

Dear Readers,

This is a very rough draft of the second chapter in my dissertation, “Representations of Power: Alfonso X, the *Book of Games*, and the Islamic Tradition.” My project provides a close study of the *Libro de los juegos*, or *The Book of Games*, an illuminated manuscript commissioned by Alfonso X of Castile-León (r. 1252-84) in conjunction with Islamic texts and manuscripts from Iberia, North Africa, and the Near East. This chapter supports the overarching desire of my dissertation, which is to show that the entire world of the *Libro de los juegos*, from the history it connects to via India, the games, and the people and nature that enliven its illuminations, manifests how one of the most important Christian kings in Europe relied upon often Islamic traditions in his representation of an ideal form of sovereignty and courtly ideals.

Please forgive the rough shape the footnotes are in. Most especially, forgive the fact that I have not yet crafted the appendix, in which I plan to give the original Arabic for the long passages I analyze from the Islamic geographies. For those interested in the original Arabic, please email me prior to or after reading this chapter, and I will quickly send them. That said, I am excited to hear your thoughts about this chapter, and am grateful for your time reading my work!

Thank you,

Alexandra (Ali) Peters

The Wisdom of Kings: India, Games, Race, and the Alfonsine Definition of Intellectualism

O España, si tomas los dones que te da la sabiduría del rey, resplandece[r]ás otrosí en fama et fermosura crece[r]ás.

*O Spain, if you take the gifts that the wisdom of the king gives you, you will shine forth, and you will grow in fame and beauty.*¹

The *Libro de los juegos* embeds the tale of games, their invention, and their meanings within a history of wise kingship, one where the brilliance of the Indian monarch in its prologue is only outshone by the intellect of king Alfonso himself. The Castilian ruler appreciated the power of writing history, and across his reign he pursued different historical projects in order to promulgate a vision of the world that centered wise kingship; specifically, *his* definition of “wise.”² His manuscript program is the physical embodiment of this distinctive wisdom, studiously curated and crafted across his life, and representing perhaps only a fraction of the vast expanse of knowledge he considered necessary to rule well: “Not only did the wise men of the ancients deem it proper that a king should know how to read, but also that he should study all of the sciences [*saberes*] in order to be able to profit by them.”³

One could study the Castilian king as a scholar (and teacher) in myriad ways, and, indeed, many have. Alfonso as a master of the law, the stars, and even poetry have all garnered attention

¹ Alfonso X. *Primera crónica general de España*, vol. 1. Ed. Ramón Menéndez Pidal. Madrid: Bailly-Baillière é hijos, 1906. Lines 31-2. Translated in Joseph F. O’Callaghan, *The Learned King: The Reign of Alfonso X of Castile*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993. Here, 270.

² Marta Haro Cortés articulates this sentiment well when describing Alfonso’s historical projects: “La producción libraria de Alfonso X testimonia... la instrumentalización de la sabiduría y del conocimiento para escribir su propia historia y con ella enarbolar la idea sapiencial de la realeza alfonsí con un claro fin propagandista de cara a la consecución de sus aspiraciones políticas.” From “Semblanza iconográfica de la realeza sapiencial de Alfonso X: las miniaturas liminares de los códices regios,” *Revista de poética medieval*, n. 30 (2016): 131-153, here, 131. Earlier in the bibliography, Laura Fernández Fernández similarly stated, “Alfonso X fue el monarca que mejor encarnó el uso y disposición de la escritura como una herramienta de ejercicio de su poder.” “Transmisión del Saber - Transmisión del Poder,” 187. See also Eliza Ruiz García, “*Rex scribens*: discursos de la conflictividad en Castilla (1230-1350),” in J.M. Nieto Soria, ed., *La monarquía como conflicto en la Corona castellano-leonesa (c. 1230-1504)*, pp. 359-422. Madrid: Sílex, 2006.

³ *Segunda partida*, Tit. 5, law XVI (294).

by modern scholars.⁴ As a historian, the Alfonsine expertise in writing the past in a way that buttressed the king's political, cultural, and philosophical aims is similarly well-known. One narrative thread that Alfonso and his collaborators developed in the historical projects was the history of man's intellect—his wisdom or *sapiencia*—and they ambitiously sought to write this history for the entirety of the known world. The *General estoria* reveals their preoccupation with wisdom, its origins, and its applications, particularly how definitions of wise kingship could accentuate the intellectual feats of Alfonso. In its pages, the terms *saber* and *sapiencia* appear 200 and 109 times, respectively, often in order to characterize the intellectualism of the great leaders in history.⁵ Included intellects are those of men like Moses and Alexander the Great, and still others with whom Alfonso compared himself. There was one kingdom, however, that was synonymous with wisdom, and, as such, did immense work for the Alfonsine representation of wise kingship: the kingdom of India. The kings of India cultivated knowledge in a manner akin to Alfonso's own aspirations. Appearing in Alfonsine manuscripts like the *General estoria* and the *Libro de los juegos*, Indian rulers are perhaps one of the more significant models of wise kingship that the *scriptorium* turned to across Alfonso's life. However, the role Indian kingship plays in Alfonso's

⁴ Scholarship on the Alfonsine iteration of "wise kingship" abounds and embraces disparate disciplines, which makes sense given his nickname "The Wise." For example, many have written about it in relation to his *fecho de imperio*, or his scientific works, or his histories like the *Estoria de Espanna* and the *General estoria*. See Robert I. Burns, *Emperor of Culture. Alfonso X the Learned of Castile and his Thirteenth-Century Renaissance*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990, especially pp. 1-13; Laura Fernández Fernández, "Transmisión del Saber - Transmisión del Poder. La imagen de Alfonso X en la Estoria de España, Ms. Y-I-2, RBME. Análisis y nuevas reflexiones sobre su significado," *Anales de historia del arte*, vol. 20, no. 1 (2010): 187-210; Daniel Gregorio, "Alfonso X de Castilla, o la sabiduría como herramienta de poder," *De Arte*, 7 (2008): 61-76; Manuel Alejandro Rodríguez de la Peña, "*Rex excelsus qui scientiam diligit*: la dimensión sapiencial de la Realeza alfonsí," *Alcanate: Revista de estudios Alfonsíes*, no. 9 (2014-2015): 107-136... [cite more??](#)

⁵ As well as to teach people about the bad leaders, men who were undoubtedly not among the many wise rulers the *General estoria* celebrates. Alfonso X. *General estoria: primera parte*, vol. 1, XXXX. Regarding the prevalence of words pertaining to wisdom, see Margherita Morreale, "Consideraciones acerca de saber, sapiencia, sabencia, sabiduría en la elaboración automática y en el estudio histórico del castellano medieval," *Revista De Filología Española*, no. 60, vol. 1/4 (1980): 1-22, here, 17.

definition of sapiential kingship—indeed, of wisdom itself—has remained remarkably understudied in a field that has long admired the intellectual production of his court.

Both the *General estoria* and the *Libro de los juegos* developed the entwined histories of the wise courts of Alfonso X and the legendary king of “India la mayor.”⁶ Both of these texts do so by constructing a vision of royal Indian intellectualism, one that, for both texts, can be eloquently represented by the kings’ inventions of games. To write these texts, the Alfonsine collaborators did not need to look far for literary inspiration. Muslim, Christian, and Jewish scholars were also contemplating the purportedly legendary courts and rulers of India, often looking to each other for more information, or drawing upon authors from classical antiquity. Despite all of this attention India garnered in the Mediterranean, it was nevertheless a world that existed in the medieval imagination more than in its reality.⁷ India, as such, featured in many medieval sources in Europe, Africa, and the Near East, but the details about its kings and its courts were hardly consistent (or accurate) across authors and traditions. This malleability presented an opportunity for Alfonso to write about Indian intellectualism in a way that propagandized his own beliefs regarding the world history of intellectualism and wise kingship.

It is the goal of this chapter to investigate how and why the legend of an Indian ruler had such efficacy in the Alfonsine project. The *scriptorium*’s vision of India was instrumental to Alfonso’s definition of cosmopolitan intellectualism, with him as a model wise king within a world that stretched far and wide. India’s intellectual production and how Alfonso characterized it also paralleled and therefore legitimized the decades of scholarly production his court had sponsored,

⁶ Alfonso X, *Libro de los juegos*, 18.

⁷ India was a region that straddled the knowable and unknowable; it was close enough that travelers from Europe had been there, but far enough away that marvels both incredible and fearsome abounded. As one scholar stated regarding Alexander’s time in India in the *Roman d’Alexandre*, it “oscillated between dream and nightmare.” Laurence Harf-Lancner, “Medieval French Alexander Romances,” in David Zuwiyya, ed., *A Companion to Alexander Literature in the Middle Ages*, 201-230. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2011. Here, 220, paraphrasing the work of Jacques Le Goff on the same subject.

which was a project not without detractors.⁸ Furthermore, this chapter will illuminate some of the ways in which the rich histories of Indian kings and games from the Islamic tradition were interpreted and reimagined in the *Libro de los juegos* and in the *General estoria*. Indeed, to follow the comparison of Alfonso with the Indian king is to appreciate still more frontiers of exchange between the court of Castile-León and the Near East. Indian kingship centered the intellect in the Islamic sources, and the feats of wise Indian kings were epic: they invented entire fields of knowledge, they were respected and celebrated in traditions spanning different religions, geographies, and chronologies, and their intellect was so prodigious it uncoded the marvelous mysteries of heaven and earth. Alfonso X, by drawing similarities between his kingship and that of India, discovered a way to describe his intellect in such grandiose terms. At the same time, both the Islamic tradition and the Castilian manuscripts reveal how they limited access to such intellectual prestige; all cultures and, furthermore, all races were not seen as equally capable of knowledge creation, and the case of India and its wise kings uncovers some of the ways Muslim and Christian writers restricted the history of man's intellect to but a few.

A fitting place to begin is the prologue to the *Libro de los juegos*, for it can tell us where Alfonso imagines his place to be among the legendary kings of old. The prologue first establishes the relationship between games and God, *alegría* and man, but then it quickly turns to the provenance of games themselves.⁹ When giving the historical account of their inventions in India, Alfonso asserts himself as a trustworthy and critical reader. He transmits the “most certain and

⁸ While not within the purview of the present study, it is still important to remember that both during Alfonso's reign and well after the emphasis he placed on his intellectual projects was criticized. Scholars today have even said that as a king Alfonso “failed,” but that as a scholar he excelled. CITE. He certainly suffered politically, but any thesis that seeks to qualitatively assess his reign suffers at least in part from too narrow a perspective. Then there is the intense scrutiny of Alfonso's astronomical projects, which early on gave rise to the fabricated “blasphemy” the king allegedly said regarding God and creation. CITE. To this day, this quote penned by medieval enemies continues to mischaracterize the Castilian king, as when it appears, in all places, attributed to him in the *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*. See page 11 of the fifth edition (1999), edited by Elizabeth Knowles.

⁹ For the significance of *alegría* within the Alfonsine definition of courtly leisure, see chapter one.

truest” tale of the Indian king and his games even when “about this is said many reasons [for games’ invention], each trying to show why these games were created.”¹⁰

The Alfonso of the prologue does the work of an historian, assessing what he wants us to believe are many, many texts on India and, due to his wisdom, selecting the version that is most true. Another way to read this claim is that Alfonso selected not necessarily the “truest” version, but rather the most convenient one for his political and cultural agenda. Modern scholars have often noted his manipulation of the text, particularly historical works, to project and propagandize a particular set of ideals.¹¹ These scholars often emphasize the claims Alfonso makes in the prologues to the two major historical projects of his reign—the *Estoria de España* and the *General estoria*—to show his keen involvement in the research and writing of his manuscript projects. However, how Alfonso describes the redaction process for the *Libro de los juegos* mirrors the verbiage of these historical manuscripts.¹² For example, in the prologue to his *General estoria*, the king explains how he requested manuscripts from other collections to help plan its text, and how he selected only those manuscripts he knew to be the truest and best: “I, Don Alfonso... after I had made brought together many texts and many histories about ancient events, chose from them the truest and the best that I knew and had this book made.”¹³ The way potential sources were collected

¹⁰ “Pero ante que esto digamos queremos amostrar algunas razones segunt los sabios antiguos dixieron por que fueran falladas estas tres maneras de juegos assí como acedrex e dados e tablas, ca sobr’esto dixieron muchas razones queriendo cada uno mostrar por qué fueran falladas estos juegos, pero aquellas que son más ciertas e más verdaderas son éstas.” 20.

¹¹ “Alfonso X de Castilla ha sido de entre los representantes peninsulares de una Corona quien mejor ha comprendido el valor de la escritura y la necesidad de su utilización para dar a conocer el propio ideario político y ponerlo en práctica.” From Elisa Ruiz García, “*Rex scribens*: discursos de la conflictividad en Castilla (1230-1350),” in *La monarquía como conflicto en la Corona castellano-leonesa (c. 1230-1504)*, ed. José Manuel Nieto Soria, pp. 359-422. Madrid: Sílex, 2006. Here, 361.

¹² I have chosen to use the term “editor” for the purpose of these cases. Here, Alfonso does not state that he is creating the narrative, but rather selecting from many options the best version. However, Alfonso’s role as an *author* has been discussed in the bibliography, specifically due to the following passage from the *GE*: see p. 191 *Transmisión*. I think this should be developed more above line near the section on the *GE*.

¹³ “Yo don Alfonso [...] después que ove fecho ayuntar muchos escritos e muchas estorias de los fechos antiguos escogí d’ellos los más verdaderos e los meiores que ý sope.” Alfonso X, *General estoria: primera parte*, vol. 1. Ed.

for historical projects also characterizes the prologue to the *Estoria de España*: “We, Don Alfonso... ordered brought together as many books about history as we could find in which they could tell something about the deeds of Spain.”¹⁴ The historical manuscripts present Alfonso as an active participant in their redaction, an additional role beyond that of patron.¹⁵ For the *Libro de los juegos* and the legend of India, then, Alfonso similarly claimed authority as editor, one who had read many source texts and learnedly chosen what was the correct version to disseminate to his readers. His is a claim of intellectual mastery over the entire written corpus on India.

The mastery Alfonso has over the different traditions on India and games also reflects his belief that he had a special role within the historical narrative itself. Had it not been for the unnamed Indian king, chess, table games, and dice games would not have been invented and ascribed deeper philosophical meanings.¹⁶ Had it not been for Alfonso, however, this long and noble intellectual lineage would have stagnated—lost in the confusion of multiple, “untrue” iterations—for it is the Castilian ruler who takes the history of games and enhances, promotes, interprets, and advances it. One way Alfonso does this is by ordering the manuscript itself made; another way is through his authority as a wise king who understands and embodies the intellectual traditions the tale of India introduce. Through the object, text, and images of the *Libro de los juegos*, Alfonso communicates his intellectual prowess on the subject of games and India, and he also compares his style of kingship to that of the legendary king of India. Undergirding all of this,

Pedro Sánchez-Prieto. Madrid: Biblioteca Castro, 2009. Here, 7. We also know important details about the precise manuscripts the *scriptorium* consulted for the historical projects. See Fernández, “Transmisión del saber,” 194-5.

¹⁴ “Nos don Alfonso... mandamos ayuntar cuantos libros pudimos haber de historias en que alguna cosa contassen de los hechos de España.” PCG 4, left lines 21-8. Regarding the *Estoria de España*, many excellent studies have been published, but perhaps two of the more significant are the following: Diego Catalán, *La Estoria de España de Alfonso X. Creación y Evolución*. Madrid: 1992, and Inés Fernández-Ordóñez, *Las ‘Estorias’ de Alfonso el Sabio*. Madrid: 1992.

¹⁵ “En sus dos grandes compilaciones históricas el rey se involucró de forma activa en su elaboración, y además de ser el promotor de la obra, *Yo don Alfonso, fiz ende fazer este libro*, tal y como se cita en el prólogo de la *General Estoria*, también actuó como coordinador de la misma.” Fernández, “Transmisión del saber,” 194.

¹⁶ 20.

the *Libro de los juegos* enshrines the process of knowledge creation, which both Alfonso and the India of legend celebrated.



Figure 1: Ms. T-I-6 El Escorial, fol. 1r. Detail, Alfonso dictating to a scribe.



Figure 2: Ms. T-I-6 El Escorial, fol. 2r. Detail, the king of India addresses the wisemen.

The opening illuminations of the *Libro de los juegos* give life to the manuscript's comparison of Castilian and Indian kingship. Seated in his finery at court, the illumination of Alfonso on fol. 1r evokes the image that soon follows of the wise ruler of India. Like Alfonso, the Indian king is attended by three individuals whom we understand are court intellectuals. Alfonso dictates to the scribe closest to him, ordering the manuscript made, and this action situates the king as a repository of knowledge, from whom among many things the story the prologue relates of 'India la mayor' seemingly springs forth.¹⁷ At his bidding,



Figure 3: Ms. T-I-6 El Escorial, fol. 1v. Detail, scribes preparing the manuscript.

Alfonso initiates the creation of the manuscript and its visual and textual worlds, and fol. 1v

¹⁷ Article on *EE* about the closed book and Alfonso *being* the knowledge.

displays the intricate process of scholars and artisans scraping the parchment smooth and applying ink from horn-like inkwells to its prepared surface.¹⁸

In the next illumination on fol. 2r the story of chess begins in earnest. The Indian ruler is depicted in conversation with the three wisemen, two of whom carry gilded books. He is seated behind a red curtain, a recurring prop in the *Libro de los juegos*, meaning that this scene was one that few were privileged to



Figure 4: Ms. T-I-6 El Escorial, fol. 2v. Detail, Indian king receiving the ludic inventions, and picking chess.

witness. Inviting us behind the curtain, the manuscript allows readers to witness this intimate conversation. As Alfonso bids his scribes to create the *Libro de los juegos*, so, too, does the conversation between the Indian king and his wisemen encourage invention. Fol. 2v places the Indian king as the final judge of the ludic creations he commissioned, and with a graceful gesture and directed gaze, he selects chess as well as the wisdom and intellectualism it espouses as the “more noble” pastime.¹⁹ The manuscript then takes us to a different kind of workshop in fol. 3r,



Figure 5: Ms. T-I-6 El Escorial, fol. 3r. Detail, artisans at work creating chess pieces and board.

one in which the most respected metaphor regarding man’s will, intellect, and agency—chess—comes into existence under the skilled craftsmanship of the woodworkers.

The prologue of the *Libro de los juegos* is a

record for both medieval royal patronage and

manuscript production. More than that, though, it is a visual record for the process by which text and object are imbued with deeper meaning. The materiality of the manuscript and the games it

¹⁸ Cite Laura?

¹⁹ Alfonso, *Libro de los juegos*, 20.

represents, their physical creation and genesis, is a tangible experience, far more tangible than the intellectual advances and history of knowledge the objects themselves represent. The manuscript reveals how innovation, symbolism, and historical memory unite the narratives of the Castilian king and the Indian ruler. Within the expansive halls of the illuminated scenes, both monarchs are resplendent in their roles as patrons of culture and learning, and the fruits of their intellects exist in the real world, taking shape out of parchment and ink, wood and lathe. The readers of the manuscript, by observing the process of knowledge creation across vastly different historical contexts in these illuminations, also become part of the process of knowledge creation. They bear witness to Alfonso mastering the same intellectual and royal achievements as the rulers of legend. Indeed, they witness how the *Libro de los juegos* as an object merges the two seemingly distant royal legacies converge into the same intellectual narrative.

