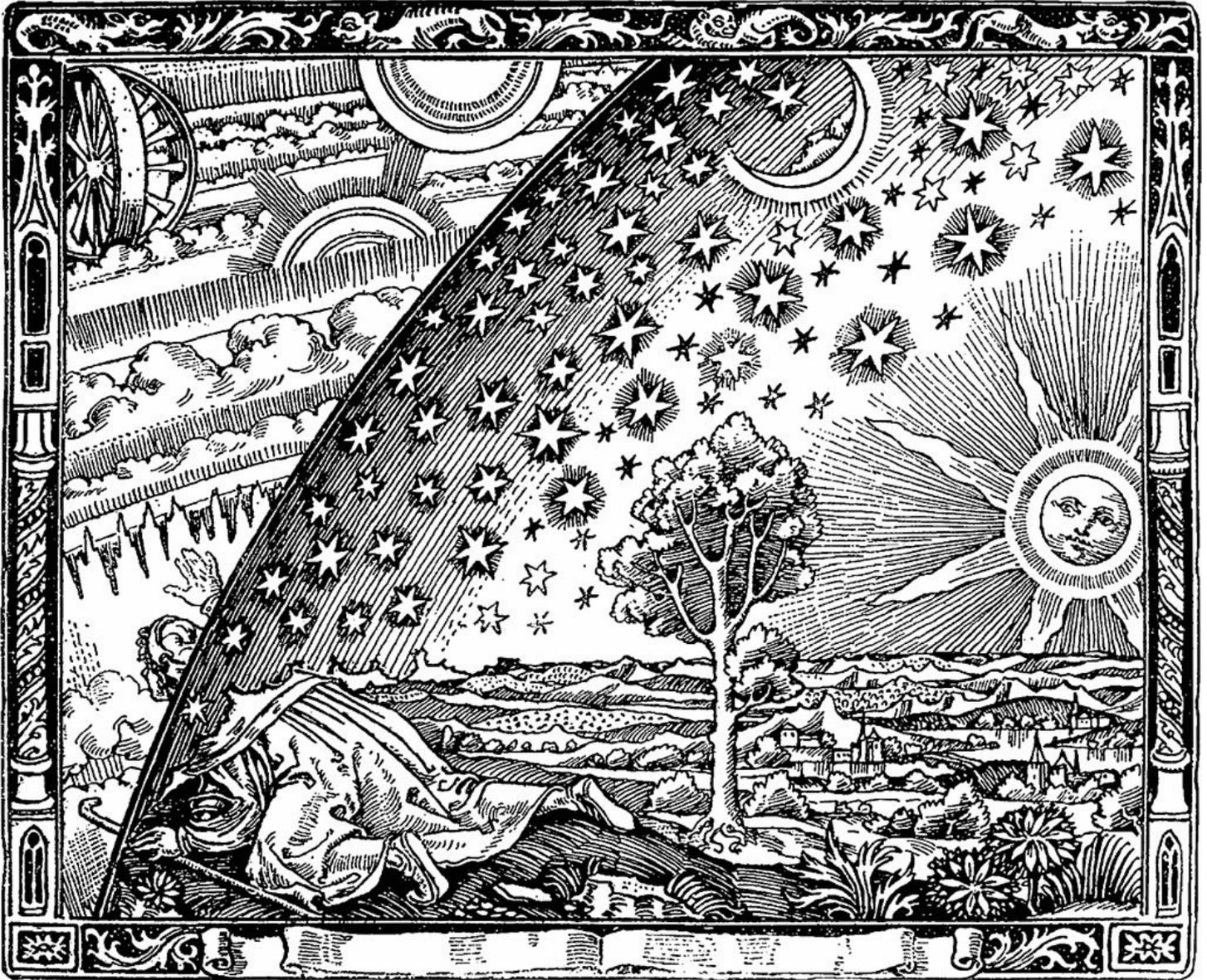


THE FLAMMARION PICTURE. How current technology shapes our understanding of the world.



A missionary of the Middle Ages tells how he had found the point where the sky and the Earth touch

The Flammarion engraving is a wood engraving by an unknown artist, so named because its first documented appearance is in Camille Flammarion's 1888 book *L'atmosphère: météorologie populaire* ("The Atmosphere: Popular Meteorology"). The engraving has often, but erroneously, been referred to as a woodcut. It has been used to represent a supposedly medieval cosmology, including a flat earth bounded by a solid and opaque sky, or firmament. The engraving depicts a traveller, clothed in a long robe and carrying a staff, who kneels down and passes his head, shoulders and right arm through a gap between the star-studded sky and the earth, discovering a marvellous realm of wheels and orbs and fires driving the cosmic clockwork mechanism of the mediaeval world. It could be a metaphorical illustration of man's mystical quests for knowledge.

Whether the sky be clear or cloudy, it always seems to us to have the shape of an elliptic arch; far from having the form of a circular arch, it always seems flattened and depressed above our heads, and gradually to become farther removed toward the horizon. The Greek astronomers represented it as formed of a solid crystal substance; and so recently as Copernicus, a large number of astronomers thought it was as solid as plate-glass.

The Latin poets placed the divinities of Olympus and the stately mythological court upon this vault, above the planets and the fixed stars.

An interpretation of the image was used for the animated sequence about the cosmological vision of Giordano Bruno in the March 9, 2014 premiere of the TV series *Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey*, hosted by the astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson. That TV series was dedicated to the popularization of science and astronomy, as had Flammarion's own work 150 years before.

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