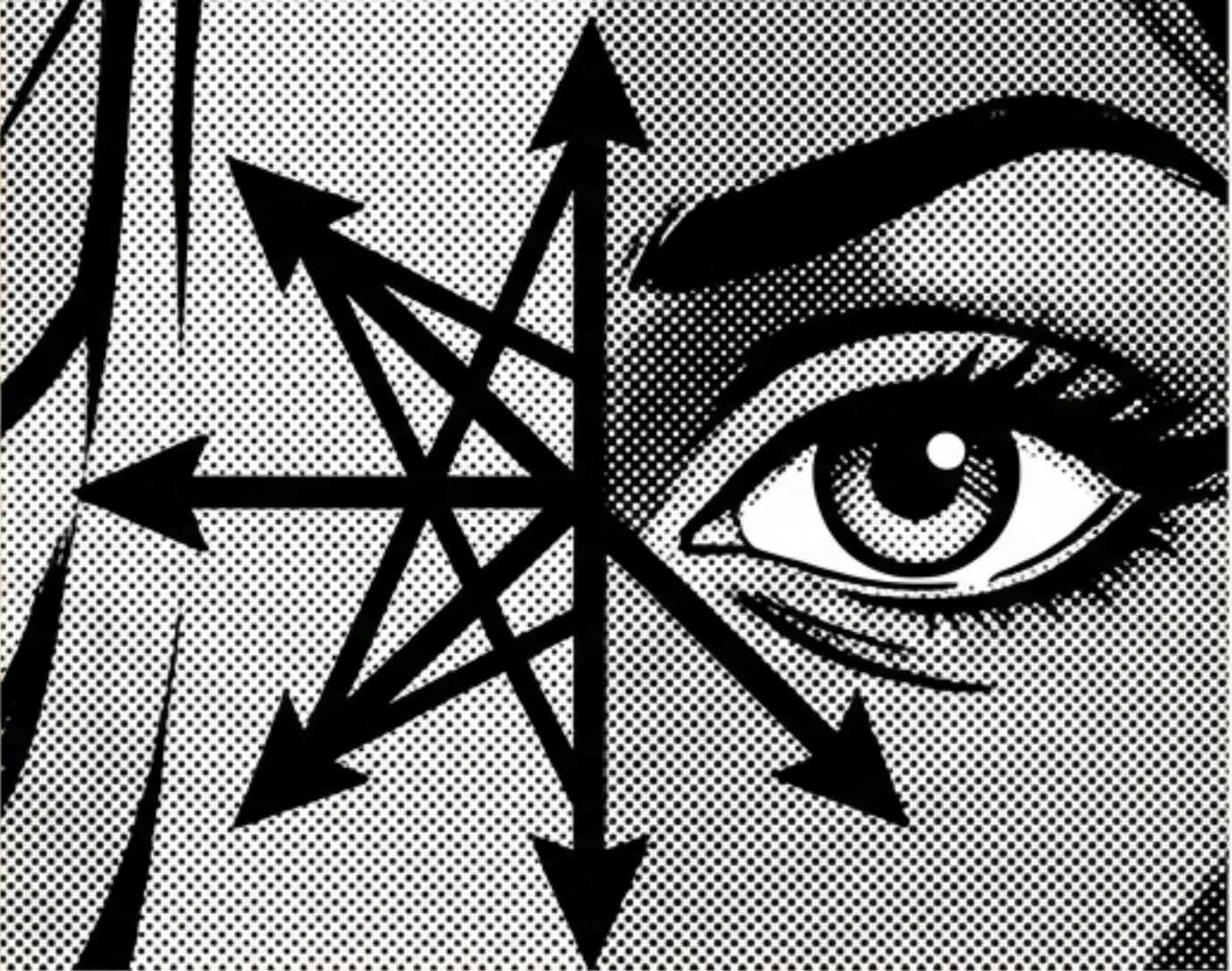




Hidden Currents

Re-evaluating Syrian Christianity and Western Esotericism

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

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.

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.

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

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



Scholarly
Turn

The New Paradigm (Revisionist View)

Quispel's Insight: Syrian
Christianity was **Enkratite**
(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.



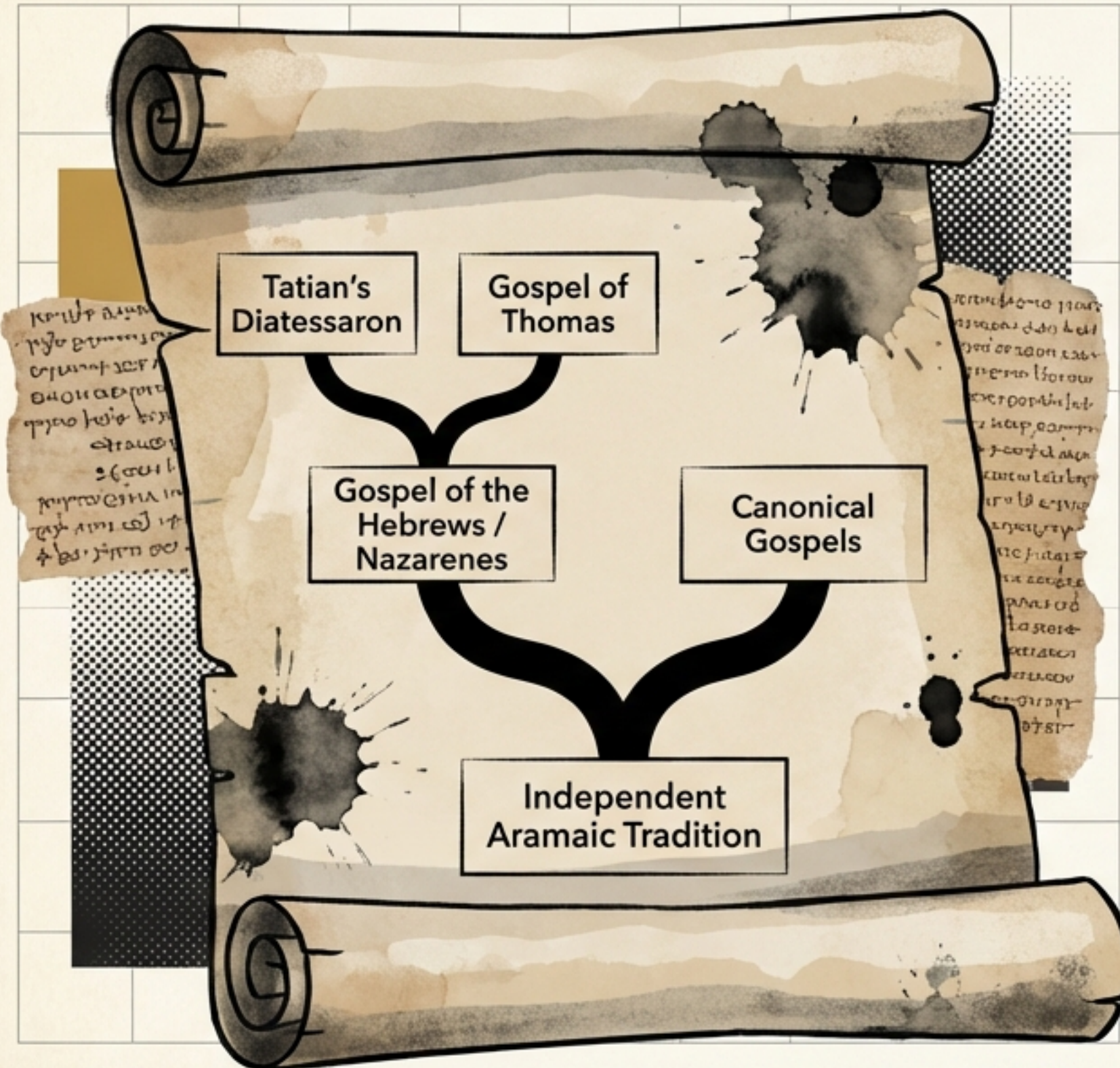
Case Study I: The Roots of Syrian Christianity

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 **Enkratite** (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
(Greek) **=** **Ihidaja**
(Syriac) **≠** **~~Divine Spark~~**

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

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

حده مخدمه

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..."



م تخدمه

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

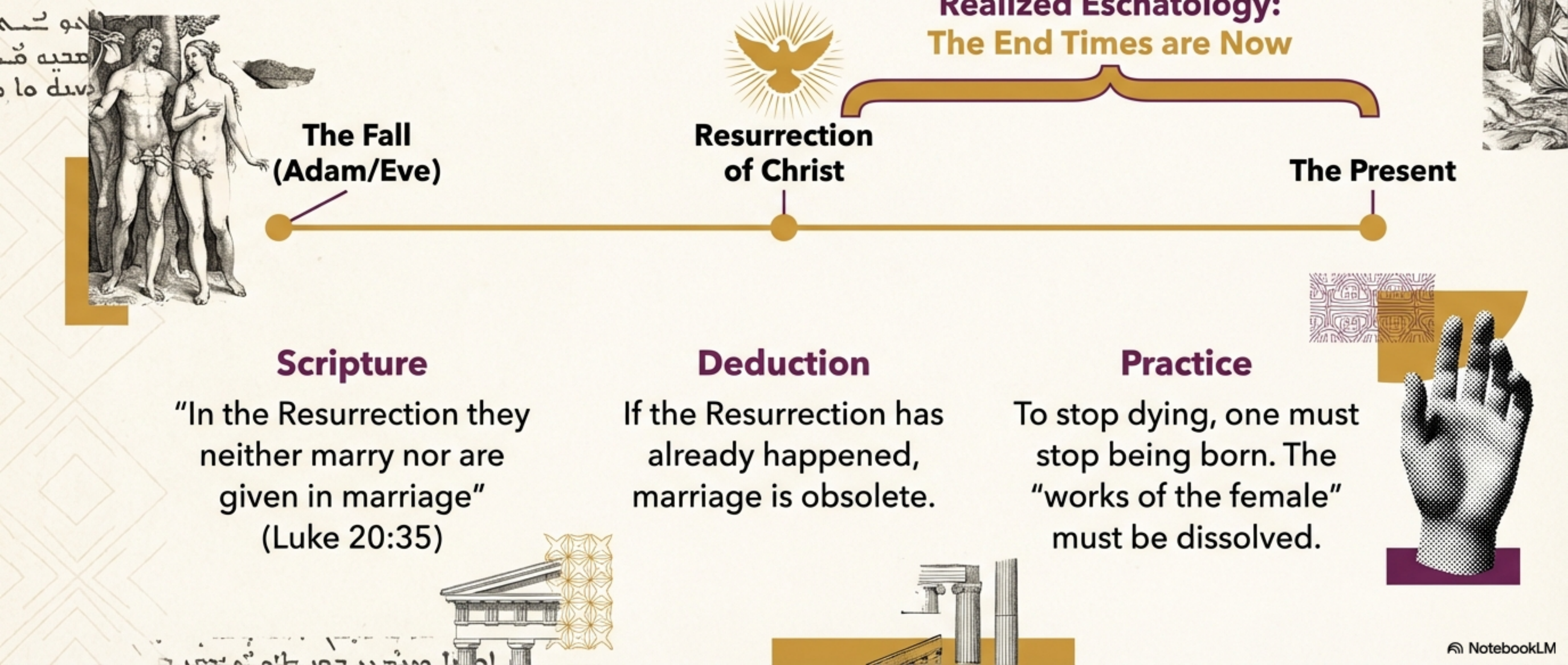
“The soul is darkness without the Spirit.”

- **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.



مقتله مَّه ته تدرد ثجه حثبا.

The Logic of Encratism: Realized Eschatology



The Bridge: From 'Heresy' to 'Western Esotericism'.

Ancient Polemics



Ancient Polemics

Messalians/Gnostics
labeled "Subjective"
& "Dangerous".

Enlightenment Filter



Enlightenment Filter

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.



Reality: The Nation of Islam.

Supreme Mathematics and the "Knowledge of God, Self, and Enemy" function as an esoteric system. Louis Farrakhan's vision of the "Mother Wheel" is direct gnosis.



Reality: Sex Magic Pioneers.

