marriage of his daughters.[3] He also has the credit of erecting various temples and monuments.[4]

But if Danaus is the eponymous hero of the Danaans and the founder of the Argive kingdom, it is strange that a persistent tradition makes him out to be of Egyptian origin. As we have seen above (p. 131), the scholiast of Eur. *Hec.* 886 stands alone in saying nothing of the Egyptian connection and leaving us to suppose that Danaus was a Greek. Yet, in view of his close relations with the early institutions of Argos, I think that Ed. Meyer and Wecklein are right in holding that the scholiast's version is the older and truer one. It remains then to explain how the belief in the foreign origin of Danaus grew up. The correct solution of this difficulty appears to be Meyer's, which is about as follows:[5] After genealogical legends had connected Danaus with Io, the Argives learned of the Egyptian goddess Isis and identified her with their own Io. Out of this identification grew the story of Io's migration to Egypt, and as this story came to be widely accepted, Danaus, the descendant of Io, was necessarily transferred to Egypt. Furthermore,

---

[1] Schol. Eur. *Med.* 1, Hyg. *Fab.* 277 (p. 153, Schm.), Eust. *Il.* 1, 42 and Schol. *ibid.*

[2] Polyb. apud Strab. 1, 23, Plin. *N H.* 7, 195, Nonn. *Dionys.* 4, 252; cf. Schol. *Il.* 4, 171, and Eust. *ibid.* Some of these writers attribute the invention to the Danaids.

[3] Arist. *Pepl.* (Müller, *FHG* II, pp. 189, 282), . τρίτος [ἄγων], ὃν Ἄργει Δαναὸς ἔθηκε διὰ τὸν γάμον τῶν θυγατέρων αὐτοῦ. Hyg. *Fab.* 273 (p. 146, 8 ff. Schm.), quinto loco Argis, quos [i. e. ludos] fecit Danaus Beli filius filiarum nuptiis cantu, unde hymenaeus dictus. Cf. also Plut. *de Mus.* 26, τὸν δ' ἀγῶνα τοῦτον [i. e. τὰ Σθένεια] ἐπὶ Δαναῷ μὲν τὴν ἀρχὴν τεθῆναι φασιν, ὕστερον δ' ἀνατεθῆναι Διὶ Σθενίῳ.

[4] Paus. 2, 19, 3–5; 37, 2.

[5] *Forschungen*, I, pp. 78, 81–82.

the chroniclers invented another descendant in the person of Aegyptus, the eponym of the Egyptians. In order to bring Danaus back to Argos the author of the epic *Danais* used the already existing myth of the Danaids and their violent suitors, who now, as Meyer says, became sons of Aegyptus and so got a name.

Wecklein's explanation of this point is less satisfactory.[1] He contends that a personage bearing the name Aegyptus figured in the most ancient legends about the Danaids, and that the whole story about Danaus and his brother was transferred to Egypt at the time when the Argives learned of the great river Nile. For in ancient times, as we know from Homer, the Greeks called the Nile by the name Αἴγυπτος, which, according to Wecklein's theory, meant in the oldest Greek *sea*, or rather the *ocean stream*, the father of all the minor rivers, which appear in this myth in the guise of men — namely, the sons of Aegyptus.

But for reasons that will be set forth more fully in another chapter, I must regard as unsuccessful all attempts to explain this myth by interpreting its personages as natural forces, be they rivers, springs, or what not. Therefore, I prefer Meyer's view of the particular point in question, although he, too, in his discussion of the crime of the Danaids, falls into the general error.

Perhaps the belief that Danaus came from Egypt is sufficiently explained by the fact that the Argives, like many other Greek peoples, conceived the aboriginal inhabitants of their country to have been Pelasgians. The founder of the Danaan race must therefore have come from foreign parts. Seeking to explain the migration of Danaus, the story-tellers hit upon the common device of a family quarrel and the consequent flight of the weaker party. Later historians and poets filled out the narrative with various details.[2]

However this may be, it is certain that almost all ancient writers that mention Danaus say that he went from Egypt to Argos and gave his

---

[1] *Sitz.-Ber. d. Münch. Akad.* 1893, p. 39 ff. Cf. esp. p. 397, where after quoting Schol. Eur. *Hec.* 886, he says: "Aegyptus ist also ein Grieche, und geht eigentlich nur deshalb nach Aegypten, um diesem Lande seinen Namen zu geben. Der Streit und die Bluthochzeit gehören dem Argivischen Lande an. Aegypten ist durch den Namen Αἴγυπτος hereingekommen.

[2] Some excellent remarks on myths of this type will be found in Holm's *History of Greece* (Eng. tr.), I, pp. 57–58.

name to the inhabitants of the Argive territory.[1] Landmarks of his journey were shown on the island of Rhodes, where his daughters were said to have erected a shrine and image of Athena at Lindus.[2] The spot where he landed on Argive soil was pointed out in the time of Pausanias.[3] As to the manner in which he got control of the Argive kingdom, accounts vary. Pausanias says that Gelanor was then king of Argos, and on the arrival of Danaus the two disputed the question of sovereignty for some time. Finally a peculiar portent was interpreted in favor of Danaus, and Gelanor resigned the kingdom to him.[4] But Aeschylus,[5] Ovid,[6] and the scholiast of Euripides[7] agree in giving the name Pelasgus to the king of Argos; and from the *Supplices* of Aeschylus it appears that Pelasgus received Danaus and his daughters hospitably on their arrival in Argos. How, then, according to this version, did Danaus obtain the royal power? The scanty evidence before us does not furnish material for a decisive answer. Perhaps the Argives were defeated and Pelasgus slain in the battle that the herald predicts in lines 961 f.;[8] then the sons of Aegyptus would have got possession of the Danaids, and after they were murdered by their unwilling brides, Danaus would have seized the throne. Such questions, however, may be dismissed without further discussion, as they have more to do with the reconstruction of the lost plays of Aeschylus than with the interpretation of the Danaid myth.

After the fiction that Danaus came from Egypt had been popularly accepted, historians added sundry details as they detected correspondences between the story of Danaus and various figures of Egyptian history. Herodotus[9] says that Danaus and Lynceus were natives of Chemmis, according to the statement of citizens with whom he conversed there. Diodorus credits Danaus with the foundation of the temple of Ammon, and, again, says he was one of those who led the Jews out

---

[1] Eur. *Frag.* 230; Paus. 4, 35, 2; 2, 16, 1.

[2] Herodotus 2, 182, Strabo 14, p. 655, Diod. 5, 58, 1, Schol. *Il.* 1, 42, Eust. *Il.* 2, 656, *Marmor Parium* 14 ff. Cf. also Strabo 14, p. 654.

[3] Paus. 2, 38, 4.

[4] Paus. 2, 19, 3 and 5; cf. 2,16, 1.

[5] *Suppl.* 257.

[6] *Her* 14, 23.

[7] On *Or.* 932.

[8] So Wecklein, *Sitz.-Ber. d. Münch. Akad.* 1893, p. 417. See also Hermann, *Opusc.* II, p. 323.

[9] Hdt. 2, 91, cf. Critobulus, *Hist.* 1, 4, 2.

of Egypt.[1] Manetho, quoted by Josephus, identifies Aegyptus and Danaus with two warring brothers of an Egyptian dynasty — Sethosis and Armais.[2]

The whole question of the migration of Danaus is treated by Schwarz in an article[3] that has little to commend it beyond the fact that the writer rejects the old "river and spring" interpretation of the myth. He finds in the story a type of the commercial relations that existed between Argives and Egyptians in early times. In the account of the murder of the sons of Aegyptus he would recognize a reminiscence of some deed of rapine committed by pirates, who afterwards came to their death through the women they had captured.

While conceding that myths might arise from, or at least be influenced by, actual occurrences of that sort, I should question the possibility of explaining after this manner a narrative so strongly marked by individual peculiarities as is the myth of the Danaids. But without spending time in refuting a theory which appears to have found no adherents, I would say that Schwarz's chief error is that which is shared by most other writers on this myth — namely, the application of one and the same canon of criticism and interpretation to the stories told about Danaus and those related of the fifty maidens.

The propriety of that method should be emphatically denied. In fact, an explanation of the murder of the sons of Aegyptus must be sought without reference to Danaus. The story of that crime is a folk-tale, a *Märchen*. Danaus, on the other hand, is a pseudo-historical personage, and no single act of his savors of the genuinely mythical, or *märchenhaft*, except his complicity in the bloody deed of his daughters. But it has been rightly observed that in the earliest form of that story both the fifty maidens and their father were in all probability nameless.[4] It was reserved for some Argive chronicler to identify the father with Danaus and call the daughters Danaids, just as the nymphs Pandrosos, Agraulos, and Herse, who lived in Attic legend independently of Cecrops, were later alleged to be the daughters of that hero.[5]

---

[1] Diod. 17, 50, 2; 40, 3, 2; cf. 1, 28, 2.

[2] Joseph. *C. Apion.* 1, 15 (Müller, *FHG*, II, p. 573).

[3] *Jahrb. f. Philol.* CXLVII (1893), p. 95 ff.

[4] So Waser, *Arch. f. Religionswiss.* II, 1–2, p. 55.

[5] Cf. Bloch, in Roscher's *Lexikon*, *s. v. Nymphae*, col. 529.

III

The story of Amymone, which forms a distinct episode in the accounts of Danaus and his daughters, must be set apart before a correct estimate of the Danaid myth proper can be made.[1] Pseudo-Apollodorus tells the story as follows (*Bibl.* 2, 14).

[Δαναὸς] . . . τὰς θυγατέρας ὑδρευσομένας ἔπεμψε. μία δὲ αὐτῶν Ἀμυμώνη ζητοῦσα ὕδωρ ῥίπτει βέλος ἐπὶ ἔλαφον καὶ κοιμωμένου Σατύρου τυγχάνει, κἀκεῖνος περιαναστὰς ἐπεθύμει συγγενέσθαι. Ποσειδῶνος δὲ ἐπιφανέντος ὁ Σάτυρος μὲν ἔφυγεν, Ἀμυμώνη δὲ τούτῳ συνευνάζεται, καὶ αὐτῇ Ποσειδῶν τὰς ἐν Λέρνῃ πηγὰς ἐμήνυσεν.

