

The origin (and decline) of painting: Iaia, Butades and the concept of 'Women's Art' in the 19th Century

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Anecdotes about ancient artists found in the writings of Pliny and Plutarch have played a central part in the literature of art since the Renaissance.¹ Modern scholarship has devoted great attention to the historiographical importance of these anecdotes and, in various case studies, has analysed the numerous re-readings, transformations and tropes. Little is to be found, however, about art-historiography's reception of ancient anecdotes on women artists, apart from the many essays on Pliny's account of the daughter of Butades (also known as Dibutades or Dibutadis).² This anecdote is perhaps one of the most cited and discussed passages in art history and also one of the most frequently depicted in painting. Found in the *Natural History*, it accounts for the uncertain origin of painting, invented by the daughter of Butades who traced the shadow of a man on a wall. Even though it consists of only a few lines, it raises issues such as absence and presence, light and shadow, male and female that have been discussed by artists, critics and historians ever since. Not only did it serve as a key argument for the importance of *disegno* as the father of all arts and for love as the origin of all inventive power, it also ascribed the invention of art to a woman. As Mark Ledbury

¹ 'From the very origins of art-historical accounts, from the fragmentary (but vastly influential) writings of Pliny on ancient artists about whom we know almost nothing else, through Vasari and all Vasari's imitators, histories of artists are saturated with anecdote.' Mark Ledbury, 'Anecdotes and the Life of Art History', in *ibid.*, ed., *Fictions of Art History*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013, 173–86, 174.

² For discussions of the topic see Robert Rosenblum, 'The Origin of Painting: A Problem of Iconography of Romantic Classicism', *The Art Bulletin*, 39, 1957, 279–90; George Levitine, 'Addenda to Robert Rosenblum's "The Origin of Painting: A Problem in the Iconography of Romantic Classicism"', *Art Bulletin*, 40, 1958, 329–31; Frances Muecke, "'Taught by Love": The Origin of Painting Again', *Art Bulletin*, 81, 1999, 297–302; Hans Wille, 'Die Erfindung der Zeichenkunst', Ernst Guldan, ed., *Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte. Festschrift für H. R. Rosemann zum 9. Oktober*, Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1960, 279–300; Petra Kuhlmann-Hodick, *Das Kunstgeschichtsbild. Zur Darstellung von Kunstgeschichte und Kunsttheorie in der deutschen Kunst des 19. Jahrhunderts*, 2 vols., Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1993, vol. 1, 159–180. Viktoria Schmidt-Linsenhoff, 'Im Namen des Vaters. Die Allegorisierung der Künstlertochter in der Bildnismalerei des 18. Jahrhunderts', in Sigrid Schade and Monika Wagner, eds, *Allegorie und Geschlechterdifferenz*, Cologne: Böhlau, 1994, 73–91; Ann Bermingham, 'The Origin of Painting and the End of Art: Wright of Derby's Corinthian Maid', John Barell, ed., *Painting and the Politics of Culture. New Essays on British Art 1700–1850*, Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1992, S. 135–165; Monika Wagner, 'Ein materialistischer Butades. Berliner Plädoyer für Kunst und Gewerbe', *Kritische Berichte*, 3, 2011, 29–39.

has noted in general, this anecdote deals in 'complex, entertaining, and meaningful ways with the vast contingencies of art making (...)'.³ The re-reading, re-interpretation and transformation of the anecdote of Butades resulted in different critical approaches to the topic from perspectives such as the theory of neo-classicism, feminism and visual culture studies. Less research can be found on the reception of the female colleagues of the daughter of Butades, such as Timarete, Irene and Iaia. Although these anecdotes have been paid less attention, at various moments they have been key to the self-promotion of women artists, served as models for art historiography on women and prompted art theoretical debates.

This article focuses on the reception of the anecdotes about the daughter of Butades and Iaia in the 19th century and their role in the definition of a female aesthetic or 'women's art' (*Frauenkunst*). This notion was introduced by Viktoria Schmidt-Linsenhoff in her essay 'Dibutadis. Die weibliche Kindheit der Zeichenkunst', in which she criticizes feminist art historiography for ascribing the invisibility of female artists to social-historical mechanisms of exclusion (e.g., exclusion from workshops, academies) and to the neglect of women in the writing of art history.⁴ Instead, women have always been part of artistic production and the literature of art but, at the same time, have often been treated differently from male artists and regarded as 'other'.⁵ This case study seeks to contribute to these earlier discussions by drawing upon Schmidt-Linsenhoff's idea of the daughter of Butades as a paradigm of 'women's art'. It will focus on depictions of the Butades and Iaia anecdotes in the context of the Gallery of the History of Ancient Painting at the New Hermitage in St. Petersburg. These will be compared with the reception of the same subjects in 19th century art historiography in order to understand how these stories contributed to the idea of a 'female aesthetic'.

Moreover, the analysis of 19th-century reception offered here will address broader questions regarding the value of the anecdotal for art historical research. Art historians of more recent times have both dismissed or upheld the importance of this literary genre, creating a duality that has divided modern scholarship. For example, whereas Carl Goldstein has described anecdotes as rhetorical formulae that 'are of no help in understanding historical figures', Joel Fineman has characterized the genre as 'rooted in the real' and thus deserving of critical attention.⁶ Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, and more recently Catherine Soussloff and Paul Barolsky, have demonstrated how the repetition of certain biographical topics in the literature of art informed the notion of 'the artist' in particular cultures at different times.⁷ Does this also hold for female artists or the concept of 'women's art'?

³ Mark Ledbury, 'Anecdotes and the Life of Art History', 183.

⁴ Schmidt-Linsenhoff, 'Dibutadis', 8.

⁵ For this issue see Carola Muysers, *Die bildende Künstlerin: Wertung und Wandel in deutschen Quelltexten 1855-1945*, Amsterdam: Verlag der Kunst, 1999, 2; Griselda Pollock and Rozika Parker, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*, London: Routledge, 1981, 84.