Locating India

There is another detail that the prologue provides that almost goes unnoticed. The king whose scholars invent games is not the king of India but rather *India la mayor*, hereafter Greater India. This extra specification hints at a specific geographical understanding of the world, as well as the types of sources that may have contributed to the *scriptorium*'s decision to use such terminology. The "India" described in Alfonsine texts is largely indebted to the myriad discussions about the subcontinent that sought to characterize its geography, culture, religions, and customs. That is, at least, what such discussions imagined India to be; for many in the Mediterranean world, India was still a distant, amorphous region on the outskirts of the known world.²⁰

²⁰ This is a title it shares, in a sense, with Spain, which was seen as the farthest point west. Dante, who will write his *Inferno* a few decades after Alfonso's death, even puts Spain and India to the same use of describing the entirety of the world in terms of east to west: at Christ's suffering, the moon eclipsed the sun, "and left dark the Spaniard and the Indian, with the Jew." Canto XXIX, lines 97-102: "Un dice che la luna si ritorse / ne la passion di Cristo e s'interpuose, / per che 'l lume del sol giù non si porse; / e mente, ché la luce si nascose / da sé: però a li Spani e a

For the West, India was the land of Prester John and Alexander the Great, and its marvels and secrets already had a long literary history prior to the medieval period in classical Greek and Roman texts from the likes of Ptolemy, Strabo, Herodotus, and Apuleius.²¹ The region Alfonso defines as Greater India points toward a geographic terminology that was similarly as ancient. In the *Expositio totius mundi et gentium*, an anonymous and peculiar source from around the fourth century, “India Maior” is the land of silk. Men live well in this giant country—as expansive as “210 days walking” across it—and due to their abundant resources frequently help defend “India Minor” from Persian attacks. Regarding India Minor, which is “150 days walking” in size, the text highlights its elephants and great rulers.²² But where are these two countries, Greater and Lesser India, imagined to be? For the *Expositio*, Lesser India was closer to ancient Persia, and as such was vulnerable to Persian military offensives. This would encompass roughly the northwest area that accounts for parts of India and Pakistan today.²³ Situating Lesser India in this region is more or less consistent across texts after the classical period.²⁴ In general, one can assume that Greater India maps onto modern India, though its frontiers will change in the Early Modern period and

l’Indi / come a’ Giudei tale eclissi rispuose.” Translated H. F. Carey [get updated!]. See also Thomas Hahn, “The Indian Tradition in Western Medieval Intellectual History,” *Viator* 9 (1978): 213-34, here, 223.

²¹ See the classical sources regarding India in John Watson McCrindle, *Ancient India as Described in Classical Literature*. Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1975. For a general medieval survey of the more Christian theological interpretations of India, as well as some discussion of the Western Alexander traditions, see Thomas Hahn, “The Indian Tradition in Western Medieval Intellectual History,” *Viator* 9 (1978): 213-34. It is worth noting here that within the Christian tradition, India was at times associated with the Garden of Eden, a phenomenon well-documented by the existence of Beatus maps that juxtapose the two regions. Thomas Hahn, “The Indian Tradition,” 222.

²² Jean Rougé. *Expositio Totius Mundi Et Gentium*. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1966. Here, 153. Charles Beckingham notes India maior and minor “occur as early as the fourth century.” “The Achievements of Prester John,” in Charles Beckingham and Bernard Hamilton, eds., *Prester John, the Mongols, and the Ten Lost Tribes*, pp. 197-206. Aldershot: Variorum, 1996. Here, 17.

²³ Some studies are far more precise than I am here, bounding the limits of these terms with cities and geographic landmarks. Given how ever-changing the concept of “India” is across the primary sources and even within the scholarship of the nineteenth and twentieth century, I prefer to allow the texts to speak for themselves, and the reader to thus appreciate the malleability this region possessed in peoples’ imagination across intellectual traditions of the premodern eras.

²⁴ Beckingham, “The Achievements,” 15.

come to also include parts of Southeast Asia, China, and the Indonesian and Philippine archipelagos.²⁵

In the Western Middle Ages, Alfonso's Greater India was within a region sometimes with the two parts just defined—Greater and Lesser India—and sometimes with three—Greater, Middle, and Lesser. These were capacious terms that could include territories such as the Horn of Africa, southern China, and Syrian Edessa.²⁶ Travel accounts sometimes define the physical boundaries of the two or three parts of India, as Marco Polo does when he equates Middle India with “Ethiopia” (a geographic term with its own complexities) and provides some details about the western part of the subcontinent, such as the coastal cities, Malabar, and the Maabar province of Greater India.²⁷ The specificity is often lacking in medieval sources, however, as when the *Roman d'Alexandre* quickly establishes, “[translate] En la fin d'orient, de Inde i ad deus paire, / Inde superior e Inde la maire.”²⁸

What each of the two or three parts of India meant often depended upon who was writing, what their motivation for writing was, and when and where they were writing. For example, a description of India's regions prevalent in Europe is best articulated by Gervase of Tilbury (c. 1150-1220). Steeped in Christian symbolism, he correlates the three parts of India to the dispersion of the Apostles: “India Superior, in which Bartholomew preached; India Inferior, in which Thomas preached; and this leads to Media, in which is the city Edessa. And India Meridiana, which borders

²⁵ Richard Flint and Shirley Cushing Flint. *A Most Splendid Company: The Coronado Expedition in Global Perspective*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2019. Here, 21. It is worth reminding readers here that Greater India was Christopher Columbus' goal in his 1492 voyage.

²⁶ Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, 411-12.

²⁷ He also equates southern China with Upper India. See Heng, *The Invention of Race*, 412. Middle I 407. Greater I 381-2.

https://books.google.com/books?id=VovVAAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ViewAPI#v=onepage&q=maabar&f=false

²⁸ Lines 4601-2. Even more vague in the *Libro de Alexandre*. You need to check this.

Ethiopia, in which Matthew the Apostle preached.”²⁹ This characterization of India is not present in the Alfonsine corpus. India is, however, a region that is addressed within biblical narratives; in the *General estoria*, India appears on occasion in the first part, which covers Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, but with less descriptive development compared to later passages in the history that are not related to religious texts.³⁰

As another example, in the early fourteenth-century tale of the knight Zifar, the eponymous hero comes from an India with three parts: “The ancient histories say there are three Indias.”³¹ This *Libro del Caballero Zifar* arose from the Alfonsine tradition, so much so that many of its sources, themes, and stylistic choices parallel it.³² If it is the case that a member of the Alfonsine court wrote it, so that the connection with the Alfonsine corpus was even more entwined, then perhaps this novel illuminates the same geographical perspective the Castilian king held.³³ This is a far from proven hypothesis, but given the shared literary environment of these texts, it sheds light on what version of India Alfonso understood since his work is not clear on whether or not there are two or three parts. Indeed, most often in Alfonsine materials, “India” is the simple term that is

²⁹ G. G. Leibniz, ed. “Otia Imperialia,” in *Scriptores rerum Brunsvicensium*, 3 vols. Hanover: Foerster, 1707-11, here, vol. I, 911. My translation: “India superior, in qua praedicavit Bartholomaeus; inferior, in qua praedicavit Thomas; & haec ducit ad Medos, in qua civitas est Edessa. Est & India meridiana, quae tangit Aethiopiam, in qua praedicavit Matthaeus apostolus.” Quoted in Harney, “The Geography I,” 209. For more on the medieval history of the Apostles in India, see Bernard Hamilton, “Continental Drift: Prester John’s Progress through the Indies,” in *Medieval Ethnographies: European Perceptions of the World Beyond*, edited by Joan-Pau Rubiés, pp. 121-154. Farnham, Surrey, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009. In particular, p. 123.

³⁰ Some instances in which India appears within biblical narratives in the first part of the *General estoria* are the following: pp. 84, 293, and 560 in Alfonso X. *General estoria: primera parte*, vol. 1. Madrid: Biblioteca Castro, 2001-9. Note that these are merely passing mentions of India, and that little to no concern for its geography, culture, peoples, etc., appears.

³¹ “E dizen las estorias antiguas que tres Yndias son.” *Libro del Caballero Zifar*, 6th ed. Edited by Cristina González. Madrid: Ediciones Catedra, 2013 (1983 1st ed.). Here, 95. Also see both of Harney’s articles, “The Geography,” on the *Caballero Zifar* and its description of India.

³² See the introduction by Cristina González for the *Libro del Caballero Zifar*, pp. 13-56.

³³ In his article, Francisco Javier Martínez defended with compelling evidence the claim that the Ferrán Martínez often named as its author is the same Ferrán Martínez who was a scribe and *sellador* to both Alfonso X and Sancho IV. “Ferrán Martínez, *escribano del rey*, canónigo de Toledo, y autor del *Libro del Caballero Zifar*” *Revista de Archivos, Bibliotecas y Museos* 81, no. 2 (1978): 289-325. Cf. Charles Wagner, “The Sources of *El Cavallero Cifar*,” *Revue Hispanique* 10, no. 33-4 (1903): 5-104.

used, and it covers a vast territory. The *scriptorium* was aware of the fact that India was enormous and politically complex, with multiple powerful monarchies ruling simultaneously over its different regions: “Cin,”³⁴ “Alfetán,” “Alquicinim,” “Almenaquir,” “Quimar,” etc.³⁵

The kingdoms in this list from Alfonso’s *General estoria* retain the definite article from Arabic because they come from the Islamic tradition. Al-Mas’ūdī (d. 956) and other geographers talk about the many Indian monarchies that carved out their power within the large territory, and the names are quite similar despite some transliteration errors in the Castilian.³⁶ As with the Christian and classical corpus, there would have been no lack of Islamic sources on India in the thirteenth century.³⁷ Since the eighth century and particularly in the twelfth century onwards, Islamic powers waged military campaigns in modern Pakistan and the greater subcontinent, carving inroads both political and cultural into the region. Post-conquest writers also note that trade between India and Arabs thrived during the *Jāhiliyyah* period.³⁸ The inheritance of Greek texts would have also facilitated the Islamic understanding and imagination of the subcontinent. In general, the entwined narratives of the Islamic and Indian intellectual traditions consistently featured in Islamic literature from Persia to al-Andalus. As the Alfonsine corpus will show, it is from the Islamic world rather than the Christian that most of its information on India comes.

Alfonso and the Islamic Geographies: Crafting a Model of Kingly Wisdom Through Indian Examples

³⁴ “Cin” in this case comes from the Arabic term for China, which was a geographical term little understood in the Christian West. In the works of Alfonso, it appears that the disambiguation of “China” from “India” was not as fully realized as it was in Islamic texts, thus its inclusion in the list of “kingdoms” of India.

³⁵ Alfonso X, *General estoria: Tercera parte*, vol. 1, 526-7.

³⁶ For the descriptions of these territories in the Arabic, see [bilingual ed.] pp. 162.

³⁷ Cite editions of al-Biruni, al-Bakri, Idrisi, al-Mas’ūdī, al-Sirāfi. And these were only some of the travelers and geographers from the thirteenth century or earlier; Ibn Battutah, Ibn Khaldun, and many others inherited and continued the fascination with India in their own writing for centuries. While quite dated, this work is still useful for those beginning to understand who the Muslim scholars of India were from the earliest known period (pre-1200): Ram Kumar Chaube, *India as Told by the Muslims*. India: Prithvi Prakashan, 1969.

³⁸ Ahmed, “Travelers.”

India and its kings were to Muslims a marvelous and powerful society that was intellectually superior to most others. In al-Andalus, Muslim scholars developed concepts about the entire world and its people based upon the intellect, and India was central to these reimagined world histories. Ṣāʿid al-Andalusī (d. 1070), a scholar from Almería, declared that Indians ranked among the Greeks and Persians as people of great knowledge, or those who had “cultivated the sciences.”³⁹ Regarding the “wisdom of its people,” he states, “[o]ver many centuries, all the kings of the past have recognized the ability of the Indians.”⁴⁰ In the chapter on the “nation” of India in his short yet influential treatise, *Ṭabaqāt al-umam* (*The Generations of Nations*), al-Andalusī explains that “The kings of China... referred to the king of India as the “king of wisdom” because of the Indians’ careful treatment of *ʿulūm* [sciences] and their advancement in all the branches of knowledge.” As he would propose, a privileged group of intellectual peoples, such as Indians, bequeath scientific knowledge from generation to generation—an Islamic conceptualization of *translatio studii*.⁴¹ Al-Andalusī structured the chain of knowledge transmission around the *isnād* principle, through which the irrefutable legitimacy of particular sciences can be traced back to the time of the Companions and the Prophet Muhammad.⁴² Who, however, did al-Andalusī believe was the inheritor of all this knowledge, bequeathed across generations and across nations? As he traced the journey of knowledge from East to West, he argues that it was Iberia.⁴³

³⁹ **CITE TABAQAT**. Régis Blachère 1935. Mohamed Aziz El Bazi, “Reflexiones sobre las *Ṭabaqāt al-umam* de Ṣāʿid al-Andalusī,” *Anaquel de Estudios Arabes* 14 (2003): 89-103.

⁴⁰ Translated in *Science in the Medieval World: Book of the Categories of Nations*. Translated by Semaʿan I. Salem and Alok Kumar. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991. Here, 11.

⁴¹ The seven categories of people are the following: Persians, Chaldeans, the *Rūm*, Copts, Turks, Indians, and Chinese. From these broad categories, he further subdivides them to separate the nations that do cultivate science from those that do not. Those who do are the following: Indians, Persians, Chaldeans, Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, Arabs, and Jews. El Bazi, “Reflexiones,” 92.

⁴² G. Martinez-Gros, “Ṣāʿid al-Andalusī,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. Edited by P. Bearman, T. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Brill, 2012. Consulted online on 25 February 2022 <http://dx.doi.org.proxy.uchicago.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_6493>

⁴³ Martinez-Gros, “Ṣāʿid al-Andalusī.” See also Julio Samsó on the “andalusocentrism” that appears in al-Andalusī and some other Muslim Iberian writers: *On Both Sides of the Strait of Gibraltar: Studies in the History of Medieval Astronomy in the Iberian Peninsula and the Maghrib*. here, 21.

In the case of the *Libro de los juegos* and its tale of the Indian court, this chain of intellectual transmission is at its core, with Alfonso embodying the king who receives and then advances knowledge from a powerful nation, India. While it is not certain to what extent the *Ṭabaqāt al-umam* might have been available to the collaborators of the *scriptorium*, it certainly was for the writer of the *Caballero Zifar*, who faithfully transmits the passages on India from this work.⁴⁴ Without a doubt, the Alfonsine project existed within this intellectual environment.⁴⁵ There were other Muslim authors from whom Alfonso could have learned who held similar notions about the relationship between one's "category" and one's knowledge. Delving deeper into the Islamic sources that were demonstrably available to the Alfonsine collaborators can illuminate how the *Libro de los juegos* represented knowledge creation and intellectual kingship, specifically through

⁴⁴ More from this shared textual tradition comes in a later section of this chapter. However, for comparison of the two introductory passages from the *Ṭabaqāt* and the *Caballero Zifar*, I provide first the latter and then the former: "The gentiles of India were a great people, and all the kings in the world and all the sages recognized them to be superior in intelligence, nobility, and knowledge. The kings of Sind [China] say there are five kings in the world and that the others follow in their footsteps: these are the kings of Sind, the kings of India, the kings of the Turks, the Persian kings, and the Christian kings. They say that the king of Sind is king of men, because the men of Sind are more obedient and more submissive than other men are to their kings and masters. They say that the king of India is the king of knowledge, for the Indians have always studied and striven for knowledge. They call the king of the Turks, the king of the lions, because they are very strong men of great prowess and daring in war. The king of the Persians is called the king of kings because they were always very great, of lordly demeanor, and had great power. With their power, their knowledge, and their great intelligence they populated half the world, and none could oppose them, although they did not share their heritage or faith. The king of the Christians is called the king of courtiers because they are more courtly than all the others, of great prowess, more genteel, and more elegant on horseback than other men." *The Book of the Knight Zifar*, 24. "Over many centuries, all the kings of the past have recognized the ability of the Indians in all the branches of knowledge. The kings of China have stated that the kings of the world are five in number and all people are their subjects. They mentioned the king of China, the king of India, the king of the Turks, the king of the Furs [Persians], and the king of the Romans. They referred to the king of China as the "king of humans" because the people of China are more obedient to authority and are stronger followers of government policies than all the other peoples of the world. They referred to the king of India as the "king of wisdom" because of the Indians' careful treatment of 'ulūm [sciences] and their advancement in all the branches of knowledge. They referred to the king of the Turks as the "king of lions" because of the courage and the ferocity of the Turks. They referred to the king of Persia as the "king of kings" because of the richness, glory, and importance of his kingdom, since Persia had subdued the kings of the center of the populated world, and because it controlled, to the exclusion of other kingdoms, the most fertile of the climatic regions. And they referred to the king of the Romans as the "king of men" because the Romans, of all the peoples, have the most beautiful faces, best-built bodies, and the most robust physiques." *Science in the Medieval World*, 11.

⁴⁵ There are many connections between Alfonso and al-Andalusī, however, such as the *Libro de las cruces* demonstrates. The astrologer 'Abd al-Wāhid Ishāq al-Ḍabbi translated for the Umayyad emir of Córdoba, al-Hakam I (796-822), the work into Arabic. Later, the work was reworked by Abū Marwān 'Ubayd Allāh b. Jalaf of Ecija, cited by al-Andalusī, and ultimately translated by Alfonso. Juan Vernet, *La ciencia en al-Andalus*. Seville: Editoriales Andaluzas Unidas, 1986. Here, 16-17.

the lens of India. A key text from the *scriptorium* that reveals its interactions with the Islamic tradition is the *General estoria*, or the ambitious history of the world.⁴⁶

In the *General estoria*, Alfonso X explores the relationship between India and intellectualism via a didactic tale regarding the acquisition, cultivation, and patronage of knowledge. The tale about India is couched within a broader discussion of Athenian education and the liberal arts,⁴⁷ and this context is important for understanding why India would later be invoked:

Ovid said in his great book that “Athens” means a place without death because there, as we said, all of the arts of all of the fields of knowledge were read and taught, [and] that they are things that never die, but rather always live and make live those who know them; and he who does not know them, or something about them, is like one dead. And for this reason the wise men call knowledge life and lack of knowledge death.⁴⁸

Complementing this burgeoning association of knowledge with life, the next chapter promptly gives “an example” found “in a book that was made in India, and has the name *Calida e Dina*.”⁴⁹ The story is of a Persian king who read in books that strange plants grow on Indian mountains. They produce a revivifying juice that brings the dead back to life. Desperate to possess these herbs, he secures passage in India for his trusted philosopher, “Barzeuay,” or Burzōy.⁵⁰ However, the plants brought back to Persia from India do not revive the dead, and Burzōy once again finds himself in India searching for the truth of the matter. It is then that the kings of India intervened,

⁴⁶ Alfonso X, *General Estoria*, VI partes, 10 vols. Ed. P. Sánchez-Prieto Borja. Madrid: Biblioteca Castro, 2001-2009. Alas, while there are a number of manuscripts of the *General estoria*, only two are from his *scriptorium*: Ms. 816, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid (*Primera parte*), and Ms. Urb. Lat.539, Biblioteca Apostólica Vaticana, Roma (*Cuarta parte*).

⁴⁷ The seven liberal arts are defined in the previous chapter, “De los saberes que son sobre las VII artes liberales.” Alfonso X, *General estoria: Primera parte*, vol. 1. Here, 384-5.

⁴⁸ “E por esso diz Ovidio en el su Libro mayor que Atenas quier dezir tanto como logar sin muert, porque se leyén allí, assí como dixiemos, e se mostravan ý todas las artes de todos los saberes, que son cosas que nunca mueren, mas siempre biven e fazen bivar al que las sabe; e el que las non sabe, o si más no algo d’ellas, tal es como muerto. E por esta razón los sabios al saber llaman vida <e> al non saber muerte.” Alfonso X, *General estoria: Primera parte*, vol. 1. Here, 386.

⁴⁹ Alfonso X, *General estoria: Primera parte*, vol. 1. Here, 386. François de Blois discusses the transmission of the coming tale across the many lineages of *Kalilah wa Dimna: Burzōy’s Voyage*, 1990. See also Bettina Krönung, “The Wisdom of the Beasts,” 434-6.