Hyginus presents two versions of this story, which differ only in insignificant details from that just quoted. Like most other authorities he says that the Lernaean fountain sprang from a stroke of Poseidon's trident.[2] This fountain was the source of a river bearing the name of Amymone.[3]

The reason for discussing the Amymone myth separately is that the ancients themselves set her apart from the other Danaids by indicating that on account of her amour with Poseidon she was not married to one of the sons of Aegyptus, and so had no part in the crime of the Danaids. It is true that Pseudo-Apollodorus[4] says that Amymone was married to Enceladus, and Hyginus[5] counts her among those who slew their bridegrooms, but in the passages in question both writers are concerned only with giving a full list of both the Danaids and the sons of Aegyptus, and hence omitted no name that figured in the myth. On the other hand, a tradition as old as Pindar excluded Amymone from the maidens that wedded the Argive athletes,[6] and it is a legitimate inference that

---

[1] H. D. Müller, *Mythol. der griech. Stämme*, p. 50, had observed that the Amymone-fable is distinct from the rest of the narrative of Ps.-Apollodorus.

[2] Hyg. *Fab.* 169 (p. 31 f. Schm.). Schol. *Il.* 4, 171, Eust. *ibid.*, Eur. *Phoen.* 187 ff., Apoll. Rhod. 1, 137, Nonn. *Dionys.* 8, 240 ff., Lucian, *Dial. Mar.* 6 *ad fin.*, Mythogr. Vat. 1, 45. Cf. Philostr. *Imag.* 8 (p. 306, Kays.), and Christodorus, *Ecphr.* 61 ff. (*Anth. Pal.* II).

[3] Strabo 8, 6–8, p. 371; Paus. 2, 37, 1; 5, 17, 11.

[4] *Bibl.* 2, 16.

[5] *Fab.* 170 (p. 33, Schmidt).

[6] See p. 133, n. 1. But Eustathius on Dion. Per. 805 says that the two whom Pindar excepts were Hypermestra and Bebryce,—an isolated tradition. See p. 132, n. 3.

she was not previously married to one of her cousins. Her fate is also set apart from that of the other Danaids in a passage in Lucian (*Dial. Mar.* 6 *ad fin.*), where Poseidon says to her . . . καὶ σὺ εὐδαίμων ἔσῃ καὶ μόνη τῶν ἀδελφῶν οὐχ ὑδροφορήσεις ἀποθανοῦσα. This ignores the fact that Hypermestra also was commonly said to have escaped the punishment allotted to the blood-stained sisters in Hades.

Amymone is rightly considered a nymph of the Lernaean spring and the stream that flowed from it.[1] That other nymphs were called daughters of Danaus appears from Callim. 5, 47

σάμερον αἱ δῶλαι τὰς κάλπιδας ἢ 's Φυσάδειαν
ἤ ἐς 'Αμυμώναν οἴσετε τὰν Δαναῶ,

where the scholiast remarks Φυσάδεια καὶ 'Αμυμώνη θυγατέρες Δαναου, ὅθεν τὴν ὀνομασίαν ἔσχον αἱ κρῆναι.[2] So also in Plut. *Parallel.* 33 (*Moral.* Vol. I, p. 385, Dübn.) Pelops is said to have had a son Chrysippus ἐκ Δαναΐδος νύμφης. Another obscure tradition said that the Curetes were descended from Apollo and the nymph Creusa, a daughter of Danaus.[3] A certain Polydora, who figures in Thessalian legends and appears to have been a nymph of the district of Mount Oeta, was a daughter of Danaus, according to Antoninus Liberalis and the scholiast of Apollonius.[4] This statement seems rather strange, since Danaus was so closely connected with the Argive territory. The coupling of the two names may be due to the fact that in Aeniania there flowed from the slopes of Oeta a river called Inachus, a tributary of the Spercheus, and in Argolis the chief river was the Inachus, which was said to have been an ancestor of Danaus. The story of Polydora presents in some respects a parallel to that of Amymone. The common tradition represented her as beloved by the river-god, Spercheus—so *Il.* 16, 176, but the scholiast on that passage tells of her being attacked by the giant, Pelor, and, it would seem, being rescued by Poseidon—a story which recalls Amymone's adventure with the satyr.

---

[1] Cf. Nonn. *Dionys.* 8, 241, where she is called νύμφη Λερναίη.

[2] Cf. Schol. Eur. *Phoen.* 188.

[3] Tzetzes on Lyc. 77.

[4] Ant. Lib. 32, 1. Schol. Apoll. Rhod. 1, 1212. The latter claims to be quoting Pherecydes, and names the river-god Peneus instead of Spercheus as the lover of Polydora. In *Il.* 16, 175 Polydora is called the daughter of Peleus. Cf. Ps.-Apoll. *Bibl.* 3, 163 and 168, where some confusion of persons is evident.

It is safe to assume that the myths of Amymone, Polydora, and other so-called Danaid nymphs, existed independently of the singular story about the murder of the fifty bridegrooms. These myths were brought into connection with the legends of Danaus and the Danaids by the conjectures of mythographers and genealogists. They give us, therefore, no warrant for considering the blood-guilty brides a sisterhood of nymphs, and, in fact, do not in any way contribute to a better understanding of the Danaid myth proper — that is, the account of the fatal marriage.[1]

IV

In the account of the crime of the Danaids there are certain peculiarities which differentiate it strongly from other Greek myths, and which are of prime importance for a correct understanding of the story. First is the fact that the fifty brothers were slain in their sleep by the brides whom they had just married. Secondly, there is some reason to believe that in the primitive form of the story it was stated unequivocally that the murderous act consisted in the decapitation of the victims. This is not said in so many words in the narratives that have come down to us, and, in fact, the hypothesis is in some degree contravened by the statement of Pseudo-Apollodorus that daggers were used. Favorable to it, however, is the uniform tradition that the heads and the bodies of the murdered men were buried separately. The third point to which special attention should be directed is that either the heads or the bodies of the sons of Aegyptus were sunk in the Lernaean marsh.[2]

---

[1] The story of Poseidon and Amymone furnished the subject for numerous sculptures, vase-paintings, coins, etc., for a list of which see Gruppe, *Griech. Mythologie* (in I. v. Müller's *Handbuch*), p. 179, n. 3.

[2] Paus. 2, 24, 2, says the murder was committed in Lerna, and the Danaids cut off the heads of their slain bridegrooms to show to their father. The heads were buried to the left of the road leading up into the Argive acropolis, and the spot was marked by a monument. The bodies were in Lerna. The rest of our authorities, namely, Ps.-Apollodorus 2, 22, Suidas (*s. v.* Λέρνη θεατῶν), Zenob. 4, 86, Apostol. 10, 57, say that the heads were buried in the marshy district of Lerna, and Ps.-Apoll. adds that the bodies were buried before the city. The statement of Pausanias is definite and circumstantial, and we can not assume offhand that it is due to a confusion. — In Suidas, Zenobius, and Apostolius *ll. cc.*, Danaus instead of the Danaids is said thus to have disposed of the heads of the murdered youths. A similar confusion

Bearing these points in mind, let us examine some of the explanations of the Danaid myth that have been hitherto offered. That of Schwarz has been already noticed. Somewhat similar is the view of Bachofen,[1] who also seeks an interpretation of the myth in primitive institutions of the ancient world. In his opinion the Danaid myth reflects a state of society in which women had the right of choosing their husbands for themselves, and would resort to desperate methods in order to free themselves from a distasteful and humiliating wedlock. Bachofen finds a confirmation of his view in Pausanias's account of the second marriage of the Danaids, when Danaus announced that he should expect no bridal gifts from the suitors, but each maiden must choose as she pleased, yet afterwards, as only a few suitors appeared, was obliged to allow the victors in the race to choose at will. An arrangement permitting the women to choose is the older gynaecocratic system, according to Bachofen. The fact that the suitors were permitted to choose marks the transition to a society in which woman was subject to man.

The distinction which Bachofen makes between the first and the second plan of Danaus rests upon a mistranslation of Pausanias's words ἢ ἂν ἕκαστος κατὰ κάλλος ἀρέσκηται.[2] Besides, as will appear later, there is reason to believe that the whole story of the Danaids being forced into a marriage with their cousins is a fiction of poets and mythographers who wished to find some explanation or excuse for the crime attributed to these maidens. Again, Bachofen passes in silence over certain peculiar and important features of the narrative — namely, the manner in which the crime was committed, and the story about the sinking of the heads in the Lernaean marsh. These objections being noted, we may pass to the consideration of a theory which, unlike Bachofen's, has found many adherents.

This is the explanation proposed by Preller in his *Griechische Mythologie*,[3] and accepted by Bernhard in Roscher's *Lexikon*, *s. v. Danaides*,

---

between father and daughters has been noted in the matter of the invention of wells. See p. 138, and n. 2. Again, in some of the paroemiographers we are told that Aegyptus himself, instead of his sons, was the victim of a blood-stained marriage. Cf. Diogenian. 2, 55, Macar. 1, 48.

[1] *Mutterrecht*, pp. 92–93; cf. *Gräbersymbolik der Alten*, pp. 395–396.

[2] See Hitzig-Blümner on Paus. 3, 12, 2.

[3] Preller-Plew, *Griech. Mythol.* II³, pp. 46–47.

and, with some modifications relating especially to Aegyptus, by Meyer[1] and Wecklein.[2] The substance of it is as follows

The Danaids were the nymphs of the springs of Argolis. Prominent among them was Amymone, the nymph of the ever-flowing fountain at Lerna. The youths whom the fable calls sons of Aegyptus were the streams and rivers of the Argive territory, which in the wet season of the year were violent torrents, and so could be regarded as importunate suitors of the local nymphs. In summer, on the other hand, these streams sank low or were dried up entirely in consequence of the nymphs cutting off the heads of their impetuous lovers — that is, checking the flow of the springs. For the heads of rivers are their springs, and it is in this sense that we must understand the local tradition that the heads of the sons of Aegyptus were buried in the Lernaean marsh, for the moist district of Lerna was especially rich in springs.

To take up some of the objections to Preller's explanation, we should observe that its advocates are not justified in taking it for granted that the Greeks made common use of the word for *head* in the sense of *headwater, source*. This application of the word *head* is of course very common in English, and in Latin *caput* is used with the same transference of meaning. But the use of κεφαλή, meaning *source*, is very scantily attested. The lexicons give only one certain example, from Herodotus, 4, 91 Τεάρου ποταμοῦ κεφαλαὶ ὕδωρ ἄριστόν τε καὶ κάλλιστον παρέχονται πάντων ποταμῶν. The historian quotes these words from an inscription of Darius, and for this reason Abicht, in his note on the passage, has suggested that the peculiar use of κεφαλή may be due to its representing a word of the Old Persian original, *sir*, which means both *head* and *source*. Macan, on the other hand, doubts whether Herodotus is exactly reproducing the language of any inscription.

