



# *The Burning of Persepolis – A Tapestry from a Set of The Story of Alexander the Great*\*

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Since 1961 the Rijksmuseum has owned a tapestry from a set made to a design by Karel van Mander the Younger (1579-1623). The subject is *Alexander and Jaddua* from *The Story of Alexander the Great* (fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> In a tranquil landscape, the Greek commander kneels before the Jewish high priest Jaddua. On the left, behind Alexander, we see his retinue and his troops. Priests stand beside Jaddua and a procession emerges from the forest in the background. Our gaze is drawn into the distance, to a hilly landscape with monumental buildings. In 2011 the Rijksmuseum was fortunate enough to acquire a second work in *The Story of Alexander the Great* – a signed and dated tapestry depicting *The Burning of Persepolis* (fig. 2). It was woven in 1619 in Van Mander's workshop in Delft, which operated between 1615 and 1623.

Karel van Mander the Younger was the son of Karel van Mander (1548-1606), who is known above all for his *Schilder-boeck*, published in Haarlem in 1604.<sup>2</sup> Karel van Mander the Elder also designed tapestries – for François Spiering's workshop in Delft – among them a set of the romance of *Amadis the Gaul* and a set of *The Story of Diana*. The Rijksmuseum owns six of the *Diana* tapestries.<sup>3</sup>

We shall be examining what we know about the life and work of Karel

*Detail of fig. 2*

van Mander the Younger in the light of the tapestries in *The Story of Alexander the Great* set in the Rijksmuseum's collection. As we shall see, the younger Van Mander was very familiar with the writings of classical authors. *The Burning of Persepolis* can be traced back with a fair degree of accuracy to a number of sources from which Van Mander drew specific details for his design; he also integrated his own inventions into the composition.

## **The Composition**

Karel van Mander took his inspiration for the scene in the *Alexander and Jaddua* tapestry from a description by Flavius Josephus (37/38-C. AD 100).<sup>4</sup> For *The Burning of Persepolis* we find descriptions by both Plutarch (46-AD 120) and Diodorus Siculus (c. 90-21 BC) that tally very closely with the scene in the tapestry.<sup>5</sup> The younger Van Mander, no doubt influenced by his father from an early age, was clearly familiar with the works of classical authors and used them as a basis for his tapestry designs.<sup>6</sup>

Classical authors tell us that after the capture of Persepolis, which was reputed to be the wealthiest city, Alexander the Great ordered his soldiers to plunder everything but the royal palace. A great deal of silver and gold, furniture and all kinds of valuable



Fig. 1  
 KAREL VAN MANDER II,  
*Alexander and  
 Jaddua*, 1617 (?).  
 Wool and silk,  
 436 x 523 cm.  
 Amsterdam,  
 Rijksmuseum,  
 inv. no. BK-1961-52;  
 purchased with  
 the support of the  
 Vereniging Rembrandt.



*Fig. 2*

KAREL VAN MANDER II,  
*The Burning of Persepolis*,  
 1619.  
 Wool and silk, 438 x 513 cm.  
 Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum,  
 inv. no. BK-2011-19;  
 purchased with the support  
 of the BankGiro Loterij.  
 Photo: De Wit Koninklijke  
 Manufactuur van  
 Wandtapijten.

objects and luxurious garments embroidered with purple or with gold were seized. Afterwards Alexander and his men, accompanied by female musicians, indulged in a great drinking bout. With the men in an alcohol-fuelled destructive rage, the Athenian courtesan Thaïs addressed them and goaded them into taking revenge for

the damage that the Persians had inflicted on the Acropolis of Athens. She urged Alexander to set fire to the luxurious palace built for King Xerxes.

The tapestry includes the moment when the building is ablaze. The composition is built up of three parts: the foreground, the middle distance and the background. Alexander is the key figure centre right, flanked by women with musical instruments (fig. 3).<sup>7</sup> Opulently dressed, he wears a turban decorated with a garland of flowers, from beneath which his blond curls emerge. He holds a torch in his right hand.<sup>8</sup> With his left he points towards the burning palace while he turns and looks at the woman on his left. Her gaze follows his pointing finger and she looks at the fire in the distance. She holds a stringed instrument in her left hand.

To the right of Alexander and the women sits a woman with her breast exposed, leaning on a table with a flute in her hand.<sup>9</sup> She wears an elaborate armband with precious stones and two pendant pearls around her upper right arm. Her head is turned to Alexander and her gaze is directed towards the burning buildings. Her ornate robe hangs to the ground from her waist. The man with the stubble standing behind her has his left arm around her, his hand resting on her breast. In his right hand he holds a gold tazza. His head is also turned and he, too, focuses on the flames in the distance. Beside him is a servant and there are soldiers behind him.

Alexander and these other figures are on the steps of the colonnaded entrance to a building. Above them hangs a green curtain and we can see garlands of flowers. There are two magnificent vessels on a plinth in the upper right corner. A woman with a lyre on her lap sits at Alexander's feet and looks up at him. A man leans over her, one hand on her shoulder and the other holding a short torch. Behind them we see the heads of two

Fig. 3  
Detail of Alexander the Great from *The Burning of Persepolis*.



