

A New Perspective on Mary of Hungary's *Labours of Hercules* Tapestries (Patrimonio Nacional, series 23)

Anne-Sophie Laruelle

University of Liège

The labours of Hercules, one of the most popular literary and artistic themes in the Renaissance, was particularly favoured in tapestries.¹ Among all the woven examples of this theme in the Renaissance, the most famous one was acquired by the Governor of the former Netherlands, Mary of Hungary. This ensemble is the first documented purchase of the regent, an amateur and fervent collector of textiles. Indeed, Mary of Hungary, like her brother the emperor Charles V, had a large collection of tapestries.² For Mary and Charles, tapestry was first medium in which Habsburg power was glorified. The inventory of Mary's possessions, made after her death in 1558, list thirty-eight series, numbering more than 254 pieces, many of very high quality, of which were figurative subjects and "verdures".³ Many can be found today in the collection of the Patrimonio Nacional. Most of her large collection was amassed when she was regent of the Netherlands from 1531 to 1555, in succession to her aunt, Margaret of Austria. The first documented purchase date from 1535, when she bought the *Story of Hercules* from a Brussels workshop.

Unfortunately, very little information concerning the use of the Hercules set has come down to us. A single document, dated 1556, mentions where the pieces were stored, namely the old ducal palace on the Coudenberg in Brussels. Indeed, a few months before Mary left for Spain, Denys de Coudenberg, her *aide de la tapisserie*, was paid to transport the Hercules pieces and some verdure from her *sallette* and *garde-robe* to hang them in the *Grande salle* of the Palace.⁴

The twelve pieces are mentioned in the inventories produced after the death of the regent in 1558.⁵ After Mary's death, the tapestry went to Juana of Austria, her niece, then after her own

1 The author of this paper has focused her doctoral thesis on this subject: Laruelle, A.-S., *Hercule dans l'art de la tapisserie à la Renaissance* (c. 1450-1565), University of Liège, prom. Prof. D. Allart.

2 On the collections of Mary of Hungary and Charles V, one of the richest ensembles of the tapestry medium during the first half of the sixteenth century, see CAMPBELL 2002, p. 267-70; CHECA 2008, p. 102-211; BUCHANAN 2008 and BUCHANAN 2015.

3 See GONZÁLEZ GARCÍA in CHECA 2010, p. 15.

4 See BUCHANAN 2008, p. 155; BUCHANAN 2015, p. 80.

5 "Cargansele mas doze panos de tapiceria de la ystoria de Ercules [...]" (Archivo General de Simancas (hereafter AGS), Contaduría Mayor de Cuentas (hereafter CMC), leg. 1017, see BEER 1891, nr 8436, CLVIII); "Ytem se mydio otro tapiçeria de la historia de Hercules" (Inventario postmortem, AGS, CMC, leg. 1093, 19 Oct. 1558, see CHECA 2010, vol. 3, p. 2877).



FIG. 7.1
Willem Dermoyen (manuf.),
Hercules's struggle with Cerberus, tapestry, 1535,
wool and silk, Madrid, Patrimonio Nacional.

death in 1573, to Philip II.⁶ Thanks to later inventories by the kings of Spain, we know that the set was still complete in 1751. At that time, four pieces were judged to be in a poor state of preservation and were discarded. Six pieces are currently preserved in the Spanish royal collections. We do not know what happened to the last two pieces.⁷

6 “Doze panos de tapiçeria de la ystoria de Hercules [...]” (Inventario de bienes muebles recibidos por Juana d’Austria, 9 Oct. 1571, see CHECA 2010, vol. 3, 2963); “A foxas 21 del dicho ynventario esta una partida de doze panos de la ystoria de Hercules viejos [...]” (Inventario postmortem, 1598, see DELMARCEL 1999c, p. 159 and p. 171).

7 On this question and on subsequent inventories, see JUNQUERA 1974; JUNQUERA AND HERRERO 1986, p. 155-62.



FIG. 7.2
 Willem Dermoyen (manuf.),
Hercules and Diomedes. Tapestry woven in the workshop
 of Willem Dermoyen, Brussels, c. 1535,
 wool and silk, Madrid, Patrimonio Nacional.

Woven in wool and silk, the pieces illustrated originally twelve of the Greek hero's exploits. Only six subjects are known to us today: Hercules fighting the Stymphalian birds; Ladon, the dragon from the Garden of the Hesperides; Cerberus (fig. 7.1), Diomedes (fig. 7.2); Achelous (fig. 7.3), and finally Hercules wrestling Antaeus.⁸ The borders, typical of the 1530s-1540s, consist in rich fruit garlands, flowers, leaves and various birds.

