

# The Three Magi Ladies and the Wise King: Diana, Circe, and Medea in Alfonso X's *General estoria*<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** Alfonso X's *General estoria* includes a small treatise on magic which claims that historically, the most important practitioners of magic were three mythological female characters: Diana, Circe, and Medea, who excelled in the art more than any other male figures. This article explores why the treatise specifically chose to emphasize these three women from among the many practitioners of magic that appear in the *General estoria*, how their portrayal significantly differs from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and previous interpreters, and the influence of other classical, Christian, and Arabic sources on magic.

**Keywords:** Alfonso X, *General estoria*, Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, *Picatrix*, Arabic magic, Hecate

## Introduction

**R**ing Alfonso X of Castile, also known as “the Wise” or “the Learned” (r. 1252–84), oversaw and supported an unprecedented production of translations, original treatises, and literary works that reflected his many interests: history, poetry, gaming, hunting, moral advice, laws, politics, sciences, astronomy, astrology, and more. One of the most notable features in the wise king's works is his intellectual curiosity about magic. The king initially sponsored translations of Arabic treatises of magic—such as the famous *Picatrix* (1256–58)—and later even commissioned original compilations—such as *Astromagia* (ca. 1277).<sup>2</sup> His interest in this topic is prevalent throughout his entire oeuvre. We find evidence of this in the *General estoria* (General history, from now on *GE*), a comprehensive chronicle of the world sponsored by the king in the latter part of his reign (after

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<sup>2</sup> On the *Picatrix*, see Attrell and Porreca; on *Astromagia*, see Agostino's edition.

1272),<sup>3</sup> in which many notable figures throughout history are described as practicing magic. The *GE* sometimes interrupts the historical narrative to delve into specific topics or motifs, including magic, to which the wise king devotes a small treatise found in the second volume of the second part (*GE2 I*). This treatise claims that historically, the most important practitioners of magic were three mythological female characters: Diana, Circe, and Medea, who excelled in the art more than any of the well-known male figures associated with it.

In this article, I will explore why in the treatise, Alfonso specifically chose to emphasize these three women from among the many practitioners of magic that appear in the *GE* and how their portrayal significantly differs from both his most direct source, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and previous ancient and medieval interpreters. I argue that Alfonso's nuanced portrayals of Diana, Circe, and Medea are a result of his unique approach, which incorporates Roman and Christian traditions, the translations of Arabic books of magic that he sponsored, and his own elaborations on these topics in original works.<sup>4</sup> Due to this, Alfonso offers a distinct perspective on the connection between magic and gender. According to his interpretation, women are not only better magi than men, but the magical abilities of these specific women are separate from their sexual relationships with men and the associated potential risks—a prejudice that had been widely assumed since Ovid and continued down to contemporary medieval commentators. Instead, in Alfonso's treatise Diana, Circe, and Medea are depicted as dedicated scholars and practitioners of magic, which aligns them more closely with the king and his learned courtiers and collaborators—and, paradoxically, with some non-Ovidian classical sources. The nuanced portrayals of the three female magi throughout the *GE*, along with the different traditions regarding the interpretation of magic that the wise king summarizes, are what lead him to characterize the three women as the most paradigmatic magi in history.

### A Treatise of Magic Containing Ovidian Personalities

Even though the *GE* uses a significantly larger quantity of pagan sources, and even introduces Arabic ones, it also adheres to the tradition of previous Christian chronicles—starting with Eusebius's *Chronicle*, translated by Jerome (fourth/fifth centuries)—and follows the biblical narrative as a structural reference. This framework leads us to the famous episode where the Witch of Endor assists King Saul in conjuring the spirit of the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 28). This episode, which presents a tangible

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<sup>3</sup> Although Alfonso was not the sole author of the *GE*—he oversaw and made amendments to the work created by a team of writers—I will adhere to the customary practice of previous researchers and credit him as the author. For further details about Alfonso, the *GE*, and its creation, see the introduction in the initial volume of his comprehensive edition by Sánchez-Prieto Borja.

<sup>4</sup> Once again, I want to highlight that to further facilitate the argumentation of this article, I will attribute solely to Alfonso the aims of the team of scholars that created the works he sponsored and supervised.

display of sorcery, has captivated Jewish and Christian scholars for a long time (Schmidt). It comes as no surprise that it offers Alfonso a perfect chance to delve into the topic of magic, which has been referenced multiple times earlier in the *GE*. The treatise that follows is divided into thirteen chapters.

The initial and final chapters inquire into the witch of Endor and Christian authorities' interpretations of this subject. Conversely, the middle chapters offer a different viewpoint on magic, drawing from Arabic scholarly theories (*GE2* II, 624–36).<sup>5</sup> It appears that in this context, biblical and Christian scholarship may be excusing the utilization of questionable sources—that is, questionable from the Church's perspective. These middle chapters ascribe the earliest and most highly regarded works on magic to legendary Hermetic sages, including Hermes Trismegistus and *Toz/Thoth*,<sup>6</sup> as well as Arabic scientific authorities, such as *Alfarabia/al-Fārābī* (ca. 870–950) and notably *Mesealla/Māshā' allāh* (ca. 740–815 CE). These Eastern theoreticians, who revealed the secrets of magic, are introduced in the second chapter of the treatise, at the end of which Alfonso underscores that “many [of the secrets] remained concealed; they are in these gentiles' stories that we place here for you, in which the express wording says one thing and the science and thinking on them another.”<sup>7</sup> This is a hint that Alfonso is going to address Ovidian characters next. Thus, the next chapter (the treatise's third), is “On those who first used charms (*encantamientos*) following the knowledge of magic,” whom Alfonso introduces in the following way: “*Mesealla* says in his book—according to his own criteria and that of other wise men whom he adduces as evidence—that three ladies, Diana, Circe, and Medea, gained the esteem of the gentiles during their times, and even later, on account of their knowledge and practice of the magical art; therefore, the gentiles distinguished them from among other sages and called them goddesses.”<sup>8</sup> While some scholars have speculated which of *Mesealla/Māshā' allāh's* books were used for this treatise (Rubio 496), there is no mention of any Greco-Roman mythological

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<sup>5</sup> The treatise was examined by Rubio in a primarily descriptive article. Salvo García has cited it in a recent publication as well as in a collaborative piece with Possamaï-Pérez. Ekman briefly discusses this treatise in a paper focusing on two magical terms in the *GE* (“Ovid Historicized”). In two studies on the textual tradition of the second part of the *GE*, both Inés Fernández-Ordóñez and Francisco Bautista have noted that one of the manuscripts contains an additional chapter about magic in this section.

<sup>6</sup> On Hermes Trismegistus in the *GE*, see my book about Hermes in medieval Iberia and Alfonso X (Udaondo Alegre, *The Spanish Hermes*).

<sup>7</sup> “E però fñcavan aún munchas d'ellas encubiertas, como están en estas razones que vos aquí ponemos de los gentiles, que la letra dize uno e la ciencia e el seso d'ello muestra ál al que lo entiende.” *GE2* II, 627. To make the *GE* more accessible to non-specialist audiences, I have translated some of its passages into English. Because of the complex grammar of old Castilian, I have aimed to make my versions both readable and faithful to the original.

