

## 1. *Ancient sources*

### A. Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* 2.1.5

But the sons of Aegyptus came to Argos, and exhorted Danaus to lay aside his enmity, and begged to marry his daughters. Now Danaus distrusted their professions and bore them a grudge on account of his exile; nevertheless, he consented to the marriage and allotted the damsels among them. First, they picked out Hypermnestra as the eldest to be the wife of Lynceus.... When they had got their brides by lot, Danaus made a feast and gave his daughters daggers; and they slew their bridegrooms as they slept, all but Hypermnestra; for she saved Lynceus because he had respected her virginity: wherefore Danaus shut her up and kept her under ward. But the rest of the daughters of Danaus buried the heads of their bridegrooms in Lerna and paid funeral honors to their bodies in front of the city; and Athena and Hermes purified them at the command of Zeus. Danaus afterwards united Hypermnestra to Lynceus; and bestowed his other daughters on the victors in an athletic contest. (trans. J. G. Frazer)

### B. Hyginus *Fabulae* 168

Danaus son of Belus had 50 daughters by several wives. His brother Aegyptus had just as many sons, and he wanted to kill his brother Danaus and his daughters so that he alone would possess his father's kingdom. When Danaus first outrage is realized what was going on, he fled from Africa to Argos with the help of Minerva, who, they say, built the first two-prowed ship so that Danaus when Egypt is found out could escape. When Aegyptus found out Dan had escaped, he sent his sons to pursue his brother and ordered them either to kill him or not to return home. After they reached Argos, they began a siege against their uncle. When Dan saw he could not hold them off, he promised them his daughters as wives if they ceased their attack. They took the cousins they asked for as wives, but the women following their father's orders killed them after they got married. Hypermnestra was the only one to save her husband Lynceus. They say that the rest of them, because of their crime, pour water into a pot full of holes in the underworld. A shrine was built for Hypermnestra and Lynceus.

(tr. R. Scott Smith and Stephen M. Trzaskoma)

## 2. *Plot Synopses*

A. Pier Francesco Cavalli (1602-1676) / Giovanni Andrea Moniglia (1624-1700): *Hipermestra* (from the program of the Glyndebourne production, 2017)

### *Act 1*

The 50 daughters of Danao, King of Argos, are engaged to marry the 50 sons of his brother Aegyptus. Afraid of an oracle predicting that he will lose his kingdom and his life to one of his daughters' fiancés, Danao orders all his daughters to kill their husbands on their wedding night.

But Danao's eldest daughter, Hipermestra, has fallen in love with her fiancé Linceo and reveals Danao's plot to him, urging him to escape. The next morning, Danao discovers that every one of his daughters has followed his orders except Hipermestra. He imprisons her for her disobedience.

### *Act 2*

In prison, Hipermestra learns that Linceo has gathered his army and is on his way to Argos. Berenice, Hipermestra's nurse, tells her that General Arbante would like to marry her. Arbante tries to convince Hipermestra that Linceo is returning only to kill her father. But Hipermestra refuses to betray Linceo and asks Arbante to leave.

Upon Linceo's arrival, King Danao, fearing for his life, asks Arbante to offer Linceo the kingdom. Hipermestra asks her confidante Elisa to beg Linceo for her father's life. After Elisa leaves, Berenice suggests that Linceo might fall in love with Elisa, but Hipermestra dismisses the idea.

Linceo has encamped his army by Argos' walls. He orders his general Delmiro to rescue Hipermestra from her imprisonment. After Delmiro leaves, Arbante arrives and Linceo asks after Hipermestra. Smarting from Hipermestra's rejection, Arbante falsely tells Linceo that Hipermestra has married Gebete, Prince of Corinth, and that Danao has an army ready to oppose Linceo. Bent on revenge, Linceo sets out to destroy Argos and kill Hipermestra

### *Act 3*

Hipermestra begs Delmiro to kill her, but he takes pity on her and encourages her to escape. Believing Hipermestra to be dead, Linceo declares his love for Elisa, who reveals that Arbante lied about Hipermestra's supposed infidelity. In despair, Hipermestra throws herself off a tower, but is miraculously rescued. Linceo and Hipermestra are happily reunited.