Fig. 4  
Detail of the  
repoussoir figure  
from *The Burning  
of Persepolis*.

torchbearers and a soldier. In front of them, one step below, stands the courtesan Thaïs with a torch in her hand.<sup>10</sup> She wears a garland of flowers and a headdress with feathers. She is accompanied by a black man. Both of them look at Alexander and his company.

Behind them a soldier leaning on a balustrade bends forward towards three soldiers by the steps. The bearded man on the left with the laurel wreath and plumed helmet looks sideways at him. Beside him stands a young soldier, a towel thrown over his shoulder, holding a shield that rests on the ground. The third, in dark armour, bends forward and lights one torch from another. He has a thick rope slung around his left arm (see fig. 8).

The sumptuously dressed woman standing with her back to us in the left foreground is particularly striking (fig. 4). She holds a wreath of flowers behind her back and looks at the blaze in the background.<sup>11</sup> Beside her on the left we can just see the back of the head of a second woman. The repoussoir figure leads our gaze to the distance where we see Xerxes's palace in flames. Fire rages through the impressive building, plumes of smoke spiral upwards, debris flies into the sky and pillars collapse. Men and women carrying burning torches run up the steps to the palace (fig. 5). Among the foremost of these figures is, again, Alexander the Great. He holds a long, burning torch in both hands and can be identified by his tall, decorated turban.<sup>12</sup> The figure to his right may be Thaïs. Around the building people stand looking at the blaze, their arms held high.<sup>13</sup> In the centre there is a square with a pillar and more figures. In the distance there are two intact structures with large arches and domes.

Karel van Mander combined different moments in time in this tapestry.<sup>14</sup> In the foreground we see the moment the drinking spree is





Fig. 5  
Detail of the fire  
from *The Burning  
of Persepolis*.

interrupted to go to Xerxes's palace and torches are collected and lit. At first sight, the pointing Alexander and the group around him on the right can also be interpreted as are observing the fire from a distance. In the background, one and the same image depicts Alexander and Thais just before they throw their torches into the palace *and* the moment when the fire is raging through the building.

The drama of the fire is in sharp contrast to the scene in the foreground. A chained monkey, the symbol of the sins of man, sits quietly eating. The marble floor is strewn with tulips and other flowers. This can refer to both the destructiveness of the Macedonians and their decadent behaviour. When Van Mander designed this tapestry the tulip was still a luxury item. It originally came from Persia

and so fits perfectly in this setting.<sup>15</sup> A shield lies on the steps, with a jumble of beautifully decorated vessels and a vase containing a profusion of flowers – lilies, irises, tulips, fritillaries and more. Some of the flowers have wilted and their petals have dropped.<sup>16</sup> In the foreground on the right there is a large basin with a decorated jug in it. All this may refer both to the looted treasures and the drinking spree. Beside it sits a boy leaning forward, one foot twisted behind the other, with a torch in his hands. He concentrates on the flame and seems to be blowing on it. He pays no heed whatsoever to the conflagration in the background (see fig. 9).

The way Karel van Mander depicted the burning of Persepolis tells us that he was well versed in classical literature, accurately reproducing, as he did, elements in the descriptions

given by Plutarch and Diodorus Siculus. The composition and the way he designed the subject, as well as details like the tulips, were his own artistic creation.

### Lighting

The colours of the tapestry are bright and very fresh.<sup>17</sup> The weavers did a superb job in capturing the shadows in the silk fabrics and the folds in the clothing with amazing realism (fig. 6). The light reflecting in the metal basins and jugs is also extremely convincing. The light from the torches illuminating the armour and the face of the stooping soldier on the left is extraordinarily striking (fig. 7). The same is true of the boy on the right in the foreground (fig. 8). Here Van Mander is making a direct reference to a lost classical work of art Pliny mentions in his *Natural History*.<sup>18</sup>

It was 'a boy blowing on the fire', for which Lycius was famous. The same author describes a painting of 'a boy who blows on a fire' by Antiphilus. Both the room, which in itself is already beautiful, and the boy's face are illuminated by the light'.<sup>19</sup>

Many learned painters emulated this effect and saw the *ekphrasis*, or artistic description, of this ancient painting as a challenge. We see this, for instance, in *Old Woman and a Boy with Candles* of around 1616-17 (fig. 9) and *Old Woman with Coal Pan* of 1618-20 by Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640).<sup>20</sup> Hendrick Terbrugghen (1588-1629) attempted a similar nocturne, *Boy Lighting a Pipe*, in 1623.<sup>21</sup> Gerard van Honthorst, Matthias Stom, Jan Lievens and George de la Tour are also among the many artists who tackled this subject.<sup>22</sup> *The Burning of Persepolis* tapestry was woven in 1619, which means that Van Mander had integrated this famous *ekphrasis* into tapestry-making at an early stage.

The drama and the pathos of the scene accord with the ethos of history painting, the highest level of the fine

arts. In the Netherlands, however, such histories were painted in smaller sizes.<sup>23</sup> Karel van Mander's lighting in *The Burning of Persepolis* actually anticipated painting. The tapestry is Mannerist in style.<sup>24</sup> The elongated repoussoir figure in the left foreground and the poses of the figures are typical. Van Mander's splendid effect of depth

Fig. 6  
Detail of Alexander the Great on the back of *The Burning of Persepolis*.  
Photo: De Wit Koninklijke Manufactuur van Wandtapijten.







