

Translation – Isidore of Seville’s Etymologiarum

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Concerning Mages. Of the first mage Zoroastres, the king of the Bactrians, who Ninus, the king of the Assyrians, destroyed by battle: of which Aristotle writes twenty times a hundred thousand verses by himself which were revealed at the discovery of his books. Democritus advanced this art after many generations, when Hippocrates and the discipline of medicine flourished. Among the Assyrians, however, the magical are copious as attested by Lucan (6, 427):

Who is able to come to know deeds by a fiber, who reveals
the birds, who protects the flashing lightning of the heavens, and the Assyrians
search the constellations for trouble (*with care/diligence*)?

Therefore, this emptiness of the magical arts is strong from the tradition of the evil angels in all of the earth by a circular path through many ages. Through a certain knowledge of futures and of the nether worlds and of his summonings are being discovered divinations, augurations, and that which is being uttered an oracle and by necromancy. Nor the marvelous things of magical illusions, of which towards such the arts came forth of the wicked in order that they might even resist Moses by similar signs, transformed rods into serpents, the waters into blood. It is said and a certain famous sorceress Circe, who changed the companions of Ulysses into beasts. It is read and from the sacrifice which the Arcadians were sacrificing by Lycaeus to his own god, from which everyone who was undertaking to transform into the forms of beasts. Hence, he appears to be entirely doubtful, which that noted poet writes about a certain woman, who was excelling in the magical arts.

‘This woman,’ he says, ‘themselves promise to unbind the thoughts with songs, which may be willing, but mind you harden to cast cares on others; to cause to stand the water of a river; to turn constellations backward; drives ghosts and nocturnals; to bellow you will see the earth under the feet, and to descend the wild mountain-ashes of the mountains.’