

Johfra and the Signs of the Zodiac

Cancer and Leo

CANCER, THE CRAB, is a negative sign, water in generation. The sun is in Cancer around 22 June, just after its highest point at the beginning of summer, the period of growth. The moon rules Cancer.

The correct symbol for this sign is not, as com-



monly illustrated, the rather large crab but the small hermit crab whose behavior more effectively expresses the character of this sign. The hermit crab puts its weak hindquarters in abandoned snail shells for protection. If it grows too big for the shell then it goes in search of a bigger one and quickly rehous-es itself. From this secure position, the creature lies in wait for its prey which it grabs quickly with its large claws and pulls into its house to polish off at leisure.

The sideways or oblique backwards movement typical of crabs is also illustrative of this star sign.

This is the fourth in a series of articles on the twelve signs of the zodiac as conceived and painted by the Dutch artist Johfra, 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.

These two main characteristics show the psychological insight of the ancient astrologers in choosing the crab as symbol for the natives of this sign.

The experiences collected under Gemini are consolidated, classified and advanced under Cancer. Cancer is a collector, at every level. At the material level, the Cancer native collects beautiful things; at the emotional level—and he is emotional by nature—he gains deep experiences. Mentally, he collects knowledge in a scientific fashion and spiritually he tries to gain insight into the basis of the existence of things. His fixed point is his house, his castle, to which he always retreats at the end of each foray with his newly obtained treasure. Here he is surrounded by everything he has collected during his existence. He is domestic by nature and convivial.

The rapid retreat into protective armor at a sign of danger is characteristic of the tortoise, too, which explains why this animal was used as symbol for Cancer in ancient Babylon (1).

The backwards locomotion of the crab relates to the way the Cancer native gladly loses himself in the past. He lives in a state of historical awareness and, looking back, can appreciate the continuity of events. Hence the representation of the sign in



ancient America as the feathered snake that moves backwards. To the Chi-nese, it was the cross-section of a tree whose yearly rings provide its history. I have included all these in the painting's frame.

The crab itself sits on its treasures which are hidden in an iron chest that it has safely buried under the sand (2). It reaches out to the moon, the ruling planet (more of this later). Hands emerge from the frame to grab the jewels and precious stones, mainly aquamarines and moonstones, the moon's jewels, the precious things collected on the material level (3).

I have chosen the pearl to represent the acquisition of emotional experiences; it is the classic symbol of suffering that leads to insight. A pearl is by way of being a symptom of illness in the oyster. Should a foreign body—a stone or fragment of shell—enter the oyster's shell, its weak, sensitive body is irritated and it reacts by covering the alien object with layer upon layer of pearl, so smoothing it and making it less painful. In this way suffering brings about the growth of a beautiful jewel (4).

Next to this open oyster the Kephera, the holy scarab beetle of ancient Egypt, rolls a pearl up the slope (5). There is double symbolism here. The scarab (*scarabeus*) is a beetle that lays its egg in manure which it has first kneaded into a ball. It then rolls the ball into a hole already dug for the purpose. Safe under the earth, and provided with plenty of food, the egg in the manure eventually develops into a new beetle. The ancient Egyptians did not know that an egg had already been laid in the manure and thought that a beetle had created itself from the rotting matter: spontaneous generation (*generatio spontanea*). Many of the ancients believed that life appeared spontaneously from dead matter without the usual implanting process being first involved. This is why the dung beetle Kephera was also seen as a shadow of the godhead who constantly recreated himself. In this case, the ball of dung was the golden sun which Kephera rolled every day across the path of the heavens from east to west. It was the ultimate symbol of rebirth, the constantly self-renewing life using the power of Ra, the sun.

Because consciousness develops and revives through grief, I have substituted a pearl for the ball of dung, so turning the sun symbol into a moon symbol because the sea and all that lives in it, just like the soul, are bound to a great extent to the moon. This is not only because the moon has the

greatest influence over the ebb and flow of the tides, but also because many creatures of the sea clearly follow the lunar cycle in their sexual behavior. There is a complex interplay between the moon, procreation and the sea. The moon is the giver of form and rules over implantation and growth. She is directly concerned with the primordial matter, the primordial ocean from which all is formed and, more substantially, with the sea from which life



evolved. The ocean is mother to us all. She is called Mara, the Bitter one. She is *Mater materia* and Mary, Mother of God, just as she is Maya, Buddha's mother. These are all aspects of the same principle coming from Binah, the primordial mother on the left-hand pillar of form in the cabbalistic tree of life.

Next to the moon I have drawn her material revelation in the form of Diana or Artemis, the chaste goddess of hunting and the animal kingdom, the eternal virgin. She represents the most spiritual aspect of the planet (6).

Let us now say something more about the attitude of the Cancer native to the spiritual, outside this world of inner feeling which, because of the rule of the moon, we have explored rather more deeply. There is a series of symbols in the top left-hand corner of the painting, in variously shaped alcoves.

The most general ones are right at the top: the key and the keyhole (7). Here they represent the Mysteries (quite apart from their popular psychoanalytical symbolism for sexuality). I shall say nothing more than that the four emblems following on from this form the key to the universe. Specifically, they are the four suits of the Tarot, which always make up the attributes, the 'magic weapons,' of ritual magic. The staff represents the element of





fire, (8) the goblet that of water (9), the sword air (10) and the pentacle with its inscribed pentagram the element of earth (11). According to classical tradition, these elements together make up the astral formulae according to which all things are tuned in the universe. If the magician controls these powers then he possesses the key to creation and he is depicted as the King of the World in the orb to the right (12). Here too comes regulation, classification, with which man tries to get a grip over the numerous revelations.