⁵⁰ Alfonso X, *General estoria: Primera parte*, vol. 1, 386-7.

and the wisest among them, shocked by the “marvelous” ignorance of the Persian king, explains to Burzōy this lesson:

I will now discuss with you the understanding of the books as it should be. Wisemen should be understood for the mountains, because just as the mountains are taller than all other places so are the wisemen greater in understanding than other men. For that which is said of India it is understood that in the time we are in that in this land knowledge of nature is sought more than in any other place. That which says to take the herbs and crush them and therefore extract the juice, this should be understood as taking and joining words and understandings of the books of wise men, and that they crush them in their hearts by studying them and knowing what they mean. And that understanding that is extracted from the books is the juice that they smear on those that do not know, who are like ones dead, and they leave from that ignorance in which they are, and are thus like those who resurrect from death to life. In this manner the ancients valued knowledge [so] that he who understood it they would call alive and the other [who lacked it] dead.⁵¹

In some versions of this tale, the result of this encounter prompts Burzōy to collect the books he finds while in India to translate into Persian, because the wise Indian king had so vividly painted a picture of the cost of ignorance.⁵² To know, and to amass knowledge, and to leave something written behind are a way to be forever “alive”; to be, in a sense, immortal. As the *General estoria* continues, the liberal arts “never forsake those who know them, nor do they let them die a permanent death, because although the wisemen of these arts die in the flesh, nevertheless they

⁵¹ “Ell entendimiento de los libros tal deve seer como te yo agora departiré. Por los montes dévense entender los sabios, ca assí como los montes son más altos que todos los otros logares assí son los sabios sobre todos los otros omnes en el entender. E por lo que dize de India entiéndese que al tiempo en que somos que en esta tierra se vusca el saber de las naturas más que en otra. Lo ál que dize que cojan las yervas e que las magen e saquen ende el çumo esto se deve entender que cojan e ayuntan las palabras e los entendimientos de los libros de los sabios e que las magen en sus coraçones estudiando por ellos e mostrando lo que quieren dezir. E aquell entendimiento que d’ellos sale es el çumo con que untan a los que non saben, que son tales como muertos, e salen d’aquella neciedad en que están, e son estonces tales como que resucitassen de muert a vida. E d’esta guisa preciavan los antigos el saber que al qui lo sabié llamávanle bivo e all otro muerto.” Alfonso X, *General estoria: Primera parte*, vol. 1. Here, 387. Per note 34 above, the anecdote of the *General estoria* differs significantly from how it is given in the separate (and earlier) *Calila e Dimna*: “Et ellos [the “físicos” and “filosofos” of the king of India] dixerónle que aquello mismo fallauan en sus escrituras segun que el avia fallado en las suyas. Et propia mente el entendymiento de los libros de la filosofia et el saber que puso Dios en algunos cuerpos et que la melezina que el dezía son las escryturas en que son los castygos e el saber, et que los muertos que rresuçitavan con aquellas yeruas son los omes neçios que non saben quando son melezinados con el saber et les fazen entender las cosas e escripturas que son tomadas de aquellos sabios. Et luego leyendo aprenden el saber et alunbran sus entendymientos.” Döhla, *El libro de Calila e Dimna*, 122 (left column, 7a). It bears mentioning that beyond the obvious differences in how the metaphor is developed, this version of the anecdote does not make this lesson come from the mouth of a wise Indian king, but rather from a group of Indian scholars.

⁵² Krönung, “The Wisdom of the Beasts,” 435.

forever live in memory.”⁵³ A tale from India, a land that more than any other “sought” the “knowledge of nature,” was an efficacious rhetorical strategy to explain what Ovid says about Athens. The legitimacy of “ancient wisemen” equating great knowledge with eternal fame is proven by the *General estoria* itself, which makes sure to perpetuate their immortal intellects by passing along their wisdom.

As the Alfonsine *General estoria* states, the tale about India comes from *Kalīlah wa-Dimna*, a collection of fables Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (d. 759/60) translated from the Persian during the ʿAbbāsid caliphate. This passage is, in fact, a translation of the work’s prologue. Alfonso commissioned a translation of the Arabic text, *Calila e Dimna*,⁵⁴ and this was the first prose, Near Eastern work translated into a vernacular in Europe, perhaps due to its wide diffusion including in al-Andalus as early as the tenth century.⁵⁵ However, the exact tale that the *General estoria* records is not from this Castilian version.⁵⁶ Given the existence of multiple versions of *Kalīlah wa-Dimna*, it is likely that the Alfonsine collaborators were working with at least two if not more iterations of the text, thus explaining how the *General estoria* can transmit a passage outside of the text used for Alfonso’s *Calila e Dimna*.⁵⁷ The metaphor of the mountains, herbs, and India are found in other

⁵³ “[L]os saberes... nin desamparan nunca a los que lo saben nin les dexan morir muerte durable, ca los sabios d’estos saberes maguer que mueren segund la carne però siempre viven por la memoria.” Alfonso X, *General estoria: Primera parte*, vol. 1, 388.

⁵⁴ When I refer to the Iberian and Alfonsine tradition of this work, I will use the title *Calila e Dimna* so as to differentiate it from the Arabic tradition of the text, *Kalīla wa Dimna*. I take my cue from the editor of the critical edition of the earliest Castilian manuscripts left to us, both posterior to the thirteenth century: Hans-Jörg Döhla, *El libro de Calila e Dimna (1251): Nueva edición y estudio de los dos manuscritos castellanos*. Zaragoza: Instituto de Estudios Islámicos y del Oriente Próximo, 2009. There is, of course, the 1984 edition by J. M. Cacho Blecua and María Jesús Lacarra as well.

⁵⁵ As Döhla notes, the Cordoban writer Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih used *Kalīla wa Dimna* as a source for his famous *al-ʿIqd al-Farīd*. *El libro de Calila e Dimna*, 45.

⁵⁶ To see how different the prologue to the Castilian version is, see Döhla, *El libro de Calila e Dimna*. The Alfonsine translation, classified within the *recensio hispanica*, later gave rise to the 1313 Latin edition, *Liber Regius*, Joan of Navarre commissioned Raymond of Béziers to complete. Thus, the transmission of the version found in the *General estoria* does not find similar traction among later readers. On the recension categories, see Niehoff-Panagiotidis, *Übersetzung*, 29.

⁵⁷ The collection of animal fables that appears in the *General estoria* is generally accepted to be completely different from the version that was fully translated by the Alfonsine *scriptorium* when he was prince. Döhla, *El libro de Calila e Dimna*, 65.

versions of the work, such as some Arabic manuscripts, John of Capua's Latin translation *Directorium humanae vitae* (which preserves part of an older, inextant Hebrew version by Rabbi Joel), and the Hebrew translation that.⁵⁸ This list alone shows how the tale of Burzōy's intellectual awakening resonated across religious and cultural traditions, and how these disparate traditions all turned to India, its rulers, and its scholars to define intellectualism.

After this passage, the *General estoria* relies heavily upon two other Islamic sources to discuss India.⁵⁹ Luckily, it gives their titles. They are the *Kitāb al-Masālik wa 'l-Mamālik* (*The Book of Roads and Kingdoms*) by Abū 'Ubayd al-Bakrī (d. 1094) and, to a far lesser extent, the *Estoria de Egipto*, a source with somewhat shaky attributions to Ibrāhīm Ibn Wasīf Shāh.⁶⁰ These texts fall into the category of geography, a style of writing that blossomed in the Near East for centuries and was developed by writers as famous as al-Mas'ūdī, al-Idrīsī, al-Iṣṭakhrī, and Ibn Ḥawqal.⁶¹

The reception of Islamic geographical texts into medieval Iberia, particularly in translation, is still little understood. Based upon nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholarship, there was a

⁵⁸ François de Blois, 1990. Here, 40-1. For more lines of transmission in Iberia, see Bettina Krönung, "The Wisdom of the Beasts: The Arabic Book of *Kalīla and Dimna* and the Byzantine Book of Stephanites," in *Fictional Storytelling in the Medieval Eastern Mediterranean and Beyond*, ed. by Carolina Cupane, pp. . Leiden: Brill, 2016. Here, 447-8.

⁵⁹ Modern study of the *General estoria*, while rich, still leaves much to be desired. A few of the seminal works on the Alfonsine history are the following: Pidal, Fernández-Ordóñez, Solalinde, Pedro Sánchez-Prieto Borja, Diego Catalán (though this is on the *EE*...).

⁶⁰ Identifying the source materials that went into the gargantuan project of the *General estoria* has been a field of inquiry for generations of scholars. The earlier writers in this field (at least, in the modern era) include Menéndez Pidal, who first identified "Abibayt Albaerī" as al-Bakrī, and Antonio Solalinde. See also R. BLACHÈRE and H. DARMAUN, *Extraits des principaux géographes arabes*, section II, "Les Itinéraires (Al- Masālik wal-Mamālik)", pp. 110-200 [check].

⁶¹ The scholarship on the Islamic geographical corpus is vast and has been for centuries. Franz Taeschner provides a well-curated if by necessity brief bibliographical list of both important primary and secondary sources in the field, including editions of all the Muslim authors listed above. "Djughrafiyā," in *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 24 January 2022 <http://dx.doi.org.proxy.uchicago.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0194>. In addition, see the following: André Miquel, *La Géographie Humaine Du Monde Musulman Jusqu'au Milieu De 11e Siècle*, 4 vols. Paris, La Haye: Mouton & Co., 1967; on Arabs writing about Europe, see Jean-Charles Ducène, *L'Europe et les géographes arabes du Moyen Âge*. Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2018.

general consensus that few geographical texts from the Near East and North Africa were translated in Iberia or even Europe more broadly.⁶² Moritz Steinschneider found no trace of the likes of al-Iṣṭakhrī and Ibn Ḥawqal in his exhaustive search of European translation enterprises. He did not, in fact, find any Islamic geographies among the translations surveyed.⁶³ While such scholarship is long overdue for reassessment, some have since theorized that this blind spot was due to a lack of interest for the genre among Western writers. As evidenced by the *General estoria*'s citation of al-Bakrī, an Andalusian geographer among other talents, this is a reductive and over-generalized statement.⁶⁴ Arabic geographies were circulating in non-Muslim circles, and, as for European "disinterest," Alfonso makes it clear that this category of works was appealing. As the prologues to his historical works and the *Libro de los juegos* asserted, Alfonso collected together the sources for his projects and assessed the merits of each, only incorporating into his final manuscript those that he believed were truthful.⁶⁵ The two named Islamic geographies passed his scrutiny.

The evidence of exchange between the *General estoria* and Islamic geographies is clear as it begins to discuss its kings: "the kingdoms of India are the kingdoms of knowledge and science, and therein was the beginning of science, and that the people of India were the first to establish

⁶² See, for example, C. Raymond Beazley, *The Dawn of Modern Geography A History of Exploration and Geographical Science*, 3 vols. London: J. Murray, 1897; John Wright, *The Geographical Lore of the Time of the Crusades: A Study in the History of Medieval Science and Tradition in Western Europe*. New York: American Geographical Society, 1925;

⁶³ *Die Europäischen Übersetzungen Aus Dem Arabischen Bis Mitte Des 17. Jahrhunderts*. Graz: Akademische Druck-u. Verlagsanstalt, 1956 (rep. 1904). A discussion of this author's work in relation to Iberian studies is briefly offered in Michael Harney, "The Geography of the *Libro del Caballero Zifar*," in *La Corónica*, vol. 10-11 (1983): 208-19, here, 213.

⁶⁴ It should be noted that Alfonso's works, including the *General estoria*, do not feature in these surveys. "Formal Arabic geography contributed next to nothing to the knowledge of the earth possessed by the Occidentals of the Crusading Age." Wright, *The Geographical Lore*, 77, quoted in Michael Harney, "The Geography of the *Libro del Caballero Zifar*," in *La Corónica*, vol. 16 (1988): 76-86, here, note 2, p. 82. Indeed, both of Harney's articles on the *Libro del Caballero de Zifar* offer a compelling counterargument to this turn-of-the-century scholarship, for he proves the awareness and understanding of Islamic geographies in vernacular writings.

⁶⁵ See notes XXXX above.

kingdoms and institute [or would “raise/lift up” be more elegant?] kings.”⁶⁶ Among their intellectual feats are advances in astronomy and mathematics, but it should never be forgotten that their literature, too, was esteemed; the long history of the Arabic version of the *Panchatantra*, or *Kalīla wa Dimna* demonstrates that fact.⁶⁷ The source for this assertion is “Abibayt Albaerī,” or, al-Bakrī’s *Kitāb al-Masālik wa ’l-Mamālik* (hereafter *Kitāb*), which the *General estoria* transliterates as the “*Quiteb almazahelic uhalmelich*.”⁶⁸ Described in the history as a wise man, al-Bakrī was born in al-Andalus to a powerful family, and even today his name is synonymous with erudition and the Islamic geographic tradition.⁶⁹ Learning from some of the most recognizable names of Western Islamic intellectualism, his years spent in Cordoba under the tutelage of the historian Ibn Hayyan and the geographer al-‘Udri of Almería led to a prolific scholarly career of his own. And, as the *General estoria* reports, he does indeed state the following about the “wise kingdom” of India in the *Kitāb*: “they claim that they are the first to join [*ḍamm*] a kingdom and to raise up in it a king.”⁷⁰

Without ever leaving al-Andalus, al-Bakrī wrote this work about the world, and it is often summarized as a geography when it actually provides far more by way of political, social, and even ethnographic information.⁷¹ The Alfonsine *scriptorium* was deeply familiar with the origins of al-Bakrī’s work, and its frequent invocation across the *General estoria* marks it as one of the

⁶⁶ 3.1. “[L]os reinos de India son reinos de saber de la ciencia, y que dende fue el comienço de la ciencia, y que los de India fueron los primeros que ordenaron reinos y alçaron rey.” 3.1, 515.

⁶⁷ 3.1, 524.

⁶⁸ Alfonso X, El Sabio. *General Estoria: Primera parte*, vol. 1. Ed. Pedro Sánchez-Prieto Borja. Madrid: Biblioteca Castro, 2009. Here, 409.

⁶⁹ Lévi-Provençal, E. “Abū ‘Ubayd Al-Bakrī,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition. Accessed December 23, 2021. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_0265.

⁷⁰ All translations from al-Bakrī my own. *Kitāb Al-Masālik Wa-al-mamālik: Juz’ān*, vol. 1. Edited by P. van Leeuwen, and A. Ferre. Qartāj: al-Dār al-‘Arabīyah lil-Kitāb: al-Mu’assasah al-Waṭanīyah lil-Tarjamah wa-al-Taḥqīq wa-al-Dirāsāt, 1992. Here, 241.

⁷¹ Lévi-Provençal, E. “Abū ‘Ubayd Al-Bakrī.” There is an edition of the text that brings together the ten surviving manuscripts of this geography for a more complete, yet still woefully inextant, version: A. P. van Leeuwen and A. Ferre, eds. *Kitāb al-masālik wa-al-mamālik*, 2 vols. Qartāj: al-Dār al-‘Arabīyah lil-Kitāb: al-Mu’assasah al-Waṭanīyah lil-Tarjamah wa-al-Taḥqīq wa-al-Dirāsāt, 1992.

more important influences and inspirations for how the history was written and what it emphasized.⁷² Its narrative was structured around the seven regions of the world and their histories, and the roads and ways that traversed and defined them.⁷³ In the first description of the *Kitāb* in the *General estoria*, the Alfonsine team not only summarizes the purpose and scope of the Arabic text, but also its authorial provenance:

We discovered that a wise king who was lord of Niebla and Salces—which are some towns [should I explain the privileges a *villa* could have in the MAs?] in the kingdom of Seville in the western part near the great sea around the land that they call the Algarve, which also means the farthest part of the West or of the land of Spain—made a book in Arabic, and they called it the *Estoria de Egipto*.⁷⁴ One of his nephews gave it another name in Arabic, *Quiteb almazahelic uhalmelich*, which means in our language of Castile <...> or *The Book of the Ways and Kingdoms*, because he talks in the book about all the lands and kingdoms, how many days walking and how many leagues each one of them is in length and width. And the history that that king made tells all of this for the purpose of the assessing where the *portazgos* should be throughout the land.⁷⁵

Introducing readers to al-Bakrī and his *Kitāb*, the Muslim’s scholarship then helps elaborate upon the events of Genesis, specifically those surrounding Joseph’s sale to Potiphar.⁷⁶ The “wise king” referenced in the quote is a slight error, because al-Bakrī was never king. His father, ‘Izz al-Dawla ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Bakrī, was indeed a sovereign of Huelva (which is next to Niebla) and Saltés⁷⁷

⁷² Fernández-Ordóñez, 177 *in passim*.

⁷³ Today, the fragments on Syria, Iraq, Egypt, North Africa, and Sudan are perhaps the more well-known, accessible, and studied, but, as Fernández-Ordóñez briefly mentions, other manuscripts such as n. 3043 of the Nuruosmaniye Manuscript Library, affiliated with the Süleymaniye Library in Istanbul, also have sections on China and India. 174.

⁷⁴ Not to be confused with the other *Estoria de Egipto* referenced above.

⁷⁵ A *portazgo* was akin to a toll travelers had to pay for the right to enter and move about a king or lord’s land. “Mas fallamos que un rey sabio, que fue Señor de Niebla e de Salces, que son unas villas en el regno de Sevilla a parte de occident cerca la grand mar escontra una tierra a que llamen el Algarbe, que quiere dezir tanto como la postrimera part de occidente o de la tierra de España, e fizo un libro en arávido, e dizenle la Estoria de Egipto, e un su sobrino pusol otro nombre en arávido, *Quiteb almazahelic uhalmelich*, que quiere dezir en el nuestro language de Castiella tanto como <...> o Libro de los caminos e de los regnos, porque fabla en él de todas las tierras e de los regnos cuántas jornadas á y e cuantas leguas en cadauno d’ellos en luengo e en ancho. E tod esto cuenta la estoria que fizo aquel re yen razón de los portadgos en qué logares deven seer por las tierras.” Alfonso X, El Sabio. *General Estoria: Primera parte*, vol. 1. 409-10. It should be noted that Fernández-Ordóñez also identifies the work in this passage as that of al-Bakrī. 173.

⁷⁶ The chapter title is “De la vëndida de Josep en Egipto, e de Futifar su señor quel compró, e del rey faraón Nicrao e de sus conquistas.” *General estoria: Primera parte*, vol. 1. 409.

⁷⁷ An island near Huelva situated near the mouth of the Odiel river on the Atlantic coast.

(Arabic, Shalṭīsh) until he was forced to surrender to the Taifa king of Seville in 1051.⁷⁸ This perhaps explains why the *General estoria* grants the polymath the royal title of his father. Viewing al-Bakrī as a king legitimates the Arabic source for the study of the world via the tradition of wise kings, “reyes sabios,” across time and faiths. For some sections of the *General estoria*, for example, the title of the work was often given as such: “the king of Niebla and the *Estoria de Egipto* say that....”⁷⁹ Alfonso and the “king” al-Bakrī fit within the concept of wise rulers, scholar kings, and who better to write a history of “all the lands and kingdoms” than a king himself? Alfonso’s connection to the legacy of al-Bakrī extends even beyond that of the rhetorical. Almost exactly 200 years after Seville’s surrender, Alfonso X conquered Huelva in 1252 from the same Taifa kingdom that deposed his father.

It is unfortunate that this work, which had such a wide and popular reception in the Middle Ages, has not come down to us extant.⁸⁰ Instead, there are only fragmentary manuscripts and

⁷⁸ Lévi-Provençal, E. “Abū ‘Ubayd Al-Bakrī.”

⁷⁹ See, for example, pp. 427, 429-431, 433.