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

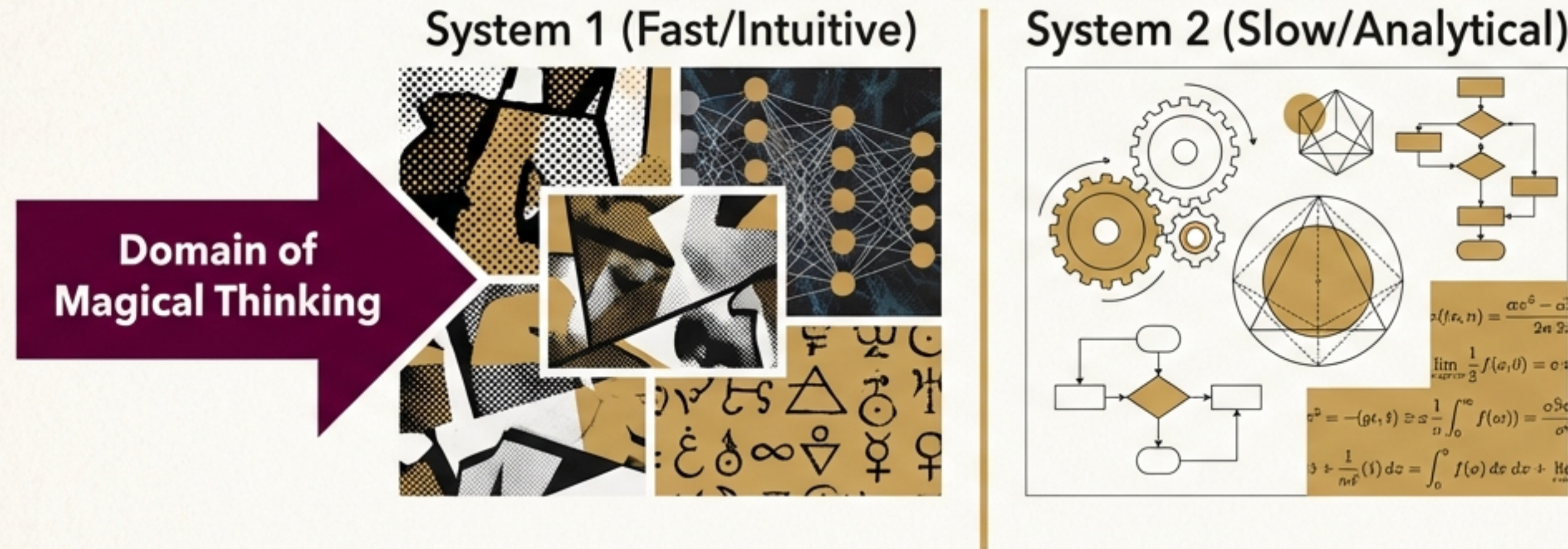


Reality: Women & Agency.

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.



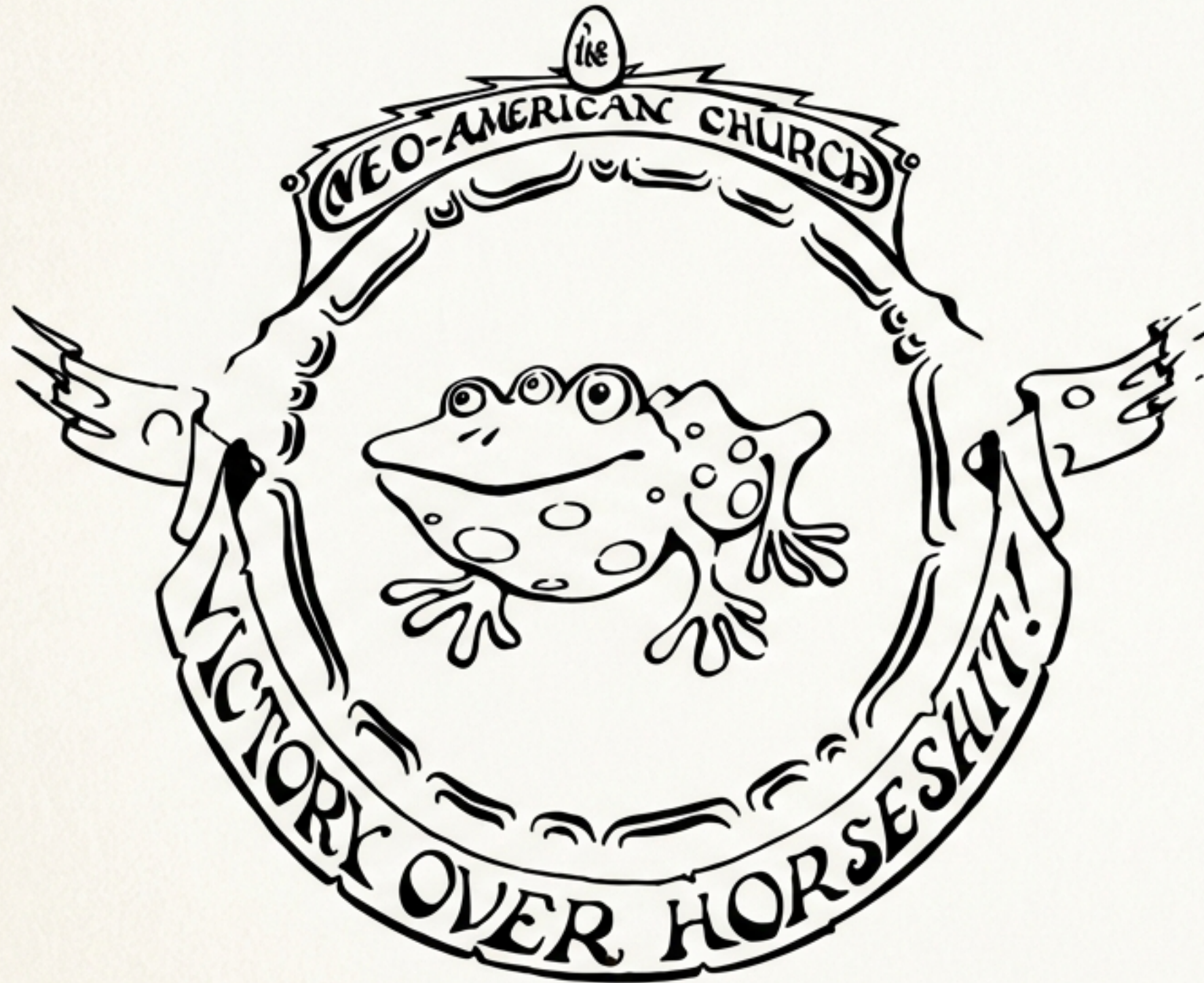
The Logic of Magic: 'Bounded Rationality'



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”



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 Ubermensch 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.



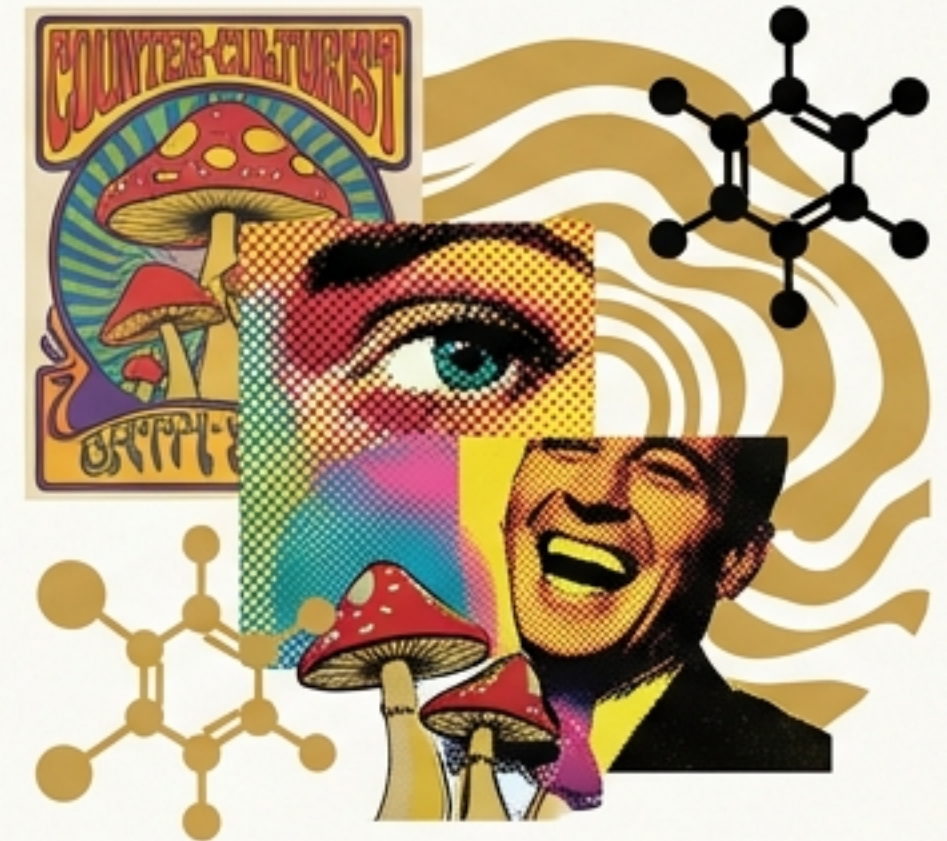
The Chaos Magician (Modern)

seeking results through
belief-shifting.



The Psychedelicitist (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.

Re-reading Sefer Yeşirah through Text and Image

A hand-drawn diagram of the Solar System on a piece of lined paper with a yellow background. The Sun is at the center, represented by a yellow circle with rays. Eight concentric circles represent the orbits of the planets, which are labeled in Hebrew from innermost to outermost: מרכורי (Mercurius), ונוס (Venus), ארץ (Earth), מרס (Mars), יופיו (Jupiter), שבתאי (Saturn), אורנוס (Uranus), and נפטון (Neptune). The drawing is done in yellow ink.

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

The Historical Void

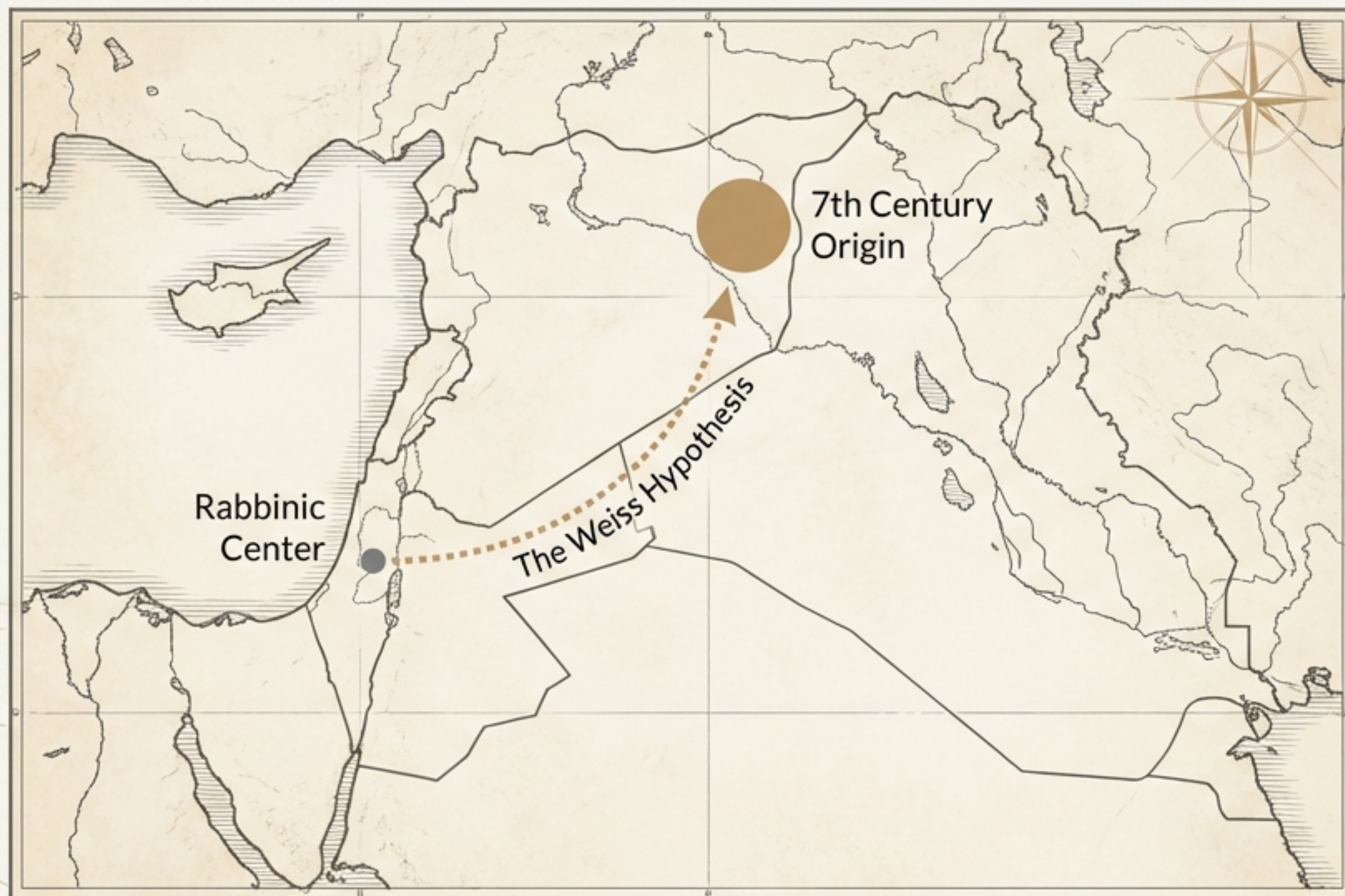


The Evidence of Absence:

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 Yeşirah* is a "border text" absorbing the intellectual currents of its neighbors.

THE FINGERPRINT OF ‘THE OTHER’

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

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

This shared “22 letter” DNA suggests *Sefer Yeşirah* 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 Yeşirah 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
Philosophers like Maimonides
tried to frame *Sefer Yeşirah* as a
rational, scientific treatise.

Pre-12th Century Practice

Early readers saw it as *Hilkhhot Yeşirah*—"Laws of Formation." It was
a manual for mysticism and magic.

