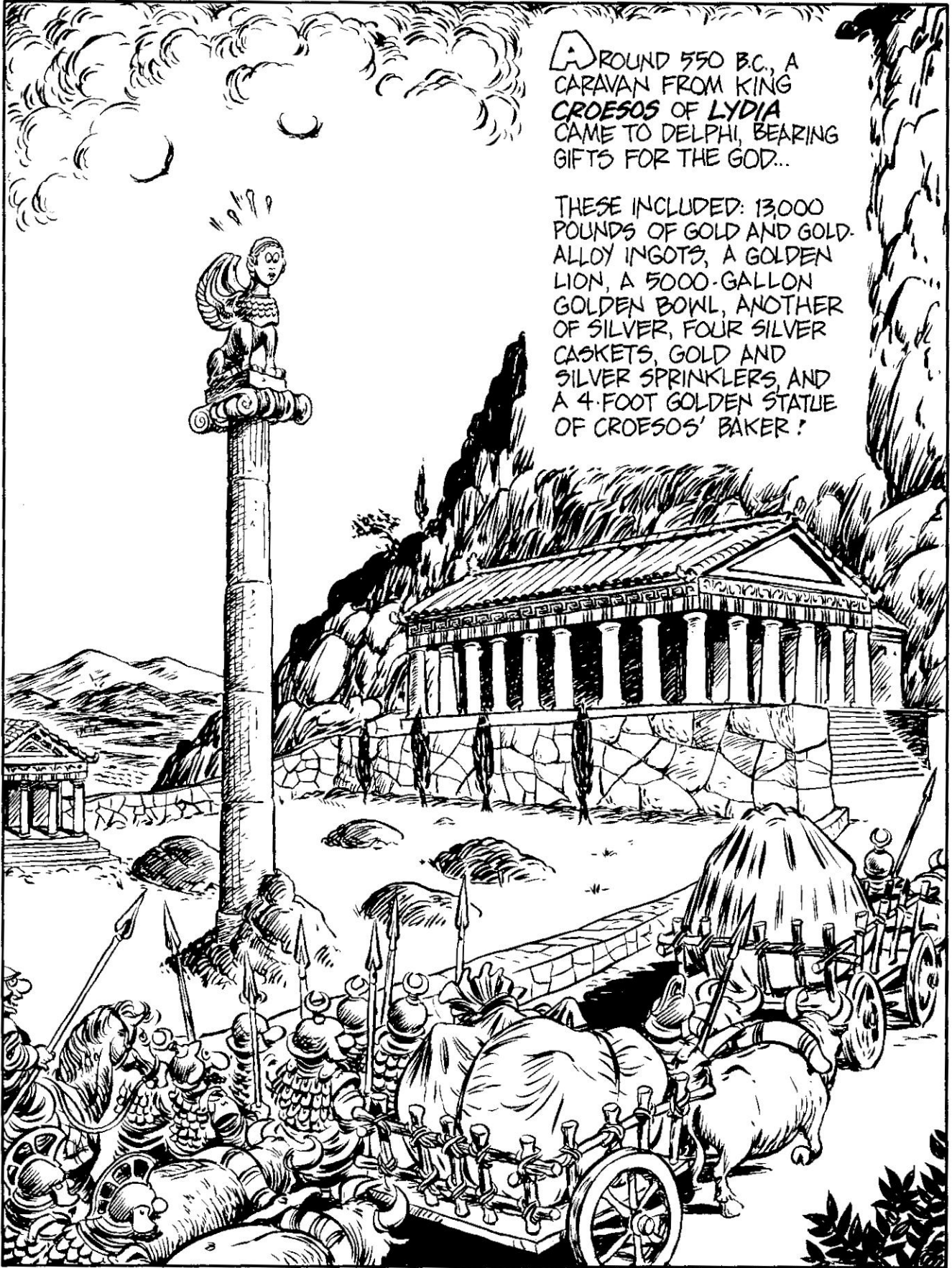


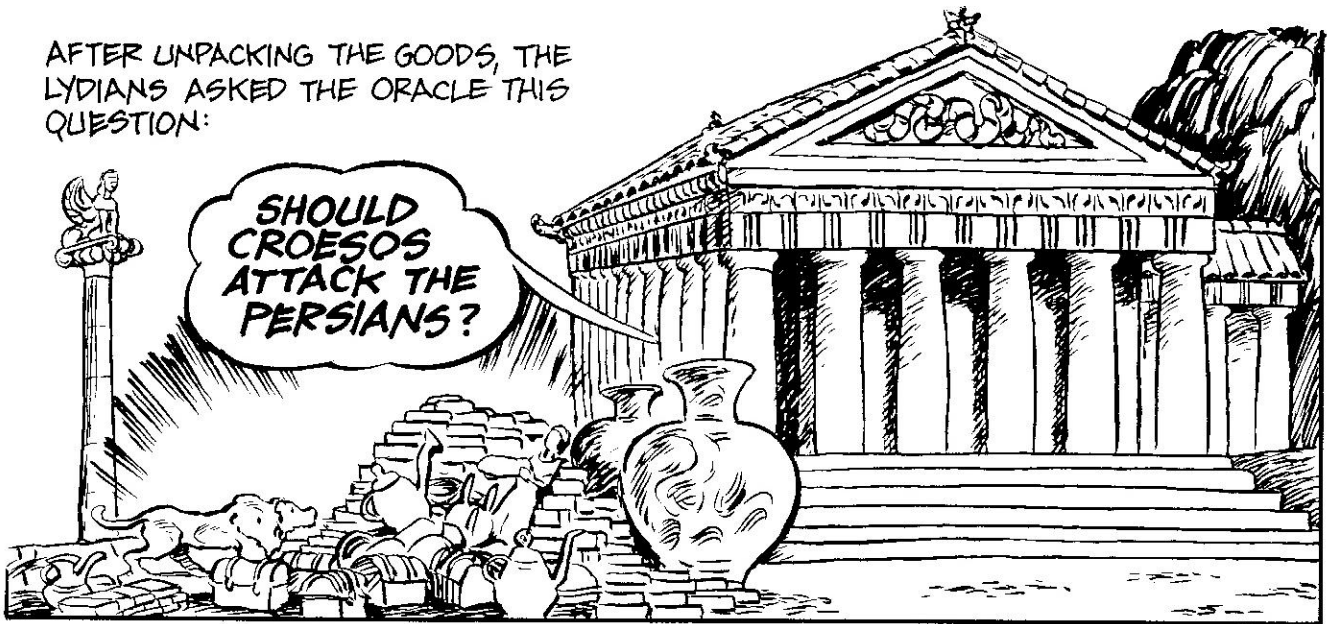
# THE RICHES OF CROESOS

AROUND 550 B.C., A CARAVAN FROM KING CROESOS OF LYDIA CAME TO DELPHI, BEARING GIFTS FOR THE GOD...

THESE INCLUDED: 13,000 POUNDS OF GOLD AND GOLD-ALLOY INGOTS, A GOLDEN LION, A 5000-GALLON GOLDEN BOWL, ANOTHER OF SILVER, FOUR SILVER CASKETS, GOLD AND SILVER SPRINKLERS, AND A 4-FOOT GOLDEN STATUE OF CROESOS' BAKER!



AFTER UNPACKING THE GOODS, THE LYDIANS ASKED THE ORACLE THIS QUESTION:



DEEP IN THE TEMPLE, THE MESSAGE WAS DELIVERED TO A PRIESTESS CALLED THE PYTHIA. (THE WORD IS RELATED TO "PYTHON.")



BEFORE GIVING HER REPLY, THE PYTHIA INHALED THE FUMES OF BURNING BAY LEAVES...



...UNTIL SHE FELT DIVINE INSPIRATION!



