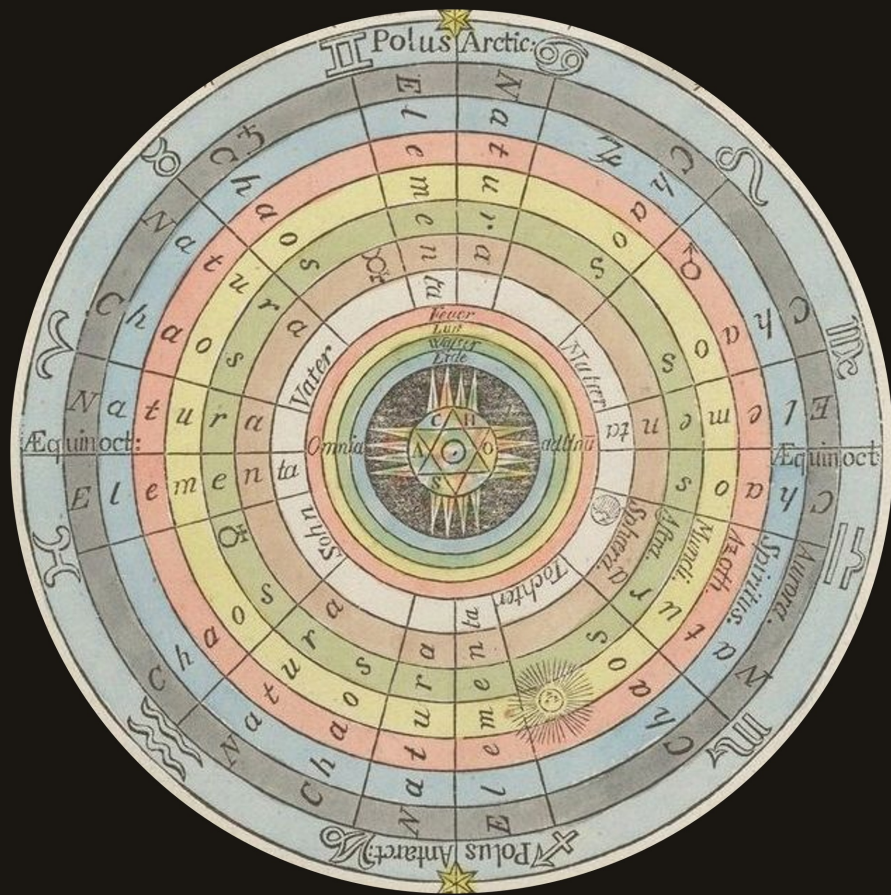




The Seven Circles of Hermes

Seven versions of the same gesture — putting everything in nested circles — from Renaissance astronomy through alchemy, occultism, and Buddhist cosmology to modern astrophysics. 1540–2012.

Why Hermes?

Hermes began as the fastest of the Greek gods — the messenger, the only Olympian free to travel everywhere: up to the gods, down to the dead, and across every border in between. He is the god of roads, merchants, translators, and thieves; the psychopomp who escorts souls to the underworld; the patron of everyone whose work is carrying something across a boundary. On the day he was born, the myth says, he invented the lyre by lunchtime and stole Apollo's cattle by nightfall — then talked his way out of it so charmingly that Apollo gave him the herd. That is the trickster half: not malice, but the intelligence that refuses to respect fences, the wit that turns a locked door into a joke.