Another passage is quoted by Jahn[3] in support of Preller's view from Strabo, 8, p. 377 Εὐρυσθεὺς μὲν οὖν στρατεύσας εἰς Μαραθῶνα ἐπὶ τοὺς Ἡρακλέους παῖδας καὶ Ἰόλαον βοηθησάντων Ἀθηναίων ἱστορεῖται πεσεῖν ἐν τῇ μάχῃ, καὶ τὸ μὲν ἄλλο σῶμα Γαργηττοῖ ταφῆναι, τὴν δὲ κεφαλὴν χωρὶς ἐν Τρικορύνθῳ, ἀποκόψαντος αὐτὴν Ἰολάου περὶ τὴν

[1] *Forschungen*, I, p. 75.
[2] *Ber. d. Münch. Akad.* 1893, p. 405 f.
[3] *Ber. d. sächs. Akad.* 1869, p. 6, n. 16.

κρήνην τὴν Μακαρίαν ὑπὸ ἀμαξιτόν· καὶ ὁ τόπος καλεῖται Εὐρυσθέως κεφαλή.

This passage undoubtedly makes Preller's explanation of the myth appear more probable, especially since it is another story in which the head of a mythical personage is said to have been buried apart from his body, and that in the vicinity of a spring. But we have not yet proof that the word κεφαλή was freely used in common speech with the meaning of κρήνη, πηγή, and this interpretation of it is not helped much by the fact that ancient sculptors sometimes used a human head to indicate the presence of a fountain.[1] Sophocles's *Lexicon of Byzantine Greek* gives no example of κεφαλή meaning *spring*, and it is not until the modern period that we find the diminutive κεφαλάρι so used.

But even if there were abundant evidence that the Greeks of the classical period used κεφαλή for *source*, *spring*, that fact would not place Preller's explanation beyond question. For, as has been noted above,[2] Pausanias says that it was the bodies of the murdered youths that were buried in Lerna, their heads being at Argos. He assigns a motive for the decapitation — namely, that the Danaids wished to show the heads to their father as a sign that the deed was done — and this may have led him or his informant to reverse the common tradition. Yet there is always the possibility that Pausanias is faithfully reporting the genuine ancient myth as he heard it from the Argives.

So the story about the heads or the bodies of the sons of Aegyptus being sunk in the Lernaean marsh can not be used to prove the correctness of the "river and spring" theory of the myth. Another bit of evidence cited to support the old explanation is that the invention of wells was ascribed to Danaus or the Danaids — naturally enough if they were indwelling spirits of the Argive springs. But, on the other hand, nothing could be more natural than to attribute the invention of useful arts to legendary and especially to eponymous persons; and the fact that the art of digging wells is specially mentioned merely shows how important it was in thirsty Argos. Again, some have thought that the nymph-like nature of the Danaids is indicated by the fact that they were fifty in number, like the Nereids. But the most enthusiastic advocates

---

[1] See Preller-Robert, *Griech. Mythol.* I⁴, p. 549, n. 1.

[2] p. 144, n. 2.

of Preller's theory would hardly assert that the fifty daughters of Thespius[1] were fountain-nymphs or that the fifty sons of Priam were rivers or river-divinities, as they explain the sons of Aegyptus. The fact is simply that unusually large families play a part in the folk-tales of all nations, and are not confined to stories about water-sprites, etc.[2]

The name *Aegyptus* helped to bolster up the theory that the fifty youths of our story were streams — that is, sons of the great world-river of Egypt. But although Homer knows the river by the name Αἴγυπτος, Hesiod[3] called it the Nile, and that name must have been in general use by the time that the story that Danaus came from Egypt gained currency. Thus it appears in the fragment of the *Danais* quoted above (p. 132). Gruppe[4] remarks "die ägyptische Abstammung des Danaos lässt sich überhaupt nicht über Olympias 60 verfolgen." If this be true, so much the less reason for identifying the Aegyptus of our myth with the great river of Egypt. It is better to regard him merely as the eponym of the Egyptians — a figure even more shadowy than Danaus. Wecklein avoids this difficulty by assuming with Tümpel[5] that Αἴγυπτος meant in the oldest Greek *great river*, or *ocean stream*. But this conjecture has little to support it.

There is nothing in the whole story that obliges us to regard the Danaids as a sisterhood of nymphs and their cousins as a brotherhood of river-spirits. In the story of the crime the legend treats the persons concerned simply as human beings, and as such we may accept them, although there is some reason to believe that the primitive form of the myth represented the Danaids as creatures of a demoniac nature, possessing superhuman strength and ferocity.

---

[1] Or Thestius. See Paus. 9, 27, 6–7, Ps.-Apoll. 2, 65–66.

[2] In modern folk-lore the numbers seven and twelve are frequent. An adventure of forty brothers with forty dragons is related in Georgeakis and Pineau, *Folk-lore de Lesbos*, p. 84.

[3] *Theog.* 338.

[4] *Griech. Culte*, p. 164.

[5] *Jahrb. f. Philol., Suppl.* XVI, p. 361.

V

The circumstance that Preller's explanation of the Danaid myth has a direct bearing upon the natural characteristics of the Argive territory has done much to keep it in favor with scholars. If then it can be shown that myths of a similar type exist in other parts of the world, it will no longer be possible to adhere to an interpretation based on local conditions. Now there is a group of folk-stories current among peoples widely different in language and customs, which when compared one with another are strikingly similar, and which have some points of resemblance to the Danaid myth. From such stories as these we may perhaps reconstruct something like the primitive form of the Danaid myth as told among the early Greeks, before it was amplified and transformed by the speculations of mythographers and poets. The popular tales to which I refer were current even in the nineteenth century in so many nations of Europe that it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that the story was known in slightly varying versions from the Caucasus to Iceland.[1] The features of the legend that are common to most of the versions may be gathered from the following outline:

A band of brothers, wandering in a forest by night, lost their way and sought refuge in a hut or a cavern inhabited by an old woman and her daughters, the number of whom always corresponds to that of the brothers. Some versions say that the features of the women indicated their savage and monstrous nature.[2] But at any rate they received the young men with the appearance of hospitality, and each of the sisters passed the night with one of the guests. The youngest brother, however, who was the shrewdest of all, suspected that some treachery was intended, and, in order to save himself and his brothers, resorted to a ruse. This takes different forms in the several versions of the story. Usually it consists in exchanging the night-caps of the girls for the hats

---

[1] See Leskien and Brugmann, *Litauische Volkslieder und Märchen*, p. 360 f., Waldau, *Böhmisches Märchenbuch*, p. 376 ff., Gonzenbach, *Sicilianische Märchen*, 83, Luzel, *Contes Bretons*, 1, Hahn, *Griechische und Albanesische Märchen*, II, p. 178 ff., Webster, *Basque Legends*, p. 79, and others to be quoted in the following pages.

[2] Some of the stories say that the old woman was a witch. In others the father, not the mother, of the girls is mentioned, and he is described as a giant or ogre.

worn by the young men, or else the hair of the girls is cut short after they have fallen asleep, or there is a shifting of positions. Later, the tale goes on, when all appeared to be asleep, the old woman came in with a huge knife to kill the young men, but on account of the darkness she failed to detect the trick, cut off the heads of her own daughters, and did not discover the mistake until day had dawned and the young men had fled.

Besides the variations alluded to in this outline, some others may be briefly mentioned. In one of the stories the father of the youths is their companion in the adventure, and he suggests the stratagem.[1] Another relates that the youngest brother was warned by a horse miraculously endowed with human speech;[2] still another says that the friendly warning came from a maiden held captive by the ogress and her daughters.[3] Other changes were introduced in order to make the somewhat coarse story suitable for young hearers. Thus some of the tales have it that the young men occupied beds on one side of the room, the witch's daughters on the other,[4] while certain other versions remove the objectionable feature by representing the persons concerned as little children — so, for example, the English nursery story of Hop o' my Thumb, which is said to be derived from a French original. There are even stories that represent the belated wanderers and their entertainers as of the same sex.[5] In almost all of these stories, after the escape of the young men is described, other incidents are added and the narrative is expanded to some length. The kernel of the story, however, remains as outlined above. Other variations and amplifications may be passed without comment.

Let us now observe some features that these stories have in common with the Danaid myth. The sons of Aegyptus were fifty in number, so also the Danaids. In some of the modern stories the number of the brothers and of the witch's daughters is larger than the ordinary.[6] The

[1] Imbriani, *La Novellaja Milanese*, 1.

[2] Leskien and Brugmann, *l. c.*

[3] Poestion, *Isländische Märchen*, p. 297 ff.

[4] *Slavic Tales, from the French of A. Chodzko*, p. 244. Cf. Schiefner, *Awarische Texte*, p. 26 f. I am indebted to the preface of the latter work (p. X ff.) for references to other stories of a similar type.

[5] Campbell, *Tales of West Highlands*, p. 252, Imbriani, *l. c.*

[6] The numbers two, three, seven, nine, twelve, and thirteen occur.

sons of Aegyptus were slain in their sleep by their newly wedded brides, in the modern stories the hostess uses her daughters as a means of bringing the guests to their death. The sexual relation appears in both cases, in the Danaid myth it assumes the dignity of a marriage, in some of the folk-tales it is glossed over, while in others it is not in any way disguised. In the story of the Danaids, Danaus appears as the instigator of the crime, in the modern stories the father or the mother of the girls — accounts vary — conceives and executes the deed. In both cases the method of the murder is decapitation — a manner of death which exercised a peculiar fascination upon the imagination of primitive peoples, if we may judge from the frequency of its occurrence in folk-lore.