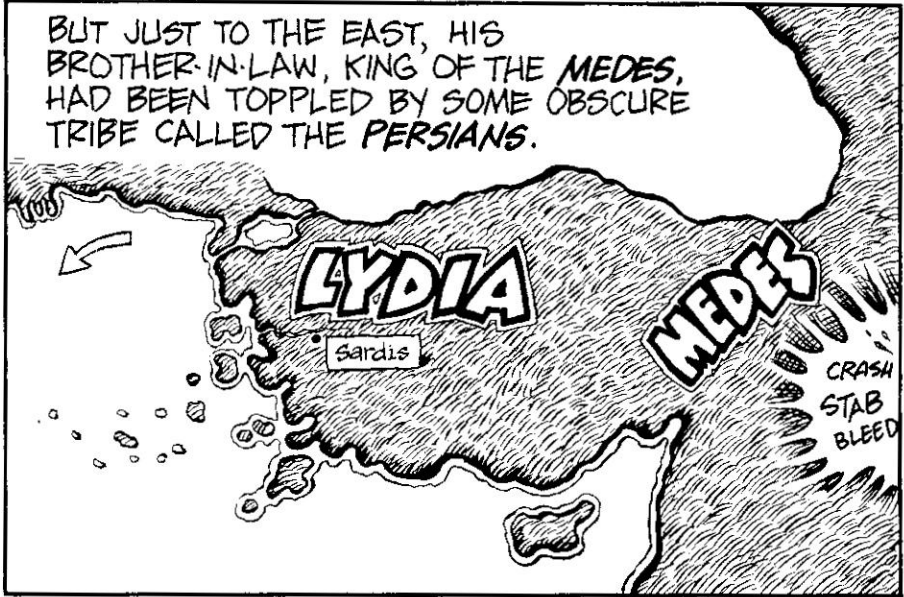
SOME WRITERS SAY THE PYTHIA HEARD THE GOD'S WHISPERS IN THE BREEZES BLOWING FROM A CLEFT IN A ROCK. (LOOKS MORE LIKE THE EARTH-GODDESS THAN THE SUN GOD, DOESN'T IT?)



WHAT'S WEALTH WITHOUT SECURITY?



BUT JUST TO THE EAST, HIS BROTHER-IN-LAW, KING OF THE MEDES, HAD BEEN TOPPLED BY SOME OBSCURE TRIBE CALLED THE PERSIANS.



MEANWHILE, BACK IN LYDIA, CROESOS WAS WORRIED. LORD OF WESTERN ASIA MINOR, INCLUDING THE GREEK CITIES OF IONIA, THIS KING WAS RICH: HIS FAMILY HAD INVENTED COINAGE...

CROESOS OWED IT TO HIS BROTHER-IN-LAW TO RETALIATE, BUT HE HAD A LOT TO LOSE, AND SO HE SENT TO DELPHI — AND NERVOUSLY WAITED...

SURE HOPE THE TREASURE ARRIVED IN ONE PIECE...

THE PIRATES HAVE BEEN JUST AWFUL LATELY...

WHY DOES EVERYTHING HAVE TO TAKE SIX MONTHS?

BITE



LONG BEFORE COINAGE WAS INVENTED, PEOPLE ALREADY USED GOLD AND SILVER AS A MEDIUM OF EXCHANGE. PRECIOUS METALS ARE RARE AND DURABLE, AND THEY MAKE PRETTY JEWELRY.



BUT HOW TO KNOW IF GOLD WAS GENUINE? YOU HAD TO BITE IT! (PURE GOLD IS SOFT.)

NOW ALL MY CROWNS ARE DENTED!



SO — AROUND 700 B.C., THE LYDIAN KINGS BEGAN STAMPING LUMPS OF GOLD WITH THE ROYAL SEAL, AS A GUARANTEE OF PURITY: THE FIRST COINS.



TODAY OUR COINS ARE BASE ALLOY... OUR DOLLARS ARE PAPER... MONEY MAKES UGLY JEWELRY... ALL THAT'S LEFT IS THE GOVERNMENT GUARANTEE — BUT OF WHAT ???

A GUARANTEE TO PRINT MORE MONEY...



PRESENTLY THE PYTHIA TOOK UP A LAUREL BRANCH AND SPOKE IN AN UNEARTHLY VOICE:



IF CROESOS ATTACKS THE PERSIANS...

HE WILL DESTROY A GREAT EMPIRE!?



NO ONE KNOWS EXACTLY WHAT CROESOS SAID WHEN THIS MESSAGE REACHED HIM AT SARDIS...