<sup>8</sup> “De los que usaron primeramente de los encantamientos segunt el saber de la mágica. Cuenta Mesealla en su libro por sí e por otros sabios a quien aduze por pruebas de lo que él dize que estas tres dueñas Diana e Circe e Medea que fueron las que en sus tiempos e aun después mayor prez ovieron de saber las cosas e obrar d'ellas por el arte mágica entre todos los gentiles a quien ellos llamavan dioses e deesas entre los otros sus sabios.” *GE2* II, 627.

characters in the indexes of his works. This is not surprising, as Gutas points out that “high Greek literature was not translated into Arabic” (194). Therefore, it is unlikely that Māshā’ allāh or any other Arabic source would have included references to figures such as Diana, Medea, and Circe. However, *Mesealla*/Māshā’ allāh is the most frequently cited authority on these characters in the treatise, and these three ladies are associated with three categories of magic related to Arabic traditions: talismans or stones (*imagenes o piedras*), confections or herbs (*confaciones o hierbas*), and sorting lots or words (*suertes o palabras*), respectively (*GE2* II, 633). Therefore, it can be argued that Alfonso developed his own treatise on magic and his own classification of the magical sciences by drawing on various traditions and citing respected authorities to support his claims. I have delved into the complex issues related to the Arabic authorities and the kinds of magic in the treatise in other works (Udaondo Alegre, “*Translatio Magiae*” and “Enchanted Origins”). Here I will focus on the three ladies and the traditions that inspired Alfonso’s elaborations on his Ovidian models.

The *GE* contains long passages with translations and interpretations of the *Metamorphoses* and various classical works by Ovid and other authors. In the treatise on magic within the *GE*, Alfonso references characters and “wisdom” from some of those earlier Ovidian passages translated and included in the *GE*. As Martínez explains (382), Alfonso regarded the translation of Roman classics such as Ovid as a means rather than an end; unlike Italian humanists, who tried to recreate classical culture, his aim was to create a new and all-encompassing vernacular culture incorporating components from many different traditions and languages, all of which would be properly translated into Castilian. The mythological stories of the gentiles, and the wisdom enclosed in them, could be interpreted and integrated with Arabic science to educate the *GE*’s readers on history and all topics that Alfonso considered important, including magic.<sup>9</sup>

Based on these translations and interpretations, we can ascertain that Alfonso explores the concept of magic in a unique way, combining euhemeristic and allegorical interpretations of Greco-Roman classics with Arabic sources. In line with Christian medieval interpreters, he believes that works like Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* actually narrate the deeds of historical figures who, due to their importance, were considered gods, while also carrying hidden meanings that can be revealed through allegory.<sup>10</sup> Alfonso views Arabic magic as essential for explaining many of the supernatural actions of Ovidian characters, which is why they were considered gods or semi-gods (Udaondo Alegre, *The Spanish Hermes*, 93-130; Ekman, “Ovid Historicized” 24–25).

We also find elaborations related to magic in an earlier short passage in *GE2*, which I reference here because in many aspects, it serves as a precursor to our treatise and clarifies Alfonsine conceptions of magic. The passage discusses the lineage of

<sup>9</sup> On Alfonso’s educational goals for his kingdom, see Martínez (184-192).

<sup>10</sup> On the versions of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in the *GE*, see for instance Salvo García (“El mito y la escritura”) and on their allegorical interpretations see Cuesta Torre; these two scholars have written numerous insightful works on these subjects.

the rulers of Troy, tracing it back to Jupiter. Jupiter is described as a lustful king and a powerful mage, capable of transforming his appearance at will through his charms and wisdom (*GE2* I, 116–17). The passage affirms that “all those kings and the other men, and queens and the other women, whom the gentiles called gods, had this magical knowledge, for there were many great sages among the gentiles at that time.”<sup>11</sup> I want to emphasize how the *GE* equates the magical wisdom of men and women, of kings and queens, as this is relevant to the treatise. Of course, Alfonso also wants to clarify the specific knowledge that makes a person a mage. Thus, he affirms that Jupiter “was a mage, and a mage is one who knows the magical art, and magical science is that knowledge through which those who know it act [on things] through [the influence of] the movement of the celestial bodies on the terrestrial things and all those inside the circle of the Moon.”<sup>12</sup> Here Alfonso provides a terse and precise explanation of how Arabic theories of astral influences, developed by authorities such as Abū Ma’shar (787–886) and al-Kindī (801–73), worked within the magic presented in the *Picatrix* and other works that he translated or compiled, which teach the apprentice how to channel the power of astrological bodies through specific rituals, talismans, and other devices.<sup>13</sup> The excerpt emphasizes that “with this knowledge the magi charm other men.”<sup>14</sup>

These ideas directly relate to our treatise, which also defines magic and elucidates that “according to the writings, magical art means ‘art or knowledge on incantations.’”<sup>15</sup> The Castilian word for incantation (charm) used here, *encantamiento*, derives from the Latin *cantare* (to sing). In Latin, both *cantus* (participle of *cantare*) and *carmen* (song) could be used to refer to a charm, because Romans understood that most charms were songs. Possamai-Pérez and Salvo García suggest that the word Alfonso uses in the *GE*, *encantamiento*, derives from the term *incantationem* found in the medieval Latin glossae to Ovid (49–50). After this explanation, *GE2* provides a specious etymology of magic, according to which the word *magus* in Latin and *mago* in Castilian (Eng. mage or magician) derive from the Greek *mantos*—which means divination. Therefore, in the treatise, a *mago* is someone who makes incantations and divinations, and as an example Alfonso mentions the three magi kings who visited baby Jesus in the Bible.<sup>16</sup> In truth, the term magi originally indicated a priestly caste in ancient Persia (Hegedus 10). As Hegedus points out, the three μάγοι of Matthew

<sup>11</sup> “[. . .] todos aquellos reyes e los otros omnes e las reínas e las otras mugieres a quien los gentiles llamaron dioses, ca de varones e mugieres ovo muy grandes sabios aquella sazón en los gentiles, que todos ouieron este saber mágico [. . .]” *GE2* I, 117.

<sup>12</sup> “[. . .] fue mago, e es mago el qui sabe el arte mágica, e la ciencia mágica es aquel saber con que los quel saben obran por los movimientos de los cuerpos celestiales sobre las cosas terrenales e sobre todas aquellas que son dedentro del cerco de la luna.” *GE2* I, 116.

<sup>13</sup> For a good explanation of these theories, see Saif (“From *Gāyat al-ḥakīm*” 297–98 and 344–45).

<sup>14</sup> “[. . .] encantan con este saber a los otros hombres.” *GE2* I, 116.

<sup>15</sup> “E el arte mágica [. . .] quiere dezir tanto como arte o saber de encantamientos.” *GE2* II, 627.

<sup>16</sup> *GE2* II, 627–28.

2:1–12 offered early Christians “some sort of Scriptural warrant for the validity of astrology” (201). Alfonso seems to be offering similar biblical validation here, because he immediately adds that “those three ladies used this knowledge of magic.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, the art practiced by the three magi is identified with that used by the three mythological ladies, and this offers us another possible clue as to why there were three of them.