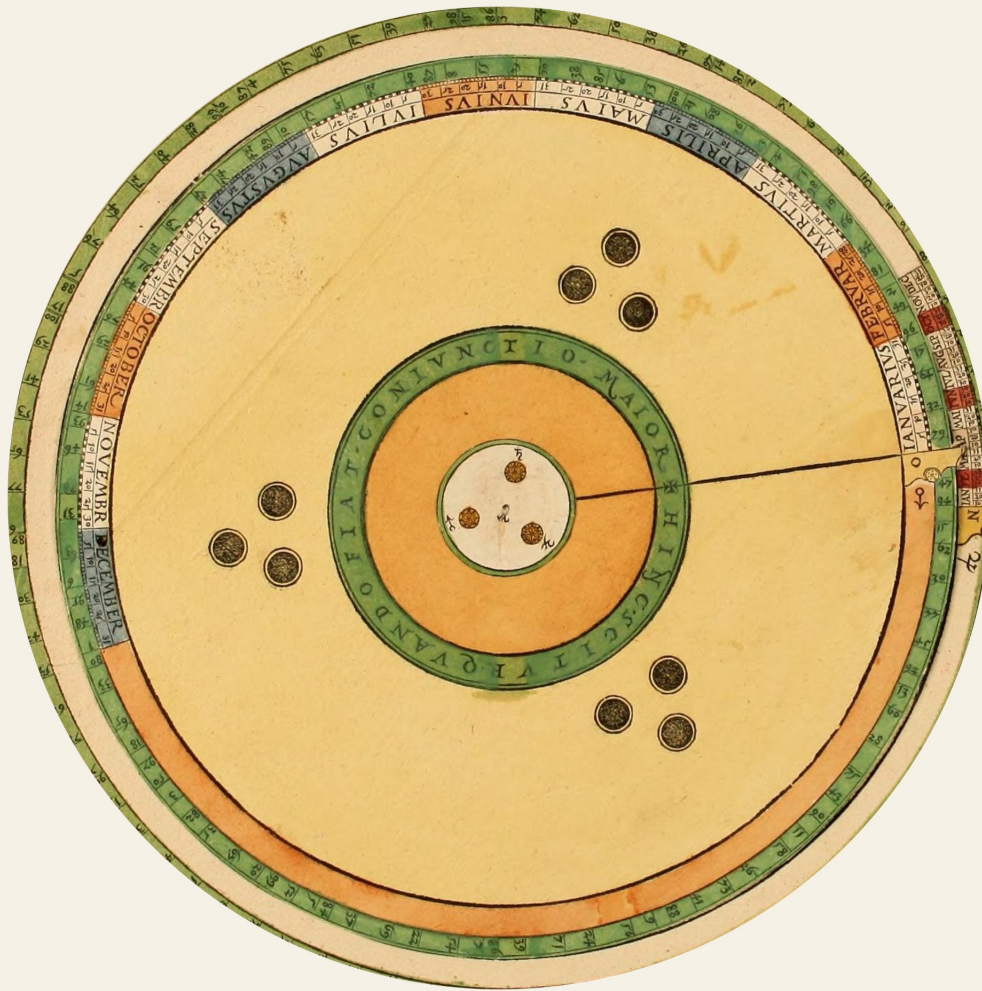
When Greek settlers in Egypt met Thoth — the ibis-headed god of writing, magic, and the reckoning of the dead — they recognized the same figure and fused the two into Hermes Trismegistus, “Thrice-Greatest Hermes,” a legendary sage credited with writing the *Corpus Hermeticum*. In its opening vision, the soul after death ascends through seven planetary circles, surrendering one earthly attachment at each ring, until it passes beyond the spheres entirely. When those texts reached Renaissance Florence in 1460, Cosimo de’ Medici ordered Plato set aside so that Hermes could be translated first. Nearly every image in this booklet — Fludd’s cosmic man, the Rosicrucian wheel, the Boehme eye — grew directly out of that Hermetic revival.

Both halves of the god live in these seven circles. The messenger is here: every plate is a message carried across a boundary — between heaven and earth, body and cosmos, the living and the dead, one century and another. And the trickster is here too, because every one of these diagrams is a beautiful act of theft: the whole universe, which belongs to no one, folded up and smuggled onto a sheet of paper small enough to hold. Seven circles, seven crossings. Hermes would approve — and then steal them back.

“Having been born in the morning, by midday he was playing the lyre, and in the evening he stole the cattle of far-shooting Apollo.” — Homeric Hymn to Hermes, 7th c. BC

The Seven Circles

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|-----|--|--|
| I | The Emperor's Astronomy
1540 | <i>a paper computer for the heavens</i> |
| II | The Microcosmic Man
1617 | <i>the body as a scale model of the universe</i> |
| III | The Eye of Providence
1715 | <i>the divine gaze inside the cosmos, not above it</i> |
| IV | The Rosicrucian Wheel
1785 | <i>creation collapsing ring by ring into CHAOS</i> |
| V | The Peaceful Deities
1927 | <i>a map of the mind in the days after death</i> |
| VI | The Crown Chakra
1927 | <i>the thousand-petaled lotus at the top of the head</i> |
| VII | The Observable Universe
2012 | <i>93 billion light-years in a single disc</i> |



The Emperor's Astronomy

Peter Apian · Ingolstadt, 1540

From Peter Apian's *Astronomicum Caesareum*, printed for Emperor Charles V and often called the most spectacular scientific book ever produced. This circle is a volvelle: layered paper discs that actually rotated on a thread axis, letting the reader compute planetary positions, eclipses, and horoscopes by hand. It is essentially a Renaissance analog computer disguised as art — proof that before electronics, calculation itself could be a luxury object, hand-colored and crowned with a little handle.