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



THE THEOLOGY OF LANGUAGE

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

SPEECH + WRITING = REALITY

The Ideal Text

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

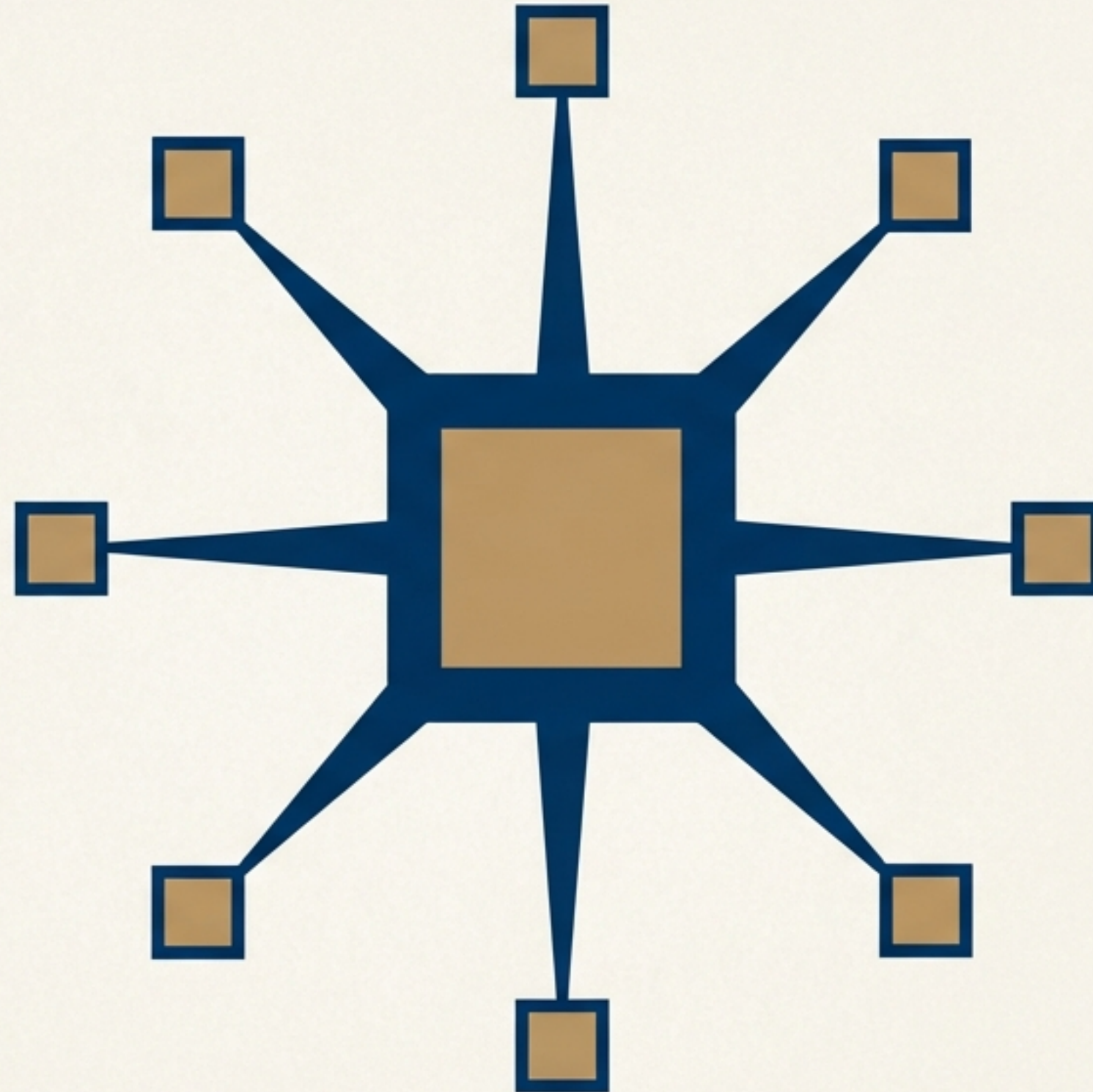
The Syriac Parallel

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

BEYOND THE TEXT: THE MYTH OF ICONOCLASM

The Misconception:

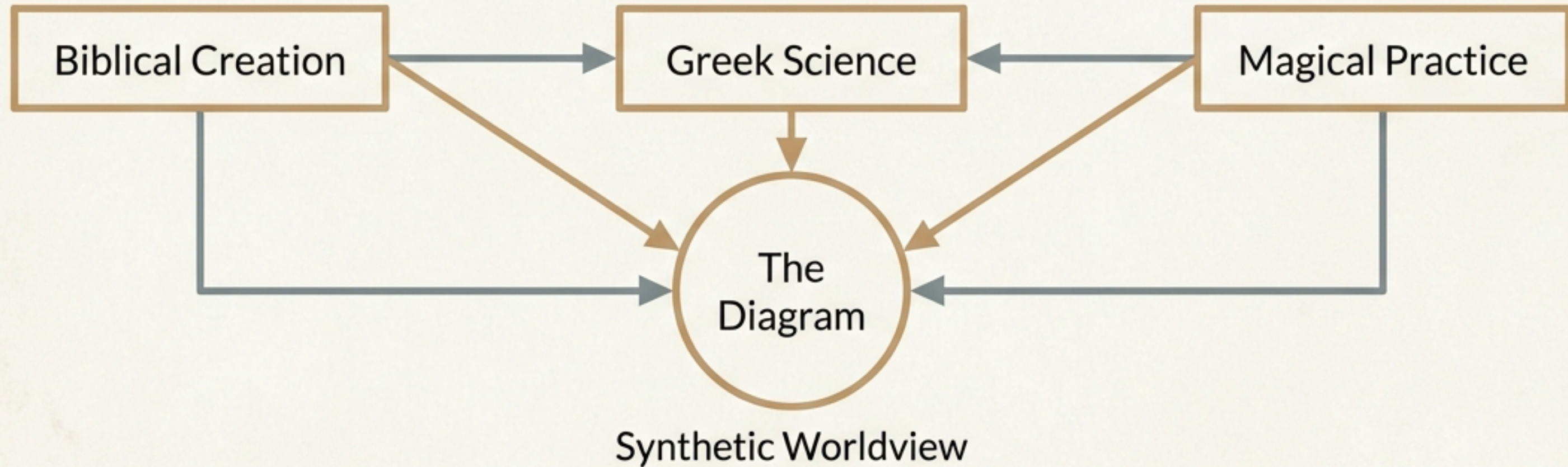
The 'Second Commandment' led scholars to believe Judaism was strictly iconoclastic and that diagrams were irrelevant decorations.



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

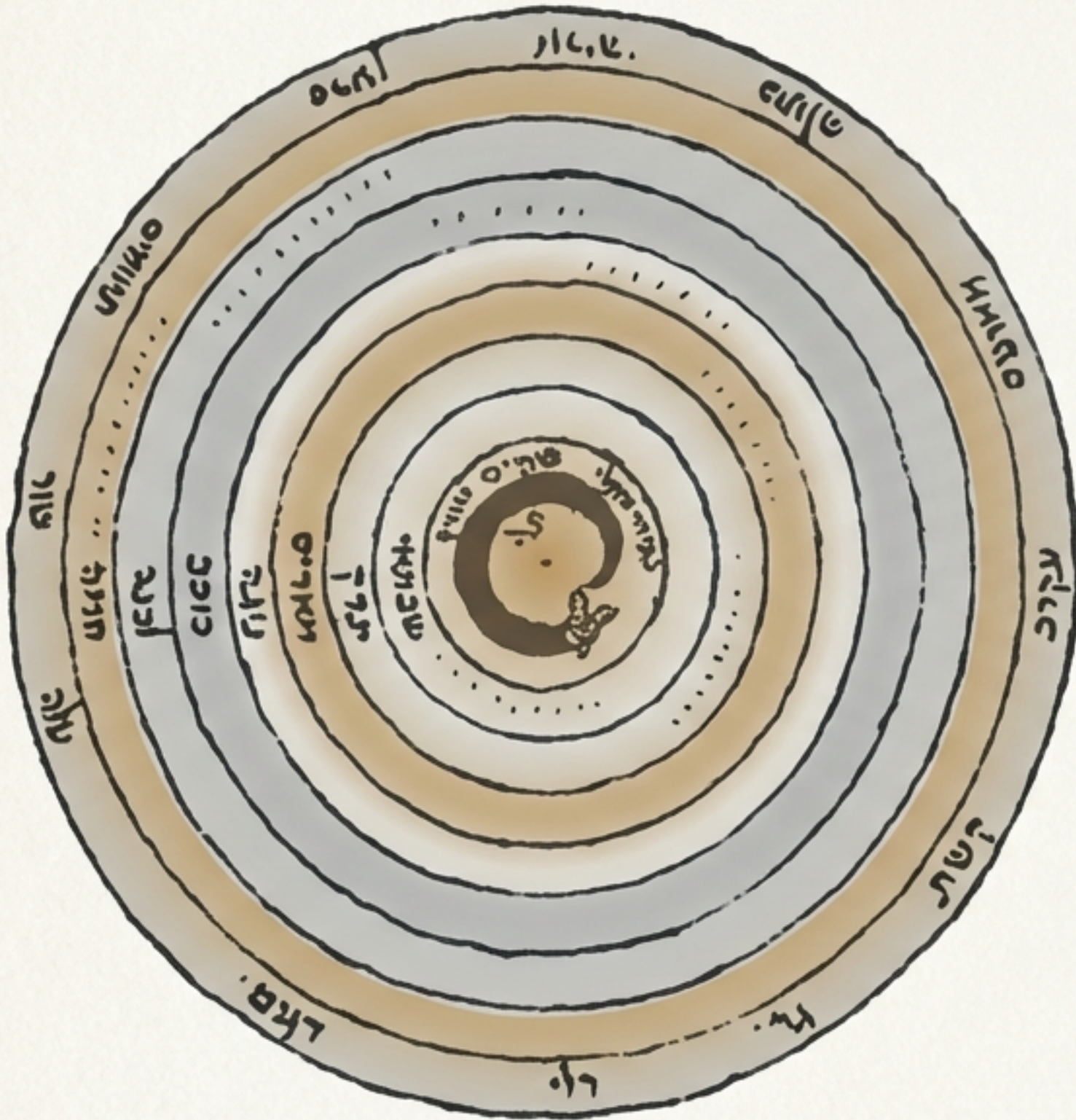
DIAGRAMS AS VISUAL EXEGESIS

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



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

THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE INFINITE

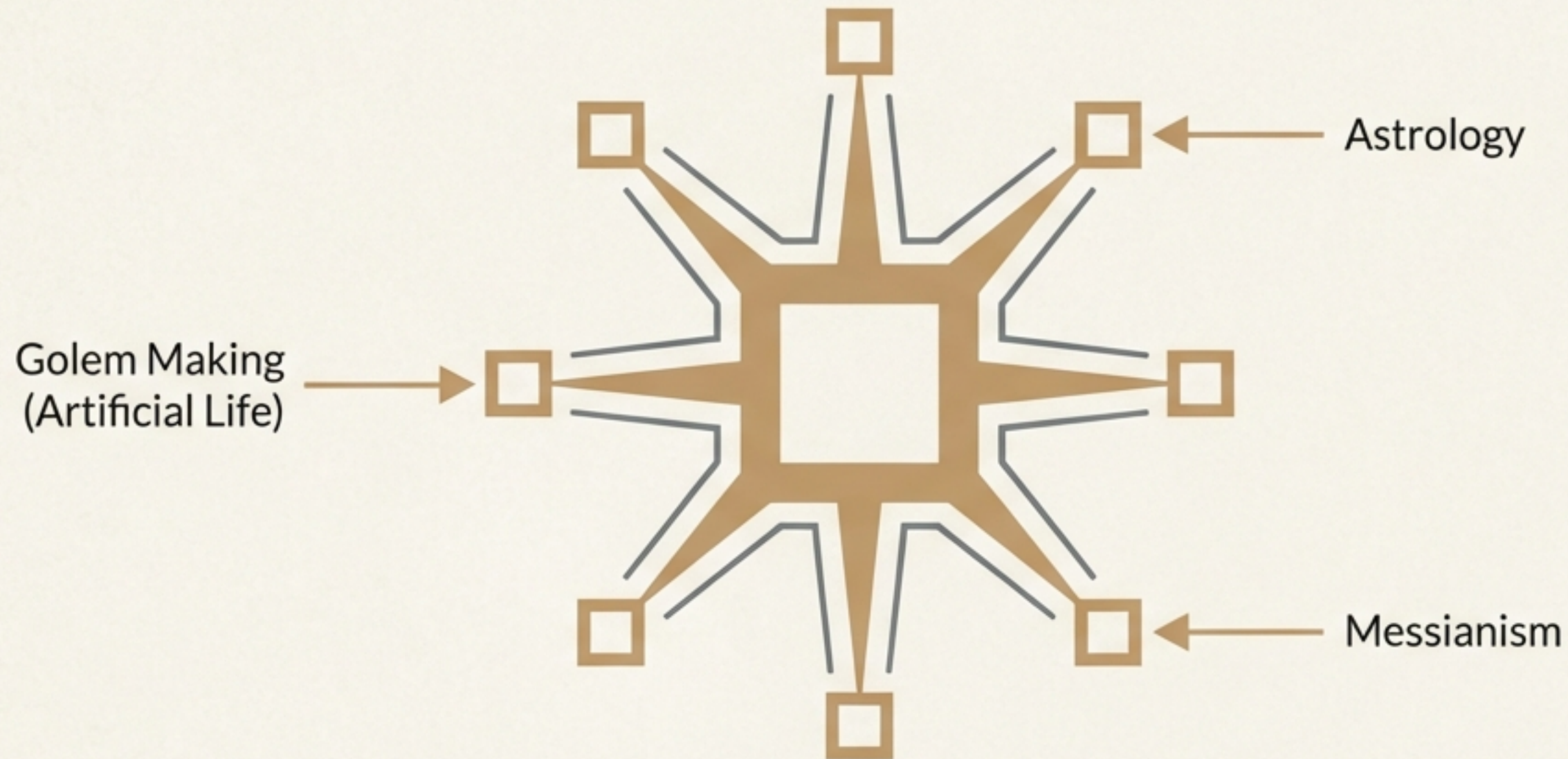


The Structure: The diagrams organize the universe into Rings:

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

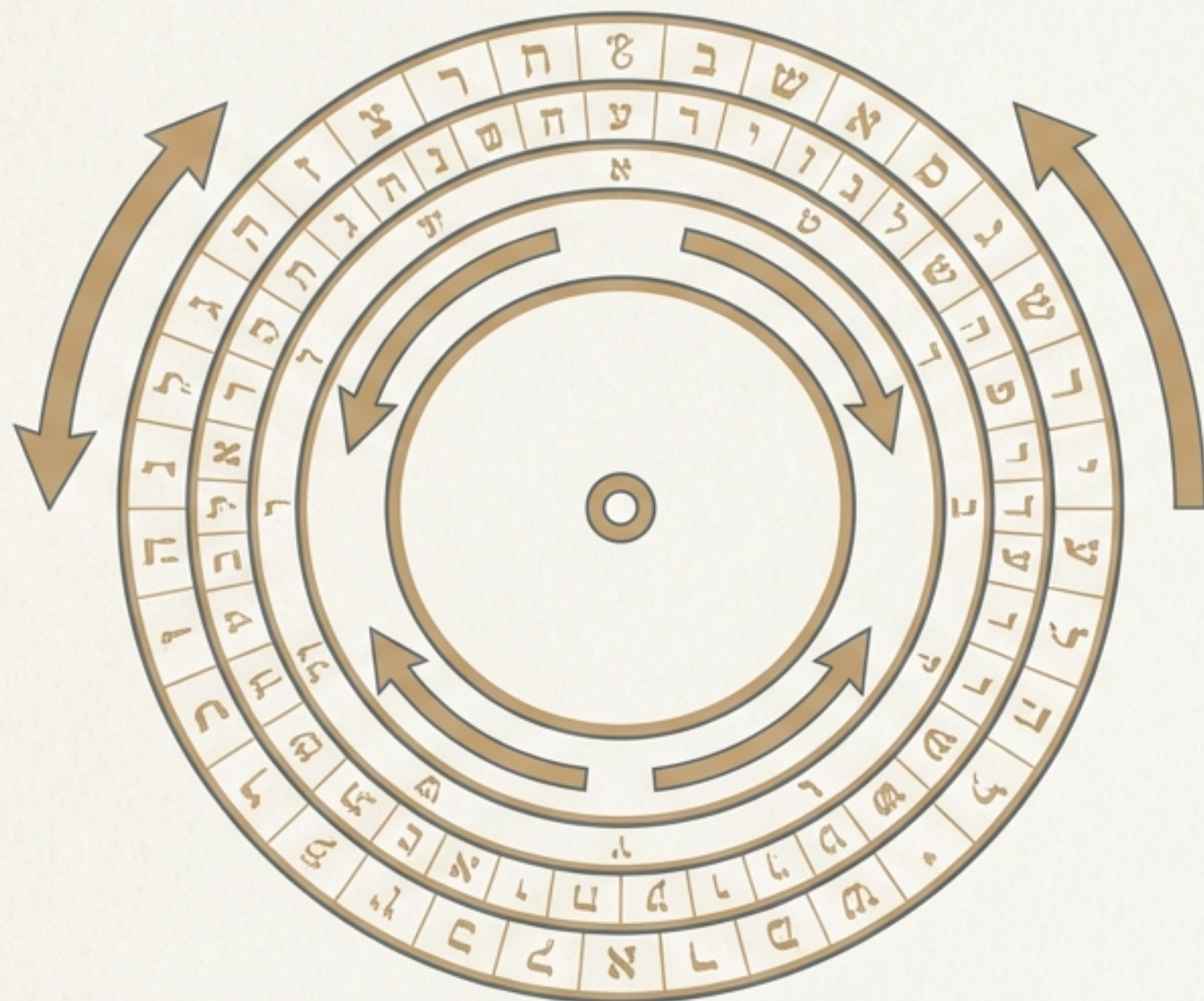
Visual Logic: These concentric circles visualize the hierarchy of creation, placing the reader in relation to the divine structure.

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

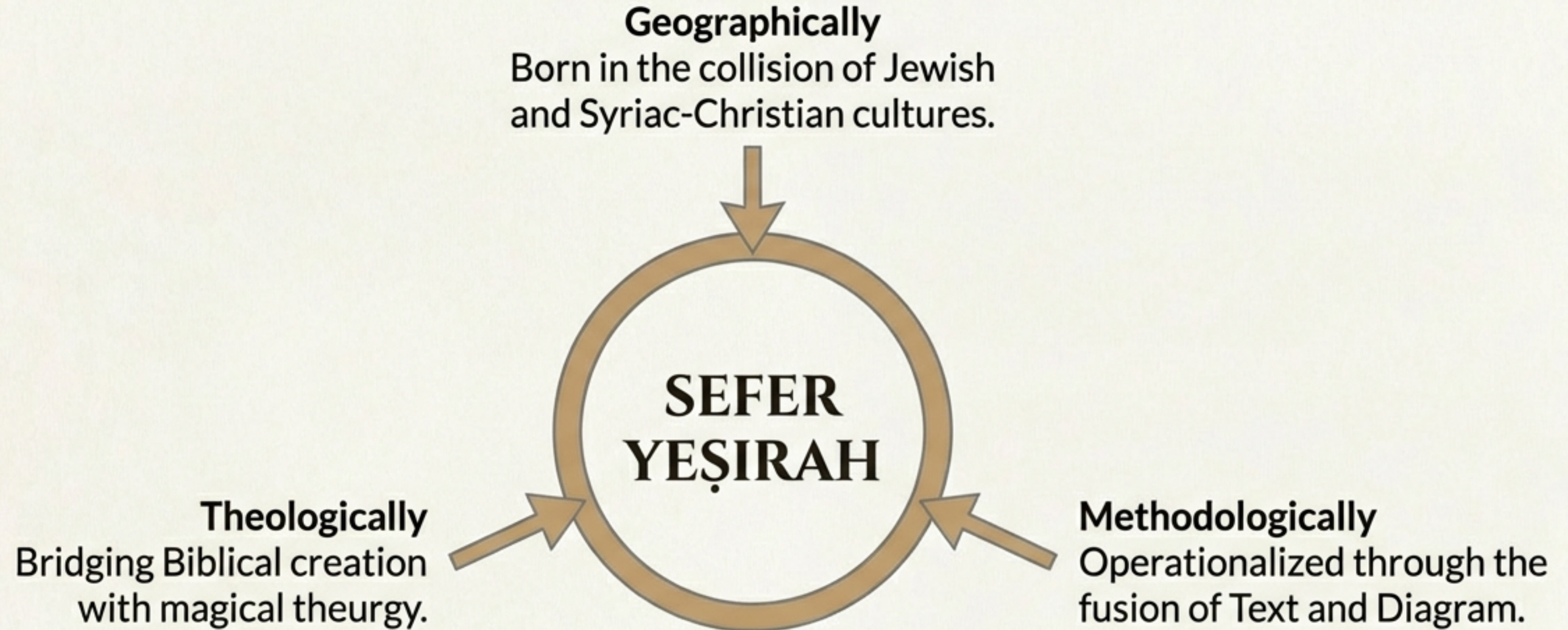


The Artifact: Volvelles (Wheel Charts).

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



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

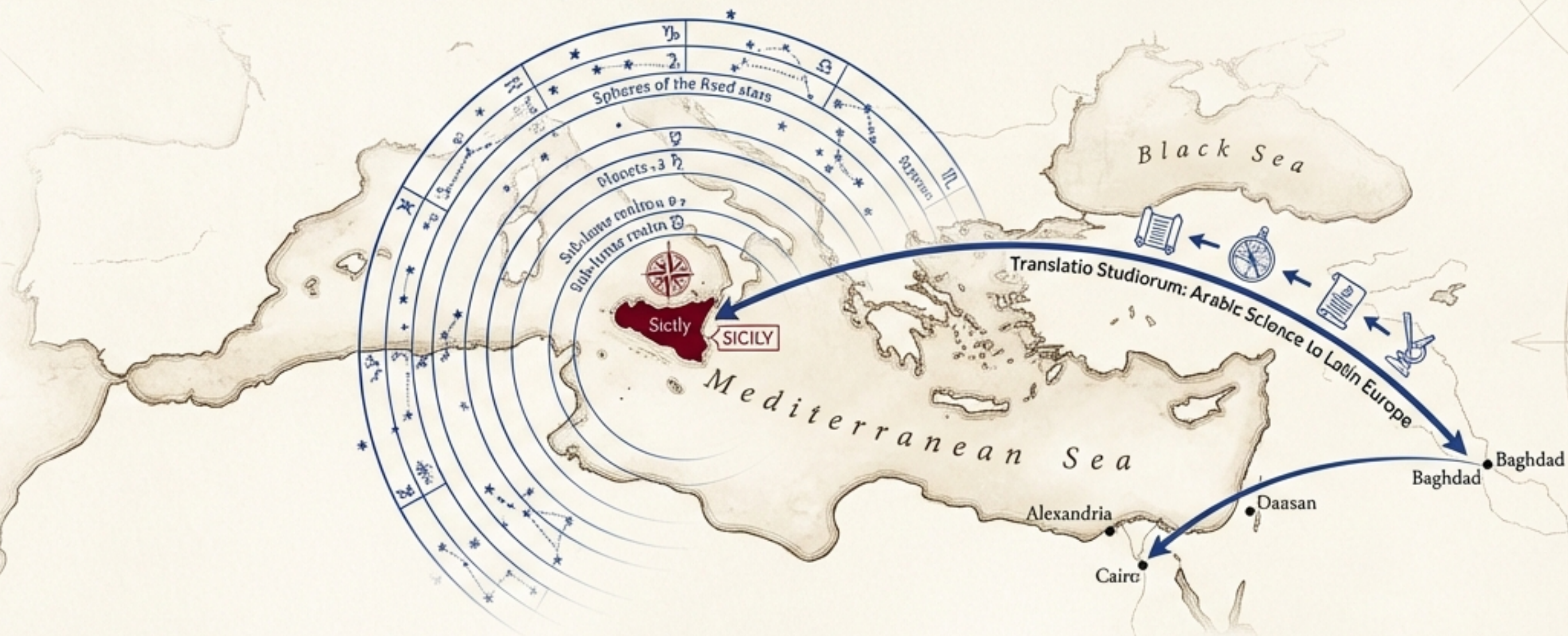
THE INFINITE LIBRARY

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 manuscript, limilus, avilum
unduns aredit forerū 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

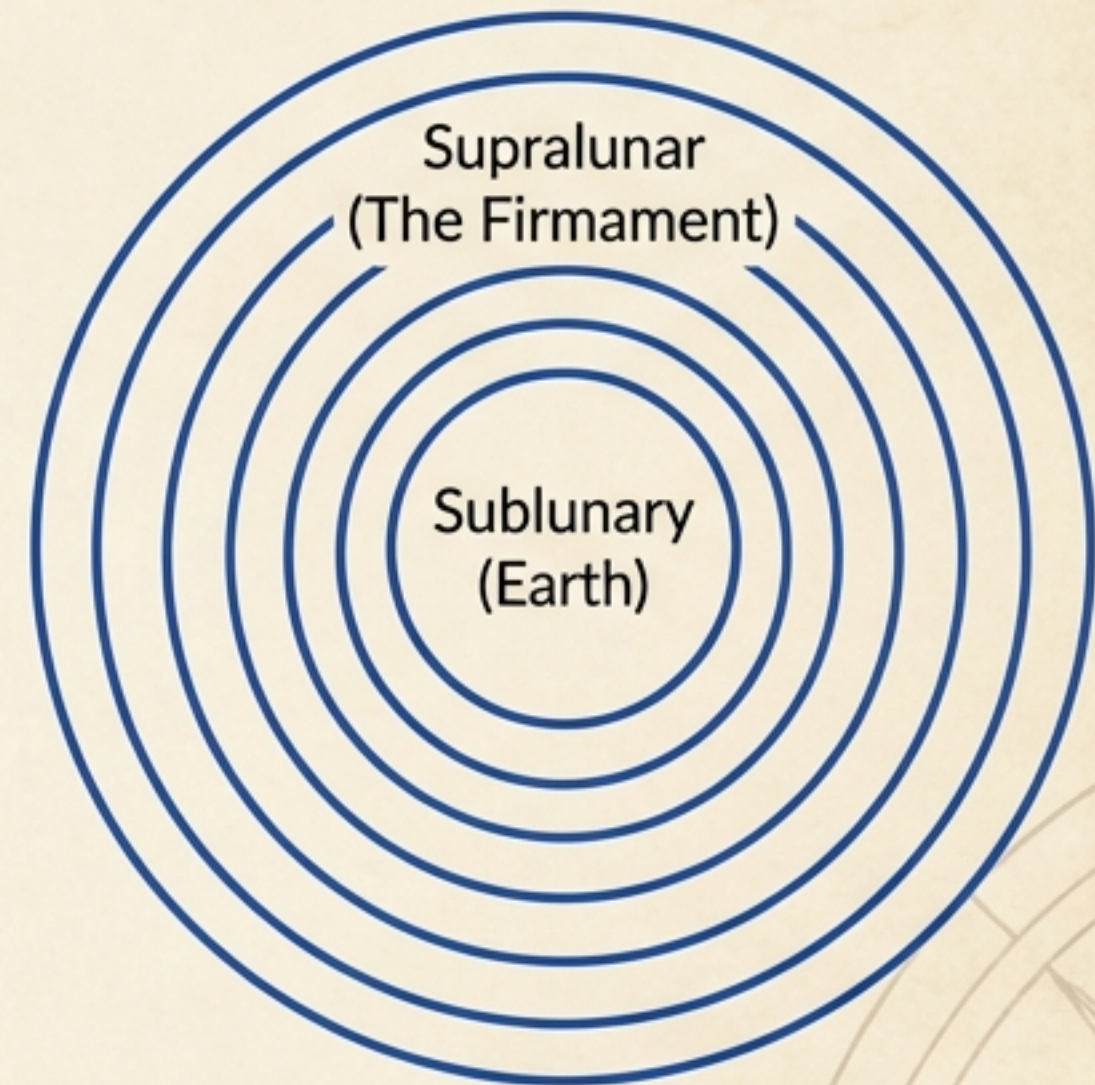
The Status Quo (Platonic/Salernitan)



Porous boundary between
Heaven and Earth.