⁶ See the discussion of Goldstein's and Fineman's stances in Julia K. Dabbs, 'Sex, Lies and Anecdotes. Gender Relations in the Life Stories of Italian Women Artists, 1550-1800', *Aurora*, 4, 2005, 17-37, 19.

⁷ Dabbs, 'Sex, Lies and Anecdotes', 19.

The Gallery of the History of Ancient Painting in St. Petersburg

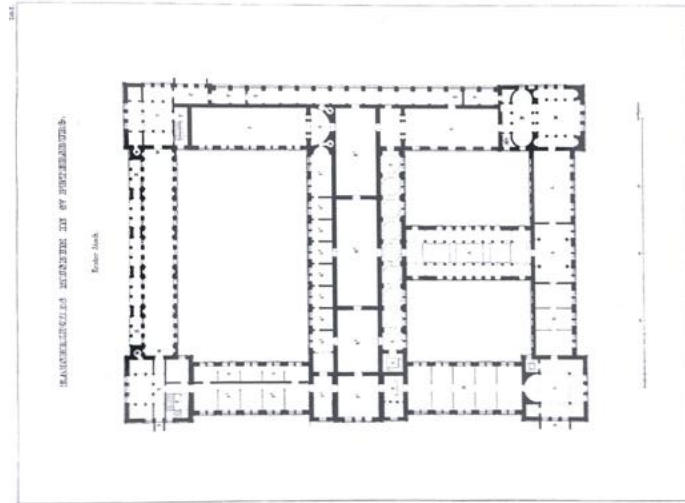


Figure 1 Leo von Klenze, Plan of the upper floor of the New Hermitage, 1850. Print, Munich, Technische Universität. Photo author.

The paintings discussed below are part of the decorative scheme of the Gallery of the History of Ancient Painting in the New Hermitage in St. Petersburg. Commissioned by Tsar Nicholas I of Russia, the museum was built between 1842 and 1851 based on plans by Leo von Klenze. The Gallery of History of Ancient Painting is located on the upper floor of the building, before the paintings galleries. On the suggestion of Klenze, its walls were decorated with 86 painted panels showing scenes from the lives of ancient artists (fig. 1).⁸ These paintings, encaustic on metal panels, were made in Munich by Johann Georg Hiltensperger and then transported to St. Petersburg.⁹ They form the most comprehensive cycle

⁸ A detailed description of the program, 'Die Loggia des kaiserlichen Museums zu Petersburg', was published in *Kunstblatt*, 25 November 1845, 389-93.

⁹ The cycle is considered the main work of Hiltensperger, who was a pupil of Peter Cornelius, an assistant of Schnorr von Carolsfeld and a professor. Hiltensperger contributed to the decoration of the Royal Palace, the Residenzpost and the Maximilianeum. Another two drawings on the *History of Ancient Painting* are part of the collection of the Munich Lenbachhaus. For Hiltensperger, see the entry in the *Allgemeines Künstlerlexikon (AKL)*. There are 138 drawings by Johann Georg Hiltensperger in der *Graphische Sammlung München* which relate to the History of Ancient Painting cycle. These are part of the artist's estate containing approximately 295 drawings and 200 photographs, which was left to the *Graphische Sammlung* in 1954 by Otto Geiger, the State Archives director and grandson of the artist. In 2003, they were re-inventoried, and the depicted subjects were identified using the handwritten lists included in the bequest. These sheets include rough pencil sketches, careful contour drawings, watercolour studies, studies partially coloured in oil and schematic spatial representations.

on the history of ancient painting.¹⁰ The gallery functions as a hub which grants access to the other floors and sections of the building. Upon leaving the rooms on the ground floor, the visitor ascends a magnificent staircase which culminates, quite metaphorically, in the light-flooded gallery of ancient painting, which in turn provides access to the rooms that contain large-scale works of modern painting.

The rectangular space of the gallery consists of nine domed bays with large windows on the southern side and three skylights. The panels representing the history of ancient painting are part of a neo-Pompeian decorative system that covers the walls and the tondi of the domes. The narration, which runs from east to west, traces the origin, ascent and decline of ancient painting.

The first scene in the east is a dome tondo of *Danaos in the Gulf of Argos*, which depicts Egyptian cult images being brought to Greece, thus giving rise to the fine arts. In this first section there are other origin legends, such as the well-known anecdote of Butades, but also lesser-known subjects, such as Cleophantus, who was the first to fill outlines with colour, and Eumaros, who was the first to differentiate between men and women. In the second and third sections we find, among others, Polygnotus, who introduced the depiction of facial expressions, and Apollodorus, inventor of the trompe l'oeil.

The third section is almost entirely devoted to Zeuxis, the fourth to Parrhasios, the fifth to Timanthes and Pauson, and the sixth to Apelles and Nikias. Thus the gallery's central bays feature not only the main protagonists of the history of Greek painting but also their works of the highest genre, history painting. The importance of this space within the gallery is accentuated by the central door that opens to the grand staircase.

In the seventh section we find Aristides, in the eighth Protogenes, and in the ninth Pausias, Antiphilos and Timomachos. The end wall shows the decline of painting through the invention of lower genres such as landscape painting by Ludius and the self-portrait by Iaia. The cycle concludes with representations of chaos and the phoenix, which allude to the demise of ancient painting as well as new beginnings.