Fig. 7  
Detail of the face of the stooping soldier from *The Burning of Persepolis*.

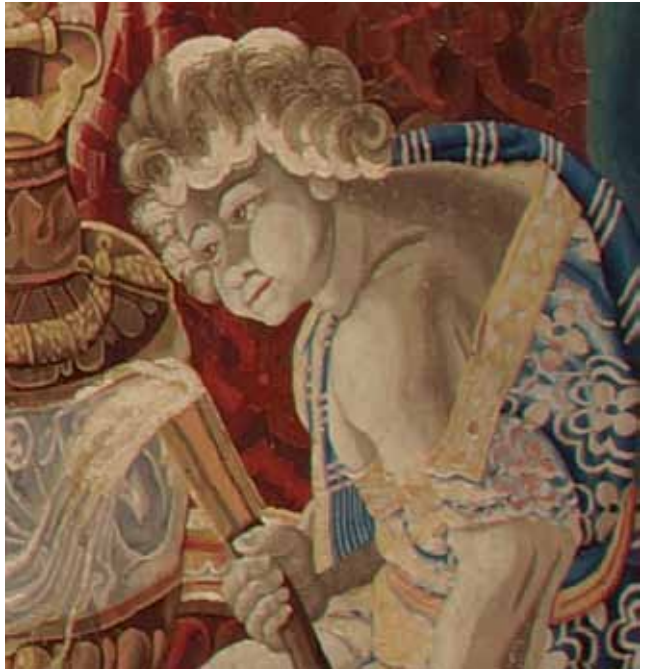


Fig. 8  
Detail of the boy in the right foreground from *The Burning of Persepolis*.

draws the viewer's eye to the burning building and the background.

### The Complexities of Borders and Sets

The borders of the *Alexander the Great* tapestries are composed of meandering vines with tiny bunches of grapes, berries and flowers with red shadow lines on a light ground (fig. 10). The branches are bound together here and there with a ribbon tied in a bow. There are five vivacious birds in the top and bottom borders and three on each side. They include doves, eagles, a sort of phoenix and parrots. Their symbolism can be linked to the scene in the tapestry.<sup>25</sup> They are shown fluttering or pecking. In the corners there are circlets of flowers decorated with ribbons and with a round fruit with curling leaves suspended in the middle. The borders have an inner and an outer edge which imitate a carved frame. Karel van Mander's name and the date have been woven into the centre of the bottom inner edge: *i KTMANDER. FECIT AN/ 1619* (fig. 11).<sup>26</sup>



Fig. 9  
PETER PAUL RUBENS,  
*Old Woman and Boy with Candles*,  
c. 1616-17.  
Oil on panel,  
79 x 61 cm.  
The Hague, Royal  
Cabinet of Paintings  
Mauritshuis,  
inv. no. 1150.

It is often the borders that make it possible to identify tapestries that have become separated over the centuries as a series, a set or a 'room'. A set may have been woven more than once so that several editions of it may exist. Because of the red shadow lines in the decoration, the borders of *The Burning of Persepolis* are described as red. Karel van Mander made four Alexander sets. However we cannot say with certainty which set this tapestry originally belonged to. We know that he also wove sets with blue and orange borders. A notarial document dated 21 July 1621 refers to three sets of *The Story of Alexander*, designed and woven by Karel van Mander. It relates to a set of eight works that were then in Frederiksborg Castle near Copenhagen in Denmark. There was also a set of nine and a set of eight tapestries in Van Mander's workshop in Delft. The latter are specifically recorded as having blue borders.<sup>27</sup>

According to a notarial document of 13 January 1623, at that time 'the Alexander room' consisting of nine pieces, orange and blue borders, as well as other tapestries and the cartoons for the tapestries for the king of Denmark, were stored with Balthasar van der Zee, former master tapestry weaver to Van Mander. Together with Maerten van Bouckholt, silk dyer, Van der Zee declared that all this was the same as that which had been made by Karel van Mander before 16 July 1621.<sup>28</sup>

After Van Mander's death, the red borders are mentioned in an archive document of 26 March 1624, at a time when the contents of his workshop were in the hands of Aert Spiering. It reports that there were three 'Alexander rooms' – 'one with red, one with blue and one with orange borders'.<sup>29</sup> However a document dated 12 February 1632 states that Van Mander may have woven four sets of Alexander tapestries to the same design.<sup>30</sup> From all these sources it can be deduced that three of the four sets remained unsold at the time of



Fig. 10  
Detail of the border  
of *The Burning of  
Persepolis*.

