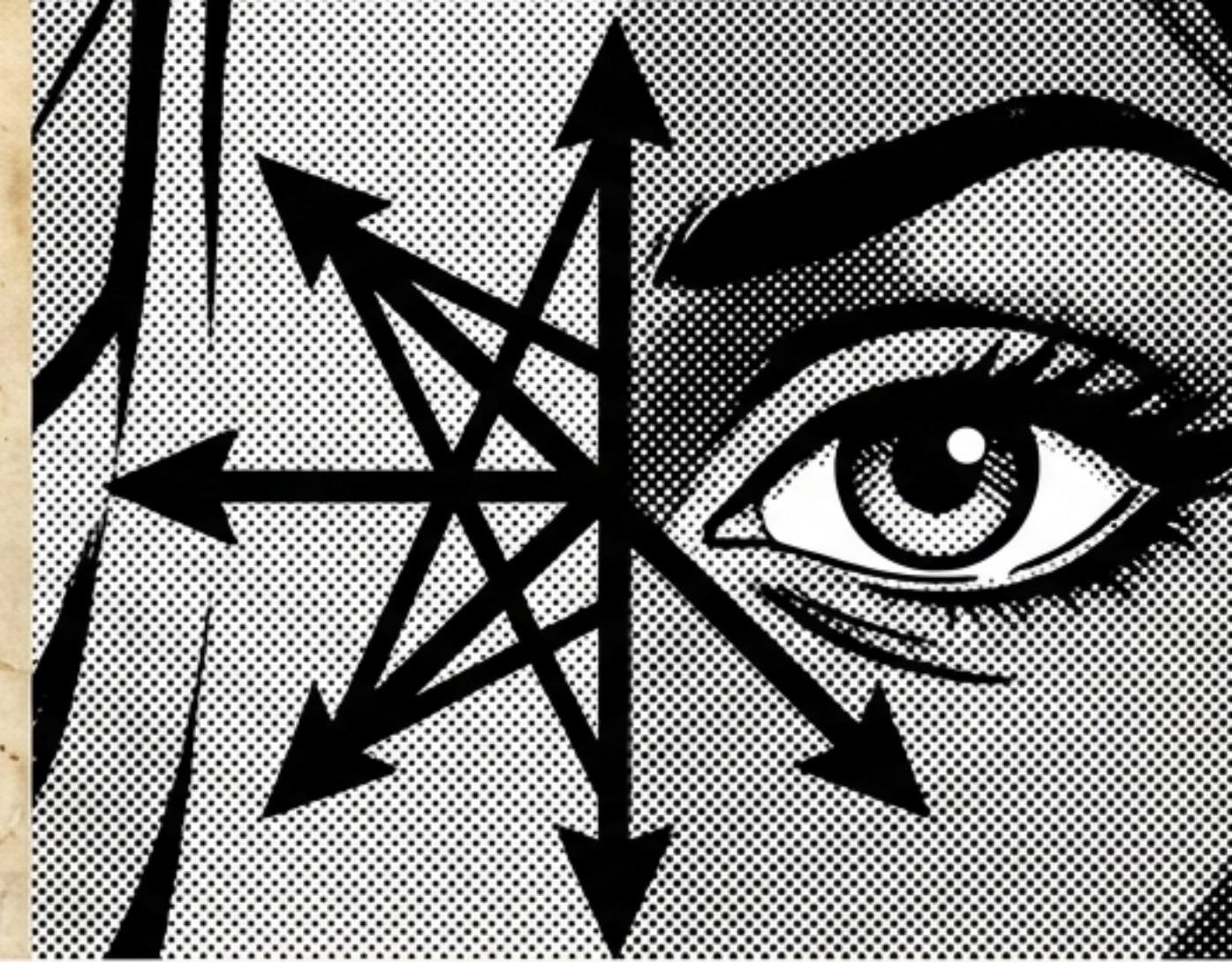


SUMMARY

History is often written by the heresy hunters. This presentation synthesizes the scholarship of Gilles Quispel and Wouter Hanegraaff to challenge two persistent errors:

1. That early Syrian texts like the Gospel of Thomas were 'Gnostic' deviations.
2. That Western Esotericism is a dustbin of irrationality.

We reveal a persistent current of 'rejected knowledge' privileging direct experience (*gnosis*) over dogma.



Hidden Currents

Re-evaluating Syrian Christianity and Western Esotericism

From the Monachos of Edessa to the Psychedelic Churches of America.



THE PROBLEM OF LABELS

The Old Paradigm (Heresiological View)

Ancient: Non-canonical Syrian texts labeled "Gnostic."

Assumption: Dualistic hatred of the world; rejection of the Creator.



Scholarly Turn

Modern: Occultism labeled "Irrational" or "Enchantment."

Assumption: Failure of modernization; relapse into primitive thinking (Weber's Disenchantment).

The New Paradigm (Revisionist View)

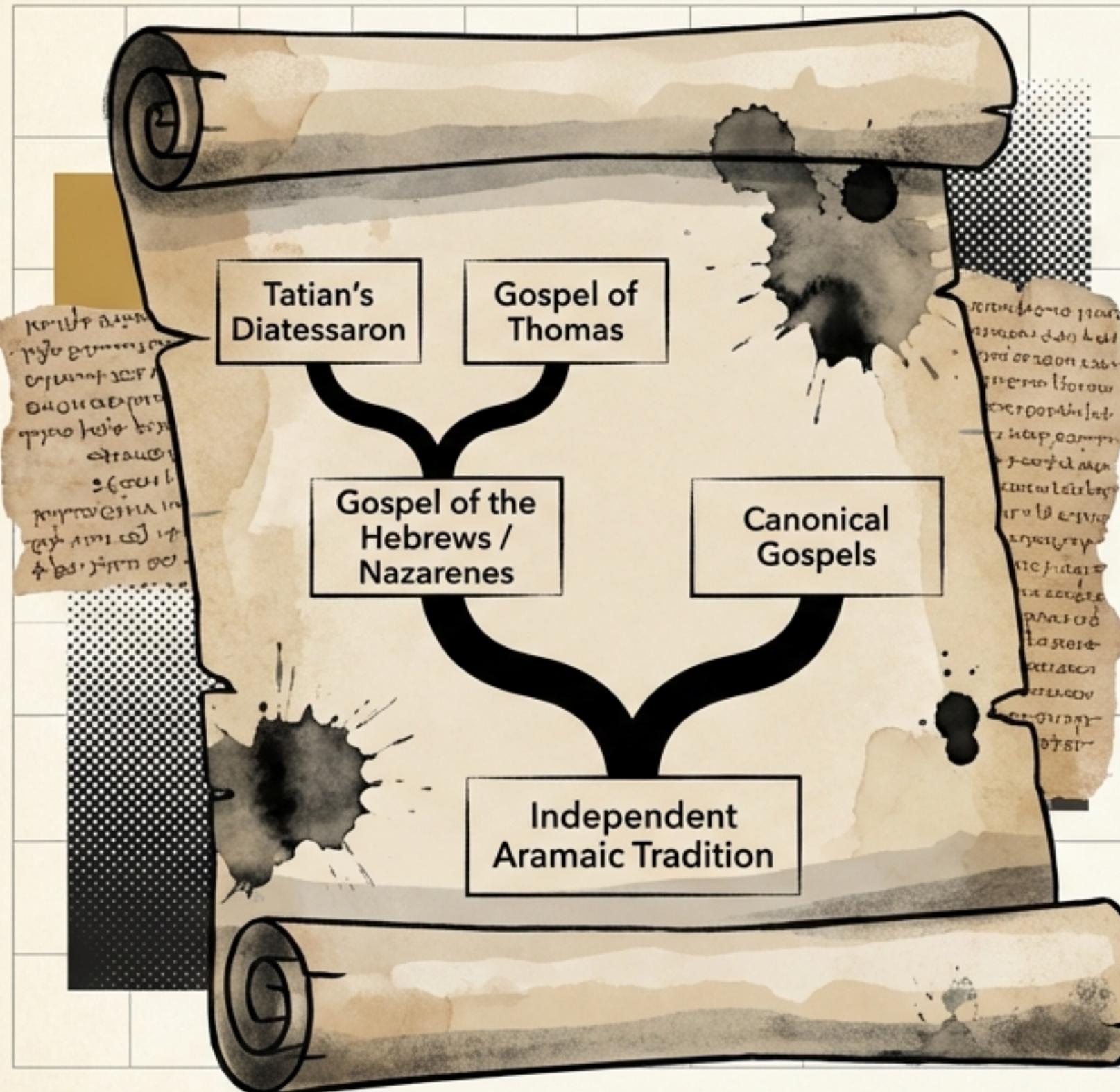
Quispel's Insight: Syrian Christianity was **Encratite** (Ascetic) and Jewish-Christian.

Goal: Return to "Paradise" state of Adam.

Hanegraaff's Insight: Esotericism operates on "**Bounded Rationality**." It is a pragmatic, creative method of processing information embedded in culture.



Case Study I: The Roots of Syrian Christianity



The Straw Man Takedown

- **The Assumption:** The Gospel of Thomas (c. 140 CE, Edessa) is Gnostic.

The Reality: There were no Gnostics in Edessa in the 2nd Century. The text is **Encratite** (Ascetic) and **Jewish-Christian**.

"Proof: Thomas and the Diatessaron share variants diverging from canonical Gospels, indicating an independent Aramaic source."

Decoding the *Monachos*: The ‘Single One’.

Monachos = **Ihidaja** ≠ **Divine Spark**
(Greek) (Syriac)

Ihidaja = **Bachelor / Celibate**
(Syriac)

Context: In the Gospel of Thomas (Logion 75), Jesus says: “Many stand at the door, but the monachos will enter the bridal chamber.” This is not metaphysical dualism. It is practical asceticism. To be a Christian in the early Syrian church meant to be ihidaja—unmarried.



Theology of the East: The Spirit as Divine Mother



The Semitic Trinity:

The word for Spirit (*ruah*) is feminine.

The Gospel of the Hebrews:

"My Mother, the Holy Spirit, took me by one of my hairs..."

The Hymn of the Pearl:

A Christian allegory of the soul (the Prince) sent into Egypt (the Body/World) to recover the Pearl (Gnosis).

The Goal: To return to the East and put on the "Robe of Light" (the Eikon/Image of God).

Salvation is not escape, but the recovery of the true Self (*Autos*) mirrored in the Robe.

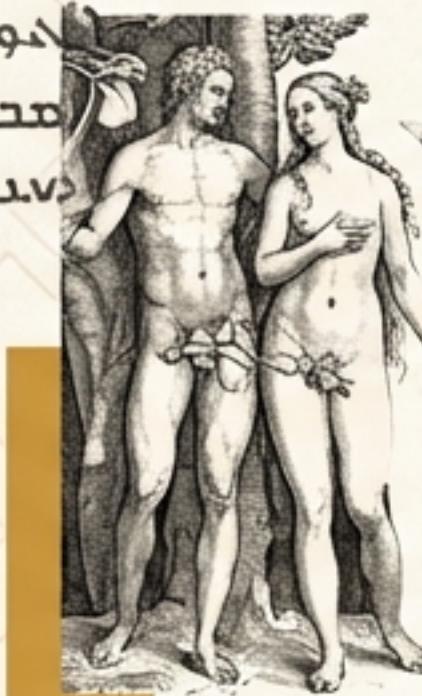
Macarius & The Messalians: The Primacy of Experience

“The soul is darkness without the Spirit.”

- **The Messalians** (“Praying Ones”): A pietist movement within the Syrian church.
- **The “Heresy”:** Sacraments like baptism do not remove the “root of sin.” Only constant prayer and the felt experience of the Spirit can drive out the “indwelling demon.”
- **Goal:** To feel the “Formation of Christ” in the soul—a tangible sensation of grace.



The Logic of Encratism: Realized Eschatology



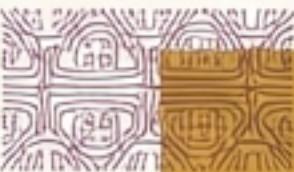
**The Fall
(Adam/Eve)**



**Resurrection
of Christ**

**Realized Eschatology:
The End Times are Now**

The Present



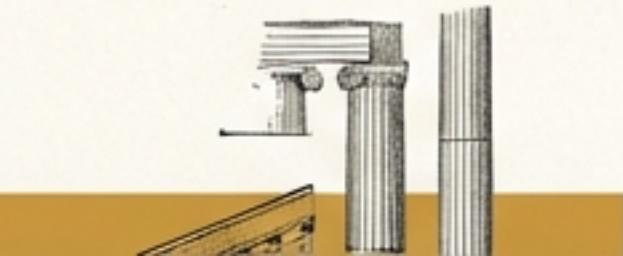
Scripture

"In the Resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage"
(Luke 20:35)



Deduction

If the Resurrection has already happened, marriage is obsolete.



Practice

To stop dying, one must stop being born. The "works of the female" must be dissolved.

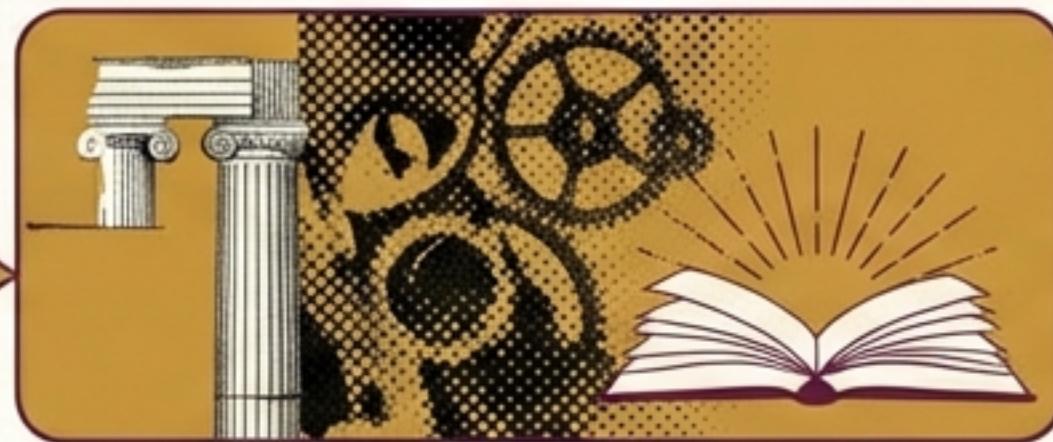


The Bridge: From ‘Heresy’ to ‘Western Esotericism’.

Ancient Polemics



Enlightenment Filter

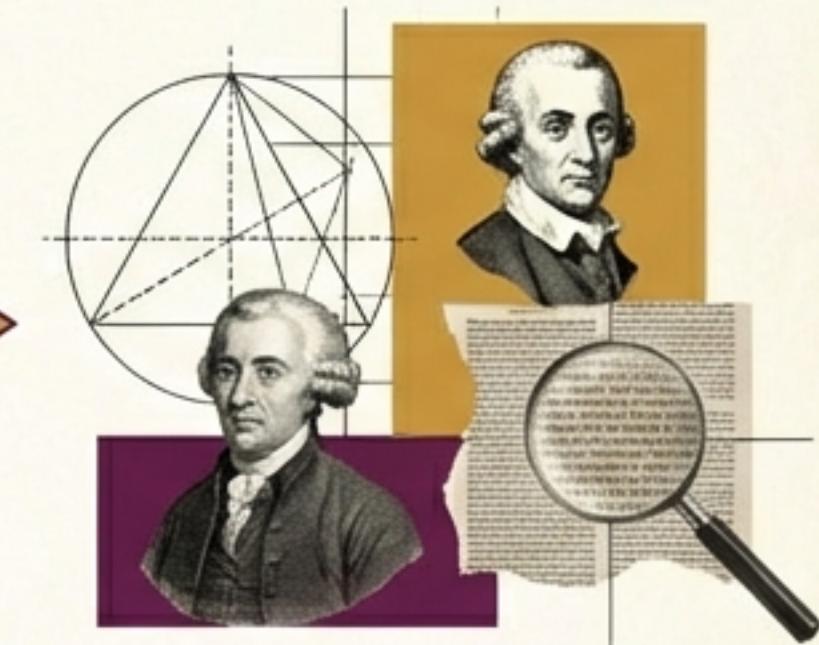


Enlightenment Filter

Ancient Polemics

Messalian/Gnostics labeled “Subjective” & “Dangerous”.

