

Johfra and the Signs of the Zodiac— Scorpio and Sagittarius

THE SIGNS OF THE ZODIAC have been drawn in much the same way for hundreds of years. Only if paintings were made of them would there be some scope for a new interpretation.[†]

I decided to get right down to the essence of each sign and then briefly meditate on as many of its aspects as possible. My idea was to combine several symbols—all of which would have a bearing on the particular sign—and so give more background to each painting, allowing the spectator more scope for free association. In this way, the twelve signs became a cycle of twelve meditations that followed the course of the zodiac.

The numerous similarities between various religious systems and their symbols, such as the Cabala, magic, alchemy and Tarot, made it possible for me to illuminate the numerous aspects of each sign by using the corresponding symbols, thus throwing the sign itself into greater relief....

The deepest truths can only be approached through myths and symbols. They cannot even be conveyed through exegesis or philosophical treatise. The Truth can only be hinted at and, even then, can only be recognized by those who already know it. Yet this recognition lies dormant within us all. The Mysteries raise this unconscious knowledge of truth to consciousness. This is not done with intellectual explanations but with symbols and games of mystery in which the truths are depicted in dramatized form.

[†] This is the first in a series of articles on the twelve signs of the zodiac as conceived and painted by the Dutch artist Johfra and coupled with his personal commentary. Johfra, recently deceased, studied the Rosicrucian teachings. Thanks to this association, his wife, Ellen Lorien, has graciously granted the Rays permission to reprint his artwork and text.

In fact, all religions, all schools of mysticism, and all esoteric societies used and still use symbols in their instruction, simply because what they are concerned with cannot be put over or expressed in any other way. A symbolic approach works totally differently from an intellectual. The latter appeals only to the intellect, leaving the rest of the individual untouched; it remains a thought construction.

A truly universal archetypal symbol works deep down; it touches the unconscious essence of the individual who thereby recognizes it from inside. It moves him totally. It strengthens him, changes him. A symbol is never absolute and objective. It is open to various interpretations. It takes on different shades of meaning according to the individual. It is subjective and adapts itself to a particular situation. It is like a mirror that, while remaining itself, constantly displays different images, depending on the person who looks in it....

In the light of the above, it will be clear to you that you should not expect exact explanations here in the sense of “this means that and that other symbol this.” I shall however try to share with you as clearly as possible the thoughts that I had when I conceived these paintings, the paths that beckoned me and the meanings I intended. They are entirely my own responsibility and are very personal. Another might see something completely different in the symbols used, and would have every right to do so. As I have already shown, it is what people themselves experience in the beholding of a symbol that determines its relevance. This is much more important than what another, in this case the painter, sees in it. Just the same, before I start discussing the twelve signs of the zodiac, I should first like to discuss the philosophical systems from

which my symbolism is mainly derived, the rich treasures of the past into which I have delved quite freely.

There have been three great philosophical schools of major influence in the field of esoteric thought in Europe since the Middle Ages. Together, they have determined the secret sciences. They are: Neoplatonism, Hermeticism, and the Jewish Cabala....

The essence of Neoplatonism is that all beings are part of the One and yet are multiply emanated on lower levels. The One first created the Logos, the Word, the Intellect or Spirit. The world of divine ideas was created in this Intellect. These were the perfect primordial ideas in whose image material nature was formed. Material beings are therefore incomplete and imperfect. Yet within them all lies the dormant memory of the archetype after which they were formed. Beauty is therefore the extent to which a being reflects its perfect primordial idea in its shape. The all-governing striving of the natural being is to ascend to its original being, above time and space, and to unite with the One from which it emanated....

The second philosophical system is closely linked with the former. Both developed in the same environment, in third-century Alexandria. Eastern and Western ways of thought came together to form a great synthesis: Hermeticism. This was rooted in the books which are said to have been written by Thoth, the Egyptian god of knowledge, or, as he was later known, the legendary Hermes Trismegistos (thrice-great Hermes)....

I particularly want to draw your attention to this important couplet: "That which is below is like to that which is above, and that which is above is like to that which is below, so that the wonders of the One are enacted."

This is the basis of all magic and astrology. What it means is that the macrocosmos (the large world of the stars) finds perfect expression in the microcosmos (the small world of the creation). The latter is a faithful reflection of the former. But there is more than that. "So that the wonders of the One are enacted" implies an interplay between both worlds within the One. This refers to the fundamental law of resonance which rules in all

worlds. Everything that vibrates (and vibration is the foundation of being) acts upon everything else —whether positively or negatively depends the vibration key. So every being that sends out a certain tone will receive a response from every other being that is tuned into the same vibrations. This is an irrevocable process, regardless of whether the being is a mineral, a plant, an animal, a human being, an angel or a planet....