⁸⁰ The edition that will be used for this chapter is one of the more “extant” compilations of *Kitāb* texts, which was the product of looking across multiple manuscripts of the work to create. Al-Bakrī, *Kitāb al-Masālik wa-al-mamālik: juz ‘ān*. 2 vols. Ed. by A.P. van Leeuwen et A. Ferre. Qartāj: al-Dār al-‘Arabīyah lil-Kitāb: al-Mu’assasah al-Waṭanīyah lil-Tarjamah wa-al-Taḥqīq wa-al-Dirāsāt, 1992. The collections of El Escorial has a volume of this work as well (Ms. árabe 1635), part of which was translated in Slane (see below). Some of the long fragments of the work have been published, but many still exist in isolated manuscripts or, in the worst cases, are lost. The MS at Paris, B. N., 5905, contains the introductory material to the *Kitāb*, covering general geography, Muslims, and non-Muslims, though Lévi-Provençal notes that a short excerpt from the non-Muslim section dealing with the Slavs was edited in 1878 by Russian scholars. “Abū ‘Ubayd al-Bakrī,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. Edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 26 February 2022 <http://dx.doi.org.proxy.uchicago.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_0265> First published online: 2012. Beyond these fragments, there are also translations of the *Kitāb*’s sections that deal with al-Andalus and Africa, though some are outdated and in need of revision. See, for example, William MacGuckin Slane, *Description De L’Afrique Septentrionale*. Éd. rev. et corr. Alger: Typographie A. Jourdan; Paris, P. Geuthner, 1913. Shorter excerpts have also been published in source compendiums on Africa, such as XXXX. As for Arabic editions, there are some that publish long excerpts, typically with a focus on a particular region, like Egypt or Iraq: Abdullah Yousef Al Ghunaim, *Jazīrat al-‘Arab: min Kitāb "Al-Mamālik wa-al-masālik" li-Abī ‘Ubayd Al-Bakrī*. al-Tab‘ah 1. Kuwait: Dhāt al-Salāsīl lil-Ṭibā‘ah wa-al-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī‘, 1977; Ibid., *Jughrāfiyat Miṣr, min Kitāb al-mamālik wa-al-masālik*. al-Kuwayt: Maktabat Dār al-‘Urūbah lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī‘, 1980; ‘Alī Mayyāh, *Jughrāfiyat al-‘Irāq fī Mu‘jam al-Bakrī*. Baghdād: al-Majma‘ al-‘Ilmī, 2002.

references to it in other works, such as what happened in the Alfonsine *scriptorium*.⁸¹ However fragmentary the transmission of this geography might have been, Alfonso was perhaps one of the more important preservers of the *Kitāb* in Western Europe. We find al-Bakrī cited in a similar manner in the *Libro del Caballero Zifar*, a text that, as already mentioned, most likely came from within the Alfonsine intellectual milieu: “Abu Ubayt, a wiseman, said: “The first wise men who observed the sun and the planets after the deluge were from ancient India.” To live in peace and to have someone lead them, they elected and raised to be king over themselves a wise man whom they called Albarheme the elder.”⁸² This was the beginning of a nation that is described in now familiar terms: “The gentiles of India were a great people, and all the kings in the world and all the sages recognized them to be superior in intelligence, nobility, and knowledge.”⁸³ India was during Alfonso’s time an imagined world that provided the ideal substrate upon which to create fictional rulers and virtuous leaders. The *Libro de los juegos* does this early on with its version of an Indian court, and the *Libro del Caballero Zifar* will drink from the same literary well and craft its errant knight as a leader from the same lands using the same Islamic sources. As the *General estoria* circulated in Spain and outside of the peninsula in the following centuries, al-Bakrī’s words were transmitted far and wide, inspiring far more than medieval Castilian literature.

⁸¹ For more regarding the manuscript tradition of the *Kitāb al-masālik wa ’l-mamālik*, see Mayte Penales, “Modos de reutilización en la historiografía andalusí: el Kitāb al-masālik wa-l-mamālik de al-Bakrī,” in Pierre Toubert and Pierre Moret, eds., *Remploi, citation, plagiat Conduites et pratiques médiévales (Xe-XIIe siècle)*, pp. 23-42. Spain: Casa de Velázquez, 2009.

⁸² “Dixo Abu Ubeyt vn sabio: “De las Indias antiguas fueron los primeros sabios que çertificaron el sol e las planetas despues del diluuiio.” E por beuir en paz e auer por quien se guiasen, exlieron e alçaron rey sobre sy vn sabio a quien dizen Albarheme el Mayor.” *Libro del Caballero Zifar*, 96. Translation above from *Book of the Knight Zifar: A Translation of El Libro Del Cavallero Zifar*. Translated by Charles L. Nelson. Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1983. Here, 23.

⁸³ “E los gentiles de India fueron grant pueblo, e todos los reys del mundo e todos los sabios los conosçieron mejoria en el seso e en nobleza e en saber.” *Libro del Caballero Zifar*, 97. Translated on pp. 23-4 in *Book of the Knight Zifar*.

All of this is not to imply that the *General estoria* makes it easy for readers both medieval and modern to distinguish between its Arabic sources. As seen in the passage from the history above, it gives another name to the *Kitāb: Estoria de Egipto*. Only referring to al-Bakrī's work by its transliterated title a couple of times, it prefers to call it elsewhere the *Estoria de Egipto*,⁸⁴ which is misleading given the fact it is used in the *General estoria* to detail far more than the history of Egypt. Even more confusing than this, there is another Arabic text by the same title the Alfonsine history draws from, but the author of that *Estoria de Egipto* is a certain "Alguazif."⁸⁵ As Fernández-Ordóñez correctly points out, because two histories of Egypt are cited, one by al-Bakrī and another by "Alguazif," some modern scholars were led astray in their attempts to catalogue, analyze, and interpret the *scriptorium*'s use of Arabic source materials.⁸⁶ Unfortunately, there are almost never any corroborating citations of the original Arabic materials, al-Bakrī or otherwise, in these academic studies to buttress such claims.⁸⁷ For al-Bakrī, the present study will give the most

⁸⁴ Fernández-Ordóñez discusses variations in the titles and authors across the *General estoria*. *Las Estorias de Alfonso el Sabio*, pp. 185 *in passim*.

⁸⁵ Scholars have suggested this could be Ibrāhīm Ibn Wasīf Shāh al-Miṣrī, though this is far from proven. There are several chronological discrepancies with this attribution that need to be addressed, the more important one for the present study having to do with how a work that was written toward the end of the thirteenth century could have made it into the decades-earlier *General estoria*. See Wüstenfeld. Solalinde was the first to suggest Ibrāhīm Ibn Wasīf Shāh as "Alguazif." *Primera parte*, xiii. His suggestion was later taken as fact by Fernández-Ordóñez, 173. Most of the references to the *Estoria de Egipto* occur in the first and fourth parts of the *General estoria*. For more on Ibn Wasīf Shāh, which is not much, see Gregor Schoeler, "Ibn Wasīf Shāh," in *Encyclopedia of the Medieval Chronicle*, edited by Graeme Dunphy and Cristian Bratu. Consulted online on 30 December 2021 <http://dx.doi.org.proxy.uchicago.edu/10.1163/2213-2139_emc_SIM_000791>

⁸⁶ "Solalinde no se percató de que el nombre de *Estoria de Egipto* también podía referirse a la obra de al-Bakrī y atribuyó equivocadamente a Waṣīf- Šāh un conjunto de citas en que bajo la denominación de *Estoria de Egipto* se oculta el texto de al-Bakrī. Son las citas que figuran en las páginas 154, 211, 212, 215, 244, 259, 260, etc. de la parte I." *Las Estorias de Alfonso el Sabio*, 174. She later notes that Solalinde's error is reproduced in the scholarship of Dubler, "Fuentes árabes y bizantinas," p. 142, note 3, and D. Eisenberg, "The *General Estoria*," 215.

⁸⁷ As but one example, Fernández-Ordóñez repeatedly asserts that certain passages in the *General estoria* were "known" to al-Bakrī, but does not give citations. When discussing the common sources for the *Estoria de España* and the *General estoria* projects, she hypothesizes that passages from al-Bakrī's *Kitāb* on al-Andalus would also have been available to the *Estoria de España* project, since it had been available for the *General estoria*. This theory would incredibly influence modern readings of the *Estoria de España*, and I personally find the suggestion compelling and highly probable. She compares a few passages from each Alfonsine history to demonstrate how they may have both used the *Kitāb*, but she fails to insert even one line from al-Bakrī to prove this point. Indeed, the only Islamic text brought to prove her point in this particular instance is not al-Bakrī but rather al-Mas'ūdī in the French translation. For the sequence on al-Bakrī in both histories, see *Las Estorias de Alfonso el Sabio*, pp. 195 *in passim*. For the French al-Mas'ūdī quotation, see *ibid.*, p. 198.

relevant but by no means exhaustive side-by-side translations of the two works, and will provide an appendix of the longer passages in the original Arabic. Nevertheless, the state of the field demands much revision. For example, it would seem that the *General estoria* cites more Arabic materials than modern scholars believe. If the *General estoria* does not directly attribute its information about India to al-Bakrī, it often vaguely cites “Muslim wisemen” or introduces a new title, such as the *Ystoria de los alarabes*.⁸⁸ Such allusions signify that the *scriptorium* was reading multiple Islamic texts to help inform its treatment of certain peoples and cultures.⁸⁹

There is one text that, alongside al-Bakrī, has the potential to expand our understanding of knowledge creation in medieval Iberia, and that is the widely copied, disseminated, and celebrated *Kitāb murūj al-dhahab wa-ma‘ādin al-jawhar*, or, *The Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems* by al-Mas‘ūdī (c. 896–956).⁹⁰ Some, like Fernández-Ordóñez, only mention al-Mas‘ūdī as a source for al-Bakrī. The repeated attribution to al-Bakrī and dismissal of al-Mas‘ūdī may be due to the fact that the Alfonsine history names the *Estoria de Egipto* and the *Kitāb al-Masālik wa ‘l-Mamālik* and sometimes their authors across the text, but al-Mas‘ūdī is not named. We know, however, that the *scriptorium* was not always consistent with how it cited its sources for particular projects, and

⁸⁸ **CITE WHERE THIS OCCURS.** Cf. Fernández-Ordóñez, who claims without evidence that the *Ystoria de los alarabes* and its variations in the third part of the *General estoria* is actually the work of al-Bakrī. *Las Estorias de Alfonso el Sabio*, 192. Until the Castilian passages are placed alongside al-Bakrī’s writing and compared properly, I do not see enough evidence in this argument to discard the theory that there were more Arabic works used in the *General estoria*.

⁸⁹ The full extent of the *scriptorium*’s use and knowledge of Arabic texts within the historical projects is far more expansive and nuanced than previously discussed, and while India serves as the main focus of this study, there is far more that could be said using these and perhaps further Arabic sources regarding Egypt, for example. Thus far, the scholarship has been content to point at this fact, but it seems that the question of what other Islamic texts trickled into the *scriptorium* still awaits its scholar.

⁹⁰ **Murūj al-dhahab wa-ma‘ādin al-jawhar**, 4 vols. Bayrūt: Dār al-Andalus, 1965. There is a reliable French translation of this work by C. Barbier de Meynard, Abel Pavet de Courteille, and Charles Pellat. *Les prairies d’or*. Paris: Société asiatique, 1962. For the quotations below, I will cite both the passages in the French and the Arabic; however, my translations are directly from the Arabic. I thank Prof. Kay Heikkinen for her thoughtful comments and suggestions on the translations from this work, though I maintain that all errors are mine alone. **Cite info on al-Masudi**

while some works, like the *Estoria de Espanna*, may list the key texts and authors with which it engaged in its prologue, others, like the *Libro de los juegos*, do not.⁹¹

In particular, it is suggested that despite parallels between the *General estoria* and the *Meadows of Gold*, the Arabic material on India in the Alfonsine *scriptorium* must have come from al-Bakrī, or, if not him, the other *Estoria de Egipto* of “Alguazif.”⁹² This argument also implies that the similarities one may find with the *Meadows of Gold* and Alfonsine works only exist because they would have been copied in al-Bakrī’s *Kitāb*, and, through him, into the *General estoria*.⁹³ This is an argument of transmission that rests on shaky foundations, as even to date very few studies have tackled the extent to which the Iberian polymath himself utilized the *Meadows of Gold* in his works.⁹⁴ The relationship is certainly there, as will be shown, but a detailed comparison that tackles the complexities of transmission is still needed. This is particularly the case because al-Mas‘ūdī’s works are not typically believed to have circulated in medieval Europe, at least not

⁹¹ And yet, for the latter, we know without a doubt based upon the work of chess scholars that unnamed Arabic chess manuals and treatises must have been used in order to complete the royal project. **Cite**. As for the *Estoria de Espanna*, refer to the famous claim that: “mandamus ayuntar quantos libros pudimos auer de istorias en que alguna cosa contassen de los fechos dEspanna, et tomamos de la cronica dell Arçobispo don Rodrigo que fizo por mandado del rey don Ffernando nuestro padre, et de la de Maestre Luchas, Obispo de Tuy, et de Paulo Orosio, et del Lucano, et de sant Esidro el primero, et de sant Alffonso, et de sant Esidro el mancebo, et de Idacio Obispo de Gallizia, et de Sulpicio Obispo de Gasconna, et de los otros escriptos de los Concilios de Toledo et de don Jordan, chancellor del sancto palacio, et de Claudio Tholomeo, que departio del cerco de la tierra meior que otro sabio fasta la su sazón, et de Dion que escriuio uerdadera la estoria de los godos, et de Pompeyo Trogo, et dotras estorias de Roma las que pudimos auer que contassen algunas cosas del fecho dEspanna, et compusimos este libro...” PCG 4, left, lines 26-44. And even this impressive list is not exhaustive, as recent scholarship has explored other materials that contributed to the redaction of the *Estoria de Espanna*. **CITE????**

⁹² See Fernández-Ordóñez, *Las Estorias*, notes 211 and 212 on pp. 180-1.

⁹³ Solalinde, vol. 1, xiii, specifically footnote 1. Daniel Eisenberg discusses Solalinde’s work on the Arabic source materials for the *General estoria*. He appears to agree with the latter’s assertion regarding the texts utilized in the historical project, only adding a couple new but not very informative observations, and thus the scholarship on the *General estoria* could still benefit from more targeted studies of its Islamic antecedents. “The *General Estoria*: Sources and Source Treatment,” in *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie* | *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie* 89 issue 1-3 (1973): 206-27, here, 215-6.

⁹⁴ **I can try to cite this, but the problem is that I literally cannot find scholarship that systematically compares the two works. Will keep searching...**

in translation.⁹⁵ If it was available to al-Bakrī, however, in whatever form or to whatever extent, then it was accessible in the south of Spain at the very minimum during the eleventh century. Indeed, the *Meadows of Gold* appears again as an influence in another near-contemporaneous work to the *scriptorium*, that of the *Caballero Zifar* in the early fourteenth century.⁹⁶ Thus, it is possible if not likely that the Arab historian's geographical works found their way into not only al-Andalus but also the crown of Castile long before many scholars had believed, and, as such, merits more consideration than previously granted it. As for the study of India in Iberian texts, to which this chapter hopes to contribute, al-Mas'ūdī is an indispensable source to nuance how information was traveling from the Near East to Iberia, and how through primary or secondary transmission it contributed to specific Iberian ideologies and literary styles.

An opportunity to explore the Islamic intellectual tradition with which the Alfonsine *scriptorium* engaged is to compare their descriptions of wise Indian kingship, which counts the invention of chess as but one of its many gifts to mankind. The *General estoria* later notes that the al-Bakrī's *Kitāb*, beyond giving geographical dimensions of the lands and kingdoms, also provides insightful information regarding India, specifically "about its kings, kingdoms, provinces, and customs of its kings and rulers of that era."⁹⁷ Alongside al-Bakrī and potentially al-Mas'ūdī and his *Meadows of Gold*, the Castilian court learned about and interpreted the history and culture of India from predominantly the geographical branch of the Islamic tradition.⁹⁸ As such, this history was what the prologue to the *Libro de los juegos* would later draw upon in the 1280s. Like the

⁹⁵ Moritz Steinschneider, *Die Europäischen Übersetzungen Aus Dem Arabischen Bis Mitte Des 17. Jahrhunderts*. Graz: Akademische Druck-u. Verlagsanstalt, 1956 (rep. 1904). See note XXXX above regarding the lack of Islamic geographical texts circulating in Europe.

⁹⁶ Cite both of Harney's works.

⁹⁷ Note that later in the *General estoria*, it is far more common to find the *Kitāb* under its alternative title, which was introduced in the history already in part one: "Istoria de Egipto de los reyes y de los reinos y de las provincias y de las costumbres de los reyes y de los señores de aquella sazón." 3.1, 515.

⁹⁸ And perhaps still more that have yet to be identified in relation to the question of India.

Arabic geographical texts, the *General estoria* begins with the man who was supposedly the first king of India. While this man did not invent any games, it is from him that a wise dynasty of subsequent kings emanates, and, as such, he exemplifies the legend of unparalleled intellectual production that defined India in medieval tradition. In Castilian, he is Arbahamén the Great. This is the *scriptorium*'s near-accurate rendition of al-Barhamin the Great [البَرْهَمَن الكبير] of the *Kitāb al-Masālik wa 'l-Mamālik* and others like it.

Citing al-Bakrī, the *General estoria* reads in part:

The first named king [of India] was Arbahamén the Great. It is said that this man was the first to begin [literally—but perhaps “to invent?”] science, and that he waged war to win honor, and that he was the first to begin teaching the making of swords and many other types of weapons that had not existed until then, and he was the first that constructed a castle. That king would pay a lot to have precious stones brought [to him], and he invented first the making of the figures of the *cercos* of the [zodiac] signs and of the planets [change “making... figures” to something like calculations? Also, what are *ce/ircos* in this context? “Orbits”?], and he put into writing how he did it all. He imagined that which would be very simple to learn and fit [enter?] in the brains [seso – fig. intelligence] of man and take shape in understanding, and that man began to talk about God and the first beginning from whence all the things of the world came. About this he made a book, and he called it *Cinduchindi* in the language of Egypt, which means in Castilian the same as the *Book of Eternity*. It is said that from this book's beginning branched off [vinieron de raíz] the knowledge and reason of other books that were made after, such as the book that they call the *Almagest*, that speaks of the stars and celestial bodies, and another named *Almair*, that talked about other things, and other such books contemporary to these.⁹⁹

The chapter goes on at length about Arbahamén's religious beliefs, specifically about the nature of God, and the position of the sun in relation to other astronomical signs.¹⁰⁰ This latter science

⁹⁹ *General estoria. Tercera parte*, vol. 1, 515-6. “Y el primero rey que ovieron ovo nombre Arbahamén el mayor. Y diz que éste començo de primero la ciencia y lidió por ganar prez, y él començó primeramente a enseñar a fazer espadas y otras muchas maneras de armas que nunca fueran fasta allí, y él fue el primero que Castillo basteció, y pagávase mucho aquel rey de traer piedras preciosas, y él asacó primero de fazer figuras de los cercos de los signos y de las planetas, y de muy ligero de aprender y caber en el seso del ombre y formarse en el entendimiento, y aquél començó a fablar de Dios y del primero comienço por do vinieron todas las cosas del mundo, y fizo d'ello un libro, y llamólo Cinduchindi en el lenguaje de Egipto, que quiere dezir en el castellano tanto como el Libro de los siglos. Y diz que de comienço d'este libro vinieron de raíz los saberes y las razones de los otros libros que fueron fechos después, como fue el libro a que dizen Almagest, que fabla de las estrellas y de los cuerpos celestiales, y otro que ovo nombre Almair, que fabló de las otras osas, y otras tales libros que ovo y de quando éstos.”