The chief difference between the Danaid story and these modern folk-tales consists in this, that in the latter all the brothers escape. In the Danaid myth Lynceus escapes by gaining the favor of Hypermestra, but is not able to save his brothers, in the modern stories the clever trick of the youngest brother is introduced, and thus all the youths are saved, while the girls are killed. Yet in one version, the Icelandic story alluded to above (p. 150), there is a character corresponding to Hypermestra, namely, the captive maiden who warns the visitors of their danger, and there is much probability in Laistner's conjecture that more ancient stories of this class represented the young men as delivered by one of the daughters of their treacherous hostess. Even the death of the witch's daughters has a corresponding tradition in some accounts of the Danaids, for, although some writers tell us that the Danaids were married again after the murder of the sons of Aegyptus, there is much reason to believe that we have a more trustworthy authority for the ancient legend in the scholiast of Euripides on *Hec.* 886, who says that Lynceus avenged his brothers by slaying all the Danaids but Hypermestra.[1]

The relationship of the Danaid myth to the folk-tales just discussed has been obscured by the later tradition, which smoothed over many

[1] The resemblance of the above-mentioned Icelandic folk-tale to the story of Lynceus and Hypermestra was remarked by Ludwig Laistner in his work *Das Rätsel der Sphinx*, II, p. 89. He did not press the comparison, however, and adopted for the Danaid myth a different explanation, to which I shall advert in another chapter. I may here express my indebtedness to Laistner's work for some valuable suggestions and for many citations from modern folk-lore.

features of the rude primitive story. Thus the crime of the Danaids is palliated by the persecution to which they and their father were subjected by their cousins. Yet our authorities are so inconsistent in their statement of the right and wrong of the quarrel [1] that we may safely reject all attempts to account for the enmity between the two families as fictions of a later growth. In the primitive myth the deed of the fifty women had as little justification as the murderous plot of the witch in the modern tales. Hence Pausanias, who is acquainted with the story of the second marriage of the Danaids, nevertheless speaks of them as blood-stained criminals.[2] Hence also certain mythographers found it necessary to invent a ceremony of purification for them,[3] and others told of Danaus being brought to trial for his share in the crime.[4] The story that a special punishment was assigned to the Danaids in the underworld is conditioned upon a widespread popular conception of their deed as an impious and unjustifiable murder. That a certain Amazon-like severity or even ferocity in appearance and character was sometimes attributed to the Danaids may be gathered from the fragment of the *Danais*, cited above (p. 132), and from a fragment of Melanippides,[5] which refers to them:

οὐ (παρθένων) φόρευν μορφᾶ(εν) εἶδος,
οὐδὲ τὰν αὐτὰν γυναικείαν ἔχον,
ἀλλ' ἐν ἁρμάτεσσι διφρούχοις ἐγυμνάζοντ' ἀν' εὐήλι'
ἄλσεα πολλάκι θήραισιν φρένα τερπόμεναι,
<πολλάκι δ'> ἱερόδακρον λίβανον εὐώδεις τε φοίνικας
κασίαν τε ματεῦσαι,
τέρενα Σύρια σπέρματα.

Attention was called in the first chapter of this paper to a noteworthy variance in the statement of the motives that induced Hypermestra to spare Lynceus. Of that variance it might be said, as was true with regard to the different causes assigned for the enmity of Danaus and Aegyptus, that the primitive legend did not raise the question, therefore, the inconsistency of the tradition is due simply to this, that the several later narrators, in seeking to explain the action of Hypermestra,

[1] See p. 130 f.
[2] Paus. 3, 12, 2.
[3] Ps.-Apollod. *Bibl.* 2, 22.
[4] Eur. *Or.* 871, with the scholia.
[5] In Athen. 14, p. 651; here according to the reading of Crusius, *Anthol. Lyr.*

hit upon different motives. But the emphasis laid upon the sexual relation in the story of Lynceus and Hypermestra is perhaps significant. Students of folk-lore have observed that the qualities of bloodthirstiness and lasciviousness are frequently conjoined in the female monsters and demons that figure in popular tales and superstitions. This conjunction was apparent in some of the stories that have been brought into comparison with the Danaid myth in the foregoing pages. There is sufficient evidence that such ideas were not foreign to the folk-lore of ancient Greece. Worthy of mention in this connection is a singular story in Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius*,[1] where the malignant demons called *Empusas*, are thus characterized. ἐρῶσι δ' αὗται καὶ ἀφροδισίων μέν, σαρκῶν δὲ μάλιστα ἀνθρωπείων ἐρῶσι καὶ παλεύουσι τοῖς ἀφροδισίοις οὓς ἂν ἐθέλωσι δαίσασθαι. Perhaps the best example of stories of this class is the one that Eustathius (on *Il.* 10, 531) gives in explanation of the proverb Διομήδεια (or Διομήδειος) ἀνάγκη[2]. καίτοι τινὲς τὴν τοιαύτην παροιμίαν ἀπὸ τοῦ Θρᾳκὸς Διομήδους φασὶν ἐκπεσεῖν, ὃς ἠνάγκαζε τοὺς ξένους αἰσχραῖς οὔσαις ταῖς αὐτοῦ θυγατράσι μίγνυσθαι, ἃς καὶ ἵππους ὁ παλαιὸς λόγος ἀλληγορεῖ. εἶτα καὶ ἀνῄρει τοὺς μὴ ἐθέλοντας γαμβροὺς ὁ αὐτὸς πενθερὸς, γαμβροκτόνος ὢν καὶ αὐτὸς κατὰ τὸν Οἰνόμαον. Similar ideas may underlie the account of Heracles' relation to the fifty daughters of Thespius.[3]

Now the stories of the daughters of Diomedes and of Thespius were never, so far as we know, made subjects for literary treatment. Had this been true of the Danaid myth also, it might have been preserved to us in a version as rude as those stories. Instead of being depicted as persecuted heroines the Danaids would appear as cruel and wanton monsters, and the account of the escape of Lynceus might afford a close parallel to a story told of the German mythical hero, Wolfdietrich, who frustrated the murderous designs of a magician, in whose castle he lodged, by resisting the advances of the magician's daughter, his companion for the night.[4]

---

[1] 4, 25 (pp. 143–146, Kays.). Cf. Ar. *Eccl.* 1056, Luc. *Ver Hist.* 2, 46.

[2] Cf. Schol. Ar. *Eccl.* 1029, and Hesychius, *s. v.* Διομήδειος ἀνάγκη. Laistner observed the resemblance between the Danaids and the daughters of Diomedes, *op. cit.* I, p. 290. For a full discussion of demons of the Empusa type, cf. I, p. 60 ff.

[3] Ps.-Apollod. *Bibl.* 2, 66; Paus. 9, 27, 6–7.

[4] *Wolfdietrich*, ed. Amelung and Jänicke, B III, 531 ff. (pp. 247 ff.).

It must be admitted that even if the relation of the Danaid story to folk-tales of the Hop o' my Thumb type is established, we have not yet arrived at an interpretation of the myth — that is, an explanation of its origin. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to account for the rise and the wide diffusion of such stories. Such broadcast dissemination can hardly be explained as the consequence of a literary tradition, and the rude character of most of the narratives is against such a supposition. Again, it might be suggested that the prototype of stories of this formula belonged to the folk-lore of that primitive race from which most European nations are supposed to be descended, and hence it was handed down to later generations in slightly varying but essentially similar forms. But the story is not confined to Indo-European peoples, as a version of it is found among the Avars of the Caucasus, who are probably of Ural-Altaic stock, and also among the Basques, whose origin is uncertain, but probably not Indo-European. Undoubtedly it is possible for folk-tales of one tribe to be transmitted to another, especially a neighboring one, even though the two be different in race, language, and customs. Yet in view of the wide dispersion of folk-stories of the form in question, we are forced to admit that the resemblance of one to another and of all to the Danaid myth may be the result of "parallel workings of the mythopoeic instinct" — if I may use Professor Gardner's phrase. Thus in the end we turn the question over to the anthropologist and the psychologist, and let them explain, if they can, why the imagination of primitive man peoples the solitudes of mountain and forest with bloodthirsty monsters, and why the stories told about these beings among peoples far distant from one another exhibit such striking similarities.

It is a singular coincidence — I do not venture to call it anything more — that the Danaid task of endless water-drawing figures in two of those "Hop o' my Thumb" tales which for other reasons I have brought into comparison with the story of the Danaids. In the Icelandic version, the witch punishes the captive maiden who aided the young men to escape by laying a spell upon her and compelling her constantly to draw water from one well and pour it into another. In the version current among the Avars the youngest of the brothers delays the treacherous plan of the witch, who is as stupid as she is ferocious, by sending her to bring water from the river in a sieve.

VI

The story that the heads or the bodies of the murdered sons of Aegyptus were sunk in the marshy region of Lerna was adduced, as we have seen, as important evidence for Preller's explanation of our myth. I have shown that it has little or no corroborative value for that theory. It is probably an aetiological myth of somewhat later growth than the Danaid myth proper — by which I mean the primitive folk-story discussed in the last chapter — and was invented to explain some ancient and obscure religious ceremony performed at Lerna.

Plutarch (*de Is. et Osir.* 35) gives the following description of a peculiar Dionysiac rite practiced among the Argives *Ἀργείοις δὲ βουγενὴς Διόνυσος ἐπίκλην ἐστίν· ἀνακαλοῦνται δ' αὐτὸν ὑπὸ σαλπίγγων ἐξ ὕδατος, ἐμβάλλοντες εἰς τὴν ἄβυσσον ἄρνα τῷ Πυλαόχῳ· τὰς δὲ σάλπιγγας ἐν θύρσοις ἀποκρύπτουσιν κτλ.*[1] The *ἄβυσσος* here mentioned is the bottomless Alcyonian lake of the Lernaean district, as is proved by a passage in the scholiast of Pindar, *Ol.* 7, 60, who says that the bottomless spring was at Lerna, and by a fuller description in Paus. 2, 37, 5–6. I quote a part of the latter passage: *εἶδον δὲ καὶ πηγὴν Ἀμφιαράου καλουμένην καὶ τὴν Ἀλκυονίαν λίμνην, δι' ἧς φασιν Ἀργεῖοι Διόνυσον ἐς τὸν Ἅιδην ἐλθεῖν Σεμέλην ἀνάξοντα, τὴν δὲ ταύτῃ κάθοδον δεῖξαί οἱ Πόλυμνον. τῇ δὲ Ἀλκυονίᾳ πέρας τοῦ βάθους οὐκ ἔστιν, οὐδέ τινα οἶδα ἄνθρωπον ἐς τὸ τέρμα αὐτῆς οὐδεμιᾷ μηχανῇ καθίκεσθαι δυνηθέντα . . . τὰ δὲ ἐς αὐτὴν Διονύσῳ δρώμενα ἐν νυκτὶ κατὰ ἔτος ἕκαστον οὐχ ὅσιον ἐς ἅπαντας ἦν μοι γράψαι.*

The mystic character of the rite in question is evident from these descriptions. The Lernaean mysteries are thought to have been an offshoot of the Eleusinian,[2] in which case the antiquity of ceremonies that appear to be connected with the Lernaean mysteries would be liable to suspicion. But it is probable that the Lernaean mysteries were founded on a site already held in veneration because of some strange, ill-understood acts of worship that were performed there, and as the very form of the ceremony described by Plutarch points to an origin in a remote and primitive period, we need not regard it as an

---

[1] Cf. Plut. *Quaest. Conv.* 4, 6 (p. 671 E), Poll. 4, 86.

