Before the Renaissance, medieval Europe was drastically different than what the modern world is like today – IMAGINE:

- A world without science
- A world shaped by myths and superstitions
- A world when long-distance travel and communication are slow and difficult.
- A world ruled by the medieval Church and its constrained worldview and morality.
- A world where medicine was part prayer and part folklore
AN INTRODUCTION

Between the 1400’s and 1600’s, renaissance magic was often divided into High and Low forms.

HIGH MAGIC

High or Ceremonial magic is a form that relies significantly on book knowledge, elaborate rituals, and sophisticated sets of writings.

Until the late 19th century, ceremonial magic in the West was nearly completely based on Judeo-Christian myth and is still done this way today.

It is intended to serve a spiritual rather than a practical goal.
LOW OR FOLK MAGIC

Low magic is practiced by ordinary people.

- Have you ever hunted for a four-leaf clover?
- Have you ever hung a horseshoe over your door?

If so, you’re participating in a kind of folk magic.

Also called Popular Magic, it was intended for Healing, attracting luck or love, driving away bad forces, recovering lost objects, bringing good crops, and fertility are just a few of the practical uses.

Because of its practical character and affiliation with the lower classes, folk magic is frequently referred to as “low magic.”
CUNNING FOLK

Central to popular magic were its practitioners, often called cunning folk. They were well-known members of local communities, and their low-key magic helped ordinary people with everyday problems, such as attracting a wife, banishing warts, improving crops, or gaining protection from malign witchcraft.
This era brought with it some terrible events across the globe, from European plague pandemics in the 1500s and 1600s, to catastrophic earthquakes and floods—such as the Netherlands’ St. Felix’s Flood in 1530—as well as famine among 17th-century North American settlers. In addition, life was brutally hard for ordinary people. It is likely that popular magic brought much-needed solace to the poorest in society.
During the Renaissance in Europe, it was a time of stimulated intellectual inquiry into different areas of knowledge:

- Questioning human’s place in the Universe
- Thinking about a person’s relationship to God
- How the Natural World worked
- How the Magical and Occult fit into the new philosophies of the time:
  - Hermeticism
  - Natural Magic
  - New Sciences such as Alchemy which gave birth to modern Chemistry
A TIME FOR A NEW OUTLOOK ABOUT MAGIC

The mindset at that time, was the perfect breeding ground for a new magical outlook because **the common populous already considered the world to be run by hidden, divine forces.**

It would take a small but powerful and wishful mental step to assume that Man might be able wield the “power of God” in order to influence the world through his own invisible, divinely appointed powers.
A tale of transference

This painting by Florentine artist Paolo Uccello depicts the famous story of Christian hero St. George slaying a dragon, which often stood for evil.
Sympathetic magic linked to the wider, ever more popular concept of universal sympathy, in which humans were believed to have close correspondences with the universe around them. In the Renaissance, this was promoted by many scholars of natural philosophy and Hermeticism.
HERMETIC PHILOSOPHY

HERMETICISM AND THE BIRTH OF WESTERN MAGIC

Hermes Trismegistos was a legendary man whose writings were a combination from the Greek god Hermes and the Egyptian god Thoth.

The introduction of ancient texts supposedly written by him, called the *Hermetica*, had a major influence in kicking off the spiritual and religious revolution of the Renaissance.

These new influences are partially the reason why we recognize a cultural shift from the Middle Ages into the Renaissance.
Through the study of the Hermetica and other ancient texts, the Renaissance reader is given a new context for a world in which magic is not only possible, but necessary.

They believed that persons must study and learn, **so they can be initiated into seven spheres**, related to the planets and their influences, in order to purify the soul and enable the pure perception that they sought.
THE DIFFERENT PLANES INFLUENCING THE PHYSICAL PLANE, VISUALIZED.
The Kybalion

It is a book, described as a Study of the Hermetic Philosophy of Ancient Egypt and Greece.

It is based on the 7 Hermetic principles, described by Hermes Trismegistus.