¹⁰⁰ And, unsurprisingly, follows al-Bakrī significantly. 241. Some of this influence even seeps into the chronology the *General estoria* uses: “[y] diz que el auge era estonces en el año de trezientos y treinta y dos de la era de Mahomad, y en el signo de los géminos.” *General estoria: Tercera parte*, vol. 1. 516.

was of particular interest to an Indian court that was fixated upon the end of the world, and how to calculate in what year it might occur. The “philosophers” and other wisemen believed and recorded in the *Book of Centuries* that after this end, God would create a new world, and “He will give man the intelligence and knowledge with which they may know God and his pros and cons.”¹⁰¹

This passage draws upon the following description from al-Bakrī, which in turn heavily draws upon al-Mas‘ūdī.¹⁰² The process of translating the Arabic into the Castilian leaves its mark on far more than the narrative itself; linguistically, the *scriptorium* went so far as to preserve certain verbs for descriptive effect, such as “to branch off”:

The first of their kings was Barhamin the Great, and he was the one who showed/envisioned the kingdom and knowledge [الحكمة] and invented them both, and he made swords and machines of war and he built large structures [البياكل] and he adorned them with jewels and he created/illustrated celestial orbits, zodiac signs, and planets and he made a book [lit. كتابة / writing] easily understood by the mind. He recorded it in the brains [or maybe just brain? Or do I need to add a qualifier, like the brains [of men]?] and he pointed out the first beginning given to all existing things, and that book is *The Book al-Sindhind* [*Kitāb al-sind hind*], which means ‘for all eternity,’ and [other] books branched off [تفرعت] from it: the *Almagest*, *al-Arjabhad*,¹⁰³ and others.¹⁰⁴

There are also differences that arose in the *General estoria*, perhaps due to interpretive license or variations in the textual tradition from which the passage was pulled. One example of that is the statement that the king waged war to attain honor, a sentiment that is not explicitly given in al-Bakrī nor in one of his sources, al-Mas‘ūdī. The other difference is the addition of “the language of Egypt.” Perhaps this reveals a generalized confusion about the topic of al-Bakrī’s *Kitāb*, which, as shown, is sometimes referred to as the *Istoria de Egipto*, and/or the linguistic landscape of India.

¹⁰¹ “Quando criarié Dios otro mundo de nuevo, que dará a los ombres seso y saber con que conoscan a Dios y su pro y su daño.” *General estoria. Tercera parte*, vol. 1, 516.

¹⁰² Al-Mas‘ūdī gives more detail about how Barhamin the Great was made king, explaining the philosophical motivations of the Indian people to select him as their first ruler. See XXXX (149 in the dual lang ed).

¹⁰³ This is a corruption of the name of the Indian astronomer Āryabhaṭa (476-550 CE), perhaps most well-known for the work *Āryabhaṭīya*. He and *al-Arjabhad* appear in countless other Islamic texts on India, astronomy, etc. *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. XII. Edited by James Hastings. New York; Edinburgh: Charles Scribner's Sons; T. & T. Clark, 1922. Here, 95.

¹⁰⁴ *Kitāb Al-Masālik*, vol. 1, 241. This passage is found in *The Meadows of Gold*, [dual lang ed] 150-1.

It is also unusual that the *al-Arjabhad*, the famous work cited in the Islamic tradition on India, became so corrupted in the *General estoria: Almair*. For this title, it is possible that it is a transliteration of another work associated with India, but none have so far come to my attention that are similar.¹⁰⁵

Following the introduction of kingship in India, the Alfonsine *scriptorium* engages with a legend surrounding Arbahamén/Barhamin the Great that is found in al-Bakrī, al-Mas‘ūdī, and others. It is the tale of how the king called together a group of seven sages in order to debate the nature of the world. These seven men said, “[l]et us come together and examine what the story and secret of the world are, and from whence we came and where we are going, and whether our coming out of non-existence into existence is because of wisdom or its opposite.”¹⁰⁶ The texts have arrived at the fundamental question about the world and man’s agency that underpins the narrative of games, and it is one that Alfonso X does more than simply translate. This legend, in which each of the seven sages debate their reasonings while the wise king of India looks on, resonates with the quasi-fabricated legend with which the *Libro de los juegos* opens: “In Greater India there was a king who greatly loved wisemen and always had them with him, and very often he made them reason about the facts that are born of things [i.e. the nature of things].”¹⁰⁷ While in the *Libro de los juegos* there are only three wisemen, the games they invent are symbolic of whether or not intelligence governs how things arise. In the *General estoria*, this philosophical questioning begins as follows:

¹⁰⁵ Al-Mas‘ūdī provides still more books in his discussion of the *Sindhind*, but, nevertheless, an origin for “*Almair*” is lacking: “Barhamin gathered together the sages and in his time they composed the *Kitāb al-sindhind*, and its meaning is “for all eternity,” and from it branched off [I suspect a typo in the dual lang ed. فرغت is given instead فرعت] the books like *al-Arjabhad* and the *Almagest*, and *al-Arkand* branched off [same typo] from *al-Arjabhad*, and from the *Almagest* a book by Ptolomy, then a later work from these were the Astrological Tables [الزيجات].” P. 150

¹⁰⁶ Al-Mas‘ūdī, [dual lang ed] 154.

¹⁰⁷ “[E]n India la mayor ovo un rey que amava mucho los sabios e teniéllos siempre consigo, e faziéles mucho a menudo razonar sobre los fechos que nacién de las cosas.” Alfonso X, *Libro de los juegos*, 20.

The king, in order to discuss intelligence, the facts of the world and its state, brought together seven wisemen, and he talked with them, saying: --Let us examine the secrets of the world and consider [perhaps **determine**] from whence we came and where we will go, and whether we were created in this world with intelligence or without it, or if any favor grew or grows for our Lord who created us in creating us [**que nos crió en nos criar????**], or if He defends us from any harm with our death, or for what reason He created us and throws us into the troubles of this world, kills us, and finishes us since he made us.¹⁰⁸

This is the closest parallel to the legend Alfonso and his collaborators create for their manuscript on games, and while scholars have posited that the three sages were meant to parallel the Biblical three wisemen, it is equally if not more convincing that the *scriptorium* pulled upon the Islamic tradition.¹⁰⁹ Adapting the common literary trope of the Indian king convening scholarly assemblies, Alfonso taps into the tradition of Indian scholars at court debating the way of the world in his work on games. A similar narrative progression takes place in the *General estoria*. Following this vivid story that solidifies India's association with the pursuit of science and knowledge, the next passages about India discuss games and their invention.

The philosophical questions that occupied the minds of India's ancient great sages—what is the nature of the world?—provide the ideal narrative foundation to explain the deeper symbolism of games. Chapters XXXIV-XXXVI in the third part of the *General estoria* are almost exclusively dedicated to the history of chess, table games, and dice in India, and all through an Islamic source base. Likewise, in the Islamic texts, the description of Barhamin the Great also flows into his heirs and the invention of games. In the first chapter of the sequence, “About the king who invented dice and table games, and this was in the time of Abijah and Asa, kings of Judah,” the Alfonsine text relays that dice games were invented in the time of Behabud (sometimes Behabut or Berhabud)

¹⁰⁸ “El rey Albarhamén por fablar de sesos y de los fechos del mundo y del su estado ayuntó siete sabios y fabló con ellos, y desi díxoles: --Paremos mientes en las poridades del mundo y mesuremos dónde venimos y dó iremos, y si fuemos criados en este mundo con seso o si non, o si creció o crece algunt pro a Nuestro Señor que nos crió en nos criar, o si defiende de algunt daño con la nuestra muerte, o por cual razón nos crió y nos echa en las cuitas d'este mundo y nos mata y nos acaba pues que nos fizo.” *General estoria. Tercera parte*, vol. 1, 516-7.

¹⁰⁹ See Sonja Musser Golladay, *Los libros de acedrex dados e tablas: Historical, Artistic and Metaphysical Dimensions of Alfonso X's Book of Games*. Dissertation, the University of Arizona, 2007. Here, 1113.

in order to stand as an “example of the worldly gains that are not won with wit.”¹¹⁰ In marked contrast to the narratives surrounding Barhamin and other kings of India, Behabud does not bequeath much else to posterity besides this game—he does, however, maintain the kingdom and its wisemen like his father.¹¹¹ It is in this chapter that the Alfonsine *scriptorium* begins to construct a narrative that sees men, guided by enigmatic kings, arise from a less noble way of living, one in which the intellect stands impotent in the face of random fate, to the noblest of them all: a kingdom only governed by the intellect.

The Islamic tradition recounts the beginnings of games with similar protagonists, though the context surrounding these Indian kings is different. Al-Bakrī records that al-Bāhyūd succeeds his father and that during his reign, “nard was created as an example of the gains [makāsib] that are not from cleverness.”¹¹² On nard’s invention, al-Mas‘ūdī provides slightly different details about the kings than al-Bakrī or Alfonso, stating that the Indian people chose Barhamin’s eldest son “al-Bahbud” to succeed him after a brief succession turmoil.¹¹³ Once more, al-Bahbud of the *Meadows of Gold* was the king who invented nard to serve as “an example of the gains [makāsib]” that “are not attained in this life by cleverness, and that a livelihood [al-rizq] is not produced in this world by skill.”¹¹⁴

The *General estoria* reveals an even deeper interest in the Arabic geographical texts when it preserves the scholarly debate surrounding the facts and events the histories and geographies

¹¹⁰ “En los días d’este rey Behabud fueron asacados los dados, y que fue esto por enxemplo de las ganancias del mundo que se non ganan por agudez.” *General Estoria: Tercera parte*, 525.

¹¹¹ *General Estoria: Tercera parte*, vol. 1, 525.

¹¹² *Kitāb Al-Masālik*, vol. 1, 243.

¹¹³ See chapter one for an explanation of “nard” and its use in both the *General estoria* and the *Libro de los juegos*. Suffice it to state here that nard is a game played with dice akin to backgammon.

¹¹⁴ 1.95. 66, p. 161. A quick note here to state that the categories of table games and dice games are conflated in both al-Mas‘ūdī and the *General estoria*, though the *Libro de los juegos* takes great care to separate the two.

provide. Echoing the doubt that permeates the Islamic tradition regarding nard's origins, the *scriptorium* translates the following:

But others say that another king who was named Azedras invented dice and table games, and he made twelve pieces [canes] like the twelve pieces [canes] of the year, and thirty pieces [canes] according to the days of the months; and the two sides [azes] of the tables are said to be according to the luck [andança] man had in this century [siglo], which is at times good and at others bad.¹¹⁵

Which we find comes from *The Meadows of Gold* and the *Kitāb*, respectively:

al-Mas'ūdī: It has been mentioned that Ardashīr bin Bābak was the first to make [nard] and play it, and he showed [with the game] the fickleness of the world with its people and the difference of their affairs. He made its twelve houses for the number of the months, and he made its pieces [kilāb] thirty after the days of the month, and he made the two dice [al-fuṣayn] an example of fate and its fickleness with the people of this world, for a man plays with them [these pieces] and if fate favors him he attains what he desires in playing, and the resolute and prudent man does not attain what another does unless fate favors him, and [he shows] that livelihoods and fortunes are not attained in this world except by good luck.¹¹⁶

Al-Bakrī: It has been said that Ardashīr invented nard, and that he made its twelve shapes [shakl] after the number of months, and its thirty pieces [kilāb] after the number of days of the month, and its two dice [al-fuṣayn] an example of fate and its fickleness.¹¹⁷

Fine-grain details find their way into the Alfonsine work. For example, the literal translation of the Arabic “dog” for the chips, *can* for *kalb*, which I have kept as “piece” above to maintain consistency.¹¹⁸ There is the curious question of how “Azedras” came from “Ardashir,” as it is not immediately clear (there are a number of slight changes to original names across these passages).¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ *General estoria: tercera parte*, vol.1, 525. “Peró otros dizen que otro rey que ovo nombre Azedras asacó los dados y las tablas y fizo los doze canes de ellas a semejanza de los doze canes del año y los treinta canes segunt los días de los meses; y los dos azes de las tablas diz que son segunt el andança que á ombre en este siglo, que es a las vezes buena y a las vezes mala, a la manera de las tablas de amas las azes, que como son de departidos colores a esta semejança las departieron así los sabios.” It should be noted that the amount the *General estoria* pulls from the *Meadows of Gold* is still not fully treated in the scholarship today. In the present chapter, only selected sections that demonstrate the closeness between the two sources are given, but the extent to which these chapters and others in the Alfonsine history copy, interpret, and manipulate this source is worthy of a dedicated study in its own right.

¹¹⁶ *Murūj al-dhahab*, 1.95. 67; *Les prairies d'or*, 161.

¹¹⁷ *Kitāb Al-Masālik*, vol. 1, 243.

¹¹⁸ For the traditional use of “*bayt*” in Arabic descriptions of chessboards, and for more about the general nature of chess in the Islamic world, see Rosenthal, “*Shatrandj*,” *EI*. Accessed Jan. 14, 2021.

¹¹⁹ We find this individual repeated across the Islamic tradition as the inventor of nard. For example, in describing the origins of nard and other such games, Ibn Khallikān (1211-1282 AD) states “Ardashir Ibn Babek, the founder of the



Figure 6: Ms. T-I-6 El Escorial, fol. 73v. Detail, the game of *doze canes*.

Aside from this, however, the basic principle of the game and, indeed, its overall purpose in demonstrating the capriciousness of fate is easily adopted into the Alfonsine work. So much so that we encounter this game once more, this time richly illuminated, in the *Libro de los juegos* chapter “they call this game the twelve dogs [canes] or the twelve brothers.”¹²⁰

It is the second table game described in the section on *tablas*, which dedicates itself to games that equally require from their players *seso* and luck.¹²¹

The next chapter of the *General estoria* continues chronologically with the kings of India: “XXXV: About the Types of Chess and its Play and to What They Were Made to Resemble.”¹²² It references *Calila e Dimna*, among the first Arabic to Castilian manuscript projects Alfonso X, then an *infante*, supported in 1251.¹²³ Alfonso lived during a veritable boom in Castilian interest and translation activity surrounding Near Eastern didactic literature; two years later, his brother, prince Fadrique, would order the translation of *El libro de los engaños e los asayamientos de las*

last Persian dynasty, invented the game of *nerd* (*tables*), which was therefore called *nerdashîr*.” From *Ibn Khallikan’s Biographical Dictionary*, vol. 3, part 1. Translated by Baron MacGuckin De Slane. Paris: Oriental Translation Fund of Great Britain and Ireland, 1845. Here, 71.

¹²⁰ *Libro de los juegos*, 287. “Este juego llaman los doze canes o doze hermanos.” Presented as a hypothesis in Murray, *Chess*, 349.

¹²¹ Section begins on *Libro de los juegos*, 281. It is rarely the case in the *Libro de los juegos* manuscript to find origin stories or histories of individual games outside of the main prologue—there are, however, some exceptions—so the story of Behabud and Azedras is not repeated there. Bringing together Alfonsine manuscripts, such as the *General estoria* or the *Siete partidas* with the *Libro de los juegos*, reveals a dynamic, interconnected system of ever-growing knowledge.

¹²² “De las maneras de los axedrezes y de sus juegos y de la semejança a que fueron fechos.” *General estoria: Tercera parte*, vol. 1, 525.

¹²³ For a summary of how this date was decided upon given the extant manuscript tradition of the work, see Döhla, *El libro de Calila e Dimna*, 64. Preserved in the Biblioteca del Real Monasterio de San Lorenzo del Escorial as h-III-9 and x-III-4. Perhaps point out this is not the first reference in the *GE* of *CwD*

mugeres, commonly called *Sendebār*, which includes characters and stories from *Calila e Dimna*.¹²⁴ Being a mirror for princes, it was certainly attractive to the young Alfonso for the wisdom it could impart to a prince preparing to rule. As such, its didactic value helped shape his and the *scriptorium*'s perception on knowledge, its cultivation, and its permanence. The example of Burzōy and the wise Indian kings, discussed above, explored these themes, but the second time *Calila e Dimna* appears in the *General estoria*, it uncovers yet another facet of wise kingship. The many “saberes” that define wise Indian kingship—didactic literature, games, and scientific advances—also can be said of Alfonso X's kingship:

King Behabut died and after him a king reined whom they called Dayzlén. This king made a book they call *Calila e Digna*, which is about examples and wisdoms, and Abén Mochafa translated this book from Arabic into Latin. Thus this book *Calila y Digna* being done, a wiseman they called Cael, son of Harón, made another book for a king whom they called Mimo, and it was similar to that book *Calila y Digna*, because it thus talked about wisdoms and examples, but due to certain differences that existed between the one book and the other, that wiseman gave it the name *Taula Huerfa*. This king Dayzlén reigned for a good while; then, he died. After him ruled a king they called Alhip. In the time of this King Alhip, according to what the history says, noble and wise men invented the game of chess in order to demonstrate how the prepared/quick man wins and the unintelligent man is defeated. The people of India kept and hid great secrets in it, [like] how one's money is doubled. It is said that the movements of chess are aligned with the celestial spheres and with the celestial bodies.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ **Cite *Sendebār*:** Döhla gives the following list of translated didactic literature from the period, replete with their modern editions (though it should be noted a great many of these have yet to see a twenty-first-century revision): *Bocados de oro*, the *Libro de los buenos proverbios*, the *Libro de los ejemplos por A.B.C.*, *Libro de los gatos*, the *Leyenda de Barlaam y Josafat*, and the *Poridat de las poridades*. *El libro de Calila e Dimna*, 43.

¹²⁵ “Muerto el rey Behabut reinó empós él un rey a que dixerón Dayzlén. Este rey fizo el libro a que dizen Calila e Digna, que es de enxemplos y de sesos, y este libro trasladó de arávigó en latino Abén Mochafa. Y pues que este libro de Calila y Digna fue fecho, un sabio a que llamaron Cael, fijo de Harón, fizo otro libro para un rey a que dizién Mimo, y semejava aquel libro al de Calila y Digna, ca así fablava de sesos y de enxemplos, y però por algunos departimientos que ovo entre el un libro y el otro púsole nombre aquel sabio Taula Huerfa. . . En días d'este rey Alhip, segunt cuenta la istoria, asacaron ombres nobles y sabios el juego del axedrez para mostrar y' cómo vencié el apercebido y era vencido el torpe. Y los de India cataron y encubrieron grandes poridades en él, y cómo se doblan las sus cuentas. Y diz que se tienen los fechos del axedrez con los cercos del cielo y con las cosas celestials.” *General estoria*. *Tercera parte*, vol. 1, 527.

The *Meadows of Gold* show that the extra information surrounding the so-called “*Taula Huerfa*” do come from the Islamic tradition even when they do not appear in al-Bakrī.¹²⁶ Aside from this slight difference, the details about these two Indian kings come from al-Bakrī in the same order. (Note the corruption of certain Arabic names in the Castilian, such as Dayzlén for Dabshalim, Alhip for Balhait, Mimo for al-Ma’mūn, or Cael for Sahl):¹²⁷

Then Dīnām ruled—and his name was said to be Dabshalim—and he is the author of *Kitāb Kalīlah wa Dimnah* (which Ibn al-Muqaffa’ translated, and Sahl bin Harūn composed a book similar to *Kalīlah wa Dimnah* for al-Ma’mūn called *Tha’lah wa ‘Afraḥ*). He was king of India for 120 years.

Then Balhait ruled and in his time chess was invented. It illustrates the victory that is granted the resolute/judicious man and the misfortune that befalls the ignorant man.

India has a secret in chess they conceal about the doubling of its calculations and via that they penetrate the highest spheres, and they made chess connected to the celestial bodies.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ A translation of the correlating passage from al-Mas’ūdī reveals the life of this narrative, which surely predates the *Meadows of Gold* scholar, is less expansively transmitted through al-Bakrī, and then subsequently embellishes the *General estoria*. Emphasis on the phrase more closely related than that of al-Bakrī to the Alfonsine text: “Dabshalīm: then after him [Fūr] Dabshalīm ruled, and he was the author of the book *Kalīlah wa Dimnah* which is attributed to Ibn al-Muqaffa’, and Sahl bin Harūn the secretary [kātib] had composed for the Caliph al-Ma’mūn, a book that’s translation is *Tha’lah wa ‘Afraḥ*. **It is similar to the book *Kalīlah wa Dimnah* in its chapters and examples, but improving on it in its elegance and style...** Balhait and Chess: then after him [Dabshalīm] Balhait ruled, and chess was made in his time, thus with its play it put an end to nard, and Balhait makes clear the triumph which is granted the prudent one and the misfortune that overtakes the ignorant one, and he made calculations according to its arithmetic, and so he put together a book known to the Indians as *Turuq Janka* that they circulate amongst themselves, and he played chess with his sages, and he made for them [the pieces] images, figures formed like those endowed with speech [or reason/rational beings], and the others from among animals that are not rational, and he made for them degrees and ranks... and the Indians have secrets that they concealed in their calculation and via that they penetrate the highest spheres, and doubling that permits them to reach the highest celestial bodies.” Al-Mas’ūdī, *Les prairies d’or*, I.67.163-5; *Murūj al-dhahab*, I.96-7 (1966-7).