B. Pietro Metastasio (1698-1782): libretto for *Ipermestra*  
(adapted from *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*)

### *Act 1*

An oracle informs Danao, King of Argos, that he will die at the hands of a son of Aegyptus. He commands his daughter Ipermestra, who is betrothed to Aegyptus' son Linceo, to murder him on their wedding night. Unable to do this, Ipermestra decides instead to reject Linceo. Informed of this by his confidant Adrasto, Danao condemns his daughter, who still refuses Linceo when next she meets him.

### *Act 2*

Danao instructs Adrasto to tell Elpinice, his niece, that she will inherit the throne if she convinces Ipermestra to change her mind. Elpinice, unsure what to do, seeks counsel. Meanwhile, Ipermestra pleads in vain with her father to spare Linceo. She then learns from Linceo, in despair at his rejection, that he plans to commit suicide. She begs him not to do it, but refuses to admit that she still loves him.

### *Act 3*

Elpinice tells Ipermestra of the king's offer. Linceo and Ipermestra reaffirm their love. Linceo agrees to leave Argos, but when Plistene, Elpinice's fiancé, hears of the king's scheme, he convinces Linceo to stay and rebel. When Danao hears of the uprising, he again accuses Ipermestra of betrayal, but when Linceo and Plistene break into his chamber, it is Ipermestra who rescues him and then, when the rebellion is suppressed, pleads for the lives of the rebels. Danaos pardons them and gives permission for the marriage of Ipermestra and Linceo.

C. Antonio Salieri (1750-1825) / Marie François Louis Roullet (1716-17860) and Jean-Baptiste Louis Théodore de Tschudi, *Les Danaïdes* (1784)

*Act 1*

The marriage of the fifty daughters of King Danaüs and the fifty sons of his brother Aegyptus are meant to bring to an end the long family feud. At the altar of the goddess Juno, Danaüs and his nephew Lyncée solemnly swear to end the hatred between them. Danaüs' eldest daughter Hypermnestre and Aegyptus' son Lyncée affirm their love and praise their happiness.

*Act 2*

Danaüs tells his daughters gathered in the temple of Nemesis that is convinced that the reconciliation was only a pretense made so that he can avenge the wrongs committed against him before Aegyptus attempts to topple and murder him. To ward this off, Danaüs orders his daughters to murder their husbands in the wedding night. They swear obedience to their father in the temple of Nemesis – only Hypermnestre refuses to accept the terrible order. Danaüs confronts his defiant daughter, telling her that an oracle has predicted that if his vengeance is not complete, a son of Aegyptus will murder him. Hypermnestre remains alone to contemplate her fate: she must choose between her loyalty to her father and her love to Lyncée, and appeals to the gods to strike her dead.

*Act 3*

The wedding of the Danaïdes with Aegyptus' sons is being celebrated. As Lyncée offers his bride the wedding goblet, Hypermnestre refuses to drink from it. Danaüs threatens her not to betray his grim plan. Hypermnestre's pleas for mercy fail and she sees no alternative but to flee. The confused Lyncée wants to follow her but is restrained by Danaüs. The freshly married pairs are led to their wedding chambers accompanied by the jubilant songs of the chorus.

*Act 4*

Hypermnestre begs her father for mercy, but Danaüs cannot be placated. He demands obedience from his daughter and leaves her alone. When Lyncée arrives, she tries to get him to flee in order to save his own life. Lyncée misunderstands her request, interpreting it as a breach of faith and accuses her of betrayal. Hypermnestre almost reveals Danaüs' dark plan, but remains silent out of fear. From outside, the screams of the murdered husbands can be heard. Hypermnestre urges Lyncée to flee. She remains and falls to the floor unconscious.

*Act 5*

Hypermnestre grieves for Lyncée, whom she believes to be dead. Only when Danaüs demands that she bring him Lyncée's body as proof of her obedience does she realize that her beloved has succeeded in fleeing. Danaüs is furious that Hypermnestre has disobeyed his order. He has her put in chains and swears terrible revenge for her treason. To accomplish the will of their father, the Danaïdes go to hunt down Lyncée. In the meantime, Lyncée and his companion Pélagus have mobilized their troops and enter the king's palace. Danaüs wants to execute Hypermnestre on the spot, but Pélagus throws himself between the two and kills Danaüs. Lyncée flees with Hypermnestre and his soldiers. Amidst thunder and lightning, the king's palace is consumed by flames and swallowed up by the earth.