Modern Academy



Modern Academy

Western Esotericism (Hanegraaff).

Western Esotericism

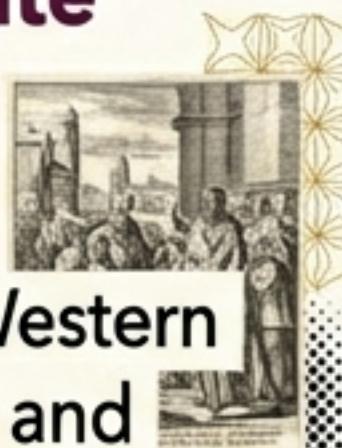
Not a “dustbin of history,” but a specific mode of knowledge dealing with:

1. Gnosis (Experiential Insight)
2. Correspondence (As above, so below)
3. Imagination (Access to reality).

Exploding Myths: Esotericism, Race, and Gender.

Myth: Esotericism is for white European men.

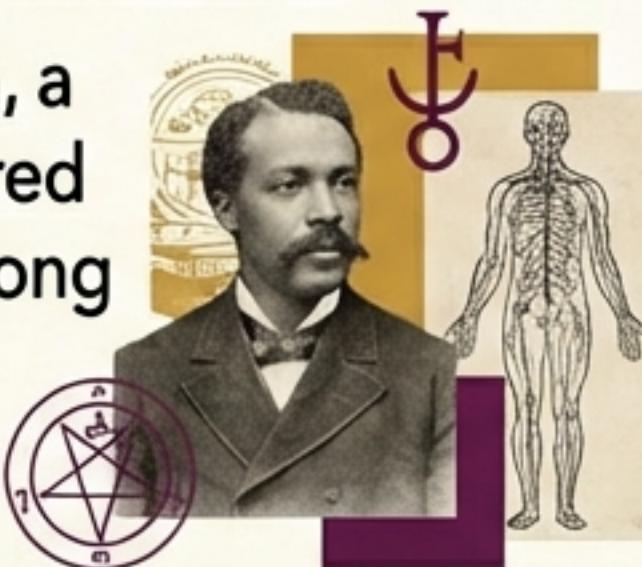
A common misconception frames esoteric traditions as exclusive to Western patriarchal figures, ignoring global and marginalized contributions.



Source: [The Golden Dawn](#)

Reality: Sex Magic Pioneers.

Paschal Beverly Randolph, a free man of color, pioneered sexual magic in America long before Crowley.



Reality: The Nation of Islam.

Supreme Mathematics and the "Knowledge of God, Self, and Enemy" function as an esoteric systematic system.

Louis Farrakhan's vision of the "Mother Wheel" is direct gnosis.

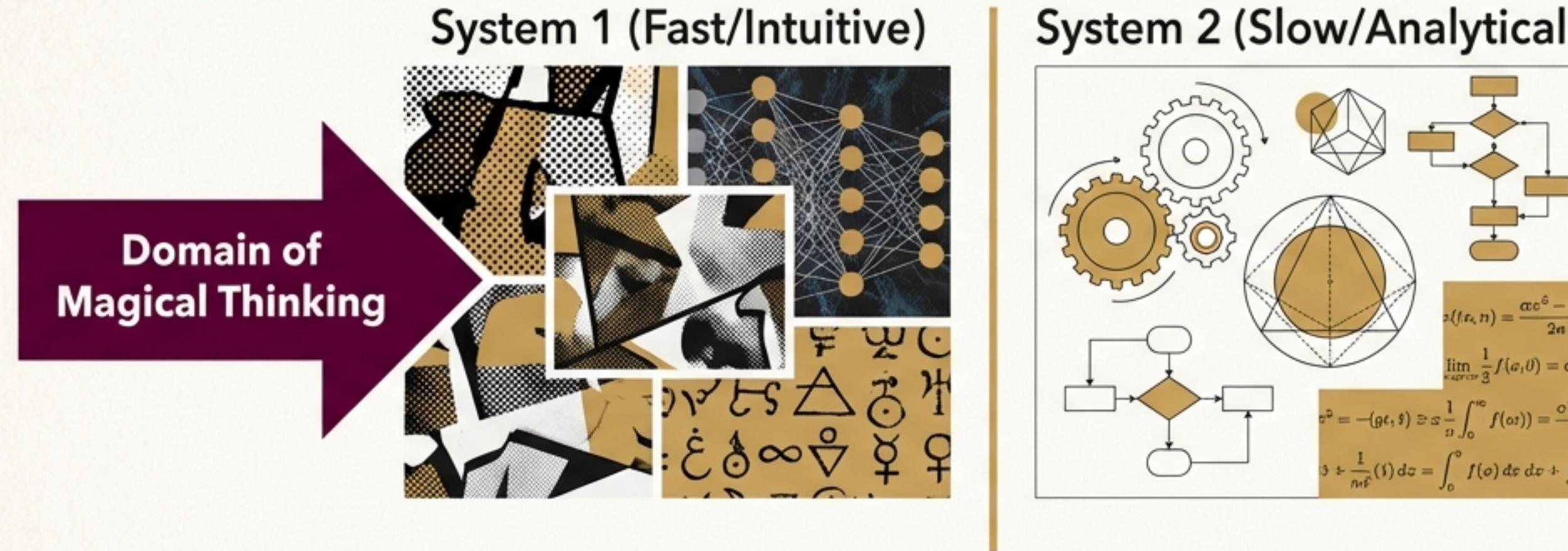


Reality: Women & Agency.

Spiritualism allowed women like Lizzie Doten to bypass patriarchal hierarchies. In the Golden Dawn, women like Moina Mathers sought the "Perfect Man"—a gender-neutral state of power.



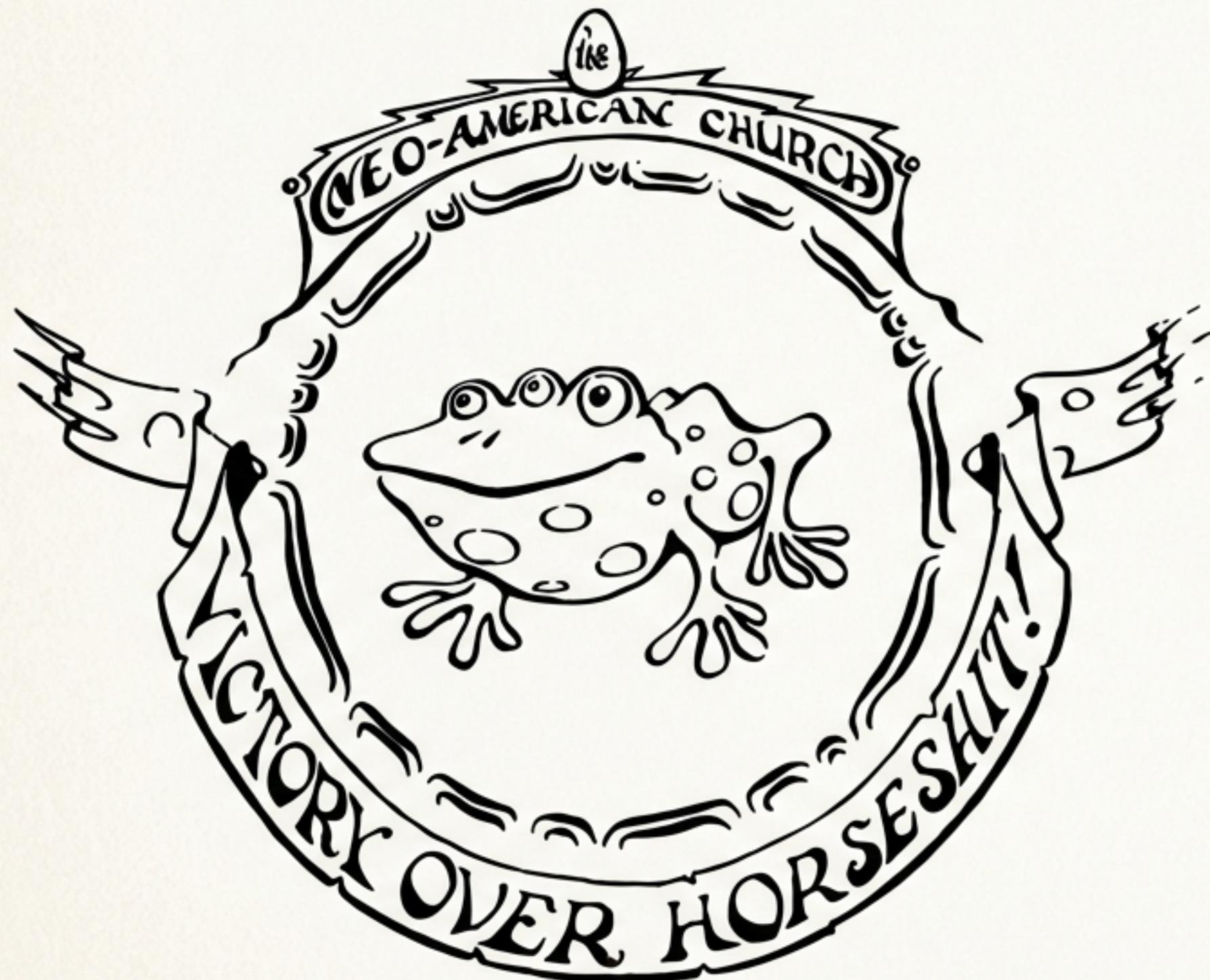
The Logic of Magic: ‘Bounded Rationality’



Tyrian Purple: Pragmatic Belief

Chaos Magic (Peter Carroll) treats belief as a tool. One does not believe in gods as objective facts; one “adopts” a belief to achieve a result, then discards it. This is not insanity; it is Bounded Rationality utilizing heuristics.

Case Study II: The Psychedelic Church & The Holy Goof



The Theology of Humor

Unlike solemn ancient Gnostics, modern esotericists (Discordians, Merry Pranksters) use Pranks (Operation Mindfuck) as spiritual techniques.

The Goal: To break the “conditioned repression” of the mind.

The “Holy Goof” triggers enlightenment through absurdity.

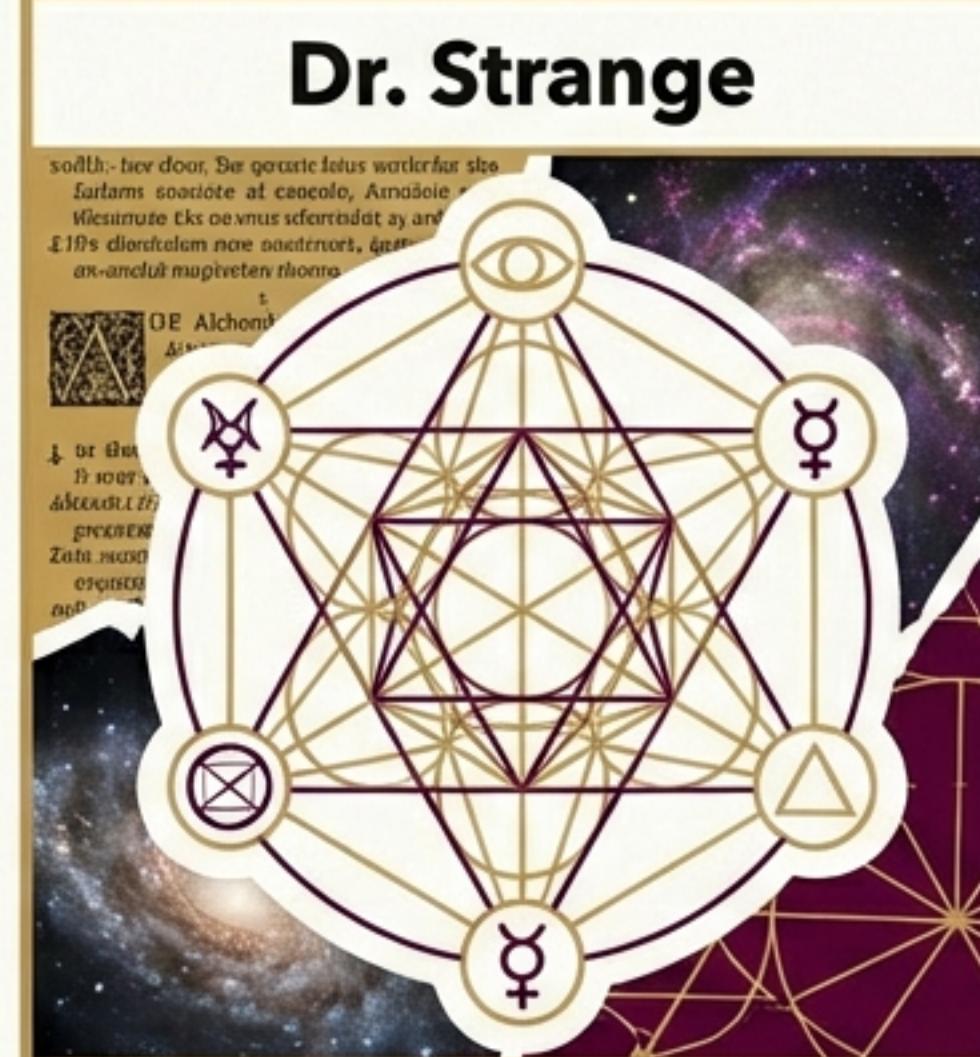
Pop Culture Gnosis: The Comic Book Shaman

Superman



The Descending Savior
(Christ/Moses typology).

Dr. Strange



Theosophy, Astral Planes,
and the Multiverse.

The Silver Surfer



Hermes, the Cosmic
Messenger.

The 'Mutant' is the modern Gnostic, possessing hidden potential that society fears.

“The Esoteric Roots of Modern Art”

The Disenchantment
Myth: Modern Art is
secular/rational.

The Reality:
Abstract Art was born
from Theosophy.

- Kandinsky: “The Spiritual in Art” influenced by thought forms.
- Mondrian: A dedicated Theosophist depicting the “Absolute” through geometry.

Modernism is occultism stripped of its rituals.

Technologies of the Self: Kabbalah & Transformation

Technologies of the Self: Kabbalah & Transformation



The Common Thread:
From
Abulafia's
ecstasy to
Pop-Kabbalah



Goal: The Übermensch or 'God-Man'—the perfection of the human into the divine.

Conclusion: The Persistence of Gnosis.

The Monachos (Ancient)

seeking the Single One
through asceticism.