This process [of responding to ever higher tonalities] is like a journey. Astrologically speaking, it is the evolution of the being through the course of the twelve signs of the zodiac. This happens not just once but over and over again on ever high levels. This concept of evolution is also the essence of alchemy. Here, the scope of the alchemist is transformed from the *materia prima*, the unformed primitive matter, by means of the "philosopher's stone," the "elixir of life" or "the powder" with which base metals could be transmuted into gold and on to a higher level. Transmutation of lower into higher faculties through a series of fixed processes forms the "Great Work."

Finally, I should like to say something of the doctrine which has had the greatest influence on esoteric thought in the west: the Cabala, the secret philosophy of the Jews. This ingenious doctrine finds perfect expression in one symbol: the Tree of Life....

I have related the planets to the sephiroth [pathways for the operation of the creative impulse] and their spheres of operation. Magic makes wide use of the hierarchy of archangels, angelic choirs, powers, and spirits of the planetary spheres. Magic is the practical expression of the Cabala. Just as cabalism and astrology are chiefly reflective, so is magic practical. The magician tries through ritual to bind the planetary system to him and to make it serve him. To do this he uses corresponding colors, sounds, metals, incense, precious stones and signatures of the relevant planetary hierarchy. This technique is based on the previously mentioned laws of harmony and resonance. When a rapport exists between two or more things in a similar tonality and one of them is struck, all similar ones will resound simultaneously. This is the power of the magic formula. By applying his own limited power

in the right way (in his microcosmos), the magician summons all the corresponding powers of the macrocosmos to him like a tidal wave. It is self-evident that if, by being wrongly tuned in, he is not prepared to answer these powers, he will be washed over and destroyed. Hence the lengthy preparations and purifications through fasting and abstinence which all old magic guides insist upon.

Besides this conjuring type of magic, there is another kind called talismanic magic. Here, objects (talismans) are made from the relevant corresponding planetary metals, and the signatures and symbols of the planetary hierarchy whose power is needed are engraved on these objects in an exact ritual. This has to happen at the moment that the relevant planet is exercising its greatest influence. The objects, loaded or ‘consecrated’ in this way, will then assure their owner of the power of the relevant corresponding planetary hierarchy which he can use for all sorts of purposes. I mention all this because I have also furnished the paintings of the signs of the zodiac with the signatures of the angels and spirits that represent the ruling planets of these signs. This is to link these paintings with the powers of the relevant planets.

I shall now turn to the description of the twelve signs of the zodiac and their ruling planets. In so doing, I shall consciously omit the psychological aspects of these signs. Character analyses of those born under a particular sign (called the ‘native’ of that sign) can be found in every astrology book, of which there are many excellent ones on sale. As far as the symbolism used in this book is concerned, I took the spiritual development running through the cycle of the twelve signs as my starting point. They are the twelve phases in the growth of consciousness along a path on which all latent powers shut away in the being can successively be made real and active.

SCORPIO

Scorpio, the scorpion, is a negative sign, water in being. The sun stands in Scorpio at the end of October, the wine month, the fruit month par excellence, the time when leaves fall and the plant kingdom turns in on itself, slowly preparing for winter.

Mars used to be the ruler but this was changed to Pluto in 1930 after the discovery of the planet. I