The scene changes to the Underworld. Danaüs can be seen chained to a rock, with a vulture ripping his bloody entrails from his body. The Danaïdes, chained to one another, are tormented by demons, tortured by snakes and hunted by the Furies. They beg for mercy, but the demons are inexorable and promise eternal torture.

### 3. Danaid operas (gathered from several sources and probably incomplete)

1658	Pier Francesco Cavalli	<i>Hipermestra</i>
1716	Charles-Hubert Gervais	<i>Hypermnestre</i>
1724	Geminiano Giacomelli	<i>Ipermestra</i>
1727	Antonio Vivaldi	<i>Ipermestra</i>
1728	Francesco Feo	<i>Ipermestra</i>
1736	Giovanni Battista Ferrandini	<i>Ipermestra</i>
1741	Rinaldo da Capua	<i>Ipermestra</i>
1741	Ignaz Holzbauer	<i>Hypermnestra</i>
1784	Antonio Salieri	<i>Les Danaïdes</i>
1792	Gaetano Isola	<i>Le Danaïdi</i>
1794	Angelo Tarchi	<i>Le Danaïdi</i>
1810	Francesco Morlacchi	<i>Le Danaïdi</i>
1816	Stefano Pavesi	<i>Le Danaïdi</i>
1819	Giovanni Simone Mayr	<i>Le Danaïde</i>
1827	Giuseppe Persiani	<i>Danao Re d'Argo</i>

*settings of Pietro Metastasio's Ipermestra, some with revised librettos*

1744	Johann Adolf Hasse, Christoph Willibald Gluck
1748	Ferdinando Bertoni, Egidio Duni
1751	Niccolò Jomelli, Pasquale Cafaro
1752	Andrea Adolfati
1754	Davide Perez
1758	Baldassare Galuppi
1759	Ignazio Fiorillo
1766	Giuseppe Sarti
1768	Gian Francesco de Majo
1769	Josef Myslivecek
1772	Niccolò Piccinni
1773	Gian Francesco Fotunati
1774	Johann Gottlieb Naumann
1780	Vicente Martín y Soler
1785	Salvatore Rispoli
1789	Gennaro Astarita
1791	Giovanni Paisiello
1825	Saverio Mercadante
1838	Baltasar Saldoni
1843	Ramon Carnicer y Battle

### 4. Recordings

Cavalli: *Hipermestra*

There is currently no available recording of this opera, but the audio from a broadcast of the 2017 Glyndebourne production (conducted by William Christie) can be accessed at:

<https://klassikaraadio.err.ee/739810/ooperiohtu-cavalli-hipermestra-dilemma>

It is to be hoped that a DVD of this production will eventually be made available.

Metastasio: *Ipermestra*

There are no recordings of settings of this text by major composers, such as Hasse or Gluck. The only recording of a setting of this libretto I have been able to find is from a 1963 Italian RAI broadcast of the 1768 version by the Neapolitan composer Gian Francesco de Majo (1732-70) available from the website [www.operapassion.com](http://www.operapassion.com) or on YouTube. Neither the score, nor the performance, nor the sound are first rate, but it provides an example of the kind of work being heard and applauded in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century throughout Europe.

Salieri: *Les Danaïdes*

The recent recording (made in 2013) directed by Christophe Rousset and available as a CD-book package, published in a limited edition by Ediciones Singulares, is splendid in every way, not least for its mastery of period style, but above all for its dramatic power. It can also be heard on YouTube.

There are also two recordings directed by Gianluigi Gelmetti, both with strong casts: Montserrat Caballé, Carlo Tuand, Jean-Philippe Lafont (1983) on Dynamic 489/1-2, and Margaret Marshall, Raul Gimenez, Dimitri Kavrakos (1990) on EMI CDCB 54073

There is also a YouTube video of a concert performance of a little-known German *Hypermnestra* by Ignaz Holzbauer (1711-83) to a libretto by Johann Leopold van Ghelen, Vienna 1741.