The narrative, conceived by Klenze and carried out by Hiltensperger, reaches from the 'old almost mythical incunabula of Fuchir to the last downfall of

¹⁰ For the decoration of the Gallery of the History of Ancient Painting, see Maija Gerwitz and Tatjana Semejenova, *Raboty i Leo Klenze w eremitaschje. K 200-ljetiju so dlja roschdjenija arhitektora*, exhibition catalogue, State Hermitage Museum Leningrad, Leningrad, 1984. The cycle has been mentioned in the literature on Klenze but not thoroughly discussed. Cf. Frank Büttner, 'Klenze und die bildenden Künstler', in Winfried Nerdinger, ed., *Leo von Klenze. Architekt zwischen Kunst und Hof 1784-1864*, Munich: Prestel, 2000, 144–55; Tatjana Semeyenova, 'The decoration of the New Hermitage. Nicholas I. public museum', *British Art Journal*, 2, 2000–2001, 127–34, Adrian von Buttlar, *Leo von Klenze. Leben, Werk, Vision*, Munich: C.H. Beck, 2014. Elena Onoprienko is currently preparing an essay on the history of the Gallery that will be published in the summer of 2020.

the arts in Byzantium'.¹¹ The concept is in the tradition of Winckelmann, who meant his history of ancient art to account for 'the origin, growth, change, and fall of art, together with the various styles of peoples, periods, and artists (...)'.¹² This story is developed within the 86 scenes that are based on ancient anecdotes and also recreate lost paintings from antiquity, such as Zeuxis's *Family of Centaurs* (fig. 2). Oscillating between fiction and historicism, the history of ancient art is told using the anecdotal as a vehicle for notions that Klenze had dealt with in his comprehensive study of the history of ancient painting, which was published in his *Aphoristic Observations* (*Aphoristische Bemerkungen*) of 1838.¹³ The main themes are the hierarchy of artistic genres – drawing, portrait and landscape painting at the margins, history painting at the centre – and a defined canon of 'master-artists', in which the male artists Zeuxis, Parrhasios and Apelles occupy the centre, while the women artists Iaia and the daughter of Butades are at the margins.

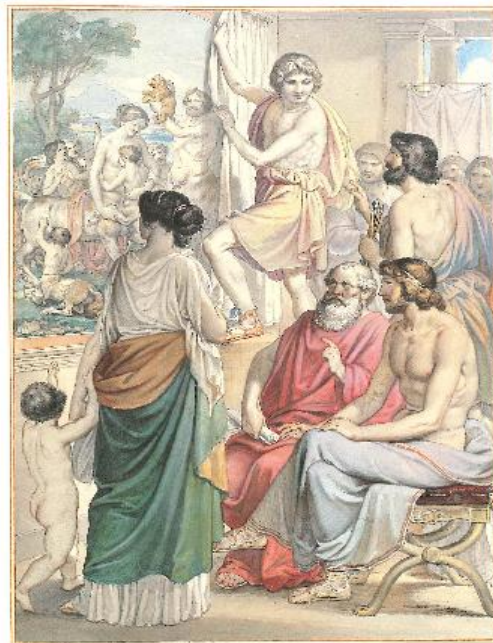


Figure 2 Johann Georg Hiltensperger, *Zeuxis's Centaur*. c.1842. Watercolour, graphite and gouache on paper. Munich, Lenbachhaus. Photo reproduced in Helmut Friedl, ed., *Ideal und Natur. Aquarelle und Zeichnungen im Lenbachhaus 1780–1850*, exhibition catalogue, Lenbach Haus Munich: Bruckmann, 1993.

¹¹ Leo von Klenze, *Das Kaiserliche Museum der schönen Künste in St. Petersburg* (=Architektonische Entwürfe, vol. 9 and 10), Munich: s.n., 1850.

¹² Cf. Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, transl. by Harry Francis Mallgrave, Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2006, 71.

¹³ Cf. chapter 'Apologie und Vision' in Buttler, *Leo von Klenze*, 284–322, esp. 315–23. – Klenze's intense discussions of Rudolf Wiegmann's studies on the 'application and technique of painting of the ancients' (1836) ultimately prompted Wiegmann's polemic entitled 'Der Ritter Leo von Klenze und unsere Kunst' (1839). Cf. Rudolf Wiegmann, *Die Malerei der Alten in ihrer Anwendung und Technik insbesondere als Dekorationsmalerei*, Hanover: Hasche Hofbuchhandlung, 1836; Rudolf Wiegmann, *Der Ritter Leo von Klenze und unsere Kunst*, Dusseldorf: J. H. C. Schreiner, 1839.

Klenze and Hiltensperger's Butades and Iaia



Figure 3 Johann Georg Hiltensperger, *The Daughter of Butades*, c. 1842. Encaustic on copper. St. Petersburg, New Hermitage. Photo: Sergey Sosnovskiy.

Figure 4 Johann Georg Hiltensperger, *Iaia Painting her Self Portrait*, 1842. Encaustic on copper. St. Petersburg: New Hermitage. Photo: The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.

The two representations of interest here – those of the daughter of Butades and of Iaia (figs 3, 4) – are depicted at the beginning and end of the cycle, at the mythic, primitive origin of art and shortly before its demise. Both of them are the only representations of non-male artists within the gallery. The daughter of Butades is depicted in the very moment of tracing the profile of her lover on a rock, whilst caressing his cheek with her left hand. Her face is shown in profile and her eyes are fixed on the shadow and her pen. The event is staged in nature and the shadow of the lover is cast by sunlight. The physical appearance of the male, especially the hair band and pose, recalls ancient depictions of the shepherd Endymion. The painting is only roughly based on Pliny's text, which reads,

(...) modelling portraits from clay was first invented by Butades, a potter of Sicyon, at Corinth. He did this owing to his daughter, who was in love with a young man; and she, when he was going abroad, drew an outline on the wall the shadow of his face thrown by a lamp. Her father pressed clay on this and made a relief, which he hardened by exposure to fire with the rest of his pottery; and it is said that this likeness was preserved in the Shrine of the Nymphs until the destruction of Corinth by Mummius.¹⁴

Unlike Pliny, Hiltensperger shows sunlight instead of lamplight, nature instead of an interior, a rock instead of a wall.¹⁵

The composition and the iconography are no invention of Hiltensperger and Klenze; they draw upon contemporary depictions of the subject such as the versions

¹⁴ Cited after Viktor I. Stoichita, *A Short History of the Shadow*, London: Reaktion Books, 2019 (first edition 1997), 11.