The Microcosmic Man

Robert Fludd, Utriusque Cosmi Historia · Oppenheim, 1617

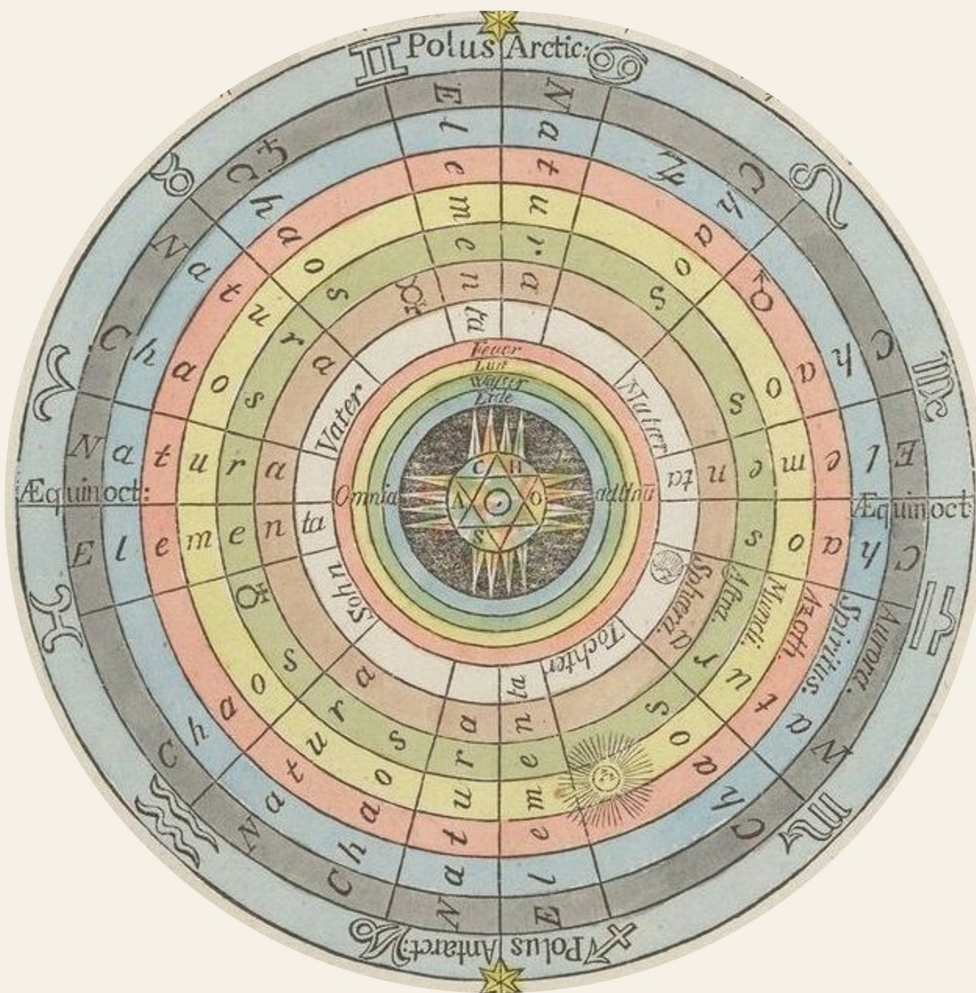
The frontispiece of Fludd's "History of Both Worlds" shows a Vitruvian-style human figure spread inside nested celestial spheres. It is the single most famous image of the microcosm–macrocosm doctrine: the idea that the human body is a scale model of the universe, and the universe a scaled-up body, so that studying one reveals the other. Every "cosmic human" image since — up through Alex Grey — is downstream of this engraving.



The Eye of Providence

Jacob Boehme, Der Weg zu Christo · 1715

From “The Way to Christ” by Jacob Boehme, the shoemaker-mystic of Görlitz whose visions of divine light in a pewter dish reshaped Western mysticism. The all-seeing eye sits at the center of a celestial sphere, crowned by a dove and ringed by an ouroboros — the divine gaze embedded in, not above, the cosmos. This rendering predates the eye’s more familiar careers on the Masonic seal and the dollar bill; here it is still pure contemplative theology.



The Rosicrucian Wheel

Geheime Figuren der Rosenkreuzer · Altona, 1785

From the “Secret Symbols of the Rosicrucians,” the great late compendium of Rosicrucian cosmology. The wheel maps creation as concentric rings running from the zodiac at the rim down through Natura, Elementa, and Chaos to the hexagram medallion at the bullseye, where the word CHAOS itself is spelled around a central sun. It reads as a diagram you fall into: the entire ordered universe collapsing ring by ring toward the primordial state it emerged from.