This article presents the result of recent research. It focuses on four main themes: the manufacture that wove the tapestries, the artists who provided the models to the weavers, the existing pieces and their iconography, and finally the patron who chose the subject and gave these tapestries a precise function in her interior.

8 Patrimonio Nacional, series 23 (inv. A. 264-7785, A. 269-8054, A. 264-7785, A. 257-7446, A. 267-7955, A. 269-8041).

Willem Dermoyen and his Production

A document, dating from 1535, tells us that Mary of Hungary purchased a series of Hercules in twelve pieces from Willem Dermoyen. The circumstances of this acquisition are unknown:

A guillaume dermoyen tapisier demourant a bruxelles la somme de mil cinq cens douze livres de XL gros que deue lui estoit pour douze pieces de tapisserie contenans *l'histoire de hercles* a v aulnes de large et vi aulnes de long que montent a III^e LX aulnes a IIII lb IIII s chascune aulne, pour ce icy par ordonnance de la royne par certification de mondict seigneur le tresorier et par la quittance dudict guillaume dermoyen du XXVIII jour de juillet, lesdits M V^e XII lb.⁹

None of the six tapestries preserved in Madrid bear the official mark of the City of Brussels. However, there is a weaver's mark on the edge of the piece representing *Hercules and Antaeus*. The most famous Brussels tapestries of the second quarter of the sixteenth century bear this mark: the *Battle of Pavia* (Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples), the so-called *Hunts of Maximilian* (Musée du Louvre, Paris), the *Story of Moses* (château of Châteaudun), and perhaps the *Triumphs of the Gods* from Henry VIII's collection (Hampton Court Palace).¹⁰ Formerly and misleadingly attributed to Jan Ghieteels,¹¹ it is now attributed to Willem Dermoyen, the famous Brussels merchant-weaver active in the 1530s and 1540s. In fact, the Dermoyen mark was never identified on a specific archive document. The series preserved in Madrid is therefore key in the series to attribute this monogram to the weaver.

The Dermoyen were merchants and weavers who played an important part in the sixteenth century tapestry industry. Numerous documents attest that Willem, sometimes associated with Jan, another member of his family, delivered tapestries to the most powerful princes of their time: Henry III of Nassau (*Genealogy of the House of Nassau*) and his wife Mencía de Mendoza (*Illustrious women; Las Muertes*), Francis I (re-edition of the *Acts of the Apostles*). He even tried to sell re-editions to Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent by partnering with merchants Peter van de Walle and Jakob Rehlinger.¹²

Willem and Jan were also both suppliers of tapestries for the Habsburgs, especially Charles V and Mary of Hungary. About 1528-30, Willem wove the *Battle of Pavia* and the *Hunts of Maximilian* for the emperor, and the set of the *Labours of Hercules* for Mary of Hungary in 1535. In 1539 both Dermoyen were part of a group of weavers accused of the weaving abuse of "retouching" (i.e. adding details and modelling in paint rather than through the process of weaving). Despite this setback, the Habsburgs continued to purchase numerous expensive series. In 1544 Jan supplied the emperor with the series of the *Story of Joshua* made with gold and silver thread and silk (now in Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna),¹³ and Willem was involved, probably with Willem de Pannemaker, another leading merchant of the day, in the production the

9 Lille, Archives civiles, Chambre des comptes, B 3357, f. 186r. The document was mentioned for the first time by Pinchart, in MÜNTZ et al. 1878-1884, 88. See also BOOGERT 1993, p. 358 (n. 72); ROOBAERT 2004, p. 162 (n. 89); BUCHANAN 2008, p. 145 (n. 8); BUCHANAN 2015, p. 332 (n. 8).

10 For the Henry VIII's series, see CAMPBELL 2007, p. 267-75.

11 JUNQUERA 1974; JUNQUERA AND HERRERO 1986, p. 155-62.

12 For an overview of the Dermoyen production, see DELMARCEL 1999a, p. 364; CAMPBELL 2002, p. 278; ROOBAERT 2004, p. 176-94.