¹⁵ For the iconography of the Butades story see Footnote 2.

of Edouard Daege, who in 1832 had staged the origin of painting outdoors, and of Friedrich Schinkel, an 1831 wall painting in his Altes Museum in Berlin (figs 5, 6).¹⁶ All of these rely on other written sources for the anecdote, for example Quintilian's account for the daylight and the story of Gyges for the pastoral elements. However, it is not so much the iconography or composition that distinguish the St. Petersburg painting; much more significant is its positioning within the context of the gallery, within Klenze's dramaturgy of the history of ancient painting.



Figure 5 Edouard Daege, *The Origin of Painting*, 1832. Oil on canvas, 176.5 x 135.5 cm. Berlin, Alte Nationalgalerie.

Photo: Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Photographer: Andres Kilger.

Figure 6 Friedrich Schinkel, *The Origin of Painting*, 1830. Gouache, 26 x 29 cm. Wuppertal, Von der Heydt Museum.

Photo reproduced in Monika Wagner, 'Ein materialistischer Butades. Berliner Plädoyer für Kunst und Gewerbe', *Kritische Berichte*, 3, 2011.

At the other end of the gallery, mirroring the Butades anecdote, we find the depiction of Iaia painting her self-portrait. According to Pliny,

Iaia of Kyzikos [Cyzicus], remained single all her life, worked at Rome in the youth of Marcus Varro, both with the brush and with the cestrum on ivory. She painted chiefly portraits of women, and also a large picture of an old woman at Naples, and a portrait of herself, executed with the help of a mirror. No artist worked more rapidly than she did, and her pictures had so much merit that they sold for higher prices than those of Sopolis and Dionysios, well-known contemporary painters, whose works fill our galleries.¹⁷

¹⁶ Wagner, 'Ein materialistischer Butades', 34. Jörg Trempler, *Das Wandbildprogramm von Karl Friedrich Schinkel. Altes Museum Berlin*, Berlin: Gebrüder Mann, 2001.

¹⁷ Pliny, *Historia Naturalis*, cited after the translation by Julia K. Dabbs in *Life Stories of Women Artists, 1550–1800, an Anthology*, Farnham: Ashgate 2009, 27.

Hiltensperger's very didactic depiction of Iaia is modelled on Pliny's description, but draws upon other sources as well. The artist is shown in the moment of copying her self-portrait from a mirror. A maiden, in the pose of Canova's *Hebe* (which itself is part of the St. Petersburg collection), brings Iaia a palette with colours and a small jug. The costly material of the classical dress and drapery alludes to the social status and wealth of Iaia, whose works 'sold for higher prices than those of Sopolis and Dionysios'. The statue of Venus chastising Cupid in the background reveals that another source for the depiction was Boccaccio, who called Iaia an 'eternal virgin of Rome' and stated that 'she gave herself totally to the study of painting and sculpture'.¹⁸ Moreover, according to Boccaccio she was 'exalted with infinite glory for the power of her intellect'¹⁹, which explains the scrolls at her feet and the lyre at the pedestal of the statue.

Klenze's interest in Iaia probably derived from his research on ancient painting techniques. In his discussion of encaustics in the *Aphoristic Observations* he refers to Iaia, or Lala as he calls her, and quotes Pliny statement that Iaia 'penicillo pinxit, et cestro in ebore'.²⁰ According to Klenze, Iaia might have used a special technique of encaustic painting, employing chemical reactions to mix fugitive oils with wax in order to brush the paint onto the surface of her works.²¹ This explains the function of the young maiden in Hiltensperger's painting who carries the jug and palette. In two preparatory drawings in Munich, the jug gives off steam or fumes (fig. 7).



Figure 7 Johann Georg Hiltensperger: Iaia Painting Her Self-Portrait, c. 1842. Pen on paper. Munich, Staatliche Graphische Sammlung. Photo author.

Although Klenze and Hiltensperger clearly had a vivid interest in the subjects of the daughter of Butades and of Iaia, the women were marginalized within the context of the gallery. A comparable 'ranking' is also found in art historiography of the time.

¹⁸ Dabbs, *Life Stories of Women Artists*, 33–4.

¹⁹ Dabbs, *Life Stories of Women Artists*, 34.

²⁰ Klenze, *Aphoristische Bemerkungen*, 604.

²¹ *Ibid.*

Butades and Iaia in Ernst Guhl's and Wilhelm Lübke's two studies entitled *Die Frauen in der Kunstgeschichte*

Several works of German-language art historiography produced shortly after the completion of the New Hermitage drew particular attention to the role of women in art history. Two professors of art history initiated the discussion: Ernst Guhl²² of the Academy of Fine Arts in Berlin and Wilhelm Lübke of the Polytechnical School in Zürich. In Guhl's *Die Frauen in der Kunstgeschichte* [Women in Art History], which he dedicated to his mother, the author offers an account of women artists since the Renaissance.²³ Each of the twenty chapters begins with a general overview on the social status of women in the period in question; these reflect Guhl's main argument that the situation of women has improved over the centuries. The book's introduction offers more general thoughts on the changing historical situation of female artists and on the characteristics of 'women's art' as a whole. Guhl states that women might be able to compete with male artists, provided that they rely on their female virtues. Lübke, on the other hand, in a study of the same title argues that women's skills are limited and that famous women artists appear only in periods of artistic decline.²⁴ His text, which is based on a lecture, owes much to Guhl's publication. However, Lübke reinterprets many of Guhl's arguments in a way that shows a markedly different understanding of 'women's art' and female artists, one that is based on Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl's *Die Familie* of 1855. Riehl portrays the family as the most important nucleus of society and cites the difference of the sexes as centrally important to the construction of society. Riehl's ideas, most importantly the key argument that female artists rose to prominence particularly in times of social decline, are reflected in Lübke's text. Lübke consequently devotes more attention to male artists' depictions of women than he does to female artists and 'women's art', thereby relegating women to the role of the model.