The Great Mandala of the Peaceful Deities

Bardo Thodol, ed. W. Y. Evans-Wentz · 1927

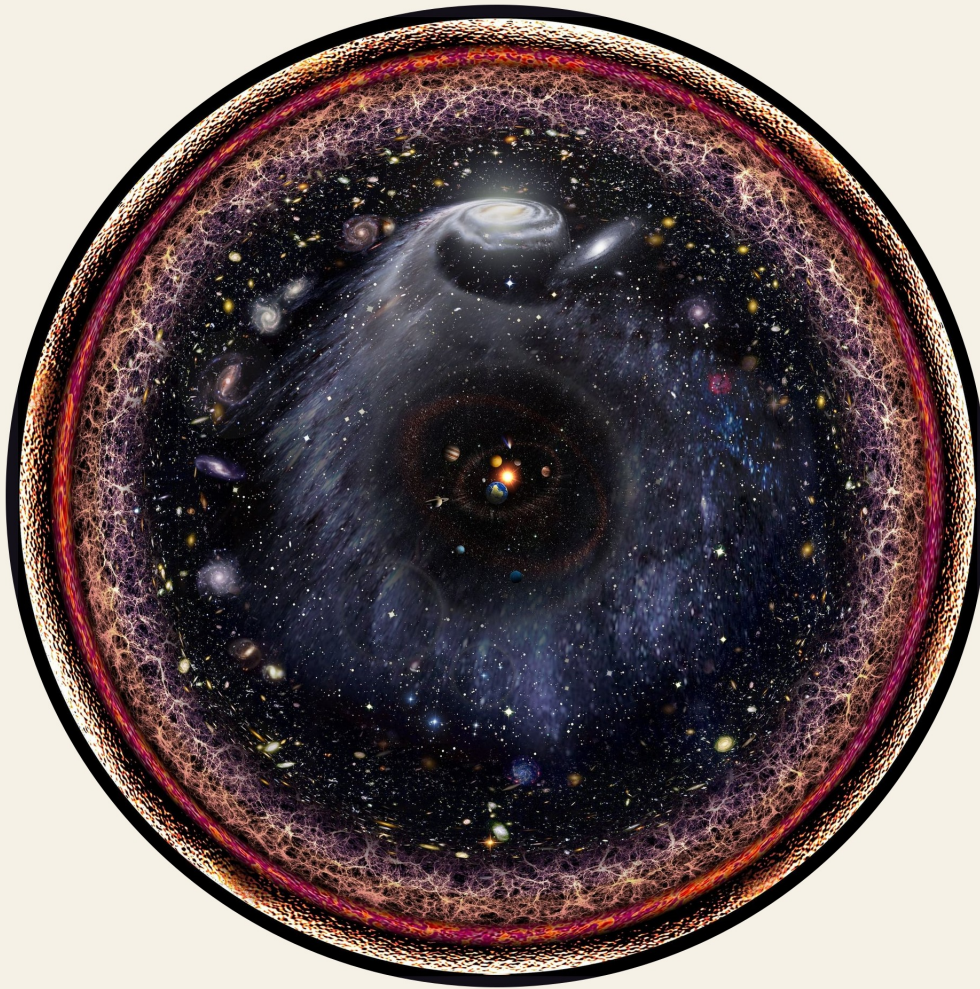
From the “Tibetan Book of the Dead”: a map of the visions a consciousness encounters in the first days after death — the forty-two peaceful deities arranged in concentric courts, to be recognized as projections of one’s own mind rather than external gods. The 1927 English edition introduced this material to the West, where Jung wrote a commentary on it and, decades later, it became the template for the first psychedelic guidebooks.



Sahasrara — the Crown Chakra

C. W. Leadbeater, The Chakras · 1927

From the Theosophical Society book that effectively created the modern Western image of the chakra system. This plate is the sahasrara, the “thousand-petaled lotus” at the crown of the head, painted as a radiant color-wheel of petals. Nearly every chakra poster, yoga-studio mural, and visionary painting of energy bodies since 1927 copies its color scheme from these plates — the missing link between Tantric diagram and psychedelic art.



The Observable Universe

Pablo Carlos Budassi · 2012, CC BY-SA

Budassi's logarithmic map compresses 93 billion light-years into a single disc: the Sun at center, then the solar system, the Milky Way, cosmic web filaments, and the cosmic microwave background at the rim, each ring representing exponentially more space. Built from Princeton logarithmic sky-map data, it is the one genuinely contemporary image in the set — and it quietly completes the sequence: the same concentric-cosmos diagram Fludd and the Rosicrucians drew, redrawn with actual data, four centuries later.



Seven Crossings

Five centuries, and none of these makers ever saw the others' work. An astronomer in Ingolstadt, a physician in Oppenheim, a shoemaker in Görlitz, anonymous Rosicrucians, Tibetan monks, a Theosophist clairvoyant, and an artist with a telescope's worth of data — each reached for the same form: everything that exists, arranged in rings around a center. Whether the center is the Sun, the self, or the eye of God turns out to be the only real disagreement.

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