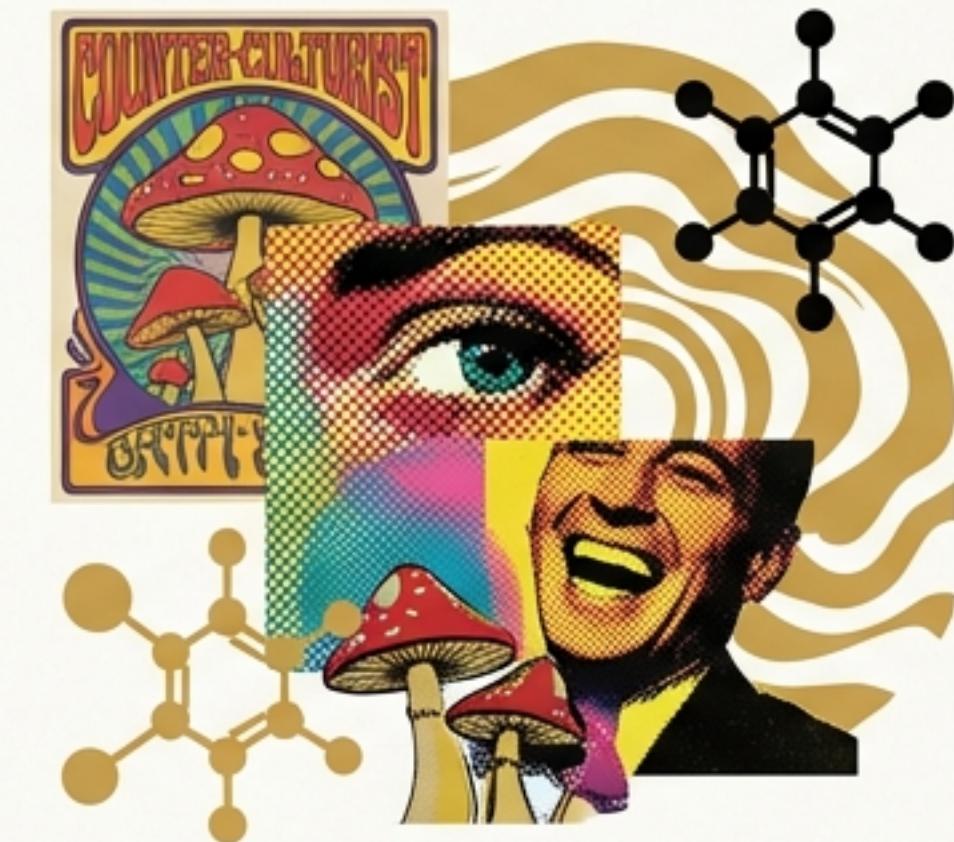
The Chaos Magician (Modern)

seeking results through
belief-shifting.



The Psychedelicist (Counter-Culture)

seeking light through
chemistry and humor.



These are not "heresies" or "irrationalities." They are technologies of experience. To ignore the esoteric is to ignore the mechanism by which culture imagines the impossible.

THE CODES OF CREATION

*Re-reading Sefer Yesirah
through Text and Image*

A book of only a few hundred words. A claim to explain the architecture of the cosmos. A mystery that has baffled scholars for a millennium. *Sefer Yesirah* (The Book of Formation) attributes the creation of the world to the manipulation of 22 letters and 10 numbers.



THE IMPOSSIBLE BOOK

The Claim: The text asserts that the universe was engineered through the “powers of the decimal number system” (the ten Sefirot) and the “twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet.”

The Attribution: Traditionally ascribed to the patriarch Abraham, implying a primal, pre-Sinaitic wisdom.

The Paradox: It is considered canonical by Jewish philosophers and Kabbalists, fascinating thinkers from Leibniz to Borges. Yet, it is “nearly impossible to contextualize.” It appears in history without a clear predecessor, possessing a unique style that defies standard categorization.



THE SILENCE OF THE SAGES

The Traditional View



Sefer Yeširah is viewed as a Rabbinic, scientific treatise from the heart of Jewish antiquity.

The Historical Void

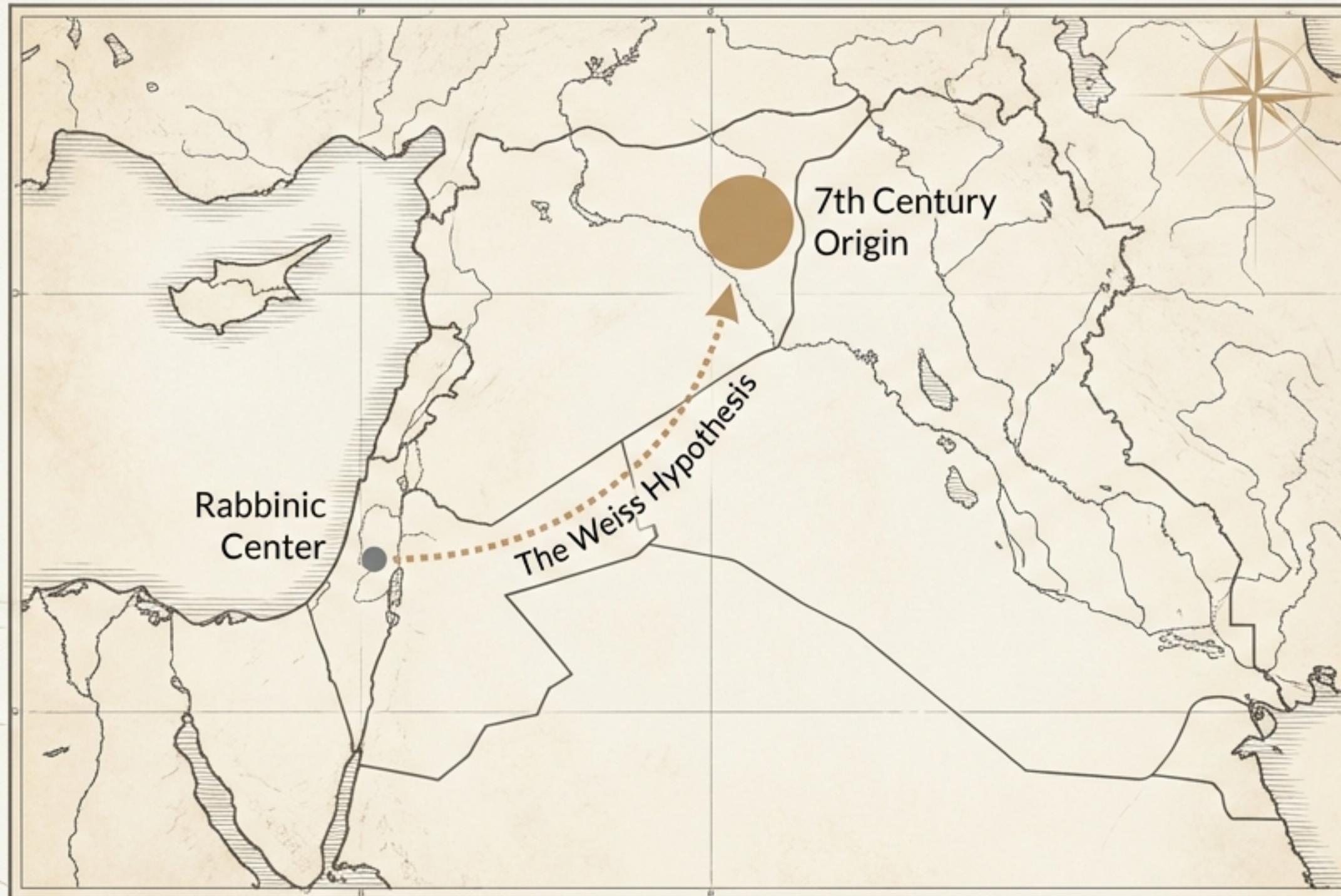


The Evidence of Absence:

1. The text does not refer to any other source in late antiquity.
2. It is not referenced by any other source in late antiquity.
3. The 'Silence of the Talmud': The Rabbinic canon is largely unaware of this text.

Conclusion: The book does not fit the Rabbinic mold. To find its origins, we must look to the margins—to a different geography and a different culture.

SHIFTING THE MAP: THE SYRIAC CONNECTION



The Thesis: Recent scholarship traces the text's origins to the 7th century C.E., written by Jews living far from the central Rabbinic circles.

The Context: These writers were embedded in a world deeply familiar with Syriac Christianity. The *Sefer Yesirah* is a “border text” absorbing the intellectual currents of its neighbors.

THE FINGERPRINT OF ‘THE OTHER’

Comparative Analysis: Sefer Yesirah vs. The Mystery of the Greek Letters

The Christian Text	The Jewish Text
<p>The Mystery of the Greek Letters (6th Century)</p>  <p>Argues the world was created by 22 letters.</p> <p>The Glitch: Greek has 24 letters. The text forces a “22” count to match the Hebrew/Syriac divine structure.</p>	<p>Sefer Yesirah (7th Century)</p>  <p>Argues the world was created by 22 letters.</p> <p>The Link: Both texts view the alphabet not just as phonetic tools, but as the elemental building blocks of the cosmos.</p>

This shared “22 letter” DNA suggests Sefer Yesirah was part of a broader cross-cultural conversation about the power of language.

JESUS AND THE CLAY BIRDS

Cultural Context: The text emerged alongside the Toledot Yeshu and Infancy Gospels—legends where a young Jesus learns the alphabet and uses the power of letters to animate clay birds.

The Shared Belief: In this cultural moment, “knowing the letters” was synonymous with the power to create life.

Narrative Insight: Sefer Yeširah is the Jewish codification of this widespread Late Antique belief: that language is the mechanism of creation.



RECLAIMING THE ‘MAGICAL’ READING

12th Century Philosophy

Philosophers like Maimonides
tried to frame *Sefer Yesirah* as a
rational, scientific treatise.

Pre-12th Century Practice

Early readers saw it as *Hilkhot Yesirah*—“Laws of Formation.” It was a manual for mysticism and magic.

Practical Application: Instructions for creating an artificial calf or a *ese Golem* through letter permutation.



THE THEOLOGY OF LANGUAGE

Core Mechanic: God created the world through speech and writing.



The Ideal Text

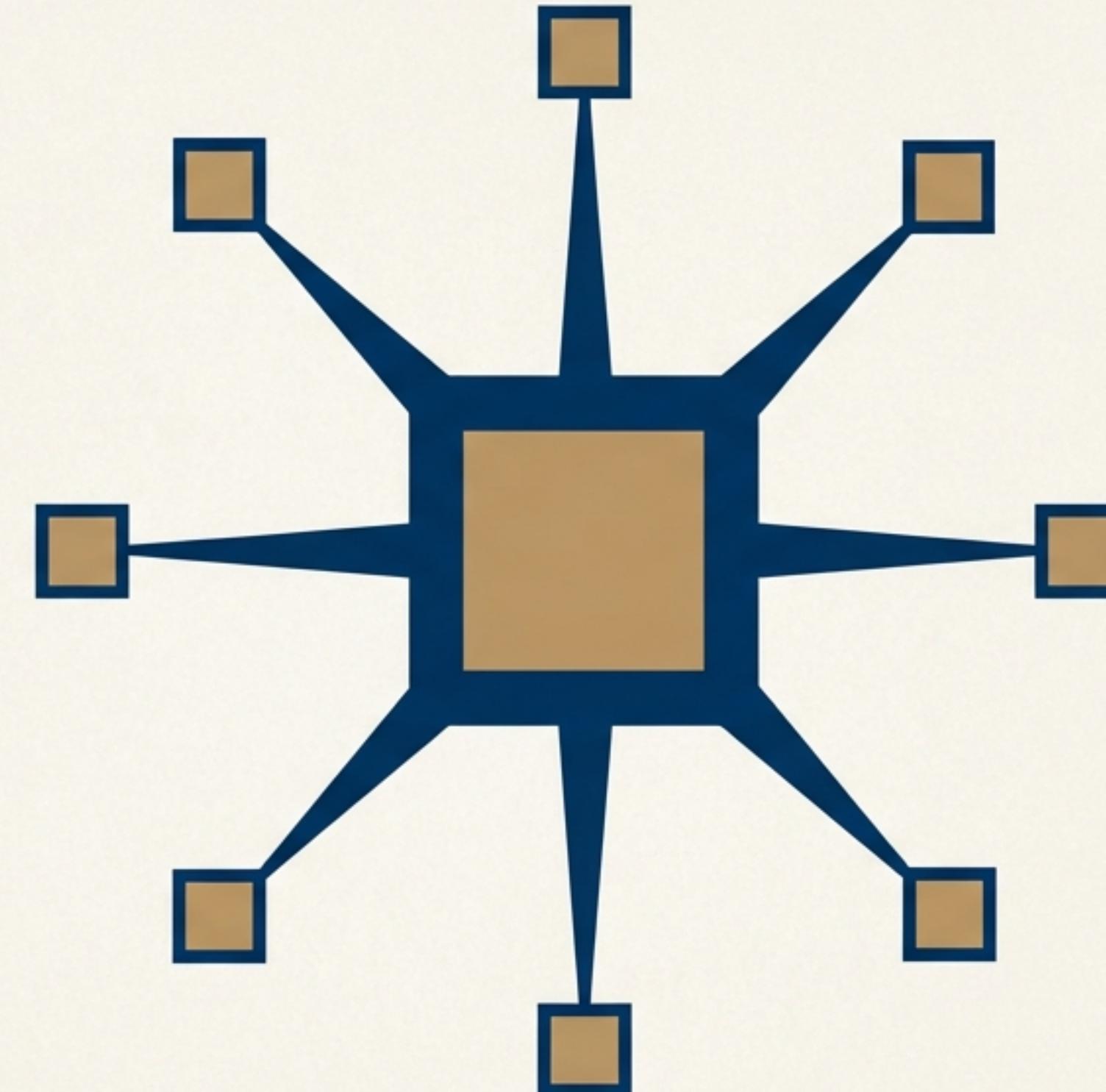
Sefer Yesirah posits Hebrew as the “Ideal Text” of the universe—the source code.

The Syriac Parallel

Syriac Christians believed their language was the divine instrument. *Sefer Yesirah* claims this primacy for Hebrew.

BEYOND THE TEXT: THE MYTH OF ICONOCLASM

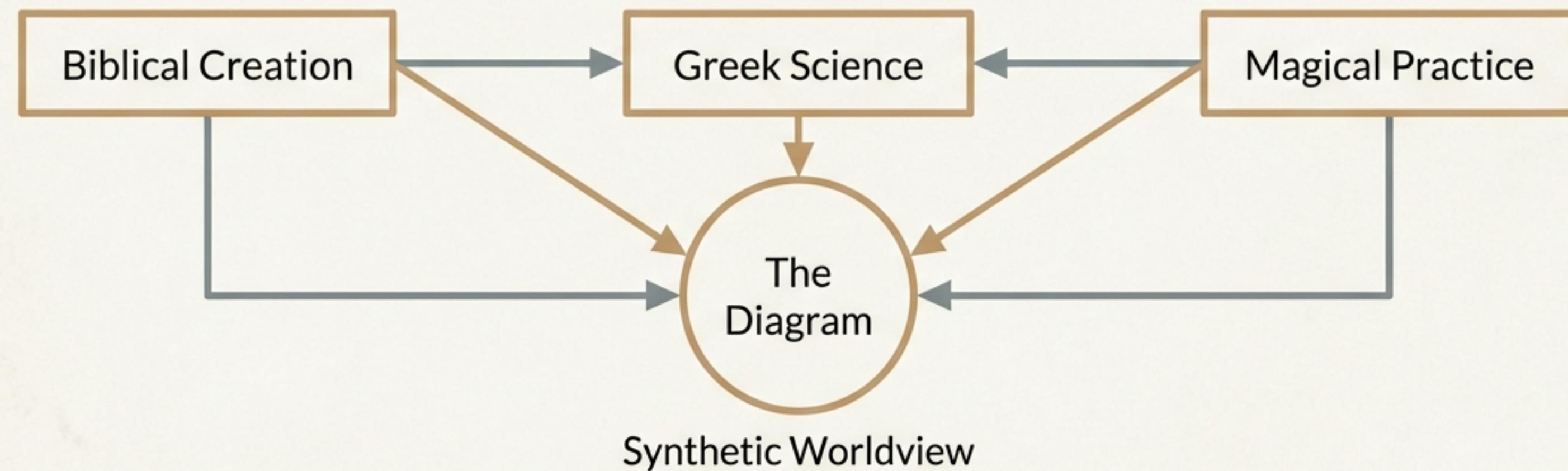
The Misconception:
The 'Second Commandment' led scholars to believe Judaism was strictly iconoclastic and that diagrams were irrelevant decorations.



The Reality: Visual culture was central to Kabbalah. We cannot understand Sefer Yesirah by reading it alone. The diagrams are not illustrations; they are integral components of the transmission.