Nevertheless, Guhl and Lübke have in common that they draw upon ancient anecdotes about women artists in three different contexts: a) the origin of painting, b) women and the hierarchy of artistic genres and c) women's access to art making.

a) Butades I: The origin of painting

Guhl states at the beginning of his study that he will address neither the question of whether women should be granted access to becoming artists, nor whether women were competent practitioners of the visual arts. As Guhl claims,

²² For Ernst Guhl see Eric Garberson, 'Art History in the University II: Ernst Guhl', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 7, 2012, 1–48.

²³ Ernst Guhl, *Die Frauen in der Kunstgeschichte*, Berlin: J. Guttentag, 1858.

²⁴ Carola Muysers, 'Künstlerin/Kunstgeschichte. Zur Konzeption der Künstlerin in der kunsthistorischen Geschlechterforschung', in Ruth Becker und Beate Kortendiek, eds *Handbuch Frauen- und Geschlechterforschung. Theorie, Methode, Empirie*, Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2008², 752–8, 752. Wilhelm Lübke, *Die Frauen in der Kunstgeschichte*, Stuttgart: Ebner und Seubert, 1862.

[The fact] that women have rarely appeared as innovators will not come as a surprise to anyone who knows that female activity consists less in the creation of new things than in the fond continuation of the existing and traditional.²⁵

Only in a few cases does Guhl grant the act of invention – an important attribute of an artist²⁶ to a woman and, in doing so, draws upon longstanding discourses that can be traced back to Renaissance theorists' reception of Pythagorean and Aristotelian contrarities such as male/form/active vs. female/matter/passive.²⁷ Nevertheless, with regard to the origins of painting, Guhl quotes the anecdote of the daughter of Butades and even mentions her presumed given name, Kora:

But it is quite significant that here, at the very beginning of the history of art, a female name is cited and that even the invention of one of the most important branches of art is ascribed to her. She was the daughter of a potter Butades, perhaps called Kora, who may have lived around the middle of the seventh century BC. Butades of Sikyon in Corinth, as Pliny explains, invented a way of producing portraits from soft clay, and with the help of his daughter, to wit: for she had been afire with love for a young man, and when he had to part with her one day she drew his face, following the shadow cast by a lamp on the wall. The father, so the story goes, filled the outline with soft clay, put it in the oven along with his other pottery, and thus the first relief portrait came into being. The story is charming and has at least as much historical probability as the invention the same primordial type of outline drawing by Saurias by tracing the shadow of his horse.²⁸

²⁵ '[D]aß die Frauen nur selten als Schöpferinnen neuer Richtungen aufgetreten sind, wird Niemanden wundern, der da weiß, daß weibliche Thätigkeit überhaupt weniger im Neuschaffen als in der liebevollen Weiterbildung eines Bestehenden und Ueberlieferten besteht'. Guhl, *Die Frauen in der Kunstgeschichte*, 4.

²⁶ Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, *Die Legende vom Künstler. Ein geschichtlicher Versuch*, Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2014⁶, 64–88.

²⁷ See Fredrika H. Jacobs, *Defining the Renaissance „Virtuosa“*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, Chapter (Pro)Creativity, 27–63.

²⁸ 'Recht bezeichnend aber ist es, daß auch hier schon auf der Schwelle der Kunstgeschichte ein weiblicher Name genannt wird, und diesem sogar die Erfindung eines der wichtigsten Kunstzweige zugeschrieben wird. Es war dies die, vielleicht Kora genannte, Tochter eines Töpfers Dibutades, welcher um die Mitte des siebenden Jahrhunderts vor Chr. gelebt haben mag. Aus weichem Thon Bildnisse zu machen erfand, wie Plinius erzählt, Dibutades aus Sikyon zu Korinth und zwar mit der Hülfe seiner Tochter; diese nämlich war in Liebe zu einem Jünglinge entbrannt, und als dieser sich einst von ihr trennen musste, zeichnete sie sich sein Antlitz nach dem Schatten, den eine Lampe auf die Wand fallen ließ. Der Vater, heißt es dann weiter, habe den Umriß mit weichem Thon ausgefüllt, diesen nebst seinen andern Töpferarbeiten in den Ofen gebracht, und so sei das erste Reliefporträt entstanden. Die Geschichte ist reizend und hat mindestens eben so viel historische Wahrscheinlichkeit

According to Guhl it is notable that the invention of one of the most important genres of art had been attributed to a female. This statement can be understood as a response to contemporary publications on the history of ancient painting that had re-evaluated the anecdote about Butades as fiction – as a mythical or legendary account. Authors such as Julius Sillig, Alois Hirt and Heinrich von Brunn all omitted the Butades story.²⁹ Heinrich von Brunn, for example, underscores the lack of any actual historical account ('geschichtliche Nachricht'³⁰) about the origin of painting and states that there is no need to pass down legends to posterity. Further on, though, he draws attention to the father, Butades, as inventor of the technique of modelling plaster upon a flat preliminary design ('Erfindung des Gypsformens über Bildwerken'), thereby assigning plausibility to the masculine element of the anecdote.³¹ The 'masculinization' of the anecdote can also be found in contemporary painting: Friedrich Schinkel's *The Invention of Painting* of 1831 switches the roles of the protagonists, turning the woman into the passive model and giving the male the active part. Only a few years earlier, in 1827, this 'pointlessly reversed roles of the sexes'³² had been introduced by Auguste Jean-Baptiste Vinchon and Louis Francois Gosse in the vault decorations of the Musée Charles X at the Louvre.