It was originally published in 1908 by "Three Initiates", one of them - the New Thought pioneer William Walker Atkinson, 1862–1932)

It is more indebted to the ideas of modern occultist authors, especially those of the New Thought movement, to which Atkinson belonged.

It has been widely influential in New Age circles.
# THE 7 HERMETIC PRINCIPLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentality</td>
<td>The all is mind</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Universe is mental</td>
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<tr>
<td>Correspondence</td>
<td>As above, so below</td>
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<td></td>
<td>As below, so above</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vibration</td>
<td>Nothing rests</td>
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<td></td>
<td>everything moves</td>
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<td>Polarity</td>
<td>Everything has its</td>
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<td></td>
<td>pair of opposites</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Gender manifests</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>on all planes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rhythm</td>
<td>Everything flows out and in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cause &amp; Effect</td>
<td>Every cause has its</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>effect</td>
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</table>
1. THE PRINCIPLE OF MENTALISM

The All is mind; the Universe is Mental.

This first principle is that all phenomena of life, matter and energy of the material universe are thoughts of an infinite and universal, living Mind.
2. THE PRINCIPLE OF CORRESPONDENCE

AS ABOVE, SO BELOW AS BELOW, SO ABOVE.

AS WITHIN, SO WITHOUT AS WITHOUT, SO WITHIN.

This principle embodies the truth that there is always a correspondence between the laws and phenomena of various planes that manifest as being and life.

Grasping this principle is what allows one to understand the hidden solutions to problems by looking at what exists a layer above, and below the problem, to infer the pattern and shadow nature of what is in-between.
3. THE PRINCIPLE OF VIBRATION

This principle embodies the truths that ‘nothing rests,’ ‘everything is in motion,’ and ‘everything vibrates.’

It explains that matter, energy, and even spirit, are simply varying rates of vibration.

A classic example of this being frequency in which the seven octaves of music, tuned up 44 octaves, miraculously becomes the spectrum of visible light (passing through states of being the buzz pitch of insects, ultra-sound, plasma, hyper sound, and even octaves of heat.)

While they change manifestation, the vibrations maintain the same correspondence, the difference being only in measurement and energy as frequencies slide up the electromagnetic spectrum.
4. THE PRINCIPLE OF POLARITY

- Everything is dual. Everything has poles.
- Everything has its pair of opposites.
- Like and unlike are the same.
- Opposites are identical in nature, but different in degree.
- Extremes meet.
- All truths, are but half-truths.
- All paradoxes may be reconciled.
5. THE PRINCIPLE OF RHYTHM

- Everything flows, out and in
- Everything has its tides
- All things rise and fall
- \textbf{The pendulum swing manifests in everything}
  - The measure of the swing to the right is the measure of the swing to the left
- Rhythm compensates
6. THE PRINCIPLE OF CAUSE & EFFECT

- Every cause has its effect
- Every effect has its cause
- Everything happens according to law
- Chance is but a name for law not recognized
- There are many planes of causation, but nothing escapes the law
7. THE PRINCIPLE OF GENDER

- Gender is in everything
- Everything has its masculine and feminine principles
- Gender manifests on all planes.
A TALISMANIC RING

Made in the 1400’s, the Sapphire and symbols were said to protect the wearer from harm.

PENDANT FROM A POST-BYZANTINE NECKLACE:

Made of Gold, Amethyst, Emeralds, Rubies, Pearls and more (16th century, CE)
Magic circles
The art of using circles in ritual magic was a tool employed by some cunning folk, as well as more learned magic practitioners. The magic circle was a symbol of protection and of the summoning of spirits, and was often drawn protectively around those performing magic. Also called “conjuring circles,” magic circles were often physically drawn on the ground.
Both the Protestant Reformation and its Catholic response, the Counter-Reformation, took place in the Renaissance. The Christian Church was politically and socially powerful, many monarchs believed that they were God's appointees, and roles such as that of the Holy Roman Emperor bestowed vast power. So it was that many people of status, Protestant and Catholic alike, dreaded threats to their positions and consulted those steeped in the occult to allay their fears.