¹²⁷ Cf. the early and contemporaneous narrative tradition in which the ruler who precedes Balhit is a certain Hashrān, who commissions the invention of the game of nard from the sage Qaflān. Murray, 208-9. It is quite impossible to list the many different texts and manuscripts in the Islamic tradition that replicate the story of Balhit, his wisemen, and the creation of chess as shown above. In a previous note, the thirteenth-century writer Ibn Khallikān made an appearance, and he is one example of an individual who follows the legend of Balhit when describing how chess was invented. Notably, he then develops the other common passage of the legend, absent in the Alfonsine oeuvre, of the wise man Sissa responsible for the creation of chess requesting a grain of wheat (sometimes one dirham), progressively doubled on each square of the chessboard, as his reward from Balhit. Needless to say, what begins as one grain ends up being an astronomical sum by the end of the calculation. Ibn Khallikān, *Ibn Khallikan’s Bibliographical Dictionary*, 71. A second example and one that mirrors this legend is the later work (c. 1360) of Yaḥyā ibn Ibrāhīm al-Ḥakīm, *Nuzhat arbāb al-‘uqūl fī al-shiṭranj al-manqūl*. A 1506 copy is now housed as Arabic MS 86 (The John Rylands Library, The University of Manchester), discussed by, *inter alia*, Joseph de Somogyi, “The Arabic Chess Manuscripts in the John Rylands Library.” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 41 (1959): 430-445.

¹²⁸ *Kitāb Al-Masālik*, vol. 1, 358-9.

Regarding Alfonsine kingship, he and his manuscripts not only promote, but also master the fields of knowledge that defined Indian intellectualism. Games are an integral part of Indian kingship, so much so that their progressive evolution is as important a narrative thread as the sequence of Indian kings. The notion that chess and table games are linked to the courts of Indian kings, and all that connection entails in terms of intellectual acumen and kingly power, is consistently articulated across the Alfonsine oeuvre. The *Libro de los juegos* is a testament to the Alfonsine mastery over a specific knowledge, one that symbolizes the nature of man and the universe, that has legendary origins in the distant world of India. The translation of *Calila e Dimna* from the Arabic *Kalīlah wa Dimnah* is yet another manuscript that connects Alfonso's court intellectualism and his keen patronage with that of India. Like the *Kitāb* passage above, the Alfonsine project conserves for its readers the same transmission history found in Islamic texts of *Kalīla wa Dimna*.¹²⁹ This includes its translation from Persian into Arabic by Ibn al-Muqaffa' around 750 AD and the later, expanded version, *Tha'lah wa 'Afrāh*.¹³⁰ He does not insert his name into its transmission lineage in the *General estoria*, but he does so in *Calila e Dimna* itself: by his order, "it was translated" from the Arabic to Latin, then to Castilian.¹³¹ The third way in which the Alfonsine model of kingship could be mapped onto the wisdom of men like al-Bahbud or Debshalīm looks to the heavens. While Alfonso was known as "the Wise," he was more

¹²⁹ Because the sources discussed emphasize and rely upon the narrative origin of India for the collection of fables that compose *Kalīla wa Dimna*, it bears mentioning that modern scholarship has yet to identify an Indian text with any compositional resemblance to the Arabic tradition. Of course, this is a fact teased out by modern scholars over centuries; to the medieval landscape discussed, India was the origin of the work and the knowledge therein, and India as a metaphor does great work for the tradition in terms of negotiating all manners of social, political, philosophical, and historical questions, *inter alia*. Döhla, *El libro de Calila e Dimna*, 10.

¹³⁰ For more on this, see Döhla, *El libro de Calila e Dimna*, 11 *in passim*.

¹³¹ We can reconstruct what the prologue to the royal copy of the manuscript must have read thanks to an inventory record of a fifteenth-century copy now lost as well: "el título de la obra era el siguiente: *El libro de Calila e Dimna, que fue sacado de Árábigo en Latin, Romanzado, por mandado del Infante Alfonso, fijo del Rey D. Fernando, en era de mil trescientos ochenta y nueve*." Döhla, *El libro de Calila e Dimna*, 63. As one may surmise, the original manuscript from the time of Alfonso X has not survived.

specifically celebrated—and, by his enemies, attacked—for his patronage of astronomical manuscripts and scholarship.¹³²

At this point in the *General estoria*, it only briefly relays the deeds of one more king—“Cores”—before the narrative ceases to focus on one royal lineage or any enigmatic ruler.¹³³ After Cores, the different Indian lineages, “disagreed with each other, and the kingdom was divided into parts.”¹³⁴ The history does mention some of the different rulers that took over regions of India, but the interest drifts to other aspects of the Indian world, such as its animals, customs, clothing, and trade goods.¹³⁵ It bears repeating that all of this information follows the Islamic textual tradition.¹³⁶ The sequence on India in the *General estoria* is not done developing intellectual kingship at this point, however. The final passage that will be compared between the Alfonsine history and Islamic sources explores another characteristic that all the Indian wisemen and erudite rulers had in common, which, albeit a physical feature, nevertheless had great implications for their intellects. Indeed, this trait, one that uncovers a pivotal moment of pre-modern racialization, informs the attempts of both Alfonso and his contemporaries to hierarchize men based upon intelligence.

General Estoria, Chapter XXXIX: “Regarding the Natures of the Men of India, the Blacks and Whites”¹³⁷

India was not defined only by the wise rulers and court scholars. Other diverse peoples lived in India, and they also played a role in how wise kingship and intellectualism were defined and

¹³² Indeed, the scholarship on this is too vast to contain in one footnote. A far too brief list will have to suffice: Laura Fernández Fernández, Samsó, XXXXXX

¹³³ “En India y en Cin y en aquellas tierras que son allá reinó entonces un rey a que llamaron Alhip, y murió aqel y reinó empós él otro rey a que dixeron Cores. Y por este rey Cores fizieron los sabios de esa sazón un libro grande para contar y conocer las enfermedades del cuerpo del ombre y sus melezinas, y pintaron en él las figuras de todas las yervas.” *General estoria: tercera parte*, vol. 1, 527.

¹³⁴ “Y desacordáronse, y partióse el reino en partes.” *General estoria: tercera parte*, vol. 1, 527.

¹³⁵ *General estoria: tercera parte*, vol. 1, 527-531.

¹³⁶ CITE corresponding passages in al-Bakrī and al-Mas’ūdī.

¹³⁷ “De las natures de los ombres de India, blancos y negros.” *General estoria: tercera parte*, vol. 1, 531.

negotiated. What is more, they reveal how sameness and difference was described and imagined within this period, and how intellectualism in the medieval period was restricted to a certain kind of people deemed by their very nature as superior. More specifically, the myth of Indian knowledge was as defined by its highest echelons of learned society as it was by those at the very bottom, who were not believed to contribute to the creation of knowledge due to their race.¹³⁸ Blackness in India is central to this paradigm of knowledge creation. Within the anecdotes on India that reveal great scholarly achievement, there is also the insistent claim that such legacy pertains to those of fair skin, a group with which Alfonso identified, whereas those who were Black were symbolic of no intellectual, cultural, or political power.

The impacts of this exclusionary perspective on intellectual production affect more than the regions now known as India and Pakistan. This is because the geographic contours of “India” in this period extended into Africa. In some classical texts, which later greatly informed Islamic geographies and European texts alike, there was a belief that territories of East Africa, and thus East Africans, were contained by the term “India.”¹³⁹ In late antiquity, there were also times when

¹³⁸ The field of history is increasingly open to the applicability of the term “race” in the premodern, but that does not mean that from within and without there are no dissenting voices. Some believe that without modern science and biology, discrimination between different peoples could not be classified as “racist,” but, as David Nirenberg demonstrates, whatever biological differences may exist between people, these “differences have no obvious or natural relationship to the cultural work they are asked to do in systems of racial discrimination, systems which are products of culture, not of nature. If this lack of congruence does not suffice to make modern racist ideologies less “racial,” then it cannot suffice to excuse premodern discriminations from the charge.” See “Was There Race Before Modernity: The Example of “Jewish” Blood in Late Medieval Spain,” in his *Neighboring Faiths: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in the Middle Ages and Today*, pp. 169-90. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2014. Here, 173. More recently, the study of race in the premodern has received heightened attention, particularly in the study of medieval literature. See, for example, Thomas Hahn, ed., *A Cultural History of Race in the Medieval Age (800-1350)*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2021; Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*. Cambridge, U.K.; New York City, U.S.: Cambridge University Press, 2018; Matthew X. Vernon, *The Black Middle Ages: Race and the Construction of the Middle Ages*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018; Cord Whitaker, *How Modern Racism Emerged from Medieval Race-thinking*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019.

¹³⁹ Regarding the classical period and its authors, “[t]he referent for “Ethiopia” seems to move about from Africa, to Arabia, to India, and to places in between, depending on the author or text in question.” Phiroze Vasunia, “Ethiopia and India: Fusion and Confusion in British Orientalism,” in *Les Cahiers d’Afrique de l’Est* [online], 51 (2016). Accessed October 8, 2021. <http://journals.openedition.org/estafrica/314>

the two separate regions were not as conscientiously delineated.¹⁴⁰ This geographic perspective has long roots with appearances as early as Homer's *Odyssey*, and a complex, entangled history that had deep ramifications on the study of both regions well into the nineteenth century (perhaps even longer).¹⁴¹ In classical antiquity, the relationship of Ethiopia and India, "is a significant component of the Greco-Roman depiction and perception of the eastern and southern edges of the world."¹⁴² When writers classified the two disparate regions within the same geographic concept, their reasoning sometimes had less to do with the land and more to do with perceived racial similarity, such as when Herodotus equates Indians to Ethiopians because of their close physical "resemblance."¹⁴³ Philostratus, Seneca, Pliny and still others defined resemblance as a shared skin color.¹⁴⁴

Authors in the Middle Ages also wrote about the perceived racial similarities of East Africans and Indians, and some provided additional arguments, usually biblical in nature, to explain this constructed sameness. The medieval three-region model of India equated "the third India" or "Middle India" with Ethiopia, and this was particularly the case by the 1300s.¹⁴⁵ Much of this has to do with the biblical story of Noah, his three sons, and where their lineages migrated to across the world,¹⁴⁶ a narrative that repeatedly finds itself at the intersection of notions of race

¹⁴⁰ See, for example, the writings of Jerome on the matter, discussed in Hahn, "The Indian Tradition," 221.

¹⁴¹ For a history of the "confusion" of parts of Africa with India and its impact on the historiography since classical antiquity to the present, see Pierre Schneider, "The So-called Confusion between India and Ethiopia: The Eastern and Southern Edges of the Inhabited World from the Greco-Roman Perspective," in *Brill's Companion to Ancient Geography: The Inhabited World in Greek and Roman Tradition*, pp. 184-202. Leiden: Brill, 2015.

¹⁴² Schneider, "The So-called Confusion," 195.

¹⁴³ Book 3, 101.

¹⁴⁴ "These excerpts all share the implicit idea that Indians and Ethiopians had the same skin color... this physical feature contributed to establish a parallel between Indians and Ethiopians, in contrast to the rest of human beings, as if they formed an "ethnic community"." Schneider, "The So-called Confusion," 198.

¹⁴⁵ E. Denison Ross, "Prester John and the Empire of Ethiopia," in Arthur Percival Newton, ed., *Travel and Travellers of the Middle Ages*, pp. 174-94. New York: Knopf, 1926. Here, 178; Beckingham, "The Achievements," 15; Paul Kaplan, *The Rise of the Black Magus in Western Art*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1985. Here, 64.

¹⁴⁶ To understand the foundations of race-making in the premodern, the curse of Ham is perhaps one of the most important themes due to its wide dissemination and its far-reaching legacies into the modern era. The bibliography on this topic covers many disciplines and historical moments, as can be expected given its use of religion. By no

and religious exegesis across time.¹⁴⁷ Noah curses his son Ham—though the reason for this curse is not always given—and this turns Ham black (alternatively, sometimes it is God who changes Ham from a white man to a black man after Noah incurred His wrath). Writers in the Middle Ages traced Ham’s subsequent journey into Africa and categorized many different black peoples as from Ham’s lineage and, thus, cursed.¹⁴⁸ Ethiopians and Indians within this worldview are seen as from the same line of descent. As early as Isidore of Seville, we read “Ethiopians are so called after a son of Ham named Cush... There are three tribes of Ethiopians: Hesperians, Garamantes, and Indians.”¹⁴⁹ In the Islamic world, this narrative survives in various permutations as well. There is the version Ibn Qutaybah disseminates,¹⁵⁰ and then there are still others, such as this variation of the narrative al-Ya‘qūbī gives: “When Nūḥ awoke from his sleep and learnt what had happened

means exhaustive or authoritative, some bibliography on Ham and race are the following: David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003; Phiroze Vasunia, “Ethiopia and India.”

¹⁴⁷ It is an idea that has modern implications that are deeply unsettling, as when contemporary French-Rwandan author Scholastique Mukasonga writes in her memoir regarding the genocide and violence in her birth country: “The Bazungu [white people] claimed to know better than us [the Tutsis] who we were, where we came from. They’d examined us, they’d weighed us, they’d measured us. Their conclusions were final: our skulls were Caucasian, our profiles Semitic, our figures Nilotic. They even knew the name of our progenitor: it was in the Bible, his name was Ham. We were virtually white (despite some regrettable crossbreeding): a little bit Jewish, a little bit Aryan. The experts, and for this we were meant to be grateful, had even concocted a tailor-made race just for us: we were Hamites!” *The Barefoot Woman*. Translated by Jordan Stamp. New York: Archipelago Books, a Penguin Random House press, 2018 (French, 2008). Recorded from around the same time as Mukasonga’s childhood, the Haratin of the Draa Valley in southern Morocco share an oral tradition that undercuts the colonizers’ view of their “Hamitic curse”: “[t]he Haratin relate that they are the descendants of Noah’s second son, Ham, and that once upon a time they used to be white. One day, however, Ham protected his head during a heavy rain-storm by carrying the Koran on top of it. The rain was so heavy that it washed all the characters of the holy book on to Ham’s skin; these characters, being sacred, were inedible, and so they turned Ham and his offspring black forever!” Cited in Chouki El Hamel, *Black Morocco: A History of Slavery, Race, and Islam*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Here, 86.

¹⁴⁸ Cite more. Also, Michael Gomez, *African Dominion*, 48-50.

¹⁴⁹ 9.2.127–28. It is worth mentioning that India was also a well-developed concept in the early medieval Christian writings as well, particularly in relation to the idea of paganism and pagan conversion. For a brief summary of this, see Thomas Hahn, “The Indian Tradition in Western Medieval Intellectual History,” *Viator* 9 (1978): 213-34.

¹⁵⁰ “Wahb b. Munabbih said that Ḥām b. Nūḥ was a white man having a beautiful face and form. But Allāh (to Him belongs glory and power) changed his colour and the colour of his descendants because of his father’s curse. Ḥām went off, followed by his children. They settled on the shore of the sea, and Allāh increased them. They are the Sūdān. Ḥām begot Kūsh b. Ḥām, Kan’ān b. Ḥām and Fūt b. Ḥām. Fūt travelled and settled in the land of Hind and Sind, and the people there are his descendants. The descendants of Kūsh and Kan’ān are the races of the Sūdān: the Nūba, the Zanj, the Qazān [or Fazzān], the Zaghāwa, the Ḥabasha, the Qibṭ and the Barbar.” Hopkins and Levitzion, *Corpus*, 15.

he cursed Kan'ān b. Ḥām but he did not curse Ḥām. Of his posterity are the Qibt, the Ḥabasha [Abyssinians, Ethiopians], and the Hind.”¹⁵¹ These geographical and theological notions of sameness, or “resemblance,” rely upon a racialized generalization of physical and character attributes, such as describing hair texture, facial features, skin color, and even sexual practices. As writers across various traditions reimagined and reinvented the geographical and theological histories of India and East Africa, the distinction between the two regions sometimes became less clear or even merging into one.¹⁵² This conflation and racialization of their two distinct peoples continues for more than a millennium and the so-called “fusion and confusion” of Ethiopia and India still figured heavily in Orientalist writings of the eighteenth century.¹⁵³

It is possible that this geographic confusion wove its way into the Alfonsine *scriptorium*. It is certain, however, that the *scriptorium* existed in a period that saw India and East Africa as useful in discussions about sameness and difference defined by geographical, racial, and biblical arguments. Such discussions characterized the Alfonsine perception of the Indian people, and thus characterizes the Indian wisdom, culture, and kingship Alfonso X discusses in the *Libro de los juegos* and in other manuscript projects. The king Burzōy meets in his Indian travels and the dynasty of inventive, erudite rulers of the *General estoria* are responsible for some of the most important intellectual advances—games and astrology—within the Alfonsine context, and, more

¹⁵¹ Hopkins and Levitzion, *Corpus*, 20.

¹⁵² For example, after listing the many names classical authors gave Ethiopians, the famous German scholar of the seventeenth century, Hiob Ludolf, wrote in 1681 that no small amount of confusion swirled around Ethiopia. Remarking on Ludolf's statement, Pierre Schneider writes, “This is probably the first appearance of a term coined by Ludolf to define a phenomenon which occasionally raises difficulties for classicists and historians, for it may hinder our understanding of ancient texts: the confusion of India and Ethiopia.” From, “The So-called Confusion,” 184.

¹⁵³ It was not until the nineteenth century that the “confusion” was reassessed and analyzed. Schneider also argues that the term “confusion” does a disservice to the classical authors who were often judged as imprecise and ignorant by much later scholars. Instead, if “confusion” is ever applicable, he argues “Christian speculations” were, “the source of several original ‘confusions’.” “The So-called Confusion,” 184-5, and 194 *in passim*. Notably, this unusual approach to the geography occurred long after such scholars had precise maps and first-hand experience of the two regions. Phiroze Vasunia, “Ethiopia and India.”

broadly, within the medieval Mediterranean world. Immediately following the discussion of wise Indian kingship, however, the *General estoria* pursues a new direction. It relates that Indians “were men with very accomplished intelligence and reason, but only those who were white [blancos], because the opposite is said about the blacks [negros].”¹⁵⁴ It is perhaps no wonder, then, that the Indian king and his courtiers in the opening illuminations of the *Libro de los juegos* are fair-skinned. Whether the artists of the *scriptorium* copied figures from now-lost Islamic illuminated manuscripts as some have suggested,¹⁵⁵ or the illuminations are a pastiche of Islamic style, the choice to make the court fair is consistent with the perception of what kind of people from India embodied the intellectual legacy. This imagination of a dichotomous Indian society of white versus black does not merely transmit what the Islamic sources were also saying; it also reaffirms the racialized thinking that arose from discussions about blackness in this period, such as that about the curse of Ham. Per Alfonso, there were two kinds of Indian people. What differentiated them was their race, and their race preordained their intellectual and cultural worth.

Such an association of whiteness with intelligence, royalty, and beauty abounds in the works of al-Mas‘ūdī as it did elsewhere in the Islamic tradition. Similarly, the negative portrayal of blackness was often articulated via the lack of these same qualities.¹⁵⁶ The *General estoria* transmits, and thus legitimizes, these associations through its translations of Arabic texts: “there is a land of a king [in India] named Zafir... and about the nature of the inhabitants there the history

¹⁵⁴ *General estoria* 3.1, 531. “De los de India cuenta la Istoría d’esta guise, que fueron ombres muy complidos de seso y de recabdo, però aquellos que eran blancos, ca de los negros diz que lo contrario avién d’esto.” Cite where this occurs in al-Mas‘ūdī.

¹⁵⁵ Kennedy. Again, the caveat against her claim it was a “mindless” copying.