Guhl, possibly in reaction to such privileging of the masculine, is not prepared to discount the credibility of the daughter's role in the story. He states,

Indeed, it [the story of Kora] is more likely [than the story of Saurias] because it gives a deeper psychological reason for the invention. The process itself evokes a graceful image, as has been painted by Daege, and it is also based on the deeply poetic view that love, whose creative power the Greeks regarded as the origin of all things, also gives rise to the practice of art (...).³³

für sich, als das Sarias durch Umziehung des Schattens seines Pferdes jene ursprüngliche Art der Umrisszeichnung erfunden habe'. Guhl, *Die Frauen in der Kunstgeschichte*, 23–4.

²⁹ Julius Sillig, *Catalogus artificum, sive architect, statuarii, sculptores, pictores, caelatores et scalptores Graecorum et Romanorum*, Dresden and Leipzig: Libraria Arnoldia, 1827; Alois Hirt, *Geschichte der bildenden Künste bei den Alten*, Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1833; Heinrich Brunn, *Geschichte der griechischen Künstler*, 2 vols, Braunschweig: C. A. Schwetschke & Sohn, 1853.

³⁰ Brunn, *Geschichte der griechischen Künstler*, vol. 1, 13.

³¹ Brunn, *Geschichte der griechischen Künstler*, vol. 1, 403.

³² Rosenblum, 'Origin of Painting', 289.

³³ '[J]a, sie ist wahrscheinlicher, indem sie einen tieferen psychologischen Grund für die Erfindung angibt. Der Vorgang an sich gewährt ein anmuthiges Bild, wie auch von Daege gemalt worden ist, und es beruht zugleich auf einer tiefpoetischen Anschauung, dieselbe Liebe, deren schöpferische Gewalt von den Griechen als der Ursprung aller Dinge angesehen wurde, auch den Anlaß zur Kunstübung geben zu lassen. (...)' Guhl, *Die Frauen in der Kunstgeschichte*, 24–5.

According to Guhl, the daughter of Butades 'was led by love to creative art, as no one is able to achieve great and important things without having been struck by the spark of love'.³⁴

b) Iaia: Women and the hierarchy of artistic genres

Guhl's whole idea of writing a book on women in art history based on the idea that 'the situation for women has improved'³⁵ is outstanding for his time, and his treatment of the Butades anecdote differs remarkably from those of his contemporaries. Nevertheless, his remarks are not wholly unconventional, as is apparent from his account of the Iaia story. Guhl concludes his chapter on female artists from antiquity as follows:

So the female artist whom I would list as active in Rome was also of Greek origin and Greek training. This was the painter Iaia from Kyzicus in Asia Minor who, it seems, practiced her art in Rome around 100 BC. The reports about her paintings that have been preserved are of great interest insofar as they show her to have been the leader of the large chorus of women who later practiced portrait and miniature painting. (...) ³⁶

According to Guhl, Iaia blazed a trail for the numerous women who dedicated themselves to portrait or miniature painting. Both types of painting were considered to belong to the lesser genres and had long been associated with women.³⁷ Guhl addresses the suitability of lesser genres to women in detail in the introduction to his study:

[T]he nature of the female gender also lays claim to the special genres to which women apply themselves. More inclined to delicate execution and careful elaboration than to the bold conception of great thoughts, women will prefer to practice arts that are characterized by light and comfortable technique. (...) Architecture is [the artistic genre] farthest removed from them. (...) [S]culpture, however, counts numerous young females among its followers; including certain types of sculpture with lighter technique, such as

³⁴ '(...) wir aber dürfen dieselben hier auf die Tochter des Dibutades beziehen, die von der Liebe zur schöpferischen Kunst geführt wurde, wie ja denn wohl Niemand Großes und Bedeutendes zu leisten im Stande ist, ehe ihn nicht der Funke der Liebe berührt hat.' Guhl, *Die Frauen in der Kunstgeschichte*, 25.

³⁵ Guhl, *Die Frauen in der Kunstgeschichte*, 1–2.

³⁶ 'So war auch es den auch die eine Künstlerin, die ich als in Rom thätig anzuführen wüßte, von griechischer Herkunft und aus griechischer Schule hervorgegangen. Es war die Malerin Laja aus Kyzicus in Kleinasien, welche, wie es scheint, ihre Kunst um das Jahr 100 vor Chr. Geb. in Rom ausgeübt hat. Die Nachrichten, die uns heute über ihre Malereien erhalten sind, haben ein großes Interesse, insofern sie uns dieselbe als die Chorführerin jenes langen Reigens von Frauen darstellen, die sich in späteren Zeiten mit der Porträt- und Miniaturmalerei beschäftigt haben.' Guhl, *Die Frauen*, 29.

³⁷ See Jacobs, *Defining the Renaissance „Virtuosa“*, 41.

wax modelling etc., it occupied about thirty women artists [of antiquity]. Almost all other names, however, belong to painting and the related arts of drawing. "Her field is everything that belongs to the purely natural", Hippel once said of women, and he adduces the remark that, when judging works of art, they have a greater sense for the natural than for what is actually artistic. There is something truthful in this, and in practice it proves that those genres of painting in which the subject as such predominates have been treated most often by women. Portrait, landscape, animal and flower painting are such genres. It is in these that most women have excelled. History painting is dominated by the purely artistic, by thought and composition; in it, that which is merely natural recedes, and accordingly the women who have distinguished themselves in this genre are most rare in the history of art.³⁸

In order to substantiate that women are more suitable for certain genres, Guhl draws upon long-established *topoi* from life writing about women that can be traced back to Renaissance authors, such as woman being too weak to work marble (e.g., Vasari on Properzia de Rossi) and women's aptitude for copying (*ritrarre*) flowers, animals and people in contrast with men's ability to invent (*inventare*) history painting.³⁹

Similar thoughts are expressed by Wilhelm Lübke in his lecture 'Die Frauen in der Kunstgeschichte' (1862). This text was much inspired by Guhl, who had co-authored the *Denkmäler der Kunst* with Lübke from 1851 to 1856. Lübke writes,