'AN ASTROLOGER CASTING A HOROSCOPE' - DRAWN IN 1617 CE
SABBATS

THE HOLY DAYS OF THE WHEEL OF THE YEAR

Sabbats are any of 8 seasonal festivals including the equinoxes and solstices, observed by persons who believe in Paganism. (a religion of celebration, not redemption, believed by early Roman Christians)

It is an ancient and sacred ritual calendar marking the Earth's changing seasons and the Sun's never-ending journey across the sky, as well as the Moon's waxing and waning cycles.
The modern-day Wheel of the Year was first suggested by the scholar and mythologist Jacob Grimm (1785-1863 CE) in his 1835 CE work, "Teutonic Mythology."

The wheel includes the following holy days (most dates flexible year-to-year):

- Samhain (31 October)
- Yule (20-25 December)
- Imbolc (1-2 February)
- Ostara (20-23 March)
- Beltane (30 April-1 May)
- Litha (20-22 June)
- Lughnasadh (1 August)
- Mabon (20-23 September).
Once Christianity had triumphed over the Celtic pagan beliefs, the holy days of the year became Christianized.

- Samhain became All Soul's Eve
- Yule, of course, became Christmas
- Imbolc was turned into Candlemas and Saint Brigid's Day
- Ostara became Easter
- Beltane was celebrated as the Feast of the Cross
- Litha as the Feast of St. John
- Lughnasadh became Lammas
- “Loaf Mass”, celebrating grains, and the Autumn Equinox became associated with various saints such as Adamnan.
Both bourgeoisie and nobility in the 15th and 16th centuries showed great fascination with the 7 Artes Magicae, which exerted an exotic charm by their ascription to Arabic, Jewish, Romani, and Egyptian sources.

They were divided into seven types:

nigromancy, geomancy, hydromancy, aeromancy, pyromancy, chiromancy, and scapulimancy.

They are all related to Divination 'to foresee, to foretell, to predict, to prophesy'.

It is the attempt to gain insight into a question or situation by way of an occultic, standardized process or ritual.
RENAISSANCE MAGIC

It was a resurgence of the magical arts which arose along with Renaissance humanism in the 15th and 16th centuries CE.

These magical arts (called *Artes Magicae*), which were ways to divine things, were divided into 7 types:

1) **Nigromancy** – Black Magic and Demonology

2) **Geomancy** - divination from the shape seen in a handful of earth thrown on the ground, or by interpreting lines or textures on the ground.

3) **Hydromancy** – divination by means of signs derived from the appearance of water and its movements.

4) **Aeromancy** - divination from the state of the air, or from atmospheric conditions or substances

5) **Pyromancy** - divination by means of fire or flames

6) **Chiromancy** - the supposed prediction of a person's future from interpreting the lines on the palms of their hands; palmistry.

7) **Scapulimancy** - divination by observation of a shoulder blade usually as blotched or cracked from a fire
NIGROMANCY – BLACK MAGIC AND DEMONOLOGY
GEOMANCY

DIVINATION FROM THE SHAPE SEEN IN A HANDFUL OF EARTH THROWN ON THE GROUND, OR BY INTERPRETING LINES OR TEXTURES ON THE GROUND.

Geomancy Tool

The 16 Geometric figures
HYDROMANCY

DIVINATION BY MEANS OF SIGNS DERIVED FROM THE APPEARANCE OF WATER AND ITS MOVEMENTS, USUALLY USED WITH SCRYING.
AEROMANCY

Divination from the state of the air, or from atmospheric conditions or substances

Aeromancy

A form of divination that observes lightening, cloud formations, wind patterns and listens to thunder to interpret messages from Spirit.
PYROMANCY

DIVINATION BY MEANS OF FIRE OR FLAMES
CHIROMANCY

THE SUPPOSED PREDICTION OF A PERSON’S FUTURE FROM INTERPRETING THE LINES ON THE PALMS OF THEIR HANDS; PALMISTRY.