Right over to the left is the Ankh cross, Egyptian symbol of immortality (13). Under it is a small triangle that points downward: the alchemical symbol for the element of water (14).

Top right, as a magic emblem, is the planetary seal of the moon (15) with the snake that moves backwards under it (16).

LEO

LEO, THE LION, is a positive sign: fire in being, because this is the second fire sign, Aries being the first. The sun stands in Leo from 23 July to 22 August and is also the ruler of the sign.

After becoming aware of dualism (under Gemini) and with this awareness collecting experiences (Cancer), the accent under Leo falls on the relationship between self and non-self. Or rather, one might say, the accent falls totally on the self which takes the centre of the stage in Leo, the self's surroundings being the theatre where the Leo native performs with distinction. Hence my positioning of the lion in the centre of the composition, sharing the centre with the ruling sun.

The lion, just like the sun, shines out over good and bad. He is the Royal Heart (1) because Leo and the sun rule the human heart. He brings a festive, luxuriant touch to his surroundings.



He bathes everything in a golden light, gold being the sun's metal, hence the richly decorated gold border.

But this sign also has its particular afflictions. The egocentrism of the Leo native can make him prey to vanity and ambition and can make him tyrannize his surroundings. Then, like all sun heroes in mythology, he has to fight both the lion in himself and other animals too (as Hercules did) that are put in his path as



obstacles to be overcome. This classic fight is shown in the right foreground of the landscape where Hercules, or Samson, is involved in a deadly tussle with his own negative Leo power (2). If he wins he will become the sun god Apollo who bewitches the whole world with the beautiful music of his lyre (3).

The regality of this sign is brought out in the luxuriant landscape with its majestic palms, erect cypresses, unflowers and citrus bushes. These plants all come under the dominion of the sun, as does the oak in the right foreground. This hollow oak has another significance which I must explain since it involves one of the deepest, most fundamental

mysteries of virtually all religions: the birth of the self-sacrificing Sun God. There is a wide-spread common myth, however much it may differ in form and presentation, which seems to express one and the same idea. All these stories concern a risen being, born of a human (frequently a virgin) and absorbed into a godhead. This dual being houses the human as well as the godly. During his period on earth he has to perform various tasks and in so doing he symbolically overcomes his baser nature.

In the end he dies after completing his work; then, however, he is aroused from death and ascends to heaven, completely deified. During this process, the hero is betrayed, frequently imprisoned, locked up or buried. The godly part appears to die, yet it lives on secretly because of its eternal nature. This immortality is later revealed in the resurrection which is manifested at different levels: during the course of the year plant growth apparently dies yet the plant goes on secretly living underground to burst out again in its full glory in the new spring.

Then again, at a high spiritual level, we are told that the Creator imprisons himself in his creation and descends to earth to transform this material revelation, working out from the inside, then returning it from its nadir to its original state. In one of these stories, Osiris (light) is betrayed by his twin brother Seth (darkness) and tricked into a chest that is soldered with lead and committed to the Nile. In Jesus' case, he is betrayed by Judas, killed on the cross (the fourfold substance) and buried in a cave. Moses is entrusted to the Nile in a basket made of rushes. Adonis underwent mystic growth rather like the dead Osiris whose coffin was overgrown by a tamarind tree.

These figures all had a similar history; through their particular birth, works, betrayal, death and resurrection (deification), they formed an intermediary, a bridge over which two fundamentally different worlds were bound together or 'reconciled'. Their mixed origins fitted them for the role of intermediary. In fulfilling this commission, their godly nature was sacrificed at birth by being imprisoned

in the baser nature, human personality. In their further existence, this personality is sacrificed in the service of their calling. In death, the vessel is broken and the imprisoned spirit freed to radiate without obstruction.

The sun also occupies a central place on the middle pillar of the cabbalistic tree of life. It is Tiphereth, the sixth sephira, also known as the 'Sun fire' or the 'Son of the All-Father' (Kether, the first sephira which stands directly above Tiphereth). The spiritual function of the intermediary is expressed clearly and sublimely here ('No man cometh unto



the Father but by me'). This principle is like the neck of an hour glass that links the five higher macrocosmic sephiroth with the four lower microcosmic sephiroth (baser personality). Tiphereth represents the higher self in man, the inner Christ through Whom the personality can consciously reach the Father. This principle is sometimes expressed in the form of a child: the royal child in the crib or in the hollow tree (4). This shows how

sacred the heart is to the personality. In alchemy, the hollow oak was the image of Athanor, the alchemical furnace, which had to be kept at a critically constant temperature for the Philosopher's Stone, the godly child, to be born. Using 'the powder' prepared from this stone, the alchemist would be able to transmute base metals into gold, limitlessly. A very clear symbolism.

A word of explanation about the magical signatures: the sign of Leo is depicted in a shield at Apollo's feet (5).

The cartouche in the top left-hand corner bears the most important seal of the sun (6).

The large cartouche on the right (middle) contains the seal of the Olympic spirits who control the domain of the Olympic spirits who control the domain of the sun (7, top), the sign of the gnostic spirit Sorath (8) and the sign of the planetary intelligence Nakhiel (9, bottom).

The smaller cartouches contain various signs which the alchemists used to illustrate gold, the sun metal, or the "Spiritual Sun" (10). (Continued) □