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

The New Science (Aristotelian/Arabic)



Strict division. Immutable
Heavens vs. Corruptible Earth.

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.”

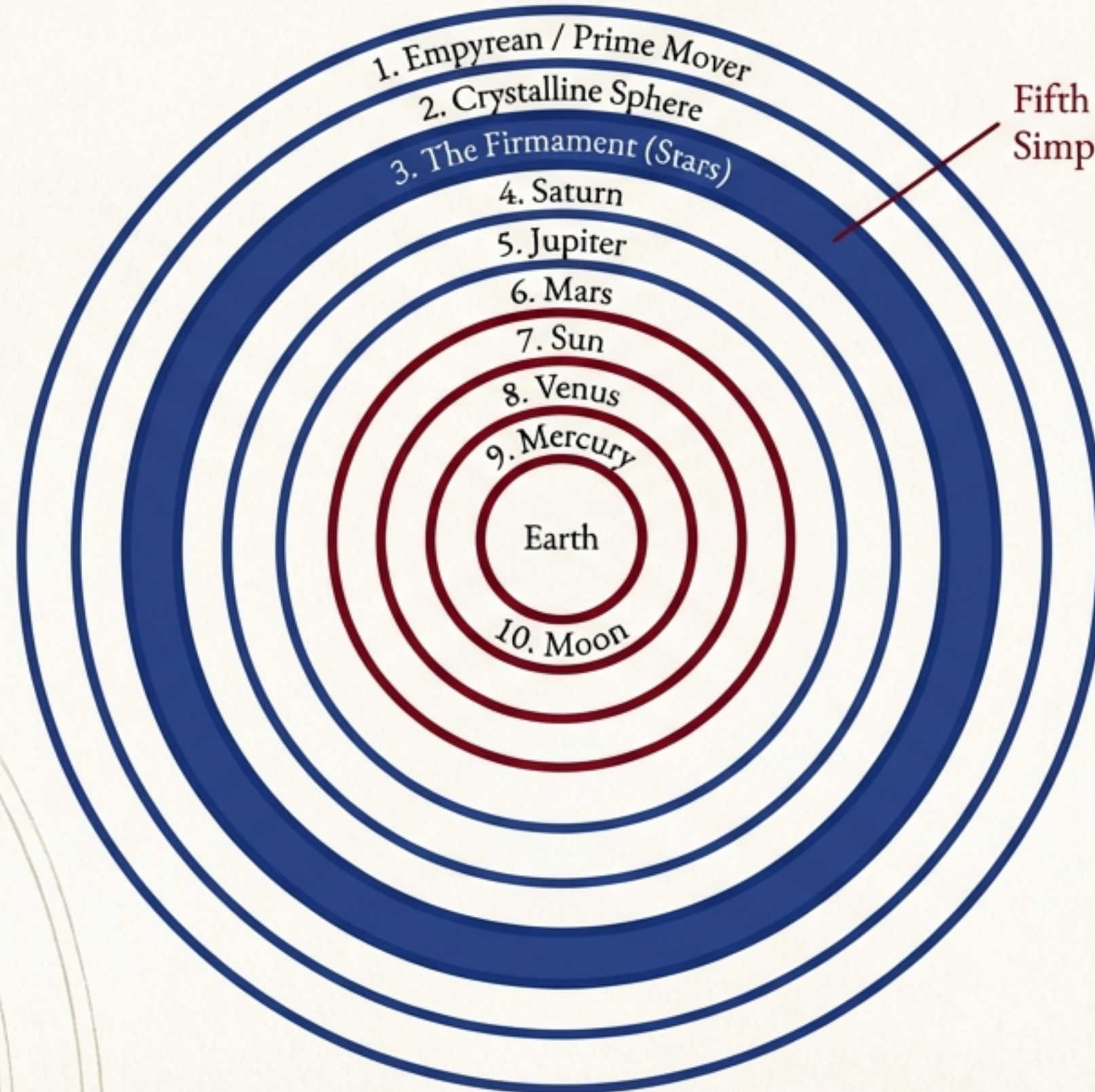
Lato



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

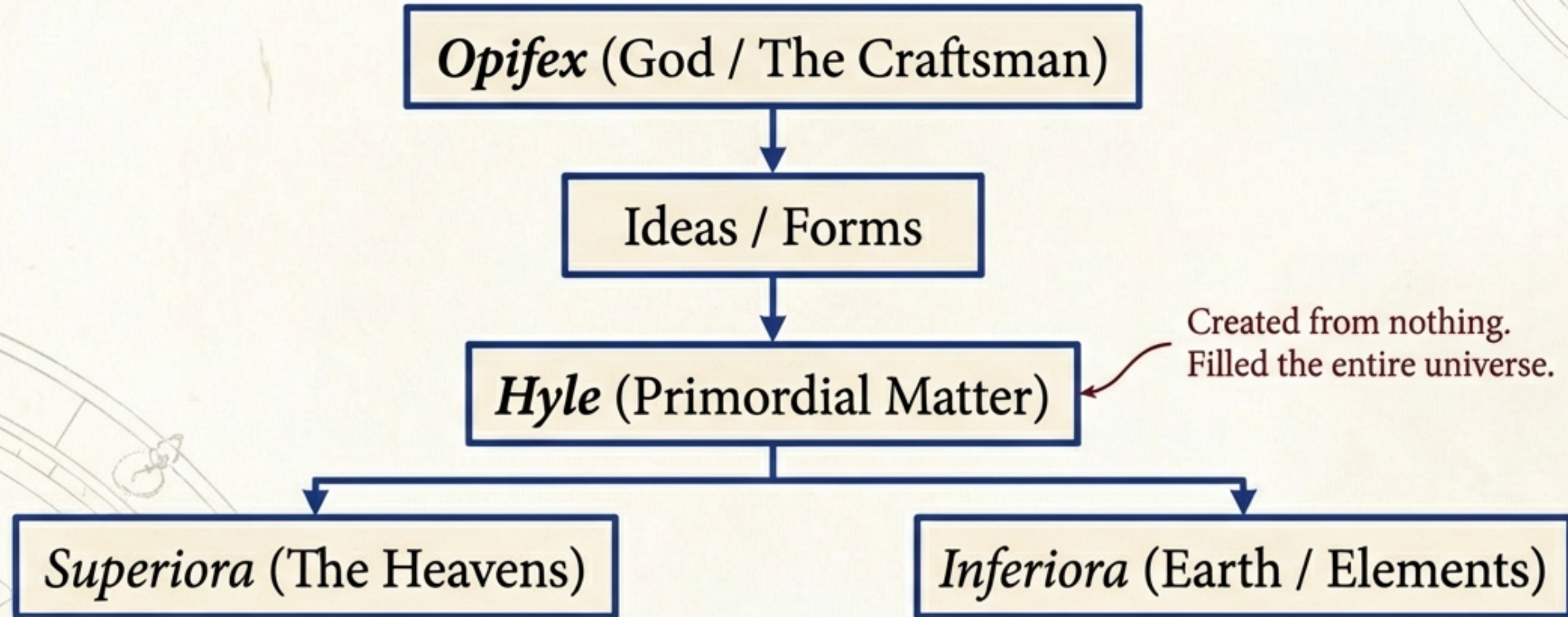
Constructing the Firmament



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

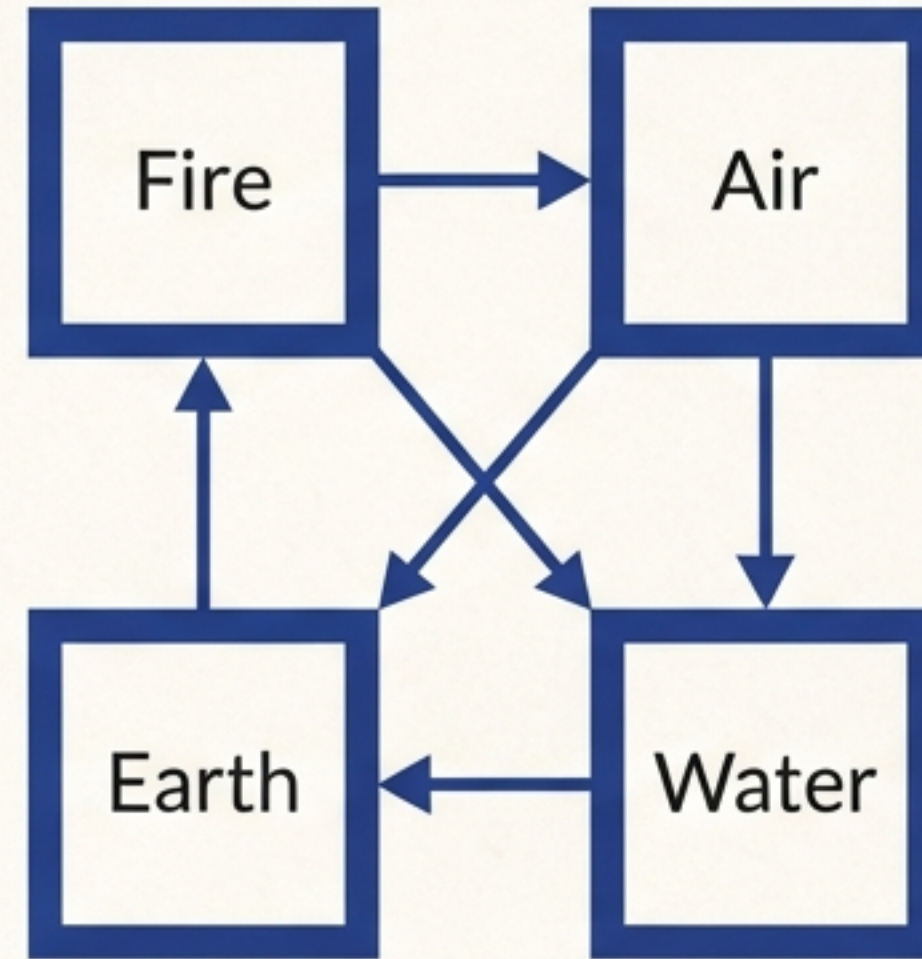


Hylomorphism: God separated the Heavens from the Earth within the single block of Hyle. Matter flows from the Divine Essence '*causally, not by generation*'.