¹⁵⁶ Regarding beauty or the lack thereof, the textual tradition surrounding Ham offers a similar window into how it related to premodern race-making: goes further, saying “Nūḥ, peace be upon him, cursed Ḥām, praying that his face should become ugly and black, and that his descendants should become slaves to the progeny of Sām.” Excerpted from the anonymous Akhbār al-zamān (which, incidentally, is sometimes linked to al-Mas‘ūdī) in Hopkins and Levitzion, *Corpus*, 34.

goes like this, that the men there are very white and beautiful, more than other men.¹⁵⁷ Abū Zayd al-Sīrāfī was one of the key sources for al-Mas‘ūdī’s passages on India in the *Meadows of Gold*,¹⁵⁸ and he consistently linked fair skin (بيض) to beauty (جمال), and savageness or hideousness (مناكير) with black skin (سود).¹⁵⁹ (Of course, he was not the only author to make associations like this in Islamic texts.) Since much in these passages from the Castilian history draw upon the Islamic tradition, the Alfonsine *scriptorium* made a conscious decision to accept and imagine Indians as either fair skinned and wise, or black and unintelligent.

As such, the *General estoria* elaborates upon its initial presentation of India as a world of racial extremes, portraying blacks in India as simpleminded, hypersexualized beings—indeed, their very humanity is diminished, and it is as if a beast or “creature,” as the text calls them, is being described.¹⁶⁰ In “ten ways of nature,” black Indians are made separate from the whites, who share “nothing” of their nature:

The first [way of nature] that departs [from whites] is that blacks have frizzy, twisted, thick, and sparse [menudo] hair; the second is that they are born with very little hair in the eyebrows; the third is that they have very wide and snubbed noses; the fourth is that they have fat and full faces; the fifth is that their teeth are white and strong; the sixth is that their bodies emit a foul odor; the seventh is that they have chapped hands and feet filled with cracks; the eighth is that their penis grows long; the ninth is that they have bad habits, and interpret that as one will; the tenth is that they have in themselves an excessive happiness, and such happiness comes from a lack of intelligence.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ Alfonso X, *General estoria: Tercera parte*, vol. 1, 530. “á una tierra de un rey que á nombre Zafir... De las naturas de los moradores de allí dize así la istoria, que son los ombres de allí muy blancos y fermosos más que otros ombres.” [Find this passage in B](#)

¹⁵⁸ Abū Zayd al-Sīrāfī and Ibn Faḍlān. *Two Arabic Travel Books*. Translated by Tim Mackintosh-Smith and James E. Montgomery. New York: New York University Press, 2014. Here, 12-13.

¹⁵⁹ For beautiful characterizations of whiteness, see the following passages in *Accounts of China and India* in *Two Arabic Travel Books*: 1.7.4, 1.7.7. For ugly characterizations of blackness, see 1.2.5.

¹⁶⁰ Alfonso X, *General estoria* 3.1, 531-2.

¹⁶¹ *General estoria* 3.1, 531-2. “Y retrae que dize Galieno que en el negro ay diez maneras de diez maneras de natura que las non ay en el otro. La primera departe que á el cabello crespo y retorcido y redondo y menudo; la segunda que les nacen pocos cabellos en las sobrecejas; la tercera que an las narizes muy anchas y romas; la quarta que an los rostros gordos y carnudos; la quinta que son los sus dientes blancos y fuertes; la sesta que les fiede el cuerpo; la séptima que an las manos y los pies resquebrados y llenos de crietas; la octava que les crece el miembro luengo; la novena que son de malas mañas, y entienda quien quisiere; la dezena que á en ellos alegría a demás, y tal alegría que viene de poco seso.”

These ten characteristics are attributed to Galen. However, locating this passage in a Galenic treatise has proved difficult; indeed, its first known occurrence in the textual record is in none other than al-Mas'ūdī's *Meadows of Gold*.¹⁶² As is the case with the overwhelming majority of *General estoria* passages on India, this quotation translates al-Bakrī and, through him, al-Mas'ūdī.¹⁶³ This is how the supposedly Galenic theories regarding blackness arrive at the *scriptorium*, which was already situated in a cultural context that was beginning to think about race as a collection of inheritable and immutable characteristics.¹⁶⁴ The textual tradition of the “ten characteristics” of blackness thus weave Alfonso X and his court into a conversation that stretches back to at least tenth-century Baghdad and perhaps even earlier:¹⁶⁵

al-Mas'ūdī: Galen mentioned ten characteristics of the Blacks which are gathered in him and not found in others: frizzy hair, faint eyebrows, broad nose, thick lips, sharp teeth, smelly skin, black eyes, cracked hands and feet, a long penis, and great joy; Galen says: “this joy has overwhelmed the Black by corrupting his brain, and due to that his mind has been weakened.”¹⁶⁶

Al-Bakrī: Galen mentioned that in Blacks there are ten characteristics not found in others: frizzy hair, faint eyebrows, broad nose, thick lips, sharp teeth, smelly skin, black eyes,

¹⁶² See Michael A. Gomez, *Reversing Sail: A History of the African Diaspora*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Here, 49. It is worth mentioning that while the words translated here do not have identified antecedents in the Galenic tradition, there is still the possibility that al-Mas'ūdī had access to a text now lost, or translated it from a source mistakenly attributed to Galen (though so far these ten characteristics do not seem to appear anywhere in the classical tradition).

¹⁶³ Without the attribution to Galen, similar ideas proliferate the Islamic tradition in the period. Al-Sīrāfi, for example, characterizes the black island cannibals of Andamān akin to Galen: “They are black and have frizzy hair, hideous faces and eyes, and long feet—the foot of one of them is about a cubit long (meaning his penis)—and they are naked.”

¹⁶⁴ For example, one of the earliest instances of the word race, or *raza*, appears in a Catalan treatise about horse breeding that claims to be a translation of a work by Alfonso X: “La.x. titulo dela enfermedat. que dizen raza. // Faze se alos cauallos una malautia quell dizen Raça. Et faze se de sequedat dela unna.” Later, this term, which gave rise to our word “race,” was applied to human reproduction, specifically regarding the concept of *limpieza de sangre* in Spain. See David Nirenberg, “Race and Religion,” in Thomas Hahn, ed., *A Cultural History of Race in the Medieval Age (800-1350)*, pp. 67-80. New York: Bloomsbury, 2021. Here, p. 8 and note 20. Also, *ibid.*, “Was There Race Before Modernity,” 180 *in passim*.

¹⁶⁵ Indeed, it also places Alfonso X within a discussion of race that extends into the modern era. A researcher who has since been stripped of his university status published in 2006 a study supporting racialized differences in intelligence citing Galen. “Ancient Greek doctor Galen cited to authorize racist IQ “data”,” *Pharos*, a research blog affiliated with Vassar College <<https://pharos.vassarspaces.net/2018/10/05/ancient-greek-doctor-galen-cited-to-authorize-racist-iq-data/>> Accessed February 10, 2022.

¹⁶⁶ Translation my own. 98.

cracked limbs, a long penis, and great joy—and his great joy corrupts his brain and weakens his mind [and his flesh? *Wa lih.amū*].¹⁶⁷

Al-Bakrī attributes the physical traits of the Blacks to their home and origin, stating that certain climatic influences like humidity affected their bodies and nature.¹⁶⁸ Following his text, the *General estoria* summarizes these effects: “Because the head of a Black man is hotter than other parts of the body, it draws the blood of the body to it, and it is said that due to this the legs are made skinny and it curves their faces and noses, and it leaves the head paralyzed, and due to this they do not have a complete brain.”¹⁶⁹

Regarding the climatic argument that the *General estoria* transmits from the Islamic tradition, it is worth mentioning that other scholars of al-Andalus like Šā‘id al-Andalusī similarly discussed the effects of the environment:

Some astrologers came up with an explanation for this condition [being black]; they said that both Saturn and Mercury control the destiny of the Indian people. Because of the influence of Saturn, their color turned black, while the influence of Mercury provided them with intellectual power and fine spirit. Saturn in partnership with Mercury gave them correctness of reasoning and depth of perception.¹⁷⁰

Such a rationale was not exclusive to al-Andalus for long—this passage was also adapted as follows into the *Caballero Zifar*:

Some of the astrologers say that the Indians had these good traits because the province of India falls naturally under Saturn and Mercury. They acquired their dark complexion from Saturn; they are wise, discreet, and clever, having obtained these traits from Mercury, mixed with Saturn.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ *Kitāb Al-Masālik*, vol. 1, 249.

¹⁶⁸ *Kitāb Al-Masālik*, vol. 1, 249.

¹⁶⁹ Alfonso X, *General estoria: Tercera parte*, vol. 1, 531. “Y porque á el negro en la cabeça más calenture que en otra parte del cuerpo tira a sí la sangre del cuerpo, y diz que por esto se le fazen las piernas delgadas y se les encorvan los rostros y las narizes y finca embargada la cabeça, y que por esto non an el seso cumplido.”

¹⁷⁰ *Science in the Medieval World*, 12.

¹⁷¹ *The Book of the Knight Zifar*, 24. English translated edited slightly. “E algunos de los estrolagos dizen que los yndios ouieron estas bondades porque la prouincia de India a por natural partiçion Saturno e Mercurio, e fizieronse loros por Saturno; co son ssabios e ssesudos e de ssotil engeño, porque les cupo de la partiçion de Mercurio, que fue mesclado con Saturno.” *Caballero Zifar*, 97.

Both authors conclude based upon this and other evidence that the Indians were spared the expected character of their race. In this sense, they overlap with the *General estoria* and the branch of the Islamic it is most closely related to:

Caballero Zifar: Of course, from time immemorial, India has been the source and way of knowledge. The Indians were men of great moderation and great intelligence. Although they are dark-skinned and resemble blacks in color, for they share common borders with them, God protected them from the blacks' way and their stupidity. He gave them good deportment and goodness in manners, and intelligence more than to many whites... Their kings were always well born and believers in God and for this reason are men of good faith and sagacious, and all believe in God deeply.¹⁷²

Ṣā'īd al-Andalusī: The Indians, as known to all nations for many centuries, are the metal [essence] of wisdom, the source of fairness and objectivity. They are peoples of sublime pensiveness, universal apoloques, and rare inventions. In spite of the fact that their color is in the first stage of blackness, which puts them in the same category as the blacks, Allah, in His glory, did not give them the low characters, the poor manners, or the inferior principles associated with this group and ranked them above a large number of white and brown peoples... [T]hey enjoy the purity of talent and the power of distinction, making them totally different from the people of Sudan such as the Zinj, the Abyssinians, the Ethiopians, and others.¹⁷³

All of the writers just referenced from the Arabic and Castilian sources situate a version of this discussion of blackness after emphasizing the unparalleled wisdom of Indian rulers. This racializing description of men is as much a commentary on sameness and difference as it is an assertion about who is by nature (and also by God's will) able to participate in the creation of knowledge.

¹⁷² Translated in *The Book of the Knight Zifar*, 24. I have retouched the translation because I do not agree with certain choices made by translator Nelson. Original: "Çiertamente de antiguedat fue India fuente e manera de çiençia, e fueron omes de grant mesura e de buen seso. Maguer que son loros, que tiran a los negros quanto en la color, porque comarcan con ellos, Dios los guardo de las maneras dellos e de su torpedat, e dioles mesura e bonda ten manera e en seso, mas que a muchos blancos... E sus reys fueron sienpre de buenas costunbres e estudiauan todavia en la diuinidat, e por esto son omes de buena fe e de buena creençia, e creen todos en Dios muy bien." The latter statement in this passage regarding the Indian's innate capacity to know and believe in the Christian God was a trope in the Western tradition. See Hahn, "India Tradition in Western History," in particular his discussion of Peter Abelard's "attempt to open wide the church door to the virtuous heathen." Here, 225-7.

¹⁷³ *Science in the Medieval World*, 11-2.

These Galenic traits should not be misunderstood to have represented a way of thinking that was universal or unchallenged. Particularly in the Islamic tradition, there was sustained resistance to the devaluation of black peoples from al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 868) onwards, specifically based upon racialized, theological arguments.¹⁷⁴ In the collection of Arabic manuscripts at El Escorial outside of Madrid, there is an early copy of a work that systematically attacks and undermines the curse of Ham. This work is the *Kitāb tanwīr*¹⁷⁵ *al-ghabash fī faḍl al-Sūdān wa-al-Ḥabash*, or *The Illumination of Darkness on the Virtues of Blacks and Abyssinians*.¹⁷⁶ Its author, the famous Ḥanbalī of Baghdad Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1200), wrote it towards the end of the twelfth century.¹⁷⁷ Ibn Khaldūn (1332-1406) similarly chastises al-Masʿūdī for his attempt to explain the “levity, excitability, and emotionalism,” of Blacks, saying in the *Muqaddimah*, “he did no better than to report, on the authority of Galen and Yaʿqūb b. Ishāq al-Kindī, that the reason is a weakness of their brains which results in a weakness of their intellect. This is an inconclusive and unproven statement.”¹⁷⁸ However, this is only a critique of the cause and effect in al-Masʿūdī’s statement.

¹⁷⁴ Often, the central point of debate in these texts had to do with the licit or illicit enslavement of blacks. A general survey of the Islamic literature that emerged in defense of the blacks, see El Hamel, *Black Morocco*, 85-6. Some notable names he mentions that partook in this debate are the following: al-Jāḥiẓ, al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505), and Ahmad al-Nāṣirī (d. 1897).

¹⁷⁵ This word in Arabic is of note because, while it means to “illuminate,” it also has the philosophical meaning of “enlightenment.”

¹⁷⁶ To name but two manuscripts in which this work is found, there is the Ms. árabe 1835 at El Escorial and the Beinecke’s MSS suppl. 588 (bound with other treatises on Islamic practice). See also Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte Der Arabischen Litteratur*. 2 vols. Weimar: E. Felber, 1898. Here, vol. 1, p. 505, n. 75. Arabic editions of this work: ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Jawzī, *Tanwīr al-ghabash fī faḍl al-Sūdān wa-al-Ḥabash*. al-Riyāḍ: Dār al-Sharīf, 1998; ibid., *Tanwīr al-ghabash fī faḍl al-Sūdān wa-al-Ḥabash*. Umm Durmān: Dār Jāmi‘at Umm Durmān al-Islāmīyah, 1993. An English translation of the Escorial manuscript was the product of a dissertation thesis: Imran Hamza Alawiye, *Ibn al-Jawzī’s Apologia on Behalf of the Black People and Their Status in Islam: A Critical Edition and Translation of Kitāb tanwīr al-ghabash fī faḍl al-Sūdān wa-al-Ḥabash*. PhD dissertation, SOAS, University of London, 1985.

¹⁷⁷ H. Laoust, “Ibn al-Djawzī,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. Edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 28 February 2022. First published online: 2012 <http://dx.doi.org.proxy.uchicago.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_3139> . Laoust shockingly neglects to mention the *K. tanwīr* in his survey of the author’s life and works. On its authorship, see Alawiye, *Ibn al-Jawzī’s Apologia*, pp. 27-8.

¹⁷⁸ *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History - Abridged Edition*, second edition. Translated by Franz Rosenthal, edited by N. J. Dawood. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958/2015. Here, 64.

Unlike Ibn al-Jawzī, Ibn Khaldūn readily accepts the racialized perception of Blacks, stating earlier in the text that, “they are everywhere described as stupid.”¹⁷⁹ Sharing this assumption, the *General estoria* continues to emphasize contempt for these people, even relaying information from the Islamic texts that shows early records of the caste system of India: “[i]t is said that there were men who did not eat when the Blacks slaughtered... and there were other men who did even more, that they did not want to take anything from their hand.”¹⁸⁰ It then says that the authors of the history it is citing stopped describing Blacks because “they were ugly creatures of a bad odor.”¹⁸¹

While Alfonso displays across the illuminations of his manuscripts that his was not a homogenous world in most applications of the term,¹⁸² India and Indians were not familiar to him and many of the authors who wrote about them in this period.¹⁸³ The “blackness” and the “whiteness” of Indians were not witnessed categories, though they could be mapped onto the people of color who existed within relatable contexts. This is evident in the fact that the racializing descriptions of India imply great malleability and could be adapted to cover a large swath of lived

¹⁷⁹ *The Muqaddimah*, 63.

¹⁸⁰ *General estoria* 3.1, 532. “Diz que ombres avié que non comién de lo que ellos degollavan... Y otros avié y aun que fazién más, que non querién tomar ninguna cosa de su mano.” Already hinted to above in note 62, many have written about this statement in multiple different languages and religious traditions.

¹⁸¹ *General estoria* 3.1, 532. “Feas criaturas de mal olor.”

¹⁸² In the *Libro de los juegos* itself, there are two illuminations of black chess players: fols. 22r and 55r. The various *Cantigas de Santa María* manuscripts similarly employ black characters in their illuminations. See fols. XXXXX. A rigorous study into the representation of blackness in the visual program of Alfonso’s court still awaits the analysis it deserves.

¹⁸³ There are no records I am aware of that situate any member of the Alfonsine court in direct connection to India. As for individuals like al-Bakrī, we know that he never left Iberia despite his inclination for geography. Things were slightly different in the Near East, where in terms of distance and proximity it was feasible for many Muslims to travel to the more accessible regions of India. For example, al-Mas’ūdī, like like Abū Zayd Ḥasan ibn Yazīd Sīrāfī, did travel to the Indus Valley. For the latter, see Abū Zayd Ḥasan ibn Yazīd Sīrāfī and Ibn Fadlān, *Two Arabic Travel Books: Accounts of China and India*. Translated and edited by Tim Mackintosh-Smith and James E. Montgomery. New York: NYU Press, 2014. This is not to say that there was not travel, trade, or other forms of contact between Europe and India during the thirteenth-century, but the records for this are scarce and scattered before the fourteenth century and it appears that not many individuals across Europe made the journey. James D. Ryan gives a helpful bibliography that introduces a few thirteenth-century Europeans who visited India: “European Travelers before Columbus: The Fourteenth Century’s Discovery of India,” *The Catholic Historical Review* vol. 79, no. 4 (October, 1993): 648-670, here, 650, note 6.

realities: “fair-skinned” did not necessarily mean “not Black.”¹⁸⁴ While malleable, the quibbling about levels of “fairness” also exposed an underlying issue with the terms being used, at least in the case of Indians, who were seen as black but did not, apparently, behave like it. Since the time of Alexander the Great, more information regarding the diversity of skin tones in India came to the Islamic and European traditions, but, still, their skin was qualified as “burnt,” just to varying degrees.¹⁸⁵ While some of these traditions mention certain Indians who were as black as Ethiopians—a people often used as a reference point for the “darkest” skin color—there were Indians described as lighter than the other peoples called black.¹⁸⁶ This nit-picking about skin tone reveals an issue that had to be dealt with when it came to Indians: if blackness implied a nature antithetical to wisdom and culture, then the legends of Indian society needed an explanation for why their nature diverged from what was expected based upon their perceived race.

There were many attempted answers to this conundrum. Al-Mas‘ūdī navigates the diverse array of described or perceived Indian skin colors, and asserts that Indians were superior to all other peoples then-defined as Black: “Indians in terms of their reason, their government, their wisdom, their sound constitution, their limpid complexion are unlike other Blacks of the Zanj, the Damdām, and others.”¹⁸⁷ Al-Mas‘ūdī does not divorce Indians from blackness, once more associating their positive qualities—“wisdom”—with a paler complexion than “other Blacks.” Some writers, like the Alfonsine collaborators in the passages above, separated Indians into the

¹⁸⁴ Frank M. Snowden gives brief samples from the textual tradition that show how authors described the blackness (or lack thereof) of Indians, particularly when these authors were comparing Indians of different regions or when comparing Indians in general to Ethiopians. *Blacks in Antiquity Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience*. Cambridge, MA; London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1970. Here, 2-3.

¹⁸⁵ “[M]ore information about these peoples had been supplied since Alexander the Great’s time. In particular, some differences in skin color had been recognized: Indians were reported to be less “burnt” than Ethiopians.” Schneider, “The So-called Confusion,” 198, citing such examples as are to be found in Strabo and Manilius.