☆@!:#2#  
WHAT KIND OF ANSWER IS THAT?  
WHICH EMPIRE??  
THAT WAS THE WHOLE POINT?



ANSWER LIKE THAT, YOU MIGHT AS WELL FLIP A COIN! ANYONE GOT A COIN??



AND SO CROESOS MADE THE FIRST MOVE, LEADING HIS LYDIANS ACROSS THE BORDER INTO MEDIAN TERRITORY, WASTING THE CROPS AND ENSLAVING THE INHABITANTS...



I CAN'T GET OVER THAT GREEDY ORACLE!?

SOON THE PERSIAN ARMY ARRIVED — ALONG WITH THE PEOPLE WHOM CROESOS HAD DRIVEN OFF THE LAND... FOR ONE LONG DAY THEY FOUGHT THE LYDIANS...



THEN CROESOS DECIDED WAR SEASON WAS OVER FOR THE WINTER!

SEE YOU NEXT SPRING!



THE PERSIANS DISAGREED!

LET'S SURPRISE THEM...



KEEPING OUT OF SIGHT, THEY FOLLOWED THE LYDIANS HOME... CROESOS HAD ONLY ENOUGH TIME TO WRITE A COUPLE OF LETTERS, BEFORE HE REALIZED THAT SARDIS WAS SURROUNDED!

"SINCERELY YOURS —" WHAT?

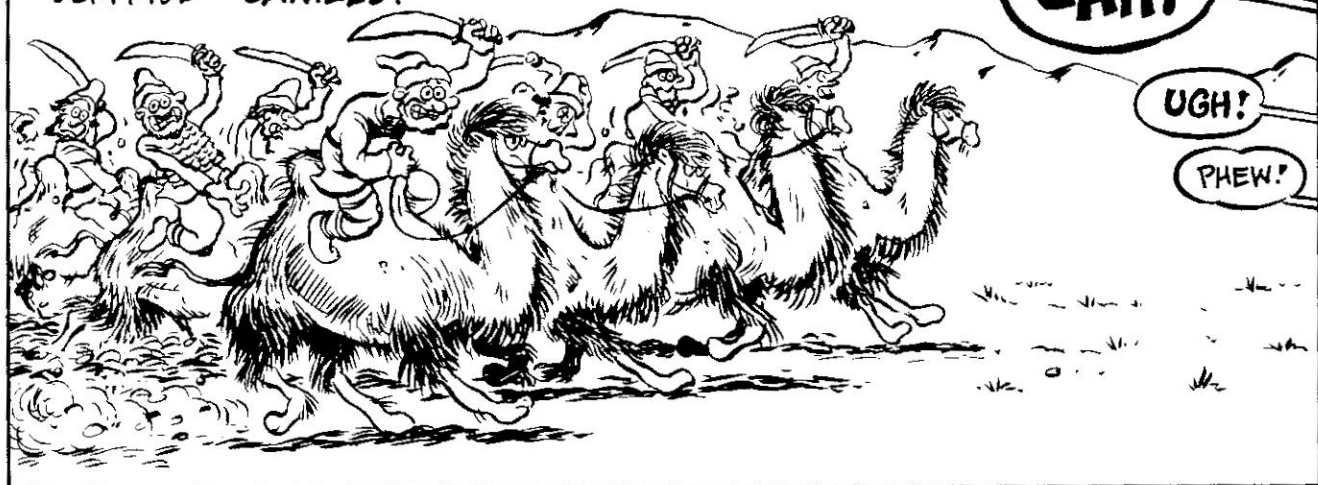


WHEN THE LYDIANS CAME OUT TO FIGHT, THE PERSIANS GAVE THEM ANOTHER SURPRISE — CAMELS.