13 BUCHANAN 2015. For the *Story of Joshua*, the emperor and the Dermoyen family, see also SZMYDKI 2005.

Apocalypse series for Philip II of Spain in 1553 (Patrimonio Nacional, Palacio Real de la Granja de San Ildefonso, series II).¹⁴

Style and Designer

There is no record so far of the artists who made the designs and cartoons. The composition of the scenes is classical, as is evident from the postures inspired by ancient sculpture, particularly the groups at the centre of each tapestry, displaying the hero's various fights.¹⁵ As Guy Delmarcel demonstrated, the idea that Giulio Romano was involved in the design of the models is not convincing.¹⁶ Indeed, one does not find the penchant for the archaeological reconstruction of antiquity that characterizes the tapestries attributed to Giulio Romano and his workshop in the 1520-1530s, such as the *Deeds and Triumphs of Scipio*, which present vast illusionistic tableaux of *Scipio's* battles and deeds. The Italian artists paid careful attention to the historical accuracy of the costumes and the character of the action and settings.¹⁷

Without neglecting the Italian style of these tapestries, a single workshop specializing in the production of preliminary drawings was considered here, as it was predominant at the time: that of Bernaert van Orley (c. 1488-1541).¹⁸ Van Orley ran a leading workshop in the design of tapestry cartoons in Brussels during the 1520s and 1530s.¹⁹ The artist became court painter to Margaret of Austria in 1518 and later to Mary of Hungary. He appears to have been successful as a designer both of tapestries and stained-glass windows, or classical paintings on panel. In his *Schilderboek* (1604), Karel van Mander wrote that van Orley executed many tapestry cartoons for Margaret of Austria and for the emperor Charles V, including hunting scenes identified today as the *Hunts of Maximilian* made by the Dermoyen in Brussels.²⁰

One might recognize in the Hercules set the hand of at least one Flemish artist. The careful examination of a drawing which I have recently discovered supports this hypothesis (fig. 7.4).²¹ It shows the struggle between Hercules and Achelous and reproduces the identical pose of both protagonists (fig. 7.3). It may be a *petit patron* made for the numerous re-editions of Mary of Hungary's series, for example the tapestry preserved in Vienna (Kunsthistorisches Museum, inv. CI/7).²² It should be noted however that it is much closer to the Madrid piece than subsequent re-editions; indeed Achelous foot is found on its shield, which is not the case on the drawing of the Louvre or the tapestry preserved in Madrid. The drawing is unsigned, undated and attributed by the Louvre to Martin van Valckenborgh. I propose to reassign it to Van Orley's workshop.

14 BUCHANAN in CAMPBELL 2002, p. 435-40 (with bibliography).

15 An aspect already highlighted by CHECA 2008, p. 194. For a similar representation, see for example the Roman copy of Hercules and Antaeus, highly restored, preserved in the courtyard of the Palazzo Pitti in Florence. See BOBER AND RUBINSTEIN 2010, cat. 137.

16 DELMARCEL 1999c, p. 159. This proposition came from BOOGERT 1993, p. 295-96.

17 For the series and re-editions of the *Story of Scipio*, see CAMPBELL 2002, 3, p. 41-49. Mary of Hungary owned also a seven-piece set of the *Deeds and Triumphs of Scipio*.

18 JUNQUERA 1974, p. 19; CAMPBELL 2007, p. 312.

19 On Bernaert van Orley and the tapestry medium, see especially BÜCKEN AND DE MEÛTER 2019 (with bibliography). However, further research is still necessary regarding the artists, especially the Italians, working in the Brussels workshops during this period.

20 BÜCKEN AND DE MEÛTER 2019, p. 194.

21 Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts graphiques, RF 38379.

22 See VAN TICHELEN 1994, p. 53-56.

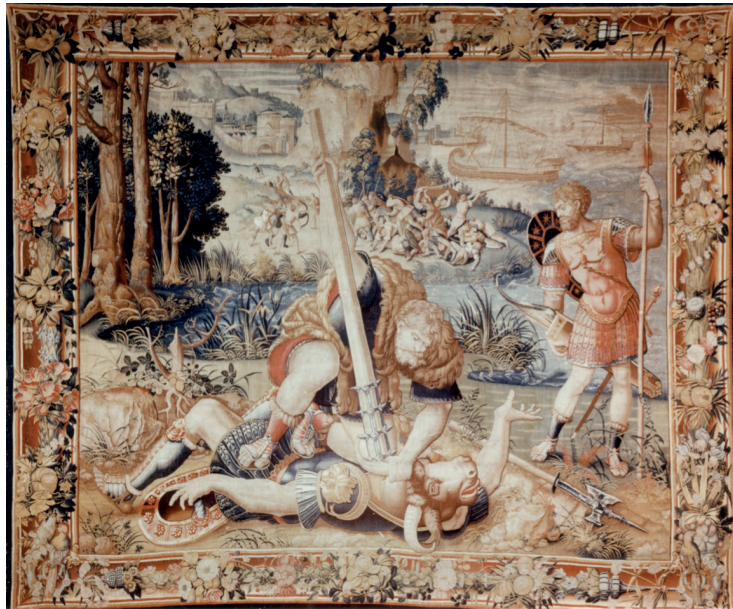


FIG. 7.3
Willem Dermoyen (manuf.),
Hercules fighting Achelous, Tapestry woven in the workshop
of Willem Dermoyen, Brussels, c. 1535,
wool and silk, Madrid, Patrimonio Nacional.