Some of the lines of the hand in palmistry:

1. Life line
2. Head line
3. Heart line
4. Girdle of Venus
5. Sun line
6. Mercury line
7. Fate line
SCAPULIMANCY

DIVINATION BY OBSERVATION OF A SHOULDER BLADE, USUALLY AS BLOTCHED OR CRACKED FROM A FIRE

SCAPULIMANCY IS THE CORRECT TERM IF OX SCAPULAE WERE USED FOR THE DIVINATION

PLASTROMANCY, IF TURTLE PLASTRONS WERE USED.
Cunning men and women frequently invoked, and had conversations with, an array of spirits that were generally thought of as fairies. In effect, fairies were a magic practitioner’s familiar (spirit helper)—similar in some ways to the animal familiars that they also often used.

Other beings that featured in popular magic included elves and fantastical creatures such as the unicorn (pictured ); so-called unicorn horns—in reality often narwhal tusks—were considered especially potent for magic and folk healing practices.
Aztec sorcery

In 1521, Spanish forces under Conquistador Hernán Cortés conquered the mighty Aztec Empire, which had dominated present-day central and southern Mexico since the 1400s. The Empire's beliefs were a blend of different Mesoamerican cultures, such as that of the Maya people, and their practices included a roster of deities, rituals, superstitions, divination, and spells. With the Spanish conquest came the conversion of indigenous people to Christianity.
Gods and sorcerers

Two of the principal Aztec gods were Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcoatl. Tezcatlipoca literally means “smoking mirror,” giving this deity his nickname, “Lord of the smoking mirror.” He is often shown with his tezcatl, a polished mirror made of obsidian. Much used for black magic in ancient Mexico, the black mirror was associated with dark forces and may have symbolized Tezcatlipoca’s all-seeing powers.
The god Quetzalcoatl took the form of a plumed serpent, with feathers from the local—sacred—quetzal bird. Snakes and serpents in general were believed to have magical and divinatory powers. Among other attributes, Quetzalcoatl was credited with inventing the calendar, which was a vital tool of Aztec divination. Through his association with the morning and evening stars, Quetzalcoatl also symbolized death and resurrection.

△ Double power

This serpent was probably worn as a chest decoration during Aztec ceremonial rites. The double-headed snake spelled bad luck and, at worst, imminent death.
This Aztec Sun Stone (c. 1500), measuring 12 ft (3.7 m) across, found at Tenochtitlan, capital of the Aztec Empire, depicts a history of the cosmos and its eras, or suns. The central face is likely the sun god, Tonatiuh, with his tongue a symbolic sacrificial blade.
Casting maize

Overlooked by the wind god, here a diviner casts maize kernels onto a cloth to read their patterns, as shown in the 16th-century Codex Magli-abechiano. Maize divination could also involve casting the kernels into water.
This image from the Tovar Codex depicts three priests making ritual offerings to prevent drought. The first priest (far left) bears burning incense in the form of a tree resin called copal, which was often used in Aztec ceremonies.
Uniting the universe

Robert Fludd’s diagram (c. 1617) shows the microcosm of man, or human life, within the macrocosm of the greater universe. Fludd’s microcosm listed the four personality types, while his macrocosm included the sun, moon, and planets, as well as higher divine beings.
Kabbalah beliefs are notorious for occult leanings and for being kept secret: one such belief, that humans share divine “sparks” from the godhead, helps promote this sense of mysterious knowledge. Different spellings include Kabbalah, Cabbala, and Qabalah and these are often associated with specific traditions, such as Judaism, Christianity, and Hermeticism, or occult practices. The form Kabbalah is often used as a general term.
Christian Kabbalah

A Christian form of Kabbalah flourished in the Renaissance, colored by the era’s Hermeticism. Christian Kabbalists explored complex notions of the universe’s unity and eventually embraced all religions, gaining Kabbalah a vital place in the West’s history of magic.