[2] Preller-Robert, *Griech. Mythol.* I⁴, p. 691.

innovation merely because of its association with a later cult. Peculiar as the ceremony is, some light is thrown upon it by recent investigations in primitive religion. Evidently the lamb thrown into the bottomless lake is the representative of an indwelling spirit of vegetation, who sinks into the bowels of the earth for a time and returns in due season. A later deistic conception changed the vegetation-spirit into an anthropomorphic god, Dionysus, and so the lamb became an offering to the Gate-keeper of the lower world, whither the god had gone. The whole idea has a fairly close analogy in a singular custom observed at the Thesmophoria.[1] Pigs were thrown into certain caverns or underground chambers called *μέγαρα* and allowed to die there. After a time the decayed flesh was brought up, cut into bits, and mixed with the seed-grain in the belief that a good crop was thus insured. The character of this ceremony, and especially the disgusting feature described in the last sentence, shows that in this case, too, the victims represent a spirit of vegetation — the corn-demon — whom later thought elevated to the dignity of a deity, namely Persephone.[2] The significance of the ancient ceremony being forgotten, an aetiological myth sprang up to meet the need of an explanation for the peculiar custom. Hence the story of the swineherd Eubuleus, in memory of whom, according to the later legend, pigs were thrown into the subterranean chambers.[3]

Now the strange ceremony at the Alcyonian lake also appears to have given rise to aetiological myths, as is natural enough in view of its very unusual form.[4] Thus we read in Schol. *Il.* 14, 319 *τινὲς δέ φασι πλείονα Ἡρακλέους αὐτὸν* (i. e. Περσέα] *εἰργασμένον οὐ τυχεῖν δόξης, ὅτι Διόνυσον ἀνεῖλεν εἰς τὴν Λερναίαν ἐμβαλὼν λίμνην.* The relation of this story to the Lernaean mysteries was observed by Lobeck.[5] It is

[1] Described in a scholium on Luc. *Dial. Mer.* 2, 1, published by E. Rohde in *Kh. Mus.* XXV, p. 548 ff. Cf. Clem. Alex. *Protrept.* 2, § 17, Paus. 9, 8, 1, Lobeck, *Aglaoph.* p. 827 ff., and especially Frazer, *Golden Bough*, II, p. 44 ff.

[2] Frazer, *l. c.*

[3] Preller-Robert, p. 779 and n. 1.

[4] Unusual, but not without parallel. Diod. 5, 4 has the following· *τὸν γὰρ Πλούτωνα μυθολογοῦσι τὴν ἁρπαγὴν ποιησάμενον ἀποκομίσαι τὴν Κόρην ἐφ' ἅρματος πλησίον τῶν Συρακουσῶν, καὶ τὴν γῆν ἀναρρήξαντα αὐτὸν μὲν μετὰ τῆς ἁρπαγείσης δῦναι καθ' ᾅδου, πηγὴν δ' ἀνεῖναι τὴν ὀνομαζομένην Κυάνην, πρὸς ἣ κατ' ἐνιαυτὸν οἱ Συρακόσιοι πανήγυριν ἐπιφανῆ συντελοῦσι, καὶ θύουσιν οἱ μὲν ἰδιῶται τὰ ἐλάττω τῶν ἱερείων, δημοσίᾳ δὲ ταύρους βυθίζουσιν ἐν τῇ λίμνῃ.* — Cf. also 4, 23.

[5] *Aglaoph.* p. 574, note. — Cf. Eustath. *Il. l. c.*

the more noteworthy because most of the writers who relate that Dionysus was slain by Perseus say that the body of the god was buried at Delphi.[1] This story, then, I conceive to have been invented to explain the throwing of the lamb into the bottomless lake, and as it is hardly to be expected that the ingenuity of myth-makers should rest content with one aetiological story, it is not surprising that we have another, which in my opinion may have arisen from this same ceremony — be it sacrificial, expiatory, or magical — and this is the story that the heads of the sons of Aegyptus were sunk in the marshy region of Lerna.

The opinion expressed in the above paragraph had already been formulated when my attention was called to the fact that a similar view is entertained by Gruppe in his *Griechische Mythologie*, part I, p. 180.[2] The author treats the subject very briefly, and the exact bearing of his explanation of the story is not clear. He may have reserved a full discussion of the question for the second part of his work, which I have not seen. Gruppe's words are as follows: "Ein dritter Hadeseingang war der angeblich unergründliche 'alkyonische' Teich, in welchen Sühnopfer hineingeworfen wurden, nach der aitiologischen Legende, weil hier die Danaiden ihre mit ihnen vermählten Vettern, des Aigyptos Söhne getötet und die Leichen oder deren Köpfe vergraben, und dann — so muss die Legende wohl ergänzt werden — als eine furchtbare Trockenheit das Land zur Strafe heimsuchte, von Athena und Hera (*sic*) gereinigt, hier das Sühnopfer dargebracht." Although Gruppe mentions the ceremony described by Plutarch, he does not seem to recognize any relationship between it and the feature of the Danaid myth that is under discussion. The same is true of the story that the body of Dionysus was thrown into the Lernaean lake — a myth which I regard as an important connecting link between the lamb-ceremony and the act of the Danaids. He appears to have had in mind certain rites of purification which it was customary to perform at the Lernaean lake. Apropos of them the following passages may be quoted.

Strabo, 8, 6 (p. 371). *δείκνυται δὲ καὶ Ἀμυμώνη τις κρήνη κατὰ Λέρνην. ἡ δὲ Λέρνη λίμνη τῆς Ἀργείας ἐστὶ καὶ τῆς Μυκηναίας, ἐν ᾗ τὴν Ὕδραν ἱστοροῦσι. διὰ δὲ τοὺς γινομένους καθαρμοὺς ἐν αὐτῇ παροιμία τις ἐξέπεσε "Λέρνη κακῶν."*

[1] See Lobeck, *Aglaoph.* p. 573, and the authorities there cited.

[2] I. v. Müller's *Handbuch*, V, Abt. 2.

Zenob. 4, 86. *Λέρνη κακῶν· παροιμία τίς ἐστιν Ἀργολική, ἣν ἀποδιοπομπούμενοι ἔλεγον. τὰ γὰρ καθάρματα εἰς τοῦτο τὸ χωρίον ἐνέβαλλον . . . ἀκριβέστερον δ' ἄν τις τὴν παροιμίαν φαίη ἀπό τινος ἱστορίας διαδεδόσθαι. Δαναὸς γὰρ ἱστορεῖται τὰς τῶν Αἰγυπτιαδῶν κεφαλὰς αὐτόθι καταθεῖναι.*[1]

The ceremony described by Plutarch may have been regarded as a *καθαρμός*, especially in later times, and as such may be one of the expiatory rites that Gruppe had in mind. If so, I have added little to the explanation that he proposed. It is to be observed, however, that according to my view the story that Danaus or the Danaids buried the heads or the bodies of the murdered men in Lerna is itself an aetiological myth. Gruppe appears to lay more stress upon a story which is not attested in ancient writers, but which he conjectures to have been a part of the ancient legend — that the Danaids made expiatory sacrifices for their crime at Lerna.

In view of the foregoing discussion, some importance may perhaps be attached to the statement of Herodotus (2, 171) that the Danaids introduced the festival of the Thesmophoria from Egypt and instructed the Pelasgian women in the mysteries of Demeter, but in his day the Thesmophoria were no longer celebrated in Peloponnesus, except among the Arcadians. The derivation of the Thesmophoric rites from Egyptian ceremonies of similar nature is to be judged as we judge other conjectures of Herodotus along this line. But if the name Thesmophoria be not pressed, the passage may at least indicate that legends of the Danaids were in one way or another brought into connection with the religious antiquities of Argos. Certain it is that numerous memorials of Danaus and the Danaids were scattered over the very district where the Lernaean mysteries were held.[2]

---

[1] Cf. also Suidas, *s. v. Λέρνη θεατῶν*, and Apostol. 10, 57.

[2] See Paus. 2, 37, 1–3. Jahn expressly denies that the Danaid myth can be connected with the Lernaean mysteries (*Ber. d. sächs. Akad.* 1869, p. 5 ff., esp. n. 18). Ed. Meyer declines to express an opinion (*Forschungen*, I, p. 75, n. 3).

VII

In the first chapter of this paper I adverted to the discrepancies in the accounts of various incidents of the Danaid myth that were said to have taken place after the death of the sons of Aegyptus. There were contradictory statements as to whether Aegyptus came to Argos or not. Again, there was a legend that Danaus was brought to trial for complicity in the murder of his sons-in-law, while another story represented Hypermestra as prosecuted by her father because she had disobeyed him and spared her husband's life. Hermann attempted to show that these two stories were reconciled and combined in a trilogy or tetralogy of which the *Supplices* was the first piece.[1] But it seems highly improbable that Aeschylus would have used this trial-motive twice in the same trilogy. It is more natural to assume with Meyer[2] that there are two distinct traditions. Aeschylus used the story of the trial of Hypermestra, treating it like the trial of Orestes in the Eumenides. The trial of Danaus is known to us through Euripides and his scholiast. However, the decision of questions of this sort is of little importance for the present investigation, which seeks to present the primitive myth, and is less concerned with the modifications the myth has experienced in the course of literary treatment. Courts of justice have no place in primitive folk-stories. They are brought into the Danaid myth as fictions of poets and local chroniclers.

Another local legend, of an aetiological character, was concerned with the escape of Lynceus. Pausanias (2, 25, 4) says that Lynceus fled to Lyrceia — formerly Lynceia, according to his statement — and kindled a bale-fire there as a sign to Hypermestra that he had reached a place of safety. She lighted an answering beacon on the top of Larisa. In memory of this the Argives celebrate an annual festival of beacon-fires. Other stories, however, had it that Lynceus did not escape without difficulty, but was for a time in the power of Danaus. The peril of

---

Hermann, *de Aeschyli Danaidibus* (*Opusc.* II, p. 330).

[2] *Forschungen*, p. 83, n. 4. Cf. p. 84, "Der Kern der Erzählung von dem Process oder vielmehr der Rettung der Hypermnestra vor dem Zorn ihres Vaters ist vielleicht älter, aber ihre Ausbildung ist gewiss das Werk des Aeschylus. Die Analogie mit den Eumeniden fällt in die Augen."

Lynceus was the theme of a play of Theodectes, of which Aristotle preserves these two fragments

Poet. p. 1452 a, 27 ff. καὶ ἐν τῷ Λυγκεῖ ὁ μὲν ἀγόμενος ὡς ἀποθανούμενος, ὁ δὲ Δαναὸς ἀκολουθῶν ὡς ἀποκτενῶν, τὸν μὲν συνέβη ἐκ τῶν πεπραγμένων ἀποθανεῖν, τὸν δὲ σωθῆναι.