Van Mander's death. We also know that two of the four sets had blue borders.<sup>31</sup>

Even though orange is also woven into the left border along with various shades of red, the Rijksmuseum tapestry of *The Burning of Persepolis* clearly has a red border. At first glance, the second tapestry in this set, *Alexander and Jaddua*, appears to have an orange border. However, closer examination of the fabric reveals that the right border is red and the left orange. Contrary to what one might suspect, this is not a question of discoloration. Both horizontal borders show a mixture of colours in the shadow effects around the motifs: areas woven in orange, salmon pink and mustard, with patches of red here and there. Sometimes the transition between one colour and another is abrupt. Looked at in detail, this is a 'messy' way of weaving. There is clearly no uniformity in the colours in the borders, so we cannot be certain if this tapestry was part of the orange or the red set. Another tapestry from



Fig. 11  
The signature and the date on *The Burning of Persepolis*.

the set, the *Homage to Alexander* in Newport, also has an orange and red border.<sup>32</sup>

A possible solution to this riddle can be found in archive sources. From them we learn that there were often problems in Van Mander's workshop.<sup>33</sup> There were complaints that the weavers often could not carry on working because the cartoons for the tapestries were not delivered in their entirety but in strips. Delivery was often delayed because for a long time Van Mander only employed one painter.<sup>34</sup> It was also alleged that he used less silk than other workshops.<sup>35</sup> Although the information stems from archive documents from the autumn of 1622, and therefore dates from after the completion of the *Alexander* set, it sometimes refers to earlier incidents. The documents clearly reveal that at that time Van Mander was having problems with his business partners, and that weavers, dyers, employees' wives, his previous employer and his housekeepers and others had made statements about Van Mander and his working methods. It is therefore not unlikely that there was already trouble when the *Alexander* set was being woven. The multi-coloured border of the *Alexander and Jaddua* tapestry may be a physical manifestation of this.<sup>36</sup>

The dates of the two tapestries may not be the same. The year 1619 is woven after Van Mander's name in *The Burning of Persepolis*. At first

Fig. 12  
The signature and the date on *Alexander and Jaddua*.



glance *Alexander and Jaddua* does not appear to have a date beside the signature. However the date (which had been worn away) was restored in the past, not in a contrasting or easily legible colour, but in the colour of the background.<sup>37</sup> This restoration itself has faded somewhat, but on careful observation the date appears to be 1617, not 1619 (fig. 12). This date is quite possible: the tapestry of *The Satrap of Susa before Alexander*, in the collection of the Federal Republic of Germany also bears this date.<sup>38</sup>

### Provenance

Establishing the provenance of the tapestry is no easy matter. Ongoing research reveals that the three works previously mentioned, *Alexander and Jaddua*, *The Satrap of Susa before Alexander* and *The Burning of Persepolis* were part of a set of nine tapestries of *The Story of Alexander the Great*, which came on to the art market in 1880 when the collection of Prince Anatole Demidoff was sold.<sup>39</sup> The Art Institute in Chicago has the tapestry of *The Crossing of the Granicus*.<sup>40</sup> *Alexander and Roxane* (or *Alexander and Cleophis*) and *The Satrap of Susa before Alexander* are in Berlin.<sup>41</sup> Museum Het Prinsenhof in Delft has *The Surrender of Porus* from this set.<sup>42</sup> A tapestry depicting a *Homage to Alexander* is on display in The Breakers, Newport, Rhode Island.<sup>43</sup> Finally, we know that a work showing *Alexander Triumphant over a Kneeling Warrior* was also part of the set owned by Demidoff. The subject and whereabouts of the ninth tapestry have not yet been discovered.

It is not certain whether these tapestries all belong to the original set of nine. It may have been put together from different sets after Van Mander's death.<sup>44</sup> *The Surrender of Porus* has a blue border (fig. 13). Two of the tapestries have an orange and red border and the other four known works – like *The Burning of Persepolis*



Fig. 13  
KAREL VAN MANDER II,  
*The Surrender  
of Porus*, 1619.  
Wool and silk,  
423 x 680 cm.  
Delft, Museum  
Het Prinsenhof,  
inv. no. w. 31.

– have a red border. Two works may well date from 1617 and not 1619.

The dimensions of the tapestries do not aid us further in this research. In an archive document referring to the Alexander tapestries, the measurements are given in ells.<sup>45</sup> In the tapestry with Jaddua there are identifying marks woven in on the back at the bottom and, rather less obviously, on the topmost, outside dark blue edge (fig. 14). They consist of finely woven lines or stripes, which are not visible on the front and appear every 32.5 cm or so. This is almost equivalent to a foot, which measures 31.4 cm and was used for works carried out for the Province of Holland and for the States-General from the beginning of the seventeenth century onwards.<sup>46</sup> Unfortunately the blue outside borders in *The Burning of Persepolis* tapestry are not original, so identifying marks like these cannot be found.<sup>47</sup> The presence of the measuring marks indicates the accuracy with which the weavers marked the work as they were weaving.

After the sale of the Demidoff Collection, *The Burning of Persepolis* tapestry was in the Somzée Collection in Belgium from 1880 to 1901. It was

Fig. 14  
The identifying  
marks at the bottom  
on the back of the  
border of *Alexander  
and Jaddua*.  
Photo: Elsje Janssen.



then sold at auction in Brussels.<sup>48</sup> It was acquired by a private individual in Belgium and decorated the staircase of a town house in Brussels from the 1920s onwards.



Fig. 15  
FRANÇOIS SPIERING  
AFTER KAREL  
VAN MANDER II,  
*Scipio and the Envoys  
from Carthage*, 1609.  
Wool and silk,  
414 x 404 cm.  
Amsterdam,  
Rijksmuseum,  
inv. no. BK-1972-77.