▲ Esoteric doctrine

A colored version of the important tree of life illustration from Gikatilla’s influential Gates of Light. The tree’s 10 spheres relate to 10 emanations that represent God’s divine nature and creative energies.
Unlocking the universe

German Jesuit priest Athanasius Kircher is often called the last man of the Renaissance, due to his prolific academic pursuits. He was a revered scholar whose studies encompassed Egyptology, mathematics, medicine, astrology, numerology, and the deciphering of complex codes.

Decoding the divine

The title page taken from Athanasius Kircher’s work *Ars magna lucis et umbrae* (1646) interweaves the science of optics with esoterica and features kabbalistic symbolism.
Perhaps used as a protective talisman, this 17th-century kabbalistic image features at its heart a Hebrew Menorah—seven-branched candelabrum—composed of words. The branches symbolize seven branches of universal knowledge.
Another officially acceptable rite, which had parallels with magical healing, stemmed from belief in the divine right of kings: the concept, which persisted throughout the Renaissance, that kings and queens were semi-divine beings whose authority came from God. Many Renaissance monarchs embraced the idea of divine right. People thought that kings and queens held special powers, so they believed that being touched by a monarch, or touching a coin that the monarch had touched, could cure diseases.
Speaking with angels
Thaumaturgy (the concept of working wonders or miracles) was central to the work of 16th-century British mathematician-occultist John Dee. He also promoted Enochian magic, a ceremonial practice that used a web of signs, symbols, and number codes to try to summon and commune with angel spirits, such as the archangels Gabriel and Uriel, in order to gain knowledge. Dee claimed, in effect, to contact the divine through a practice based partly on the apocryphal Judeo-Christian Book of Enoch.

Dee claimed that the angel Uriel gave him this crystal in 1582. Symbols or spirits supposedly appeared in it, helping heal illness or predict the future.
Seeing the future

Dee developed complex number systems for his divinatory rites. The number seven was pivotal, partly because there were said to be seven planetary spheres. With Dee’s associate Edward Kelley acting as medium, the pair also used scrying devices such as mirrors or crystals (crystalomancy) to receive the teachings of the angels.

△ The holiest of tables

This is a 17th-century marble copy of Dee's wooden Holy Table, complete with Enochian letters, with which the angels were said to spell out messages for Dee and Kelley. Dee made the wooden original in 1582 according to angelic instructions delivered to him via Kelley.
ENOCHEAN MAGIC

Enochian magic is a system of ceremonial magic based on the 16th-century writings of John Dee and Edward Kelley.

They claim their knowledge and the book of Enoch was given to them by angels.

The goal of many of these ceremonial acts is to summon and command spirits.

Usually, these spirits are celestial creatures.

3D reconstruction of the "Holy Table" used by John Dee, including a crystal ball used for scrying, seven planetary talismans, and circular tablets inscribed with the Seal of God.
Cosmic squares

Magic-square talismans used astrological magic to try to draw on planetary forces. In this 1651 Jupiter square, the numbers total 34 when added in any direction.
Between the lines

This engraving from Agrippa’s *De occulta philosophia libri tres*, an important work of occult philosophy, shows lines and areas on the hand associated with zodiac symbols. Such guides were a cornerstone of Renaissance palmistry (also called chiromancy, or palm reading).
Mapping the universe

This celestial map from the 1600s is by Dutch-German cartographer Andreas Cellarius. Exploration and astronomical studies were core facets of Renaissance culture, and astronomy was an important branch of natural philosophy.
The Theban alphabet

The so-called Theban alphabet, a writing system with equivalences to the Latin alphabet, took hold in the occult world during the Renaissance. Often given an original attribution to Honorius of Thebes, a mysterious (and possibly mythical) writer of the medieval period, it was first
Created by or in imitation of the 17th-century Swiss artist Matthäus Merian, this anthropomorphic landscape can be turned on its side to reveal a human face. Links between humanity and the natural world were important to philosophy, and disguising forms to explore philosophical allegories was a popular artistic pursuit.
Created by or in imitation of the 17th-century Swiss artist Matthäus Merian, this anthropomorphic landscape can be turned on its side to reveal a human face. Links between humanity and the natural world were important to philosophy, and disguising forms to explore philosophical allegories was a popular artistic pursuit.
THE SCREEENE OF FORTUNE

The Screene here behold which will informe both young & old. In all you desire to know.