FIG. 7.4
Unknown designer, workshop of Bernaert van Orley (?),
Hercules fighting Achelous, c. 1535,
Pen and brown ink, with white highlights on paper,
Paris, Musée du Louvre.

Even though they were unable to name the designer of the Hercules series, tapestry specialists recognized his intervention in other series of the 1530s: the *Story of Venus* (Patrimonio Nacional, series 41),²³ the *Story of Psyche* (PN, series 137),²⁴ or yet another tapestry from the *Story of Aeneas* (PN, fictitious series 45).²⁵

In all cases, the compositions of this artist were immensely successful. Just look at the large number of woven Hercules re-editions in Flemish centres until the seventeenth century.²⁶ This is also noticeable in the re-use of certain formulas in contemporary tapestries. For example, the similarities between the representation of Hercules in the tapestry of Hercules against Ladon the dragon and that of Cadmus in the piece of the *Triumph of Prudence*, among the *Seven Virtues* (Biltmore House, Asheville), or yet the three daughters of Atlas, the Hesperides, with the three ladies of a slightly later tapestry showing Sarah on the *Story of Tobias* (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, inv. T IV/8).²⁷

Reconstruction of the Series and Iconography

The adventures of Hercules myth are various and numerous. Hercules was the demi-god who embodied the ideals of strength, fortitude and bravery. Ancient authors never agreed on the exact number of *Labours* imposed on the hero and also contradict each other on their sequence.²⁸ They did establish a canon of twelve *Labours* but it was never taken up as is during the Middle Ages or the Renaissance. One must however emphasize the importance of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, whose list of twelve *Labours* did not contain the canonical ones, but other exploits previously considered to be secondary.²⁹ The interest in Hercules is also present in other successful books: Boccaccio's *Genealogy of the Gods*, in which the author quotes no less than thirty-one *Labours*, the stories of the Trojan cycles, as well as the *Ovide moralise*.³⁰

At the end of the fifteenth century, Raoul Lefèvre's *Recueil des histoires de Troie* contains the most elaborate story of Hercules' life and deeds.³¹ Lefèvre's *Recueil* was the source of a great number of tapestries from the end of the fifteenth century and in the sixteenth century. Several

23 CHECA 2008, p. 194.

24 JUNQUERA AND HERRERO 1986, p. 337.

25 IBIDEM, p. 312; CAMPBELL 2007, p. 310 and p. 395 (n. 43). Campbell also suggests a link between the *Story of Venus* and a patron of a *Story of Jupiter*.

26 The Mary of Hungary's series was so successful that it was reproduced in Brussels and other specialized centres in quality weaving, particularly in Oudenaarde and Enghien. The best preserved of these is the eight-piece set woven in Oudenaarde around 1550. See VAN TICHELEN 1994, p. 53-56.

27 For the tapestry of the *Seven Virtues*, see BENNET 1992, p. 99-110 (with bibliography). On the *Story of Tobias*, and its design attributed to Van Orley, see SEIPEL 2004, p. 68-77. It is also notable that the weaver mark appearing on the tapestry of the *Seven Virtues* is identical to that found on a re-edition, partially preserved, of the *Story of Hercules* woven after Mary of Hungary's series (Museo Stibbert, Florence).

28 See for example STAFFORD 2012, p. 3-19. It is important to mention that the texts of the ancient authors were not all available in the 1530s. Poggio had produced a Latin translation of Diodorus Siculus' *Historical Library* in the second half of the fifteenth century, whilst the first printed version of Apollodorus' *Library* appeared only in 1555.

29 His list of twelve labours (*Consolation of Philosophy*, book 4 7.13-35) replaces five of the canonical labours (Geryon, the Augean stables, the Amazons, the bull and the Cerynian hind) with other exploits previously considered to be *parerga* (Achelous, Antaeus, Cacus, the centaurs and Hercules carrying the heavens).