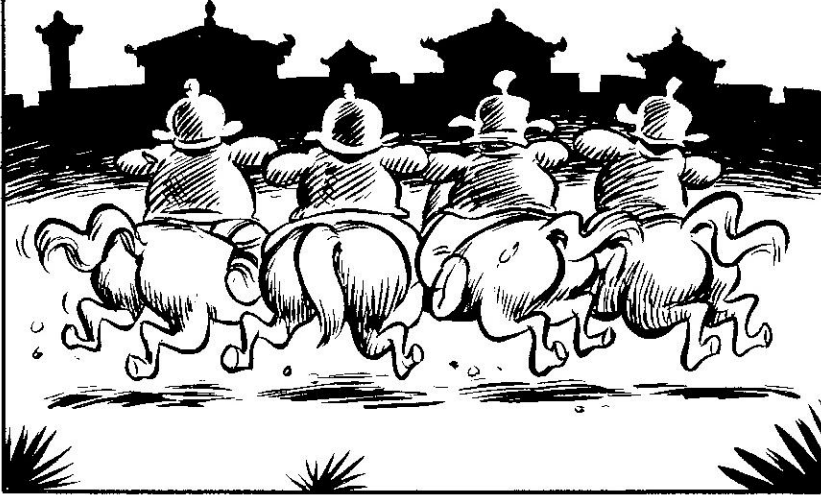
GAH!

UGH!

PHEW!



THE LYDIAN HORSES TURNED TAIL AND BOLTED FOR HOME —



BUT THE PERSIANS WERE MOUNTAIN MEN! THEY WENT RIGHT UP SARDIS' WALLS...



THE CITY FELL; CROESOS WAS SET ATOP A PYRE WITH FOURTEEN LYDIAN PRINCES; THEN —



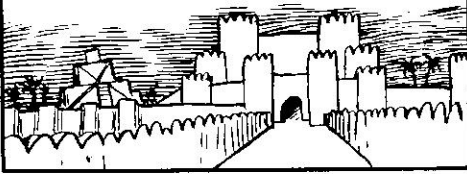
I JUST WANTED TO SAY THANKS FOR THE GREAT EMPIRE.!

THE PRINCES WERE BURNED, BUT CROESOS -AND SARDIS- WERE SPARED. THIS SHOWED THE POWER AND MERCY OF PERSIA AND ITS SHAH CYRUS, WHO NOW COMMANDED THE RICHES OF CROESOS.!



# "MENE MENE..."

THE PERSIANS MOVED NEXT AGAINST **BABYLON**. THIS WAS NEBUCHADREZZAR'S NEW, REBUILT BABYLON, MORE SPLENDID THAN EVER, WITH HANGING GARDENS, THE ISHTAR GATE, ZIGGURATS, PALACES...



... AND ENDLESS BRICK TENEMENTS, HOME OF THE CAPTIVE JEWS, WHOM WE LAST SAW IN VOLUME 4!



ACCORDING TO THE BIBLICAL ACCOUNT, THE CROWN PRINCE **BELSHAZZAR** SAW THE **HANDWRITING ON THE WALL** DURING A PALACE BANQUET... AND SENT FOR A JEWISH SAGE TO DECIPHER IT...

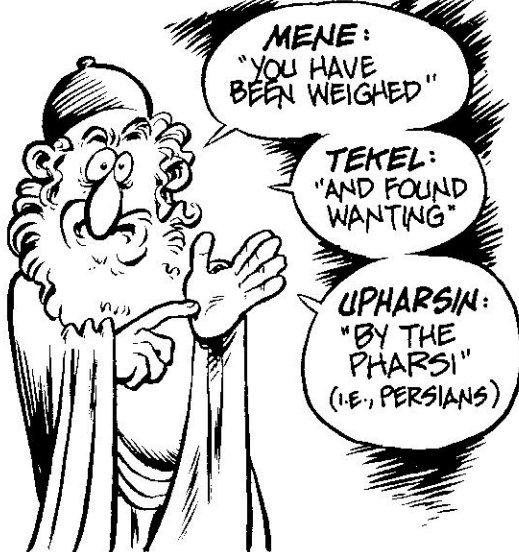


THIS WAS THE PROPHET **DANIEL**. HE READ:

"MENE MENE TEHEL UPHARSIN!"