Ibid. p. 1455 b, 29 ff. ὥσπερ ἐν τῷ Λυγκεῖ τῷ Θεοδέκτου δέσις μὲν τὰ προπεπραγμένα καὶ ἡ τοῦ παιδίου λῆψις, λύσις δ' ἡ ἀπὸ τῆς αἰτιάσεως τοῦ θανάτου μέχρι τοῦ τέλους.[1]

A Byzantine historian cites Archilochus as authority for a story that Lynceus made war upon Danaus, killed him, and seized his kingdom.[2] Others said that both Danaus and his daughters were put to death by Lynceus.[3] On the other hand, some writers leave us to infer that Danaus died a natural death,[4] and Pseudo-Apollodorus indicates that Danaus and Lynceus were reconciled, since he says that Danaus finally restored Hypermestra to her husband.[5] The vengeance taken by Lynceus upon the Danaids and their father has a parallel, as we have seen, in some modern folk-stories that resemble it in other respects as well. But the only inference that we can draw from these confused and contradictory statements about Lynceus is that none of the versions can be selected with certainty as preserving the form of the primitive myth, and all alike may be the inventions of local chroniclers and poets.

The story that after the murder of their cousins the Danaids were given in marriage to noble Argive youths, who were matched against one another in a foot-race, has not come down to us in an uncontradicted tradition, as appears from the last paragraph.[6] Yet this contest of the Argive suitors is made the central feature of the whole myth in the explanation proposed by Laistner,[7] which I must now discuss briefly. Laistner finds an analogy to the Danaid myth in a German story which

---

[1] An obscure fragment. The word παιδίον can hardly be applied to Lynceus, and its reference is uncertain.

[2] Ioan. Malal. *Chron.* 4, *ad init.* Cf. Interp. Serv. *Aen.* 10, 497.

[3] So Schol. Eur. *Hec.* 886, and perhaps Ovid, *Her.* 14.

[4] Paus. 2, 16, 1. Hyg. *Fab.* 170, *ad fin.* (p. 34, 4 ff. Schmidt).

[5] *Bibl.* 2, 22; cf. Schol. Eur. *Or.* 871.

[6] See also p. 133.

[7] *Das Rätsel der Sphinx*, I, pp. 283–292.

is about as follows: A herdsman who was pasturing his cattle at the foot of a mountain was once approached by a maiden clothed in white, who besought him to deliver her from an enchantment. This he could do by carrying water three times to the top of the mountain in two golden buckets, which she gave him. On the three trips the herdsman was threatened successively by a herd of stags, a flock of wild geese, and a drove of wild oxen. The stags and the geese did him no harm, because he went his way without heeding them, but he took fright at the oxen and ran away, so the charm was broken and the maiden had to wait for another deliverer. In some other stories of this type, it appears that death was the penalty for failure to accomplish the task set by the fairy.

From an examination of a number of stories of this type Laistner constitutes a mythical formula, which disregards unessential variations of the stories, as follows: A water-carrying field fairy is freed from an enchantment by a man who, in order to accomplish her deliverance, has to perform some feat involving bravery, strength, or endurance, as well as mortal danger in case of failure. The Danaids, according to Laistner, were such enchanted maidens. The endless water-carrying to which they were condemned in Hades corresponds to the magic spell from which the white maiden of the German story begs deliverance, while, from another point of view, the water-carrying in both cases goes back to a time when the Danaids, as well as the white maiden, were conceived as nymphs of the rain or the dew. Just as Laistner believes the water-carrying to be an ancient and essential feature of the story, so he thinks that the race of the Argive suitors belongs to the primitive myth, answering to the herdsman's running three times up the mountain. Originally the Danaids were isolated figures in the popular legends, and when they were united into a sisterhood of fifty at a later period in the development of the story, their mortal deliverers were matched against one another in a race, instead of having to contend with physical obstacles or objects of terror. The sons of Aegyptus were men who failed in the attempt to free the enchanted maidens, and so lost their lives. The story that Lynceus was saved by his bride from the fate that befell the other sons of Aegyptus did not, in Laistner's opinion, belong to the primitive myth, but was borrowed from some folk-tale like that Icelandic version of the "Hop o' my Thumb" legend,

which has been mentioned in a previous chapter.[1] It was introduced into the Danaid myth by some Argive genealogist, who wished to represent one of the daughters of Danaus as a shining exception among the barbarous sisterhood, and to trace the royal line of Argos back to her union with an Egyptian prince.

Whatever may be said of the main thesis of Laistner's work, he has rendered no small service to mythological study by pointing out the resemblances that exist between Greek myths and the folk-lore of northern peoples. His explanation of the story of the Danaids is therefore entitled to serious consideration. It has, however, certain difficulties. First, while it is not impossible nor unreasonable that stories about a sisterhood of malevolent demons should arise from superstitions about single beings of this kind, it must be remembered that our oldest records of the myth speak not of single Danaids, but of a sisterhood, and besides, we have similar stories from numerous other peoples in which a group of monstrous women are concerned in a plot like that of the Danaids. It is still harder to accept Laistner's view in regard to the origin of the story about the race of the Argive suitors. Again, the story of Hypermestra is rejected on very slight grounds. While Laistner holds that it was interpolated into the Danaid myth from some story like the Icelandic *Märchen* of the "Hop o' my Thumb" formula, we may see in the Icelandic story a testimony to the genuineness and antiquity of the Hypermestra-motive in the Danaid myth.

But Laistner's chief error consists in this, that he regards the race of the Argive suitors as the most important feature of the myth,[2] and combines with it the legend of the endless labor of the Danaids. Yet the sources from which we derive our knowledge of the myth indicate clearly that these two things belong to distinct traditions which are not easy to reconcile. Our information about the race of the suitors comes from Pindar, Pausanias, and Pseudo-Apollodorus, not one of whom manifests any knowledge of the story about the punishment of the Danaids in the lower world. Hyginus knows the story of the Danaid task, and also says that the Danaids were married to Argive husbands after the death of their father. He does not, however, say that the

[1] See p. 150, n. 3.

[2] *Rätsel der Sphinx*, I, p. 291. "Die Hauptsache aber blieb der Lauf der 'Erlöser' nach dem Ziel, wo die Prinzessinnen standen."

suitors were matched against one another in an athletic contest.[1] On the other hand, among the numerous passages in later writers that refer to the punishment of the Danaids, none allude to their second marriage. This is natural enough, for the story that the crime-stained women were married again and lived happily ever after could hardly co-exist with a wide-spread popular belief that they were doomed to undergo a special punishment in Hades.

So far from believing that the race of the Argive suitors is the essential feature of the Danaid myth, I am convinced that that story, as well as the statement that the Danaids were purified from their guilt by Hermes and Athena, is alien to the primitive legend and is an invention of Argive chroniclers and genealogists, whose object was to trace the noble families of Argos back to the most ancient figures of Argive legend, Danaus and his family. As the common version represented the Danaids as bloodthirsty monsters, and related that they were put to death by the sole survivor of the fifty brothers, it became necessary in some way to clear their reputation and to invent a second marriage for them. That Pindar should adopt the more refined version of the legend is perfectly natural and in accord with his manner of treating myths. Pausanias also may have got his information from Argive priests or other local story-tellers, who would be disposed to give an account flattering to the ancient aristocracy of Argos rather than to adhere to the original form of the myth. Yet even Pausanias's account of the Danaids does not ignore the fact that they were regarded as tainted criminals.[2]

A proof that the race of the Argive wooers is a later addition to the myth, and is not *märchenhaft*, may be discerned in the fact that no danger was involved in the contest. Yet in the folk-stories upon which Laistner bases his theory, the task that the "deliverer" has to perform involves difficulty and danger, or else death is the penalty for failure. Such stories were not unknown to the Greeks witness the myths of Atalanta and Hippodameia. In answer to this argument for the later origin of the story of the race, Laistner has only the conjecture that when the enchanted maidens were united into a sisterhood, the deliverers were matched against one another instead of being made to undertake a

[1] The passage quoted on p. 138, n. 3, appears to refer to a festival in which musical performances played the principal part.

[2] See p. 134.

dangerous feat — a decidedly improbable supposition. Again, Laistner sees in the murdered sons of Aegyptus would-be deliverers who lost their lives in the attempt to free the Danaids from an enchantment. But this identification runs counter to the tradition of the myth, which does not indicate the remotest connection between the fate of the princes and any dangerous exploit involved in the wooing of their cousins. The murder of the fifty youths belongs to the ancient folk-tale that is the nucleus of the Danaid myth. The race of the Argive suitors and the second marriage of the Danaids were trumped up in order to remove certain difficulties in the legendary genealogy of the royal house of Argos.[1]

VIII

Recent study of the Danaid myth has concerned itself chiefly with the endless punishment inflicted on the Danaids in Hades. This punishment had passed into a proverb in the later period of Greek literature, is very frequently mentioned by Latin writers, and is represented on several works of ancient art. The old explanation of the myth represented the Danaids as nymphs of fountains. According to this view the eternal water-pouring would be only a sign of their guardianship of springs and wells, which the later legend regarded as a punishment for the murder of their husbands. In recent years, however, a different interpretation of this feature of the myth has been proposed and widely accepted. This view will be developed in the following pages.

We have seen[2] that the peculiar punishment of the Danaids was first mentioned in the pseudo-Platonic dialogue *Axiochus*. But from a peculiar punning passage in the *Gorgias*, p. 493 A–C, it appears that certain mystic eschatologies of the day assigned to the souls of mortals that had never been initiated into the mysteries a similar task — to carry water with a sieve and fill a leaky vessel. A briefer allusion in

---

[1] As this chapter has dealt with the story of the second marriage of the Danaids, I add here without comment references to some passages in which some of the daughters of Danaus are said to have been married to Achaean heroes: Paus. 7, 1, 6; Herodotus 2, 98; Istrus apud Steph. Byz. *s. v.* Ὤλενος; Eust. *Il.* 11, 756 (p. 883, 1).

[2] p. 136.

the *Republic* (2, p. 363 D–E) gives this punishment to the impious and unjust in general, without naming any particular class. Plutarch[1] says that certain rites of purification were considered a safeguard against such a punishment in the lower world; hence we may infer that the superstition that he had in mind attributed the endless task to souls of uninitiated persons. Passing allusions in Xenophon[2] and in Diogenes Laertius[3] are of somewhat uncertain bearing. It is probable, however, that these writers intended to refer not to the task of the Danaids, but to that of the irreligious or the despisers of the mysteries. Suidas and the paroemiographers also refer to the endless water-carrying of the uninitiated, sometimes side by side with the statement that the Danaids suffered this punishment in Hades.[4] Much more numerous are the cases in which this endless toil is attributed to the Danaids;[5] Latin writers, in fact, seem to know nothing of the fables that assigned it to mortals who neglected the mysteries.