30 JUNG 1966, p. 13-16.

31 IBIDEM, p. 16-30. Other important works from the fifteenth century include the *De Laboribus Herculis* by Coluccio Salutati and *Los doze Trabajos de Hércules* by Enrique de Villena.

episodes of the Madrid series, in particular, seem to correspond to this narrative. However, Lefèvre does not include the scene of the Stymphalian Birds, which suggests that we ought to reconsider the problem. Moreover, later re-editions of the series, particularly in the sixteenth century, when it enjoyed a great success, allow us to formulate certain hypotheses concerning the other subjects it displayed.³²

Malcolm Bull suggested that the subjects of the Mary of Hungary's series might have come from the narrative created by Boethius because the *Consolation of Philosophy* was widely translated and reproduced in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.³³ I tested his hypothesis. The choice of subjects according to the Latin author could indeed correspond to the set. But the analysis of certain iconographic details pleads in favour of the utilisation of another sources.

If we follow Boethius, the first subject would have been *Hercules fighting the centaurs*. However, a nineteenth century description of a tapestry (whereabouts unknown) from a re-edition of the series of Mary of Hungary suggests that a tapestry illustrated the adventures of Hercules among the centaurs.³⁴

Another piece must have been *Hercules fighting the Nemean lion* (now lost).³⁵ Hercules was commanded to bring to king Eurystheus the invulnerable pelt of the Nemean lion, a monster produced by the union of Echidna and Orthus. Hercules found its cave and shot at it, the arrows bounced off. Hercules therefore cornered it in its lair, clubbed it, and strangled it with his hands. He removed the lion's skin, and thereafter wore it himself. It's Hercules' most common attributes. The tapestries display an interesting detail: Hercules does not fight one, but three lions. These three lions are not found in the canonical sources, but are a late addition, probably popularized in the fifteenth century by Raoul Lefèvre's *Recueil des Histoires de Troie*.

Hercules slaying the Stymphalian birds. Hercules was to kill the birds that infested the woods by Lake Stymphalus in Arcadia. These birds had steel claws and attacked passers-by. According to tradition, they did not have human faces but for Boccaccio, who was often copied by Medieval and Renaissance mythographers, the Stymphalian birds were identical to harpies.³⁶ It has already been pointed out that the episode does not appear as such in Lefèvre's *Recueil*. However, the "harpies of Stymphalus" appear in "the faytes of Hercules" in certain examples of the late fifteenth century *Roman de Jason*, the counterpart to the *Recueil des histoires de Troie*.³⁷

Hercules fighting the dragon in the garden of the Hesperides. The tree of golden apples that Gaia gave to Juno and Jupiter, as a wedding present, grew in a garden at the edge of the world.

32 Among the re-editions, none is extant in twelve panels. The eight-piece set, divided in nine, preserved in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna (inv. Cl/1-9) is the most complete. For an overview, see VAN TICHELEN 1994, p. 53-56.

33 BULL 2005, p. III.

34 "Au premier plan un centaure renversé cherche à se couvrir de son bouclier; au second plan, une caverne, à l'entrée de laquelle Hercule se présente devant les centaures rangés en bataille", see *CATALOGUE UNION CENTRALE DES BEAUX-ARTS* 1876, p. 224. That piece was in the collection of the marquis Bourbon del Monte.

35 Re-editions in Vienna (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Cl/1) and in Antwerp (Rockoxhuis).

36 "Septimo arcu Stynphalidas occidit aves, Arpyas scilicet [...]" (BOCCACCIO 1951, XIII). On this subject, see DELMARCEL 1982. The confusion dated back to Servius' *Commentary on the Aeneid* (4-5th c.).

37 "Thene the ryght valia[n]t hercules we[n]te forth on his waye / all reco[n]forted tabide all auentures. And hit happend him that he ca[m] vnto a place of a king named Furi[us] whome he deliuerid fro[m] the arpies & enchaced the[m] vnto the Ryuer of sturphale in suche wise as it is conteyned in the historie of the faytes of Hercules" (LEFÈVRE 1492, without foliation).

It was guarded by the Hesperides, the daughters of Atlas occupying the background of the composition, and by the dragon Ladon. For his labour, Hercules was ordered to bring the apples, the symbols of immortality, to Eurystheus. Upon reaching the garden, the hero killed Ladon with his club, and plucked the apples himself.