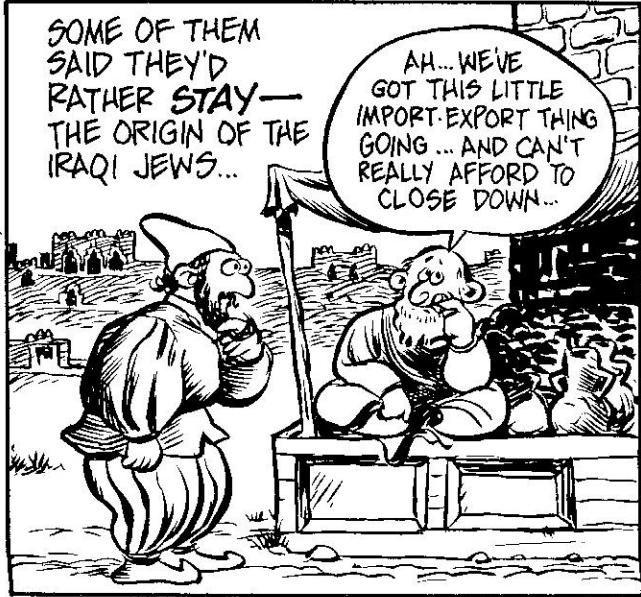
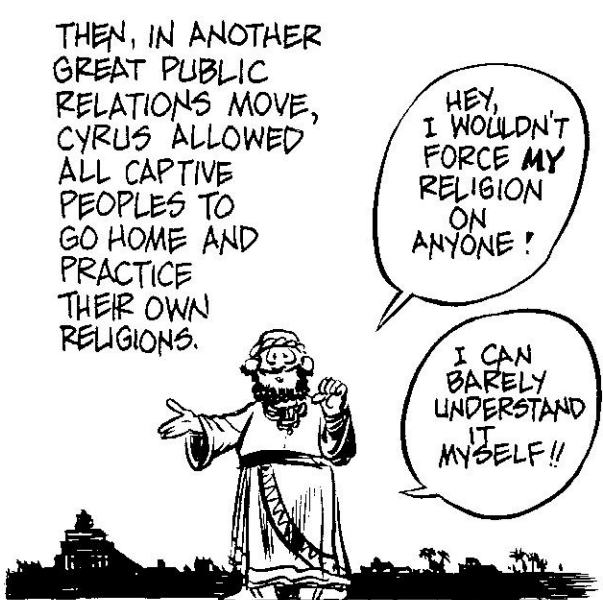
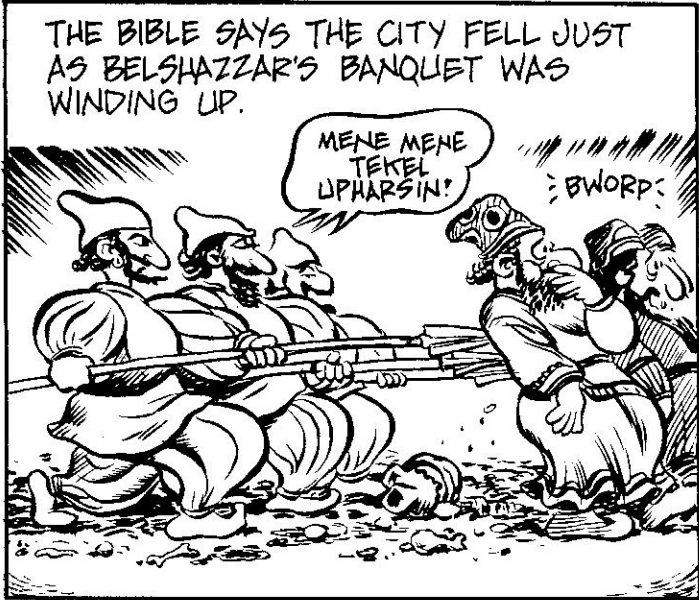
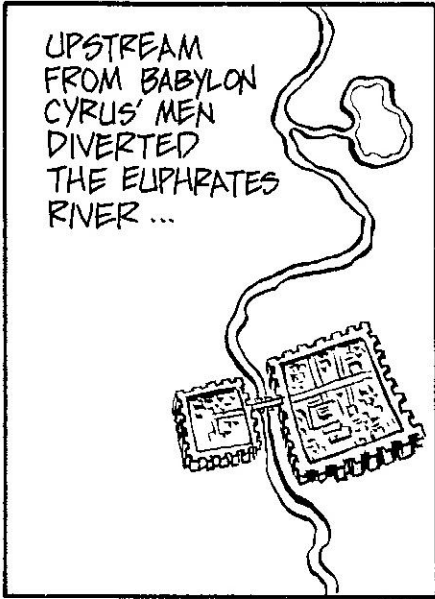


MEANING:



SUCH ARE THE LETTERS WRITTEN BY THE ANGEL'S FIERY HAND!!