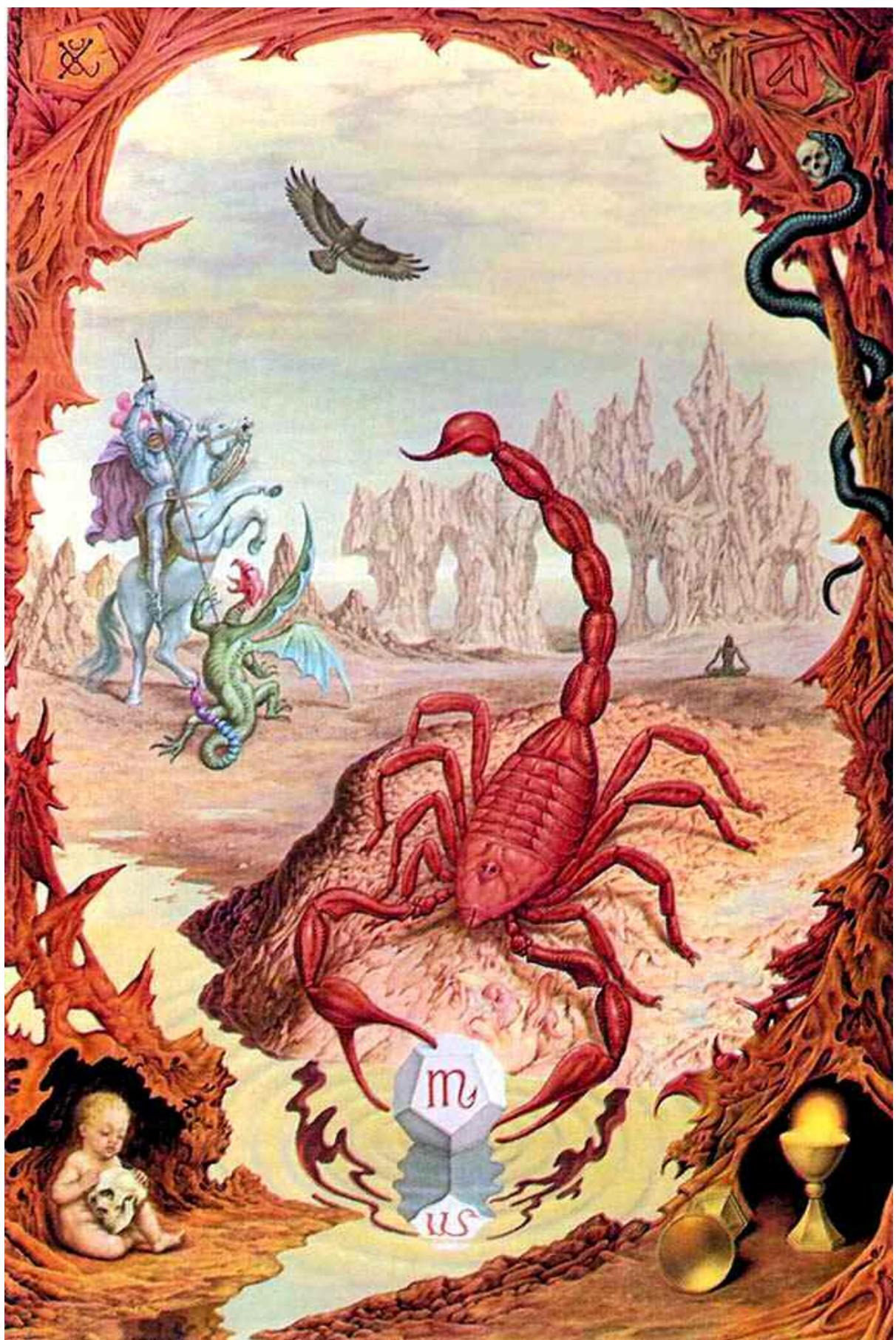
have kept to the old sign of Mars.

Scorpio is a battlefield of intense psychic collisions and deep experiences. This is immediately evident from the symbolism linked to the sign in ancient cultures. In ancient Indian writings, the scorpion is referred to as the “dark serpent.” It is also the seven-headed dragon that Hercules killed; Apes, the snake of darkness, killed by Horus, son of Osiris, in Egyptian mythology; the dragon killed by St George; and the snake of paradise which brought death and yet, with it, the knowledge of good and evil. It is also the eagle, as this sign is sometimes illustrated in the modern English zodiac. It even represents Satan.

If one wanted to sum up the nature of this sign in a few words, then one would say: awareness of the most fundamental facets of life and transformation of the primary forces.

Scorpio is about the libido, the power of creation, as well as love, birth, death and resurrection. A Scorpio native delves deeply into the problems connected with all these and is constantly occupied with them; he struggles continuously against those principles in himself. In affliction, he is perverse and destructive. If he conquers his poisonous sting he turns into a mystic or a doctor, doing good to his fellow people. Yet he throws himself into everything with an intensity given by Mars, who rules over him.

I have particularly tried to express in this painting the essence of the creative power that is released through the death of the baser nature to transmute the human into a risen being. I have placed the astrological symbol of Mars in a dodecahedron (1). This regular twelve-sided surface is one of the Pythagorean structures. As we have just seen, the pentagon, the five-sided surface, is associated with the planet Mars because Mars is allotted







to Geburah, the fifth Sephira, on the left pillar of the cabalistic tree of life, the pillar of severity. The pentagon also, however, symbolizes the human being with his five senses who fills a pentagram with his arms and legs outstretched. The dodecahedron is made up of twelve pentagrams and that is why I have used it to symbolize man's voyage along the path to consciousness through the twelve phases of the zodiac.

In this case, man is in the phase of the scorpion. He strives to find out what state he has reached but can only see the reflection of this in the surface of the sea of his consciousness; this surface is constantly changing as his own emotions change, so giving a very misleading image (2). His emotions block his insight and therefore prevent him rising to a higher level. His instincts are

his poisonous sting, the dragon of his lower nature that he has to fight, like St George (3), who represents his higher nature. He must become a yogi, a mystic, to transform the basic powers inside him in a long drawn-out process of self-discipline (4). He will then rise from this sublimation like an eagle, the royal soul bird that flies to the sun (5). The old self dies (6) and a new person is born as a child (7).

