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ROBVR ET VIS  
PRVDENTIE IVNCTA  
OMNIA SVPERANT





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CYRUS THE GREAT

TAPESTRIES

at the

HARVARD CLUB

New York, 1916

(Courtesy of P. W. FRENCH & CO.)



# *The Story of Cyrus the Great*

*Founder of the Persian Empire, as told in a set of seventeenth century Brussels tapestries, having an average height of eleven feet, six inches*

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This set of Cyrus the Great tapestries, signed with the Brussels mark and the monogram GM, was made by Michel van Glabeke at Brussels in the first half of the seventeenth century. It is one of the few sets ever woven to picture the Story of Cyrus. The only other important surviving set with which I am acquainted is the Renaissance one in the Royal Spanish Collection. Both sets have Latin apothegms in the bottom border, appropriate to the story. The one in the tapestries before us is: ROBVR ET VIS PRVDENTIE IVNCTA OMNIA SVPERANT. This reads, translated: "Strength and Force united to Wisdom conquer all Things."

Borders and panels are in all details of style characteristic of the period. The costumes are based on

Roman, with seventeenth century adaptations. The use of the Roman ax and fasces in tapestry IV; and of the double eagle of the Holy Roman Empire, on the stomacher of Cyrus in tapestries III, IV, VII, though anachronistic to the extreme, is in keeping with similar anachronisms of other tapestries of the period.

Until the middle of the sixth century B. C., the name Persian was confined to the tribes inhabiting the southwestern part of what is now called Persia. They were subject to the Medes who inhabited the northwestern part of the same country. The king of the Medes was Astyages (B. C. 584-550). Astyages had a daughter, Mandane, married to Cambyses, the leader of a clan of one of the Persian tribes. Astyages dreamed that he saw grow from Mandane's body a vine that covered all Asia. The Magi (Wise Men) declared that this meant Mandane's son would take away his grandfather's crown. To prevent this, Astyages sent for his daughter to visit him, and when the child Cyrus was born, gave it to his prime-minister, Harpagus, with instructions to have it put to death. Harpagus gave Cyrus to a shepherd, Mithridates (*tapestry I*), with instructions to expose him on a mountain frequented by wild beasts. Mithridates



took the child home to his wife (*tapestry II*) who had just given birth to a dead child. This she exposed instead of Mandane's son, and brought him up among the shepherds as her own son. When Cyrus reached the age of ten, he was one day chosen king by his playmates, and as king had one of the boys beaten who refused to obey him. The boy's father complained to Astyages, who summoned Cyrus into his presence, and recognized him by his features and his proud spirit as the son of Mandane. Harpagus and the shepherd, when called before the king, admitted the truth. Astyages pardoned the shepherd, but inflicted on Harpagus a cruel and barbarous punishment that the latter never forgot. As for Cyrus, the Magi said the dream had been accomplished when Cyrus was chosen king by playmates. So Astyages, fearing him no more, sent him to Mandane and Cambyses, who received him as one raised from the dead. When Cyrus came of age, Harpagus, who nursed a bitter desire for revenge on Astyages, sent a secret message to Cyrus, bidding him put himself at the head of the Persians and shake off the yoke of the Medes, who being weary of the tyranny of their king, would offer little resistance. Cyrus found the suggestion good, and acted upon it. When Astyages learned that Cyrus was or-

ganizing rebellion among the Persians, he raised an army, at the head of which he placed Harpagus. When the armies met, Harpagus, followed by most of his troops, deserted to Cyrus. Astyages then raised another army, in order to resist the invaders. Cyrus and Harpagus, after a long campaign (*tapestry III*), finally captured Astyages himself (*tapestry IV*), who passed the rest of his life as the subject of his own grandson. Thus did the empire of the Persians succeed that of the Medes in the year 550 B. C. Jealous of Cyrus, the other great powers, Babylon, Egypt, Sparta and Lydia, decided to combine against him in 546 B. C. under the leadership of the Lydian king, Croesus. Cyrus attacked and defeated Croesus before the others arrived (*tapestry V*), and made Lydia a Persian province. In B. C. 539, Cyrus defeated the Babylonians, and annexed that mighty state to Persia. From the beginning of B. C. 538, Cyrus describes himself as "King of Babylonia and King of the Countries" (*i.e.* of the world). That same year he set free the Jews (*tapestry VI*), whom Nebuchadnezzar had transported to Babylonia. He also allowed them to return to Palestine and rebuild the temple at Jerusalem. Later, wishing to extend his empire farther to the east, he sent a messenger to Tomyris, Queen of the Mas-

sagetae in Central Asia, east of the Caspian Sea, asking her hand in marriage (*tapestry VII*). She, desiring to keep the throne for her young son, refused the offer. In the war that followed, Cyrus was defeated and killed, but the empire he had created lived after him.

GEORGE LELAND HUNTER, '89

*TAPESTRY I*

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*Eight Feet, Six Inches Wide*

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*Harpagus gives the  
infant Cyrus to the shep-  
herd Mithridates.*



*TAPESTRY II*

---

*Eight Feet, Six Inches Wide*

---

*Mithridates gives the  
infant Cyrus to his wife.*



*TAPESTRY III*

---

*Twelve Feet, Six Inches Wide*

---

*Cyrus, with the help of  
Harpagus, conquers the  
Medes.*





TAPESTRY IV

—

*Seventeen Feet Wide*

—

*Cyrus captures his grandfather, Astyages.*



*TAPESTRY V*

---

*Twelve Feet, Eight Inches Wide*

---

*Cyrus defeats and captures  
Croesus, King of Lydia.*



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TAPESTRY VI

—  
*Fifteen Feet Wide*  
—

*Cyrus frees the Jews, gives them permission to rebuild their temple at Jerusalem, and returns to them the sacred utensils of which Nebuchadnezzar had robbed them.*



*TAPESTRY VII*

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*Ten Feet, Ten Inches Wide*

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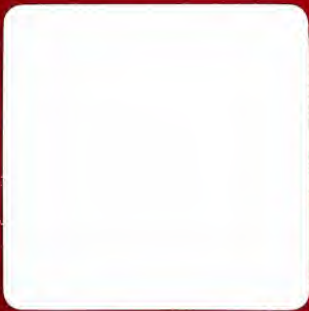
*The messenger of Cyrus before  
Queen Tomyris.*





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