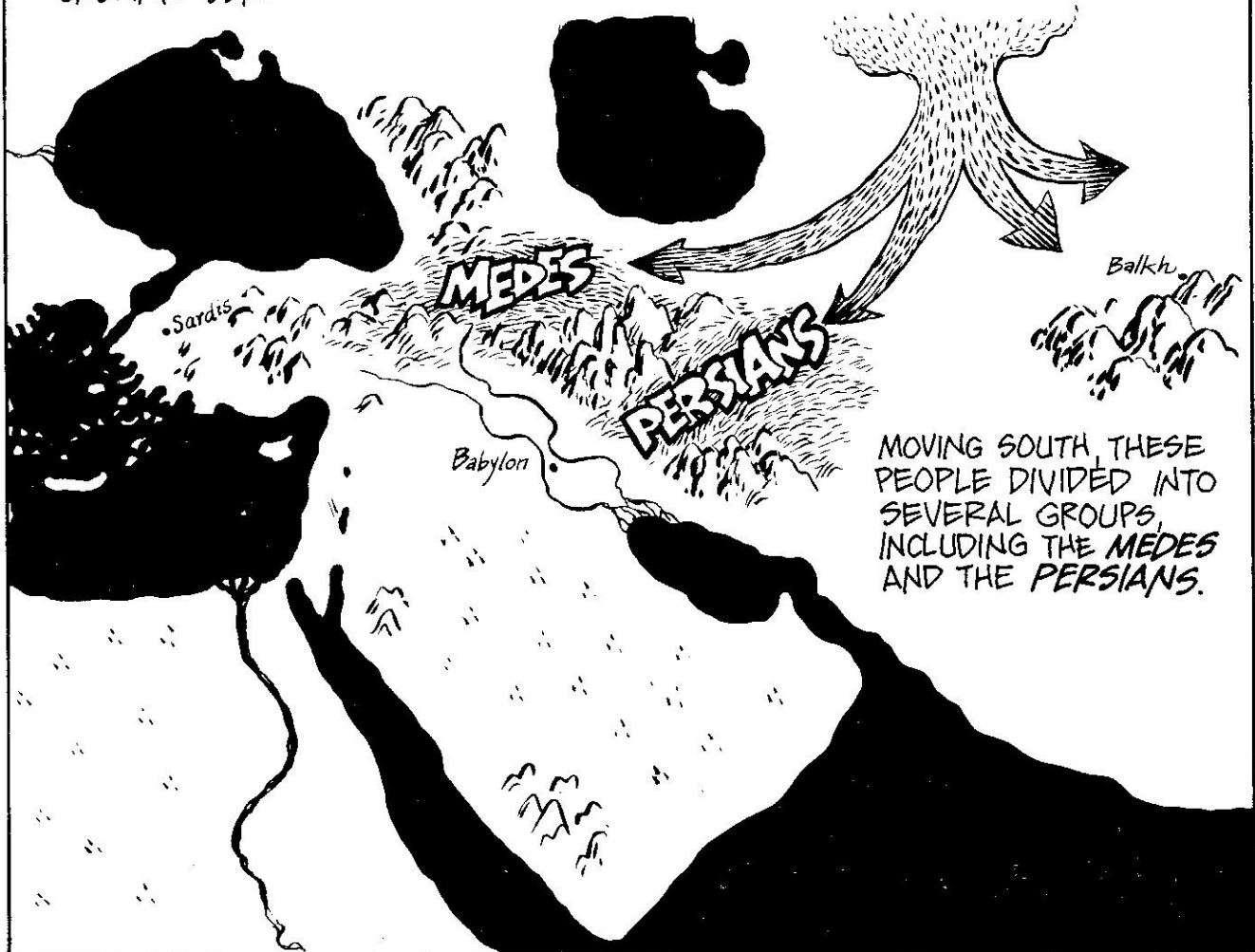






# A GREAT EMPIRE

SO WHO WERE THESE PERSIANS? ORIGINALLY THEIR FOREBEARS WERE INDO-EUROPEAN NOMADS, KNOWN AS THE ARYANS, FROM BEYOND THE CASPIAN SEA.