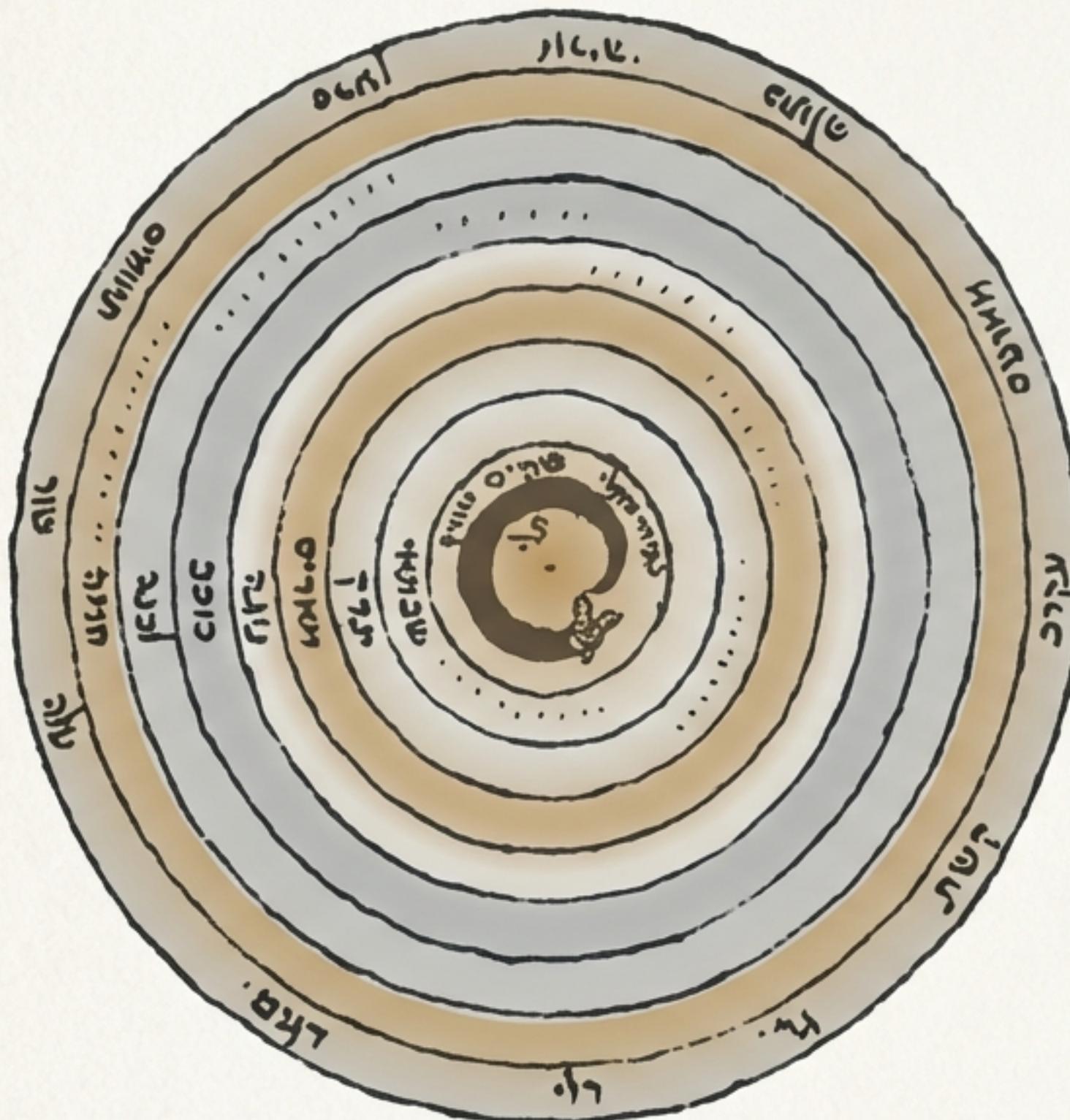
DIAGRAMS AS VISUAL EXEGESIS

Definition: Diagrams in these manuscripts function as “glosses” (commentaries).



“Cosmographies are synthetic... they illustrate a worldview.” – Marla Segol

THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE INFINITE

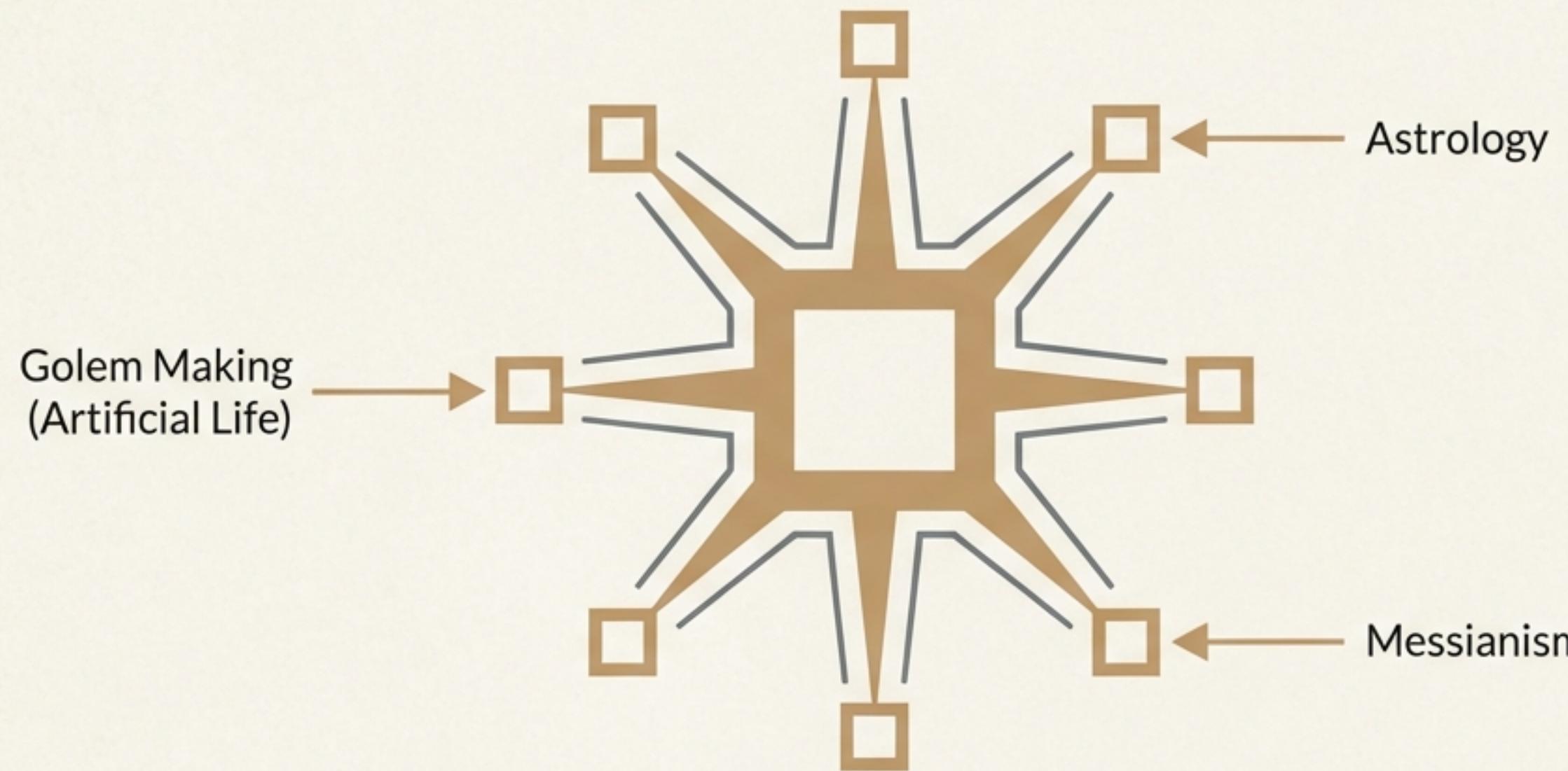


The Structure: The diagrams organize the universe into Rings:

1. The Ten Sefirot
(Numbers/Dimensions)
2. The Twenty-Two Letters
3. The T'li (The Dragon/Axis)

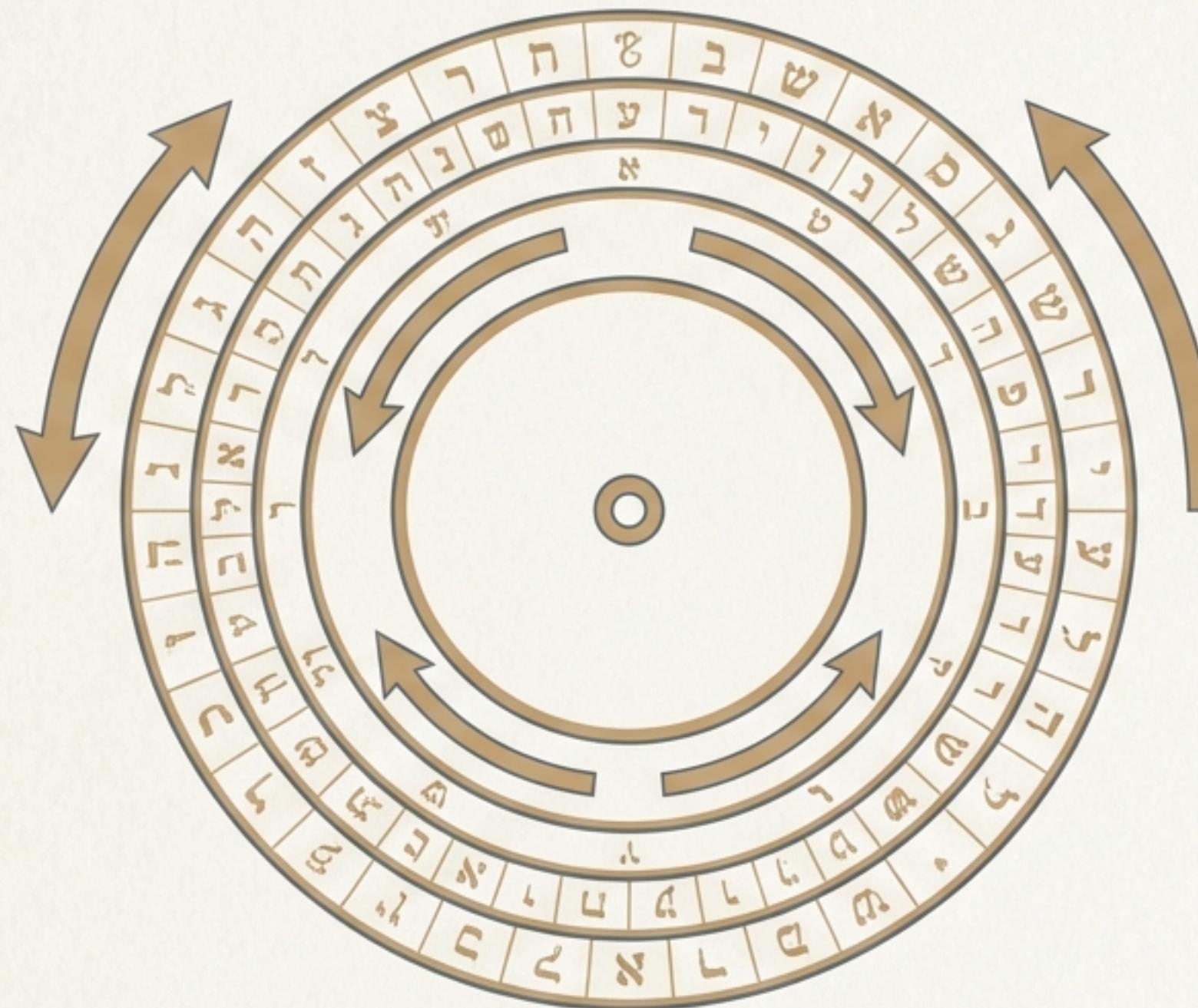
Visual Logic: These concentric circles visualize the hierarchy of creation, placing the reader in relation to the divine structure.

THE INTERFACE OF RITUAL



User Manual: These diagrams were not static art. They served as instructional schematics, showing the initiate how to combine and permute letters to affect reality. They were the interface between the mystic and the 'code' of creation.

COMPUTING CREATION



The Artifact: Volvelles (Wheel Charts).

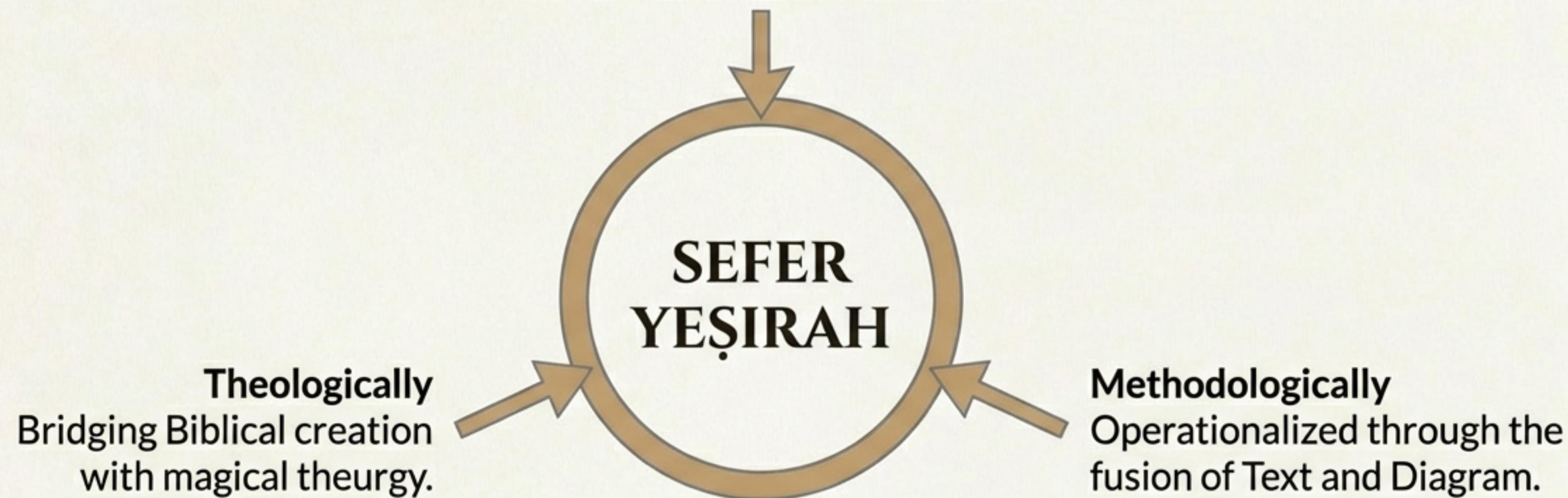
Functionality: Permutational letter charts with moving parts.

The Concept: By rotating the wheels, the mystic could 'dial in' combinations of letters, effectively running the program of creation. It is an ancient analog computer.

A SYNCRETIC MASTERPIECE

Geographically

Born in the collision of Jewish
and Syriac-Christian cultures.



It is a machine for understanding the universe, built from parts
found in the cultural collision of the **7th century**.