The choice of three women as the best illustrations of magic seems to require some justification. As we saw above, Alfonso claims that among gentiles magical knowledge was equally accessible to men and women, but here he recognizes that “many marvel at the evidence that the three ladies went further in the magical art than men” and explains that “since women were always lighter [in their disposition] to belief than men, spirits came in a lighter way to their conjurations and summons.”<sup>18</sup> It is difficult to understand what the wise king means by *ligero* (“lighter”) in this context. In their *Diccionario de la prosa castellana del Rey Alfonso X*, Kasten and Nitti indicate that *ligero* can mean “easy” and “with easiness.” Thus, perhaps this passage implies that women are more closely intertwined with the spiritual world, or more easily influenced and used as vessels. In any case, being “lighter” seems to make women more proficient magi. Even though the treatise is going to focus on these three female characters, Alfonso preserves the *GE*’s consistency by pointing out that “we also find men who performed deeds through their magical knowledge, such as those three Hermeses, King Jupiter, King Solomon, Virgil, Ovid, and others, but they did not achieve as much.”<sup>19</sup> As mentioned earlier, in the *GE* Jupiter is characterized as a great mage. The three Hermeses were referenced not only at the start of this treatise (*GE2* II, 624–25) but also in an earlier passage with distinct Arabic Hermetic influences (*GE2* I, 48–55).<sup>20</sup> This short inventory of male magicians also includes three historical characters who were known as experts in magic according to some medieval traditions: Solomon, Virgil, and Ovid. Solomon is connected to Jewish magic lore, which Alfonso knew through his translation of the *Liber Razielis* (García Avilés); however, when *GE3* renders the biblical history of Solomon—which occurs soon after this treatise—it talks about his legendary wisdom, but not about magic (*GE3* I, 327–59). Alfonso might not want to connect the biblical narrative of Solomon with magic. During the Middle Ages both Virgil and Ovid were considered magicians—due to the magic and wonders Ovid described in the *Metamorphoses*, this comes as no surprise (Rand; Pavia; and Segal).

<sup>17</sup> “E d’este saber de la mágica usaron aquellas tres dueñas.” *GE2* II, 628.

<sup>18</sup> “[. . .] se maravillan algunos cómo podrié ser de alcançar las mujeres más en el saber que los varones [. . .]. E porque las mugeres fueron siempre más ligeras para creer quequier que non los varones, veniénles por ende los espíritus más ligeriamiente a sus conjuraciones e a sus llamamientos que les fazien.” *GE2* II, 628.

<sup>19</sup> “E fallamos otrosí varones que se metieron a los fechos d’este saber, como aquellos tres Hermes, el rey Júpiter, el rey Salamón, e Virgilio, e Ovidio, e otros, mas pero non obraron ende tanto.” *GE2* II, 628.

<sup>20</sup> On the legend of the three Hermeses in the *GE* and its sources see the chapter I dedicate to it in my book (Udaondo Alegre, *The Spanish Hermes* 131–172); see also Fraker (197–205) and Burnett (“Legend of the Three Hermes” 231).

Despite referencing these illustrious male magi, Alfonso still insists that Diana, Circe, and Medea were the most accomplished practitioners of the art that the world had known. To sustain his claim, he dedicates the next chapter to an elaboration “On the lineages of those magi ladies,” which includes discussing specific chapters from the *Metamorphoses* where they are found (*GE2* II, 628–29), and in this way he once more recognizes the authority of Ovid in this treatise. Like many other wise and important characters in the *GE*, Diana, Circe, and Medea are defined as being from noble lineages. Thus, we find out that “Ovid says in the fourteenth chapter of his major book that Circe was the daughter of the Sun.”<sup>21</sup> Immediately, *GE2* provides an euhemeristic clarification that of course the Sun does not conceive daughters, and Ovid is actually referring to the wise philosopher Apollo, who “knew about all knowledges and all the natures governed by the Sun’s power.”<sup>22</sup> This terminology is reminiscent of Arabic astrological magic, where it was essential to know about the nature (*tabi’a*) of things, and where the Sun was one of the seven “planets” that influenced terrestrial matters.<sup>23</sup>

The treatise also closely follows the *Metamorphoses* when he states that “Ovid says in the seventh book of his major book that she [Medea] was daughter of Lord Aeëtes, king of the Island of Colchis.”<sup>24</sup> But Alfonso also uses other sources, as he mentions that “The gentile authors and the book of their generations say that Diana was the daughter of Jupiter and Lady Ceres, whom gentiles called goddess of the earth and the harvest.”<sup>25</sup> The book Alfonso is referring to appears multiple times throughout the *GE* under different names, all variants similar to *Libro de las generaciones de los dioses gentiles* (Book of the generations of the gods of the gentiles). As Saquero and González suggest (98–99), this is probably a manual by an unidentified Latin mythographer entitled *Liber de genealogiis deorum gentilium*, related to Fulgentius (sixth century), the Digby mythographer (twelfth century), and Theodontius (twelfth century?). These authors made use of the three anonymous Vatican Mythographers (Saquero and González 98), widely diffused sources of mythology during the Middle Ages. The first preserved manuscripts of the Vatican Mythographers are from the twelfth century, although it is likely that the first one was written much earlier (Pepin 5–10).

Most of the mythological material in the *GE* comes from the *Metamorphoses*, which lacks a strict chronological structure. Alfonso follows the *Chronicle* of Eusebius/Jerome, which inserted mythological episodes into the biblical chronology. However, as Saquero and González state (99), Alfonso could have also used the *Libro de las*

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<sup>21</sup> “E de Circe dize así el Ovidio en el catorzeno capítulo de su libro mayor que fue hija del Sol.” *GE2* II, 628. Indeed, it appears in *Met.*14.9–10.

<sup>22</sup> “[. . .] que todos los saberes sopo e todas las naturas que por el poder del Sol se gobiernan.” *GE2* II, 628.

<sup>23</sup> On these ideas in the *Picatrix*, see Attrell and Porreca (12-14 and 18).

<sup>24</sup> “Dize Ovidio en el seteno libro de su Libro mayor que fue fija de don Oeta rey de la Isla de Colcos.” *GE2* II, 628. We find this information in *Met.*7.7–10.

<sup>25</sup> “Cuentan los abtores de los gentiles e el libro de las sus generaciones que Diana fue fija del rey Júpiter e de doña Ceres, a quien sus gentiles llamavan deesa de la tierra e de las mieses.” *GE2* II, 628.

*generaciones*—and likely other medieval works—to provide internal organization for the myths and additional data and interpretations he incorporated. This is made clear in the quote from the treatise mentioned above, because in the *Metamorphoses* Diana is not the daughter of Ceres, that role is held by Proserpine. In fact, alternative ancient traditions associated Diana with Proserpine, a Chthonic deity related to the underworld and magic, and this tradition was transmitted through some medieval sources, as we will see later. Since the *Metamorphoses* only provides the noble lineages of Circe and Medea, Alfonso turns to the *Libro de las generaciones* for information on Diana. He also mentions that “we have already talked about Diana earlier, but we have not yet discussed Circe and Medea. We will come back to them in their appropriate places.”<sup>26</sup> Therefore, he emphasizes that significant episodes featuring the three ladies in leading roles are included in the *GE*. Let us turn to examine these episodes to determine the extent to which their narratives influenced the wise king’s selection of Diana, Circe, and Medea as history’s three most exceptional magi.