Hercules capturing Cerberus (fig. 7.1). In this labour Hercules had to go to the Underworld to bring back the infernal three-headed hound, Cerberus. Guided by Mercury and Minerva, Hercules descended and received permission from Pluto to capture Cerberus as long as he did not use weapons. Hercules wrestled the hound into submission and carried him to Eurystheus, then returned him to Pluto. In the Underworld, Hercules found Theseus and Pirithous attached to their chairs; they are depicted on the right of the tapestry. He delivered Theseus but was unable to free Pirithous. The hound is here represented, like Achelous, with a human body. It is a rare choice, used in particular for illustrations of *Ovide moralisé* or the *Recueil des Histoires de Troie* in the fifteenth century.

Hercules and Diomedes (fig. 7.2). Diomedes, king of Thrace and son of Mars, fed his mares with the flesh of foreigners he had imprisoned. Hercules was required to bring these horses to Eurystheus. After overpowering the grooms, Hercules made Diomedes suffer the same fate, and, thus was able to subdue the horses. Eurystheus dedicated them to Juno and set them free, but the horses were eaten by wild animals on Mount Olympus. The episode of the mares devouring Diomedes is an uncommon subject in the Renaissance art, sometimes illustrated in some manuscripts of the Lefèvre's *Recueil*.³⁸

Another piece must have been *Hercules killing the Lernean Hydra* (now lost).³⁹ Offspring of Echidna and Typhon, the Hydra was a poisonous water snake that lived in the marshes at Lerna. It had numerous heads, one of which was immortal. Hercules was sent to kill the monster. Whenever Hercules ripped off one of the Hydra's heads with his club, a new one appeared in its stead, unless the neck of the severed head was cauterized. In the canonical sources, as in the Renaissance, Hercules only manages to kill the monster with the help of a companion. Hercules severed the immortal head and buried it under a large rock. The Hydra has seven heads in the tapestries: it is the usual number given by Boccaccio and copied by several other authors, including Raoul Lefèvre.

Hercules fighting Achelous (fig. 7.3). This piece has often been interpreted as the fight of Hercules against the minotaur, or even against the Cretan bull.⁴⁰ We believe, however, that these episodes were widely superseded by Hercules' struggle against Achelous, due to the authority of Boethius' and Ovid's texts. Achelous had set his sights on Dejanira, but she chose Hercules. A battle ensued: Achelous metamorphosed first into a serpent, which Hercules managed to choke, then changed into a bull, losing a horn to Hercules, causing it to capitulate. Achelous' representation is unusual: he is not usually shown with a human body and a bull's head in the Renaissance. This type of representation is found in the illustrations of the *Bible of the poets*

38 For an illustration, see: Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France (hereafter BnF), ms. fr. 22552, f. 198.

39 Re-editions in Vienna (KHM, Cl/2), Aubusson (Cité internationale de la tapisserie, legs Fougerol), Florence (Museo Stibbert, inv. 3441).

40 JUNQUERA 1974; JUNQUERA AND HERRERO 1986, p. 155-62.

dating back to the end of the fifteenth century, but also in the French translations of Boccaccio's *Genealogy of the Gods*.⁴¹

Hercules wrestling Antaeus. This feat occurred during his mission to steal the golden apples from the garden of the Hesperides. The Libyan giant Antaeus, son of Neptune and the Earth, challenged all who entered his territory to a wrestling match. He provoked Hercules. The hero took him down three times, in vain. Indeed, the giant's mother renewed his strength every time he touched the ground. Hercules, realising what was happening, held his opponent in the air and suffocated him in his arms. This theme was particularly widespread throughout the Renaissance.⁴²

The series must have included the episode of *Hercules against Cacus* (now lost).⁴³ Ancient authors described Cacus as a man of colossal size, whose mouth vomited swirls of flames and smoke. Hercules, leading Geryon's herd, made a stop in Rome where the giant stole the oxen. They write that he entered the cave walking backwards, pulling the animals by the tail, to avoid leaving any clues. Cacus made it impossible to track them. Hercules abandoned his search for them and set out with the rest of the herd, but as he passed the cave he heard lowing from within. Entering the cave, Hercules killed Cacus and recovered the stolen cattle. The site of this encounter is said to be near the Ara Maxima, an altar where Hercules was worshipped by the Romans. Since the medieval period, Cacus had been identified with the Evil.

A piece might have illustrated *Hercules carrying the Erymanthean boar* (now lost). We have found a fragment of a panel on this subject in a late re-edition of the Madrid set.⁴⁴ This labour involved capturing alive a monstrous boar that lived on Mount Erymanthus in Arcadia and ravaged the plains. He chased it into a field of snow, where it became exhausted, and captured it in a net.