If you but burne the wheel below.

Unto some letter there you'll see what tis the starrs for you decree of good.

Anonymous, printed in Great Britain between 1650 and 1750. A fortune-telling game, in the collection of the British Library

Wheels of fortune provided answers to users’ questions by blending astrology, symbols, numbers, and letters. This 17th-century example reads: "The Screene of Fortune here behold / Which will inform both young and old / In all you desire to know."
The golden age of alchemy

The story of alchemy is one of magic versus science, of secrecy and symbolism, and of seeking perfect understanding in order to achieve transformation. Alchemists explored the nature of matter; pursued a holy grail of turning base metals, such as lead, into gold; and sought perfection of the body and soul.

△ Precursor to chemistry

This image of a double still comes from German surgeon and alchemist Hieronymus Brunswig’s 16th-century distillation manual. A pioneering book on chemistry, its ideas borrowed heavily from alchemy.
Fixing the volatile

This 1600s or 1700s illustration is based on the earlier, unillustrated text of the *Twelve Keys of Basil Valentine* (1599), a work that details 12 steps to creating the Philosopher’s Stone. The flowers may symbolize purified precious metals.
Pursuing the Stone

This “Ripley Scroll” is named after the influential 15th-century English alchemist George Ripley. The red and green lions represent sulfur and mercury respectively: two central ingredients for making the Stone.
Ideas of regeneration and resurrection ran throughout alchemy. In this image from *Splendor solis* (1500s), a crowned angel offers a cloth to a man rising from a dank swamp. His black and red coloration reflects two of the stages in the alchemical process.
Alchemist Heinrich Khunrath’s *Amphitheatrum sapientiae aeternae* (1609) includes this fanciful imagining of the green stone tablet on which Hermes Trismegistus is reputed to have carved his Emerald Tablet text.
Alchemy in art

Two major Renaissance preoccupations, art and alchemy, often came together during the period. Alchemy was a gift for artists—a colorful, exciting, magical topic, filled with exotic symbols such as dragons and majestic birds. All kinds of images of alchemy appear in Renaissance paintings, from the scholarly and allegorical to the workaday.

▲ Plates 12–18 of Splendor solis (1500s) were probably created by multiple artists, but their names have not survived.
SECRET OF THE
ROSE AND CROSS

Rosicrucianism

The secret movement called Rosicrucianism, named after its emblem of a rose upon a cross, first began in the early 1600s. Rosicrucians professed that their followers had access to hidden mystic knowledge and could offer the key to transforming society—claims that made the movement the subject of intense speculation. Rosicrucianism also gave rise to related orders, which have lasted for centuries.

Symbol of the society

THE ROSY CROSS OR ROSE CROSS
OCCULT SYMBOLS

The Rose Cross is associated with a number of different schools of thought, including the Rosicrucians, also known as the Order of the Rose Cross.

It is also a symbol related to the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, Thelema, and the OTO (Ordo Templi Orientis) (All of these will be discussed in a future class)
CHRISTIAN ROSENkreuz (c. 1378–1484)

Legendary founder

**Mons philosophorum** ("Mountain of Philosophers") was Rosenkreuz’s tomb, guarded by a lion.

The *Fama* alleged that Christian Rosenkreuz, a German monk, had made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and studied mystic arts and the Kabbalah in Arabia and Morocco. On his return in 1403, Rosenkreuz founded a brotherhood devoted to healing the sick and passing on the mysteries. He was said to have died in 1484, aged 106, and it was the discovery of his tomb in 1604, apparently lit by an ever-burning lamp, that led the Rosicrucians to publicize the manifestos and the society.
This illustration from German alchemist Daniel Mögling's 1618 book *Mirror of the Wisdom of the Rosy Cross* shows wisdom and knowledge emerging from the East to descend on the citadel that belonged to the Rosicrucian order.
Figure of wisdom