### Three Ovidian Episodes Featuring Female Magic in the *GE*

Earlier in *GE2*, Alfonso presented a version of the myth of Acteon, a hunter, who appears by the river and takes Diana and her nymphs by surprise while they are naked and bathing.<sup>27</sup> Angered, and separated from her weapons, Diana sprinkles water from the river—accompanied by a curse—on Acteon, who is transformed into a stag and then torn apart by his own dogs.<sup>28</sup> Alfonso explains that, to execute this transformation, Diana “proceeded to use her knowledge of magic” and “turned to the waters as she would have done to the weapons, charmed them, and took them in her hands, and then she hurt and charmed Acteon.”<sup>29</sup> Therefore, Diana is considered knowledgeable in magic, and in line with a widespread interpretation of its effects in the *GE* (i.e., creating an illusion; Udaondo Alegre, *The Spanish Hermes*, 107-108; Ekman, “Ovid Historicized” 26–28), we notice she “made it that whoever saw Acteon would think that he was a stag, and she also clouded his judgement in such a way that he himself thought it.”<sup>30</sup> This is the only relevant passage related to Diana and magic in the *GE*.

Regarding Circe, in *GE3*, we find a section about Ulysses’s return to Ithaca, including references to the hero’s famous encounter with the goddess from the *Odyssey*,

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<sup>26</sup> “E de Diana e de sus fechos avemos ya fablado antes d’esto, mas de Circe e de Medea aún non, e diremos d’ellas adelante en sus lugares.” *GE2* II, 628.

<sup>27</sup> On the ancient traditions of this myth, see Schlam.

<sup>28</sup> *Met.* III.138–252; and *GE2* I, 205–12. On Alfonso’s treatment of this episode, see Ekman (“Acteón”), and on the ancient traditions of this myth, see Schlam.

<sup>29</sup> “[. . .] que obró d’allí adelant Diana del so saber de la mágica [. . .] tornós a las aguas cuemo se tornarié a las armas e encantólas, e tomó dellas con sos manos, e firió a Acteón, e encantó y luego a él mismo.” *GE2* I, 210.

<sup>30</sup> “E fizo que quantas cosas le viesen que todos coidassen que era ciervo; e a él turvió otrossí el sentido de guisa que él mismo lo cuidaba.” *GE2* I, 210.



which Ovid retells in the *Metamorphoses*. Even though Alfonso follows and quotes Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and *Heroides*, the main source for the passage is the French poem *Roman de Troie* by Benoît de Sainte-Maure (ca.1155–70), combined with other medieval sources in Latin.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, Alfonso's Circe clearly shows a medieval influence that we must take into consideration when looking at the interpretation of magic and other components. In this regard, the *Roman de Troie* introduces the figure of Telegonus, son of Ulysses and Circe, not mentioned by Homer or by Ovid (Gómez 33–34), and *GE3* also includes him. The *Roman de Troie* asserts that Telegonus's mother, "Circe [. . .] knew so much/that she transfigured men/and transformed them into many appearances/through the strange art of nigromancy."<sup>32</sup> Alfonso closely follows this source here and greatly elaborates on the reference to magic:

the goddess Circe was so wise in the knowledge of the magic of nigromancy, which is the knowledge of charming and conjuring things related to it, that—like Ovid tells, and about which we have already said something in this history—she knew so much about conjuring and charming that she altered the judgement and eyesight in such a way that, like the story tells, she transfigured men and other things in a manner that made some appear to be lions, others wolves, and others pigs.<sup>33</sup>

These additional details also include a clarification that identifies nigromancy with magic in general, something that also occurs in the *Picatrix*.<sup>34</sup>

We also appreciate the reference to not only Ovid but also to an earlier passage in the *GE*—it is most certainly a reference to our treatise, where Circe is profusely mentioned. This allusion to the treatise not only clarifies the terminology related to charming (*encantar*) and conjuring (*conjurar*) but also clearly articulates the reference to how she transformed the appearances of things as they appear to the eyes, which was already suggested in the *Roman de Troie*. The truly interesting thing about this passage is that it does not look into Circe's other deeds, especially the most dangerous and terrifying ones that intrigued ancient and medieval commentators.<sup>35</sup> Thus, Alfonso does not mention the famous lust and fast paced love affair of Circe and Ulysses

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<sup>31</sup> *GE3* I, 250–82; *Met.*XIV.223–319. On the other sources for Circe in *GE3*, see Gómez (33–34). On the entire cycle of Troy in the *GE*, see Casas Rigall (113–207 and 262–64)

<sup>32</sup> "Circès, icele que tant sot / Que les homes transfigurot / E muõt en mainte semblance / Par estrange art the nigromance." *Roman de Troie* 29.975–78. My translation.

<sup>33</sup> "Y fue aquella deesa Circe dueña tan sabia en el saber de la mágica nigromancia, que son los saberes de encantar y conjurar sobre las cosas que a ello pertenecen, ca, así como cuenta Ovidio y avemos ya dicho en esta historia alguna cosa, ella sabié tano de conjurar y de encantar que trasmudava los entendimientos de los ombres y las vistas de guisa que, así como cuenta la historia, trasfigurava los ombres y a las otras cosas, de guisa que a los unos fazié parecer en semejança de leones, a los otros de lobos, a los otros de puercos." *GE3* I, 270.

<sup>34</sup> For instance, in *Picatrix* I.ii.1. On the medieval concept of nigromancy and the *Picatrix*, see Attrell and Porreca (10–12).

<sup>35</sup> This is also observed by Gómez (36).

or the dreadful episodes with Glaucus and Picus. Instead, it focuses on the conjugal relationship between Circe and Ulysses, which seems to be peaceful, as well as her role as an advisor to their son Telegonus. Alfonso is simply interested in emphasizing that Ulysses, in addition to Telemachus, whom he had with Penelope, “had another son from Circe, who was known to the pagans as the daughter of the Sun because of her wisdom, and he was called Telegonus.”<sup>36</sup> This benevolent and respectful view of Circe can be related to Alfonso’s portrait of Medea.

The most famous passage in the *Metamorphoses* that contains magic—Medea and her encounter with Jason—is chronicled in a lengthy section of *GE2*.<sup>37</sup> At the beginning of the translation of this passage, Alfonso explains that “this princess, Medea, was among the wisest ladies the world had at that time, especially in the arts of magic and the stars.”<sup>38</sup> Therefore, even though Ovid does not mention it when she first appears, the main attribute that Alfonso highlights is Medea’s wisdom, as exemplified in her superiority in the disciplines of magic and astronomy/astrology. Moreover, Ovid immediately emphasizes how Medea “conceived an overpowering passion. Long she fought against it, and when by reason she could not rid her of her madness she cried: [ . . . ] ‘Come, thrust from your maiden breast these flames that you feel, if you can, unhappy girl. Ah, if I could, I should be more myself. But some strange power draws me on against my will. Desire persuades me one way, reason another’” (*Met.*VII.9–11,17–20).<sup>39</sup> In the *GE*’s rendering of this passage, Medea also “liked Jason very much when she saw him because he was tall, handsome, and young” but her feelings were more rational, as she “thought about marrying him,” and “apart from those qualities already mentioned, she found him to be well-reasoned and a man of good understanding, which made her like him very much.”<sup>40</sup> In this way, the internal conflict between desire and reason described by Ovid is elaborated on and interpreted by Alfonso as Medea “having an argument with herself in the way scholars and teachers in the schools have when they make what they call in the language of Castile *disputatio* (*disputar*).”<sup>41</sup> Therefore, far from being an impulsive woman driven by passion, Medea is actually more akin to an educated scholar specializing in magic who, understandably, is attracted to a handsome

<sup>36</sup> “Y el otro hijo ovo de Circe, aquella de que vos avemos dicho que la llamaron sus gentiles fija del Sol por razón de que era muy sabia, y a éste llamaron Telegion.” *GE3* I, 260.