Fools Beating the Air

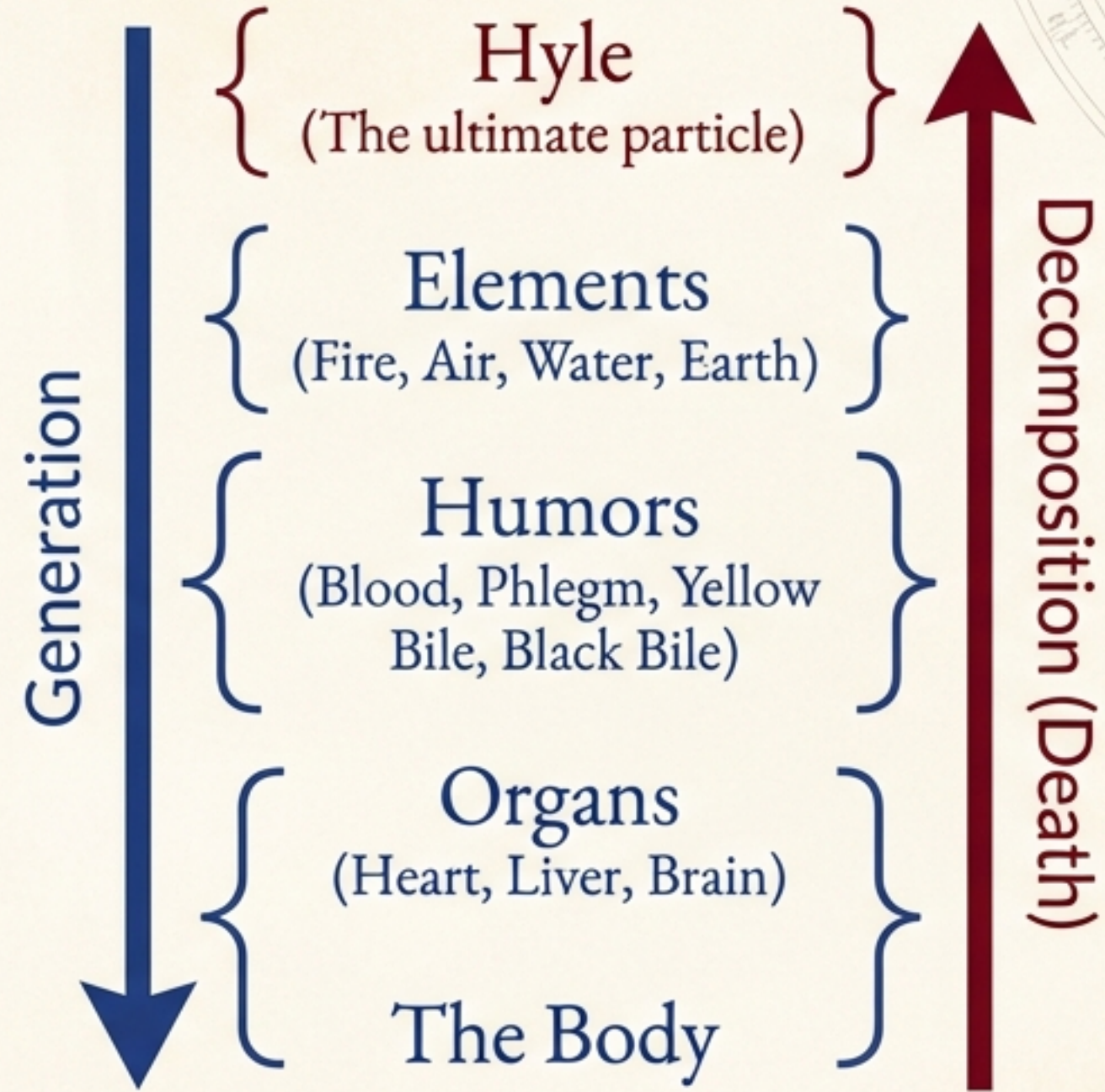
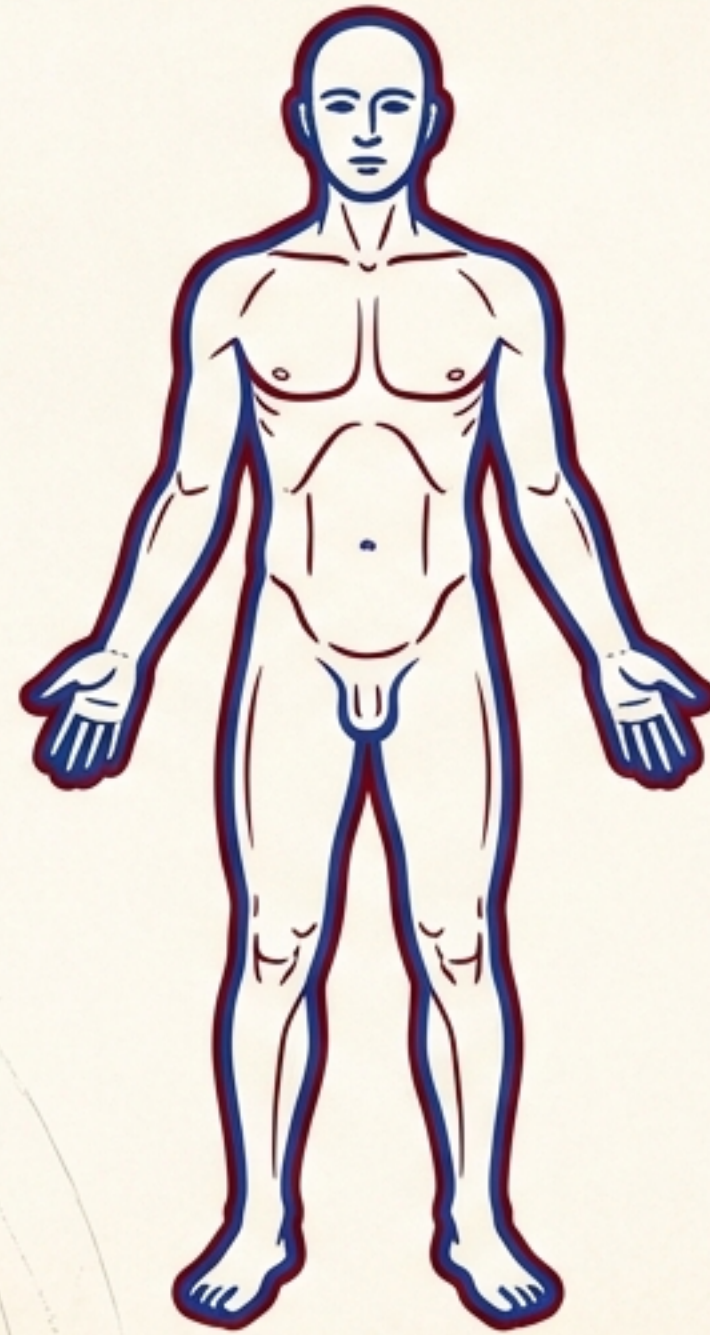
**stultizantes
verberant
aerem**

They are fools beating the air.



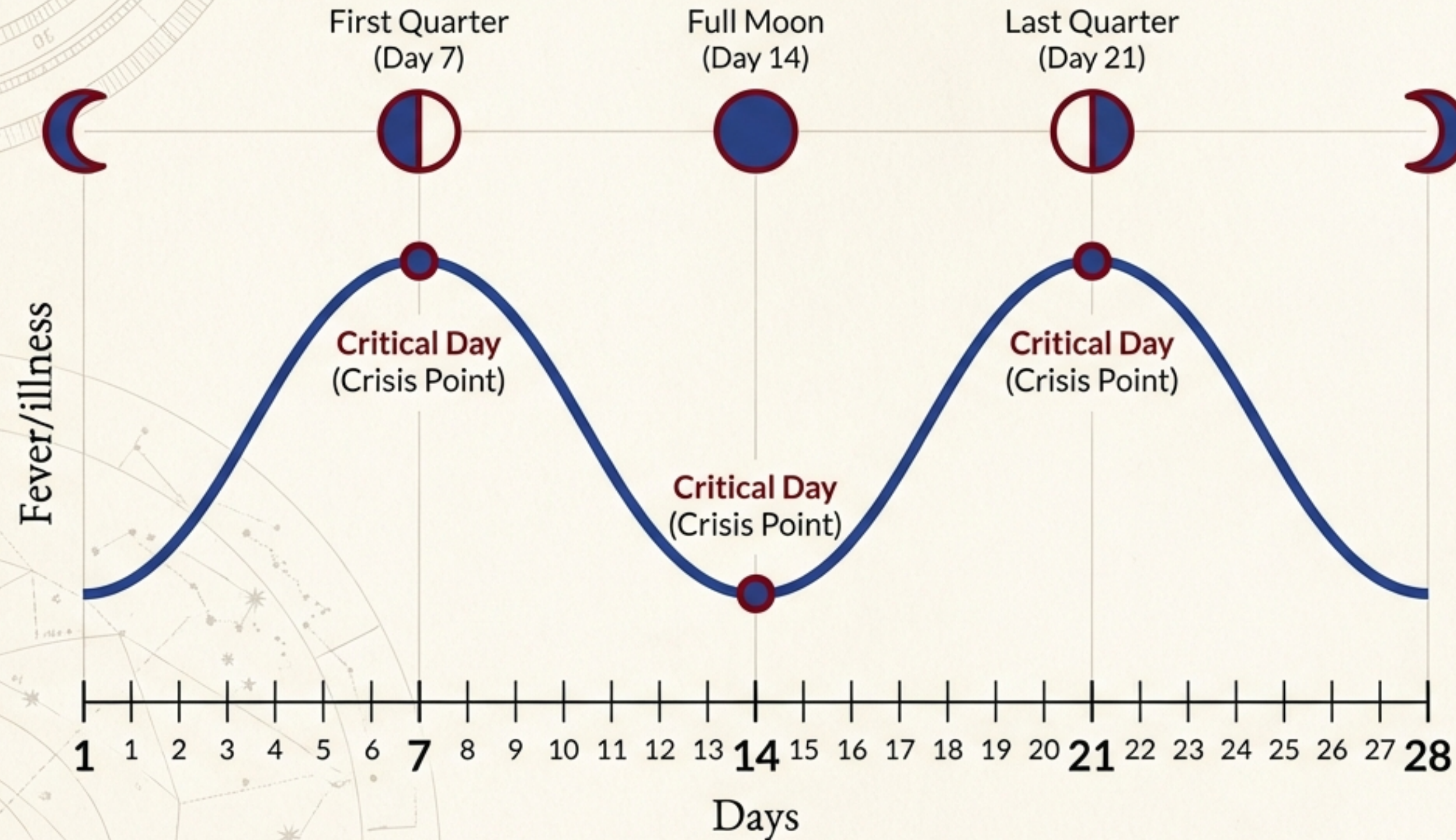
The Polemic against Salerno. The author argues that visible earth and fire are merely compounds ('commixtio'), not true elements. True elements are invisible and simple. He attacks the Salernitan doctors for failing to understand this distinction.