³⁸ 'Zweitens macht sich die Natur des weiblichen Geschlechts auch auf die besonderen Kunstgattungen geltend, denen sich dasselbe zuwendet. Zarte Ausführung und sorgfältige Durchbildung mehr geneigt, als zu kühnem Erfassen großer Gedanken geeignet, werden sich die Frauen vorzugsweise mit den Künsten einer leichten und bequemen Technik beschäftigen. Am fernsten liegt ihnen die Architektur. (...) [Z]ahlreichere Jüngerinnen hat allerdings die Sculptur aufzuweisen, mit der sich einschließlic gewisser Zweige einer feineren Technik, wie des Bossierens in Wachs u. a., ungefähr dreißig Künstlerinnen beschäftigt haben. Fast alle übrigen Namen aber gehören der Malerei und den verwandten Kreisen der zeichnenden Künste an. (...) "Alles was zum Gebiet des bloß Natürlichen gehört," sagt Hippel einmal von den Frauen, „ist ihr Feld;“ und er verbindet damit die Bemerkung, daß sie auch in der Beurtheilung von Kunstwerken mehr Sinne für den natürlichen, als für den eigentlich künstlerischen Theil derselben zeigen. Es liegt etwas Wahres in dieser Bemerkung und in der Kunstübung bewährt es sich in der That, daß diejenigen Gattungen in der Malerei, in denen der Gegenstand als solcher überwiegt, von den Frauen am meisten behandelt worden sind. Das Portrait, die Landschaft, die Thier- und Blumenmalerei sind solche Gattungen. In ihnen haben sich auch die meisten Frauen hervorgethan. In der Historienmalerei überwiegt der rein künstlerische Theil, der Gedanke, die Komposition; das bloß Natürliche tritt darin mehr zurück und dem entsprechend sind die Frauen, die sich in dieser Gattung hervor gethan haben, am seltensten in der Kunstgeschichte.' Guhl, *Die Frauen in der Kunstgeschichte*, 5–6.

³⁹ See Jacobs, *Defining the Renaissance "Virtuosa"*, 100–2.

[T]he circle within which female talent (...) was able to produce something worthy of recognition is a very small one and, moreover, lies outside the highest spheres of artistic creation.⁴⁰

Lübke furthermore associates women with lesser artistic genres, as had Guhl. According to Lübke, the place of women in the arts was

[o]f course not in the main genres, not in great historical composition, not in large-scale oil paintings, let alone frescoes. The nature of things assigns to women the smaller branches of painting, limiting them to an area that is concerned not with presenting thoughtful content but instead with the natural description of objects. (...) If I am not mistaken, women's active participation seems to increase in inverse proportion to the importance of the art. (...).⁴¹

With this in mind, Guhl's declaration of Iaia as 'leader of the large chorus of women who later practiced portrait and miniature painting', gains a negative aspect, as it confines women's success only to the lesser genres.

The anecdote about Iaia had, however, been interpreted differently before, as becomes clear from its reception in Renaissance art, namely in the work of Sofonisba Anguissola. In 1556 the artist executed a round miniature self-portrait that she inscribed 'Sophonisba Anguissola virgo ipsius manu ex sepuclo depicta Cremonae' (fig. 8).⁴² As Christina Strunck has noted, there are several reasons to assume that the inscription alludes to Pliny's account of Iaia.⁴³ The round format recalls that of a mirror, which features prominently in the anecdote and was standard in pictorial representations of the story (including, for example, the version by Hiltensperger). By referring to herself as 'virgin', Anguissola alludes to Boccaccio's description of Marcia/Iaia as a virgin of Rome in his *De mulieribus claris*. The reception of Pliny's anecdote can be interpreted as a strategy for Anguissola's self-promotion. First and foremost, her contemporaries would have understood the reception as a competitive comparison – a *paragone* – with the ancient artist. Moreover, the allusion to Iaia

⁴⁰ 'der Kreis, innerhalb dessen die weibliche Begabung (...) Anerkennenswertes hervorzubringen vermochte, ist ein sehr enger und liegt noch dazu außerhalb der höchsten Sphären des künstlerischen Schaffens'. Lübke, *Die Frauen in der Kunstgeschichte*, 5–6.

⁴¹ 'Freilich auch hier nicht in den Hauptgattungen, nicht in der großen historischen Komposition, nicht in umfangreichen Ölbildern oder gar Fresken. Die Natur der Sachen weist den Frauen die kleineren Zweige der Malerei zu, beschränkt sie auf ein Stoffgebiet, in welchem es sich nicht um Darlegung eines gedankenvollen Inhalts, sondern um natürliche Schilderung des Gegenständlichen handelt. (...) Täusche ich mich nicht, so scheint die selbstthätige Theilnahme der Frauen genau in dem Maße zuzunehmen, als die Bedeutung der Kunst abnimmt (...)'. Lübke, *Die Frauen in der Kunstgeschichte*, 7, 9.

⁴² See Christina Strunck, 'Hofkünstlerinnen. Weibliche Karrierestrategien an den Höfen der Frühen Neuzeit', in Birgit Ulrike Münch, Andreas Tacke, Markwart Herzog and Sylvia Heudecker, eds, *Künstlerinnen. Neue Perspektiven auf ein Forschungsfeld der Vormoderne*, Petersberg: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2017, 20–37, 23.

⁴³ Strunck, 'Hofkünstlerinnen', 23.

demonstrated humanistic education, and Pliny's account attributes rapidness to Iaia, a quality esteemed as *sprezzatura* and mainly ascribed to male artists by Anguissola's contemporaries.⁴⁴ In addition, the fact that Anguissola was able to surpass her male contemporaries by achieving higher prices made her a role model for Renaissance women artists.