<sup>37</sup> *GE2* II, 144–87. For the sources of the passage of Medea in the *GE* and particularly its allegorical interpretation sections, see Cuesta Torre (190-192). As Salvo García also explains (351-53), the main sources are Ovid’s *Met.*VII.1–424 and *Heroides* VI (Hypsipyle to Jason) and XII (Medea to Jason).

<sup>38</sup> “E esta infante Medea era de las más sabias dueñas que en el mundo avié a aquella sazón, e sobre todo en el saber de la arte mágica e en el de las estrellas.” *GE2* II, 144.

<sup>39</sup> I am using the translations of Ovid’s works from the Loeb Classical Library, with slight modifications.

<sup>40</sup> “[ . . . ] desde lo vio como era él grande e feroso e mancebo pagóse mucho d’él, e pensó en casamiento con él” [ . . . ] “pues que vio en Jasón las noblezas que son dichas e cómo era bien razonado e le sintió por varón de buen entendimiento pagóse mucho d’él.” *GE2* II, 144.

<sup>41</sup> “Se metió ella a aver contienda consigo misma en las razones a la manera que la an los escolares e los maestros en las escuelas en aquello que llaman disputar en el lenguaje de Castilla.” *GE2* II, 144.

man, appreciates his intelligence, and approaches the situation with a rational mind. In fact, the *disputatio* and *lectio* were Scholasticism's innovative ways of teaching, learning, and reasoning that were diffused during Alfonso's time—this mention would be proof of the early arrival of Scholastic teaching methods in the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>42</sup> And he wants Medea associated with them.

*GE2* faithfully renders Medea's displays of magic in the *Metamorphoses*, such as the aid she provides Jason during his battles with monsters to achieve the golden fleece, Aeson's rejuvenation, the killing of Pelias, and the flight on dragons or snakes. As Salvo García has observed (358–59), there is a correspondence between the explanations of how Medea's magic works in this section and the treatise that I am examining, which leads Salvo García to conclude that the treatise had been composed prior to the *GE* and then inserted in a place that Alfonso deemed convenient. Moreover, in one place the treatise mentions that Medea has already appeared in the *GE*, and in another place that she will appear;<sup>43</sup> this contradiction reveals that it was written at a stage when different components of the historical work were still being assembled.

As I mentioned earlier, the treatise assigns one specific category of magic to each of three ladies.<sup>44</sup> The category of herbs/confections (*yerbas/confaciones*) corresponds to Medea. This category is extensively mentioned in this section, confirming that the compilers had the treatise in mind when they composed it. *Yerbas/confaciones* are remarked on, for instance, when Jason asks Medea to rejuvenate his aging father Aeson. As in Ovid, Medea recites a long and famous invocation to Hecate for help with this task. Hecate, as we will see below, was considered the goddess of magic. Alfonso reproduces this invocation, and it is remarkable how he acknowledges Hecate as the “lady of charms” (*señora de los encantamientos*) and interprets her classical epithet, “threefold,” as being related to the three kinds of magic that he later defines in the treatise—something that of course is not found in Ovid (*Met.*VII.179–219; and *GE2* II, 154–560). Thus, Medea affirms that Hecate is powerful “of words, of herbs, and of stones, and [of their respective] conjurations, works, and virtues, due to which in Latin gentiles call her *tri formis*, which in Castilian means three forms, and this means three powers.”<sup>45</sup> As I will explain later, in antiquity, Hecate and her magic were not only related to Medea but also to Circe and Diana.

Furthermore, Alfonso could find evidence in the *Metamorphoses* for attributing the magic of confections or herbs to Medea. Ovid describes how, after her invocation, Medea travels to different regions of the world in a chariot drawn by dragons to collect the herbs she needs for the spell, something also mentioned in *GE2* (*Met.*VII. 220–35;

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<sup>42</sup> On the *disputatio* in medieval universities and philosophy, see Bazán, Wippel, Franssen, and Jacquart.

<sup>43</sup> *GE2* II, 628; and *GE2* II, 634.

<sup>44</sup> See also my article (Udaondo Alegre, “Enchanted Origins”).

<sup>45</sup> “[. . .] deesa doña Ecate, que es poderosa [. . .] de palabras e de yerbas e de piedras e de sus conjuraciones e sus obras e de sus virtudes, donde le llaman los gentiles en su latín *tri formis*, que es tanto en el lenguaje de Castilla como de tres formas, e esto es de tres poderes.” *GE2* II, 154.

and *GE2* II, 156–67). Then Alfonso elaborates on the section where Medea uses these herbs and other components in the spell to rejuvenate Aeson, and Alfonso associates some of the details given by Ovid with Arabic magic; for instance, Medea purifies the altar where she will place Aeson during the ritual with fire, water, and sulfur—three times with each. Alfonso interprets this to mean that the *sulphur* was used to make suffumigations<sup>46</sup>—a procedure commonly mentioned in the *Picatrix*.<sup>47</sup> Finally, *GE2* describes the entire procedure as a *confación*, a Castilian word that corresponds to the Latin *confection*—its etymological origin mentioned profusely as a specific charm in the *Picatrix*:<sup>48</sup> “Once Medea saw that she had cooked these herbs and virtues in her confection (*confación*), [she] approached Aeson and slit his throat; as his blood poured, she took the cauldron with her confectioned (*confacionadas*) herbs from the fire [. . .] and poured them in his mouth and wound.”<sup>49</sup>

Later in the *Metamorphoses* Medea repeats the same procedure for crueler purposes. Pelias, the king of Iolcus, refuses to give Jason the kingdom when he comes back with the golden fleece—as he had promised—so Medea conspires to kill him. The princess meets with the king’s daughters and tells them that she has the power to rejuvenate him. To demonstrate this, Medea mentions that she will transform an old ram into a young lamb with her medicine. Ovid uses the Latin word *medicamine* (healing substance) (*Met.*VII.310), which Alfonso once again translates as *confación*. Medea cuts the ram’s throat and tears it to pieces. Then Ovid specifies that the *venefica* (poison giver, sorceress) submerged the pieces in a boiling cauldron containing powerful potions (*validos sucos*) (*Met.*VII.316–17). As a result, a young lamb emerges. After a few days, Medea boils another cauldron—this time with herbs without powers (*sine viribus herbas*)—puts Pelias and his palace guards to sleep with the power of her magical song and her tongue (*cantus magicaeque potentia linguae*) (*Met.*VII.327 and 330), and finally, accompanied by his daughters, kills Pelias, who is not rejuvenated. When Alfonso presents this episode, he explains that once the cauldron is boiling, Medea “put there her herbs, stirred them, and made her *confación*, then she cut the lamb’s throat [. . .] and put [the lamb] in the cauldron with the *confación* of herbs.”<sup>50</sup> Later in the story Alfonso translates the description of the herbs for Pelias’s charm as having “no strength” and that Medea put Pelias and his guards to sleep “by utilizing magic, and made her charm

<sup>46</sup> “[. . .] e tres vezes con piedra sofre faziéndole con ella sus safumerios.” *GE2* II, 158. *Met.*VII. 261.