The last piece must have been *Hercules holding the celestial globe for Atlas* (now lost).⁴⁵ This episode is not part of the canonical Labours in Antiquity; then associated with the conquest of the apples of Hesperides, according to which the Titan Atlas obtained the apples while Hercules assumed his burden of shouldering the sky. Diodorus of Siculus tells however that Atlas was actually an astrologer, who discovered the spherical nature of the heavens. Hercules relieving him on his burden is an indication that the knowledge had been passed on to the hero. This idea was then found in Le Fèvre's *Recueil* ("how Hercules, with King Atlas, began to study the science of astronomy and the seven liberal arts").⁴⁶ Also, according to Boethius, Hercules's last labour was to carry the globe because Hercules deserved to go to heaven (i.e. eternal glory); Boethius urged men to follow Hercules' example: it is an address to the virtuous who should strive to overcome their carnal desires through a contemplative life in order to be received in the heavenly kingdom.

41 *Bible des poètes* 1493, f. 243 (Paris, BnF, Velins-559); BOCCACCIO 1498-1499, f. 424 (Paris, BnF, Rés. J-845).

42 See especially BULL 2005, p. 105-107.

43 One piece in Florence (Museo Stibbert, inv. 3440).

44 Aubusson (legs Fougerol).

45 It is the subject of a piece in the old North Mimms collection. The fragmentary series has reappeared recently on the art market in UK (Sworders Fine Art Auctioneers, *The Principal Contents of North Mimms Park*, 17-18 April 2018, lots 300-304). The theme is also shown in the tapestry of the *Triumph of Hercules*, after that of Leo X. See KARAFEL 2016.

46 LEFÈVRE 1492.

Charles v, the “Imperial Hercules”

One cannot help but wonder why Mary of Hungary wished to acquire a series evoking the *Labours of Hercules*. What interest could the regent have had in this subject when she had refused another series (subject unknown) from Jan Dermoyen during the same month of July 1535?⁴⁷ Was her wish merely to acquire a trendy theme in the European courts of her time? Was the purchase intended to glorify her brother? There is no direct allusion to the figure of the Emperor Charles v in the set. Yet, in the first half of the sixteenth century, Charles v was indeed the personality most often associated with the demigod.⁴⁸

Let us recall first of all that tradition placed the hero among the ancestors of the Spanish kings. In 1498, Anniius of Viterbo (born Giovanni Nanni) published his *Antiquitatum*, a work in which he created false writings under the name of Berosus.⁴⁹ Anniius distinguished three Hercules in this work: the Hercules of Libya, ancestor of the Gallic, Spanish and Italian kings, the Greek Hercules, destroyer of Troy and the Hercules “Alemannus”, ancestor of the Germanic kings. The Hercules of Libya, a civilizing hero, son of Osiris and descendant of Noah, first went to Spain before traveling to Italy and Gaul, and even founding the city of Troy. Dedicated to the Catholic Monarchs,⁵⁰ Anniius’ work provided the Spaniards with the necessary material to claim they descended from a civilization far older than that of the Romans, and could serve them to assume a prestigious and heroic lineage.⁵¹

From the imperial perspective, Maximilian I had also identified himself with Hercules as “Hercules Germanicus”.⁵² According to Tacitus, copied by humanists and genealogists in the service of the king of the Romans, the Hercules “Alemannus” descended from Tuisson, son of Noah and King of Germany. Maximilian could thus include the demi-god among his ancestors. On the death of his wife Marie, he also tried to perpetuate the tradition of the Burgundian court, where the figure of Hercules was highly regarded.⁵³ In order to counter France, Maximilian had brought his family closer to the Catholic Monarchs by negotiating the marriages of his children Philip with Juana of Castile, and that of Margaret with the infant Juan of Castile. One event deserves to be noted, for it is rich in symbolic meaning: Margaret brought an entire chamber of Herculean themed tapestries from Flanders to Spain.⁵⁴

Through his parents, Charles inherited all these traditions. The figure of Hercules was a model of virtue perfectly suited for the future emperor. Already at the time of his Joyous Entry to Bruges in 1515 an image of Hercules plucking a golden apple from the garden of the Hesperides

47 ROOBAERT 2004, p. 162.

48 There is a lot of literature on the assimilation of Charles V to Hercules. See especially CHECA 1987 and CHECA 1999.

49 JUNG 1966, p. 41 et seq. On Hercules in Spain before Anniius’ work first appeared, see RUCQUOI 2011.

50 Anniius even compares their actions to those of Hercules in his preface: “Hi enim soli tenebras a luce diuiserunt: tyrannos Hispaniarum et geriones, tanq[uam] semen Herculeum magna vi atq[ue] fortitudine sustulerunt, latrocinantes deleuerunt [...]. Quidq[ue] Hispania ferox Pridem impiis et barbaris mixta ad humanitatem et mores mutata est” (ANNIUS OF VITERBO 1512, prefatio).