In this illustration from a Rosicrucian manuscript of 1785, the figure of Sophia (Wisdom) rises up from a dense network of alchemical signs, an indication of how complex the language of Rosicrucian symbols had become.
LOOKING TO THE STARS

Western astrology

Astrology, the belief that movements of the stars and planets influenced human lives and events on earth, had its origins in Babylonia.

In Renaissance Europe, translations of ancient texts increased interest in astrology at the same time as a new discipline emerged: astronomy—the scientific study of the universe and of objects in space without reference to humans. The two disciplines were often thought complementary at the time.

Royal patronage

The astronomer Giovanni Bianchini (kneeling) presents his *Tabulae Astronomiae* to the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III. First compiled in 1442, his work provided more accurate measurements of the locations of planets and stars than before, which were an invaluable source for astrologers.
▲ Merchants guided by the planet Jupiter

In astrology, planets controlled particular areas of life, and Leonardo Dati’s *De Sphaera* (1470) shows Jupiter exerting a benign influence on bakers, grain-sellers, and fishmongers.
This illustration is from Peter Apian’s 1540 *Astronomicum Caesareum*, a work of Ptolemaic astrology.

The Enlightenment weakened the hold of astrology on science. Sir Isaac Newton (despite being a keen alchemist) formulated the theory of gravity and swung scholarly opinion away from Ptolemaic cosmology (that the earth was stationary and at the center of the universe) to a view of the world based on science.
The Renaissance is associated with great figures like the father of the Latin revival Petrarch, the humanist philosopher Pico della Mirandola, the great artist and inventor Leonardo da Vinci, and the poet Dante Alighieri.

Humanism and the keen interest in reason common to many of those smitten with Aristotelean philosophy during these centuries brought about profound challenges to the authority of the Roman Catholic Church during this time.

Dante Alighieri, detail from Luca Signorelli’s fresco, Chapel of San Brizio, Orvieto Cathedral in Italy

Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons
Divination tools

The process of reading patterns and signs to indicate the future, divination is one of the oldest and most widespread forms of occult practice. Many methods are still popular today, reinvented and reimagined to meet modern needs, especially those of New Age followers. Different cultures have chosen different signs to interpret, and scholars have identified numerous kinds of "mantia" (powers of prophecy)—from abacancy (divination by dust) to zygomancy (divination by balancing weights).

▲ Celtic ogham staves are notched with ogham symbols (early Irish alphabet letters linked by a solid line). There are 26 staves in a set, 25 for the symbols and one blank. Three of the sticks are selected at random from a bag for divination.
A crystal ball is said to reveal secrets or visions of the future to those who know how to “scry” or look into it. Crystal balls have been used for divining for thousands of years and attracted famous practitioners such as Elizabethan alchemist John Dee.

A pendulums are used for an ancient form of divining called pallo- mancy. The significance of the direction in which the pendulum swings is predetermined by the user. Typically, the seeker asks a question and the swing of the pendulum indicates a yes or no answer.
**Astrodice** are three dice rolled for divinatory interpretation—one for the zodiac signs (above left); one for the sun, moon, and planets (above right); and one numbered 1–12 for the 12 houses of the zodiac.

**Merkaba** is a symbol for divine energy: in Hebrew, *mer* means light, *ka* means spirit, and *ba* means body. It takes the shape of an eight-pointed star (two conjoined pyramids). For divination, users swing the star as a pendulum or spin it in a frame.
Rune stones come in sets of 24, each with a different runic symbol in Old Norse style. The diviner invites the seeker to choose one or more of the stones without looking and then interprets the selection.