### Karel van Mander as a Designer of Tapestries and Businessman

We also know of other designs by Karel van Mander. In 1609 he designed a set depicting *The Story of Scipio*. A tapestry from it showing *Scipio and the Envoys from Carthage* is in the Rijksmuseum's collection (fig. 15).<sup>49</sup> Shortly afterwards he made the designs for a set of episodes from *The Story of Orlando Furioso*. The Rijksmuseum has a tapestry from it depicting *Isabella and Rodomonte* (fig. 16).<sup>50</sup> Prior to 1615 Van Mander designed *The Story of Alexander the Great* and after 1616 several sets of tapestries were made for the king of Denmark. Shortly before his death he had begun to draw the cartoons for *The Story*

of *Mark Antony and Cleopatra*.<sup>51</sup>

Karel van Mander did not lead a quiet, simple life. He worked first as a tapestry designer and cartoon painter for François Spiering in Delft. It was after the death of his father that Spiering joined forces with him. The collaboration lasted from 1608 to 1615, the year Van Mander set up his own workshop.<sup>52</sup> He evidently felt exploited and a slave in Spiering's employ.<sup>53</sup> But there must have been problems between employer and employee from the outset. There are statements that Van Mander handled cartoons carelessly, that he did not do enough work and repeatedly quarrelled with Spiering about it, that he was dragged from the house to go and draw, that François Spiering's children brought

him food and drink so that he could keep working, but nevertheless the work did not progress, that he sat drinking and that he received money even before the work was done.<sup>54</sup> Van Mander appears to have had financial problems throughout his life. During the time he worked for François Spiering his employer helped him pay his rent and gave him money to support himself as well as for his marriage.<sup>55</sup> According to Spiering, Van Mander's difficult character was the reason that he lived in constant poverty.

Van Mander's complaints about his work for Spiering and the lack of money to support his wife and children came to the attention of the painter Huybert Jacobsz Grimani (1562-c.1631). According to a contract dated 8 September 1615 in Delft he and the moneylender Nicolaas Snouckaert van Schauburg (1568-1635) started a 'compagnie van tapytseryen' (tapestry company).<sup>56</sup> Karel van Mander was able to work under his own name independently of François Spiering.

The competition between the two workshops only lasted seven and a half years because of Van Mander's untimely death.<sup>57</sup>

Various aspects combined to sour the relationship between former employer and employee. Van Mander poached commissions from King Christian IV of Denmark from Spiering. In 1616, for example, he travelled to Denmark and persuaded the king that he could supply him with tapestries directly at a better price than Spiering would charge him.<sup>58</sup> Worse yet, when Van Mander left Spiering's workshop he took the designs and cartoons he had painted for *The Story of Alexander the Great* with him to his own workshop. Obviously this created problems with his former employer. Spiering accused Van Mander of breach of contract. He demanded the return of what Van Mander had made when he was working for him and he also wanted him to finish the designs for *The Story of Alexander the Great* and *The Story of Scipio*. Spiering also insisted that Van Mander did not take

Fig. 16  
FRANÇOIS SPIERING  
AFTER KAREL  
VAN MANDER II,  
*Isabella and  
Rodomonte*,  
c. 1609-20.  
Wool and silk,  
316 x 518 cm.  
Amsterdam,  
Rijksmuseum,  
inv. no. BK-1962-6.



anyone else on or start on other work until he had done what Spiering demanded.<sup>59</sup> However, Van Mander finished the designs and the cartoons and then had the tapestries woven in his own studio.

Soon after setting up his own workshop, Van Mander also had problems with his partners.<sup>60</sup> Various sources attest that he borrowed money, defaulted on payments, ran up debts, did not keep up payments and spent his business partners' money without fulfilling his obligations.<sup>61</sup> The problems with his business partners had still not been resolved at the time of his sudden death in February 1623 and dragged on for his family, former employees and partners.

His generally unreliable conduct notwithstanding, Karel van Mander did complete the commissions for King Christian IV of Denmark according to the agreement. Between 1616 and 1621 he designed and wove various sets of tapestries for the Danish king.<sup>62</sup> In addition to the set of eight portraying *The Story of Alexander*, there were sixteen tapestries depicting the *War of Kalmar* (1611-13) with King Christian IV as the victor.<sup>63</sup> To this end Van Mander had visited the scenes of the fighting and made drawings. He also made two tapestries depicting the *Coronation of Christian IV* in 1596 and four genre

scenes with guards.<sup>64</sup> Despite his difficult nature, Karel van Mander was able to fulfil important commissions and this established his name as a designer and weaver of tapestries.

### The Importance of The Burning of Persepolis to the Rijksmuseum

The tapestry of *The Burning of Persepolis* from *The Story of Alexander* designed by Karel van Mander is a very interesting addition to the Rijksmuseum's tapestry collection. Together with *Alexander and Jaddua* it gives an idea of Van Mander's place in Northern Netherlandish tapestry art. Whereas a peaceful rolling landscape can be seen in one composition, the recently acquired work shows a raging fire. Two variations of a *modus dicendi* are represented here. The museum is in the position to alternate complete displays of these works with tapestries from *The Story of Diana* designed by his father, Karel van Mander the Elder – woven in François Spiering's workshop – or present them in different combinations. This means that Delft tapestries, and these two workshops, can be placed in the spotlight and visitors to the Rijksmuseum can discover the importance of this centre of production.

#### NOTES

\* With thanks to Jan de Hond and Gregor Weber for drawing my attention to classical authors and seventeenth-century painters of 'nocturnes'.