Figure 8 Sofonisba Anguissola, Self-portrait, c.1556. Boston: Museum of Fine Arts.
Photo: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Emma F. Munroe Fund.

c) Butades II: Women's access to art-making

Lübke's use of the Butades anecdote is quite different from Guhl's and extracts from the story bear a meaning that has nothing to do with the origin of painting. Lübke states:

Let us allow the poetic fairy tale to be regarded as a historical reality for a moment; it contains a truth that all epochs of art history confirm for us, which is that the vast majority of female artists have been led to art by personal influence, be it by the example of the father or brother, or by the guidance of the lover or the husband.⁴⁵

Lübke in effect downplays women's agency in becoming involved in art-making and ascribes the phenomenon instead to male influence. He draws upon

⁴⁴ Jacobs, *Defining the Renaissance „Virtuosa“*, 100–5.

⁴⁵ 'Lassen wir das poetische Märchen einen Augenblick als geschichtliche Wirklichkeit gelten; es enthält eine Wahrheit, die uns in allen Epochen der Kunstgeschichte bestätigt wird. Die nämlich, daß die große Mehrzahl der Künstlerinnen durch persönlichen Einfluß, sei es durch das Beispiel des Vaters oder Bruders, sei es durch die Anleitung des Geliebten oder des Gatten zur Kunst geführt worden sind.' Lübke, *Die Frauen in der Kunstgeschichte*, 9–10.

ideas that had been raised by Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, who stressed the importance of men in 'introducing' women to art. Yet Riehl had gone further by designating the domestic sphere as the preferred area of activity of female artists and by defining their role as 'assistants' to male artists: 'The woman should rule by serving, her service being to free the man from restrictions by restricting herself (...)'.⁴⁶

Guhl argues differently about how women become artists. He concludes that the differences in male and female interactions with the outside world make it easier for men to choose a profession independently.⁴⁷ He, however, states that women are often introduced to the profession by their 'father, *mother* or brother' [emphasis added].⁴⁸ On the whole, his analysis is more nuanced than Lübke's, likely because his overriding aim is to account for the participation of women in education ('Theilnahme der Frauen an der allgemeinen Bildung') and in art ('Theilnahme der Frauen in der Kunst') and to characterize their profession and disposition ('Beruf und Anlage') from a cultural-historical perspective.

Conclusion

The mid-19th-century reception of the stories of the daughter of Butades and of Iaia sheds light on the question of how female artists were viewed at that time. Especially the various iterations of the story of the daughter of Butades reveal that this anecdote was interpreted in new ways beginning in the 1820s: while its significance with respect to the invention of art diminished, its relevance as a potentially historical account, as an allegorical tale and as a source for understanding the social status of the female artist increased. Lübke's interpretation of the story as a 'poetic fairy tale' is mirrored by the tendency of contemporary antiquarians to omit it from their publications. Guhl's account, on the other hand, shows a different approach to the anecdotal. Unlike Lübke, he assumes a kernel of historical truth within the story of the origin of painting. He actually gives a name – Kora – to the woman earlier known as 'daughter of Butades' and mirrors the important shift within the reception of the anecdote at the middle of the 19th century, showing a more positivist reading of the story.⁴⁹ A similar approach is reflected in the reception of Pliny's account of Iaia, which was frequently cited in scholarly encyclopaedias on ancient painting.

The depictions within the Gallery of the History of Ancient Paintings reflect different historiographical approaches to the ancient anecdotes. The daughter of Butades is presented through an almost allegorical lens: she is strongly idealized,

⁴⁶ 'Herrschen soll die Frau, indem sie dient, den Mann aus seiner Beschränkung herausreißen, indem sie sich selbst beschränkt (...).' Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, *Die Familie*, Stuttgart: Cotta, 40.

⁴⁷ Guhl, *Die Frauen in der Kunstgeschichte*, 8.

⁴⁸ Guhl, *Die Frauen in der Kunstgeschichte*, 8.

⁴⁹ The name 'Cora' is also found in Bostock and Rileys English edition of Pliny's *Natural history*. See *The Natural History. Pliny the Elder*, ed. by John Bostock, Henry Thomas Riley, London: Taylor and Francis, Red Lion Court, Fleet Street, 1855, chapter 43.12, note 1 (<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.02.0137:book=35:chapter=43&highlight=butades#note1>).

her white flesh is almost sculptural in appearance and the drapery recalls allegorical depictions of the time. The pastoral setting does not derive from ancient written sources; instead, it generally reflects contemporary ideas about the origin of painting. In contrast, the depiction of Iaia in the Gallery reveals a more literal, philological interest in the written sources. Details such as the mirror, the brush, the jug, the colours and even the splendour of her attire are taken from Pliny's (and Boccaccio's) accounts of the painter. Hiltensperger's depiction suggests that there was no doubt about the historical validity of Pliny's account.

Seen more broadly, the reception of the ancient anecdotes on Iaia and the daughter of Butades suggests that anecdotes not only shaped the myths and legends of the 'heroic'⁵⁰ artist and his social status, but also generated different shades of meaning in the definition of 'the artist'. Iaia and the daughter of Butades represent the artist as 'other', the female counterpart who was excluded from the narrative of the heroic 'divino artista'. Because the attribution of painting's invention to a woman did not match the contemporary narrative of the history of painting and the understanding of 'women's art', the daughter of Butades increasingly disappeared from accounts of the history of ancient painting. The invention of art and the origin of painting became less and less associated with women.

Instead, the anecdotes, insofar as they were seen as reflecting historical truths, were used to prove that 'women's art' had, since its beginnings, been limited to lower genres such as portrait painting and been expressive of 'female qualities' such as diligence and patience.

All three examples treated in this essay suggest that the duality within more recent art historical scholarship on the anecdotal – reflected in the studies of Goldstein, Fineman and others noted above – can be traced back to 19th century authors such as Guhl and Lübke. A systematic analysis of the reception, reinterpretation and transformation of ancient anecdotes about female artists will therefore not only help to address the role of anecdotes but might also sharpen our understanding of how female artists were perceived in different times and cultural contexts.

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⁵⁰ For the discussion of the concept of the 'heroic' artist or 'divino artista' see the 'Introduction' to this special section.