The cup of the old life is drained and knocked over (8). It is no longer of any use. It is replaced by a new (because nobody puts new wine into old bottles) in which the light of the Spirit will go on burning (9). This is how the 'dark serpent' who brought death to naivete and innocence in paradise yet makes a new person possible by bringing with him the knowledge of good and evil (10).

I have tried to express the character of the lower Scorpio in the intricate pointed and hooked shapes of the frame.

The colors are, of course, shades of a poisonous red because of Mars.

The magic signs are: (top left) the planetary seal of Phaleg, belonging to Mars (11), and (right) the signature of the intelligence Graphiel (12).

SAGITTARIUS

Sagittarius, the archer, is a positive sign, the last of the three fire signs, so fire in resolution. The sun stands in this sign at the end of November, the month of slaughter, the time when the animal world goes into hibernation, rest and death, yet also the time when inner spiritual life reaches a peak. Jupiter is the ruling planet.

The experiences gained have been analyzed under Virgo, balanced under Libra and sorted out (the ephemeral from the lasting) under Scorpio. Under Sagittarius, the self is projected on to this material and, together, they are formed into something completely new: the ideal new image of man. The Sagittarius native is, before all else, an idealist who aims his arrows at a raised target. The Sagittarian plunges himself into the ideas he has acquired, this being represented by the setting sun of the Chinese zodiac (1), the ancient Chinese symbol for this sign. (The modern Chinese zodiac has a tiger, which refers to the firmness of the sign.)

The self and non-self are joined together under Sagittarius to make





the all-self, hereby resolving the dualism of the sign of Gemini. The first fruits of consciousness now come into being. Sagittarius's motto is synthesis, the picture of the centaur being a good



example: the horseman. The Scorpio native must continue to struggle with the animal in his nature (the ruler of Scorpio is Mars [now Pluto-Ed.]) but this conflict is harmoniously resolved in the Sagittarian (the generosity of the ruling Jupiter). Here the instinctive is logically linked with the spiritual; it becomes the vehicle, the mount. That is why the church Christianized the Sagittarian feast of the winter solstice, by proposing saints in the place of other pagan horse-

men: St Nicholas, for example, and St Martin. They are also typical saints of good deeds (Jupiter again).

The urge for unity of experience in the Sagittarian expresses itself especially in his great love for nature, particularly for animals and horses, since he is himself half horse. The Sagittarian stays in touch with his origins and although he aims high in his idealism, his feet stay firmly on Mother Earth, who will never disown him. He is inspired, above all, by the generosity of Jupiter. That is why Jupiter, the supreme god throned in the clouds, lights the arrows of idealism with his heavenly fire which the archer cannot help shooting (2). It is the same Jupiter's generosity (the planet Jupiter is associated with Hesed, the fourth sephира on the right pillar, that of generosity) that rules over the luxuriant growth of the plant kingdom (3). I have depicted this Jupiter power in the form of the plant-inspiring dryads and elves (4), while the air spirits, the sylphs, carry the Jupiter powers through the air in the form of rain clouds (5).

The Sagittarian develops by forgetting his stallion body in his passion (because, as da Vinci said, "passion of the spirit excludes passion of the senses") and this body becomes white and serene; it turns into a unicorn, ancient symbol of chastity (6). He is the mythological centaur Chiron then, too, teacher of Asclepius the god of healing, and many heroes such as Hercules, Jason and Achilles. He also becomes the Hermit of the ninth Tarot card who, as the wandering wise man, lights the way of others with his lamp of instruction (7). The Sagittarian becomes the square door of the cave of consecration and the Mysteries, the square of construction which has four steps leading to it (four being Jupiter's number) (8).

Over his arm he bears as trophy the skin of the Ram, the golden fleece. The first fire sign has finally found resolution in the last fire sign Sagittarius, the fire power now being aimed at the non-self instead of the self (9).

The magical seals are as follows: The symbolic sign of Sagittarius on the door (10); above that, in the middle of the semi-circular arch, the astrological sign of Jupiter (11); to the left of the arch the sign of the planetary spirit Hismael (12). To the right, that of the planetary intelligence Lophiel (13). Bottom left, in red in a cartouche in the frame, the seal of the Olympic planetary spirit Bethor (14). Under that, the sign of Sachiel (15). Bottom right-hand corner, in a cartouche, Jupiter's own seal (16). (Continued) □