Among the pictorial representations of the task of eternal water-carrying, the celebrated painting of Polygnotus deserves first mention. It was in the Lesche of the Cnidians at Delphi, and is described by Pausanias. Besides many other scenes in Hades, Pausanias says that two women, one young, the other old, were represented carrying water in broken vessels.[6] Over them was an inscription signifying that they had not been initiated into the mysteries. In another group, which he describes shortly afterward,[7] there were persons of both sexes and of various ages carrying water to fill a large vessel (πίθος). The hydria carried by one of the figures appeared to be broken. Pausanias says nothing about the large vessel being leaky, but as it was probably

---

[1] Plut. *non posse suav. vivi*, p. 1105 A.

[2] Xen. *Oec.* 7, 40.

[3] Diog. Laert. 4, 7, 50.

[4] Suidas, *s. vv.* ἀπληστία, εἰς τὸν τετρημένον, εἰς τετρημένον πίθον ἀντλεῖν; Zenob. 2, 6; Apostol. 6, 79.

[5] Plut. *Sept. sap. conv.* 16 (p. 160 B); Lucian, *Dial. Mort.* 11, 4, *Dial. Mar.* 6, *ad fin.*, with scholl., *Tim.* 18, *Hermot.* 61, Alciphr. *Epist.* 1, 2; Porphyr. *de abst.* 3, 27; Macar. 3, 16; Apostol. 6, 79; Zenob. 2, 6; Suidas, *s. vv.* ἀπληστία, εἰς τετρημένον πίθον ἀντλεῖν; Scholl. *Gu. I.* on Eur. *Hec.* 886; Hor. *Carm.* 3, 11, 21, and 2, 14, 17; *Tibull.* 1, 3, 79; Ovid, *Metam.* 4, 462, and 10, 43, *Ib.* 177; Seneca, *Med.* 751, *Herc. Fur.* 761; Lucr. 3, 1006 ff.

[6] Paus. 10, 31, 9. [7] 10, 31, 11.

represented as sunk in the ground after the Greek fashion the leak would not be visible. Pausanias supposed that this group also represented people who had made light of the sacred rites of Eleusis, and there is no reason to think that he was mistaken. The figures around the great vessel are probably to be taken together with the two women described as uninitiated, in spite of the fact that in Pausanias's description some figures intervene between the two groups. The circumstance that the intervening figures are said to have been on a higher level than the first group removes all difficulties in the way of bringing the two groups of ἀμύητοι together.

Then there is a black-figured Attic lekythos published by Heydemann,[1] which has a rough representation of men and women hurrying to pour water into a large jar. The presence of Ocnus and his ass in the design shows that the scene is in Hades.[2] The fact that some of the water-carriers are men indicates that we are not dealing with the task of the Danaids. Heydemann, it is true, did not regard the figures as ἀμύητοι because the vessels that they carry are not broken.[3] This, however, is a matter of little consequence. Anybody familiar with the myth would understand that the large vessel was perforated, although only the upper part of it is shown in the picture, and the task would be recognized as an endless one, which is the point of chief importance.

Representations of the task of the Danaids are more numerous. Especially interesting is a black-figured vase of the Munich collection,[4] which shows Sisyphus rolling his stone up a steep rock, and near by some small winged female figures climbing up the sides of a huge πίθος and pouring water into it from the pitchers that they carry. These are supposed to be Danaids in the guise of εἴδωλα — hence the wings. Then there are several large red-figured amphoras from Lower Italy,[5]

---

[1] *Arch. Zeit.* XXVIII (1871), pp. 42–43, pl. 31, 22; Furtwängler, *Arch. Anz.* 1890, p. 24.

[2] See Paus. 10, 29, 1–2; *Museo Pio-Clementino*, IV, pl. 36.

[3] Kuhnert (*Jahrb. deutsch. arch. Inst.* 1893, p. 110) calls them ἄγαμοι, because the men are all beardless youths.

[4] Cf. Jahn, *Vasensammlung König Ludwigs I*, no. 153. A cut in Roscher's *Lexikon*, *s. v. Danaides*, and in Baumeister's *Denkmäler*, Abb. 2040.

[5] *Monum. Ined.* VIII, pl. 9 (also in Baumeister, *Denkmäler*, fig. 2042 A); *ibid.* II, pl. 49 (also in *Arch. Zeit.* I, pl. 11), Raoul-Rochette, *Mon. Inéd.* pl. 45 = *Arch.*

which are adorned with scenes like that described by Horace (*Carm.* 3, 11, 21 ff.) and Ovid (*Metam.* 10, 41 ff.)—Orpheus singing in Hades and the Danaids among the hearers. Some of these pictures show the great vessel that the Danaids are to fill, in others the urns that the maidens carry are the only indication of their punishment. Another noteworthy monument is a well-head in the Galleria dei Candelabri of the Vatican,[1] on which the Danaids are represented trying to fill a large jar which is cracked at the bottom. Near by is Ocnus with the ass. Still another important representation of the Danaids is a Roman mural painting preserved in the Vatican Library — one of a series of landscapes with scenes from the Odyssey.[2] The scene is in Hades. In the foreground the Danaids are trying to fill the leaky vessel, in other parts of the picture Tityos, Sisyphus, and Orion (?) are represented. There are some other monuments that can with more or less certainty be referred to the Danaid myth, but they do not merit more than a passing mention.[3]

If we should judge from archaeological evidence only, it would remain doubtful whether the task of filling a leaky vessel was first attributed to the Danaids or to the uninitiated. Since the literary evidence that assigns it to the uninitiated is somewhat older than the passages that refer it to the Danaids, many writers have assumed that this singular punishment was first thought of as peculiar to those who neglected the mysteries,[4] and was in some way or other transferred to the Danaids at a later period. This cannot, however, be regarded as certain. It may

---

Zeit. I, pl. 13; *Bull. Arch. Napol.* (*Nuov. Ser.*) III, pl. 3 — cf. p. 49 ff., where Minervini discusses a number of works of art that represent the Danaids.

[1] *Mus. Pio-Clem.* IV, pl. 36, 36*.

[2] Published by Wörmann, *Die antiken Odysseelandschaften vom esquil. Hügel*, pl. VII. A cut in Roscher, *s. v. Orion*, col. 1023.

[3] *Catalogue of Vases in Brit. Mus.* IV, F 210; drawings from Cod. Pighianus in *Ber. sächs. Akad.* 1869, pl. I, II 1, II Bγ, III D; cf. p. 11, p. 267 of the text. Referred to the Danaid myth with less certainty: Campana, *Due Sepolcri Romani*, pl. 2 C and 7 B (see Jahn in *Ber sächs. Akad.* 1869, p. 11), *Catalogue of Vases in Brit. Mus.* III E, 186.

[4] See P. Schuster, *Rh. Mus.* XXIX, p. 628. G. F Creuzer, *Symb. und Myth.* IV, 146, and Bachofen, *Gräbersymbolik*, p. 395 ff., had already for different reasons contended that the story of the punishment was a later addition to the Danaid myth. See also A. B. Cook, *Journ. Hell. Stud.* XIV, p. 98.

be only accidental that the punishment of the ἀμύητοι is mentioned at an earlier date than the labor of the Danaids. Apropos of this, some remarks of Hirzel[1] are quite to the point "Dass es uns aber für das höhere Alter der Danaidenversion an äusseren Zeugnissen mangelt, kann Zufall sein. Im Übrigen ist nicht einzusehen, weshalb man später noch gerade die unglücklichen Danaiden für diese Strafe sollte ausersehen haben. Die umgekehrte Entwickelung ist viel wahrscheinlicher. Statt sich zu verengen geht die Vorstellung immer ins Weite. Vielleicht deutet darauf auch ein Fragment des Komikers Philetäros bei Meineke, III, 299.

> Ὦ Ζεῦ, καλόν γ' ἔστ' ἀποθανεῖν αὐλούμενον·
> τούτοις ἐν ᾅδου γὰρ μόνοις ἐξουσία
> ἀφροδισιάζειν ἐστίν, οἱ δὲ τοὺς τρόπους
> ῥυπαροὺς ἔχοντες μουσικῆς ἀπειρίᾳ
> εἰς τὸν πίθον φέρουσι τὸν τετρημένον."

Certainly it seems more likely that a peculiar punishment assigned by popular legend to certain mythological characters should be transferred to a large class of evil-doers than that the reverse process should have taken place. Other instances of such a transference might be revealed by a careful search. At present I can refer only to a passage in the Apocalypse of Peter (32), where a certain class of wicked souls are said to be driven up a steep cliff, then down again, and so their torture is kept up eternally—a punishment that may be a reminiscence of the torment of Sisyphus.

The view that the labor of filling a leaky vessel was originally assigned in popular fables to mortals who had scorned the mystic rites and was transferred to the Danaids at a later date has been taken up by many scholars, largely through the influence of Erwin Rohde. That distinguished scholar, in the first edition of his *Psyche* (p. 292, n. 1), conjectured that the myth grew out of the double meaning of the word τέλος. Those who were not initiated into the mysteries remained ἀτελεῖς ἱερῶν;[2] hence they were condemned to ὑδρεῖαι ἀτελεῖς.[3] Later in place of the ἀμύητοι, the Danaids were introduced into the fable as

---

[1] *Comm. in hon. Momms.* p. 14, n. 5.

[2] *Hom. Hymn to Ceres*, 482.

[3] See *Axiochus*, *l. c.*

being γάμων ἀτελεῖς,[1] for the Greeks regarded marriage as a sacred rite, a τέλος.[2] In this light Rohde interprets the custom of placing a λουτροφόρος on the graves of unmarried persons[3] — a sign that they must forever carry water in the lower world.

This view was accepted by Kuhnert, Dieterich, and Frazer, all of whom have made contributions to the literature of the subject.[4] But in the second edition of *Psyche* (I, p. 326 ff.), Rohde discussed the task of the Danaids at greater length, and modified the opinion he had formerly expressed in some important particulars. He gave up the contention that the punishment ascribed to the Danaids was borrowed from fables about the unhappy lot of the uninitiated, and substituted a theory about as follows The primitive Greeks had a superstition that persons who died unmarried were punished in the other world by being compelled to carry water eternally, as if for the customary bridal bath — thus trying to perform a ceremony that they had neglected on earth. This punishment was made to serve a religious purpose by the mystic poets, who applied it to the souls of those who neglected the Eleusinian rites; and so the old superstition about the fate of the ἄγαμοι was forgotten. Still later some poet substituted the Danaids for the ἄγαμοι and the ἀμύητοι,[5] and the older fables were entirely forgotten. In support of Rohde's view, Waser[6] cites a legend of the Swiss canton, Wallis, according to which the shades of men who die unmarried haunt a certain spot on the bank of the Rhone, where they are condemned to carry sand from the river up a steep mountain in perforated baskets.[7]

Few voices have been raised in opposition to Rohde's theory, but it

---

[1] Rohde rightly takes the story that the Danaids were put to death by Lynceus to be the older version, and rejects the later fiction of the second marriage.