¹⁸⁶ Recall how above al-Andalusī refers to the Indians’ skin tone as “the first stage of blackness,” which implies a “fairness” in comparison to other blacks. See note 172.

¹⁸⁷ [bilingual ed.] 163.

categories of white and black, but the terms “white” or “fair-skinned” could still be applied to individuals who were of color. “Fair-skinned” in such contexts was also still synonymous with intellectual merit. This hints at the fact that race was increasingly associated with certain physical, cultural, environmental, and theological arguments that necessarily affected the Western and Islamic worlds’ estimation of a person’s mind. Perhaps that is the most important aspect of all the discussions about India that come together and inform the *General estoria* and other Alfonsine works. Very few of these passages are about India. Rather, India becomes a metaphor, a concept, an idea, one that reveals how India was a staging ground in the Middle Ages for premodern notions of race.

The discussion of blackness in India almost always follows the pages of heroic and marvelous deeds of the fair-skinned rulers within the Islamic tradition (specifically the thread of Al-Mas‘ūdī/al-Bakrī), the Alfonsine corpus, and the Castilian sources that later drew from both. The intentional juxtaposition of these discussions of great achievements and racial difference has much to tell us about how premodern Christian Europe harvested ideas about race from other cultures and used them for its own projects.¹⁸⁸ By better understanding what groups were “allowed” to bequeath knowledge in the Middle Ages, or how ideas of race and ideas of intellectual excellence were understood together, it is then possible to appreciate the ways premodern notions of race affected intellectual discourse and the medieval concept of *translatio studii*, or the transference of learning from one generation or culture to another. Medieval writers often sought ways to represent who they were (and who they were not) as they constructed differences among

¹⁸⁸ To be clear, the Islamic tradition did not “imbue” Christianity with racism, nor am I interested in an origin story of the first racialized thinking. Rather, the Alfonsine court represents a point in time within a chronology that spans centuries in both directions, and it participates in a dialogue about sameness and difference that was manifesting simultaneously across many religions, cultures, and traditions.

men.¹⁸⁹ In the case of India, its fair-skinned, and its dark-skinned people, one of their many rhetorical uses within the Alfonsine and Islamic exploration and construction of sameness and difference was that they allow for a particular definition of knowledge creation. We cannot talk about how Alfonso X associated himself with the wise kings of India if we do not also appreciate how he imagined the people called Indians. Like the Islamic tradition, the *scriptorium* carefully curated the contours of India, and only elevated the intellectualism of the fair-skinned rulers that they distanced from the rest of the populace. The brand of intellectualism that was lauded in the *General estoria* and the *Libro de los juegos* reveals a racialized self-perception and definition of sapiential kingship in the Alfonsine court, one that largely defined itself by rejecting the black Indian.

Conclusion: Alfonso and the Stars

This chapter has shown the ways in which the Alfonsine notion of wise Indian kingship borrowed from the Islamic intellectual tradition. Like these innovative and erudite rulers of old, Alfonso and his collaborators engaged with contemporary dialogues about what the history of intellectualism was, and who was allowed to shape that narrative and who was not. Alfonso also defined through the Indian examples the specific fields of knowledge a king must master, and in that endeavor he, like India's kings, associated himself closely with *Calila wa Dimna*, patronized many translation projects, sought wisdom, and pursued the celestial bodies and their science. Being an astronomer king, however, is a topic still undiscussed, and it has the potential to nuance how Alfonso saw himself as not only participating in a long and prestigious history of wise kings, but also as advancing the sciences and leaving his own inventions for posterity. In essence, his enactment of

¹⁸⁹ For more on the construction of identity, race, and "sameness and difference" in the pre-modern era, see David Nirenberg, "Race and Religion," and, *ibid.*, "Was There Race."

translatio studii. The *Libro de los juegos* makes manifest Alfonso's desire to leave his mark on history, but in more ways than one: he mastered the astronomical games that, for ancient rulers of old, decoded and made clear the secrets of heavenly bodies.

Many have written about Alfonso's passion for astronomical manuscript projects.¹⁹⁰ Because the *scriptorium* translated a number of astronomical treatises from Arabic into the vernacular, the relationship between these texts and the Islamic intellectual tradition is central to studying astronomy in the time of Alfonso.¹⁹¹ In the Islamic texts, Indian kings often counted among their achievements a mastery of astronomy.¹⁹² Indeed, this particular renown was not isolated to the works of Muslim writers. The Jewish polymath Maimonides, in his *Letter on Astrology*, attacks the pseudoscience astrology of "stargazers," whom he equates to "idolaters," by showing how kingdoms guided by astrology—"Chaldeans, Chaldeans, Egyptians, and Canaanites"—"produced a falsehood and a lie," which the sharper intellect of Persian, Greek, and Indian wisemen disassembled with the true science: astronomy. For Maimonides, India gave the world the "great philosophers, men of intellect and science" who uncovered the potentials of the "exceedingly glorious science" of astronomy that so amazes him: "How many amazing conditions are made intelligible by this science, all of which is undoubtedly true... I am now making clear to you the main points of those matters that are the mystery of the world."¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ A few of the key manuscripts in this field are the following:

¹⁹¹

¹⁹² Already discussed above were the short passages from al-Bakrī and al-Mas'ūdī regarding Indians and the "secrets" of the heavens. Al-Andalusī also has this information to add: "To their credit, the Indians have made great strides in the study of numbers and of geometry. They have acquired immense information and reached the zenith in their knowledge of the movements of the stars [astronomy] and the secrets of the skies [astrology] as well as other mathematical studies." *Science in the Medieval World*, 12.

¹⁹³ Isadore Twersky, *A Maimonides Reader* (New York: Behrman House, Inc., 1972) pp. 463-473. You read this online so get actual page #s. The incredible richness in source material regarding the Jewish perception and representation of India in the Middle Ages is clear to anyone who has delved into the bibliography of the translation of *Kalīla wa Dimna*, the Hebrew writings on Alexander, or the works of Judah Halevi, to name only a few.

It may be Alfonso was inspired by al-Bakrī's claim that chess in India was meant to mirror the movements of celestial bodies, for his love of the science shapes the categories of the *Libro de los juegos*. While there are the three broader categories of chess problems, dice games, and table games, a fourth and smaller category ends the manuscript. This is the section dedicated to the astronomical versions of games, and perhaps due to their associations with the firmament, or because the knowledge of astronomy was "strange" in its foreignness to all but a few learned individuals, these games seem to resonate with the knowledge of Indians who "concealed secrets" in chess about the stars:

Having previously shown all three types of games that are named in books, the playing of chess as well as dice and tables... it is now appropriate to show another nature of play that is very noble, very strange, very beautiful, and of great understanding for the knowledgeable and mainly for those who know the art of astronomy.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ "Mostradas todas las tres maneras de juegos que son dichas en los libros ante d' éste, tan bien en el jugar de los escaques como de los dados e de las tablas... conviene agora que se muestre otra natura de juego muy noble e muy extraño e muy apuesto e de grand entendimiento pora los entendidos e mayormiente pora aquellos que saben el arte de astronomía." Alfonso X, *Libro de los juegos*, 359. While I understand the unusual switch from "açedrex" to "escaques" in this final section, I do not see why Golladay treats this game and translates it as "checkers." Most especially because the text following the title heading gives the three other sections of the book again using "escaques" instead of "açedrex." See her dissertation, 628 *in passim*.

If chess was called “noble” in the manuscript’s prologue and in other Alfonsine works, the two games that complete the *Libro de los juegos* are something even nobler. Like the mysterious version of chess hinted at in the Islamic tradition, astronomical chess in the Alfonsine work relies upon the simulated movement of spheres to play. Both astronomical chess and tables’ strange beauty inspires awe and admiration, and the *scriptorium* does not disappoint when illuminating the game boards in equally impressive style. There are only a



Figure 7: Ms. T-I-6 El Escorial, fol. 96v. Alfonso leads a game of astronomical chess.

small proportion of illuminations in the *Libro de los juegos* that take up an entire page; astronomical chess and tables are two of the most luxurious.

The gameboards and the players for these two games represent different aspects of the heavens and celestial bodies. There are seven sides of the chess table where each of the seven players sits, and each player has the role of a planet: Saturn, Jupiter Mars, the sun, Venus, Mercury, and the moon. Each planet is described as a person. For example, “Mercury has the appearance of a young man dressed in colorful fabrics, and is writing in a book.”¹⁹⁵ Within the heptagon, a circle with the zodiac signs encloses a perfectly round chessboard and divides



Figure 8: Ms. T-I-6 El Escorial, fol. 96v. Detail, Capricorn in the *ochava esfera*.

¹⁹⁵ “Mercurio ha semejança d’omne mancebo vestido de paños de muchas colores, e que está escribiendo en un libro.” Alfonso X, *Libro de los juegos*, 365.

the inner board into twelve slices.¹⁹⁶ While the illumination has suffered across time—the finer details of some players’ faces have worn away, e.g.—the general shapes of the twelve zodiac signs in the eighth sphere, “la ochava esfera,” are still visible, especially in person with the manuscript. From this eighth sphere, the chessboard is made of seven increasingly smaller rings in accordance with the seven planets.¹⁹⁷ At the very center of the board is a core with the four colors of the elements: fire (red), air (blue), water (white) and earth (gold).¹⁹⁸ The game of astronomical chess expresses the dominant perception of the universe in the thirteenth century.¹⁹⁹ Earth was the center of the universe and around it radiated seven concentric spheres occupied by the planets, and an eighth sphere that housed forty-eight constellations whose stars were divided into septentrional, zodiacal, and meridional sections. The planetary spheres moved in perpetuity, whereas the eighth sphere was fixed in place.²⁰⁰ **Astronomical chess simulated the zodiac’s influence on each planet**

While the accompanying illumination does not necessarily follow the descriptions of the planets, there is one character that stands out. The sun, which, like the moon, is considered a planet, is “a young king who has a gold crown on his head, and is dressed in shining gold fabrics.”²⁰¹ In

¹⁹⁶ “Et el cerco ochavo ha de seer llano, e las figuras de los doze signos puestas en éll como deven seer, que son éstas: Aries, Tauro, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagitario, Capricornio, Acuario, Picis; et es Partido en doze partes segunt estos doze signos.” Alfonso X, *Libro de los juegos*, 362.

¹⁹⁷ Ana Domínguez Rodríguez, “Retratos de Alfonso X en el *Libro de los Juegos de Ajedrez, Dados y Tablas*,” *Alicante VII* (2010-11): 147-160, here, 159. “Et los otros siete cercos son segund los siete cielos en que están las siete planetas.” Alfonso X, *Libro de los juegos*, 362.

¹⁹⁸ “Et otrossí hay quatro cercos redondos que son segundo los quatro elementos que son de dentro d’estos ocho [the eight spheres]. El primero es vermejo que es por ell elemento del fuego, el segundo es cardeno claro por ell elemento dell aire, el tercero es blanco por ell elemento dell agua, el cuarto es Redondo a manera de pella e de color parda que es por ell element de la tierra.” Alfonso X, *Libro de los juegos*, 362.

¹⁹⁹ However, not without some limitations. As the text admits, certain facets of the universe structure were omitted from gameplay and gameboard: “Et comoquiere que los siete cielos son departidos en más partes, e non podrién aquí caber en este tablero que fuessen apuestos; tomamos destos departimientos segunt aquella cuenta lo más breve que conviene a este juego.” Alfonso X, *Libro de los juegos*, 362.

²⁰⁰ Ana Domínguez Rodríguez, *Astrología y Arte en el Lapidario de Alfonso X el Sabio*. Murcia: Real Academia de Alfonso X, 2007. Here, 451 *in passim*.

²⁰¹ “El Sol ha semejança de rey mancebo que tiene corona d’oro en la cabeça, e viste paños d’oro reluzientes.” Alfonso X, *Libro de los juegos*, 363.

the position of the sun on the gameboard is Alfonso X.²⁰² He lacks some of the symbolic objects with which the planet is associated, but he does wear the golden bonnet, gilded attire, and the insignia of Castile-León on his red robe.²⁰³ He is accompanied by a young boy who circulates the air with a large gold fan. Presiding over the game, we witness a king at play. The Alfonso in fols. 96v and 97v is far from the king stoically and rigidly enthroned in fol. 65r, with the heavy gold crown and voluminous robes marking this as a scene at court, one ceremonial in nature.²⁰⁴ Ana Domínguez Rodríguez has characterized these more relaxed images of the king as “nearly Islamicized.”²⁰⁵ There are some iconographical choices that could support this observation—instead of a throne, for example, Alfonso sits on a floor cushion “Turkish-style, like Oriental sovereigns.”²⁰⁶ However, Alfonso sits on the floor elsewhere in the manuscript (e.g. fol. 47v), and for a visual program that demonstrates a keen awareness of how to depict an Islamic sovereign (e.g. fol. 17v), very little of that iconography appears in fol. 96v. Indeed, Alfonso wears nearly the exact same attire and is seated more or less in the same way in fol. 47v, in which he plays a game of chess against a modestly clad Christian woman.

²⁰² Ana Domínguez Rodríguez has published a collection of studies on Alfonso X’s image, particularly in this manuscript. See the following: “El *Libro de los Juegos* y la miniatura alfonsí,” in *Alfonso X el Sabio, Libros del Ajedrez, Dados y Tablas*, facsimile edition, pp. 30-123. Madrid, 1987; “El Officium Salomonis de Carlos V en el monasterio de El Escorial. Alfonso X y el planeta Sol. Absolutismo monárquico y hermetismo,” *Reales Sitios* 83 (1985): 11-28; “Retratos de Alfonso X en el *Libro de los Juegos de Ajedrez, Dados y Tablas*,” *Alicante* VII (2010-11): 147-160. Also, see I. Bango Torviso, “La vida del monarca en imágenes” en 194-199 de VV.AA., *Alfonso X el Sabio*, catálogo de exposición, Murcia, 2009.

²⁰³ For example, the “figure of the sun” also holds in his left hand a “round apple” and in the right a flowering branch, “like the emperors when they crown them.” For the most part, the individuals seated at the gameboard in the illumination do not display all of the details that are associated with their planet, which is probably for the better considering Mars is meant to hold a “freshly decapitated” head. Alfonso X, *Libro de los juegos*, 363.

²⁰⁴ In fact, this scene almost appears to be an audience session with the king. Nearly nude and quite distraught men, victims of their gambling vices, edge into the frame in disorderly desperation, and Alfonso, their lord and judge, imperiously ignores them in gaze and body language.

²⁰⁵ “Retratos de Alfonso X,” 161.

²⁰⁶ “Retratos de Alfonso X,” 161.

The next illumination of the manuscript, that of astronomical tables, is similar in its layout to fol. 96v, which means that its portrait of Alfonso, too, lacks the Islamic flavor Domínguez Rodríguez suggests. Fol. 97v again situates the king at the twelve-o'clock position of the gameboard, presiding over the complicated game and its six other players. His attire and his seating arrangement are also similar; the cloth is now green instead of red, and the lounge chair is slightly more ornate than in fol. 96v. Once



Figure 9: Ms. T-I-6 El Escorial, fol. 97v. Alfonso leads a game of astronomical tables.

more, the seven players of astronomical *tablas* align with the seven planets, and Alfonso, the “yellow” player, is the sun. The rules of play are briefly given and, after that, the manuscript ends.²⁰⁷

The search for the Islamic connection may well need to look beyond the illuminations. While Alfonso does not visually resemble Islamic rulers as some scholars suggest, the intellectual context of these two games in al-Bakrī *inter alia*, particularly that of astronomical chess, do situate Alfonso within the court culture it absorbed via the Islamic tradition. It may be more accurate to state, however, that Alfonso is imitating *Indian* court culture, as described through the Islamic tradition.

²⁰⁷ The colophon that gives the date of the manuscript’s completion comes in the text right after the last sentence on the astronomical *tablas* game. See fol. 97r.

The *General estoria* shows that the inventions of Indian kings were metaphors for increasingly advanced understandings of the universe. From the first king who invented games of chance to the king who invented chess, there was a progression both in man's understanding of God, the world, and the nature of things as well as in his own agency and power. After chess replaced table games, a form of sophisticated knowledge arose from chess that was not known to any outside of the Indian court and had the power to unlock secrets of this world. Even the rules of the mysterious game and how it was played were not given in the referenced passages by al-Bakrī or his source, al-Mas'ūdī.

Because neither the *Kitāb* nor the *Meadows of Gold* are forthcoming with how astronomical chess would be played, the provenance of Alfonso's astronomical games is still uncertain to scholars. It could be the case that Alfonso and his court invented these two astronomical variants, and that they represent an Alfonsine contribution to the history of games.²⁰⁸ However, astronomical chess does exist in the Islamic record, but only rarely.²⁰⁹ In these records of astronomical chess, it is attributed to India. In the best surviving example, from the *Meadows of Gold* and hundreds of pages after the descriptions of the Indian kings and their inventions, al-Mas'ūdī describes just the board of a sixth variation of chess:

Then there is the circular, celestial [النجومية] chessboard called astronomical. It has twelve houses per the number of zodiac signs, divided into two halves [of the board] upon which move seven different colored pieces [amthāl] according to the number of the five stars and the sun and moon and their colors.²¹⁰

This zodiacal chessboard seems similar to that of Alfonso X, but al-Mas'ūdī does not explain the rules of the game, the roles of the different pieces, nor other integral details—like the concentric circles of the four elements—that define the Castilian version. Aside from the chessboard of al-

²⁰⁸ H. J. R. Murray, *The History of Chess*, 349-51.

²⁰⁹ H. J. R. Murray, *The History of Chess*, 343.

²¹⁰ Bilingual ed. vol. 8, 313-4.

Mas'ūdī, there are not many other records of this chess variation to compare; Murray only found one other Islamic text that mentions astronomical chess, and it postdates the *Libro de los juegos*.²¹¹ Al-Bakrī does not report on this, either. Even if the astronomical game variants are one day discovered to not be unique inventions of the Alfonsine court, fols. 96v and 97v are still a declaration of Alfonso's mastery over the mysterious knowledge chess tethered to the heavens represented. He is akin to a final king of the intellectual progression the *General estoria* inherited from the Islamic tradition—he takes chess and games and masters a new game, representative of a new form of knowledge, superior to all that has come before.

India symbolized the fantasy of this secret knowledge. Alfonso's interpretation of Indian kingship from *Calila wa Dimna*, to the *General estoria*, to the *Libro de los juegos* acknowledges the debt owed the legendary rulers. It also simultaneously positions the Christian king as an inventor himself, one who collated untold years of knowledge into the folios that comprise the *Libro de los juegos*, imbuing it with his own perspective on an expansive, cosmopolitan world with Castile-León as its cultural center. Alfonso aligns his image with that of Indian kingship not simply because it expands the potentials for expressions of power (although this is in itself an innovation for the historical and geographical context). Rather, he does so because he mastered the same knowledge of the heavens and earth cultivated in India. This means that the Alfonsine intellectual project—indeed, Alfonso's *intellect*—was meant to be seen as extraordinary even when compared to the prestigiousness of ancient history.

Games such as chess and their rich metaphorical depths were ways for the *scriptorium* to explore the frontiers of knowledge, its lines of inheritance, and its ever-evolving futures in multidimensional ways. Games bridged philosophical preoccupations with astrological

²¹¹ *The History of Chess*, 343. He locates the second reference in the *Nafā'is al-funūn fī 'arā'is al-'uyūn*, an encyclopedic work by fourteenth-century Persian physician Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd al-Amūlī.

explorations, and military acumen with the care of the soul. Per the Islamic accounts, games defined legendary courts that were as intellectually generative and wise rulers as culturally influential as the Alfonsine court and Alfonso himself confidently proclaimed to be.²¹² At the same time, discussions of games and the intellects that created them also opened the door for early conceptualizations of race, and this possibility was consistently explored across the texts discussed in this chapter. [insert nifty final sentence].

²¹² C.f. J. B. Sánchez Pérez, who states that games' origins were "completely unknown" to Alfonso and contemporaries. 11.