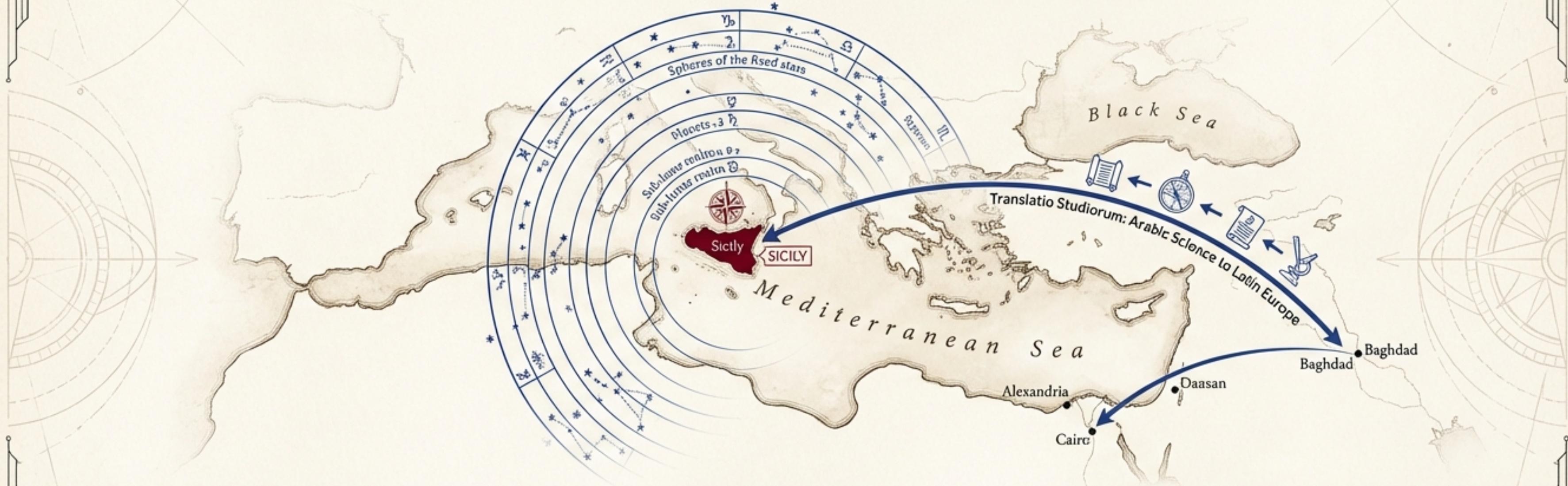
THE INFINITE LIBRARY

Legacy: This short, cryptic text captivated thinkers from the medieval Kabbalists to Leibniz and Borges.

Final Insight: It remains a testament to a profound human intuition: that the world is made of language, and if we can just find the right combination of letters, we can rewrite reality.

THE SECRET PHILOSOPHY OF THE STARS

Unlocking *De secretis philosophie* and the 12th-Century Scientific Revolution



THE ARTIFACT

De secretis philosophie
(*Apex phisice*)

Unknown Author, preserved in multiple MSS.

THE ORIGIN

Southern Italy,
c. 1137–1151

Norman Kingdom, crossroads of culture.

THE PROPOSITION

Importing forbidden Arabic physics
to modernize Latin medicine.

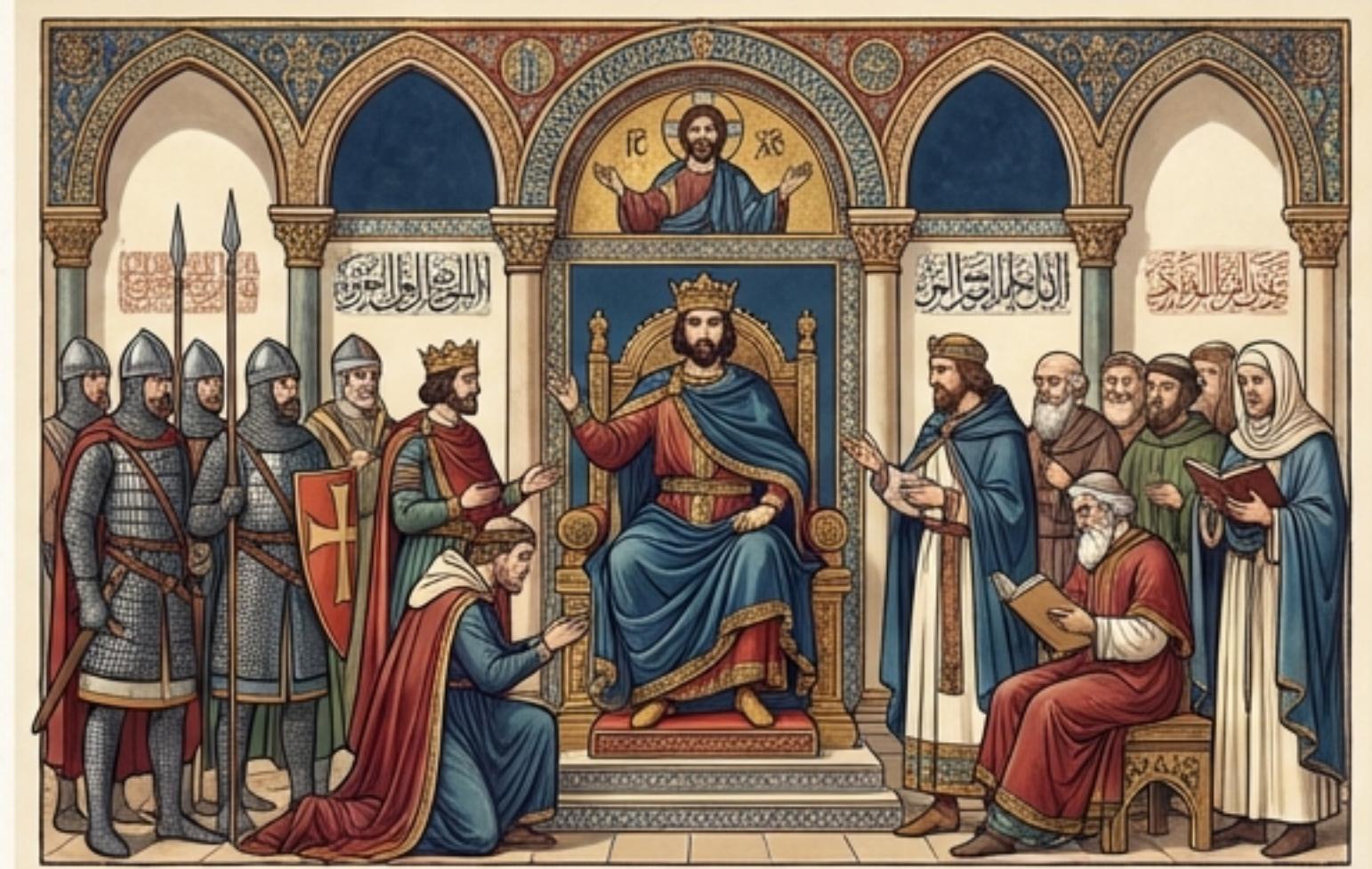
A radical synthesis of celestial and earthly elements.

The Patron and the Realm

Latin *ixtampiclis douudatri*
manuscript, limilus, avilum
unduns aredit forent dit.

Domine **Roberte**, dei gratia
cancellarii regis Ytalie, qui
licerumin tum apritios vem
mionantis suftitinoportu.

Robert of Selby,
Chancellor to
Roger II
(fl. 1137-1151).



The Setting: The **Norman Kingdom of Sicily**—a melting pot of Greek, Arabic, and Latin cultures. The Chancellor intervened in the text's composition, requesting specific additions on **Divinity** and **Creation**.

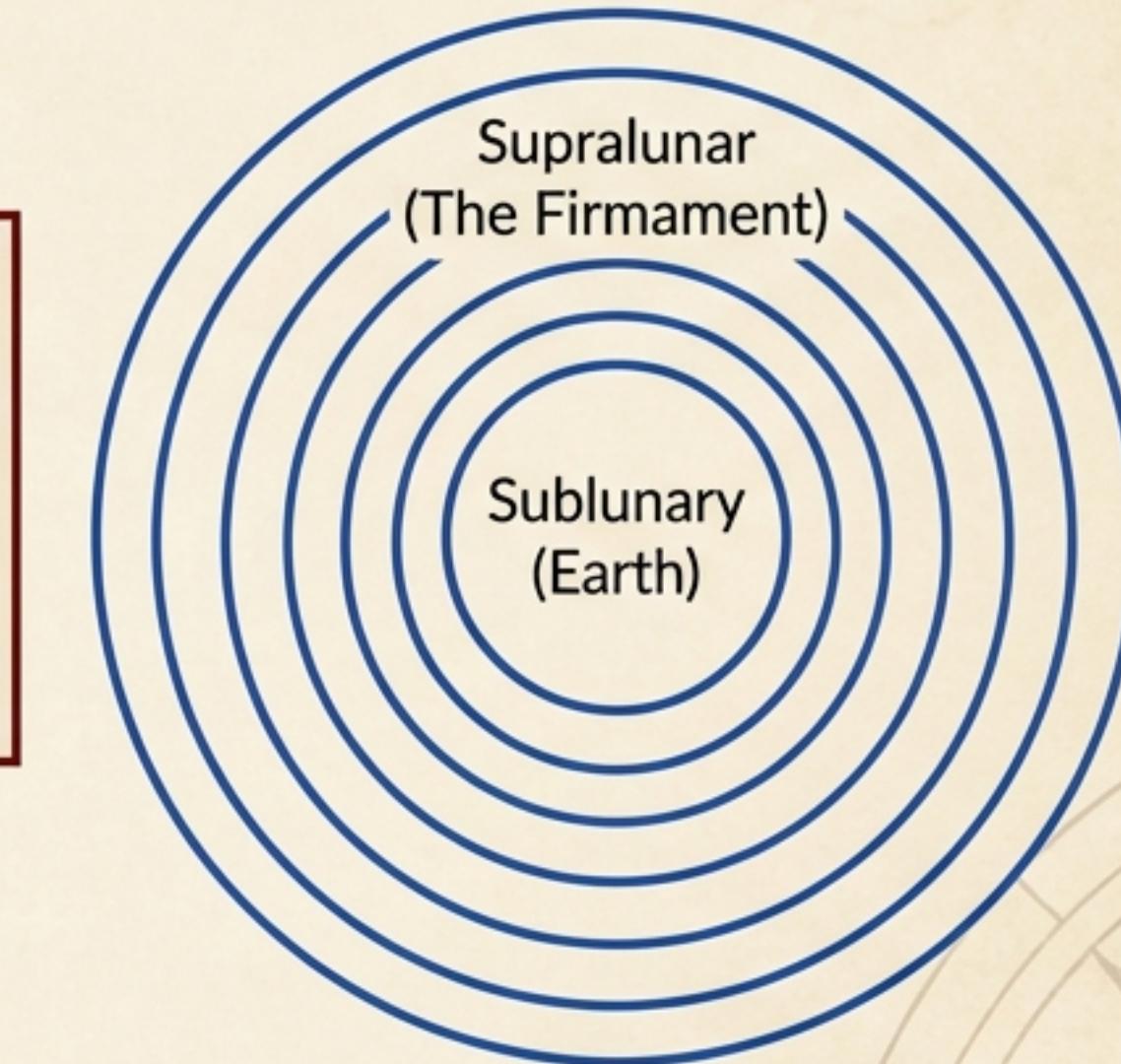
A Clash of Cosmologies

The Status Quo
(Platonic/Salernitan)



Porous boundary between Heaven and Earth.

The New Science
(Aristotelian/Arabic)



Strict division. Immutable Heavens vs. Corruptible Earth.

The Shift:
De secretis rejects the Old Way to embrace the rigid Peripatetic model.

The Hidden Source

Cinzel

Lato

Font : Deep Iron Gall Ink Black

De secretis philosophie (Latin)

“Praise be to God, the beginning without beginning... who was eternal before everything.”

EB Garamond

Liber de orbe (Arabic Source)

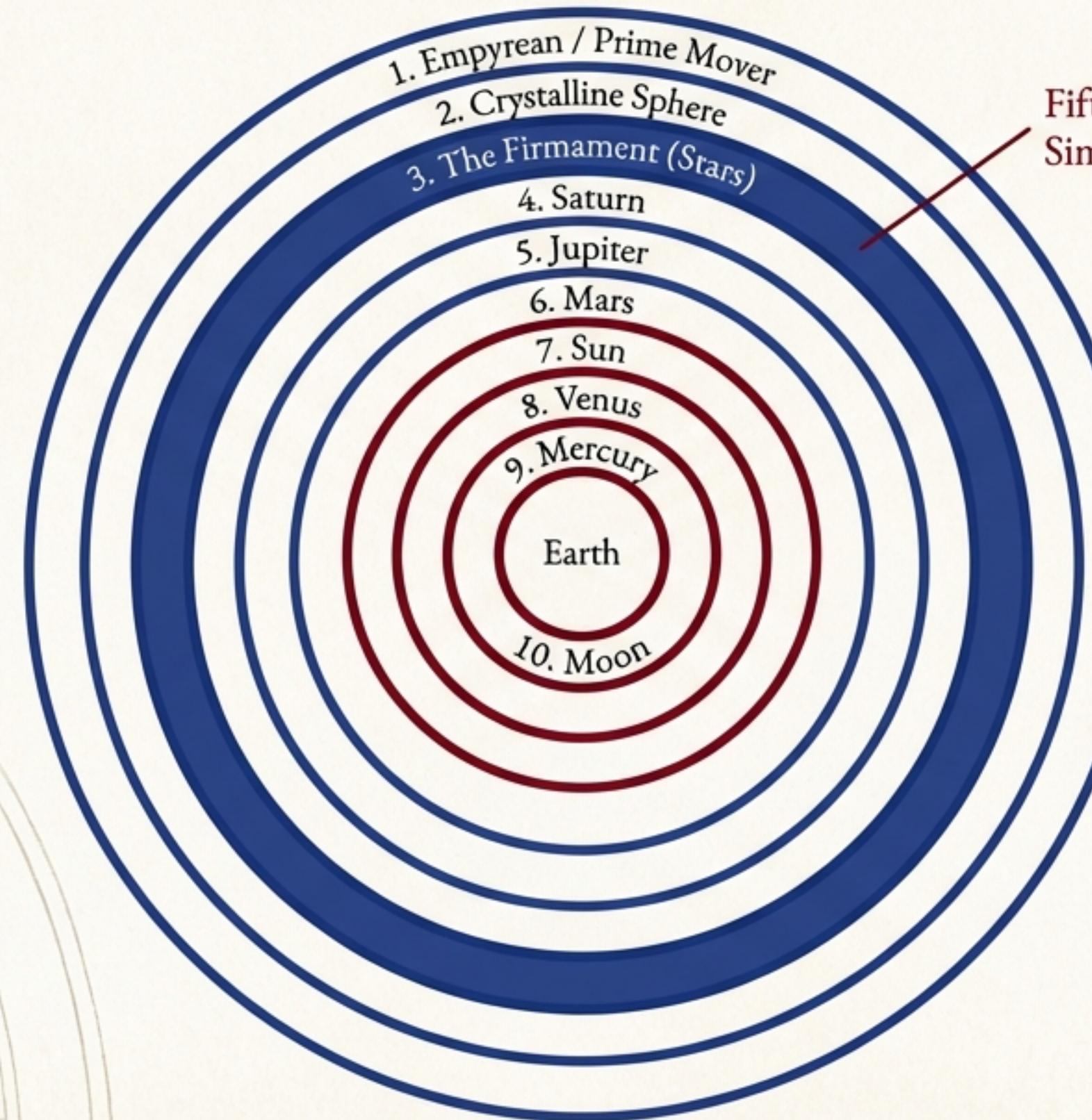
“In the name of God, merciful and compassionate... Praise be to God... Praise be to God...
God bless Muhammad.”

Lato

 The Discovery: The author plagiarized the *Liber de orbe*, attributed to the Jewish-Persian astronomer **Masha'allah**. He scrubbed Islamic references but kept the physics and the ‘10 Spheres’ model intact.