The Body as Microcosm



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

The Physics of Critical Days

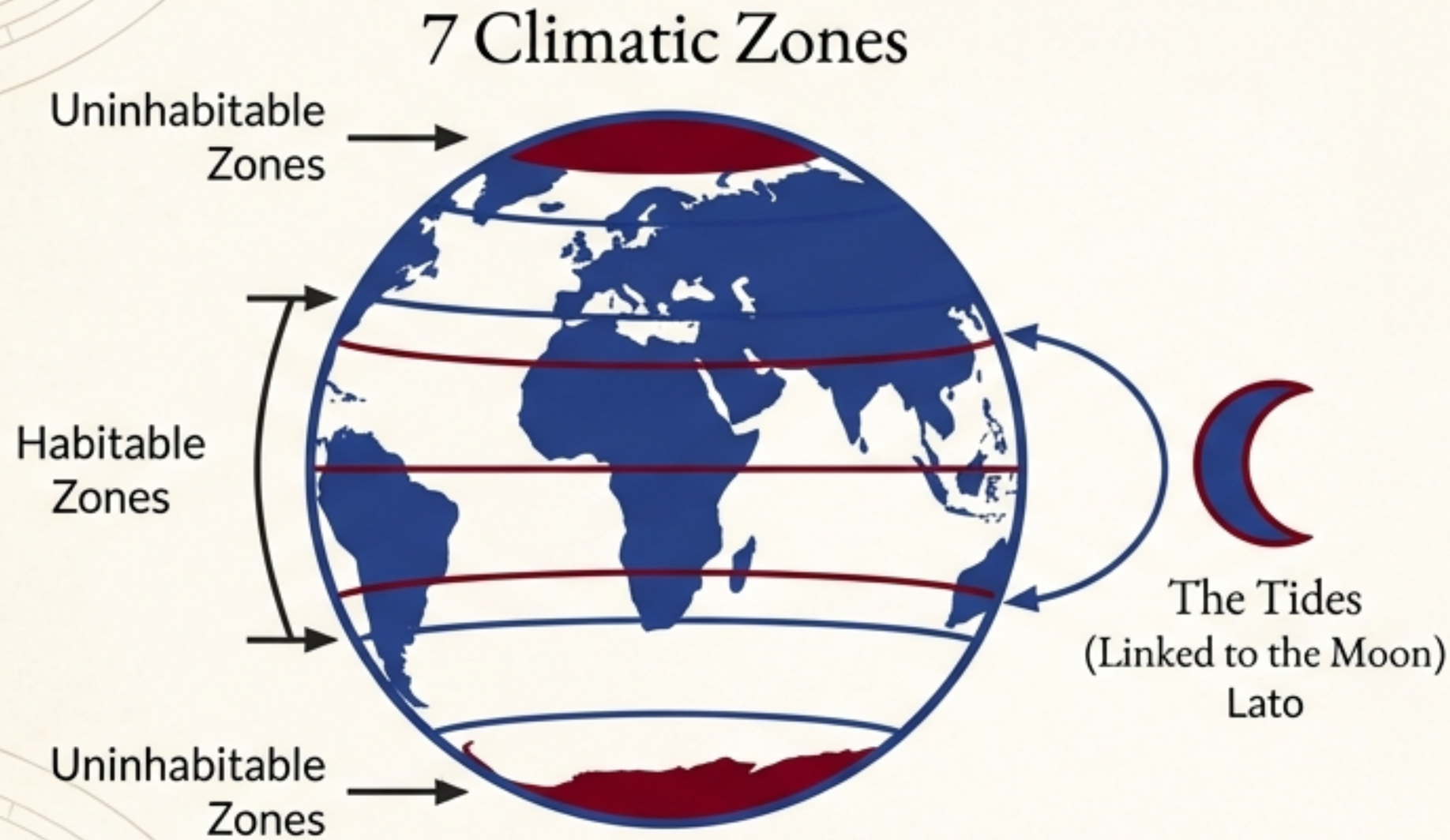


Lunar Influence & Humoral Movement

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

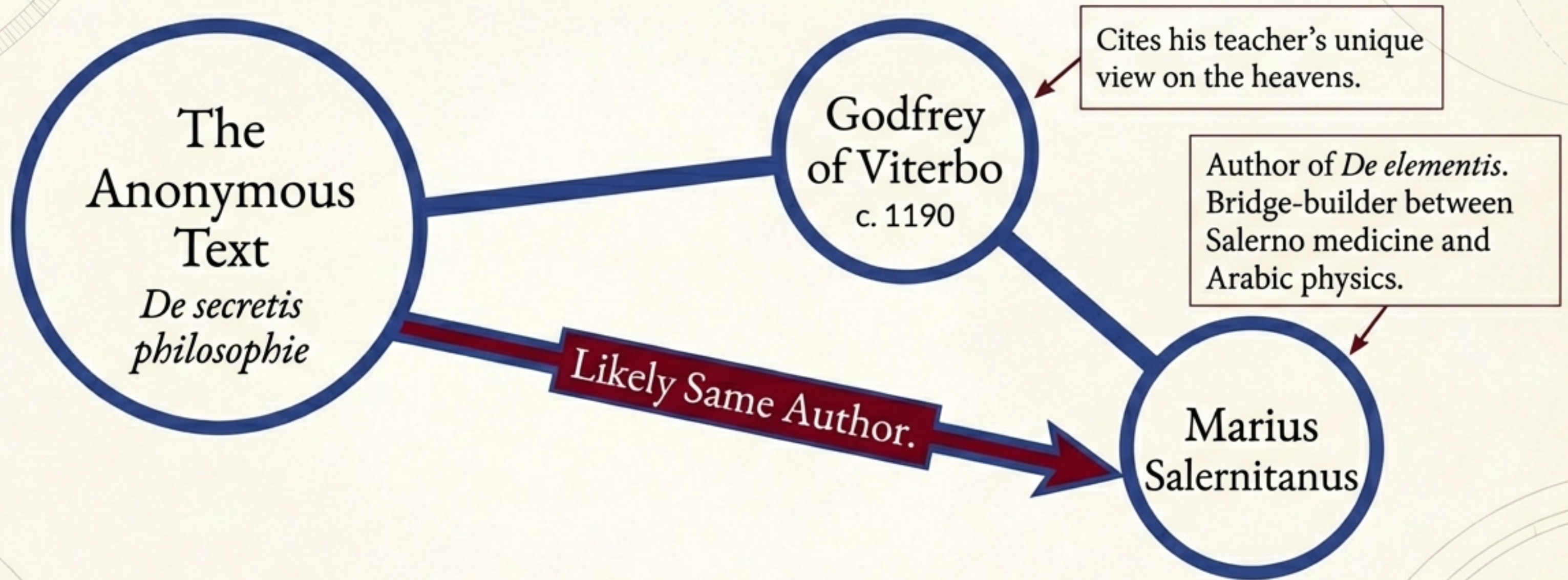


In Book 5:

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

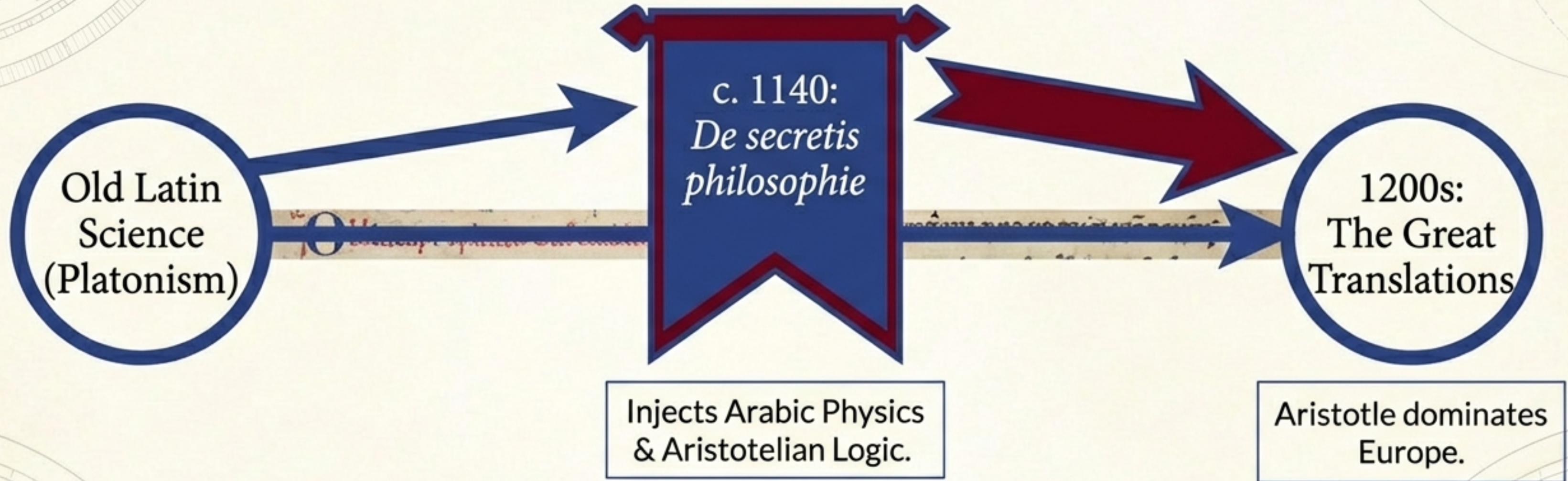
Completing the Cosmography: The system unites the Heavens, the Atmosphere, the Earth, and the Human Body into one “Total Science”.

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.

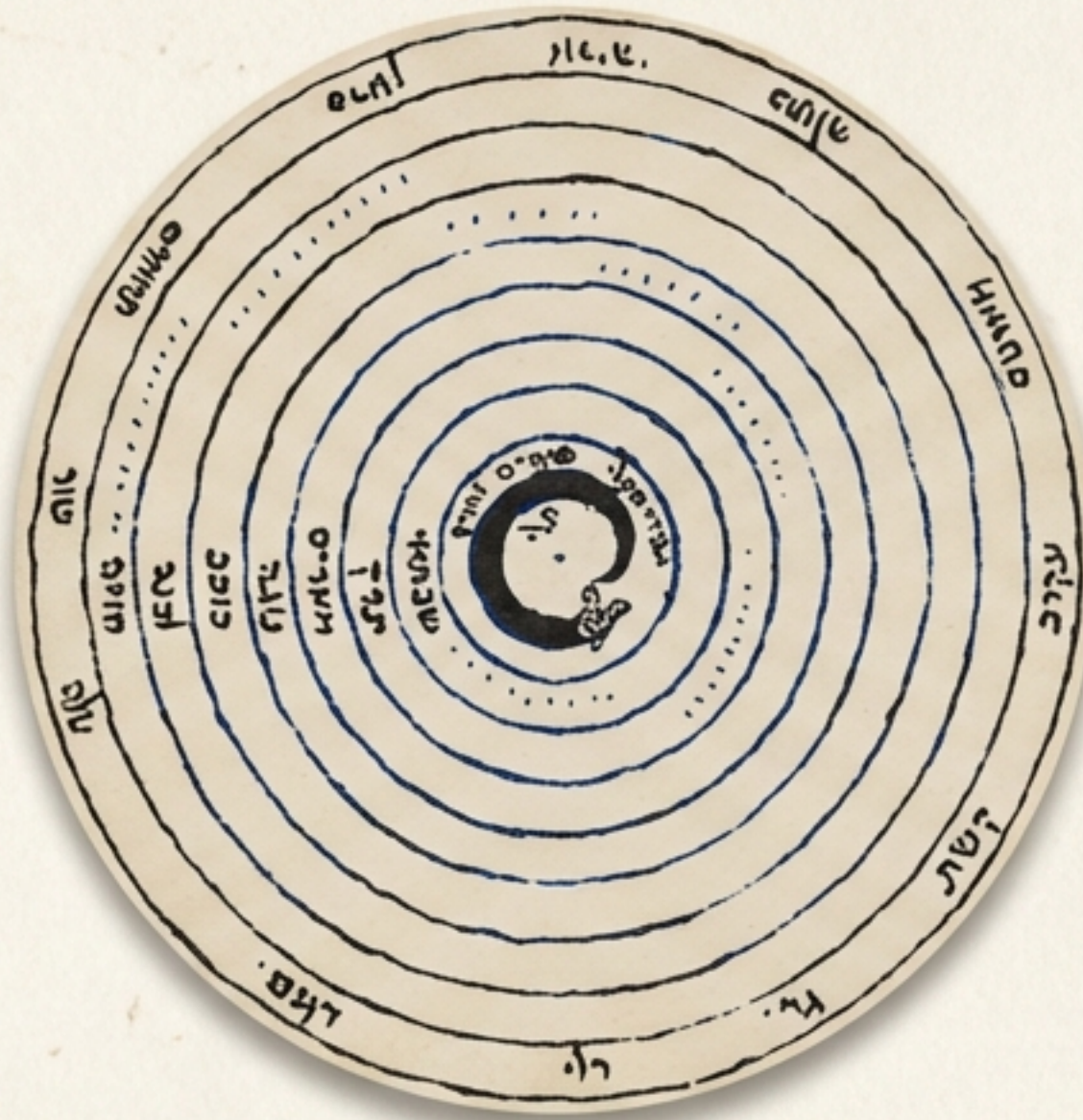
The Bridge to the Future



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 Yetsirah.



For centuries, scholars have debated the meaning of the Sefer Yetsirah (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.

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

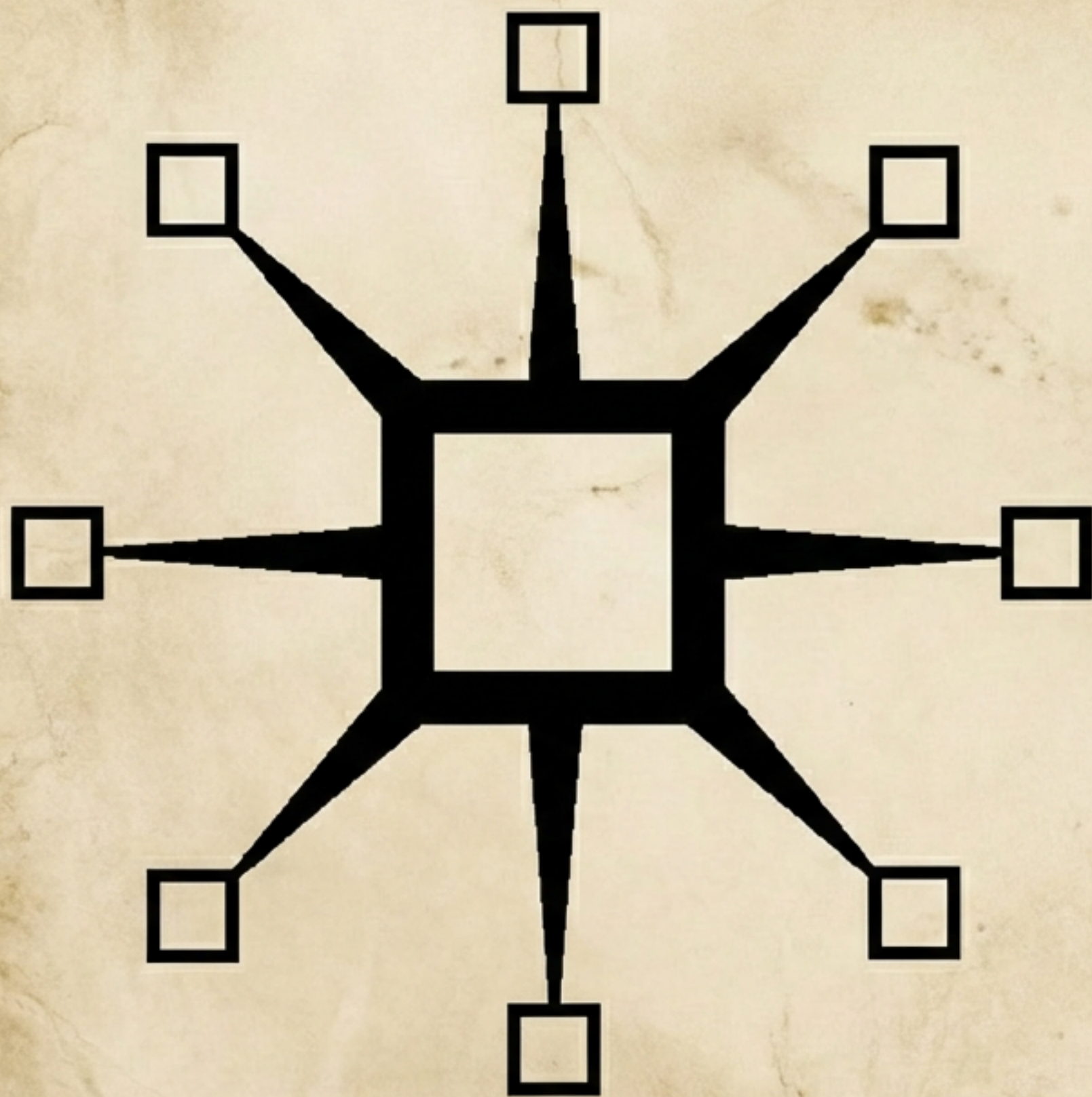
The common belief that Jewish culture forbids visual representation (“You shall make no graven image”) is largely an Enlightenment invention designed to create a specific group identity.