1 See E. Hartkamp-Jonxis and H. Smit, *European Tapestries in the Rijksmuseum*, cat. Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum) 2004, pp. 222-26, no. 55.

2 K. van Mander, *Het schilder-boeck waer in voor eerst de leerlustighe ineght den grondt der edel vry schilderconst in verscheyden deelen wort voorghedraghen* (facsimile 1st

ed.: Utrecht 1969). It describes the life and work of a large number of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century painters.

3 Inv. nos. BK-2006-75, BK-1954-69-A, BK-1969-2, BK-1954-69-B, BK-2006-76, BK-2006-77. See Hartkamp-Jonxis and Smit, op. cit. (note 1), pp. 203-15, nos. 52a-c, and E. Hartkamp-Jonxis, *Weaving Myths. Ovid's Metamorphoses and the Diana Tapestries in the Rijksmuseum*, Amsterdam 2009.

4 Flavius Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*; see Hartkamp-Jonxis and Smit, op. cit. (note 1), pp. 223-24.

- 5 Plutarch, *Bioi Paralleloï (Parallel Lives)*, book 17, p. 38; Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica*, book 17, pp. 70-72.
- 6 In his *Schilder-boeck*, Karel van Mander refers to various classical authors as sources, including Pliny and Plutarch. See H. Miedema, *Karel van Mander. Het leven der oude antieke doorluchtighe schilders met de bronnen uitgegeven*, Amsterdam 1977, passim.
- 7 Diodorus Siculus writes that female musicians were invited to the banquet. See Siculus, op. cit. (note 5), p. 72.
- 8 This corresponds with the description by Plutarch, who specifically states that Alexander had a wreath on his head and a torch in his hand. See Plutarch, op. cit. (note 5), p. 38.
- 9 Diodorus Siculus also specifically mentions the presence of flutes. See Siculus, op. cit. (note 5), p. 72.
- 10 Diodorus Siculus describes how torches were collected and how Thais, with a torch in her hand, led the procession, singing and playing music, to the palace. Ibid.
- 11 This kind of figure seen from the back in the foreground of a tapestry can be traced back to tapestries designed by Bernard van Orley in the second quarter of the sixteenth century. A number of fine examples can be seen in the tapestries of the *Hunts of Maximilian* in the Musée du Louvre in Paris, in particular the months of January (inv. no. OA 7324), February (inv. no. OA 7325), June (inv. no. OA 7321), September (inv. no. OA 7320), October (inv. no. OA 7317) and November (inv. no. OA 7322). See Arnout Balis et al., *Les Chasses de Maximilien*, Paris 1993, pp. 20-21, 26-31, 34-37.
- 12 The accounts of the burning of Persepolis by classical authors report that Alexander was the first to throw a burning torch into Xerxes's palace, followed by Thais. See Plutarch, op. cit. (note 5), p. 38; Siculus, op. cit. (note 5), p. 72.
- 13 The classical authors wrote that the Macedonians ran up joyfully. Ibid.
- 14 This is not uncommon in tapestry and was a frequently used device in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.
- 15 The tulip was planted for the first time in the Northern Netherlands in the Hortus Botanicus in Leiden sometime after 1592. Van Mander integrated a sought-after novelty in this scene. This detail does not occur in the descriptions by the classical authors.
- 16 A symbol of transience.
- 17 Even so, a comparison of front and back shows that the colours have faded somewhat. Dye analysis carried out on six red and purple wool samples by A. Néss Proaño Gaibor, Art Technology Analyst at the Rijksdienst voor Cultureel Erfgoed (Cultural Heritage Agency), revealed various dyes, including madder and the less colourfast orcein, and also a cheap cochineal variant. The *Alexander and Jaddua* tapestry has faded more than *The Burning of Persepolis*, perhaps because a considerable amount of orcein was used in it.
- 18 Pliny the Elder, *Historia Naturalis*, book 34, p. 79.
- 19 Ibid., book 35, p. 138; see also p. 143.
- 20 Dresden, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, inv. no. 1747-1750; oil on panel, 116 x 92 cm.
- 21 Eger, István Dobó Museum, inv. no. 55.236; oil on canvas, 67.6 x 55 cm.
- 22 Cf. for example A. Blankert et al., *Nieuw Licht op de Gouden Eeuw. Hendrick ter Brugghen en tijdgenoten*, exh. cat. Utrecht (Centraal Museum) 1978, p. 107; cf. pp. 308-10.
- 23 There were no frescos covering whole walls in the Netherlands as there were in Italy. There were, though, 'mobile frescos' or tapestries.
- 24 Whereas Ebelte Hartkamp-Jonxis describes the style of Van Mander's tapestries as very similar to Flemish baroque painting (Hartkamp-Jonxis and Smit, op. cit. (note 1), p. 180), Koenraad Brosens points to the similarity to late sixteenth-century Mannerist paintings (K. Brosens, *European Tapestries in the Art Institute of Chicago*, cat. Chicago (The Art Institute) 2008, no. 57, p. 344).
- 25 Karel van Mander the Elder refers to the symbols in his *Schilder-boeck*. They stand for love and simplicity (dove), power, a quick mind and a strong army (eagle), excellence and unique, learned men (phoenix) and eloquence (parrot). See Van Mander, op. cit. (note 2), *Van de Wtbeeldingen der Figueren, Het tweede Boeck*, fols. 130v, 131r-v. Karel van Mander the Younger also designed similar, but not identical borders for his set of the *Story of Scipio*: the birds are different and the bunches of grapes are more substantial. See Hartkamp-Jonxis and Smit, op. cit. (note 1), no. 53, p. 216.
- 26 The 'i' in front of Van Mander's name here means 'the younger' or son of Karel van Mander.
- 27 G.T. van Ysselsteyn, *Geschiedenis der tapijt-weverijen in de Noordelijke Nederlanden*.