EB Garanzuli Blue

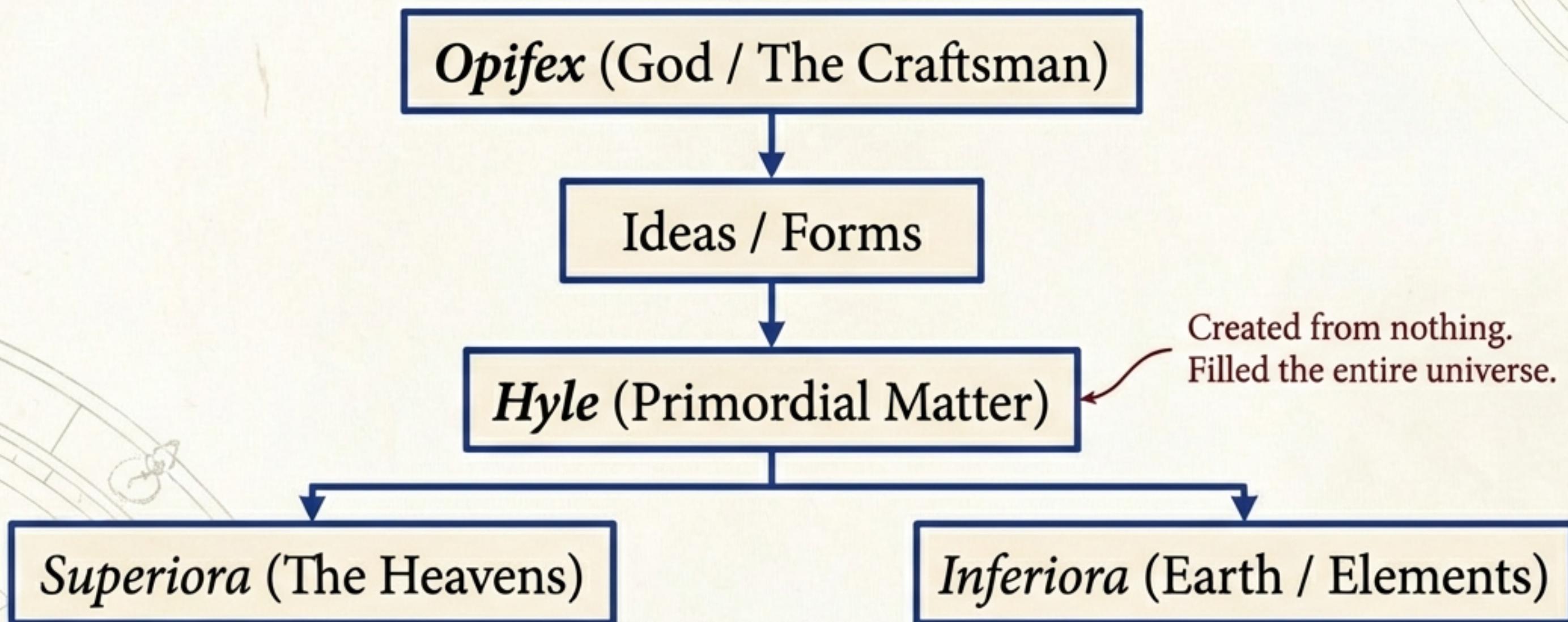
Constructing the Firmament



Fifth Essence (Quintessence) -
Simple, Spherical, Immutable

“The heavenly bodies
are simpler and more
perfect than inferior
things because they
do not suffer intensity
or remission.”

The Creation of Matter

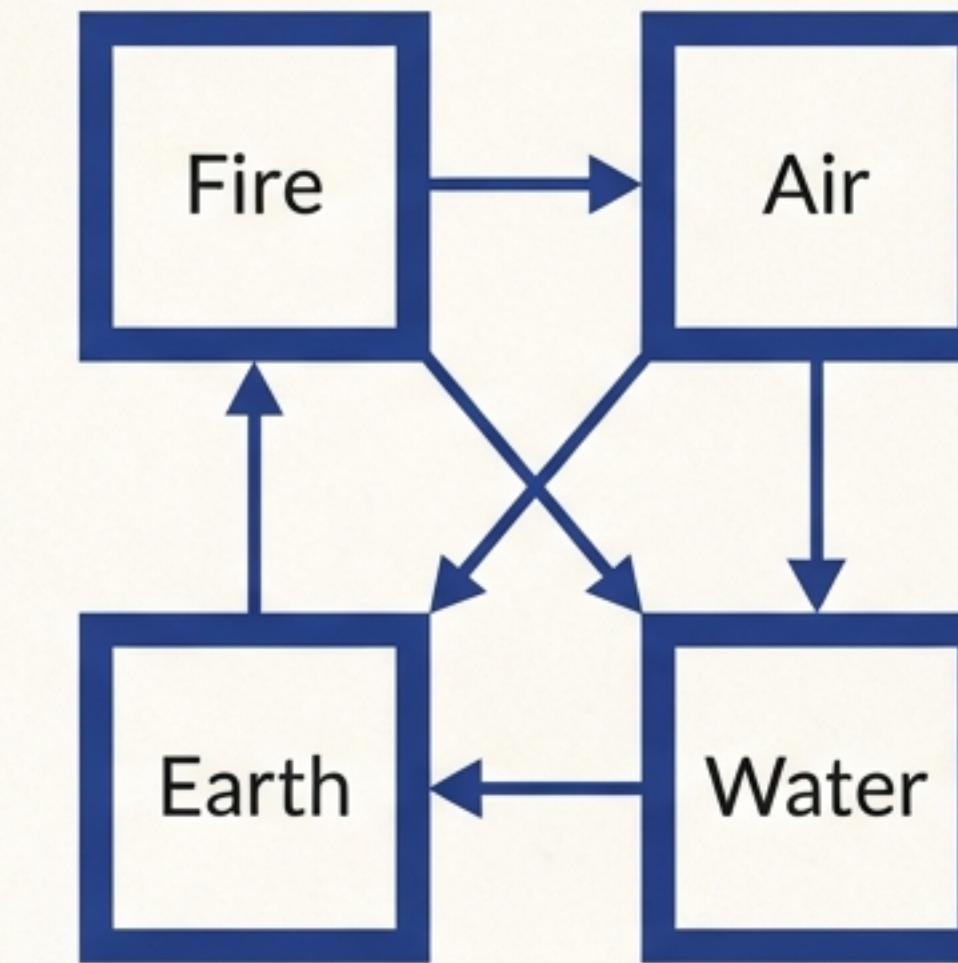


Hylomorphism: God separated the Heavens from the Earth within the single block of Hyle. Matter flows from the Divine Essence '*causally, not by generation*'.

Fools Beating the Air

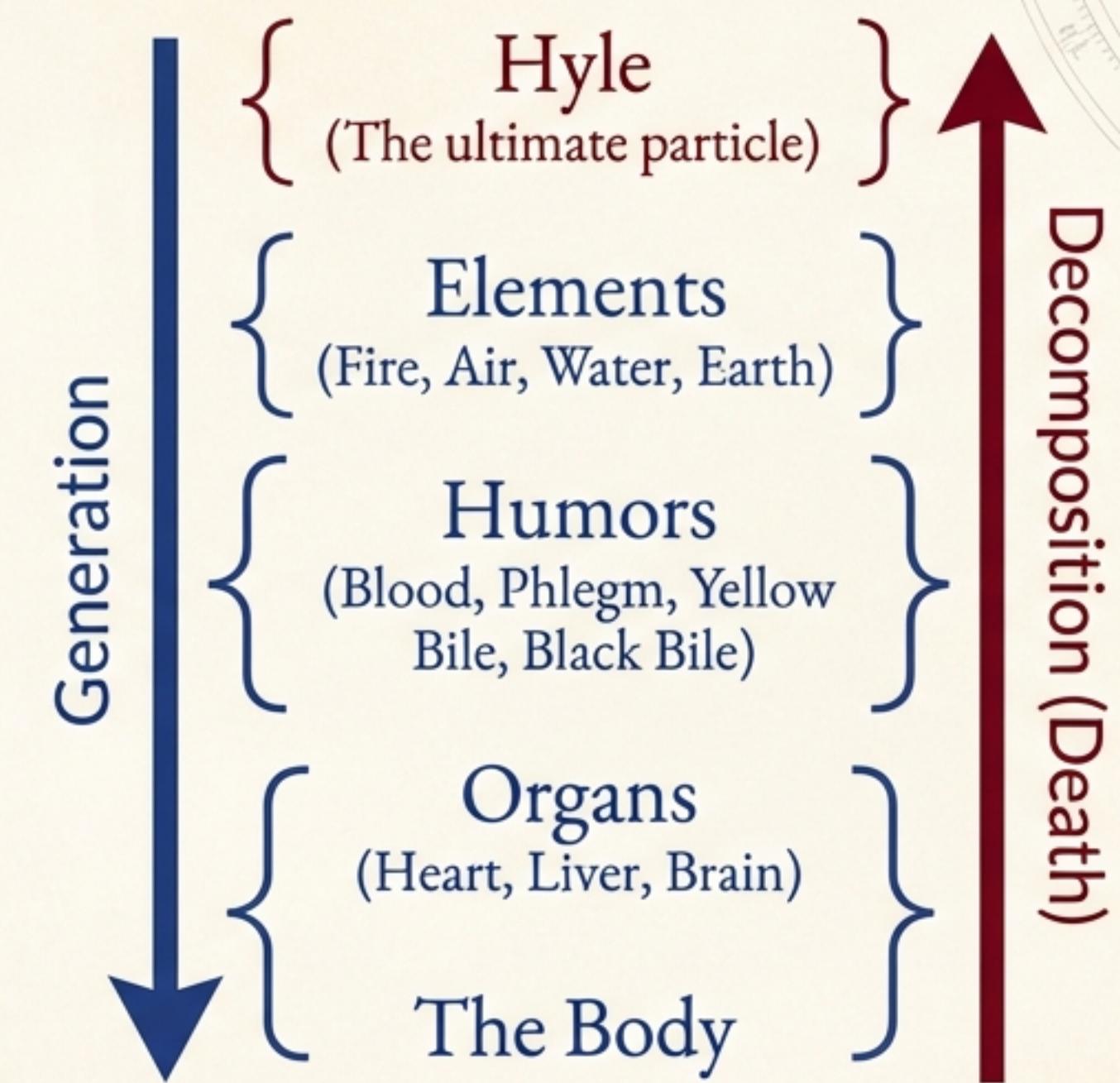
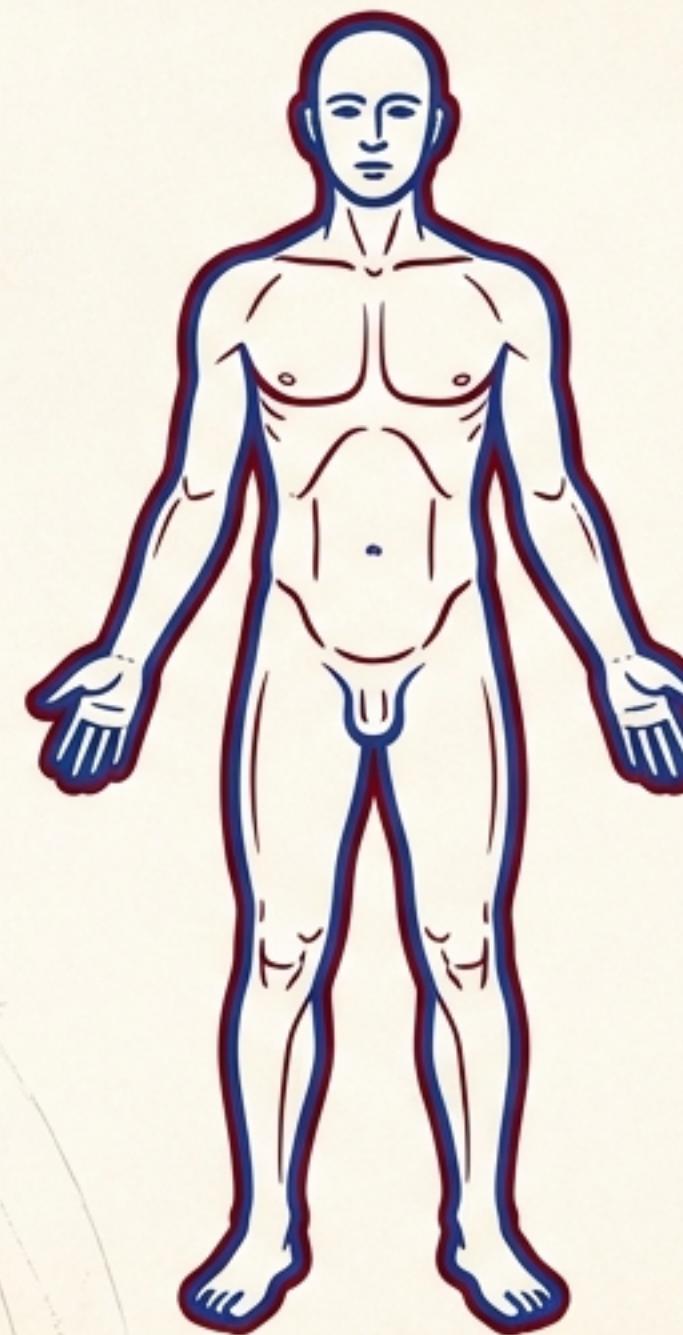
**stultizantes
verberant
aerem**

They are fools beating the air.



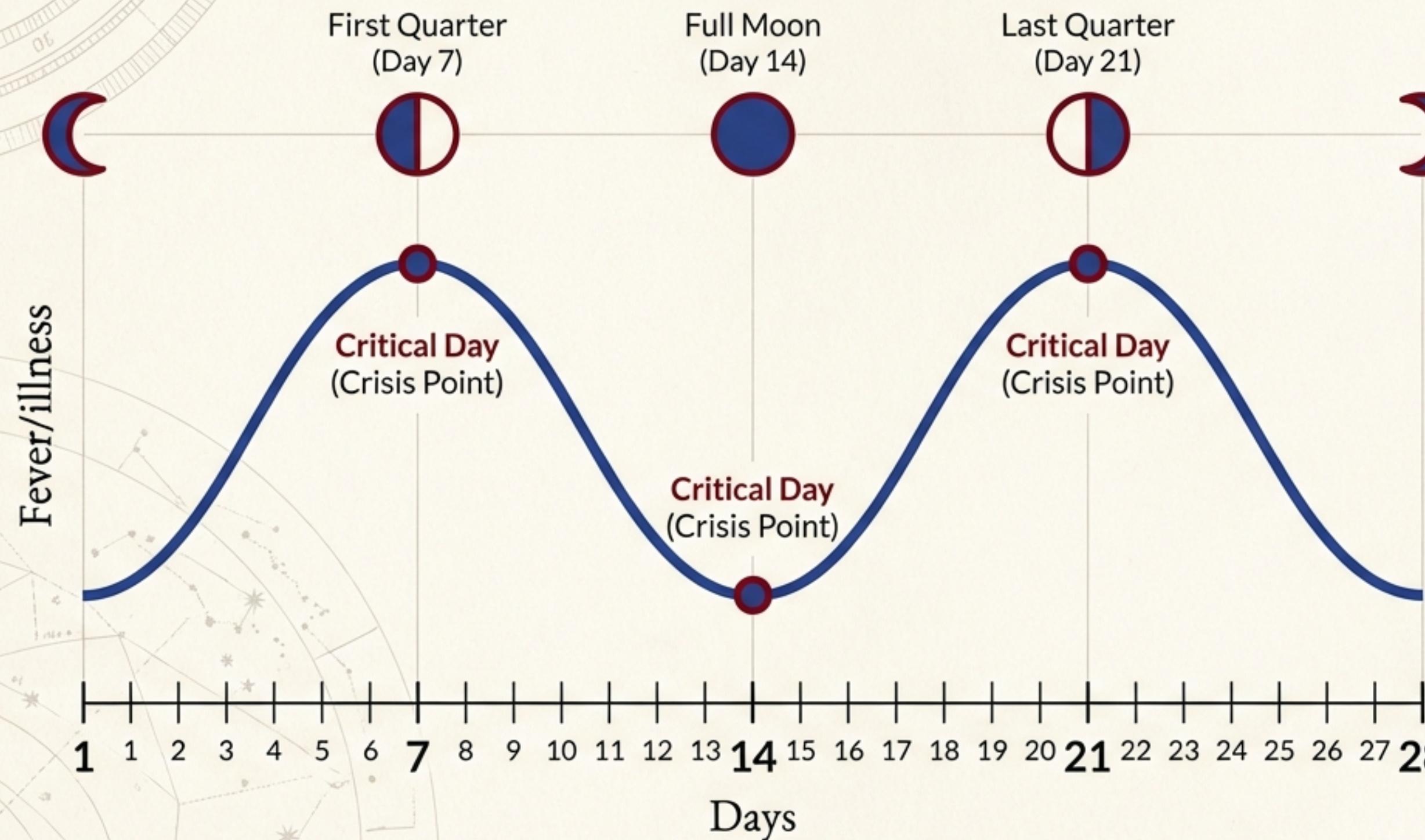
The Polemic against Salerno. The author argues that visible earth and fire are merely compounds ('commixtio'), not true elements. True elements are invisible and simple. He attacks the Salernitan doctors for failing to understand this distinction.