<sup>47</sup> Attrell and Porreca have opened an interesting avenue of research by pointing out the psychoactive ingredients in the *Picatrix*’s suffumigations and confections and their potential mind-altering effects, and their conclusions are applicable to the material in this section and the treatise (26–30)

<sup>48</sup> See, for instance, *Picatrix*.III.xi, 1–12. I delve into this variety of magic in Udaondo Alegre, “Enchanted Origins.”

<sup>49</sup> “Medea pues que estas yerbas e estas virtudes vio en su confación que havié guisado llegó a Eson e degollólo e fizo salir toda la sangre vieja, e mientras la sangre salió tomó ella el calderón de sobre el fuego con sus yerbas confacionadas [. . .] e metióle d’ello en la boca e d’ello le echó en la llaga.” *GE2* II, 159–60.

<sup>50</sup> “[. . .] e echó y sus yervas e bolviólas e fizo su confación, e degolló luego el carnero [. . .] e dio con él en la caldera en aquella confación de las yerbas.” *GE2* II, 171.

[. . .] by reciting the words of her charm.”<sup>51</sup> Therefore, when Alfonso translates Ovid he also interprets him, here according to the theories of Arabic magic he had already interpreted and classified in the treatise.

Despite her well-known fame as an impulsive murderous sorceress, quite justified by the atrocities and displays of magic that this section describes, Alfonso strives to present a positive portrayal of Medea. She is initially a learned scholar of magic who rationally decided to help her future husband in his endeavors, but then she is driven to act out of anger due to his wrongdoings. Before Medea kills Pelias, Alfonso inserts the letter from *Heroides* VI by Hypsipyle, the abandoned first wife of Jason, in which she curses Jason and Medea, into the narrative (*GE2* II, 162–70). Alfonso apocryphally states that Medea was aware of this letter, and as a result, she began to distance herself from Jason due to her disappointment. Ashamed, she ultimately decided to move to the palace of her husband’s uncle, whom she eventually kills (*GE2* II, 170). In a similar exculpatory way, Alfonso includes Medea’s letter to Jason from *Heroides* XII that she writes before her most infamous and horrific act, the murder of their sons, and in this way we can at least partially understand the princess’s point of view after Jason abandons her for Creusa. Moreover, as Salvo García points out (361–62), Alfonso quickly summarizes the horrendous acts of Medea, and even omits some of them, such as the assassination of Creusa. Additionally, Alfonso makes up a “happy ending” for Medea: she returns to Colchis and reconciles with her subjects (*GE2* II, 187).

### From Lustful Sorceresses to Wise Magi

Alfonso’s lenient portraits of Circe and Medea are a stark contrast to the disparaging way Ovid characterized them and their use of magic, as many scholars have noted. Magic plays a significant role in the repertoire of narrative devices in the *Metamorphoses*, yet particularly, “it helps depict the irrational and the demonic force of the passions” (Segal 6). Female lust is often associated with magic in the poem, particularly in the cases of Medea and Circe, which contain the most sustained accounts of magic and are closely associated with love (Segal 9–11). In the case of Medea, the shift from helpful to destructive magic “follows the evolution of a young girl from helpful enchantress to murderous witch,” whereas with Circe, “her magic is an extension of her susceptibility to desire, her power over men, and her dangerous sexual jealousy and anger” (Segal 11). In the Scylla and Picus episodes, Circe is “a highly eroticized figure, susceptible to love at first sight” (Segal 22). In a similar way, Boyd points out that in the *Metamorphoses*, Circe is “a voracious lover” and “a vindictive wielder of powerful magic” (115), whereas Pairet highlights “the predatory sexuality of the goddess” (“Shades of Circe” 394).

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<sup>51</sup> “[. . .] yervas que non avién ninguna fuerça [. . .] obró ella entonces de la mágica e fizo su encantamiento [. . .] diciendo Medea sus palabras de sus encantamientos.” *GE2* II, 172.

The challenge that women possessing magical powers poses to masculine authority not only runs throughout ancient Greek and Roman literature (Segal 2) but also extends to the Middle Ages, which offers “a vast repertoire of exempla targeting learned women”; and this fear of female knowledge is encapsulated by Circe’s magic (Pairet, “Shades of Circe” 394), a story “whose misogynistic features the mythographers of late antiquity and medieval commentators had amplified” (Pairet, “Shades of Circe” 401). This portrait of Circe is quite distinct from Alfonso’s version. He portrays her as an accomplished second wife and mother of Ulysses’s son, as well as a very wise woman skilled in magic. When it comes to Medea, Alfonso makes an effort to depict Jason as the cause of her misfortunes and then cruelties.

Furthermore, in the treatise on magic, the learned magic of Medea, Circe, and Diana is depicted as being completely separate from men, and neither Jason nor Acteon are mentioned. Alfonso limits himself to pointing out how Mesealla allegedly says that Circe “transformed things through [sorting] lots and operated very effectively using herbs, milk, and other substances, as we will later narrate in the story of her and Ulysses the Greek.”<sup>52</sup> Therefore, Alfonso’s portrayal of female magic occurs in a universe that is very different from the androcentric world of Ovid. Although Alfonso’s interpretation of these female characters as diligent sages differs from his Ovidian source, it actually echoes alternative ancient versions of them, which can also reveal some of the particularities of the Castilian rendering. The selection of Medea as one of the most powerful magi in history may not seem surprising, given her prominent role in both the *Metamorphoses* and the *GE*. Despite her brief appearance in another section, the inclusion of Circe also appears fitting due to her widespread fame. However, questions arise about the choice of Diana over other figures from the *Metamorphoses* who exhibit more significant displays of magic in the *GE*, such as Juno, (i.e., *GE1* I, 307; *GE2* I, 214, 228, 313, and 326). In order to address Alfonso’s choices, we must consider parallel traditions that also might have influenced him.