- Bijdrage tot de geschiedenis der kunstnijverheid*, The Hague 1936, vol. 2, no. 349 (Rotterdam Municipal Archives, Notarial Archives, 21 July 1621).
- 28 *Ibid.*, no. 372 (General State Archives, The Hague [hereafter referred to as ARA], Notarial Archives Delft [hereafter referred to as NAD], 11 January 1623).
- 29 *Ibid.*, no. 407 (ARA, NAD, 26 March 1624).
- 30 *Ibid.*, no. 473 (ARA, NAD, 14 January 1623).
- 31 One for the king of Denmark and one that remained unsold. Both consisted of eight pieces.
- 32 Brosens, op. cit. (note 24), p. 344. However I do not know to what extent this tapestry has similarities to the borders of the *Alexander and Jaddua* tapestry. The same variety of colours found there also occurs in the borders of *The Satrap of Susa Before Alexander* in Berlin; with thanks to Ines Ordon of the Bundesamt für zentrale Dienste und offene Vermögensfragen (Federal Office of Central Services and Unresolved Property) for sending detailed photographs.
- 33 There were squabbles over bobbins and a wooden ell measure. See Van Ysselsteyn, op. cit. (note 27), no. 361 (ARA, NAD, 31 October 1622). There are also statements by weavers declaring that the employees could never have taken or stolen silk, wool or bobbins without 'the master' knowing, from which it may be concluded that there were problems with the material. *Ibid.*, no. 366 (ARA, NAD, 30 November 1622).
- 34 *Ibid.*, nos. 364, 365 (ARA, NAD, 4 and 9 November 1622). In itself this cannot have had a direct influence on the weaving of the borders because they were always the same for any one set. Weavers did, though, need several cartoons for borders if a number of tapestries in the same set were being woven on different looms at the same time.
- 35 *Ibid.*, nos. 366, 367 (ARA, NAD, 30 November 1622). This may have been a particularly important aspect when it came to competitiveness, for Van Mander's master weavers Balthasar van der Zee and Marcus van Grootendael stated in a notarial document of 1 May 1620 that the tapestries for the king of Denmark were woven with fine silk and that more and finer silk was used than in works made by François Spiering. *Ibid.*, no. 343 (ARA, NAD, 5 November 1620).
- 36 This observation makes plain how important it is not to look at written archive sources in isolation from the woven tapestries, but to make the connection between the two while studying the sources and the art works. Scientific research such as dye analysis also makes an important contribution in this respect (see note 17).
- 37 It may not have been realized during the restoration that the gaps originally bore the date or there may have been uncertainty about the year, so a neutral filler was chosen.
- 38 Hartkamp-Jonxis and Smit, op. cit. (note 1), p. 225, note 135. When Hartkamp-Jonxis and Smit's book was published, the tapestry was in the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe in Hamburg, inv. no. Lg. 203. It is now held in Berlin, in the Bundesamt für zentrale Dienste und offene Vermögensfragen (the Federal Office of Central Services and Unresolved Property), inv. no. 23941.
- 39 Prince Anatole Demidoff Coll., probably from 1840; Paul Demidoff Coll., Villa San Donato, Florence, 1870-80; sale Demidoff Coll., Florence (Palais de San Donato), 15 March 1880, no. 109. The tapestries are not specified individually in the sale catalogue, but described as *tapisseries flamandes à sujets héroïques*.
- 40 Inv. no. 1911.439. Brosens, op. cit. (note 24), no. 57, pp. 341-44.
- 41 Bundesamt für zentrale Dienste und offene Vermögensfragen (the Federal Office of Central Services and Unresolved Property), inv. no. 23940, 23941. Previously in the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe in Hamburg, inv. nos. Lg. 204, Lg. 203.
- 42 E. Hartkamp-Jonxis, 'Alexander the Great and Porus, 1619', in G. Luijten et al. (eds.), *Dawn of the Golden Age. Northern Netherlandish Art 1580-1620*, exh. cat. Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum) 1993-94, pp. 424-25. This tapestry was the only one of the set of nine to be illustrated in the 1880 sale catalogue.
- 43 Managed by The Preservation Society of Newport County, New York.
- 44 Brosens, op. cit. (note 24), p. 344.
- 45 A set of eight works measuring 316 ells in Frederiksborg Castle, a set of nine works measuring 389 <sup>4</sup>/<sub>5</sub> ells and a set with blue borders measuring 268 ells long. See Van Ysselsteyn, op. cit. (note 27), no. 349 (Rotterdam City Archives, Notarial Archives, 21 July 1621). The then Delft ell was 68.3 cm. See J.M. Verhoeff, *De oude Nederlandse maten en gewichten*, Amsterdam 1983, p. 17. However conversions do not give us a realistic length.
- 46 The rod is generally used as a measurement of land and is 3.767 m, which equals 12 feet. See *ibid.*, p. 69.
- 47 It would be interesting to do further research into the other tapestries, like the technical analyses André Brutillot, conser-