The Body as Microcosm



“Medical subjects will be discussed by way of philosophical reasoning.”

The Physics of Critical Days

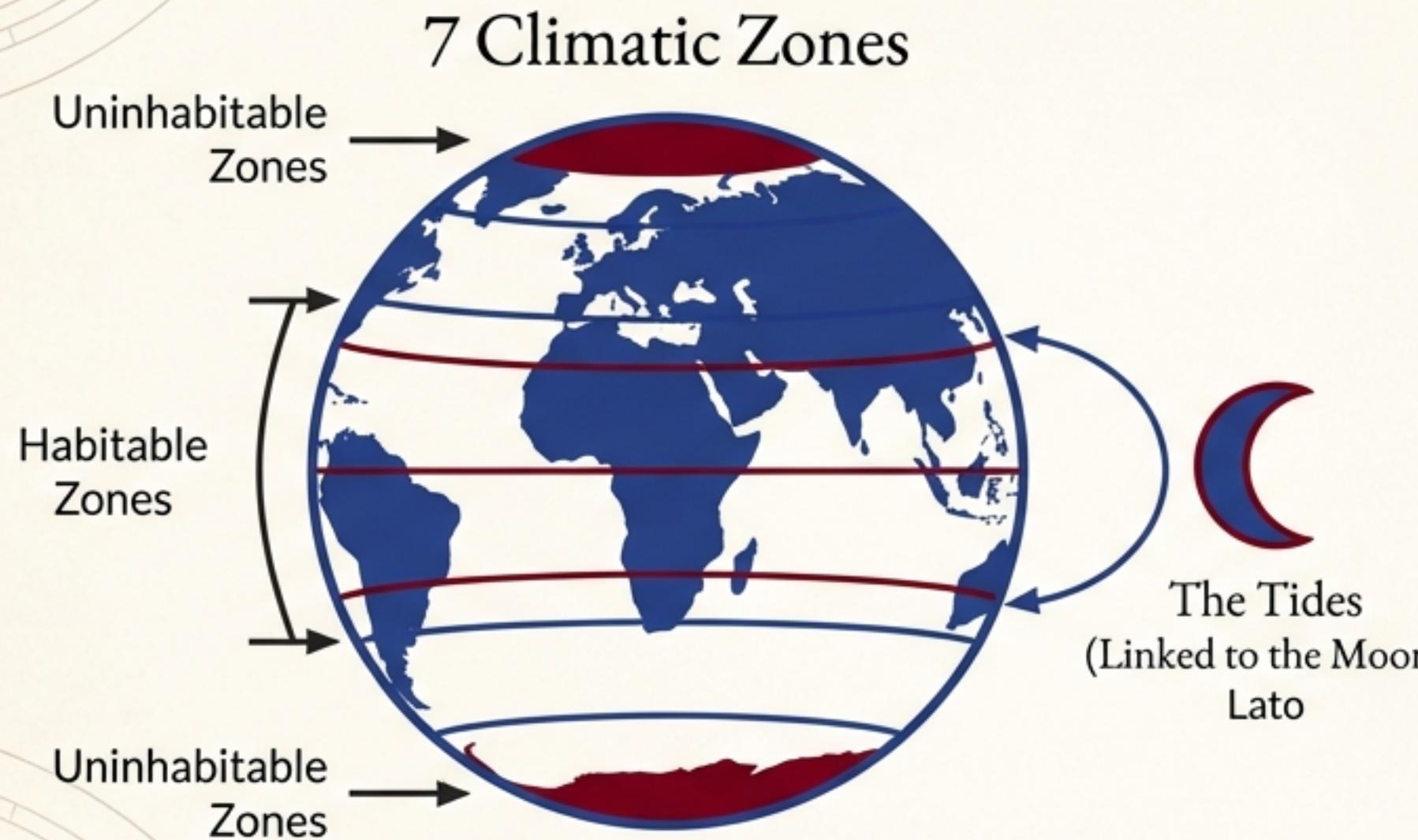


Lunar Influence & Humoral Movement

The Moon is the “cause of construction and destruction.” Its movement moves the humors in the body.

Astronomy provides the causal explanation for the medical symptom.

Meteorology and Time

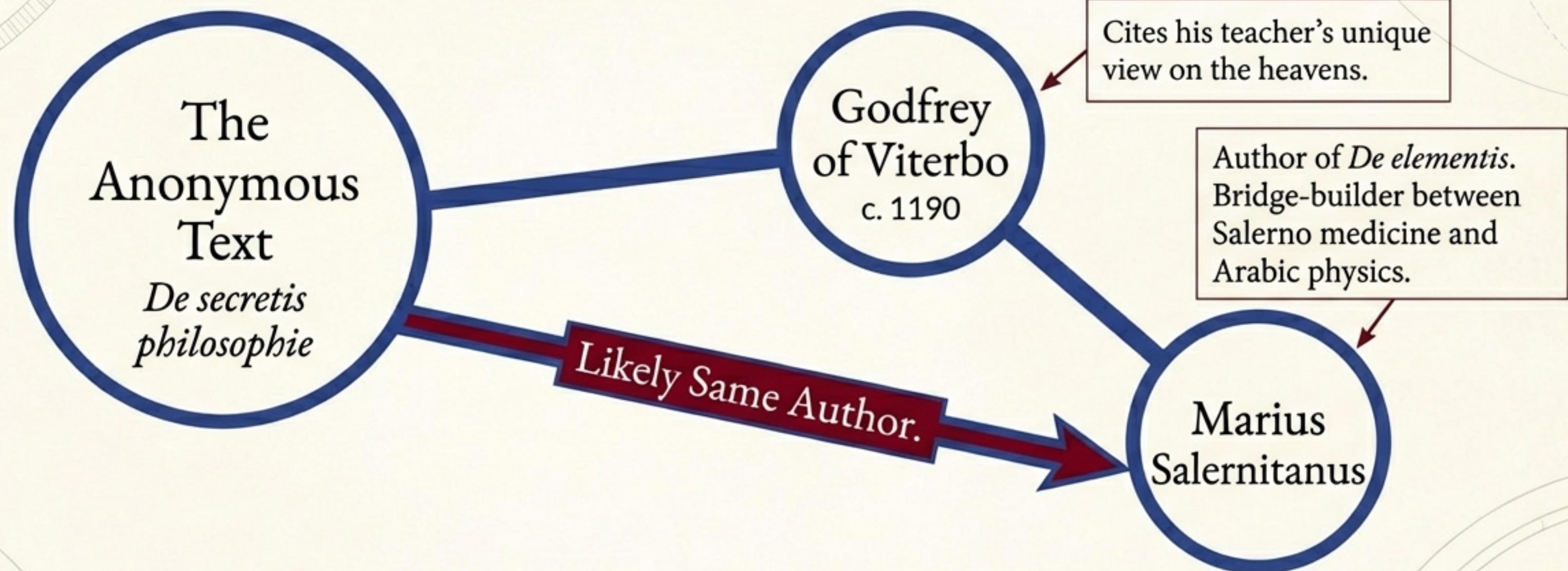


In Book 5:

- The Seasons (Time)
- The Tides 
- Climatic Zones
 - Habitable vs. Uninhabitable

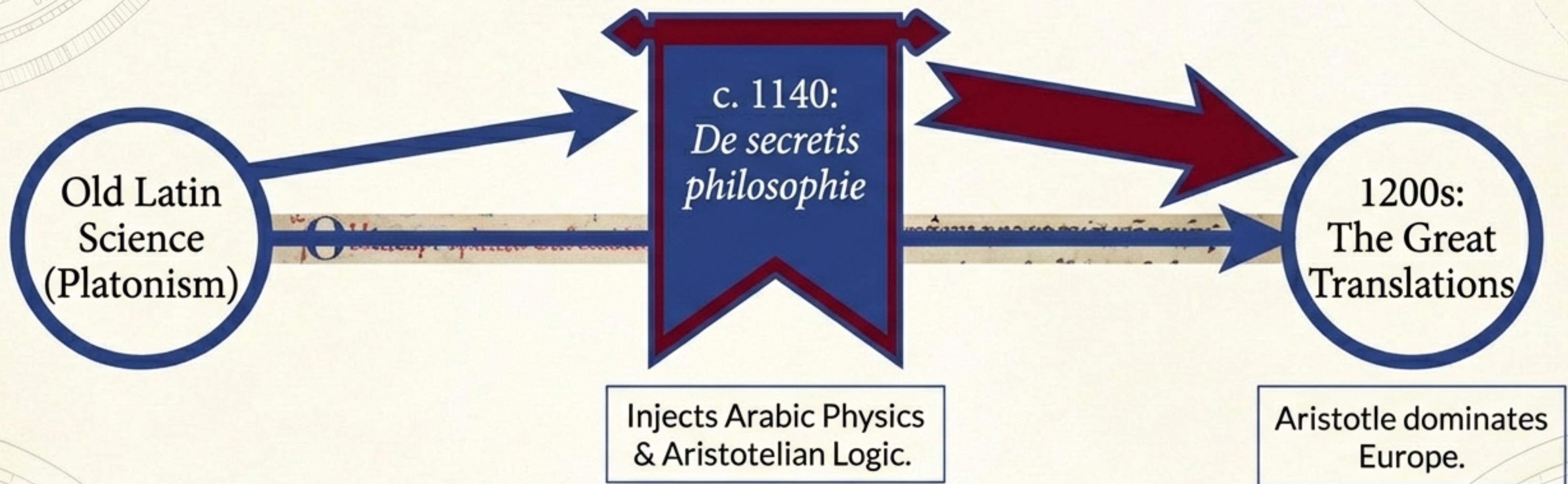
Completing the Cosmography: The system unites the Heavens, the Atmosphere, the Earth, and the Human Body into one “Total Science”.

Identifying the ‘Secret’ Author



Godfrey of Viterbo mentions Marius taught that the heavens are not made of elements—a view unique to *De secretis* in this era.

The Bridge to the Future



By importing Masha'allah's *Liber de orbe* under a Latin guise, this text paved the way for the scientific renaissance of the 13th century, creating a full-fledged cosmography that linked the stars to the pulse.

The Locked Box and the Visual Key

Word, Image, and the Hidden Mechanics of the Sefer Yetzirah.



For centuries, scholars have debated the meaning of the Sefer Yetzirah (Book of Creation). Is it philosophy? Is it magic? This deck explores the thesis of Marla Segol: that medieval diagrams were not merely illustrations, but necessary technologies designed to fix the meaning of an impossible text and enable the user to manipulate reality.

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A Text “Deep, High, and Hidden”

The *Sefer Yetsirah* (SY) is a mystical cosmogony from Late Antiquity. It is shockingly brief—between 1,300 and 2,500 words—and written in simple but laconic Hebrew. The text narrates the creation of the universe through numbers and letters, but offers no definitions for its core terms. It is semantically unstable and polyvalent.

“The words of this book are deep, high, and hidden from the stare of those who study it, notwithstanding that many have tried to explain it.

— Moshe Cordovero (16th c. Kabbalist)

Dismantling the Iconoclastic Fallacy

The Myth

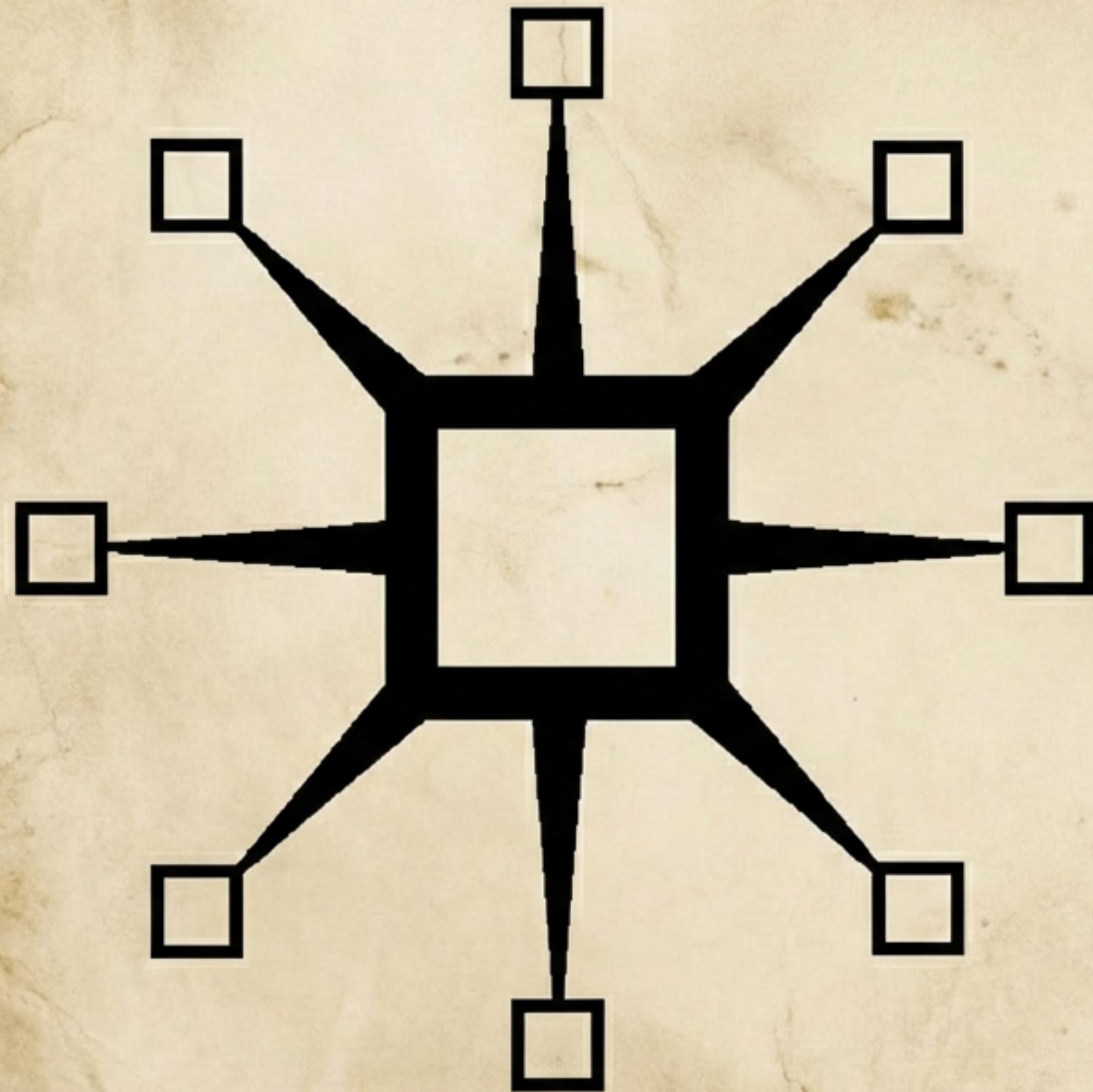
The common belief that Jewish culture forbids visual representation (“You shall make no graven image”) is largely an Enlightenment invention designed to create a specific group identity.



Visual Exegesis

The Reality

Jewish history is rich with “Visual Exegesis.” Diagrams in Kabbalah are not decorative violations of law; they are **authoritative** tools used to map the divine. They exist to **reconcile** conflicting cosmologies—biblical, philosophical, and scientific—into one coherent worldview.