51 One example of the interest in the figure of Hercules is the presence of a six-piece set in Isabel the Catholic’s collections. See FERRANDIS 1943, p. 140-41.

52 MCDONALD 1976; BRAUNGART 1991.

53 JUNG 1966, p. 16-37.

54 “tapeçeria que la princesa nuestra señora troxo de flandes [...] vna cama de tapaçeria en que ay quatro pieças çielo e cabeçera e costado e sobre cama muy ricos de oro de la estoria dercoles”, see FERRANDIS 1943, p. 48.

appeared on a triumphal arch.⁵⁵ In 1516, Charles was proclaimed “King of all Spains”. According to Luigi Marliano, Charles had to become “a new Hercules or an Atlas”.⁵⁶ The subsequent adoption of the Hercules columns, combined with his *Plus Ultra* motto, announced clearly his ambitions.⁵⁷ With his election as king of the Romans, then as Emperor, the identification of Charles with Hercules became more explicit. He had to assert himself in a context where his rivalries with the other two powerful “Hercules”, Francis I and Henry VIII, were very strong.⁵⁸

It was a successful concept since from around 1530 the Imperial Hercules had established itself. The demi-god was thus invited to all the Joyful Entries of Charles V, his arms and armour, art works, as well as in literature.⁵⁹ The heroic and virtuous exploits of the new Christian Hercules were celebrated throughout Europe, especially after his victories at Pavia and Tunis. In addition to the works Charles V and his family commissioned on this theme, the Emperor had received such gifts personally: he was offered, for example, a twelve-piece set from Francis Borgia (after 1530), or a statue of the hero on the occasion of his Entry to Paris in 1540.⁶⁰

Thanks to Mary of Hungary’s artistic purchases, the classical iconography that characterized the court of the emperor in Spain also came to the Brussels palace.⁶¹ Indeed, the acquisition of the series in 1535 was only the beginning. We have another preserved testimony in the decoration of the Coudenberg Palace. The association of Charles V to Hercules re-emerged in the construction of a new outdoor staircase around 1538: at the top Charles was represented as an ancient triumphant general sitting on an eagle, holding a sword and a sceptre, flanked on one side by Hercules holding onto his columns, and on the other by the hero chocking the life out of Antaeus.⁶²

We can conclude from this that Mary of Hungary’s purchase from the Dermoyen workshop was, as on many other occasions, to serve the interests of her brother. Charles was ruling a vast empire and was constantly in need of reliable family members who could govern his remote territories in his name. In this perspective, it is interesting to note that Mary of Hungary in her most important official portraits, such as Titian’s portrait (Museum of Decorative Arts, Paris), is depicted next to a column as direct reference to the figure of Charles V and Hercules. It was frequent that the women of the House of Austria (Juana of Austria, Isabel Clara Eugenia, Margaret of Parma) who exercised functions made themselves portrayed with an image-portrait of the male figure that they represented as a sign of the family and affective bond that united them, but also as a sign of submission, loyalty, obedience and respect.⁶³ There is no doubt that the new tapestry series on the Herculean theme was used to consolidate and propagate the mythical and heroic image forged around Charles V.

55 “le second fut Hercules presentant une po[m]me d’or laquelle il conquest iadys en aphricque. Et fut soubz luy escript Mon cher ayme ie tay garder toutes mes pommes vieilles & nouvelles” DU PUYS 1515, without foliation.

56 See ROSENTHAL 1973.

57 ROSENTHAL 1971 and ROSENTHAL 1973.

58 On the assimilation of Francis I to Hercules, and rivalries, see LARUELLE 2017.

59 For instance, his Entry in Florence, in 1536, where he is represented as Hercules fighting the Hydra on the Santa Trinità bridge. See JACQUOT 1960, p. 433.

60 “Item douze pieces historiee de Hercules de cinq aulnes de profond venant du marquis de Lombay” (Inventario de tapices, 29 Nov. 1544, see CHECA 2010, p. 145). For the statue, see JACQUOT 1960, p. 438; JUNG 1966, p. 89.

61 CHECA 1999, I, p. 13-66.

62 DE JONGE 2008, p. 127-28.

63 See PORTÚS PÉREZ 2000. Many thanks to Noelia García Pérez for pointing out this issue.