- vator of tapestries at the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum in Munich, is making of the tapestries in the museum's collection, *Éléments d'analyse technique des Tapisseries*, see <http://www.tapestries-brutillot.com/images/AnalyseQuadrilingueUltime.pdf>. The back of Van Mander's tapestry of *Scipio and the Envoys from Carthage* in the Rijksmuseum's collection cannot yet be studied because it is currently fully lined.
- 48 Sale De Somzée Coll., Brussels (Salle de Fêtes au Parc du Cinquantenaire), 20/25 May 1901, no. 562, under the title *Alexandre faisant metre le feu au palais de Persépolis*.
- 49 Hartkamp-Jonxis and Smit, op. cit. (note 1), pp. 215-18, no. 53.
- 50 Ibid., pp. 219-22, no. 54. This tapestry is missing the borders.
- 51 When he died, along with completed and unfinished sets of tapestries and a number of cartoons, his workshop contained 'bedcovers, tablecloths, edgings, cushion covers, samples and the piece with the horse' ('beddecleen, tafelcleen, rabatten, kussen-cleen, monsterstuckxken ende het stucxken mettet paert') also executed in tapestry, see Van Ysselsteyn, op. cit. (note 27), no. 372 (ARA, NAD, 13 January 1623). The 'piece with the horse' is later referred to as the 'piece with St George' ('stucktye van Sint Joris'); *ibid.*, no. 407 (ARA, NAD, 26 March 1624). It is here that the Cleopatra series is also mentioned: '... and also the Cleopatra room, of which little had been finished at that time' ('...ende noch de camer van Cleopatra, daer toen ter tijt noch weynich op gemaect was').
- 52 1608 was also the year in which Van Mander married Cornelia Rooswijckx. *Ibid.*, no. 391 (ARA, NAD, 8 June 1623).
- 53 According to Van Mander, when Spiering sold tapestries he charged double the price per ell. *Ibid.*, no. 375 (ARA, NAD, 19 January 1623).
- 54 *Ibid.*, no. 319 (ARA, NAD, 28 August 1619): statements made by former servants of François Spiering about events some eleven years before.
- 55 *Ibid.*, no. 391 (ARA, NAD, 8 June 1623).
- 56 *Ibid.*, no. 375 (ARA, NAD, 19 January 1623).
- 57 From then on the Spiering family had Delft's leading weaving workshop until it closed around 1635.
- 58 Van Ysselsteyn, op. cit. (note 27), no. 377 (ARA, NAD, 19 January 1623).
- 59 *Ibid.*, no. 298 (ARA, *Hof van Holland, Register van Sententiën* 1617, 11 December 1617).
- 60 That is to say in connection with making and selling tapestries; *ibid.*, no. 296 (ARA, NAD, 23 July 1617).
- 61 *Ibid.*, no. 362 (ARA, NAD, 1 November 1622); nos. 375, 377 (ARA, NAD, 19 January 1623); no. 378 (ARA, NAD, 20 January 1623); no. 381 (ARA, NAD, 29 January 1623); nos. 382, 383 (ARA, NAD, 11, 13 February 1623). We also know about his short temper and the possession of weapons; *ibid.*, no. 361 (ARA, NAD, 31 October 1622); *ibid.*, no. 380 (ARA, NAD, 28 January 1623).
- 62 On 31 August 1619 Van Mander was granted a passport to allow him to transport eighteen tapestries to Denmark for the king. On 1 May 1620 mention is made once again of a passport to send eight tapestries and a sample (which was returned later) to the king of Denmark. On 27 October 1621 a passport was again granted for the export of twenty-one tapestries. See *ibid.*, no. 320 (ARA, *Staten generaal, Minuten van Resolutiën* 1619, 31 August 1619); no. 336 (ARA, *Staten generaal, Minuten van Resolutiën* 1620, 1 May 1620) and no. 352 (ARA, *Staten generaal, Minuten van Resolutiën* 1621, 27 October 1621). The tapestries for the king of Denmark were destroyed in a fire in Frederiksborg Castle in 1859.
- 63 Also entitled the *Victories of the King*.
- 64 Our knowledge of these tapestries comes in part from archive drawings and in part from drawings made shortly before the fire by F.C. Lund and Heinrich Hansen, which are in the collection of the Nationaal Historisch Museum in Frederiksborg Castle in Hillerød. They served as points of departure and examples for redecorating the great hall of Frederiksborg Castle after it was rebuilt. To replace the tapestries initially, coarsely woven canvases were painted by the artist C.N. Overgaard and students from the Royal Academy for Fine Arts in Copenhagen. Between 1901 and 1926 a number of tapestries were woven again in the castle (S. Mentz (ed.), 'The Tapestries in the Great Hall' in *Short Guide Frederiksborg Museum*, Hillerød 2003, pp. 40-41; S. Heiberg (ed.), *Christian IV and Europe: the 19th Art Exhibition of the Council of Europe, Denmark, 1988*, Copenhagen (Nationalmuseet), pp. 17, 56.