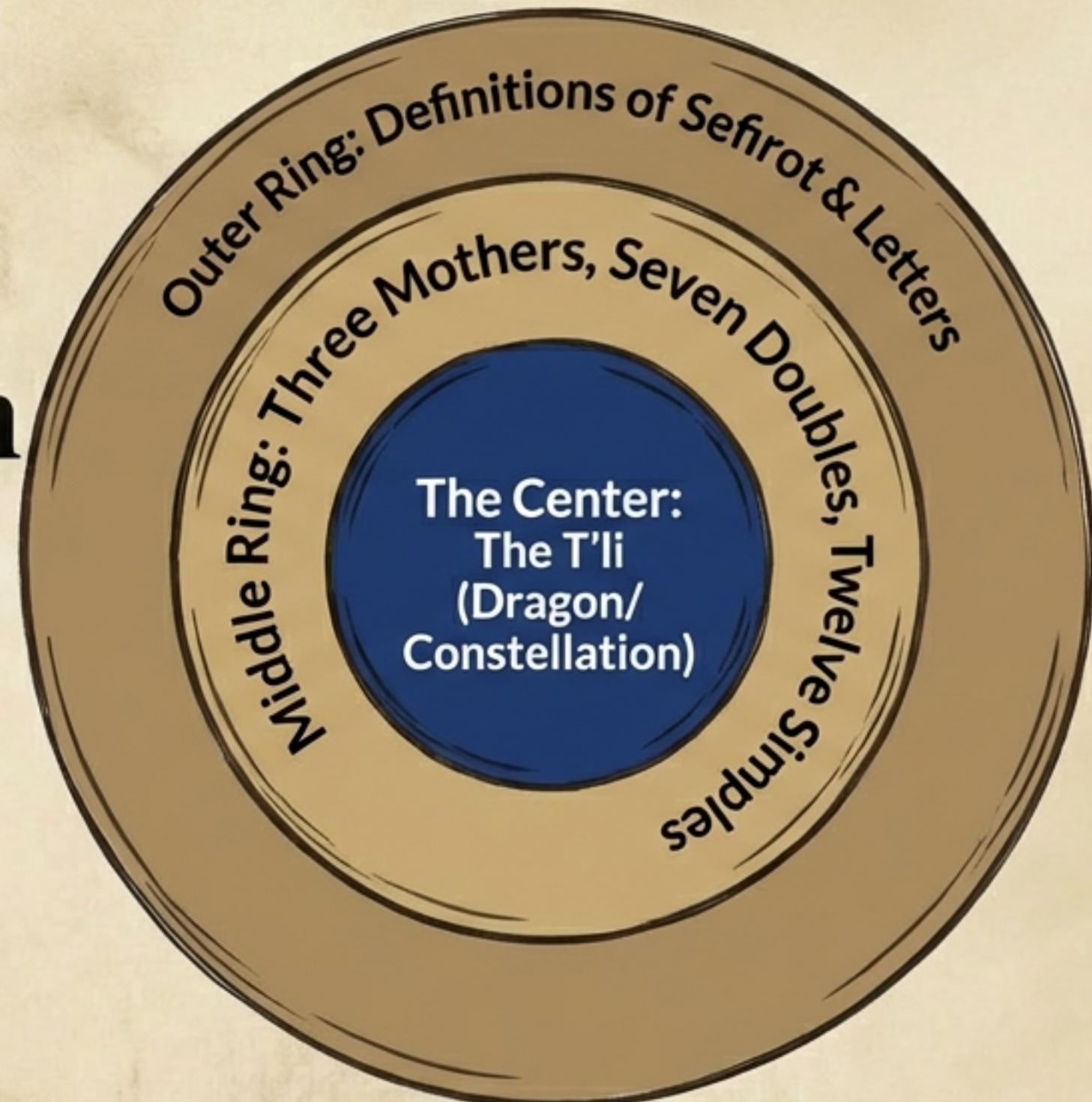


The Mechanics of Creation: The 32 Paths of Wisdom

God 'carved out' the universe using 32 specific instruments.

- 1. The 10 Sefirot:** Dimensions creating the boundaries of existence (Up/Down, East/West, Good/Evil).
- 2. The 22 Letters:** The building blocks of substance, hewn from air.
- 3. The Triad:** Every letter operates across three dimensions:
 - The Universe (Space/Planets)
 - The Year (Time/Seasons)
 - The Soul (The Human Body/Experience)

Genre as Argument: The Ring Composition



The Sefer Yetzirah is not a linear story; it is a Ring Structure. The literary form itself argues for the text's purpose. It centers on the mechanisms of control (The T'li), suggesting the text is not just for reading, but for using.

Giving Form to the Formless: The Sefirot

The text asserts the Sefirot are “without substance” and fails to define them clearly.

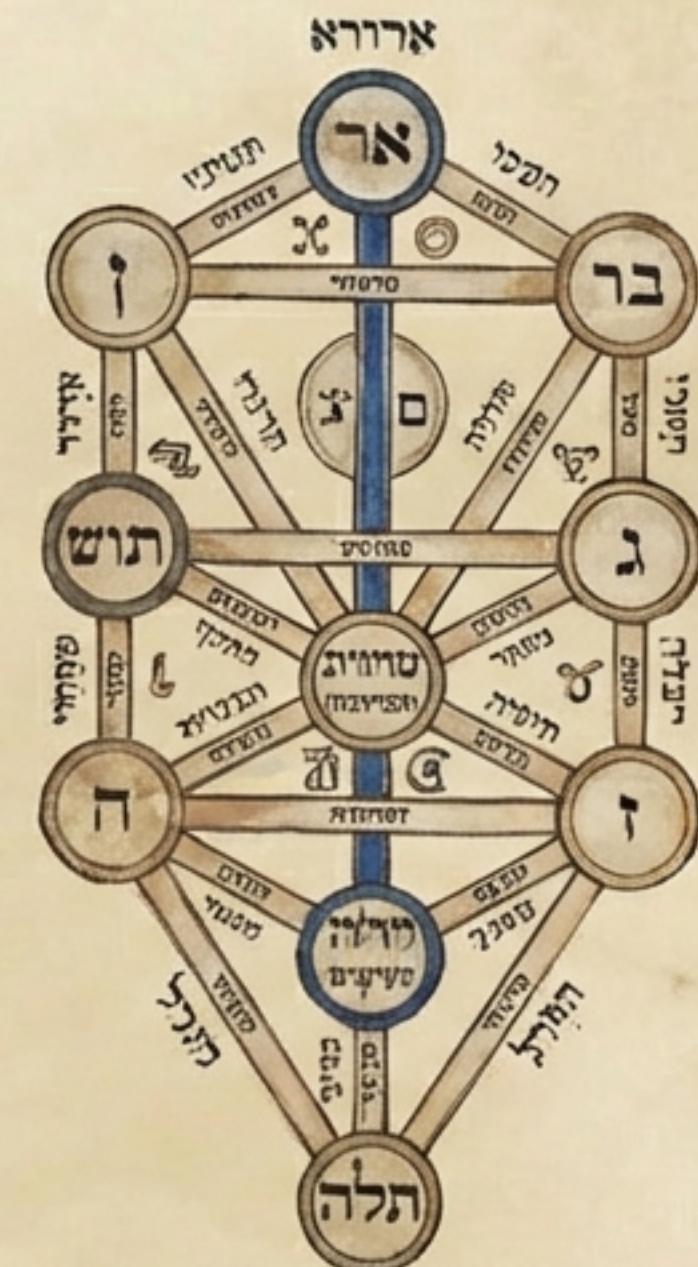
Medieval scribes used diagrams to “fix” the Sefirot, turning abstract numbers into a rigid structure.

These diagrams serve as “Cognitive Maps” to navigate the abyss between the Creator and the Created.

אָתָּה רְאֵן,
10



Stage 1: Textual Void



Stage 2: Visual Solution (The *llan*)

The T'li: The Dragon at the Center of the Cosmos

- **Identity:** The celestial hook or dragon (Draco) that holds the universe together.
- **Function:** “The T’li in the Universe is like a king on his throne.” It moves and rules all constellations.
- **Synthesis:** The mechanism by which the operator understands the movement of time and space.



The Atomic Theory of Letters

Letters are the physical stones of creation.

The 3 Mothers	The 7 Doubles	The 12 Simples
Aleph, Mem, Shin. Rule over Air, Water, Fire. The source of all things.	BGD CPRT. Hard/Soft sounds. Create polarity in life: Life/Death, Peace/Evil.	Correspond to the 12 constellations, 12 months, and 12 human organs (sight, anger, sleep).



The Technology of Permutation

The text instructs the user to “Combine, weigh, and exchange.” This is the science of permutation. The tool is the Volvelle (Wheel)—concentric paper circles that rotate to calculate the 231 Gates of the alphabet. These are analog computers for theurgy.



Raising the Golem: Ritual, Not Monster

In medieval Kabbalah, the Golem was not a monster created for labor. It was a ritual of “Totemization”—turning an object into a subject. Creating a Golem was a messianic act, demonstrating the operator’s ability to participate in the repair of the cosmos.



Figure 6.2 MS Parma 1390

Instructional Design for the Miraculous

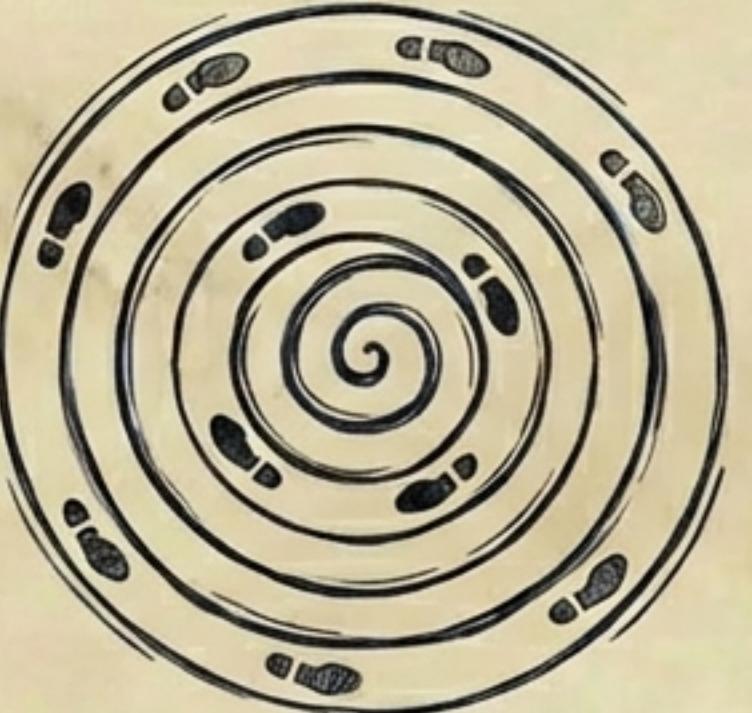
1.



Preparation.

Purification and donning
white vestments.

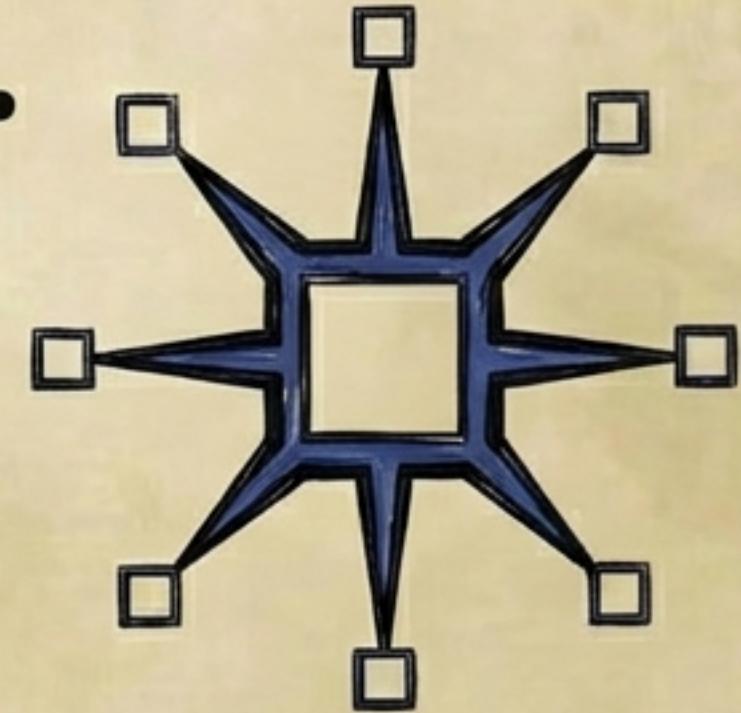
2.



Circumambulation.

Walking in circles
around the dust.

3.



Permutation.

Reciting alphabet tables
combined with the
Tetragrammaton.

‘From there on go out and calculate
that which the mouth cannot speak.’

The False Divide: Magic as Religious Act

Scholars often separate “Mysticism” (feeling God) from “Magic” (affecting reality). For the Kabbalist, these were one and the same.

Magic
(Manipulating
Letters)



**Imitatio
Dei**

Religion
(Praising God)

Key Concept:
Theurgical efficacy—affecting the divine
structure—was the goal of the religious experience.

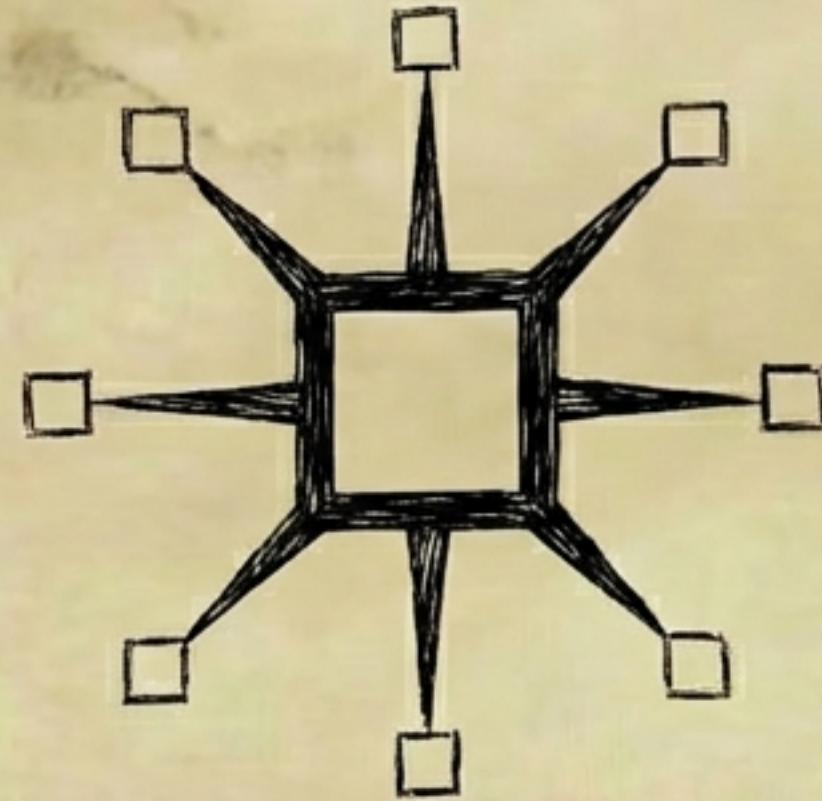
Orienting the Soul: The Diagram as Cognitive Map

The medieval cosmos was crowded. The diagrams of the *Sefer Yetzirah* act as ‘Cosmographies,’ reconciling conflicting models into a single visual field. They allow the user to mentally and ritually travel through the spheres, past the T’lli, to the divine source.



The Scribe as Engineer

The 'Ugly Duckling' of Manuscripts



Kabbalistic diagrams were not made by professional artists. They were drawn by scribes in the margins of their own books. They are utilitarian, drawn in the same ink as the text. This proves they were functional tools for tools for study, showing the active 'thinking process' of the scribe.

Reading the Invisible

The *Sefer Yetzirah* began as a locked box of contradictory words. Through the ‘visual exegesis’ of medieval diagrams, it became a navigable map. These diagrams represent the human drive to visualize the invisible—to draw lines around the infinite so that we might understand our place within it.