Johnston has integrated ancient references to Medea’s diligent pursuit of knowledge into a portrayal of Medea as a dedicated scholar of magic in her recent work, *Gods and Mortals*. Johnston evokes Medea’s “years of studiousness” and how she “had spent her childhood studying the arcane properties of plants and how to put them to use” (*Gods and Mortals* 251 and 253). To support this portrait, Johnston uses sources such as Diodorus Siculus (first century CE), in whom traces of the close ancient relationship between Medea, Circe, and Diana can also be found. Diodorus even provides an alternative lineage that further connects the three women. According to him, King Helios (a euhemerized Sun) had two sons, Aeëtes, king of Colchis, and Perses, king of Tauric Chersonese. Diodorus says that strangers who visited Tauric were sacrificed to Artemis—that is, Diana—and that Perses had a daughter called

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<sup>52</sup> “[. . .] mudaba ella las cosas por fechos de suertes, e obrava como lo adelante contaremos en las razones d’ella e de Hulixes de Grecia.” *GE2* II, 629

Hecate, who founded a temple for the goddess and, like her, was “fond of hunting” (*Library* IV.45).<sup>53</sup>

Hecate, who was “ingenious in the mixing of deadly poisons” and discovered aconite, among other drugs, married her uncle Aeëtes and bore two daughters, Circe and Medea. Moreover, Circe and Medea inherited their scientific curiosity from their mother Hecate/Diana. Circe devoted herself “to the devising of all kinds of drugs and discovered roots of all manner of natures and potencies such as are difficult to credit, yet, notwithstanding that she was taught by her mother Hecate about not a few drugs, she discovered by her own study a far greater number” (*Library* IV.45). In a similar way, Diodorus affirms that “from her mother and sister she [Medea] learned all the powers which drugs possess” (*Library* IV.45). I want to highlight the two Greek words related to magic, “natures” (φύσεις) and “potencies” (δυνάμεις) used by Diodorus here; the Abbasid Arabic translators would elaborate on these terms in their Hellenistic sources, and they would be rendered in posterior treatises of magic as *ṭabi’a* and *qumwa*.<sup>54</sup> “The *GE* renders in Castilian those concepts from Arabic magic as *natura* and *potencia* (Udaondo Alegre, *The Spanish Hermes* 101-102).”

### **Diana/Hecate: The Threefold Moon Goddess of Magic**

The connection that Diodorus makes between Diana, Circe, and Medea provides us with insight into why Alfonso chose them. This bond has deep ancestral roots, harkening back to the ancient symbolism of the Moon and its phases that were associated with three female deities, Diana being the most important of them. As Pairet explains, in the preclassic period Diana was worshipped as a triple goddess (Diana *triformis*), in a triad that associated her with the Moon and death’s world, represented by Selene/Moon and Hecate (who would later be known as *triformis* as well, as we saw in Ovid). In this way, the three goddesses represent the phases of the Moon and the stages of life: Diana/Artemis (crescent Moon) was the growth, Selene (full Moon), maturity, and Hecate (new Moon), death (Pairet, “Dame des trois formes” 429–30). According to Green, “these were neither different goddesses nor an amalgamation of different goddesses. They were Diana [. . .] Diana as huntress, Diana as the moon, Diana of the underworld” (134–35). This is why Virgil invokes Diana in this way “Hecate, treble-formed, the three faces of Diana the virgin” (*ter geminamque Hecaten, tria virginis ora Dianae*) at Dido’s funeral pyre (*Aeneid* IV.511; cited in Green 133). Thus, Hecate or Proserpina (the Latin form of Persephone) “are used as names for Diana in the underworld” (Green 134–35). And here we have a very important clue, because, as I explained above, Alfonso says that Diana is the daughter of Ceres (*GE2* II, 628), which means that he is identifying her with Proserpina and also, as I will develop below, with Hecate.

<sup>53</sup> In Ovid, Perses is father of Hecate as well, whom he calls *Hecates Perseidos* (*Met.* VII.74), but Circe, like Aeëtes, has Helios/Sun as father, which makes her the aunt of Medea.

<sup>54</sup> See, for instance *Ghāyat al-Hakīm* II.6, 86 (the *Picatrix*’s Arabic original). On Arabic theories of magic with Greek roots, see Saif, *Arabic Influences* 27–45.

Starting in the fifth century BCE, the underworld deity Hecate became increasingly associated with the magical arts. During the Hellenistic period, many texts referred to her as “the terrible Hecate” in magical incantations and sacrificial rituals (Martin, *Sorcières et magiciennes* 76–77). This magical dimension of Hecate is still remembered in her role in the rituals described in the *Chaldean Oracles* in the second century CE (Johnston, *Hecate Soteira* 76–110). This image was passed down to Latin authors, such as Ovid and Virgil. As Pairet explains, these bonds between Hecate and magic are reinforced by her association with Medea and Circe (“Dame de trois formes” 433). This is why Ovid has Medea invoke Hecate twice; the second time in a ritual that calls her “triple” and involves the crescent Moon, which is associated with Diana (*Met.*VII.74 and 179–95). Significantly, later in the *Metamorphoses*, Circe invokes Hecate twice as well (*Met.*XIV.42–44 and 405). Therefore, the ancient triad of goddesses associated with the Moon might have been implicitly substituted by another one: Diana/Hecate, Circe, and Medea, which finds echoes in Diodorus and Ovid and is closely related to magic. The question is, through which channels could this triad have influenced Alfonso’s choice of three lady magi and to what extent was he aware of the identification of Diana/Hecate?

We can find a trace in the Vatican Mythographers, who, as I said earlier, were extremely influential during the Middle Ages and were specifically related to a source Alfonso used in this treatise, the *Libro de las generaciones de los dioses gentiles*. In a section *On Proserpina, or Diana*, the First Vatican Mythographer greatly elaborates on everything I have just explained.

They say that Proserpina, the daughter of Ceres, is Pluto’s bride [. . .] The same goddess is named Diana, (duana, as it were), since the moon (luna) appears both in the day and at night [. . .] The same goddess is Trivia, because she is observed in three forms. On her Virgil says, ‘the three faces of maiden Diana,’ since the same goddess is called Luna, Diana, and Proserpina [. . .] In Greek, she is named Hecate. (Pepin 54)

Similarly, the Second Mythographer explains: “They say that Diana, namely Luna [. . .] is called Trivia because she is thought of in three forms. Thus Virgil writes ‘the three faces of virgin Diana,’ because the same goddess is called Luna, Diana, and Proserpina [. . .] Men say that this same Luna is Proserpina among the dead” (Pepin 114–15). Here we have clear evidence as to why Alfonso could refer to Diana as the “daughter of Ceres” in the treatise, and also a clue about her identification with Hecate, the goddess of magic. However, there is a clearer indication that Alfonso was assimilating Diana with Hecate in the treatise.

As I mentioned above, in the section on Medea in *GE2* Alfonso was following the narrative in the *Metamorphoses* but decided to insert Medea’s letter to Jason from the *Heroides* XII in which the princess justifies her crimes. In this letter, Medea also mentions the magical rituals that she performed for the benefit of Jason. Medea explains how she came to a dark grove, and “There is in it—there was, at least—a shrine to Diana, wherein



stands the goddess, a golden image fashioned by barbaric hand” (*Heroides* XII, 68–70). And Ovid mentioned in the *Metamorphoses* (VII.74) that “Medea then made her way to the ancient altars of Hecate, daughter of Perses.” When the *Heroides* reproduces the invocation of Medea, she says “I pray, by thy line, and by the godhead of thy all-seeing grandsire the sun, by the three-fold face and holy mysteries of Diana” (*Heroides* XII, 68–70). Since Ovid knew that Hecate was the granddaughter of the Sun, her identification with Diana here is absolute: he equally refers to the altars of Hecate in the *Metamorphoses* and Diana in the *Heroides*. Alfonso closely translates how Medea prays to Diana in the *Heroides* “by the lineage of your grandfather the Sun, who sees everything, and by the three faces of Diana, and for the sanctuaries of her secrets.”<sup>55</sup> Since Alfonso is translating the two works of Ovid, it is natural to assume that he took on the same identification. Moreover, the second invocation to Hecate in the *Metamorphoses* frequently mentions the Moon (VII.179–81, 193, 207–8), which reinforces the connection to Diana. Alfonso faithfully renders this section (*GE2* II, 154–55).