[2] Aesch. *Eum.* 838, γαμηλίου τέλους; Soph. *Ant.* 1241, τὰ νυμφικὰ τέλη.

[3] Cf. Demosth. 44, 18.

[4] Kuhnert, *Jahrb. d. deutsch. arch. Inst.* VIII (1893), p. 110 f., Dieterich, *Nekyia*, p. 70, n. 1; Frazer, *Commentary on Pausanias*, vol. V, p. 389.

[5] A similar opinion was expressed by Wilamowitz, Eur. *Herc. Fur* 1016. He contends that the persons represented filling the large vessel in Polygnotus's picture were ἄγαμοι, — a view in which I cannot concur.

[6] *Archiv f. Religionswissenschaft*, II (1899), pts. 1–2, p. 47 ff. Waser accepts Preller's theory that the Danaids were fountain-nymphs of Argos.

[7] See Rochholz, *Deutscher Glaube und Brauch im Spiegel der heidnischen Vorzeit*, I, p. 155; Tobler, *Kleine Schriften z. Volks- und Sprachkunde*, p. 136.

seems to me that the objections they urge are cogent. Robert[1] very properly declines to accept the suggestion that the idea of a punishment like the one in question could arise from a play on the word ἀτελεῖς. Likewise Milchhöfer,[2] who adds some other criticisms of Rohde's explanation to this effect: The notion of the endless water-carrying imposed as a punishment upon certain unhappy souls may have arisen from some trite domestic proverb about the uselessness and perpetual emptiness of a leaky vessel.[3] There is no proof that there was ever a Greek superstition to the effect that souls of unmarried persons were condemned in the other world to carry water perpetually for the nuptial bath. So far as pictorial representations are concerned, the vessels carried by the figures engaged in carrying water are not λουτροφόροι, and the πίθος is not a bath-tub. If the ancient tradition had made it clear that the Danaids died as virgins, it would be easier to believe that they were substituted as ἀτελεῖς γάμου for the ἀτελεῖς ἱερῶν. Finally, Milchhöfer remarks, the character of the Danaids as fountain-nymphs must be taken into consideration as bearing upon their task of water-carrying.

While agreeing with most of Milchhöfer's criticisms of Rohde's theory of the myth, I do not follow him in identifying the Danaids with the nymphs of springs, for reasons that have been set forth in another chapter. Yet that old view of Preller's has retained many adherents, simply because if the Danaids were nymphs it was easier to see why the punishment assigned to them should have to do with the carrying or pouring of water. The need of a reason why the punishment should take this particular form rather than another, led me for a time to look with some favor upon Laistner's suggestion[4] that the Danaids might after all be nymphs, not of springs, but of the rain and the dew. Laistner apparently had in mind beings like certain field demons known from Slavic legends, especially among the Wends and the Lithuanians. These demons were believed to guard the grain-fields against mischievous intruders and to water them in times of drouth. But to human beings they often showed themselves savage and ferocious, and were

---

[1] *Die Nekyia des Polygnot*, p. 52, n. 27.

[2] *Philologus*, LIII, p. 397, n. 14.

[3] Cf. Lucr. 3, 934 ff., Plaut. *Pseud.* 102 and 369.

[4] See p. 161.

said to *cut off the heads* of their victims with a sickle.[1] If superstitions of this sort were widely diffused among European nations, and if any trace of them could be found in Greek mythology, we might believe that they had exercised an influence on the development of the Danaid myth. The water-pouring of the Danaids would then be a token of their benevolent activity as spirits that water the fields, which was in later ages misunderstood and interpreted as a punishment. Thus the ancient saying that the Danaids watered thirsty Argos would be something more than a mere piece of Euhemerism. But as we hear of field-demons of the kind in question almost exclusively in Slavic folk-lore, it does not seem possible to use those stories to clear up any feature of the Danaid myth.

To return to Rohde's theory. I have noted with approval Milchhöfer's objection to it on the ground that Greek folk-lore does not bear out the assumption of a superstition assigning the task of eternal water-carrying to the souls of persons who died before marriage. Waser does not help Rohde's case by the modern instance that he cites. The Swiss story bears a general resemblance to that about the fate of the Danaids, — the sand escapes from the baskets just as the water runs out of the leaky vessels of the Danaids, — but certainly there is nothing in this task of carrying sand that makes it especially appropriate for incorrigible old bachelors. The gist of the matter is simply that the labor is fruitless and unending. That the fablers had nothing else in mind is apparent from an inspection of the same authorities that Waser quotes, — especially Tobler,[2] who refers to a number of popular sayings, some of them humorously conceived, about the fate of old maids in the other world, — as, for instance, that they are condemned to sift snow, to split flax-seed, offer matches for sale in hell, and so on.

In the end, therefore, it seems more reasonable to accede to the opinion of Milchhöfer that the idea of a punishment like that of the Danaids arose from some familiar domestic proverb about the uselessness of attempting to fill a leaky vessel. The paroemiographers say that the old saw εἰς τὸν τετρημένον πίθον ἀντλεῖν grew out of the Danaid myth or the fables about the fate of the uninitiated; but the reverse process

[1] See Veckenstedt, *Wendische Sagen und Märchen*, pp. 54, 7 and 9; 56, 12; 106, 4; 110, 2; *Sagen der Zamaiten* (*Litauer*), pp. 178–179, 180–181, 186–187.

[2] Tobler, *op. cit.* pp. 135 and 147.

is more natural and more likely. The task of carrying water in a perforated vessel is frequently mentioned and variously applied in the folk-lore of many nations.[1] Sometimes a demon of some sort is delayed and baffled by being sent to bring water in a sieve or a basket.[2] An ancient method of exorcism consisted in forbidding the evil spirit to return to his accustomed haunt until he had dipped all the water out of a pond with a sieve.[3] Sometimes this task is the doom assigned to a wicked spirit.[4] Again there are tales in which a human being who has fallen into the power of a witch is set to work bringing water in a sifter or a leaky pot.[5] Then there is a whole cycle of stories of a moral, almost homiletic, cast, in which the task of the Danaids figures as a penalty for evil doers.[6] These last, however, do not concern us, as there is reason to believe that they depend upon a literary tradition, which may go back to the Danaid myth itself.[7]

If the idea of a punishment consisting in the filling of a leaky vessel arose in the manner indicated, we must still remain in some doubt as to the time when it was first attributed to the Danaids. The mere fact that the literary allusions to the punishment of the Danaids are later than those which assign a similar punishment to the uninitiated, does

---

[1] Only a very captious critic would here object that the Danaid task consisted in filling the leaky πίθος, not in bringing water in leaky vessels. It is true that the broken pitchers are generally put in the hands of the ἀμύητοι, but I cannot believe that these details are significant. Besides, it appears from Porphyr. *de abst.* 3, 27 that some story-tellers made the labor of the Danaids harder by giving them only sifters to carry water in.

[2] Schiefner, *Awarische Texte*, pp. 27–28; Schneller, *Märchen und Sagen aus Wälschtirol*, p. 202.

[3] Sommer, *Sagen aus Sachsen und Thüringen*, no. 10; Strackerjan, *Aberglauben und Sagen aus Oldenburg*, I, p. 202, § 183; Veckenstedt, *Mythen und Sagen der Zamaiten*, II, p. 144.

[4] J. M. Mackinlay, *Folk-lore of Scottish Lochs and Springs*, pp. 138 and 182; cf. Kuhn, *Sagen aus Westfalen*, I, p. 203.

[5] Grimm, *Märchen*, no. 79; Joseph Jacobs, *English Fairy Tales* (ed. 1898), p. 215, cf. p. 260. See also Joel Chandler Harris, *Uncle Remus His Songs and his Sayings* (ed. 1881), p. 99.

[6] Sébillot, *Contes des Provinces de France*, pp. 227, 229; Schleicher, *Litauische Märchen*, pp. 72, 74; Ralston, *Russian Tales*, p. 335; Grimm, *Märchen*, no. 79.

[7] Johannes Bolte, in *Zeitschr f. deutsch. Philol.* XX, p. 333, finds a Greek prototype of stories of this class in a life of Arsenius by Theodorus Studita († 826).

not, in view of the scanty evidence, prove beyond question that the torment of the ἀμύητοι is an older conception and that the idea of the labor of the Danaids sprang from it. The task of the Danaids is, indeed, a later addition to the myth in this sense, that a moralizing fable that makes the blood-stained sisterhood expiate their crime in Hades must be later than the rude folk-story which is the basis of the Danaid myth. In that, as we have seen, the wicked sisters were put to death by the sole survivor of the fifty brothers, and there was an end of the matter. Recent investigators tell us that Greek ideas about the punishment of the wicked in the other world took shape under the influence of mystic teachings, and that mystic eschatology is in a special sense responsible for the introduction of certain "property figures" of Tartarus, such as Ixion, Sisyphus, and others. If this is true, then the introduction of the Danaids among the other famous criminals of Hades may also be due to the influence of the mysteries. But I should still contend that their peculiar task was assigned to them without regard to the question whether it was especially suitable for them or not. The labor of filling the leaky vessel was fixed upon the Danaids arbitrarily, — because they were evil-doers, not because they had done wrong in some particular way, — just as the task of Sisyphus was given to him without reference to the character of his crimes. The fact that the Danaid task was also the punishment of those who neglected the mysteries, is only a proof that it was not appropriate exclusively to either the Danaids or the ἀμύητοι.[1]

[1] I add a list of passages referring either to Danaus or the Danaids, which there was no occasion to cite in the course of the paper: Eur. *H. F.* 1016; Paus. 10, 10, 5; Philostr. *Vita Apollon.* 7, 7; *Anth. Pal.* 7, 384; Cic. *Parad.* 44; Ovid, *Trist.* 3, 1, 62, *Ars. Am.* 1, 74, *Ibis*, 355; Propert. 2, 31, 4; 4, 7, 63; Verg. *Aen.* 10, 497, Stat. *Theb.* 5, 118, and Lactantius *ad loc.*; Schol. Germ. S. p. 172 f. (ed. Breysig); Sen. *Herc. Fur.* 502, *Herc. Oet.* 952, 962. Plato, *Menex.* p. 245 D. The fragments of the *Danaides* of Aristophanes contribute nothing to our knowledge of the myth, and very little is learned from the remnants of Aeschylus' tetralogy on the subject. Timesitheus wrote two tragedies about the Danaids, Nicochares a comedy about Amymone; see Suidas, *s. v.* Τιμησίθεος, and Athen. X, 426 f.