MOVING SOUTH, THESE PEOPLE DIVIDED INTO SEVERAL GROUPS, INCLUDING THE MEDES AND THE PERSIANS.

THE MEDES, WHO LIVED IN ASSYRIAN TERRITORY, BECAME CIVILIZED EARLY, WHILE THE PERSIANS WERE STILL PRETTY WILD!



STILL, AFTER A CENTURY OR TWO IN THEIR NEW HOME, THE PERSIANS HAD DEVELOPED THEIR OWN RELIGION, CUSTOMS—AND CARPETS, OF COURSE...

THEIR RELIGION, AS PREACHED BY ZARATHUSTRA OF BALKH, DIVIDED ALL THINGS INTO TWO PRINCIPLES, GOOD AND EVIL.



GOOD WAS IDENTIFIED WITH THE ONE GOD AHURA-MAZDA, WHO WAS REALIZED IN FIRE, WHILE EVIL WAS DARKNESS.



THEIR DEAD WERE NEITHER BURIED NOR CREMATED, BUT SIMPLY EXPOSED TO THE ELEMENTS.



VERY EAGLE-LOGICAL!

THE MINISTERS OF THE FAITH WERE THE MAGI ("MAHG-EE") — HENCE OUR WORD "MAGIC."



AHA! AHURA-MAZDA!

THE WORST SIN WAS TO TELL A LIE. CRIMINALS ALWAYS CONFESSED!



FEROZ, DID YOU CHOP DOWN THE PEACH TREE?

YES, FATHER!

THEIR HABIT WAS TO RECONSIDER SOBERLY ANY DECISION THEY HAD MADE WHILE DRUNK. AND VICE VERSA.



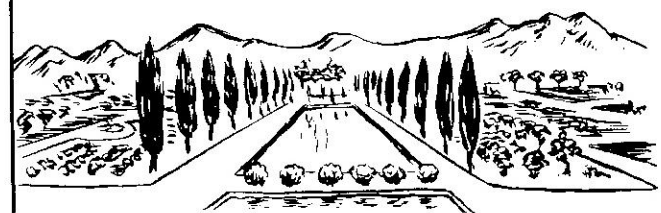
THIS COULD GO ON AND ON AND ON...

THEIR RETAIL TRADE WAS TIGHTLY CONTROLLED: OF THE GREEK MARKETPLACES, CYRUS SAID,



WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE, WHO HAVE SPECIAL PLACES WHERE THEY GO TO CHEAT EACH OTHER?

AFTER THEIR CONQUESTS, THE PERSIANS BROUGHT HOME EVERY SHRUB AND FLOWER OF THE REALM, PLANTING FORMAL GARDENS CALLED PAIRIDAEZA, FROM WHICH WE DERIVE "PARADISE."



THE PERSIAN EMPIRE  
BEGAN WITH THE CONQUESTS  
OF **CYRUS THE GREAT**.



IN 549 B.C. HE CONQUERED HIS COUSINS,  
THE MEDES.

OOO



THE MEDIAN KING  
HAD LOST POPULAR  
SUPPORT WHEN HE  
DISHED UP A  
NOBLEMAN'S SON  
FOR SLIPPER, AND SO  
THE MEDES HAD  
NO **STOMACH** FOR  
FIGHTING.



AS WE SAW, THAT BATTLE BROUGHT IN  
**CROESOS** OF LYDIA.



AFTER TAKING  
LYDIA, IONIA, AND  
BABYLONIA, **CYRUS**  
MOVED ON TO  
THE LANDS TO  
THE EAST.

HE DIED IN BATTLE SOMEWHERE IN CENTRAL  
ASIA, AND WAS BURIED IN THIS MODEST  
TOMB, STILL STANDING IN IRAN.