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.

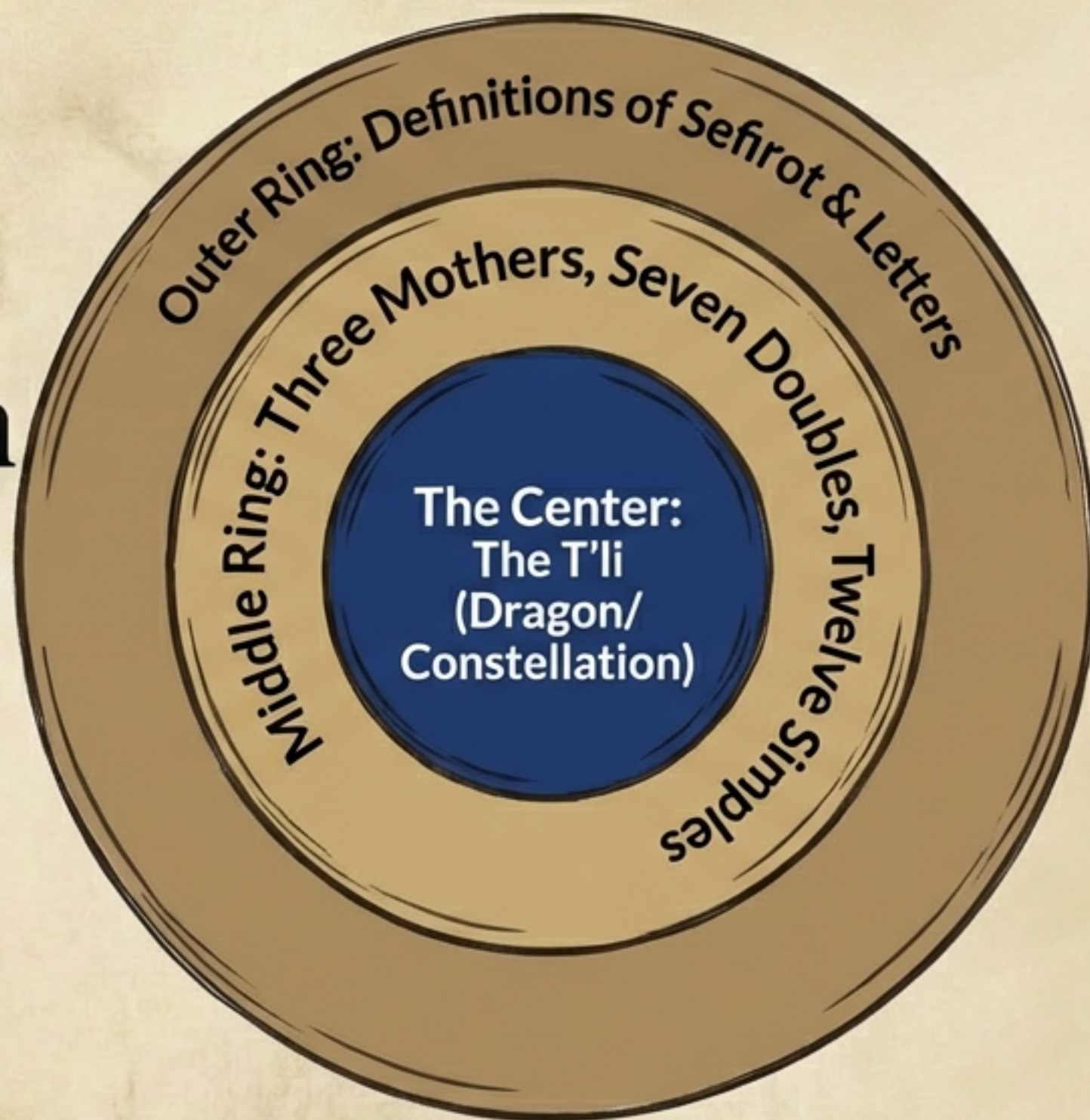


The Mechanics of Creation: The 32 Paths of Wisdom

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 Yetsirah* 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

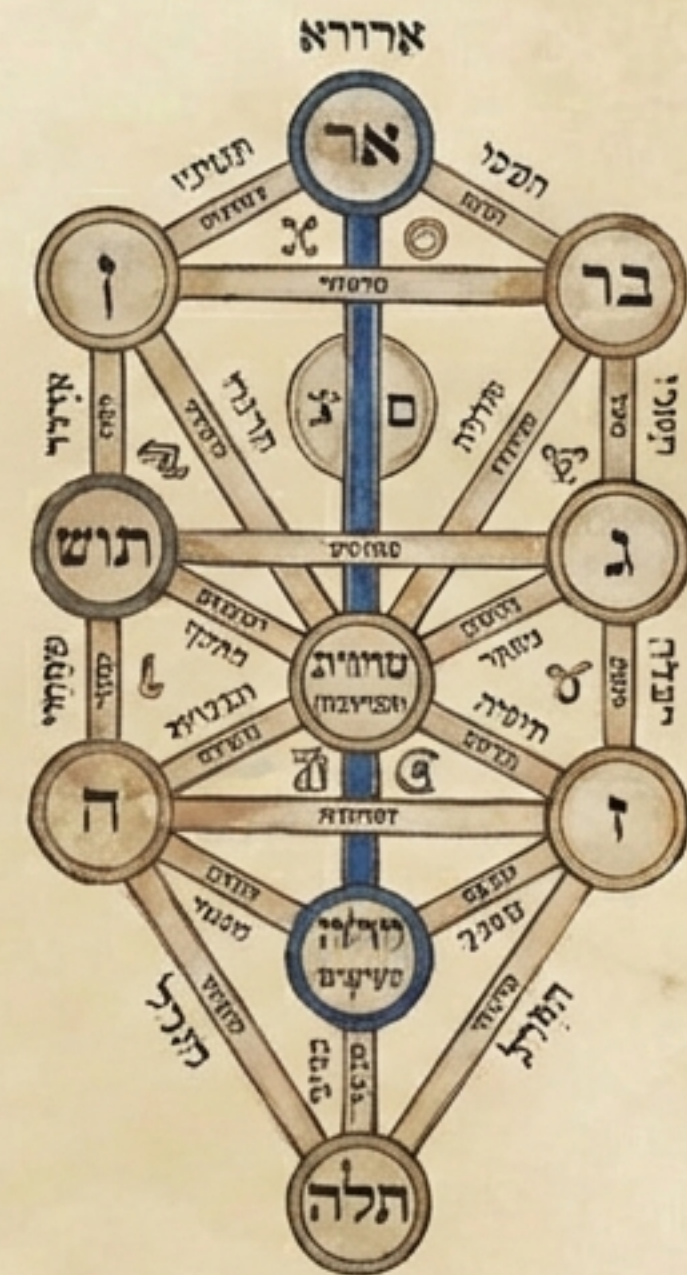
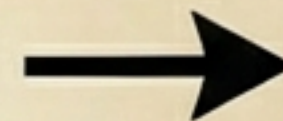
The text asserts the Sefirot are “without substance” and fails to define them clearly.

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.

א
ב
ג
ד
ה
ו
ז
ח
ט
י

Stage 1:
Textual Void



Stage 2:
Visual Solution (The *Ilan*)

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 Volvele (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

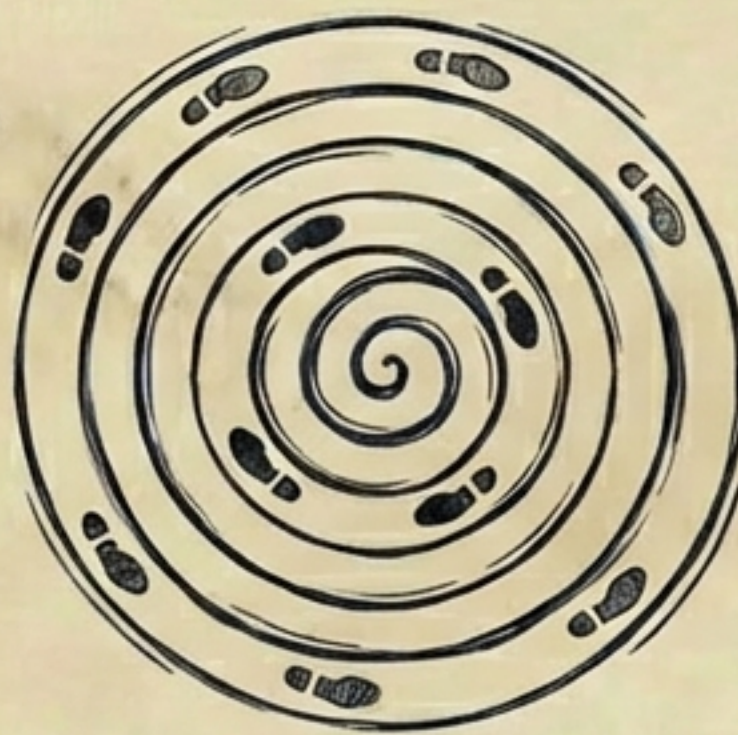
1.



Preparation.

Purification and donning white vestments.

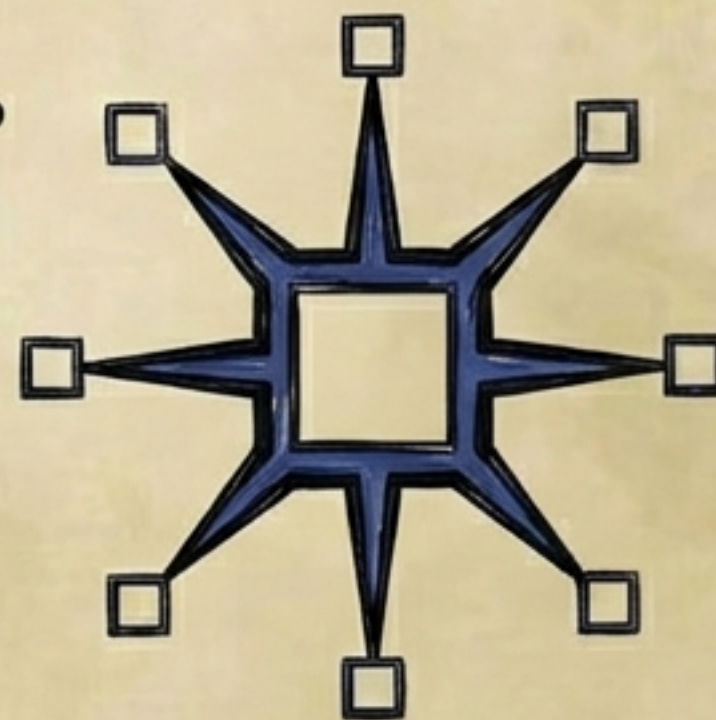
2.



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)



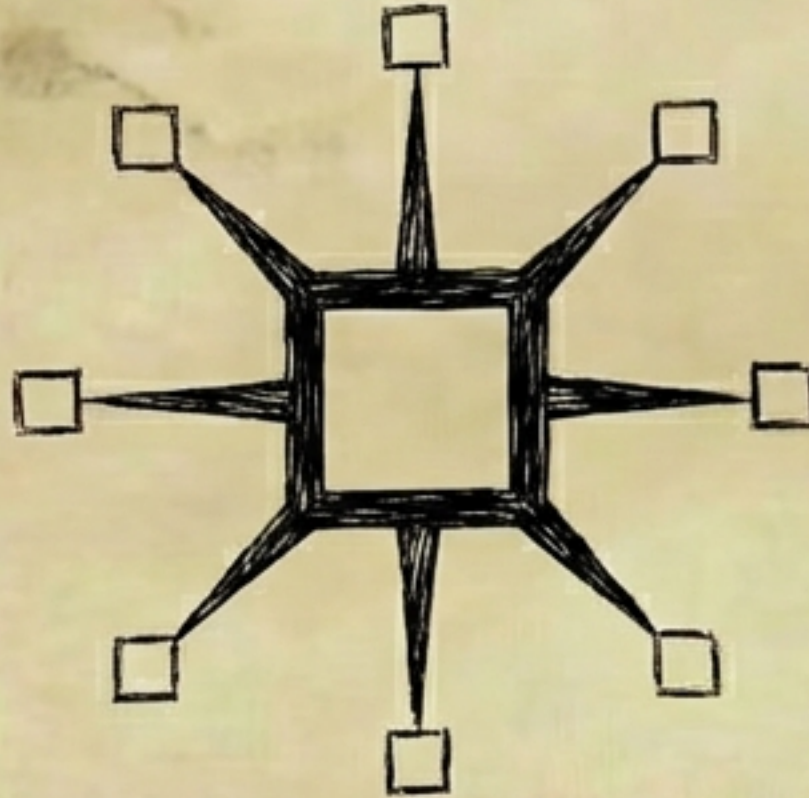
Religion
(Praising God)

Key Concept:

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

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 Yetsirah* 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.