At the end of her letter in the *Heroides*, Medea complains that she has lost her family, her vassals, her country, and even her magical powers: “My very incantations, herbs, and arts abandon me; naught does my goddess aid me, naught the sacrifice I make to potent Hecate” (*Heroides* XII, 167–69). Alfonso translates this as: “My incantations, herbs, and arts abandoned me, and the sacrifices to the powerful goddess Diana do not assist me at all with all these things.”<sup>56</sup> Therefore in Alfonso’s very literal rendering of this passage, he translates Hecate as Diana. This is because, for him, as for Ovid, and most likely for some medieval sources used by the *GE*, the two were seen as the same goddess who, since Hellenistic times, presided over sorcery and was closely related to Medea and Circe. It is also revealing that in the translation of the first of Medea’s invocations to Hecate—from the *Metamorphoses*—Alfonso interprets it as saying that she was called *tri formis* because of the three kind of charms (words, herbs, and talismans), which he later describes in the treatise as being associated with Circe, Medea, and Diana. This makes Diana/Hecate the most significant classical figure associated with magic, and it becomes perfectly understandable why she is included in Alfonso’s triad.

## Conclusion

At the end of the treatise Alfonso once more insists that, in addition to Diana, Circe, and Medea, there have existed many other philosophers and wise male and female practitioners of the magical art. Among the men, he now lists King Jupiter, Apollo, Mercury, Asclepius, King Solomon, Virgil, and Ovid, and among the women Queen Juno, Pallas, Ceres, Latona, and Erichtho (*Erato*) (*GE2* II, 635)—the witch who

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<sup>55</sup> “Por el linage de tu abuelo el Sol, que vee todas las cosas, e por las tres caras de Diana, e por los santuarios de las poridades de ella.” *GE2* II, 182.

<sup>56</sup> “Desamparáronme los mios encantamientos e las yerbas e las artes, en non me fazen ya nada los sacrificios de la poderosa deesa Diana de todas estas cosas.” *GE2* II, 185.

appears in book VI of Lucan's *Farsalia*, which Alfonso includes later in the *GE* (on the version of *Farsalia* in the *GE*, see especially Almeida). But Alfonso ends this chapter—the last of those I am discussing here—by mentioning King Saul's "pythoness" (the Witch of Endor); this reference reminds readers that another sorceress was in fact the reason why this treatise of magic is included in this exact place in *GE2*. Moreover, the next chapter is "On what Master Petrus, Augustine, Jerome, and others say about Samuel's resurrection,"<sup>57</sup> and in it he only cites Christian authorities' explanations of the necromantic episodes.

Since the Bible acknowledges the existence of magic in this section, Alfonso decides to insert a treatise on this art here. There were opportunities to place it earlier in the *GE*; for instance, when the pagan gods display magical powers in Ovidian episodes. In fact, Alfonso included brief explanations on how magic works before the appearance of this treatise. However, Alfonso decided that the eleven chapters of the treatise's body fit better within the biblical episode and, more precisely, between two additional chapters where Christian authorities comment on divination and magic. These precautions were completely justified, because in 1279—while the *GE* was still being written—bishops and prelates in Castile sent a private memorandum to the pope in which they complained, among other things, about Alfonso's wrong doings—including divination—and departures from Christian doctrine. The bishops were backed by the rebellious son of Alfonso, the future king, Sancho IV the Brave (see Linehan 147).

Cautiously arranged in this way, the intellectual explanations in the eleven central chapters refer to authorities related to Arabic magic and the Hermetic traditions, such as Hermes, Toz, and Mesealla. According to the treatise, they affirmed that three Greco-Roman mythological women, Diana, Medea, and Circe, represented magic and its different kinds better than any other practitioners in history—including those luminaries in the lists that open and close the treatise. However, Greek writings on mythology had not been translated into Arabic, making it difficult to believe Alfonso's justification for his sources. The treatise, however, offers a coherent description of Circe, Diana, and Medea according to the episodes in the *Metamorphoses* that are rendered in the *GE* and expresses ideas about how magic works that are consistent with the Arabic translations and original treatises produced in Alfonso's *scriptorium*.

Circe, Diana, and Medea in particular are presented as exemplary princesses who come from select lineages and practiced the magic that they diligently learned, and this made them worthy of a place not only in the books of magic but also in history. Alfonso wants to establish a connection between the three ladies in the treatise and the episodes from the *Metamorphoses* that he translated as genuine historical facts in other sections of the *GE*. Thus, we can draw on the story of Medea and Jason for examples of the "practical" application of the kind of magic described in the treatise. Alfonso usually interprets supernatural powers in the *Metamorphoses* according to Arabic categories,

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<sup>57</sup> "De lo que maestre Pedro e Agostín e Gerónimo e otros dizen del reçitamiento de Samuel." *GE2* II, 636.

and this is even more remarkable in this story. The choice of Medea, therefore, seems fully justified. However, the space allocated for Circe, and especially Diana, in their respective sections of the *GE* is much more limited, even though their magical wisdom is emphasized. However, their choice can also be substantiated.

A close reading of the sections about Medea from the *Metamorphoses* and the *GE* enabled us to uncover the close connection between Diana, Circe, and Medea and three powerful female figures associated with the three phases of the moon in late antiquity. To understand this threefold manifestation, it is also necessary to understand the close identification of Diana with the underworld deity Hecate, who came to be considered the goddess of magic. As we saw, both Ovid and Alfonso give us clues that Diana and Hecate are the same goddess, and in fact, as *tri formis*, she encapsulates the three kinds of magic embodied by the three ladies in the treatise. Moreover, the medieval sources available to Alfonso undoubtedly stated that Diana was Hecate. However, both Ovid and his medieval interpreters presented a misogynistic interpretation of learned sorceresses like Medea and Circe, associating their powers with irrationality and a lust for men. Alfonso completely avoids Ovid's disdainful conception of the three women magi. As we have seen in the translations of their most famous episodes, the *GE* presents a sympathetic portrait of the sorceresses, even admiring their dedication to knowledge. The treatise does not give any importance to their male partners. Alfonso foresees the revisionist and flattering interpretation of female knowledge—of magic in particular—that Christine de Pizan (1364–1431) would make a century later in *The Book of the City of Ladies* (Pairet, “Shades of Circe” 394). In my opinion, just as important historical male characters are presented as examples for his (male) subjects throughout the *GE*, these three ladies in the treatise are presented as exemplars for his (female) subjects. According to Alfonso, the gods and goddesses of the gentiles were actually wise men and women who did not rely on each other to develop their standing and talent in ancient times. In this sense, he also offers a model for his female subjects, who could be the equals of those men who collaborated with him in his scientific, astrological, and magical endeavors.<sup>58</sup> The wise king was able not only to elaborate a unique theoretical treatise on magic but also to develop a paradigmatic illustration of ambitious intellectual goals by uniquely receiving and jointly interpreting classical, Christian, and Arabic sources.

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<sup>58</sup> For a reconstruction of this ideal of learned subjects in Alfonso, see Montero.

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