I Ching cards are a modern take on the ancient Chinese text of the same name. The circled pattern of lines at the bottom left of the card replicates the yarrow sticks that were the original divination tool.
Casting dice is an ancient method of divination called astragalomancy. The dice were originally knucklebones or other small bones of sheep and goats. The skill lies in interpreting the fall of numbers.

Spirit boards (often called Ouija boards) supposedly spell out messages from spirits beyond the grave as the pointer mysteriously moves to different letters. In fact, the pointer is moved subconsciously by the participants.
Dowsing rods indicate hidden water or mineral deposits underground as they twitch in response to subconscious movements of the dowser’s hand. Originally, dowsers used twigs, but now most favor two L-shaped rods.

Tea-leaf reading (tasseography) dates back to the start of tea-drinking but remains popular today. To make a reading, the diviner interprets the pattern of leaves left at the bottom of the cup.
Scrying mirrors have an ancient history and are still used as a psychic tool to invoke spirits in the hope that they will offer insight into the past, future, and even events taking place elsewhere in the present.
Scrying mirrors have an ancient history and are still used as a psychic tool to invoke spirits in the hope that they will offer insight into the past, future, and even events taking place elsewhere in the present.
The Power of Prediction

almanacs and calendars

In the 16th and 17th centuries, almanacs were much more common than scholarly books on astrology. Rather like a modern diary, they contained practical information, beginning with church festivals, feast days, and market days, followed by more specific astronomical sections, with times of sunrises and sunsets. Astrological predictions about the weather, crops, and politics followed the practical section.
△ Agricultural advice

This 16th-century English almanac contains saint’s days and predictions about the effect of signs of the zodiac (here Libra and Scorpio) on agriculture and rural life.
▲ Tables of magical and cosmological correspondences appear on this page from the *Magical Calendar* (1620) by Johannes Theodorus de Bry.
▲ Herbal cure

This illustration reproduced from an Aztec physician's 1552 codex shows the nonochton, a herbal remedy for heart pains, in which the plants’ petals were ground up in water and drunk as a juice. Colonizers were often skeptical of local medicine.
▲ Inhabited by spirits

*Nkisi* statuettes from the Kongo were believed by West Africans to store spiritually charged energy, which could then be activated by driving metal objects such as nails into them.
▲ Scenes from the New World

This watercolor of an “Indian Conjurer” is by John White, governor of the very first English North American colony at Roanoke, which was established in 1587.
This 17th-century book shows a patriarchal cross, designed to protect the reader from violence, illness, and demons. The book and its contents are typical of the mix of religious fervor and magical belief that circulated in colonial New England.
Master of illusion

This 1664 engraving for the frontispiece to an edition of Corneille's complete works places the playwright at the center. The works include *L'Illusion comique*, a play that uses magic to summon up its theatrical universe.
Shakespeare’s fairy mischief

Magic provided William Shakespeare with an entertaining and thought-provoking way to communicate his ideas. In his romance comedy *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, written in 1595–1596, he uses magic to play with the theme of romantic love (as had many earlier, medieval romances): is it random madness or a type of magic? Is it ruled by otherworldly forces? Do supernatural beings have any more control over love than mortals?

▲ *Titania and Bottom* appear in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* by J.A. Fitzgerald (famous in his day for his paintings of fairyland), 1800s
POPPETS AND FETISHES

Dolls are used in magic include *poppets*, which are effigies, made to look like a particular person.

*Fetishes* are supposed to contain spirits which give them powers to protect (or punish), in some instances.

Some dolls are designed to protect a community.
3-LEGGED TOAD

THE ELEPHANT WITH AN UPRaised TRUNK IS A GOOD LUCK SYMBOL IN MANY COUNTRIES.

GOOD LUCK CHARMS

▲ Lucky shoe

This man’s left shoe, from around the late 1600s, was found in a wall between a window and chimney of a Cambridge University college. It was probably placed there to protect the college’s master.
THE END